

Research Report

**Labour Movements in Agriculture Sector: A Case Study of
Kuttanad Region**

Submitted to:



**Kerala Institute of Labour and Employment,
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Submitted by

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Executive Summary

The agrarian relations in Kuttanad has undergone several changes for the past seven decades. In early 40s labour movement came to existence as a pressing need to withstand the dominance of farmers and landlords in the region. Since then the region has been a hotspot for violent labour struggles from the very historical Punnapra-Vayalar agitation to the recent agitation against the conversion and filling of paddy fields. Within a few years it became the nerve centre of trade union activities in the state. While the struggle of the trade union movement became so strong with the support of the left movement it induced a more or less powerful reaction from the farmer's side. They used their political power and money power to withstand the pressure set by the union movement. Initially the trade unions were strongly against labour saving initiatives, but later they gradually supported certain levels of mechanisation with conditional agreements. At present, the paddy farming activities are predominantly controlled by the dictates of the militant trade unions in Kuttanad. It has changed to a level that once victims of exploitation have now become the agents of exploitation of the region.

The role of labour movements in this transition is significant. This study is an attempt to trace out the influence of labour movements in the region on various issues across time since 1940. It analysed the impact the movement created in the region by way of influencing the various stakeholders like farmers, agricultural labours, political leaders, government officials etc with a special focus on the agrarian relations. The dynamics of the struggle initiated by the movements in Kuttanad had been covered in the present study. Ultimately the study had been instrumental to explain the balance sheet of the gains and losses of seven decades of labour movements in Kuttanad region.

The study used data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data had been collected from various stakeholders of paddy cultivation in the Kuttanad region. This included respondents such as agricultural workers, farmers, trade union representatives, social and environmental activist, and intelligentsia. The timeline of this study spreads across 70 years from 1940. Since this is predominantly a historical exploration the inclusion criteria was to get

response from people who had some exposure to the events during this time line. Thus the major chunk of data was collected from people belonging to 70+ age groups. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the respondents, which was supplemented by data generated through focus group discussions. The historical data had been collected from Government reports, Trade Union Records, research reports, newspaper reports and other published materials which had been supplemented by information collected from respondents.

Traditionally the agrarian relation in Kuttanad was more of a patron-client relationship which is best described as *janmi-adiyan* relations. It was a modified form of master-slave relations where the workers were treated just as commodities. There existed a repressive caste system with the upper castes establishing their economic and social life based on land. The laws of pollution also prevented the *lower castes* from entering into any craft or trade which demanded transactions with the upper castes. This oppressive form of social discrimination was prevalent in its worst form till 1930s. With the mobilisation of labour by the caste and political organisations, nature of this relationship also underwent transitions across time. It was a story of about 25 years long struggle and sacrifice. Later stages, the struggles of labour movements became so frequent to get the basic rights of the labouring class. This included increase in wages and improvement in conditions of work. Thus the relationship became that of an employer-employee relations by mid 50s. The agrarian relations in Kuttanad got a reverse transition leading to the dominance of labour movement by the late 60s. In a place where landowners were the dictators, they had to beg the mercy of unions to get sufficient number of labourers on time to carry out the agricultural operations hassle free.

The dynamics of struggles in Kuttanad is a story of pain, sacrifice and perseverance of dedicated people. It is the story of the contribution of the left movement in agrarian sector in Kerala. There were several isolated struggles in different places by different groups and were predominantly led by the left movement. Even for the same issue the struggle had to be repeated in several other parts of the region. This was mainly because the ultimate authority in determining the conditions of work was the landowner himself. Hence it became a continuous and persistent effort from the part of labour movements to fight against each and every landowner in getting the minimum conditions of work. It is clear from the history that a major chunk of the struggle was for getting a reasonable wage and ensuring equity in payment of wages across regions and gender. There

were also struggles for improving the conditions of work such as regulating time and ensuring minimum level of welfare for labourers.

During the initial years of struggle it was more of a war against the dominating landowners. Thus it can be described as a struggle for survival and emancipation of the labour class by the left movements. The leaders of the struggle found it extremely difficult to get the labourers united as the prevailing social system was against challenging the landowners. Any attempts of organised movements from the part of labourers were vehemently suppressed by the landowners by force. They used all the possible form of revolt against the agitators. On several occasions they used the support of police force to repress struggles. The treatment was totally inhumane and cruel. As a result several labourers had to sacrifice their life for the labour community. But gradually the determinant leadership fuelled by the left political parties had succeeded in getting their demands approved.

There was a clear class perspective in the struggles of Kuttanad. There was a broad congruence between party affiliations, caste identity and class background. Initially it was a struggle by the oppressed labours belonging to the lower strata of the society. As and when the struggle got powerful from the working class the landlords also started reacting more or less in an equal force. At the peak of the struggles it was a fight between two equally powerful groups- the economically powerful landlords and the politically organised labourers. The strength and strategy of the struggles varied according to the political landscape of the state. That means, whenever left affiliated party was ruling the state the struggles got intensified.

There is no doubt that the labour movement has impacted the agricultural sector particularly in Kuttanad and the state in general. The contribution of the left movement in improving the conditions of work in the agriculture sector cannot be understated. However, there are diverse views on the nature and type of impact the struggles created among the stakeholders of agriculture. Increase in wage rate is claimed to be most important and fundamental change brought in by the union movement in Kuttanad. Another major impact of the union movement was regulating conditions of work in the agricultural sector in terms of hours of work. Union interventions could protect labour against exploitation by preventing the favouritism and subjectivity in selecting the workers. Resisting the labour saving technologies had been a priority

of labour movement from time to time. Establishing a tripartite machinery to resolve the labour related disputes was a sign of government accepting the role of labour movements.

The much acclaimed Land Reform is yet another major accolade of agriculture movement in the state. This was a revolutionary measure as far as the working class is concerned. Legitimation of hutment rights and enactment of Agricultural Workers Act, in 1974 were counted as other major achievements of the unions. The unions were also instrumental in bringing development programmes in Kuttanad even though these projects could not bring the expected outcomes to the region. The replacement of master slave relationship with an employee-employer relationship is a major gain of the struggles of labour class. The attached labour system with all inhumane treatment of the workers had been modified to casual labour system. This in turn brought out a transition in the social relations in the Kuttanad region. There existed a high level of social and caste based discrimination which later got disintegrated to a great extent due to the continuous struggles. The presence of an egalitarian worker-cultivator relationship and disintegration of jajmani relations are indicators of such achievements. Over the years the union could help the working class to liberate from the absolute subordination of the feudal relations.

Political mobilisation of labour and the marginalised category is yet another significant achievement of the union movement in agriculture sector. The story of the struggles of agricultural workers in Kuttanad is an example of emergence of powerful political force even influential enough at the state level governance. Introduction of two welfare programmes to compensate the failure to effect the basic changes in agriculture sector.

Discussing about the setbacks, union movement was criticised for not maintaining the standard of living of the labourer in the face of dwindling days of employment. Agricultural labourers remained agricultural labourers even after the struggle and their political mobilisation. They remained a discontented lot. The decreasing area and production of paddy in Kuttanad raises serious concerns about the contributions made by the labour movements in the region. They could not influence the youngsters belong to the new generation in preserving the dignity and status of cultivation.

Given the claims of achievements, the current landscape of Kuttanad gives us an alarming picture. To list a few this includes: increase in cost of cultivation, decrease in area and

production of rice, decrease in labour requirement, job shift to non-agricultural sectors, predominance of lease cultivation, shift to cash crops, issues in procurement of grains, declining number of agriculture labourers, lack of availability of quality seed, heavy use of pesticides and weedicides and environment issues related to fast development interventions of the region. These are issues threatening the paddy cultivation in almost all the stages of it.

While substantial progress has been achieved by the labouring class in terms of social mobility and conditions of work through the union movement, the paddy cultivation sector in Kuttanad has reached to a pathetic situation. In their attempt to bring 'gains' to the working class and their liberation, the movements and struggles could not treat preserving the paddy sector as a priority. This led to a scenario where farmers no more want to continue with the paddy cultivation, new generation no more prefer to work in paddy fields, the area of paddy fields are shrinking and ultimately paddy cultivation a 'less status' or unwanted work. Unions could realise this alarming transition very late. It is quite accidental to observe most of these are bye-products of militant labour movements in the region. It is in 1990s they organised a massive struggle against the conversion of paddy fields. This struggle could not gain its purpose on the grounds of convincing reasons proposed by the farmer's community. The balance sheet of labour movement can be described as strong political mobilisation and empowerment of working class contrasted by stagnation of agriculture as a primary occupation. A good number of people in Kuttanad now strongly feel that the labourers in Kuttanad are over conscious of their rights and privileges. The militancy has gone to unexpected levels. So in a couple of year's time the labour class in Kuttanad become an extinct species.

List of Abbreviations

AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress
AKKS	Akhila Kuttanad Karshaka Sangam
ATMA	Agricultural Technical Management Agency
BKMU	Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (marxist)
CPI(ML)	Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)
CPI	Communist Party of India
CSD	Civil Supplies Department
DKTF	Deseeya Karshaka Thozhilali Federation
DLO	District Labour Officer
DPR	Detailed Project Report
GALASA	Group Approach for Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture
GFF	Group Fish Farming
GSDP	Gross State Domestic Product
HYV	High Yield Variety
IRC	Industrial Relations Committee
K L D C	Kerala Land Development Corporation
KAU	Kerala Agriculture University
KKF	Kerala Karshaka Federation
KKS	Kuttanad Karashaka Sangam
KKTU	Kuttanad Karshaka Thozhilali Union
KPAC	Kerala Peoples Arts Club
KSKTF	Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Federation
KSKTU	Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union
KVS	Kuttanad Vikasana Samithy
MGNREGS	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme

MSL	Mean Sea Level
MSP	Minimum Support Price
MSSRF	M S Swaminathan Research Foundation
NATPAC	National Transportation Planning and Research Centre
PMS	Pulaya Maha Sabha
RASTA	Rural Agency for Social and Technological Agency
RSP	Revolutionary Socialist Party
SNDP	Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalanasangam
SRFA	Save Rice Field agitation
TALU	Travancore Agriculture Labour Union
TKTU	Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali Union
TMB	Thanneer Mukkam Barrage
TSW	Thottapally Spillway
TU	Trade Union
UKKS	Upper Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

1.1.Agricultural Sector: Kerala Scenario

As per the census of 2011, Kerala has a total population 3,34,06,061 belonging to the geographical area of 38,852 sq.kms. The number of main workers in Kerala was 93.3 lakhs, which formed 27.92 per cent of total population of the state. The number of cultivators was reported to be 5.4 lakhs which constitutes 5.84 per cent of the main workers in the state. The number of agricultural labour in Kerala came to 9.19 lakhs, which is 9.85 per cent of the main workers. The number of main workers in the state got a stagnation pattern since 1991 onwards. There is a sharp decline in the agriculture labour force in the year 2001. In 1981 the agriculture labour constituted 28.23 per cent of main workers while in 2011 it has become 9.85 per cent (Census of India, 2011). Number of females among the agriculture labour force is 2.9 lakhs, which forms 31.56 per cent of the total agriculture labour in the state in 2011.

The share of total cropped area in the total geographical area is 68 percent. It marked an increase of 14,296 ha during 2011-12 over the previous year while the net area sown declined by 31,375 ha over the previous year. The share of land under non-agricultural uses out of total geographical area is 10 per cent in 2011-12. There is an increase in the area under current fallow (1,028 ha) and increase in the area under fallow other than current fallow (5727 ha) during 2011-12. The area under cultivable waste also increased by 3,772 ha and barren and uncultivated land declined by 2,021 ha. (Government of Kerala, 2012). The number of operational holdings in 2011 is reported to be 68.31 lakhs occupying an area of 15.11 lakhs ha. (Agricultural Census, 2011). Both this figures shows a decrease compared to that of 2005-06 data recording a percentage variation of 1.06 and 2.83 respectively. About 62

per cent of the labour force in the state is engaged in agriculture, 11 per cent in industry and 27 per cent in the service sector (Devi, 2012).

Kerala stands second-highest in terms of value generated per hectare of land (Punjab is at the top). In terms of net income, Kerala is the third highest (Kannan, 2011). These two indicators are treated as positive predictors of productivity and efficiency of agriculture sector in the state. The productivity also noted to be increased with the integration of technology and chemicals. But still it confronts with a host of factors detrimental to its growth in the desired levels. This is evident from the data available from Government sources (Government of Kerala, 2012). The quick estimate of agriculture sector in 2011-12 indicated a negative growth of 1.6 per cent over the previous year. The provisional estimate of agricultural income of the state again shows a negative growth of 4.5 per cent during 2010-11. While examining the growth of real estate business and consequent destruction of the wetland ecosystems in the Kerala, Raj and Azeez (2009) observed that the real estate sector is gradually swallowing up the rice cultivating low-lying wetlands. The number of land holding increased with the emergence of fragmentation of farms.

The share of area under rice, the major food grain crop of Kerala, in total cropped area declined from 27.8 per cent in 1980-81 to 11.6 per cent in 2000-01. Similarly, area under tapioca, another major food crop, declined from 8.5 per cent to 3.7 per cent, during the same period. On the other hand, the share of area under commercial crops such as coconut, rubber, pepper and coffee increased during the past two decades. Among these crops, the share of area under rubber almost doubled from 8.2 per cent in 1980-81 to 15.8 per cent in 2000-01 (Jeromi, 2003). That means cropping pattern in Kerala shows a relative preference over cash crops instead of its traditional food grains like rice and tapioca.

The strong position of the economy, high level of education of farmers and agricultural labourers, high level of organisational affiliations of farmers, and well established research support are considered as favourable factors of agriculture in the state (Kannan, 2011). The average daily wages in Kerala remains the highest in the Indian states (Haque, 2003). This is a point of concern for many of the researchers. The prevalence of high wage rate is reported to be an important factor in the poor performance of the agricultural sector in Kerala (Krishnan, 1991 and Kannan 2011). While discussing about the labour and industrialisation in Kerala Thomas (2003) observed that worker organisation has made significant improvements in wage rates and living conditions of informal sector workers in Kerala. The strong labour organisation and consequent frequent incidence of labour disputes in Kerala do not have significant association with industrial backwardness of the State.

1.2.Agriculture Labour in Kerala

The major factor, according to Devi and Vijayaraghavan (2010), which supported non-farm activities as livelihood option in Kerala, was the satisfactory work environment provided by industrial and service sectors. This was obvious with the working conditions and facilities available in service and industrial sectors as compared with agricultural sector. Moreover, these were not much physically exerting jobs. Women found the opportunities in industrial and service sectors suitable to their educational qualifications and hence satisfying for them. Also these were lesser risk jobs, as there was a regular income guaranteed as salary and other perks in addition to better social status. Krishnan (1991) has noted a different reason for the poor agricultural growth in the state. The bio-technological and institutional innovations necessary to sustain a high wage rate in agriculture were totally ignored in its agricultural development programmes. While Kerala succeeded to a very large extent in developing and implementing a rather coherent and integrated social development programme, it has not

done so in the field of economic growth. The perspective of Jeromi (2003) is bit different. Quoting the data during 1999-2000 and 2000-01 that agricultural income grew by 3.7 per cent, he argues that agricultural income continued to display volatility during the 1990s with lower growth.

Labour scarcity in agriculture, especially in rice farming, is reported to be an important reason behind declining paddy area in the state. Cultivators have responded to this issue by adopting several alternatives like substituting the hired labour with family labour, capital (combined harvesters, transplanting machinery, etc.) or chemicals especially weedicides (Devi, 2012). Kannan in his article (1998), has observed that social dynamics and educational advancement have resulted in a shrinking supply of labour to agriculture. The horizontal shifts to secondary and tertiary sectors and out-migration to other countries/ states contribute to such a situation. Presently, the average age of agricultural labourer is reported to be more than 50 years in Kerala.

One of the salient features of the agricultural sector of Kerala as observed by Mahesh (2002) is the intensive use of cultivable land and the predominance of perennial cash crops. Labour is therefore, a major input of agriculture in Kerala. However, the cultivators feel that the cost of labour is high and in spite of the high wage rates, farm hands are not available in time to carry out the operations. Side by side with this alleged non-availability of farm labour, there exists high rates of unemployment and under-employment in rural areas. The census figures and the various surveys conducted by government agencies also indicate shrinkage in the proportion of agricultural labourers and the existence of large-scale unemployment among them. There are also indications that the rural labour is shifting to non-agricultural work and moving out to urban centres in search of work.

Another issue is poor work participation of female labour. In spite of featuring high rate of literacy and sex ratio, there is a marked difference between work participation rate of male and female labours in the state. While males show a progressive change of increasing work participation rate, females show a stagnated figure around 16 per cent. Devi (1981) studied the extent of female participation in economic activity in the state and the occupational pattern among them. She found that women in Kerala are primarily engaged in skilled or semi-skilled vocations and level of education among working-women is much higher than the rest. Again, the variables marriage and family were found not to affect the work participation rate but family disruption due to divorce or separation did. Kumar (1994) also supports this argument of decrease in female participation rate. He points out the reason for the same as the nature of the economic structure in the state, which has shown reduced demand for female labour.

Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006) observed that changes in the cropping pattern had been instrumental in displacing large volume of the women workforce from agriculture, especially in the rural areas, and the primary sector is no longer the most significant channel of employment. Manufacturing industries, was also largely stagnant. Economic activity among women has only increased in the tertiary sector. These had further led to the intensification of unemployment in the state, more so among the educated females. Large-scale emigration and outmigration from the state brought about prosperity to a certain extent, but has failed to provide tenable solution to the problem of unemployment. The authors content that the convergence of all these factors has led to a declining trend in work force participation among females. This also widened the gender gap in employment during the last decade. The trends in work participation are equally acute in all the districts. All the northern Malabar districts have witnessed a fall in the work participation rate among females, whereas the

southern districts have witnessed marginal increase. Agriculture dominated districts of Pallakad, Idduki and Wayanad continues to be the highest women-employing districts. Agriculture, no longer remains the most important sectors of female employment. Casual employment of women workforce is also on an increase. The study revealed that the variables like migration, reduction in paddy cultivation, growth in per capita income (mainly due to remittances), male workforce participation, sex ratio, and female literacy rate to certain extent showed a significant correlation with female workforce participation rate. The authors attribute two reasons for the paradox of low female employment and high social development. First one is the pattern of development process in the state, which has remained largely irresponsive to the transition in the quality of the women workforce and the second, the overall occupational transformation in the state.

While explaining the impact of mechanisation on the cropping pattern, Verma (2001) observes that farm mechanization has led to an increase in inputs on account of higher average cropping intensity, larger area and increased productivity of farm labour. He contends that farm mechanization increased agricultural production and profitability on account of timeliness of operation, better quality of worked one and more efficient utilization of inputs. Whereas mechanization increases on- farm human labour marginally, the increase in off- farm labour such as industrial production of tractors and ancillaries was much more.

Thadathil and Mohandas (2012) have undertaken a study on the impact of MGNREGS in Wayanadu district of Kerala. They found that MGNREGS contributed to hike in the labour wages during its initial phase of implementation. The MGNREGS wage acts as a standard minimum wage in the region, keeping the labour market wage high. But, it is not really responsible for the movement of labour from the agricultural sector in the long run. While analyzing the labour market dynamics of Kerala, Mallika (2013) reported that during 1999-

2007 period, noticeable fluctuation is visible in labour supply, while labour demand fluctuates slightly.

Kannan (1998) brought out the positive features of labour in Kerala. According to him labour in general and rural labour in particular, Kerala's record in achieving a measure of human dignity and social progress is remarkable, viewed especially from an all-India context. The oppressive and degrading conditions, still prevalent in many parts of rural India, involving organised violence by landowning classes, indignities to women workers, and degrading conditions of work are no longer the story in Kerala. The emergence of trade unions as a strong labour institution and the overall social progress has led to a remarkable decline in the incidence of child labour (around one percent as against eight per cent in all India), social acceptance of certain work norms as eight hour work, intervals and formal labour relations as against patron-client relations. It has also witnessed a sustained increase in wages and the securing of non-wage benefits in several occupations which are not officially categorised as 'formal' or 'organised'. From a broader developmental point of view Kerala has reached a stage, socially speaking, where the labour force is ready to move into more skilled, technologically superior, high value-adding occupations with better wages and conditions of employment. But the dilemma is the inability of the state in meeting this challenge.

In his paper, Ramkumar (2006) highlights the achievement of Kerala through its public action. It benefited the State in implementing a historic land reform, investing heavily in education and health, initiating a number of social security measures (such as schemes for subsidized food distribution and for social assistance and social insurance for unorganized workers and destitute sections of the population) and encouraging cooperatives. Land reform is considered as the most important and effective social security strategy for the rural poor.

There are different reasons for this achievement. First, due to the ownership of homestead land, workers were freed from being forced to depend on landlords for living space. Secondly, the free provision of homestead land represented a major financial saving for worker households, as investment in land for housing was not required. Thirdly, production in homestead plots was an important supplement to the incomes of households.

1.3.The Context

The state of Kerala is well known for its unique model of development. It has demonstrated outstanding achievements in many social development indicators, even at par with the developed countries. At the same time the state has failed to achieve a proportionate economic development. In 2011, Kannan observed a transition in the Kerala economy. According to him the state witnessed a structural transformation making it a non-agrarian character, both in terms of income and employment. The change is so fast that the share of agriculture and related activities of the state income declined from 22% in 2004-05 to 11% in 2008-09. This has further come down to 9.1 per cent in 2011-12 (Government of Kerala, 2012). Though rice remains the main food of Kerala, the scenario of rice cultivation in the state gives some alarming insights. The percentage share of rice in Net Area Sown has drastically declined from 40.49 in 1961 to 9.63 in 2013 (Government of Kerala, 2013). Production of rice reduced to almost half over the period of last six decades. In 2013 the quantity of rice produced was 5,08,299 tons compared to that of 10,67,531 tons in 1961. That means over a period of five decades it has come down to less than half of the production.

The agriculture sector in the state is confronted with a host of issues. The crippling growth rate in agriculture as against a reasonably robust annual growth rate of GSDP of the State is a cause of concern. Even though a revolutionary measure of land reforms implemented in the state, it could not help to completely resolve the problems in the agriculture sector. There are

several reasons for this. Cultivators in the state have shifted their priority from traditional food grains to perennial cash crops. There is a marked change in the land use pattern also. Scarcity of labour and high wage rate remains to be the pressing problems in the agriculture sector in the state. Out migration to gulf countries has been a traditional feature of Keralites which in turn declined the supply of labour within the state. The implementation of the programmes like MGNREGS has also impacted the agriculture sector, which resulted in the movement of workers from agriculture sector to other local labour requirements. The non-availability of labour has prompted the cultivators to adapt alternative options of less labour intensive technologies and wider use of chemicals in their work. The youngsters in the state do not prefer to work in the agriculture related activities because of poor social status attributed to this sort of work. The educated youth in the state prefers to work in the tertiary sector. This has added gravity to the labour scarcity in the traditional sectors of the state. The militancy of trade unions is another factor which influenced the agrarian relations in the state. All these factors contributed to an 'agrarian crisis' in the state where people heavily depends upon neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh for its food and vegetable requirements.

1.4.The Research Problem

The agrarian relations in Kuttanad has undergone several changes for the past seven decades. In early 40s labour movement came to existence as a pressing need to withstand the dominance of farmers and landlords in the region. Since then the region has been a hotspot for violent labour struggles from the very historical Punnapra-Vayalar agitation to the recent agitation against the conversion and filling of paddy fields. Within a few years it became the nerve centre of trade union activities in the state. While the struggle of the trade union movement became so strong it induced a more or less powerful reaction from the farmer's side. They used their political power and money power to withstand the pressure set by the

union movement. Initially the trade unions were strongly against labour saving initiatives, but later they gradually supported certain levels of mechanisation with conditional agreements. At present, the paddy farming activities are predominantly controlled by the dictates of the militant trade unions in Kuttanad. It has changed to a level that once victims of exploitation have now become the agents of exploitation of the region. In spite of many Government interventions to regulate the agrarian relations, the militancy of Trade Unions seems to be a factor of concern.

The role of labour movements in this transition is significant. This study is an attempt to trace out the influence of labour movements in the region on various issues across time since 1940. It analysed the impact the movement created in the region by way of influencing the various stakeholders like farmers, agricultural labours, political leaders, government officials etc with a special focus on the agrarian relations. The dynamics of struggles initiated by the movements to respond to cross cutting issues in Kuttanad had been covered in the present study. Ultimately the study had been instrumental to explain the balance sheet of the gains and losses of seven decades of labour movements in Kuttanad region.

1.4.1. Research Objectives

2. To trace out the historical transition of labour movements in agriculture sector since 1940.
3. To portray the changes in agrarian relations in Kuttanad.
4. To describe the dynamics of struggles initiated by labour movements across various issues related to paddy cultivation in the region.
5. To assess the impact of labour movements on the agriculture sector in Kuttanad.

1.5. Research Methodology

The study used data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary data had been collected from various stakeholders of paddy cultivation in the Kuttanad region. This included respondents such as agricultural workers, farmers, trade union representatives, social and environmental activist, and intelligentsia. The timeline of this study spreads across 70 years from 1940. Since this is predominantly a historical exploration the inclusion criteria was to get response from people who had some exposure to the events during this time line. Thus the major chunk of data was collected from people belonging to 70+ age groups. Primary data was collected through in-depth interviews with the respondents, which was supplemented by data generated through focus group discussions.

The historical data had been collected from Government reports, Trade Union Records, research reports, newspaper reports and other published materials which had been supplemented by information collected from respondents. Special care has been taken to capture response of respondents belonging to all the above mentioned categories from the various parts of Kuttanad ecosystem. Thus the diversity in terms of geography and agriculture practices in different parts of the Kuttanad ecosystem had been ensured while selecting respondents for the study. The information generated through the in-depth interviews had been supplemented through observation during field visits. Altogether 44 respondents were interviewed for this study during the field visits extending three months from September to November 2014. The procedure to fix the number in each category was kept flexible and the criterion was saturation of ideas. That means the interviews were continued until we realise that no further information is shared by the new respondents. The cut off number was around 10 respondents. A detailed list of respondents is given in the appendix. Collaboration and support of the various NGOs working in the Kuttanad region had been sought to identify and access the respondents of this study.

The data had been collected at different stages. Initially discussions with key informants in different localities had been carried out. They helped in providing basic information and an overall picture of the Kuttanad region. Further they helped to identify other reliable respondents in their own locality belonging to the different categories like agricultural workers, farmers, trade union representatives, social/environmental activists, and intelligentsia. After a round of interviews and discussions with respondents a summary of the inputs had been prepared objective wise. In subsequent stages further required data had been collected based on the leads generated in the previous stages. Altogether four rounds of such discussions and consolidation had been done to ensure the veracity of information generated. An expert opinion on the information collected at each stage is also sought to gain proper direction in the data collection in the subsequent stages.

1.6. Chapter Scheme

The report of the study is presented in seven chapters as follows.

Chapter 1-Introduction and Design of the Study

Chapter 2-Kuttanad: The Setting of the Study

Chapter 3-Review of Literature

Chapter 4-Agrarian Relations and Labour Movement in Kuttanad: A Historical Review

Chapter 5-Dynamics of Struggles and its Impact

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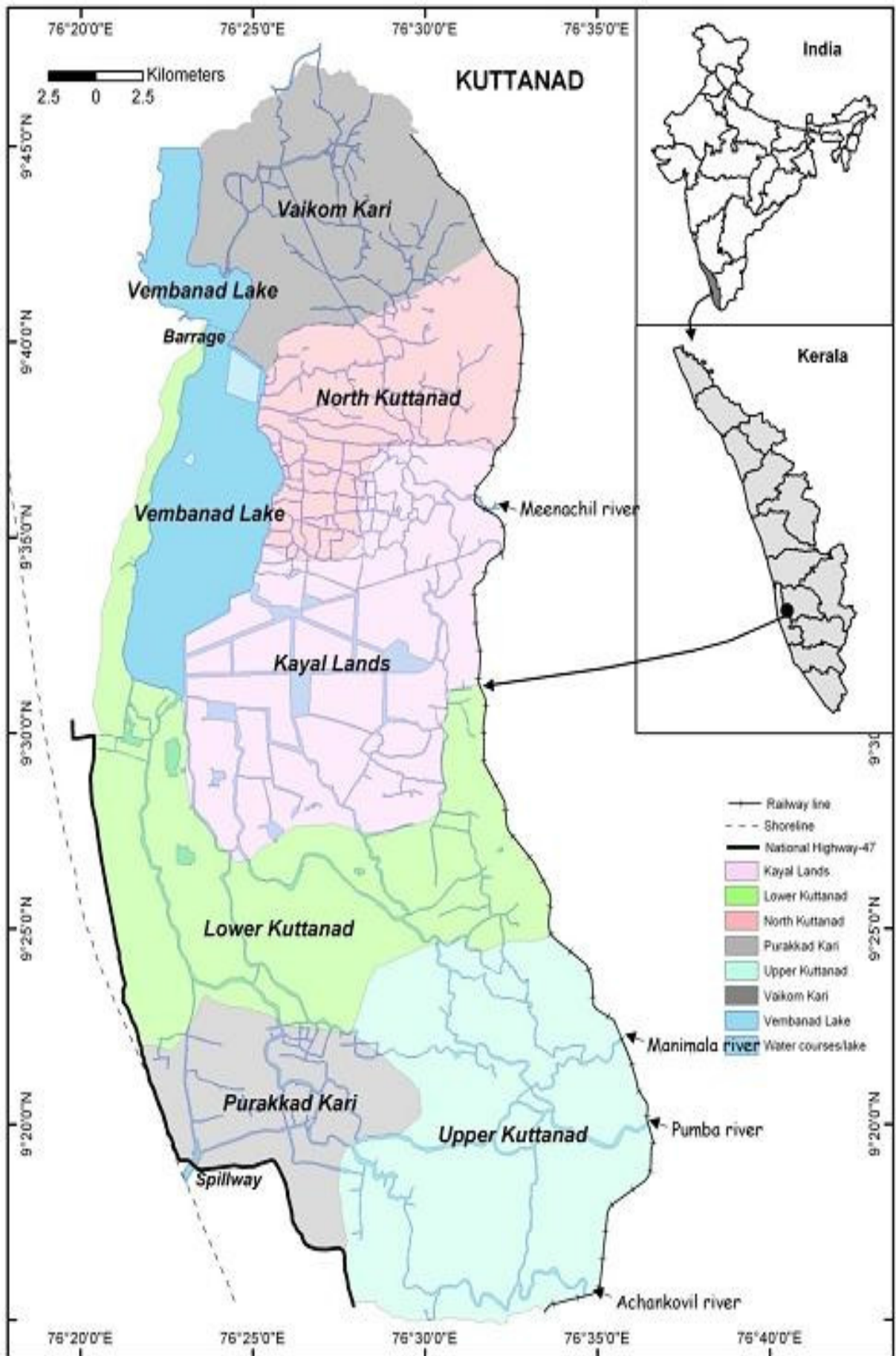
Chapter 2

KUTTANAD: THE SETTING OF THE STUDY

Located in the southwest coast of Kerala, Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala, is unique among the rice ecologies of the world and is the biggest wetlands of the country. This low lying backwater region is located between latitudes $9^{\circ} 8'$ and $9^{\circ}52'$ and longitudes $76^{\circ} 19'$ and $76^{\circ} 44'$. It extends to 11 taluks covering 79 villages belonging to three districts namely Alappuzha, Kottayam and Pathanamthitta. Kuttanad wetland region has an area of 1, 10,000 ha, which is divided into four ecological zones. These are garden or dry land (31,000 ha), wetland (11,000 ha), reclaimed land situated below sea level (55,000 ha), and water bodies including lake, canals, etc (13,000 ha). It is divided into six agro-ecological zones such as *Kayal Land*, *Lower Kuttanad*, *Upper Kuttanad*, *North Kuttanad*, *Purakadu Kari* and *Vaikom Kari*.

2.1. The People

Based on the 2011 census data Kuttanad region has a population of 1.4 million. The percentage of male and female population is 48.23 and 51.76 respectively. There are around 1,30,219 Scheduled Caste and 4826 Scheduled Tribes in this region. The Kuttanad region has a literacy rate of 87.96 which is little less than the state figure of 93.91. Percentage of male literacy rate is 88.60 which is almost close to the female literacy rate of 87.36. As per the census figures of 2011, there are 5,45,312 total workers, 4,19,421 workers and 14,607 main cultivators. The number of main agricultural labours comes to 37,950 and the percentage of male main agricultural labours and female main agricultural labours is 65.47 and 34.53 respectively. This region is having 1,25,891 marginal workers, 5,077 marginal cultivators and 27,470 marginal agricultural labours (Census, 2011).



Kuttanad has a number of peculiarities. It was part of the coastal area of the Arabian Sea, which became a shallow bay due to a geological uplift. Kuttanad in Kerala, is the lowest region of India, with 500 square kilometres of the region below sea level. Most of the area is covered with water throughout the year. Kuttanad is one of the few places in the world where farming is carried out below sea level. It is a deltaic formation of important rivers of Kerala, Pamba, Meenachil, Manimala, Achencoil confluence into the Vembanad Lake. The incessant inflow of silt carried by these rivers over thousands of years accumulated in this shallow bay and gradually made it an extensive blackish water lagoon and backwater system extending from Alapuzha in the south to Kochi in the north. In course of time the shallow parts of the lagoon further silted up by the river systems became wet lands while the deeper parts of it still remain as backwaters.

The ecological character is closely linked to the local socio-culture and livelihoods. The unique ecology of Kuttanad region has supported a multiplicity of enterprises based on inland fisheries, paddy, coconut, and several cultures while evolving different economic activities (Swaminathan, 2007). The people in this region are dependent on paddy cultivation and allied activities like fishing, animal husbandry, lime-shell collection, etc. for livelihood. The area is also famous for its coconut cultivation, duck rearing and coir industry.

Kuttanad region encompasses vast stretches of backwaters, bordering mangrove formations, and rice fields. The mystifying labyrinth of shining waterways composed of lakes, canals, rivers & streams, is lined with dense tropical greenery and preserves village life styles that are completely removed from the buzz of city life. The views change from narrow canals and dense vegetation to open scenes and dazzling green paddy fields. Kuttanad is a backwater paradise and became the favourite destination for backwater cruise in Kerala. (Thampatti and Padmakumar, 1999)

Though the economy of the region was dependent on rice, the only crop that could be raised in lowland areas, it was also supported by coconut in homesteads, and by inland fisheries. Paddy

fields in Kuttanad are divided into three categories namely, *karappadam*, *kayal* and *karinilam*. (Thomas, 2002). The largest area karappadam is old reclaimed land extending to more than a lakh acres. Kayal is newly reclaimed wet land which lies ten to twenty feet below sea and is divided into padasekharams. Karinilam is comparatively dry fields with black peaty soil of high acidity and is located near village settlements. The soil in Kuttanad is a mixture of sand and clay in varying proportions. Generally in most of the low lying areas the soil is highly acidic and contains toxic salts. Kayal lands are reclaimed beds from Vembanad Lake and are mainly located in Kuttanad and Kottayam taluks. Karappadams are situated along the waterways and lakes mainly in the eastern and southern parts of Kottayam district while kari nilam is situated in the taluks of Viakom, Cherthala and Ambalapuzha(ibid).

Transformation of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad region to its present form is invariably related to the history of the reclamation of karappadams and kayal lands (Thomas, 2002). Reclamation involves the construction of outer walls called ring bunds (*puravarambu*) around the particular portion and draining the enclosed area by bailing water out of that enclosed portion at the beginning of every crop season. A government regulation issued in 1818 allowed reclamation and cultivation of such lands. This was further encouraged by providing guarantee for the possession of such lands tax free for the first ten years and thereafter levying very light taxes. Three distinct stages can be identified in the reclamation of kayal lands from the Vembanad Lake. In the first stage it was carried out by private entrepreneurs without any financial support from the part of the government. In this stage reclamation and other agricultural activities were completely under the barter system of financing in which farmers received loans from private money lenders like the Mancombu Brahmins in terms of paddy and paid back their loans also in terms of paddy. The next stage of reclamation was in the year 1888 with the government decision to provide direct loans to riots for reclaiming and bringing under cultivation the portions of Vembanad backwaters. It

boosted up the reclamation activity by encouraging huge investments by large number of wealthy and influential farmers from different parts of Central Travancore. This continued till the end of 1903 when the government considering the safety of the Cochin port banned further reclamation from the Vembanad lake.

The third phase of reclamation of kayal lands began with the repealing of ban on reclamation in 1912 (Thomas, 2002a). The old reclamation was confined to shallow upper Kuttanad area but due to the pressure on land and possibility of making new profits attracted the, more enterprising of Kuttanad's agricultural entrepreneurs to the New Reclamations in the Vembanad lake. In 1941 the Kayal King Muricken obtained the government authorisation to reclaim three blocks and he reclaimed over 936 hectares land in 6 blocks. The last in the series of reclamation has been the R block or Holland project of the early 1960's. The most difficulty in reclamation process was constructing bunds and draining water. The draining was done with the help of water wheels, oil engines and at last electrical engines.

Due to the geographical features, rice cultivation in Kuttanad was exposed to several threats such as regular flood submergence during monsoons and saline water intrusion during summer. As the wetlands in Kuttanad were submerged in water for most part of the year and due to poor drainage facilities annual and perennial crops cannot be successfully cultivated in these lands. The Kuttanad agro system, therefore, was faced with serious problems of hydrology, floods and salinity. The search for a permanent solution to the problem of floods and crop loss in Kuttanad had led to the construction of a spillway at Thottapally for the speedy drainage of flood water to the Arabian Sea. Due to the accumulation of floodwaters from the river systems in Kuttanad water level used to rise beyond manageable limits soon after the onset of the southwest monsoon. The entire low lying areas of the region used to remain flooded till the end of north east monsoon making it impossible to raise a second crop during the autumn season (Thampatti & Padmakumar,

1999). Detailed hydraulic surveys conducted from the early thirties had shown that this problem could be mitigated by diverting the floodwaters directly to the Arabian Sea at the extreme south of the flood limit itself.

The construction of a spillway was started in 1951 at Thottappally located 20 kilometers south of Alappuzha town (Sreejith, 2013). The maximum monthly dispatch of floods entering the Kuttanad region during the monsoon months was estimated as 69,000 cusecs and the spillway was designed to discharge more than 90 percent of it directly to the sea. However, while designing the spillway the problem of piling up of water due to the raising sea level during the monsoon months and the consequent formation of sand bar on the seaward side of the spillway were not taken into account. Therefore after the spillway was completed in 1955, the realized capacity of it is found to be less than one - thirds of the estimated capacity and hence fails to serve its purpose to some extent. Though the construction of the spillway had not made any perceptible improvement in the control of floods, it helped in raising an additional crop of rice by preventing the salinity intrusion during summer.

The construction of permanent outer bunds around the R Block kayal lands under the R Block - Holland Project that was started in 1961 was a landmark in the history of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad (Thomas, 2010). The embankments built earlier as part of reclamation were made of mud and were not strong enough to withstand the incessant wave action. Most of them were submersible under floodwaters during the monsoon months. Under the R Block - Holland Scheme permanent and non-submersible bunds that stood six feet above the MSL with a top width of ten feet and a total length of 10.4 kilometers were erected around the R Block kayal lands. Later in the 1970's the Kerala Land Development Corporation (K L D C) initiated a Bund Improvement Scheme for the repair and strengthening of ring bunds in kayal lands. However, the project had been dropped half way due to the paucity of sufficient funds. From the early days of reclamation destruction of *puncha* crop due to the ingress of saline water had been a recurring phenomenon in

the kayal lands of Kuttanad area. Thanneermukkom Salt Water Barrier was envisaged to mitigate the problem of saline water intrusion in to the Kayal lands located in the south of Thanneermukkom during the summer months when the fresh water inflow of the feeder river systems becomes weak. In addition to protecting the summer crop from water salinity also aimed to facilitate a second crop soon after the *puncha* season. Even though the construction of the Bund had begun in 1958 it was commissioned only in 1975. The Barrier is built across the Vembanad kayal connecting Vechoor in the east to Thanneermukkom in the south. Every year regulators of the Bund are lowered in December to prevent the entry of saline water in to Vemband lake and remain closed till May when the discharges from feeder rivers improve with the pre monsoon rains. After the construction of this Barrier it is possible to raise a second crop in most of the *puncha* lands.

Kuttanad is also an Intensive Agricultural District Programme area where the green revolution package has been tried with some success. The Green revolution package was introduced under the supervision of Ford foundation and U S government into Kuttanad region. Its strategy called for the injection of new high yield varieties of seeds, high energy technology (chemical fertilisers, pesticides, pump sets, tractors) changed the agrarian structure.

The development activities no doubt have helped in increasing rice cropping intensity in the region, but have led to several ecological problems. The construction of Thottapally spillway and permanent lining for earthen bunds had aggravated the flood situation in Kuttanad due to shortfalls in their design. But the construction of Thanneermukkom regulator, had not only contributed to the flood situation, but also to environmental degradation to a large extent. The persistence of fresh water conditions on the southern side of the regulator has triggered several ecological backlashes like proliferation of weeds, deterioration of water quality, increased morbidity among the local population and destruction of subsistence fishery on which the local

fishermen depended. The periodic tidal inflow which used to flush the water body is completely prevented with the result that the drained water from the rice fields with heavy load of pesticides and fertiliser residues remains stagnant in the water body. Added to these pollutants are the human, animal and agricultural wastes, and industrial effluents that are emptied into the Kuttanad water system. The human intervention and all these activities virtually turn Kuttanad, the rice bowl of Kerala into a poison bowl. Being the granary of Kerala, the problems in Kuttanad affects the entire state. Almost all the development schemes including the recently declared Kuttanad Package have reported to be failures raising serious concerns about the ecology and life of people in this region. The present study is conceived in this backdrop.

2.2. Paddy Cultivation in Kuttanad

In spite of the sharp decline in area under rice in the State; Kuttanad rice bowl accounts for 18 per cent of the paddy growing area and 25 per cent of total production of the State. Cultivated paddy lands in Kuttanad represent 26 per cent of the current land use pattern. The *punja* land located in Kuttanad is further classified as *Karappadam land* (33,000 ha), *Kayal land* (13,000 ha), and *Kari land* (9,000 ha).

In 1967, area under paddy in Kuttanad was about 60,921 ha, which in 2003 declined to 37,624 ha. The share of Kuttanad to the State's total paddy production shrunk from 37% in 1967 to 18% in 2003 (Swaminathan, 2007). During 1967-2003 period, 20 % of paddy lands have become fallow lands, another 8.3 % had become permanently water logged. Many of these neglected paddy lands have naturally evolved into a dense scrubland; some of them have lost their depth as they get filled with gravel, silt, and plant debris. An analysis of data from 1960-61 to 1999-2000 shows that paddy area in Alappuzha has indeed increased from 1968-69 till 1975-76 upon which it started declining slowly initially till about 1985, and more steeply afterwards. By the year 2000, the area appeared to have reduced to one-third of the peak area in 1975-76. Production of paddy

had peaked at about 1.4 lakhs tonnes/year during the decade 1971-72 to 1981-82, and the production decline started afterwards. This phase coincides with the spread of high-yielding paddy varieties which appear to have been the chief factor for the observed increase in paddy production. The increase was facilitated, no doubt, by the confidence that saline intrusion would be reduced by the Thanneer Mulkam Bund (TMB). To this extent, it appears that the barrage did accomplish what it set out to do – agricultural intensification (ibid).

Paddy cultivation is not only intensely linked with the livelihoods of the people, but also adds profound scenic beauty to the region. Paddy cultivation is essential for conserving the ecology of the Kuttanad wetland system. Compared to the other rice producing areas in the State, productivity of paddy crop is higher in Kuttanad region. Similarly, the per hectare cost of cultivation is also found to be higher in this region. The farmers of this region face several disadvantages, which their counterparts elsewhere are not facing. Under this unique predicament promotion of eco-friendly farming, generation of additional income, promotion of investment, creation of employment opportunities and development of farming infrastructure are essential. With threat of further shrinkage of rice area looming large, there is a dire need to safeguard rice cultivation and livelihood of rice farmers in principal rice growing area like Kuttanad (Swaminathan, 2007). The only sustainable way to do this is increasing the profitability from rice cultivation without losing competitiveness.

Rice in Kuttanad is grown during two seasons. *Puncha* is the main paddy crop in Kuttanad sown in November or December and harvested by the end of March. Rice is grown by construction of bunds and dewatering the so formed polders mainly during the *puncha* season from October – November to January – February. The *virippu* is the additional crop grown from May to the end of June and harvested in September or October. But there are slight variations in farming in Kayal and Karappadams. Due to geographical features Kayal areas mainly engages in *Puncha*

cultivation only and it starts in October. High yielding varieties of rice are sown in all the areas of Kuttanad. The rice cultivation in the six agronomic zones of Kuttanad is not similar. Productivity and profitability also remain different in these regions.

The paddy fields reclaimed from the Kayal exist in clusters called polder or *padasekharams* or *padam* or *padavu*. Many of such *padasekharams* are man-made in the sense that they are reclaimed lands from the bed of backwaters. Each of them is bound by an outer bund, which protects the cluster from surrounding water body. The *padasekharams* vary in size from 1 ha to 985 ha. A few of them, such as C, D, E, J, H, and R, Blocks, etc far exceed 240 ha (600 acre) size. Strengthening of outer bund during every crop season is very crucial to safeguard the crop from frequent flooding and intrusion of saline water common in the area. These bunds, depending on their location undergo erosion in different intensity caused by wind, floodwater and tidal currents and speedboat induced wave action. The regular maintenance of outer bund is managed by the respective 'Padasekhara Samithy' with cost proportionately shared by owners of the fields.

A century prior to 1940s, cultivation of *puncha* rice in Kuttanad was once in two or three years and the crop used to extend only up to January-February, when the sowing in the whole Kayal area used to complete before November, under a season imposed crop calendar and varieties used were 100 or less in duration. Since the 1940s, annual cultivation of paddy was encouraged by the Governments of the time for augmenting rice production in the State. However, paddy cultivation in Kuttanad continued to be risky with the *virippu* crop facing unpredictable submergence during monsoon flooding and the *punja* crop threatened by salinity intrusion. During December to May, when water flow in the four rivers flowing in the southern side of *Vembanad Kayal* decreases, tidal influx of salt water from Arabian Sea into the Kayal increases.

This period also witnessed the arrival of high yielding rice varieties, such as I R 8, *Annapoorna*, *Aswathi*, *Rohini*, *Triveni* and *Jaya*. While traditional Kuttanadan *punja* crop was 100-105 day

duration, the new high yielding varieties, which totally replaced the traditional varieties, were 15-20 days longer. Current ruling varieties, Jyothi and Uma, mature in 115 or 120 days. The increased maturity duration of varieties and the insurance against saltwater intrusion during summer offered by the Thanneer Makkam Bund, encouraged a non-rhythmic punja season stretching from November to May, replacing the earlier stringent punja crop calendar between November and March.

Chapter 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter attempts to review the literature related to the concept of social and labour movements. It explains the ideology and scope of social movement in general and labour movements in particular. Oommen (2010) is one author who tried to explain comprehensively the inception and development of social movement in Indian context. He observed that studies on social movements are relatively recent in social sciences and historians attempted to study it first.

3.1. Social Movement

One of the satisfactory conceptualisation of social movements is given by Oommen (2010). According to him social movements are mechanisms through which human beings attempt to move from periphery of a system to its centre. That is movements are conscious efforts on their part to mitigate deprivation and secure justice. While movements are conditioned by social structural factors, it also implies voluntary actions, participants create movements to achieve the goals they want to achieve, movements are perhaps the chief mechanisms through which the deprived categories demonstrate their power. Movements emerge when human beings committed to a specified set of goals participated in protest oriented purposive collective actions. Therefore its crucial aspects are mobilization and institutionalization (ibid).

The approaches to social movement can be classified as historical, psychological and sociological. Historians use the life cycle approach and the focus was broadly on the characteristics of the participants and their motivations, the psychological approach highlights movements as expressions of individual participant's needs and discontentment. They had the assumption that the aspirations and frustrations of individuals provide motives

for participation in movements. A sociological analysis of movements presupposes a theory of society because the collective action is one of the possible responses to crises, which occur in society. All sociologists who have studied complex societies consider the goal of the movement to be the change whereas anthropologists have a more or less contradictory perspective. They speak of the goal as the system of stability, regeneration or maintenance (ibid).

While describing about the scenario in the global south Agarwala (2007) observed that trade unions have suffered declining membership as the informal sector grows, and the new forms of resistance that have emerged often do so around issues and causes beyond the workplace, such as land, social and political rights, and even welfare demands. The heterogeneity of the actors involved and the specific ends pursued by these groups clearly differentiate them from traditional labour movements, and a large number are considered new social movements which are reflective of, and better suited to, the heterogeneous class and employment relations of the informal sector. But Friedman (2012) brings in a contradictory view point. According to him though some social movements have proven themselves powerful centres of organisation and action, social movements in general facing numerous problems and often lacking the capacity for sustained mass action.

Oommen (2010), while describing about the theoretical frame of social movements, contents that none of the founding fathers- Durkheim, Weber, and Marx suggested any neat and tidy theories of social movements or collective actions. There are different forms of collective actions such as panic responses, hostile outbursts, and organized social actions. Of these the first two could not be considered as social movements for they are relatively short term unorganized outbursts and are not necessarily inspired by an ideology or prompted by an issue.

Therefore only when an elementary collective action (the crowd behaviours, mass action) acquires organization and form a body of customs and traditions, established leadership an enduring division of labour, social rules, a social organization and a new scheme of life it becomes a social movements. It is suggested that social movements should be conceptualized as those purposive collective mobilizations informed of an ideology to promote change or stability using any means violent or non-violent and functioning with in at least an elementary organizational framework.

Authors classified movement in different ways. For example, Mukherjee (2013) classified the movements based on the quality of change they pursue like accumulative, alterative and transformative. While accumulative changes are intra-systemic, the latter two are systemic changes alterative change is geared to create new structures and transformative change aims at replacing the existing structure. He also distinguished three types of movements based on the nature of change they pursue such as collective mobilization geared to alteration or transformation of the structures of the system is a social movement, collective mobilization aimed at wide ranging changes in the major institutional system is a revolutionary movement and collective mobilization aimed at change within the system is a quasi movement.

Rao (1978) proposes three types of social movements – reformist, transformative and revolutionary. Reform movements bring about partial changes in the value system, transformative movements aim at effecting middle level, structural changes and the objective of revolutionary movements is to bring about radical changes in the totality of social and cultural systems. Classification of Oommen (2010) is bit different. He distinguishes three ideal types of movements as ideological, organizational and charismatic, based on which the three crucial elements of a movement emerge- ideology, organization or leadership. This typology is based on the assumption that when societies or communities within them experiences strain, mechanisms such as, formulating a new ideology, establishing a new

organization or throwing up a new leadership are likely to emerge. Irrespective of which movement component emerges first, other components too will have to emerge subsequently if it has to become a social movement.

The classification of social movements must also base on the group formation and the nature of goals these movements pursue. Group formations are three such as biological and spatial collectivities (eg: gender, race, age and regional/ local groups), civil collectivities (eg: workers, peasants, students, professional), and primordial collectivities (eg: linguistic, religious and caste groups). The goals may be categorized into instrumental and symbolic. Instrumental goals are those pointed towards the reallocation of wealth and power, symbolic goals are those that geared towards the redefinition of status and privilege. Movements may pursue anyone of these goals or they may sometimes combine both instrumental and symbolic goals.

In this version, movements are products of tensions released by structural differentiation and tension management mechanisms by specialized role incumbents. Due to dissatisfaction, individuals no longer perform role adequately this is followed by protests by the deprived that organize movements and finally new mechanism of regulation and coordination, such as unions, associations and welfare agencies are created to mobilize resources and commitments. A more flexible and specialized system inevitably emerges. Thus movements are viewed as adaptive mechanisms in a period of rapid social change.

The adequate framework for the study of social movements should take into account the dialectics between historicity (past experiences) social structures (present existential conditions) and the urge for a better future (human creativity). Theory of social movements implies not only a theory of social structure but also a vision about the future society (Oommen, 1985). Movements are neither mere emotional outbursts nor entirely the resultants

of the manipulations by leaders and demagogues, but the consequence of conscious efforts on the part of the participants to change the present social arrangements in the light of their past experiences avoiding pitfalls. Finally the continuous triggering off of the movements implies that human beings are not imprisoned by present structures and no moratorium on their creativity can be imposed. It is not necessary that an ideology should emerge first, for the birth of the social movements. People may come together and start an organization to deal with situation of strain. As the organization grows and develops, the ideology will be developed.

Three factors impinge on the scale of movements are the number of participants, the time span of movements and the social composition of movement participants. The movement participants should be of substantial number. The number of participant can be defined as substantial both in terms of universe, which forms the basis of mobilization as well as the absolute number of participants mobilized into collective action. The time spans defines the scale, yet it is one of the most neglected aspects in the studies of the movements. Thus uprisings, rebellions, civil disturbances, revolts, insurrections etc are all indiscriminately and interchangeably referred to as social movements. Some of them exist for a short period and others may continue for several months. The social composition of the participants is discerned in terms of the number of potential participants a movement can mobilize into collective action.

3.2. Labour Movement

The labour movement is a broad term for the development of a collective organization of working people, to campaign for better working conditions and treatment from their employers and governments, in particular through the implementation of labour and employment law (Paul and Robin, 2007). The labour movement exists to protect the

conditions (including pay) of workers, and to improve them if possible. The movement came into existence soon after the industrial revolution, when work began to be focussed on factories. Many ruling class individuals and political groups may also be active in and part of the labour movement.

In some countries, especially in the United Kingdom and Australia the labour movement is understood to encompass a formal "political wing", frequently known by the name labour party or workers' party. In Europe, the labour movement began during the industrial revolution, when agricultural jobs declined and employment moved to more industrial areas. The idea met with great resistance. The labour movement was active in the early to mid 19th century and various labour parties and trade unions were formed throughout the industrialized world. The International Workingmen's Association, the first attempt at international coordination, was founded in London in 1864. The key points were the right of the workers to organize them, the right to an 8 hour working day etc. In 1871 the workers in France rebelled and the Paris Commune was formed. From the mid-nineteenth century onward the labour movement becomes increasingly globalized.

According to Oommen (2009) the goal of the labour movement is change of the system; it challenges the present arrangement which favours those who own and control the means of production. The objective of the labour movement is radical and it may not endorse goals and means always acceptable to those whom they confront. He suggests that labour movements should be seen as purposive collective mobilisations, informed of an ideology to promote change or stability, using any means – violent or non-violent – and functioning within at least an elementary organisational framework.

3.3. Labour Movements in India

The role of labour movement is also explained in the context of class struggles (Harikumar, 1986). There are two clearly distinguishable agricultural classes in developing economies. The first class comprises those who work on land. They include tenants, share croppers, bonded labourers and various types of hired landless labourers. This group can be further divided into independent tenants and other comprising marginal tenants, share croppers and landless labourers. Independent tenants are those who own enough land and capital to be able to continue production and meet family consumption requirements without any need to lease in land or work for wages or borrow from moneylenders. The second group consists of traders, landlords and usurers.

Neither the labouring class nor the non-labouring class are internally homogenous. There are reasons for this. A peasant may also be a moneylender and a trader. These groups are neither stable nor distinguishable. For labouring classes, survival is the main problem and survival strategies are dependent on employability and exchangeability of their labour, which largely depends on the nature of personal relationships with the producers. Non-labouring groups seek to maximise their share of the produce of land, which they receive in the form of profit, rent, trading margins and usurious interest. Production relations observed may be viewed as the operation of two sets of mutually contradictory strategies - survival strategies and appropriation strategies.

The coexistence of a variety of production relations shows two features of these agrarian systems, viz., personalised economic relations and a very low remuneration for labour. Surplus in all forms is extracted in the form of tributes from the producers rather than generated in the process of production. Thus maximisation of surplus involves minimisation of remuneration for labour and not expansion of production and productivity. Personalised

economic relations arise from economic and social compulsions - the poverty of labouring class and relative surplus of labour.

Oommen (2010) identified three factors which conditions social movements including labour movements in a society. They are: (1) The core institutional order (CIO) of society, (2) the principal enemy as perceived by the deprived, and (3) the primary goal pursued by the society, all of which change over a period of time. That is to say, the nature and objective of the labour movement keep changing as these features of society change.

The Indian labour movement is more than 160 years old, with its origin in the 1850s and 1870s. But it gained momentum in 1918 when the Madras labour union was formed with mill workers as members. The formation of the All India Trade Union congress (AITUC) in 1920 gave a fillip to the organized labour movement in India. A series of agitations and strikes happened during the early years of unionization in different parts of the country. The focus of the unions was to end exploitation of workers in factories and other workplaces like mines, Trade union also participated in the freedom struggle against the colonial rule. National leaders like Mahatma Gandhi were active in the trade union movement. The introduction of the Trade Union Act of 1926 provided the required legal framework for unions. The election of communist government in states like Kerala and West Bengal gave a flip to the labour movement in the states. With the support of political parties and the elected governments, the public sector companies and many private companies became heavily unionized.

There are different schools of thought about the rationale for labour movements. The socialist or Marxist view suggests that the labour movement came into existence as evidence of workers resisting exploitation by those who control and manage their work. But rightists or conservatives view it as evidence that workers are greedy (in their demands for better wages

etc) or power-hungry (should they aim to change capitalism). The twentieth century has witnessed the dominance of one view or the other at different times.

The widening gap between the incomes of the richest and the poorest are primarily a reflection of a tendency for top incomes to grow faster than incomes throughout the rest of society. This widening gap seems, in the absence of strong trade unions and an effective labour movement, to reflect a lack of any effective democratic constraint on top incomes. Some of the more equal societies gain their greater equality by redistribution, but others start out with smaller differences in pre-tax incomes. The weakening of the labour movement during the last quarter of the 20th century has had a significant impact on the ability of working people to influence their standard of living and quality of life. Labour government could play in generating a good life for country.

Labour values are not abstract universal values such as 'freedom' or 'equality'. Distinctive labour values are rooted in relationships, in practices that strengthen an ethical life. The Labour tradition was rooted in a politics of the Common Good, a democratic movement that sought its rightful place in the life of the nation. Today's labour movement includes trade unions, any political parties that exist to represent workers and various political organisations of a socialist, anarchist or Marxist outlook.

Labour has been central to the modern globalization process. From issues of the embodied movement of workers to the emergence of a global division of labour, and organized responses to capitalist relations of production, the relevance of labour to globalization is not new, and it is far more significant in shaping the world than is usually recognized. The labour movement must inspire people with a broader vision of what is possible. Throughout the world, action by the labour movement has led to reforms and workers' rights, such as the two-

day weekend, minimum wage, paid holidays, and the achievement of the eight-hour day for many workers

In order to understand the nature of participants in mobilisations in rural India we must recognise that three identities are simultaneously salient: primordial/ascriptive (caste, religious, linguistic, etc), class/occupational, and political/ideological (Oommen, 1984). The tendency to ignore this multiple identity of participants and to emphasise only one of these identities has cluttered our understanding of the real character of agrarian movements. Insofar as the participants in agrarian movements are drawn from a multiplicity of castes and identified with different political groups/parties even when they belong to the same class category, it will be nearly impossible to mobilise all of them into class-orientated collective actions. The sources of their deprivations vary and consequently their perceptions of enemies and styles of protest too vary. For example, the dalits were and still are deprived on three counts: cultural oppression, political subjugation and economic exploitation. There seems to be a hierarchy of deprivations in their cognitive map and it is no accident that the earliest mobilisations by dalits were collective actions to fight *untouchability* followed by the demand for political rights, currently graduating on to class actions (Oommen 1984).

Agrarian Classes and Political Mobilisation in India

Category Identities	Mobilisers	Main Issues	Chief Enemies
Agrarian Proletariat drawn mainly from dalits, adivasis and backward classes	Political Parties such as CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML) and Radical NGOs	Higher wages, better working conditions, political rights, cultural oppression, human rights	Landlords and rich farmers, drawn from upper and middle castes, and politically right wing, the bureaucracy and the police
Middle peasantry drawn mainly from middle and upper castes	Parties such as CPI, CPI(M) and Indian National Congress	Higher prices for agricultural products, subsidised agricultural inputs.	Rich landlords and farmers (as they corner much of the subsidised inputs), petty revenue and development bureaucracy.

Rich farmers drawn from upper and middle castes	Parties such as Congress, politically independent organisations such as Punjab Zamindari Union, Tamil Nadu Agricultural Association; left parties such as CPI, CPI(M) also extended support.	Higher prices, subsidised inputs, disciplining of wage labourers and if possible reduction of wages etc.	The state, agrarian proletariat, industrial urban India.
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(Source: Oommen, 1984)

3.4. Marxian Theory of Class Struggle

Karl Marx viewed the structure of society in relation to its major classes, and the struggle between them as the engine of change in this structure (Rummel, 1977). According to him conflict was not deviational within society's structure, nor were classes functional elements maintaining the system. A class is determined by the ownership of property. Such ownership vests a person with the power to exclude others from the property and to use it for personal purposes. In relation to property Marx proposed three great classes of society: the bourgeoisie who own the means of production such as machinery and factory buildings, and whose source of income is profit, landowners whose income is rent, and the proletariat who own their labour and sell it for a wage. Therefore Class is conceived as a theoretical and formal relationship among individuals.

Marx proposed that the force transforming latent class membership into a struggle of classes is *class interest*. Out of similar *class situations*, individuals come to act similarly. They develop a mutual dependence, a community, a shared interest interrelated with a common income of profit or of wages. From this common interest classes are formed, and for Marx, individuals form classes to the extent that their interests engage them in a struggle with the opposite class.

Class conflict as explained by Marx is the struggle between classes having opposing interests. Initially this was proposed to be restricted at the micro level. Eventually, given the maturing of capitalism, the growing disparity between life conditions of bourgeoisie and proletariat, and the increasing homogenization within each class, individual struggles become generalized to coalitions across different contexts. Thus increasingly class conflict is manifested at the societal level. The distribution of political power is determined by power over production (i.e., capital). Capital confers political power, which the bourgeois class uses to legitimize and protect their property and consequent social relations. Finally, the division between classes will widen and the condition of the exploited workers will deteriorate so badly that social structure collapses: the class struggle is transformed into a proletarian revolution.

The Marxian theory of class struggle is essentially applicable to the struggles in the agrarian sector in Kuttanad. There existed two easily distinguishable classes in Kuttanad. Initially the powerful landlords who enjoyed all the power had supreme dominance on the labourers who worked for them. The workers had no voice but to follow the dictates. Any isolated act of disobedience or resistance from the part of workers lead to cruel and inhumane treatment even to the level of finishing life through physical torturing. It was a different version of slavery. This continued to a level where the workers and their families had found it impossible to tolerate. Thus some local leaders having the leftist thinking had taken the courage to organise the toiling labourers. They had to struggle to mobilise the people as any attempt of such collective actions was severely opposed by the powerful landowners and was considered as antisocial. Landowners made use of all forms of coercion to suppress the organised movements from the part of labour class. Gradually, the local leadership could succeed in organising the masses against exploitation and inhumane treatment. Several people had to sacrifice their life and several others had to face severe torturing to withstand

the resistance of landlords. It was the political philosophy and leadership which contributed to the success of such a mass mobilisation. Later by mid 1960s the unionisation had reached to a level of militant organisation. The landowners had to get consent from the representatives of union movement for almost all decisions related to agricultural operations. By that time the working class became so powerful in terms of their collective consciousness and bargaining power. Thus the struggle in Kuttanad was essentially a story of two equally powerful classes.

The dynamics of the agrarian movement in Kuttanad had been critically analysed by Oommen (1985) in his work. He claimed that the beginning and the nucleus of agrarian movement in Travancore rests with the formation of class/occupation based associations in Kuttanad. The experiences show that once a deprived category is organised to fight its enemies, the enemies in turn will organise to face the opposition.

The author summarises the lessons of the agrarian struggle in Travancore as follows:

- a. In order that a confrontation develops into a movement, the deprived categories should be sufficiently united and strong enough to offer resistance.
- b. If the struggle was fought for the cause of the poor they should have external support in the form of organisational, financial, and political.
- c. The struggle should be led by persons drawn from dominant families in the local community.

In other words he explained the factors influencing the survival of any movement as the external agencies support and the degree of legitimacy the movement enjoys. He concluded that lack of status crystallisation of a primordial collectivity lead to movement participation, to establish congruence between its different statuses-class, caste and political. Also a social movement serves as a status maintaining or bestowing device to its local leaders and a

material or emotional need fulfilling device for its followers (Oommen, 1985). The institutionalisation of the movement is believed to occur as the goals it pursued are achieved or elaborate machinery for the implementation of movement goals emerges or associational proliferation takes place leading to the substitution for the movement by these associations. The author concludes that the goals pursued by the agrarian movement have been achieved and the agrarian problems remain unsolved.

Chapter 4

AGRARIAN RELATIONS AND LABOUR MOVEMENTS IN KUTTANAD: A HISTORICAL REVIEW

The focus of the present study is on depicting the historical transitions of agrarian relations and labour movements in Kuttanad. It attempted to trace the history from 1940 onwards. The inputs for this chapter is derived from published sources especially the old historical information. This is verified and supplemented with the data collected from respondents belonging to the different categories such as labourers, farmers, trade union members, intelligentsia and activists.

Agrarian relations in Kuttanad need to be analysed in the pretext of prevailing socio-economic scenario especially before 1940s. There was a time where the labourers were treated as slaves in modest form of attached labour system. Narayan (2003) rightly describes the history. He noted that despite the early development of capitalism in Kuttanad, the relationship between farmers and labourers remained pre-capitalist or semi-feudal and authoritarian, at least until the early 1940s. Caste and caste prejudice were important factors in this relationship (ibid). There existed a repressive caste system with the upper castes establishing their economic and social life based on land. Division of labour was predominantly based on caste whereby the manual labour was relegated to the lowest castes while the upper castes owned the means of production. The upper caste landowners remained the 'primordial power' in society and were challenged by the economic power of new classes who later became politically powerful also. The non-agricultural job opportunities and avenues of educational development triggered social movements with liberatory goals by the

lower castes and politicisation based on communal/caste grounds with competition for resources such as land and for service sector jobs (ibid).

4.1 Attached Labour System

Many factors were instrumental for the widespread existence of attached labour system primarily because this ensures the availability of adequate number of workers. This was predominantly of semi feudal in nature. The arduous nature of job that too in unhealthy and unhygienic conditions prevented the cultivators from participating in the farming work. There was a personal bond and commitment from the part of worker which is passed down from generations (George, 1984). The labourer and his family are often housed in a small plot of land attached to the farm; they are assured of employment opportunities -within the farm and are given cash advances and perquisites at intervals. However the compensation to the workers was not adequate enough to their suffering (Jose, 1976).

The intensity of suffering of the attached labourers was explained by George (1987) also. The ban on leasing out land had prevented the *pulayas*, *parayas* and other slave castes from becoming tenants. It relegated them to the level of landless agricultural labourers. The laws of pollution had also prevented the *pulayas*, *parayas* and other slave castes from entering into any craft or trade which demanded intercourse with the upper castes. These people were not employed to work in the dry lands which were adjoining the houses of upper caste land owners, and tenant cultivators, enforced economic dependence. Thus all possible changes of upward mobility were sealed to them. The laws of pollution in fact pushed them to wet land cultivation, which is a very unhealthy, untidy and a hard type of labour. Threat of eviction from homesteads, perpetration of physical violence and subjugation by the socially disabling rules of caste were the devices by which the tenant cultivators and the latterly emerged class of owner-cultivators exercised their hold over attached labourers.

Traditionally, agriculture sector in Kuttanad comprise three tiers of people: top consists of land lords of Brahmins and Nair Chieftains, tenants who leased in land from the dominant groups formed the middle layer and aggreestic slaves of the landlords who were the actual tillers of soil were the lowest category (George, 1984). Jose (1976) noted the existence of a caste-based hierarchical society wherein, the superior ownership rights on land called *jenmom rights* were held by the temple authorities, the Brahmin families and the Nair chieftains. They constituted the class of non cultivating landlords who thrived on the rent share. The land used to be leased out to tenants in large parcels. These tenants mostly belonged to the Nair or Syrian Christian communities. Under the traditional system there existed a protected land market. The privilege of leasing in land was not extended to members of the scheduled castes and tribes who formed the lowest strata of the society. The actual tilling operations in lands thus leased out, was done not necessarily by the tenants but by labours belonging to the scheduled castes and the backward communities like the Ezhavas. The scheduled caste members, who were socially relegated to carry out the agricultural operations were treated as aggreestic slaves to the land and transacted along with it by the jannies. This type of social discrimination was prevalent till 1930s (Tharamangalam, 1981).

4.2. Origin of Labour Movement

The history of labour movement in Kuttanad can be traced back to the First World War. George (1984) has portrayed a clear picture of issues during that time. He noted that the paddy price hike during the First World War made capitalist tenants reclaiming shallow backwaters. Jose (1976) also substantiated this incident in his work. According to him, opening up of additional land for cultivation, with vast areas under individual possession had far reaching repercussions on the agrarian relations in Kuttanad. One such change is the increase in scale of labour requirements for agricultural operations.

Further, due to the peculiar geographical and ecological features of the Kuttanad the agricultural operations could not be done in isolation with small groups of labourers. For example, padasekharams in the kayal zone being vast expanses of paddy fields, agricultural operations like dewatering, sowing and transplanting and harvesting had to be carried out in unison, which required the services of thousands of labourers together for peak season operations. This necessitated a new phenomenon of migration of agricultural workers in large numbers from the nearby villages. This seasonal migration during the peak requirements initiated a transition from the attached labour system to the employment of casual labourers. Introduction of electric engines for agricultural operations like dewatering, construction of permanent bunds with granite walls were other changes during early 20th century.

Despite these developments, the paddy cultivation was not in sound condition because this improvement in paddy production could not benefit the workers (George, 1984). The workers continued to struggle with long hours of work, low wages, exposure to the vagaries of nature and irregular wage payments etc. Added to this was the intense social discrimination and humiliation. This was reflected in the dress, language, customs and relationship with land lords. This multiple suffering created a tension among the workers and they were ready to retaliate. The economic crisis in 1929 and large scale unemployment during Second World War further added momentum to such a thinking. The social transformations like formation of SNDP and *Pulaya Maha Sabha* (PMS), *Vaikom satyagraha* and *Moplah revolt* in Malabar were other factors boosted up the formation of an organised movement among agricultural workers. Proximity of Kuttanad to the Aleppey town, a hub of industrial activity, influenced the agricultural workers a big way. They started comparing their work with that of factory workers and realised that the working conditions and wages were worse than that of the factory workers. This created dissatisfaction among the former.

George (1984) cites incidents like the strike of coir factory workers in 1938 as another contributing factor for union movement in Kuttanad. This strike was a successful one and the agricultural workers realised that united actions and collective movements was the ultimate solutions to their human sufferings. Jose (1976) also recorded same point while describing about the history of trade union movement among agricultural labourers in Kuttanad. He observed that from 1938 onwards the task of organizing the agricultural labourers of Kuttanad was taken up by the leadership of the coir factory workers, a task which they successfully accomplished by the beginning of the 1940's. Tharamangalam (1981) also described the reasons for the origin of trade union movement in Kuttanad. According to him, the ecological and geographical conditions together with its proximity to the Aleppey town, the nerve centre of trade union activities in the State were some of the factors instrumental in unionisation of agriculture workers in Kuttanad. The interaction of the agricultural workers with the coir workers became a propelling force in this. The role of coir factory union activists in the beginning years of unionisation of agricultural workers was remarkable.

In 1999, Kannan summarised the context for political mobilization of agriculture workers. He observed the role of historical factors in the process of 'political mobilisation under conditions of accelerated social change'. According to him the factors include the early proletarianisation of a large portion of the traditional work-force, the emergence of social-reform movements for attaining social dignity for the poor and those considered socially backward, the upcoming of nationalist politics, quickly accompanied by a radical political movement which sought to incorporate all sections of the labouring poor, irrespective of their status as peasant, wage labourers, or self-employed in non-agricultural occupations.

All these factors induced the toiling mass of agricultural labourers in Kuttanad to respond to the communist call of unionisation. As a result the **first labour union among agricultural workers in Kerala was formed in 1939**. There were differences in opinion regarding the name of the first union. Alexander (1980) described it as the Travancore Agricultural Labourers' Union (TALU) while according to most of the other authors like Goerge (1984), and Tharamangalam (1981) it is Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali Union (TKTU).

4.3. The Growth and Transition of Labour Movement

According to Alexander (1980) the first organised struggle of the movement was the one conducted in 1941 demanding the regulation of working hours, and use of standard measures for paying wages, to press these demands, labourers had to resort to 'strike', the agitation finally led to some regulation of working hours. George (1984) narrated the incident of a major successful struggle of TKTU against a land lord named *Thevarkattu Thomman* in the year 1943. The workers joined for a total strike and was able achieve their demand after seventeen days of struggle. This was a time for union activities to be rejuvenated to the full extent. Instilling political and social consciousness and confidence among workers were the dominant aims of the union then.

It was Tharamangalam (1981) who attempted to give a comprehensive description of the struggles. The **first phase was the formation years** from 1938 to 1951 and was described as difficult and trying time for the movement. The leaders had to struggle a lot to get the workers attracted to the union because the workers had an intense bond(age) with their bosses. It was really challenging to mobilise the workers by fighting against the resistance proposed by the land lords and farmers. Moreover, the workers who joined in the union also had to face lot of suffering in the form of beatings, loss of employment, false law suits and

eviction from their homesteads. The social system was all against the workers. The small victory in the beginning years of the union attracted the *Pulaya* workers who were reluctant to join the movement initially. The formation of Kerala Peoples Arts Club (KPAC) created great influence throughout the state. They used their plays as a medium for conscientising the working class all over the state. Oommen (1985) summarised peculiarity of the period prior to 1952 the agrarian movement in Travancore-cochin. According to him the movement operated almost invisible concentrated on the “idea marketing’ sensitising the agrarian poor about the exploitation they were subjected to and sharpening their sense of deprivation.

The **second phase was a consolidation stage**, which spills over the period 1951 -57, because the union could organise a number of protests and struggles (Tharamangalam, 1981). The success of these struggles was a morale boosting experience to the agricultural workers in Kuttanad. From the late 1950s the work of the unions became intense and regular. They could involve in almost all issues confronted by the workers. The militant struggles of the agricultural workers were against the land lords and the government to enact laws and policies in favour of workers. The landlords in turn tried to resist the pressure of workers through physical means and influenced the govt. through power influence. Thus **the agrarian relations in Kuttanad became a power struggle between the organised agricultural workers and the powerful landlords** (George, 1984). By this time the conflict between the two parties was much frequent.

Oommen (1985) elaborated the strategy of union. According to him the conflict between the farmers and workers depended on two things. The resources the farmers possess like economic and political. The ability of the person to command and mobilise a local militia force which could match the political party and union volunteers. **It these factors were there the union made a strategic withdrawal.**

One important turning point in the evolution of labour movement in Kuttanad is the **Punnappra Vayalar upheaval**. The struggle was against the anti people policies of sir C.P. Ramaswamy Iyer, the divan of the State. This dominantly attracted the participation of agricultural workers. Hundreds of people were killed and many others injured in the struggle. As a consequence of this the govt. imposed ban on the union activities **which was a setback to the organised movements** during that time. The ban was lifted in 1951 which gave rejuvenation to the union activities. TKTU made use of this incident to its full potential to mobilise the workers further. In 1953 there was another strike declared by TKTU. It was successful as the govt set up a tripartite meeting. Since the landlords were not willing to implement the resolutions of the tripartite meeting another strike was initiated in 1954 against Murikkan family. In 1955 the strike was for *theerpu* which was agreed upon by the farmers. Oommen (1985) rightly explained the scenario. He concluded that consequent upon the virtual breakdown of patron client relations, the farmers found it difficult to persuade the free floating workers to perform their traditional obligations. While the workers did not find it persuasive enough to discharge traditional obligations as several privileges they used to enjoy were no more available to them. This was the beginning of an employer employee transactions and relationship in Kuttanad.

4.3.1. History after Kerala State Formation

The first ministry under the leadership of Communist Party was **a progressive factor** for the workers movement. In 1957 a major struggle was initiated for fixing the minimum wages. Even though this was vehemently opposed by the farmers the govt. could make a final notification in fixing the minimum wages for various agricultural operations. It was during this time the govt. tried to maintain a harmonious relations in agriculture sector. Some of the

positive decisions made in favour of the workers include: hutment dwelling right, declaration of minimum wages, prevention of eviction, prevention of police force from intervening agriculture related disputes and formation of Industrial Relations Committee (IRC), a tripartite machinery. The struggle in 1958 was for further increase in wages and reducing working hours. Another issue of concern for workers in 1960s was mechanisation of agriculture sector. Initially restricted use of tractors was permitted by the owners of tractors. Then due to persistent pressure from workers unions it was decided to employ ploughmen at least twice before each cultivation. The struggle against other labour saving technology also continued and the farmers had to face stiff resistance from the workers unions.

The communist ministry introduced Agrarian Relations Bill in 1957. This too was strongly opposed by the landlords. There was continued pressure from workers unions to pass the bill. But later the new government which came in to rule tried to dilute the bill. Due to the interventions of High court the bill got modified but was not in full shape of helping the workers. But a thoroughly revised Land Reforms Act was passed in 1963. This time period witnessed the formation of a **farmer dominated organisation called Kerala Karshaka Federation (KKF)** sponsored by Kerala Congress. This further intensified class division between the farmers and workers. The workers were numerically strong while the farmers were economically and politically strong. Parallel to this there were initiatives to split the left dominated workers union and by 1960 congress sponsored agriculture workers union got strength in Kuttanad region. In 1962 the major issue was the protecting the right of hutment dwellers (Oommen, 1985). In 1966 the CPM sponsored union demanded wages higher than the prescribed rates. As long as the communists were in power such demands were accepted.

The split of the communist movement in 1964 was another major setback to the workers movement in Kerala. As a result of difference in philosophy, a new organisation called

Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU) was formed in 1968 supported by CPM. In the same year CPI formed Kuttanad Karshaka Thozhilali Union (**KKTU**) which was later attached to its state wing Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (KSKTF). This was later became affiliated to the national organisation formed in 1968 called Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union (BKMU). In 1973 Congress Party also succeeded in organising agriculture workers by forming a state level organisation *called Deseeya Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (DKTF)*. The revolutionary socialist party also formed a union in Kuttanad in 1969 called **Upper Kuttanad Karshaka Thozhilali Union** which was not a successful effort.

With the support of LDF ministry in 1967 workers movement **regained its momentum**. The wage rates and working hours for different areas in Kuttanad had been fixed during their tenure. Since 1967 the struggles and agitations of agriculture unions further increased in number and militancy. In 1969 another mass movement was initiated by KSKTU for effective implementation of land reforms bill. Finally the bill got the assent of the President in December 1969. With the pressure from KSKTU, the govt had taken over three big farms of Rani, Chithira and Marthandam from Murikkan (landlord) renamed it as QST Kayal comprising 1600 acres. But this was not very successful due to red tapism and bureaucracy. Another major struggle was in 1971, demanding hutment rights (*kudikidappu*).

During 1960s the increase in the number of agricultural labourers was more than three times the increase in population, with no significant increase in the acreage under rice or intensity of cropping. This led to competition among the workers themselves on the one hand and struggle between the labourers and cultivators for employing the labourers on the other. Many instances of violence erupted in different parts of the region (Thomas and Thomas, 1999).

There was a time in sixties and seventies where the farmers had to get prior support from the union offices to get the harvesting done hassle free. Kannan, (1988) reported that "It is a kind of irony when a farmer in Kuttanad had to go to the union offices in the late sixties and seventies to inform them of the date of harvesting and request them to limit the number of workers for that operation. It was only a decade ago that his lordship decided who should participate in harvesting". Only the harvesters with entry pass were allowed to the paddy field to harvest (Thomas 1994). Conflicts and physical confrontation increased in number and intensity. The scenario during 1965-75 was rightly described by Tharamangalam (1981) as "few agricultural operations in Kuttanad took place without the massive presence of police" There were many instances of violence erupting in many parts of the region. Strikes, hartals and police interferences leading to lathi charges were frequent in those days. Extreme cases of shooting, resulting in the death of agricultural labourers were also reported. Number of union activists arrested and cases registered by police and charged to courts increased many on flimsy grounds (Oommen 1970; Das 1972; Alexander 1973; Tharamangalam 1981 and Kamalasanan 1993).

4.3.2. Struggle in 1970s

The struggle initiated in 1970 was for improving wages and working conditions. Consequent to the continuous struggle by KSKTU in December 1970 these demands were approved by the CPI Government. Land Grab was yet another powerful attempt by KSKTU to notify the surplus land.

In 1970, Land grab agitation was the major event of the union. In November 1969, the CPI led govt. got in to the power. This was to ensure the ownership rights to the hutment dwellers. The other objective was to take over and distribute the surplus land. **The second phase of the struggle was excess land struggle in 1972.** In its first stage union focussed on

identifying excess land while the second stage the focus was creating temporary huts by volunteers of the struggle symbolically establishing their rights (Oommen, 1985). He observed that the struggle in 1972, in a way was a setback to the militant union. Since the people had ownership of land their deprivation got mitigated and they are not fully available to the union activities which they were completely devoted. So the author contends that the movement of this sort to be success if the dispossessed should be kept a low level of material welfares, their deprivation to be unalleviated and their aspirations to be kept unfulfilled.

In 1974 the focus of the labour movement was on agricultural Workers Bill. As a result of organised struggle the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act got assent from the President in July 1974. This invited further agitation from both the workers and the landlords for provision against their interest. The landlords succeeded in getting their demands agreed. **During the 1974-75 period the struggles and agitations found to be disappeared to become a calm and peaceful era.** This was partially because of the slowdown of activities of CPM led union and invasion of the other unions led by Congress and RSP in the Kuttanad region. Existence of IRC and collective negotiations helped to reduce the conflicts. **Declaration of emergency in 1975-1977 was another hindrance on the rigour of labour movement.** This was an adverse time for workers movement. Land lords tried to take advantage of this to the best of their capacity. Despite the emergency, the workers resisted anti labour attempts during this time. KSKTU continued to put pressure for the worker's rights.

4.3.3. Struggle during 1980 -2000

During early eighties, the focus of the agrarian mobilisations changed from land reforms to the welfare of the agricultural workers. One such turning point in the agrarian relations in Kuttanad was the introduction of a new social security measure in the form of Agriculture Labourer (*Karshaka Thozhilali*) Pension. Initially the amount was Rs.42 per month.

Currently pension is Rs 500/ month. This had been an agenda of struggle for the union for several years.

The demand of KSKTU for three decades for the protection of paddy land has been materialised by enacting the Paddy Land Protection Act in 1982. They conducted several struggles for this purpose. It was in 1986 that the Government had appointed Indo Dutch Mission to conduct a survey in Kuttanad for its development planning. For the development of the paddy farm sector in Kuttanad the study proposed (1) effective measures to control floods and salinity ingress, (2) more scientific planning and management in paddy cultivation, (3) implementation of sub soil drainage system in karilands, (4) measures for the adequate supply of HYV seeds, (5) moderation in the use of chemical fertilizers and insecticides, (6) better surveillance and control of plant diseases and pests, (7) mechanization of farming activities, (8) effective machinery to impart training to farmers and (9) diversification of crops to supplement paddy farmers' income. With the implementation of these proposals, the study anticipated that the per hectare productivity of the puncha and virippu crops in Kuttanad could be enhanced by 12.20 percent and 20.05 percent respectively.

The year 1989 was noted for the introduction of Group Farming method in Kuttanad. Labour Welfare Fund for agricultural workers was introduced in 1990. Agricultural workers having minimum age of 18 years are eligible for this. This fund is created out of a tripartite contribution from the agriculture labour, farmer, and government. In age of 60 years, they will get the maturity amount of Rs. 25,000. This was introduced by LDF ministry under the leadership of E K Nayanar. This provides financial support to marriage of daughter, education, special support to children having higher marks in SSLC.

A major struggle in 1992 was an anti reclamation stir under the left initiative. This was widely known as *vettinirathal*. In order to protect paddy land union members entered into

paddy fields having other crop cultivation. The top level leaders like Harkishan Singh Surjith, and V S Achuthanadhan were actively involved in this struggle. But later the struggles of KSKTU became violent and they destroyed crops of several acres of land in the name of this riot. They forcefully occupied the reclaimed land.

In 1996, Shri. KNS Nair was entrusted to carry out a study on the issues in Kuttanad. As per his suggestion an attempt was made for fish culture in alternate years which would raise the income of the farmers. The popular slogan was one paddy and one fish. Unfortunately this attempt was thwarted by the agricultural labour union (under the leadership of CPI M) in Alappuzha district. It is carried on profitably in the Kuttanad region falling under Kottayam district. An agitation in the name 'Save Rice Field agitation (SRFA)' was launched by KSKTU in 1997. Raising a high point of rice debate the strategy was destroying the crops planted in rice fields.

KSKTU claimed to mobilise workers against rice field conversions from 1982- 1996 after the first SRFA in 1982 in Kuttanad. There were demonstrations in front of government offices to bring the issue to the notice of the government. But there was not much response from the government or from farmers. Another massive campaign on the issue was initiated by KSKTU in July 1997. The support from scientists of KAU made more impact in creating awareness about rice field conversions. They could sensitise people to the scientific and social aspects of rice field conversions like the environmental problem, water conservation issue, unemployment and social issues due to a fall in food production because of rice land conversions. However, farmers and their organisations painted a very different picture of SRFA. They commented that there are no big farmers or agrarian capitalists in Kuttanad as KSKTU claimed. According to them low profitability, scarcity of labour and high wages are the major problems of rice cultivation. Farmers claimed that SRFA was a sheer political exercise targeted to political opponents and suggested the hollowness of this 'symbolic

agitation' by listing the CPI (M) leaders and cadre who have converted rice fields to other uses (Narayan, 2003).

Since CPI (M) was in power during SRFA, they could not afford to let the agitation continue, given the concerted negative response in the political realm. In the pretext of a discussion by the then chief minister the struggle came to an end. KSKTU claimed that rice field conversions completely stopped in 1997 as a result of the agitation, but from 1998 onwards conversion has been wide- spread again, because of the carelessness and rent-seeking behaviour of the government officials responsible for implementing the law (Sudhakaran, 1998:39). On both sides of the political fence, there were exaggerated claims and counter-claims for and against the agitation. These perspectives moulded public opinion and one of the debates in land use which was most discussed in Kerala.

The year 2000 was noted for the introduction of threshing machines in Kuttanad. Since the harvesting was done by labours, they were eligible to get *patham & theerpu*. Hence without much resistance the labour unions had to oblige to this. Another initiative during 2000 was GALASA (Group Approach for Locally Adapted and Sustainable Agriculture). This was initiated and being propagated by the Agricultural University as an experiment in padashekharams of Kavalam Panchayat. This was well received by the farmers (as more profitable and less dangerous) and hence continued to the agricultural season of 2003-04. RASTA (Rural Agency for Social and Technological Agency) a Non- Governmental Organisation attempted to popularise appropriate and participatory technology in particular and the use of organic inputs. Through frequent monitoring farmers themselves became key informants and resource persons. It is reported the programme also yielded rich dividends. ATMA (Agricultural Technical Managemnet Agency) Government organised agency started its activity in Kuttanad region in 2008. This agency is concentrating on the development of

paddy, fish, cattle etc. ATMA is linked with Krishi Bhavan. Government fund is transferring to farmers through ATMA. ATMA is conducting study and training programs, disease identification of paddy and its remedies and new technology identification.

4.3.4. Struggle after 2000

Introduction of harvesting machine in 2005 was another turning point in the agriculture sector of Kuttanad. This is vehemently opposed by the labour unions. Harvesting is a highly labour intensive work. The workers were really scared of losing employment in large scale during harvesting seasons. This led to frequent conflicts between farmers and labours. Farmers had to take permission from local party leaders to use harvesting machine. One turning point in this agitation was the summer rain during 2007-2008 (primary data). Because of the heavy unexpected rain harvesting could not be done properly during this time as they could not mobilise adequate labour. As a result, vast areas of paddy fields got affected. A group of people from various part of Kerala assembled & harvested some areas of paddy under the leadership of KVS, a NGO working for farmers in the region. The unions could be convinced of the labour shortage through this incident and they had to accept the requirement of machines for harvesting. Limited level of involvement of manual labour is still possible to harvest the areas where machine cannot perform like, side of the fields.

A scheme to write off debt burden up to Rs. 2,00,000 was also launched in the 2006. There was a provision to offer financial support of Rs 50,000 to farmers who suicide due to debt. The amount of pension of agricultural labours got increased from Rs. 120 to Rs. 500 per month (sourceprimary data). Another major turning point in the agrarian sector was declaration of Kuttanad Package in 2008. This was proposed as a comprehensive project involving the largest among the financial packages sanctioned to a single region. Designed by famous scientist M.S. Swaminathan, it was expected to conclusively deal with the flood

threats that were for long plaguing Kuttanad, and ensure overall development of the region. It was expected to mitigate agrarian distress in Alappuzha & Kuttanad Wetland System which was approved by the Govt. of India. It was a Package with a total cost outlay of Rs. 1,840 crores which was accepted by the Govt. of India for funding under on-going Central Sector Schemes. The Kuttanad Package will help to preserve the unique Kuttanad ecosystem, increase the rice production and productivity and improve the standard of living of the farmers of the region by way of reduced cost of cultivation and improved income. But the much acclaimed package is criticised for its poor monitoring and implementation. Major projects under the package — the renovation of Thottappally spillway, Thaneermukkom barrage and the Alappuzha-Changansserry (AC) canal — have not been started yet. The shoddy implementation also worsened the flood situation in Kuttanad. A package envisaged to save Kuttanad is now bringing only woes to the people of the region (Bablu, 2013).

In 2013 there was a decision to distribute surplus land (under the ownership of govt and land linked to court cases) to landless people. Even though the demand of unions was to provide at 10 cents, government agreed to distribute 5 cents based on land availability. But it is also not happening now, because of the lack of availability of appropriate land to be distributed. For example the person in Alleppey will be demanding land in the same district itself, this may not be possible as such.

4.4. Class Struggle: Counter Reaction by the Farmers

The dynamics of movement in Alleppey was by and large explained as confrontations between laboured led by Marxists and farmers affiliated to Kerala congress. Thus the gradual emergence of farmers and agrarian proletariats as separate classes is almost certain when they are organised and mobilised into collective actions based on their specific economic interests. (Oommen, 1985)

The identities were party based within each class category while the class perception itself was the function of politicisation. Whenever the interests of a particular agrarian category were endangered, they form in to associations but all those who belong to this category did not come together. There was a clear cut political affiliation. There was a broad congruence between party affiliations, caste identity and class background. Most of the *Pulaya* participants are agriculture labourers and belonged to either CPI or CPM. Most of the *Cyrian Christians* are rich or middle level farmers and are affiliated to Kerala Congress. The *Nairs* and *Ezhavas* are more dispersed in terms of occupation and party affiliations. (Oommen, 1985)

Narayan (2003) attempted to portray the counter force and reaction from the part of farmers against the militant group of agricultural labourers. The earlier farmer tactic of unleashing organised repression on militant labourers via various social and economic sanctions became less effective (Jose, 1984). The political inclination of leftist governments favouring the working class led to the emergence and consolidation of the contrary interest on the agrarian scene, the landed/farmer interests (Oommen, 1985). This emerging class of capitalist farmers in Kuttanad considered the trade unions a threat from the early days of mobilisation. The use of police for repression of trade union activities and physical force were the initial forms of resistance by the landed class. In spite of a prolonged period of confrontations and coercive strategies by farmers and the use of police, they found that the trade unions were growing in strength. With a pro-labour ministry in place in 1957, the farmers' position became more precarious, especially with the policy of non-interference of police in labour disputes. The farmers also were forced to organise.

Tharamangalam (1981) also acknowledged that it was the organised movements of the workers which resulted in organising farmers associations. The most militant of this was

Kuttanad Karashaka Sangam (KKS) in 1957. In the early 1960s various farmers associations had been joined to forming a federation the **Akhila Kuttanad Karshaka Sangam(AKKS)** sponsored by Kerala Congress. The left parties were more focussed in organising small and marginal peasants. But this could not create any serious impact on the agrarian relations in Kuttanad.

Oommen explains this phenomenon as, 'in an area where one category of population is organised to assert rights, it is almost inevitable that the categories which are adversely affected will also organise themselves either as a defence mechanism or as a counter-offensive' (1985). The first farmer's association, the *Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham* started functioning in 1932. But it was not so strong enough to mobilise them together. The *Upper Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham* (UKKS) was the biggest and was formed in 1958. They were very active in 1958-59 and then dormancy came with the dismissal of the Communist administration in 1959. It picked up momentum again in the wake of the next Communist administration in 1967. Most of the primary members are middle and small cultivators with associate members drawn from the agricultural labour force providing muscle power (ibid).

A federation of farmers' associations emerged in the 1960s called the *Akhila Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham* (AKKS) 'in the wake of the threat from organised labour unions sponsored by the communist parties' (ibid). But the functioning of this federation seemed to be sporadic. When the threat vanishes there is no common goal, interest or ideology that cements them together. It is noted that the farmers also had different political affiliation due to conflicts of interest among them. There were farmers' associations ('poor peasants') for the CPI and CPI (M) and agricultural workers' unions for the Kerala Congress and Congress. However, explicitly the majority of the middle and rich farmers belonged to Kerala Congress

and most landless agricultural labourers, especially of lowest castes, joined the CPI (M)-sponsored KSKTU (Oommen, 1985). Although most of the agrarian conflicts are class conflicts, they are more or less political confrontations too.

The move by the Communist government in 1959 to implement land reforms also triggered reaction by the upper caste land-owning farmers. There were incidents (example of Niranam Brigade) by which farmers organised a militant brigade of high castes, indulging in a number of group clashes. According to the landed class perspective the 'Niranam Brigade' (also called the 'palm cap brigade') was formed 'to counter the constant atrocities against farmers and peace-loving people. In 1957 as soon as the Communist party came to power, the party cadre began reacting to these attempts intensely. As the major land-owning class, the Christian farmers were targeted by the attack of party cadre'(Narayan, 2003).

The farmer tactics to trade union strategies changed from mid-1960s to the late 1970s. Kannan (1999) observed the farmers responses such as retrenching workers, shifting to casual employment and resorting to a policy of hire and fire. As a result physical violence broke out in several rice fields especially during harvest time. Several instances of workers forcibly harvesting rice were reported. Farmers tried strong-arm tactics by hiring mercenaries but it did not last long since the government was not always behind them. When pro-labour governments were in power, the scales tilted in favour of unions since the police would not be used to interfere in what was called 'labour disputes'. One of the major strategies of farmer resistance to trade union activity in the 1980s was the shifting away from labour-intensive crops like rice.

The conflict between the two classes during 1980s had been ascribed to issues around the Land Utilisation Order of 1967 that insists on continuance of food crops in those lands

traditionally so used. While the farmers widely criticise this, the working class used this as a defence to resolve their maladies. Farmers argued that this order lost its social relevance as the days of acute food shortage were over. The agricultural labourers, faced with loss of job, and organised under strong trade unions, demand continuance of rice cultivation legitimising the land utilisation order. Save Rice Field Agitation (SRFA), was a strong agitation launched by KSKTU in August 1997 by destroying the crops planted in converted rice fields. It became acutely political and controversial issue during that period. However, in spite of these, rice field conversions were rampant, as evidenced by the fall in area under rice. This was mainly because the farmers had to resort to more profitable cultivation options than rice. But this shift away from rice created serious job loss especially for the lowest castes and women labourers. This is substantiated by many studies. For example, Kannan (1998) estimated that the per capita employment of agricultural labourers declined sharply and the wage gains were leading to job loss. It also revealed that the decline in employment due to the fall in rice area was 'around 35 million man-days by mid-seventies and early eighties and around 50 million man-days by mid-nineties'. Average annual days of employment for agricultural labour in Kerala in 1964-65 was 194 for men and 143 for women compared to 273 and 180 respectively for all India, and by 1974-75 the per capita employment declined to 160 days for men in Kerala with no change for women.

A special convention 'Save Rice Fields' was held in Moncombu on June 9, 1997. A team of KSKTU leaders reported to the government that the 'extra-profit-motivated agrarian capitalists have reclaimed rice fields, mined sand and started fish farming with the help of Revenue Officials responsible to conserve rice lands' and the new SRFA was planned to bring this issue to the notice of the government and the public (Lakshmanan, 1998).

The reaction of the farmers as usual was the other way around. They portrayed a very different picture of SRFA. According to them there are no big farmers or agrarian capitalists in Kuttanad as KSKTU claimed. Low profitability, scarcity of labour and high wages were the major problems which prevent the farmers from paddy cultivation. Farmers complain that SRFA was a sheer political exercise targeted to political opponents and suggested the hollowness of this 'symbolic agitation' by listing the CPI (M) leaders and cadre who have converted rice fields to other uses. Farmers generally argue for their freedom of choice to shift away from rice. They have their own convincing reasons for this. (see Narayan, 2003 for a detailed list of such arguments). In the SRFA all these parties except CPM took a pro-farmer stand.

On the labour side, they too have rationale for SRFA agitation highlighting issues of livelihood of the poor. But the agitation could not gain public support because of its militant and destruction strategy generally described as “vettinirathal”. Later, they had to withdraw the agitation. But the debate on the same continues. Trade unions raise the issue that if the farmer's have a right to choose the land use, laborers have a 'right to work' as well, which can only be ensured if rice cultivation is sustained. The farmer perspective projects the acute shortage of labour and reduces SRFA to a mere political act by the trade union with no labour participation. Thus the issue of rice in Kuttanad remains as an impasse.

The forgoing analysis substantiates the claim that the dynamics of struggle in Kuttanad can be considered as a movement. All the elements of a social movement were present there. There was a felt unrest from the part of a deprived category of labourers. They were highly united and strong enough to offer a resistance to their enemies; landlords and rich farmers. There was external support to the movement from caste and political sources. Finally the presence and committed involvement of the local leadership was another notable feature of the labour movement in Kuttanad.

Chapter 5

DYNAMICS OF THE STRUGGLES AND THEIR IMPACT

This chapter covers two broad themes. The first part is devoted to portray the dynamics of the various struggles initiated at different parts of Kuttanad. Another theme covered in this chapter is the impact generated by the struggles of labour movements in the agricultural sector in Kuttanad region. It is widely accepted that the labour movements had been instrumental in impacting several fundamental changes in the sector. Authors like George (1984) had given a detailed analysis of the impact created by the labour movement in the agricultural sector in Kuttanad till early 80s. In the second part of this chapter, a detailed discussion of the various achievements and limitations of labour movement in agriculture sector had been carried out. The data for this chapter is consolidated mainly from primary sources, which is corroborated with secondary sources appropriately.

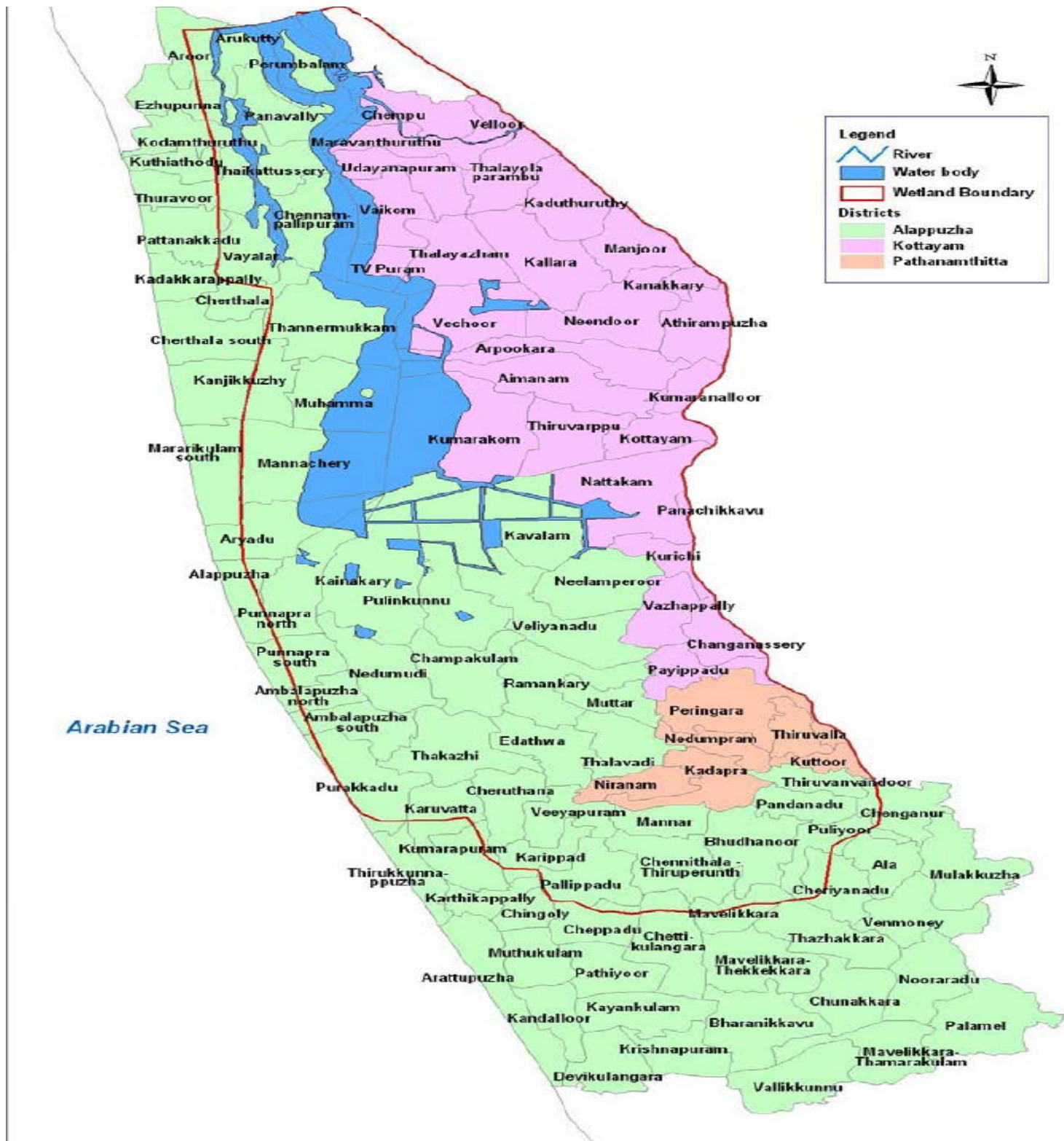
5.1. Dynamics of the Struggles

This section attempts to consolidate the dynamics of struggles occurred at different parts of Kuttanad. There were several isolated struggles in different places by different groups. Even for the same issue the struggle had to be repeated in several other parts of the region. This was mainly because the ultimate authority in determining the conditions of work was the landowner himself. Hence it became a continuous and persistent effort from the part of labour movements to fight against each and every landowner in getting the minimum conditions of work. It is clear from the history that a major chunk of the struggle was for getting a reasonable wage and ensuring equity in payment of wages across regions and gender.

5.1.1. Struggles Related to Wages

One of the earliest attempts to demand increase in wages was during the end of 1939. Agricultural labourers under the leadership of S K Das and C K Kesavan demanded increase

Map of Kuttanad



in wage. They already gave a notice to the landlord Sri Kavalackal Mathan with the same demand. Labourers demanded increase of 1 *kuliyān* and also the wage in kind. But the landlord rejected their demands and the women labourers started *Khoravo*. They did not consider the threatening of landlord and the police. Finally the farmer agreed their demand in the presence of police. This was the first successful movement with a demand to increase the wage. Pallathuruthil Mundakathil Bhargavi, Kailasam Bharathi, Mundakathil Thankamma, Sadanandan, Konisseril Gopalan, Mannisseril Velayudhan were the people who led this struggle (source: Vasudevan Nair- Union Member, Cherukara). In 1941 Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali Union (TKTU) had initiated another struggle with Kurisummottil Kunju- a landlord in Chengalam. The demand was to increase the wage by 1 *kuliyān*. He denied their demand and took police support. Police arrested V S Sreedharan, Kamalakshi and Vanchithara Kochukalyani. But women labourers and union members surrounded the police station and finally the demand was approved. This was the first struggle in Chengalam. A number of similar struggles were organized in Chengalam and Thiruvārppu and all the farmers were forced to accept this demand (Source: Vinod- union- Pallom).

In 1942, strike by TKTU was at Padaharam in the field of a famous landowner. It was intended to increase the wage for women labourers from 3 *kuliyān* to 5 *kuliyān*. Labourers conducted a satyagraha of batch of 10 people. Finally an agreement came to accept the 5 *kuliyān* wage between farmers and labourers. Strike in D Block Puthanarayiram in 1942 was against farmers named Kunnummayil Thattasseril Job, Asariparambil Thomas, Kavalam Mulesseril Chacko, and Kainakari Thevarkattu Thomas. At the end of harvesting, labourers and these farmers had a bargaining in terms of wage rate and the rights of the labourers and that ended up in a strike. Labourers did not allow removing paddy from the field. Their strike lasted for one month and finally farmers had to agree the demand of labourers. This strike was organized by union under the leadership of Kalarickal George, P T Simon, M V Joseph,

Peter Xavier etc (Source: Kuruppu- farmer-Liseu). In the same year TKTU conducted another struggle in Kainady Kandakudy P J Joseph's Appu Kayal to increase the wage. In the beginning of crop season union members such as Kottayam Bhasi, M C Abraham, M T Mani etc demanded 8 *kuliyam* for men and 5 *kuliyam* for women. But then the farmer rejected their demand and he used the police support. But labourers didn't change their demand and finally their demand was approved. Kandakudy P J Joseph was a famous and influential farmer at that time. So the victory of labourers against him made tremendous changes and was a morale booster among the labourers in that region (Source: Vasudevan Nair- union -Cherukara). In 1943 the strike was (TKTU) in Pooppally Kuttie's paddy field to increase the wage from 4 *kuliyam* to 5 *kuliyam*. After a few days they shifted strike from paddy field to Kutty's house. Mr Chandrasenan coordinated that strike. Finally Kutty agreed to make that change which was demanded by the union.

During 1940s TKTU conducted a satyagraha in front of the house of Pulinkunnu Champan with a group of agricultural labourers and union leader V D John. Champan had land in D Block kayal and he didn't give any wage to labourers after their 3 days of work. On the third day of satyagraha at 10 pm someone called V D John and goons of Champan threatened him to kill if they wouldn't stop the satyagraha. He suddenly agreed and asked a boat to reach Alleppey. John and those labourers reached Alleppey in the next morning. They reached the union office in Alleppey. Union members from the office came and tied that boat in the jetty and they told the supporters of the land lord to give the entire wage and they will not release the boat. Then on the 2nd day landlord gave the entire wage and his labourers collected the boat (Source: Kunjamma-labourer- Pulinkunnu).

In 1948 union demanded wage increase at the rate of Idangazhi paddy per day. As part of this TKTU organized a strike in Kainakari Karippathil Kunjamma's *Moovayirathanjooru kayal*.

Labourers surrounded Kunjamma and did not allow her to move from his office. Many party leaders came there and next day early morning Kunjamma gave the entire paddy as wage and for the remaining amount he gave his golden chain. MC Mani, K Ramankutty, K J urian, P K Madhavan, V P Kumara Das were the leaders (source: A D Kunjachan- Union Representative Champakulam). In 1952 at Aimanam, Kottayam Taluk the demand was to increase the daily wage of women labourers from two and half measures (idangazies) to 3 measures of paddy. So they first proposed the demand to the prominent landlord of that locality Mr Kochu Thommy. By the end of November they met him but he didn't accept the demand. On November 30, labourers refused to collect their wage and then on the next day union announced a strike. K V Janardanan, Vazhayil Antony, Pancheril P K Sumaran were the leaders. Union members visited house of each and every agricultural labourer for the success of strike. On December 3rd agricultural labourers assembled in Kavalackal Kochu Thommy's field and office. He had some labourers from other parts of Kuttanad. Struggle between those labourers and local labourers in the presence of union members happened. With the support of police farmers had beaten the agricultural labourers and union members. 8 men and 21 women labourers were arrested and they were taken to the Kavalackan's office and severely beaten by the police (Source: Pavithran-farmer-Nattakom). On Dec 4th arrested union members availed bail by the court and they got a warm welcome by around 10,000 agricultural labourers from Kottayam to Aimanam. On Dec 5th their demands were accepted by the farmers on the labour conference.

In 1953 TKTU also conducted a struggle in Vallikunnam- known as Meni Struggle. This happened after the removal of communist party ban. Meni was an agricultural labour of Kaduvakulam Lashmi Vilasam family. He was dismissed from his job because he demanded higher wage. Union tried for a compromise but there was no positive response from the part of the farmer. Hence the union announced a strike. Hundreds of union members and

agricultural labourers took part in that satyagraha in front of Lakshmi Vilasam. Meanwhile Meni was arrested by the police. This intensified spirit of the struggle. Union organized huge meeting and a procession in Manakkattu market and started an action council office. Some of the farmers also supported that strike and most of the major leaders of the party came and gave their support. Police took all the methods to suppress the struggle. After 30 days the union leader KK Koyical started hunger strike in front of Lekshmi Vilasam. He was arrested then K Kesavan continued the same. At last the demands of labourers were accepted in a tripartite committee in the presence of First class magistrate. Meni also got the compensation. The struggle was successful (Source: K D Mohanan-union representative- Mancombu)

In 1954 TKTU union demanded the wage increase of women agricultural labourers in Mepral–Chathankari region. Women labourers started satyagraha in front of the house of farmer- Puthenparambil Reji. The struggle lasted 14 days and led by V P P Namboothiri, P C Pappan and C K Koruthu. The struggle affected all the areas of Mepral–Chathankari. Agricultural labourers did not work for these days. Union conducted processions and meetings every day. Farmers got the Police support but they couldn't resist the agricultural labour movement. At last farmers had to increase the wage from 12 Ana to Re.1. This strike made lot of social changes. The slavery attitude among the labourers abolished, *Onappanikar* (Bondage system) system almost vanished. The lunch was given to labourers in a proper manner. Farmers were forced to form their own union – Karshaka Sangham (Source: Mr K D Mohanan- union- Mancombu)

In 1954 union demanded higher wages in Kavanattinkara estate. The landlord R G Baker fired those labourers. So union organized a satyagraha in front of his Bungalow and it lasted for 6 months. This was the longest struggle organized by union in Kumarakom region. Finally Baker accepted the union demands and allowed those workers in his field (Source:

Rajendrakumar- union- Kidangara). In 1955, a struggle was conducted in the field of the then Agricultural Minister in the state cabinet to increase the rate of maintenance wage (*theerpu*) during harvesting. Despite very cruel police repression, finally he had to agree 'to the Union's demands. Even though a tripartite agreement was reached in 1953, many of the land lords were not ready to implement those agreements. To ensure the implementation TKTU again called for a strike in the field of Thomas Joseph Muricken along with *Satyagraha* in front of his house in 1954. The demand was to get 3 idangazhy paddy as wage to women labourers. 80 women union members and many other union leaders started *Satyagraha* in front of the house of Muricken but in their boats. Union also opened a special office attached to Communist party office at North Kavalam. The details of the struggle spread all over the Kerala. Lot of union members came there from various parts of Kerala and joined with them. After 18 days of prolonged struggle Muricken agreed to give the rates recommended by the tripartite committee. Muricken's failure resembled the failure of entire landlord group (Source: Vasudevan Nair- union representative- Cherukara).

In 1955, union conducted struggle for *theerpu* in Vellisrakal paddy field of Mr Kora. All the agricultural labourers belonging to this field participated in that strike. Union conducted huge meeting on February 22 at Puzhavathu in Changanacherry. Union conducted processions from various areas to the meeting place. Police arrested many union members. Union arranged a meeting of active union members of Kottayam, Alleppey districts and they formed an action council under the leadership of Mr S K Das. By this time Kora arranged some other labourers from Harippad region for work. But union decided to resist those workers from February 27. Finally Kora was forced to give *theerpu* due to continued pressure from the union movement. In the year 1957 the Travancore Agricultural Workers' Union demanded that the rate for harvesting should be increased to one-ninth and organised strikes in different parts of Kuttanad. The farmers opposed these demands and tried to break the strike by

harvesting the field with "loyal workers", by organising their local associations, etc. This was opposed by the Union, and the resulting conflict led to the eruption of large-scale violence in various parts of Kuttanad. In spite of the government's reluctance to allow the police to interfere in the conflict, farmers suppressed the workers in most parts of Kuttanad,

In 1961 union organized a struggle in *Methran Kayal* to increase the wage of women labourers. But farmers collectively decided to oppose that demand. But they didn't get any workers in their field to pursue farming operations. They arranged some labourers from Vechoor region. Union members and agricultural labourers blocked those boats. Finally farmers accepted the demands.

In 1962 union organized another struggle to increase women labourers wage in *Arupanku kayal* in Kuttamangalam, Kainakari Panchayath. Police arrested 21 union members and this provoked the labourers. Farmers didn't get any labourers for their work and finally they had to accept the union demands. K K Damodaran, Manathara Nayanan, K Raveendran and K R Pavithran were the leaders of that struggle (source: Labourer- Ponga). In 1968 CPI had a special movement. The aim of that was to announce the rights of agricultural labourers and also to formulate a state committee of CPI. In the same year union organized a meeting of active members from various parts at Changanacherry. Party proposed a plan to EMS government for one lakh house project, land and house for agricultural labourers. They submitted that plan with the procession of 25000 agricultural labourers in Trivandrum. In that labourers of Kuttanad wore their traditional dress which they used in paddy fields. By the end of 1968 party organized national level meeting in Moga, Punjab. All those initiatives showed the role of CPI among the agricultural labourers (source: K D Mohanan-union- Mancombu).

In 1970 January leftist agricultural labor unions organized a struggle in *Cherukalil Kayal*. Union demanded 1/7 as patham and 1/4 as theerpu. But the land owners like Kavalackal

Mathan and Thomman didn't accept the demand first. That area was a dominant centre of CPM. Kavalackan appointed labourers from other parts and had the police support. The struggle was suppressed by police and 200 CRP force. But thousands of agricultural labours conducted procession against that. Police shot many people and agricultural labour Sahadevan was the martyr of that incident. Later party provided compensation to Sahadevan's family and also provided job to one of his sons. But nothing prevented the labours from their demands and finally their demands were accepted.

During 1970 January agricultural labours demanded 1/8 as padham and 25 paise increase in wage, arrangement of threshing place near to paddy field and they conducted prolonged struggles for that. Finally farmers agreed their demand. But the land owner Ezhutholil Malayil Nanupilla and his supporters in Cheriyanadu were disappointed in that agreement and they used labours from other parts to carry the sheaves. Union opposed that movement but the landowner used the help of police to carry the sheaves. The frustrated land owner killed the union leader E K Rakhavan. But that attempt failed and on 20th January 1970 they killed his brother agricultural labour Sivaraman. But after that incident all the land owners were forced to accept the agreement.

In 1970 October CITU, AITUC unions demanded Rs. 3.75 as wage for women agricultural labourers. So union announced strike in Mankuzhy paddy field in Kumarakom. But the land lords didn't accept the demand. They had the police support and police opted all methods to suppress the strike. On October 10th union organized a procession of agricultural labourers. Union members had a confrontation with police and it ended up in an open fight with union members and police. Police arrested around 73 people. Kumarakom area had literally police raj at that time. They destroyed all the houses, raped women and beaten all the people. C K Purushotahman- founder leader of Communist party in Kumarakoam region entered the

police station without any fear and then finally authorities agreed to stop their activities. That was the last attack by police in Kumarakom region to agricultural labourers and union members. CPI and CPM jointly led the Mankuzhy strike. It also got the congress support especially against the police action in that region.

In 1971 in Kuttanad region, the working time and wages were 5 hours and Rs 3.50 respectively for women labourers. In upper Kuttanad area it was 6 hours. But no clear rule for payment of wages. So KSKTU demanded same wage in that area also. Some farmers accepted that but some especially Thachedathu Cheriyan and Kandarappally Luokse paid only Rs.2 initially. But union forcefully collected Rs.3.50 from those farmers. But landlords like Neendoor Pralel Ippu, Mathai, and Luko didn't agree the union's demand. Union arranged strike on Dec 16th and organized a procession against those landlords. But those farmers did their farming activities with the support of some labourers from other parts of Kuttanad. On Dec 27th union members asked those labourers to stop their work, but they told without the approval of their landlord they wouldn't stop their work. During that time one of the land owners of Pralel Paddy field became violent and he killed some union members. Union announced a hartal on the next day in Neendoor. The major leaders of Marxist party EMS, AKG, N E Balaram visited Neendoor and gave their moral support to those people.

During 1979, 80, 81 period Marxist party and RSS had lot of fights. Some of them were linked to agricultural field. Mancompu Ambennamadathil Chandra Swami fired one of his permanent agricultural labour. Union demanded some compensation for that labour. But Swamy didn't agree that so union conducted prolonged struggles for that and did allow threshing in his field. RSS supported Swamy. Similar way lot of incidents happened.(source: N A George- union- Mancombu)

Thykkattussery struggle:- during 1988 in Alleppey district the wage of women agricultural labour was Rs. 15 and men labour was Rs.20 . In most of the area labours got more than that amount but in certain parts of Cherthala agricultural labours got less than the minimum wage. Especially Tharakans didn't give the IRC rate. KSKTU's 11th district and state meeting addressed this issue. District committee decided to organize a struggle in the areas where labours were getting very low wage. Based on that Cherthala Area committee started struggle in the fields of Thykkattussery Abraham Tharakan and his brothers paddy field in 1988 June.

This struggle lasted for eight months but the land lord didn't increase the wage. District Labour Officer (DLO) organized many Labour conferences but landlord didn't participate in any of those meetings and he used various strategies to suppress the struggle. He gave all his land to Thykkattussery co-operative bank and with the help of bank filed case against agricultural labours and union in High Court. Union's district committee discussed that struggle and decided to use all the labours for that struggle. Under the leadership of Cherthala, Aroor area committee union formulated a convention and committee with C K Maniyan as the president and the P K Divakaran as the secretary. Convention was inaugurated by CPI(M)district secretary K K Chellappan. Based on the decision taken in the convention union started satyagraha in front of the land lord Abraham Tharakan's house from 1989 January 16 under the guidance of the committee and after some time they had to spread the struggle to Thykkattussery co-operatvbe bank. CITU, Karshaka Sangaham, DYFI, SFI, Mahila Association were also participated in that struggle. Several processions, meeting were coordinated in the district related to that. National and state leaders of the union visited that place and gave directions and support for the struggle. In 1989 February 17th in all the panchayats union organized meetings and procession to show their support to the struggle and area committee provided Rs. 100 each and district committee provided Rs. 500 for the struggle. The participants had been beaten up by the police and those police were suspended

and SI got transfer. The intensity of the struggle increased day by day. At last in 1989 march 12th landlords accepted the union demands. The wage of men became Rs.22.50 and the women became Rs.15 after that struggle and they also agreed to give the pending amount of Rs 3,000 to each labour.

R Block struggle:- famers in R Block Kayal used those land for other crop cultivation instead of paddy. Even though farmers got lot of profit, they were reluctant to give minimum wage to their labours. Whenever labours demanded higher wages, all the time landlords suppressed those struggles with the help of police and *gundas*. In that situation district committee of union decided to start a struggle in R Block Kayal and they conducted a convention there. G Sudhakaran inaugurated that struggle and they formulated a committee with MM Antony as the president and the A D Kunjachan as the Secretary. Union started the struggle in 1988 July 26 and it lasted 20 days. DLO organized conferences many times but the farmers under Kerala Congress didn't participate. Many processions and meeting were held in Kuttanadu to support the struggle. Finally in a meeting with the representatives of farmers, union district leader, committee representatives in 1988 August 14, the issue got resolved. By that agreement wage of women became Rs.16.50 from Rs.14 and for men it became Rs.22 from Rs.18.

5.1.2. Struggle for Improving Conditions of Work

In 1941 the struggles in Thakazhi was against land lords popularly known as Pulimukhathu Thuppayees, challenging their anti labour approach. There were 6 people in this thuppayees family. They used to physically abuse the labourers who questioned the wage rates. The rates of wages given by these landlords were five *kuliyam* and 1.5 edangazhi for men and three *kuliyam* and 1 edangazhi for women. The workers were forced to work from early morning to late evening without even a lunch break. Another condition was both the husband and wife

should come for the work together. Otherwise the payment will not be given. Even for minor mistakes the punishment was severe. Once a worker named Chothan was severely beaten for demanding curry for *Kanji* (porridge) offered by the landlord. This sort of issues forced the labourers to react to the ill treatment. The union members under the leadership of Shri T K Varghese Vaidyan organized a meeting in Thakazhi. The landlords reacted to this move by deputing *gundas* with weapons. But they had to withdraw them by seeing the strength of labour force there. The meeting was a strong warning to the landlords against injustice. Then the landlords used indirect methods of charging police case against the workers. Later all the workers left work with these landlords with the support of one humane local person called Kesava Pillai. In 1942 there was a mass strike against these landlords. This was marked as one of the successful reactions of the labour class against exploitation and physical harassment.

It was in 1942, union organized a meeting at Mankombu region and 80 members participated and they mainly discussed the attitude of farmers and their cruelty against labourers. Mr. N C Joseph was the president and Mr. Michael Kaniamparambil was the secretary of that committee. This was the first agricultural labourers Committee in Mancombu, Pulincunno and Chambakulam area. They insisted the labourers to take rest during lunch time and also demanded descent wage to employees. Union demanded 8 *Kulaiyan* for men and 5 *kuliyar* for women and conducted massive struggle for that. Even though the farmers had support of both the police and criminals, but they weren't able to resist the labourers. In 1942 itself labourers had a dispute with Kandakudy P J Joseph in his field *Irupathinalayiram Kayal* related to the bonus of Onappanikar. Union demanded 100 para Paddy to those people and farmers didn't accept that and union conducted a strike in that field. They didn't allow the farmers and his supporters to take even a single paddy from the field for a period of 12 days. Finally land lord agreed to give 100 para paddy. S K das coordinated that struggle. But the

reaction of the farmer was very cruel. Police arrested many people and they were severely beaten up by the police. After 2.5 years the case was rejected by the court because of insufficient evidences.

Another similar struggle was in 1944 against Mr Kuncharia who was a prominent farmer in *Arayiram Kayal*. Mr T P Joseph and Mr Lukose were his Onappanikar. Joseph had a connection with karshaka thozhilai union. Union demanded 100 para paddy as a bonus to onappanikar, but Kuncheria gave only 25 para paddy. So union blocked the paddy for 20 days in the field and they didn't allow taking paddy from the field. During that time government officials also came there to collect levi, but labourers allowed to take a part of paddy except the labourers proportion. By that time Mr Thomman younger brother of Mr Kuncharia also came there with some criminals and they forcefully tried to take the paddy from field. That ended up in a struggle between farmers and labourers. Police came and arrested many people. Union members were severely beaten up by the police. Kurichy Illiparambil John, Kurichy Madhavan, T P Joseph, Louis Neelamperoor, Pulinkunnu David were arrested in that issue.

The western part of Thiruvalla Taluk such as Niranam, Kadapra, Peringara, Nedumpram were the center of agricultural labourers. In 1944-1945 themselves Communist party had significant role in Kadapra Peringara Panchayats. Eviction of one labourer called Kanjiravila Kutty by the landlord Ennakattu Thamburan and its after effects made significant changes in agricultural labourers and it inspired those people. Farmers adopted very cruel methods against labourers. They killed, raped, threatened the labourers and compelled them to work without any rest. After some point of time due to the influence of union, labourers started to react against farmers for their cruelty.

The landlord Kottayil Varkey and his *gundas* had severely beaten an agricultural labourer Makaran at the western parts of Niranam in 1950. The reason for that was Makaran took 2, 3 paddy plants from Varkeys field. One small child named Krishnankutty saw that incident and he didn't know how to react to that and he took Varkeys stick and ran away. Varkey saw that child and followed to catch him. Varkey tied up his both hand and legs and finally tied up him with his house. Krishnankuttie's father Thevan came and cried. But Varkey didn't allow him to enter his house. Night at 10pm they removed the child from the house and closed him in a room without giving a single drop of water. Next day morning by 11 am they allowed Makaran to go, but again started to beat the small child. Child cried a lot and finally that cruel landlord and his son allow Krishnankutty to go with a warning. That incident affected all the agricultural labourers, especially the youth. They decided that either to live or to die in a descent manner.

Agricultural labourers organised a meeting at Mr Pappan's tea shop in the month of August 1951 under the auspices of TKTU. Almost all the agricultural labourers of Niranam assembled there. It was organized by Mr Krishnan Kutty and Pappan. After that a committee was organized with Krishnankutty as president and Kuttappan as secretary. They demanded 1 hour lunch break and working time as 8 hours. They also demanded rice in leaf instead rice soup in mud vessel. Farmers expressed their opposition towards this. But due to union compulsion farmers forced to agree all the demands. By that time union also demanded increase of wage from Rs. 2 to Rs. 2.25 for men and for, Rs. 1.5 Rs to 1.75 for women. By 1955 all the demands of Travancore Karshaka Thozhilali union were accepted.

John Jacob, a land lord at Niranam had severley beaten his Kudikidappukaran Narayanan in 1954. The reason was related to the number of coconuts in Kudikidappu land. But no one had the courage to take Narayanan to the hospital. But a communist leader George Vargheese

took him to the hospital. So John Jacob threatened George. TKTU decided to conduct a meeting against John. John's *gundas* planned to threaten that meeting. But they could not do much as it was a planned meeting. Philips, Damodaramenon, V N Damodaran and George Varghese were the organizers of that meeting. It was in 1958, the union appointed its agents in different parts of Kuttanad to show a red flag so that workers could start and stop work at the fixed times. Subsequently, the farmers raised the issue before the IRC and after prolonged discussions, it was agreed to install a number of sirens at different places in Kuttanad. A part of the cost of installing the sirens had to be met by the farmers. In 1959 January a landlord of Kainady had severely beaten a labourer Shankaran for a silly issue. So labourers decided to conduct a procession in front of the house of that landlord and they distributed notice regarding the same. The procession was supposed to move towards Kainady church. The authorities of church communicated a false message that the aim of procession was to destroy the church and asked all the Christians to gather in the church. Around 50 active labourers planned to block the Christian procession, but they did not have the courage to do that. Farmers also had the police support. Though nothing serious happened in that procession, it created lot of anxiety among farmers. But after 1 month in February, the farmers reacted in a strange strategy. The landlord Kandkudy Appukunj's house got destroyed by fire. Suddenly union members and labourers understood the fact that it was a conspiracy against them. Early morning 4 am a group of police under leadership of S I Dasayya came and started all kinds of cruel measures against labourers. They destroyed the house of agricultural labourers, severely tortured their wives and kids. They did lathy charge. Most of the labourers wounded and Kuruppasseril Madhavan died due to severe injuries. Farmers and government thought that would finish the union activities. But all these increased the spirit of people and more and more people came to the union especially the educated youth from middle level farmers.

In the early 1960s union restricted the introduction of highly labour saving devices like tractors. Rich farmers formed Akhila Kuttandu Karshaka Sangham and affiliated to it the existing Kuttandu Karshaka Sangham and they introduced trained cadres to resist the militant activities of TKTU. 1962- From late fifties, there were attempts by farmers to introduce tractors in Kuttanad. But this was opposed by the labourers, especially the Kuttanad Uzhavu Thozilali Union (Ploughers' Union), which was affiliated to the CPM. In 1962 the Union brought before the IRC a resolution prohibiting the introduction of tractors in Kuttanad. After much deliberation, the IRC decided as follows: Those who have their own tractors can plough their land with tractors. But taking into consideration the benefit of ploughing with animals, and the labour it provides, farmers should avoid the use of tractors. At the same time the traditional ploughers should plough the fields properly, and under this expectation, it is decided that under no condition should tractor be used in Kuttanad.

In 1969 march, a struggle between police and agricultural labourers happened in Veeyapuram Peruvanthakari paddy field of John Jacob (Niranam Baby). He didn't allow the labourers to thresh the paddy in the field and instead of that he asked to carry it to his house for threshing. The labourers opposed this suggestion and farmers then tried to use labourers from other parts of Kerala. Lot of discussions were carried out to resolve the problem in the presence of district collector and RDO. At last on March 27th fight happened between labourers, union members and police and Niranam Pada (Kuruvadippada) of Niranam Baby. In that struggle union member- Gopalan murdered. Every year Marxist party remembers that day. Union's district president K P Joseph and Taluk secretary Veliyam Narayanapillai also were severely beaten by the police. 62 people were arrested in that struggle and finally the case was rejected by the court due to the absence of solid evidences. In December CPM affiliated agricultural labour unions organized a meeting at Punnapra for redistributing the excess land. 10000 of agricultural labourers were participated in that meeting. AKG and EMS also participated in

that meeting. From 1970 January 1st onwards CPM forcefully took those excess and Kudikidappu lands, destroyed the coconut plants etc. This was one of the intense movements ever happened in Kuttanad.

In 1970 July 27th union leaders Neelakandan and Bhargavi became martyrs in Kallikadu. The land owner Thambi Arayan tried to evict his kukidappukaran Pappukutty with police support. Police arrested Pappukutty because he opposed that eviction. Agricultural labours organized a march to police station under the leadership of Neelakandan for the release of Pappukutty. Police shot the people in the procession. That incident motivated all the agricultural labours to strengthen their struggle.

In 1974 February 25th agricultural labour Velukuttan was killed in the land owners and his supporters attacked the KSKTU office at Kandamkary. The land owner Gopinathkurup denied the right of his labour Sreedharan. Union organized a strike against that. But land owners could suppress that strike with the help of police. Farmers were very happy in their victory and they attacked the union office and killed Velukuttan. But land owners were not in a position to deny the already written agreements.

In March 21, 1982 agricultural labour Chandrasekharan was killed by *gundas* of land owners in Veliyanadu. During that time agricultural labourers demanded that threshing place should be near to the agricultural field to reduce the difficulty in carrying and transporting harvested paddy to the threshing place and they started a struggle for that. But farmers tried to carry that paddy with the help of *gundas*. But agricultural labours failed that attempt under the leadership of leader Chandrasekharan. *Gundas* killed him but their demands were accepted by the farmers afterwards.

By the end of 1980s and the beginning of 1990s the need to introduce threshing machines in the Kuttanadu farms being debated. When harvesting was at its peak the available work force

was not just sufficient to finish the reaping and the threshing on time in all the areas. The workers used to move from one area to another finishing the reaping process first and then return for the threshing. There was a gap of 2 to 3 weeks in reaping and threshing. For instance in the government controlled farms of Rani, Chithira and Marthanadam crops worth more than Rs 2 lakhs was estimated to have been damaged. But the trade union leaders pointed out that the change might through up new problems in the region. KSKTU district secretary G Sudhakaran said that agricultural labours had only seventy working days and the introduction of machines would decrease the working days again.

In 1989 union decided to conduct struggles against the barren lands. Farmers converted the fertile land into barren land without cultivation. On 1989 February 6th union organized a convention in Punnapra Vayaler Memorial Hall against that. CPI(M) District secretary K K Chellappan inaugurated that convention and then convention organized in each Area, panchayats, and region. Union organized lot of marches and meetings in various parts of the district to convey the importance of the struggle to the people and on 1989 February 11 struggles conducted in 11 areas. Around 30,000 people participated in that struggle in 165 centers. G Sudhakaran, D Lakshmanan, M M Antony, V Kesavan, N Soman etc were the leaders in that struggles. The struggle inspired other people apart from agricultural labours. But after that struggle lot of follow up struggles are happening in various parts.

5.1.3. Land Grab Movement

In 1970, a state wide land grab movement was launched under the leadership of the Marxist led agricultural labour union. The left movement was responsible for the successful implementation of the provisions of land reforms relating to the conferment of ownership rights to land on hutment dwellers and tenants. The 'land grab' movement of 1972 was an initiative with an intention of unearthing surplus land (above the ceiling) and bringing it to

the notice of the government than its occupation, although in a number of cases agitators 'entered' such land. It led to many violent confrontations and encroachments. The campaign continued year after year until 1975. The struggle lasted 80 days, 2.5 lakh people were court arrested, more than 15000 people were jailed and about 175 thousand acres 'came to light' in the process. It did not, however, yield any land to the agitators. Out of the estimated 70,000 hutment dwellers in Alleppey district 20,000 people participated in that movement. The Campaign agenda included threats of occupying the excess lands until the government took them over and redistributed to the landless. About Two lakh volunteers participated in the struggle.

The Land Grab Agitation of 1970 and the second phase of the Excess Land Struggle of 1972 brought enormous material benefits to the landless agricultural workers. In contrast during the first phase of the Excess land Struggle the party volunteers were instructed to identify but not occupy the excess land. It was a thoughtful policy pursued to "maintain" the material deprivations of the landless, to make them available to the party for mobilization activities (possession of land would demand their time for cultivation). However, the policy had to be abandoned later. A second land-grab' movement was launched by the CPI(M) in January 1979. It was more of a satyagraha rather than a militant movement. The CPI(M) failed to evolve a satisfactory formula for determining the ceiling in Kerala in conformity with the party line.

5.1.4. Anti Reclamation Stir

In 1982 December, union started the first stage of struggle for the protection of paddy cultivation. The struggle started at Kavalam with the convention inaugurated by V S Achudandan. A committee formulated for the co-ordination of the struggle. G Sudhakaran was the president and the M M Antony was the secretary of that committee. Union actually

started the struggle in 1983 May as dharna and picketing. But when the union realized that government was not at all interested in the prevention of paddy field conversion they increased the intensity of the struggle. Union members destroyed the crop plants of Akarakalam Appachans in Irumpanam paddy field. Thousands of agricultural labours participated in those struggles. Lot of people were arrested and severely punished by police and *gundas*. The opposition of union and the agricultural labours prevented other land owners from the conversion process.

In 1985 November union conducted a second stage of struggle in Akarakalathil Antony's 13 acres of field as a part of paddy field protection struggle in Mancombu. The land owner tried to convert those lands for coconut plant cultivation. Around 3,000 agricultural labours including women and old people took part in that struggle they started to spread the sand heaps which made for coconut plant cultivation. More than 200 policemen attempted to suppress it. The police attempt was failed by volunteers. The courage and enthusiasm of women leaders and agricultural labours were very high which in turn inspired several other people. By that time struggle spread in various parts of district. Various committees formulated in different parts of the district for the protection of paddy field. Union organized processions from Thakazhy under the leadership of M J Mathunni and from Neelamperoor under the leadership of V K Veluthakunju. District leaders of union met collector and submitted their written petition against the land conversion. But the approach of government to that issue was not satisfactory.

On 7th December 1985 union conducted a harthal in kuttanadu agricultural region as a protest against the police action towards the agricultural labours who involved in the strike against the land owners. Union organized strike in 12 villages of Kuttanadu. It affected the regular agricultural activities in that region. In each every panchayat agricultural labours conducted procession and meeting related to that.

5.1.5. Save Rice Field Agitation (SRFA)

The historical emphasis on food production has forced the state to insist on rice cultivation and land utilization order (1967) prohibited by law any conversion of land to other uses. Save Rice Field agitation (SRFA) was the high point of rice debate when the trade union KSKTU launched an agitation in 1997 by destroying the crops planted in rice fields. The labour perspectives was to fight against agrarian capitalists who make huge profits through rice fields conversions by colluding with corrupt officials , by law responsible for the conservation of these lands.

Farmers are against this agitation and they claimed that low profitability, shortage of labour, high wages is the major reasons for crop shift and rice field conversion. According to farmer perspective, SRFA is to be seen in the light of the institutionalization of CPI(M) and KSKTU. Party cadre and not the agricultural labourers mainly carried out the agitation. Media also had their own position and the issues discussed were crop destruction, farmers right to choose the crop, low profitability, need for mechanization, lack of labour discipline, CPI(M)'s violence, environmental conservation, food security, job loss etc. The decrease of area under rice cultivation leads to increasing unemployment, marginalisation of lower caste people. Save Rice Field Agitation was the reaction of agricultural labour unions to the job loss due to rice field conversions. Labourers in Kuttanadu mainly depended on rice, so the conversion of paddy fields is the reason behind the labour mobilization. The stand of CPI(M) is to support the labour mobilization and on the other hand the position of Kerala Congress towards farmers. The mobilization witnessed in SRFA is an indication of the political dissent in Kerala. This was a typical example of a struggle against monopolization of resources by the dominant sections. A land use strategy with or without rice is not only identifying what is technically feasible in a democratic fashion, but also recognizing the differential interests and striving to build solutions that can command sufficient consensus through responsible politics.

5.2. Impact of the Struggles

Kuttanad had the claim of having the highest wage rates among the agricultural workers in the country. This is the dominant gain of the militant labour movement (source: primary data from trade union representatives). The union could also succeed in influencing the govt to undertake periodic revision of the wage rates. They could also stipulate the working hours to a reasonable limit. At times the real wages in other parts of the country declined. But the movement in Kuttanad could succeed in maintaining the real wages without affecting such falls.

More or less similar is the view proposed by Thomas (2010). He observed that the agrarian movement could bring higher wages and better working conditions to paddy field workers of Kuttanad compared to other similar places. The wage payments in kind for harvesting operations increased from less than 10 per cent of the produce in 1951 to 13.9 per cent and after 1970 to 16.65 per cent along with the increase in money wage. Improvement of the conditions of work in favour of the labourer was another noticeable impact of the union movement. The duration of the non-harvesting operations has been reduced to 5 hours a day in *Kayal* and 6 hours in other areas from 8 to 10 hours a day in the fifties. The union could also manage to retain the system of kind payment for harvesting while succeeded in preventing the mechanisation of agricultural operations to a great extent (ibid).

Union had taken several initiatives to protect labour against many form of exploitation. The unions could also resist the favouritism and subjectivity in terms of selecting the workers for the agricultural operations. There was a time when the landlords had the prerogative of selecting workers according to their whims and fancy. It could develop a system of employing workers belonging to the vicinity. Another system introduced was giving preference to those employed in the previous years. Regulating the inflow of immigrant

workers from the nearby villages was another achievement of the labour movements. The unions also succeeded to a great extent in maintaining the employment opportunities by resisting the labour saving initiatives of the land lords. Legitimisation of hutment rights was another main achievement of the labour movement in Kuttanad. A tripartite machinery to resolve the labour related disputes is a sign of govt accepting the role of labour movements.

Enactment of Agricultural Workers Act, in 1974 was another achievement of the unions. The much acclaimed Land Reform is yet another major accolade of agriculture movement. This was helpful to the small peasants and agriculture workers to own small areas of land. The unions were also instrumental in bringing development programmes in Kuttanad. The first project was the Thottappally spillway project, which was proposed to prevent the flood problem in Kuttanad while the Thanneermukkom bund was intended for mitigating the saline water influx. The Aleppey Changanassery Road was helpful in accessibility of Kuttanad which in turn brought quick development in the place. These projects could not gain the expected outcome as it brought in some ecological imbalance in the region. Another important benefit of the union movement was the allocation of homesteads for the hutment dwellers. This has a special relevance to Kuttanad as it was a place with the highest proportion of hutment dwellers; about 28 percent of the state. With this the deed of eviction vanished and attached labour system disappeared.

While explaining about the social transformation that happened as a result of union involvement, George (1984) concluded that the collapse of attached labour system was mainly because of the unionisation of labourers during early 40s. This marked the transition of the *pulayas* and *parayas* who were attached labourers to the category of free wage labourers which was already in existence. But some scholars like Jose (1980) debate this point of view. For them, the transition from slave labour to free labour was a mechanistic outcome of the capitalist development in agriculture especially the construction of granite

walls around the padashekarams (which prevented the need for attached pulayas) and the electrification of the dewatering operations. These developments obviated the need for keeping attached labourers for mud mining and turning water wheels.

The replacement of master slave relationship with an employee-employer relationship is a major gain of the struggles of labour class. The attached labour system with all inhumane treatment of the workers had been modified to casual labour system. This in turn brought out a transition in the social relations in the Kuttanad region. There existed a high level of social and caste based discrimination which later got disintegrated to a great extent due to the continuous struggles. The presence of an egalitarian worker-cultivator relationship and disintegration of jajmani relations are indicators of such achievements (George, 1984). Over the years the union could help the working class to liberate from the absolute subordination of the feudal relations. As a result the workers could emerge as free floating and educated labour force who are conscious of their rights and prepared to negotiate with their employers and the govt at large.

Political mobilisation of labour and the marginalised category is yet another significant achievement of the union movement in agriculture sector. The story of the struggles of agricultural workers in Kuttanad is an example of emergence of powerful political force even influential enough at the state level governance. This was even reflected in the election held to the State legislature and Lok Sabha. The movement could succeed in making a public opinion in favour of them by creating a public awareness on the problems they face. They could generate a sense of we feeling among the working class and convince them about the need to be united. The union activities also empowered the socially marginalised groups like Harijans and Adivasis in the state. The leading unions among the agricultural workers are well represented by these weaker sections of society (George, 1984).

According to Thomas (2010) the struggle of the unions was instrumental in the setting-up of a permanent body for wage fixation– the Industrial Relations Committee (IRC). Narayan (2003) also observed that the institution of the tripartite mechanism as a revolutionary change in the context of Kuttanad. Many other positive achievements of Trade Union movement were enlisted by Thomas (2010) in his work. The movements and struggles could also succeed in inculcating the workers, a sense of class consciousness (which made easy the mobilisation and organised struggles), self respect and dignity of labour. Ultimately a political mobilisation of labour happened with the support of a party with appropriate ideology and strategy to organise the discontented mass of labourers.

While discussing about the contribution of labour movements Kannan (1988) highlighted introduction of two welfare programmes to compensate the failure to effect the basic changes in agriculture sector. The first was a project known as the 'one lakh housing scheme' for the agricultural labourers who had no hutment land and who have not benefited from the Kerala Land Reforms Act of 1969. Despite many limitations and drawbacks of the scheme it was a public expression and endorsement of the agricultural labourers movement. The other programme was aimed at all aged members of agricultural labour households, known as the 'Agricultural Labourers' Pension Scheme'. It envisaged a monthly pension of Rs. 45 to all agricultural labourers above the age of 60 for men and 65 for women. However the scheme had been vehemently criticised partly due to the financial difficulties of the state and mainly due to the accusations from the opposition parties that it was a scheme to reward the supporters of the C.P.I(M). The scheme was drastically curtailed by the succeeding anti-left Government . But these schemes, however marginal, could not have come about without the organised strength of the agricultural labourers and their increasing politicisation.

According to Narayan (2003) the achievements of unionisation are many-fold. He summarises it in the form of legislative measures for the welfare of agricultural workers, education of the workers about their rights and empowering them into a political force with class consciousness. Thus the union acted as a great political force for the CPI (M), for demonstrations, picketing, etc., which in turn raises the political consciousness of participants which helps them to fight for their economic rights. The CPI (M), Congress, CPI and RSP are the major contenders of mobilisation of the agrarian poor in Kuttanad, with CPI (M) having the largest followers.

In 1998 Kannan also attempted to record the achievements of union movement in agriculture sector. Notable achievements of unionisation according to him included the conditions of work as would approximate to those in formal employment status in the organised sector. These were fixed hours of work (eight hours or less), impersonal in place of patron-client relationships, non-wage benefits and loosening the linkages as between land, labour and credit. The second notable achievement was a sustained increase in wages that exceeded the increase in cost of living. Wage differences for similar skills were not significant. A third notable achievement was the political support extended to labour to form labour cooperatives whenever they were threatened with either migration of the industries or closure of units. Another contribution of the movement was the initiation of a number of labour welfare measures including old-age pension to rural workers and creation of welfare funds that imparted a degree of economic security to many segments of the so called unprotected labourers.

Authors like Thomas (2010) also attempted to describe failures of the union movement. He is of the opinion that the movement could not maintain the standard of living of the labourer in the face of dwindling days of employment. Agricultural labourers remained agricultural

labourers even after the struggle and their political mobilisation. They remained a discontented lot. With a view to appease them certain democratic initiatives (legislative measures) like the enactment of Kerala Agricultural Workers Act were taken. It was criticised for not meeting its expectations. Also the initiatives to protect agriculture and paddy cultivation from the part of the movement in the latter stages seem to be marginal. The decreasing area and production of paddy in Kuttanad raises serious concerns about the contributions made by the labour movements in the region. They could not influence the youngsters belong to the new generation in preserving the dignity and status of cultivation. However, Oommen (1985) pointed out the hidden agenda behind political mobilisation which he contends as deliberate intentions for potential class gains. Philip (1994) also identified the effect of caste organisations among the working class and category organisations among artisans as more of stratification. According to him, more than promoting solidarity among the working class, it resulted in segmentisation and fragmentation of the rural communities.

While the gains of labour movements were manifold as far as the labour community is concerned, the farmers' perspectives are on the grim side. They consider the labour movement as a force which destroyed all the powers the farmers had been traditionally enjoying for decades. This has resulted in ultimately losing control over most of the agricultural operations. The militancy of the union movement has reversed the power relations in the sector. In a place where there was a direct relation between the labourers and the landowners, now this relationship is mediated by the labour unions. The farmers had to get the approval of the unions to proceed with almost all agricultural operations like sowing, reaping and applying fertilisers. Thus the relationship became more of an employer-employee relationship similar to that of the industrial sector.

The achievement of the unionisation of the labour also caused an overall increase in the labour cost to the landowners. Every time it is the union representatives who determine the wages and there is a continuous demand for increase in wages for labourers. Some of the farmers were of the opinion that the demands of labour unions sometimes found very unrealistic while comparing with the yield and cost of grains. This prompted many of the large scale farmers to stop paddy cultivation. They have opted for either of the two alternatives. One was shift to cash crops which is considered less labour intensive and more economical. The other option adopted was lease out their paddy land to other small scale farmers who could otherwise manage the paddy cultivation by offering their own labour.

Labour unions are at the winning side while analysing the impact of labour movements in agriculture sector. First and foremost gain for them was that they could establish their political philosophy among the rural folk. The struggles were platforms for them to spread the political ideology and develop a firm base in the Kuttanad region. This is more of true with the left affiliated labour unions as they were the pioneers to initiate a struggle against the landlordism in the region. This was even evident in the state assembly elections, where the discerning votes came from the agricultural workers. Another gain of the union movement is development of local leadership in the Kuttanad region. It was an opportunity for the local leaders to experiment in mobilising the labour class. Fortunately many leaders succeeded in their attempt.

When we look at the struggles it was a fight between landlord, Police and the Government at one side and the powerless labourers on the other side. Initially the struggles were dominantly opposed and suppressed by the landlords. The story of the agrarian struggle in Kuttanad proved that despite such a dominant and powerful opponent on the other side the

unity and strength of the working class could succeed ultimately. It is the power and conviction of the leadership inspired by the leftist movement that served as the thread of holding them together in their struggles. It is fact that they had to pay big dividend for their victory in the form of loss of life of several people and exposure to torturing to all possible extent. It was a proof of their determination and conviction that they need to be treated as human beings. Another feature of the struggles was that these were customized to the context. They had opted for different forms of struggles like *satyagraha*, strike, picketing, procession and non-cooperation depending upon the demands of the situation. Finally the powerful landlords had no other option but to surrender to the united actions of the union movement. In the later stages the landlords became less bargaining and they had to follow the demands of the militant unions. Thus a reversal of power relations happened across decades through the struggles in Kuttanad.

Chapter 6

70 YEARS OF LABOUR MOVEMENT IN KUTTANAD: THE BALANCE SHEET

The primary aim of the present study was to get a critical analysis of the agricultural sector in Kuttanad in the context of emergence and development of trade union movement there. This focus of this chapter is highlighting the debris generated out of seven decades of labour movements. What is given here is an analysis of the present scenario of the region and is placed in the context of the historical labour movements. There were contrasting claims made by different stakeholders. An objective analysis of such claims has been made by cross checking the data from respondents who belong to different categories. Thus the primary data collected through field work form the inputs for this chapter where an analysis of the present issues and status of Kuttanad is carried out. However appropriate data from secondary sources have been used to substantiate the arguments of the respondents.

6.1. Decrease in Labour Requirement

Paddy cultivation is a highly labour intensive activity. Periodic monitoring and controlling water level is essential for the healthy growth of the rice plant. The periodic monitoring of weeds and controlling the pests are found to be tedious processes. Due to the socio-economic status prevailing in the State of Kerala the labour community is getting narrower. The paddy field owners were unable to recruit sufficient labours for these processes. This phenomenon started early in the mid seventies and intensified after every year (Kannan, 1998). Now majority of the paddy field farmers are employed in some other activities or are considering paddy cultivation as a secondary business. Poor rainfall, increase in the salinity of Vembanad lake and oil leak from houseboats and service boats have adversely affected the 'puncha' cultivation in Kuttanad. This has also affected the fish cultivation.

Over a century, rice cultivation in Kuttanad, including dewatering, was carried out with only manual labour. The first mechanization was the entry of a special pumping device called *petti and para*. During the initial years there was fierce opposition against mass mechanization from organized labour. It was mainly on the fear of losing employment opportunities. With the decline in labour availability, decrease in profitability from rice farming and farmers abandoning rice farming on economic grounds, the organized resistance to mechanization is selectively reducing. Currently most of the farmers use mechanized ploughing, including power tiller, despite in some areas they have to make the traditional payment to the ploughman. That is predicted to cease in near future, because new generation is not interested in ploughing. Now most of the input applications and weeding to a certain extent are also mechanised. The scope of manual labour is very limited and nominal. Mechanisation in harvesting started with thresher, moved to harvester and then to combine harvester-cum-thresher. Another reason reported by labours was the existence of several schemes at grass root level to promote entrepreneurship and provision of one rupee rice.

Analysis by Narayan (2003) observed that the drastic reduction of labour days is going further. It was seen that an average of 133 woman-labour days and 21 man-labour days is generated by rice farming per hectare per crop. The figures indicate the general job loss by crop shifts and the feminisation of agricultural labour work. This was cutting into the wage gains accrued by labour due to a pro-active trade union movement. Given the continued decline in area under rice, the per capita employment must have registered a further decline in the 1990s.

Even though this is a common phenomenon in the agriculture sector in the state, the impact of reduction in employment affects the region like Kuttanad more severely because of the unique geographical and climatic conditions. As per the estimates of Kannan (1998) the

decline in employment due to the fall in area under rice was 'around 35 million man-days by mid-seventies and early eighties and around 50 million man-days by mid-nineties'. Average annual days of employment for agricultural labour in Kerala in 1964-65 was 194 for men and 143 for women compared to 273 and 180 respectively for all India, and by 1974-75 the per capita employment declined to 160 days for men in Kerala with no change for women (GRC, 1999). This was the result of a strategy of substituting female labour for male labour during the initial period of wage bargaining. In 1983-84 per capita employment declined to 147 and 115 days for men and women respectively. The decline in men's employment (days per year per man hired) was 18 percent between mid-1960s and mid-1970s and 8 percent between mid- 1970s and mid-1980s in Kerala (ibid.).

The farmers estimate of the about the reduction in labour requirement is about 60%. That means compared to earlier times only 40% of the labour is required for the present day farming in Kuttanad. Loss of employment was a prominent concern expressed by the labours during field visits of the present study. The labours reported that they have an average of 15 to 30 days of employment during a season and most of the times the farming happens only in one season due to various reasons predominantly unpredictable climatic changes. While labourers complain that the regular and intense use of weedicides is a factor which reduced the labour requirement in paddy fields substantially, the farmers are of the view that it is because of lack of availability of adequate labour that they were forced to think about options of using weedicides.

6.2. Job Shift

The traditional agricultural laboures are no more exclusively in to the agricultural work. There is several push and pull factors for this job shift. The push factor is mainly the decreasing labour requirement in the agricultural sector whereas the pull factors are many.

The employment guarantee scheme offers them with minimum 100 days of work for them with minimum effort and hardship from the side of labourer. The perceived social status of the non-agricultural work prompts them to work for other sectors like construction and tourism. It is also reported that the *Janashree* and *Kudumbashree* also offers them options to work other than agriculture.

A Labourer 2 from Nedumudi observed a very interesting social phenomenon related to change in job preferences among people belong to Kuttanad. “During early times marriage was between people belonging to almost same or closer area. So they used to have knowledge about paddy cultivation. Now the system is changed. The newly married ones to Kuttanad are from far places and these people are not exposed to the land and cultivation. So they are not interested to take up work in the paddy fields”. He is saying that after some time Kuttanad paddy fields will be filled with Bengali and Assami labours.

According to a farmer from Karuvatta Kari Lands “Today’s generation don’t know anything about agriculture, cultivation etc. If harvesting machine is not here, harvesting won’t happen in our place. People in all the sectors would like to incorporate their children in the same sector. For example, doctors motivate their child to be a doctor, teachers encourage their children to become teachers. But no farmers want their children become farmers.” It is noted that none of the children of labours and farmers interviewed for this study is presently in the field of agriculture.

6.3. Lease Cultivation

The increasing unfavourable economics of paddy cultivation with hired labour promoted emergence of lease cultivation, during the beginning of 1980s, where the lessee without paid family labour manages to earn a better profitability (Thomas, 2002).

The leasing is usually for a very short period, may be for one or two crop seasons, and this is agreed between the lessor and lessee on oral agreement with no lease records. Care is also taken to change the lessee after a lease cycle. Lease rate for a single cultivation is around Rs. 12,000- 15,000 in Kayal areas and Rs. 18,000- 20,000 in Karappadams (primary data). Lease rate is largely based on soil productivity, field location and bargaining skill of lessees, etc. Under such leasing, the lessees do not take much interest in maintaining outer bund or improving soil fertility. Lessees are now included in the eligibility for most of the support and subsidies extended by the government. Lessee is not the actual member of padasekhara samithy which is actively functioning in each padasekharam. Lease farming and contract farming are the trends in current paddy cultivation in Kuttanad. Size of holding of land of each person got decreased due to land ceiling. This also encouraged people to opt for lease farming. It increases the productivity, but the lessee is always concentrating on maximum yield. So they tend to use excess pesticides and weedicides and not at all interested in the protection of fields or ecological balance.

A Farmer from Karilands responded “Leasing affects the paddy fields itself. Because lessee is not interested in the proper maintenance of paddy fields such as proper weeding, outer and inner bund construction etc. They are more concerned about maximising yield only”.

Harikumar (1986) also delineated the context for emergence of lease cultivation. During early eighties the farmers of Kuttanad had to confront with host of issues such as increasing cost of cultivation, declining profitability of paddy cultivation and land management problems. This forced to seek new land relations as the special conditions prevailing in Kuttanad supported this trend. They were left with two alternatives, less intensive cultivation or leave more land fallow. Constraints like capital intensity and strong protest from agricultural labourers to conversion stand against this. While farmers are forced to find out other ways of land

utilisation, agricultural labourers are forced to find alternative choices for livelihood due to the increase in unemployment. This resulted in the emergence of informal leasing.

While attempting to explain the features of emerging lease farming Thomas (2010) observed that the lessor-lessee relationship is unlike the dominant-dependant/patron- client relationship of the earlier dispensation. Present day relation is an informal and even impersonal one that resembles relations of market; the highest bidder gets land for cultivation. There is no written document / agreement on the terms and conditions of leasing. Unlike other communities the Ezhavas lease in more than they lease out and since their ownership holding also is significant, they form a dominant section of the farming community in the study area. Most of them were the traditional supporters of the Marxist party. The author contents that emergence of this community has some implications for the changed relations in this region. Surplus land recipients of the erstwhile attached labour class, also lease out their land. But reasons for their leasing out are different from those of other lessors. The present day contract approximates relations of a free market; use of land like any other immovable property is exchanged for a consideration of reward.

6.4. New forms of Collaborative Farming

Most of the paddy cultivation in Kuttanad is now happening on group farming basis. Each padasekhram will have a Padasekhrara Samithy under government control and all the activities related to cultivation are under the guidance of padasekhra samithy. This Samithy has a secretary, president, committee members based on the size of padasekharam. In group farming all the activities of paddy cultivation like field preparation, sowing, application of pesticides, irrigation and dewatering etc for a large padasekharam is happening at the same time. This reduces the cost, risk etc. The members of group farming are sharing their profit

and risk among each other. 50 % subsidy through Krishi Bahavan is available to the farmers for the expenses related to soil ameliorants.

Under Co-operative farming a group of 5-10 people join together for cultivation for a specific period of time. Government is supporting this initiative by giving subsidised loans through nationalised banks. They are sharing the cost of input, manpower, risk etc. If they required, government is providing subsidised loans through nationalised banks with the support of NGOs. Agricultural labours will also get an opportunity to do farming process by this method.

6.5. Rotational Farming

Rotational farming is one of the suggested approaches to manage the crisis of farmers. Integration of fishery with rice under 'one paddy-one fish' ('1P-1F') offers a different opportunity in Kuttanad. Under the rotational / sequential system of farming, fish / prawns are cultivated in rice fields after one rice crop in a year cycle. Since each padasekharam is owned and operated by several farmers, fish integration in such padasekharam is facilitated under group approaches. Under the Group Fish Farming (GFF) system, expenses and income are shared according to holding size. The agricultural wastes can be essential inputs for freshwater aquaculture and at the same time wastes emerging from aquaculture could be ploughed back into the agricultural farming system. GFF is predominantly seen in the Kayal areas.

6.6. Shift in Crops

There is a widespread apathy among farmers on rice cultivation. They realise that paddy cultivation is not profitable on grounds of high cost of production, low prices and exploitative market. Increasing cost of production of paddy cultivation and lack of commensurate price

for produce is pushing farmers in increasing their debt burden. This is the major reason for many leaving the cultivation leaving the land fallow. An important factor contributing to high cost of production is the high recurring cost on the infrastructure for paddy cultivation, particularly in Kuttanad. This involves strengthening of outer bunds including repair of breaches, construction of motor thara, pump house and vachals. Secondly, the increasing cost of labour and decreasing input per man days. Third factor is an uncertain market and market price for the produce. Different studies show that 60-74% of the cost of cultivation is accounted to hired manual labour. This, depending on the location, varies between 10-20 % of cultivation cost (Swaminathan, 2007).

There are also productivity restraining factors such as non-availability of quality seeds and other inputs on time, risk of crop loss at every stage including terminal post-harvest stage from summer rains, and deficiencies in technology transfer and services. Another major cost component is on hiring agricultural labour by small and medium farmers. Farm machinery was scarce in Kuttanad and there was resistance against this option from organized labour and it is almost changed now due to shortage of labour during peak operations. The area of some padasekharams is much higher than the desirable size and it increases cost of transportation of inputs to plots located deep inside and transporting out produce from there. Manageable padasekaram size may also help in faster dewatering to conduct sowing on time. This would also reduce the overall loss in situations of outer bund breach.

6.7. Absence of Crop Calendar

Virtual absence of enforcement of a crop calendar for paddy cultivation in various seasons, particularly the punja crop, which is grown in largest area in Kuttanad including Lower Kuttanad, Kayal Land and North Kuttanad, an erratic cropping schedule is being followed,

particularly after the commissioning of TMB. This compels longer period of closing for the TMB with cascading impact on Kuttanad ecology and ecosystem. Late sowing is also reported to increase pest and disease incidences and increased application of pesticides. Kuttanad is facing labour shortage during peak labour intensive operations. Timely operations required under new crop calendar require well-managed assessment of labour availability and supply. But several farmers in the region complained that it is impossible now a day to follow a crop calendar because of the unpredictable climate and seasonal variations.

6.8. Increase in Cost of Cultivation

Most of the combine harvester comes from outside and farmers are required to pay exorbitant charges. Now the rate is around Rs 2000-2400 per acre (source: primary data). Even then, farmers prefer to use machinery as it makes harvest and threshing faster, because manual harvest and threshing take 2-3 weeks to complete and this causes substantial post-harvest yield loss. There is widespread demand for providing farm machineries and related service support within Kuttanad at reasonable rate.

Narayan (2003) reported the change in wage rates in the rice cultivation. According to him in 1952 the harvest wage in rice cultivation was 1/12 or 8.3 percent of the produce, and gradually increased to 1/6 or close to 17 percent by the mid-1980s. The rise in labour wages continued even in late 90's (GRC, 1999). The increase in cost of cultivation is explained by the respondents in different forms and expressions. The rate of the combined harvester comes to Rs.1,600 to Rs.1,800 per hour. The farmers suggest that the government to have some systems to provide such machines in a subsidised rate. At present average wage for woman labourer is Rs.300 and expenses for food and travel. For male labourer it comes to Rs.600 to

700. For fertiliser cum weedicide application the wage rate is around Rs.600/acre (source: primary data as on November 2014).

A farmer from Ramankary expressed it as “Farmers are forced or able to give double wages to agricultural labours due to labour shortage. Machines suitable for Kuttanad paddy fields are necessary. Dewatering & irrigation- machines which needs low input and capable of providing maximum output are necessary and should be formulated.”

One trade union representative is of the opinion that the wages in Kuttanad is insufficient to meet the changing needs of labourers. He laments “Wage is not sufficient. Women labourers must get at least 500 Rs as wage. Earlier, labour got minimum of 150-200 working days in a cropping season. But now they are only getting maximum 30 days. The one of the ways to compensate this loss is increase in wages”.

The estimates of (Leela mony, rice research institute) give a clear picture of the increase in cost of labour. The requirement of human labour for rice cultivation is very high in Kerala ie., around 148 man days constituting more than 70% of the total cost. A study on the decennial changes in the structure of cost of cultivation per ha. of rice in Kuttanad showed that between 1988 and 1998, share of expenditure on human labour increased substantially from 42 per cent to 61 per cent and has still increased during 2003-04. A census on agricultural labourers shows marginal increase, but the fact is that the number of labourers is also dwindling. The average age of women agricultural labour force in the rice bowls of the state is reported to be above 60. This has eroded the efficiency of labour.

6.9. Procurement of Grains

At present in Kuttanad, the major buyer of paddy is the Civil Supplies Corporation under the leadership of government of Kerala. Procurement is made on the special Minimum Support Price (MSP) decided by the State Government. Now the farmer is getting around Rs. 1900/ quintal from rice mills through the Supplyco procurement system (source: primary data). Procurement of paddy is happening with in 2-3 days of harvesting. Payment is done to through the bank and farmer is getting the payment within 1- 2 months. The Civil Supplies Department (CSD) of Kerala is facilitating the current procurement at the MSP fixed by the State government. It helps in the reduction of the loss to farmers from grain damage due to rain soaking. However, the procurement system as it operates now has to be far more farmer-friendly. The prescribed grain quality for the fixed MSP is that it shall not exceed 17 % in moisture and 3 % in unfilled grains and foreign body content. Whenever these quality limits are crossed, adjustment of such quality deficiency is made out in the grain weight eligible for payment. There is avoidable arbitrariness in this practice, which tends to exploit the farmer. Sometimes payment is delayed up to 3-4 months.

A labourer from Kainady reported the concerns related to procurement of paddy. “It is done by civil supplies dept at a rate of Rs. 1,900 per quintal. Payment for the paddy will take some time but the farmer has to pay Rs. 100-120 as procurement charge at the time of selling it. In this, Rs. 12 is government contribution. Even though payment of supplyco takes 2-3 months the farmer has to pay Rs. 88 (100-12) at the time of procurement itself. In effect a farmer gets only around Rs. 1800 per quintal.”

Another concern expressed by the farmers is that the increase in price for paddy is not proportionate with that of the rice in the market. Thus the advantage of increased demand and price of the rice is not reaching to the farmers.

6.10. Declining Number of Agriculture Labourers

Unique skills and work culture of agricultural labour of Kuttanad is on decline and Kuttanad is now facing labour shortage during peak periods of agricultural operation. They constitute one of the most well organized groups in Kuttanad. The younger generation farmers as well as farm labourers are not at all interested in agriculture. Kannan (1998) substantiates this observation. He reported the phenomenon of lack of entry of youngsters in the labour force in Kerala as early in 1998. According to him the zero rate of growth in the younger age group of 15-29 since 1990 is an indication that there is no net addition to the annual entrants in this group of the labour force.

There is a paradox of coexistence of unemployment reported by labourers and non-availability of adequate labour experienced by the farmers. This is primarily because the agriculture operations happen simultaneously in all the fields due to its seasonal nature. So the requirement for labour in the peak season is extremely high. But many of the other operations like removing weeds, ploughing, pumping water, harvesting, threshing etc are now predominantly carried out by machines. Thus rest of the season the requirement of the labour becomes minimal. This in turn prompts the labourers to seek for other forms of employment.

A farmer from Karuvatta Kari shared the plight of farmers in these words “there was a time where the number of labourers had to be restricted with the support of police force because of the availability of large number of labours. Now farmers are begging to the labours for their support”.

Another farmer from Kari lands “Most of the machines are from Tamilnadu. Government is providing some training to selected local labourers and they are using government machines from 8am to 5 pm in weekdays. But private parties are many and they are doing at any time

based on the requirement. This activity is also tedious so local labours are not much interested in this.”

6.11. Change in Conditions of Work

With the change of time, working conditions and working hours of the labour have undergone significant change. The current widely followed daily working hours is 4 hours for ploughing, 5 hours in Kayal lands for all work, and 6 hours in rest of the area. The ruling daily wages for man and woman are Rs.700 and Rs. 300, respectively (source :primary data) with additional proportionate rate for every extra hour of work it is far higher than the IRC rate of around Rs. 560 and Rs. 330 respectively. But now women are also demanding Rs. 600- 700. Loading and unloading rate for labour is Rs. 120 per one quintal packet of paddy for a distance of 35 meters and there is a proportionate rate for each extra distance. Rate for filling one quintal packet is Rs. 30. The ruling rate of sowing and applying manure, pesticides or weedicides is Rs. 500-600 per acre.

Agricultural labour on the other hand, complains that the labour days available in a year are less and this have to be enhanced. The woman labourers complain about the gender discrimination in wage payment. They want enhanced wages, if not on par with that of men. Although the different operations require almost equal number of men and women, 80% of the current labour force in paddy cultivation is woman. This is mainly because more men are moving out of agricultural sector. Greater proportion of cultivation cost is attributed to labour cost, depending on whether or not machinery is used. The labour unions enhance the wage levels, particularly when the government decides to increase the procurement price. With the declining availability of labour, increasing shift to mechanization becomes an essential imperative for the farmers.

A labourer from Nedumudi explained the change in conditions of work as--- “Piece work is an emerging practice in agricultural fields. Same employee will do activities in different fields in the same day. For example, sowing in one field in the morning and sowing or pesticide application in another field in the afternoon. So the employee will get cash based on each activity. This will help them to get a higher wage compared to doing a full day work in a single field”

6.12. Lack of Availability of Quality Seed

Lack of availability of seed emerged as the most critical issue reported by farmers. Unlike in other places, Kuttanad farmers currently do not save *Punja* crop seed for re-using during next season and this is the only crop most of them grow. They attribute practical problems in drying the seed after harvest and its safe storage without losing viability for eight months under high ambient humidity. Hence, supply of fresh seed during every season becomes necessary. Currently, the National Seeds Corporation and Karnataka State Seeds Corporation through the Department of Agriculture and Kerala State Seed Development Authority meet much of the seed demand on the two currently ruling varieties, *Jyothi* and *Uma*. Although the recommended seed rate is 40 kg /acre, farmers use higher seed rate up to 50kg/acre, often as a precaution against possible poor seed quality, loss of seed etc (source: primary data) . Due to shortage of quality seeds all kinds of seed reach farmers during sowing season, leading to problems like poor germination, seed mixtures and poor yield. Only a small part of the certified seed supplied is locally produced and bulk of the seed, therefore, comes from other states.

6.13. Social Mobility

Kannan (1998) observed that from a broader developmental point of view Kerala has reached a stage, socially speaking, where the labour force is ready to move into more skilled,

technologically superior, high value-adding occupations with better wages and conditions of employment. While describing the changing status of agricultural labourers in Kuttanad, Thomas (2002) observed that over the last few years agricultural labourers in Kuttanad have acquired a multiple status. The words of the labours substantiate this.

A traditional Labourer belonging to Karuvatta explained his status. He is having own land, leased land. He primarily works in his land for major part of the year. In addition to this during free time he also takes up work as a labour in other fields. Another labourer from Pallathuruthy commended “children of agricultural labours are having good education and they are employed. So they are not interested in agriculture. They are not allowing their parents to do agricultural activities.”

With the implementation of land reforms many of them had received plots of surplus lands having size not exceeding one acre. Some of them lease in additional land for personal cultivation, some others lease out their land and the rest of them sow in their newly acquired land and indulge in other activities during the non-farming seasons. The distinction between paddy farm workers, marginal farmers, inland fishermen, construction workers and casual labourers has narrowed down in the rural areas of Kuttanad as the very same person performs all these activities in different times.

One of the farmers from Ramankary has given an account of the social transformation “Agricultural labours, and union members who conducted struggles against landlords became the land owners and they are not participating in any strike now”

6.14. Increased use of Pesticides and Weedicides

This is one of the severe threats Kuttanad is confronting as of now. Even though several studies were conducted on identifying this issue, no solution is emerged so far. The responses

from the farmers and labourers indicate the intensity of this issue. For example, a study by Devi (2007) revealed that the pattern and intensity of pesticide use in Kuttanad region. According to it pesticide use is often unscientific at all levels of use—from the selection of chemicals and handling practices to averting behaviour. This results in health damages to the extent of Rs. 38 per day (US\$ 0.86) per individual. This study reported the use of 19 types of pesticides, 3 weedicides and 4 fungicides in the region. It is also revealed that all these chemicals are used excessively to the range of 17.5 per cent to 233 per cent than the recommended level of application. Nineteen health symptoms as a result of the application of these chemicals have been identified predominantly among those applicators and agricultural labours. This is another point of concern expressed by almost all the respondents of this study during our field work. The words of a labourer from Karuvatta were expression of real concerns---“Usage of weedicide and pesticide helped us to reduce the labour requirements and increased the health problems. We prefer to use it because it requires less cost and leads to sudden changes in the fields in short period. In spite of all the technological support there is no happiness in the Kuttanadan agricultural fields now”.

A farmer from purakkad expressed his concern in these words “Pesticide usage is extreme. Proper awareness should be given to the farmers and labours. Due to labour shortage and lower expense people are using higher level of chemical fertilizers & pesticides”. Another farmer from Thottappally observed “Fertilizer and pesticide application are not systematic and correct. Awareness creation among farmers and labours are very necessary, but it is not happening properly”

While most of the farmers expressed that they never wanted to use weedicides and pesticides. But the situation forces them to use it to a heavy dose. Most of the farmers and labourers are not aware of the negative health issues associated with the intense use of these chemicals. Some labourers prefer to take up this job alone for want of higher wage rates without

knowing the health issues they are exposed to. The farmers use weedicides as a labour saving mechanism. Another interesting information shared by a farmer is that the number of pets increased in the region despite the intense use of pesticides.

Even though there were attempts to promote organic farming in Kuttanad, the farmers are no more interested to continue the same because it was less profitable and very costly compared to the traditional methods of agriculture. One of the main concern was organic farming is perceived to be more labour intensive compared to the traditional mode of farming. A representative of KSKTU reported that “union is against for lease farming because it increased the usage of pesticides and weedicides to get maximum profit.”

6.15. Environment Issues

The water tourism is contributing to the ecological degradation of Kuttanad. The houseboats and tourist resorts add to the pollution load on water with more solid wastes, notwithstanding that few of them are holding a “Green Palm” certificate from Tourism Department. It also contributes considerable fuel contamination from outboard motors and boat cleaning docks. Adequate study is not conducted on the carrying capacity of boats in the Kayal, and the Irrigation Department, which issues license for boats, has no precise information on the number of un-licensed boats. Pollution and water stagnation and the foul smell emanating from putrefied fish and decomposed organic contents are growing challenges to sustained tourism. Lack of navigation aids such as channel identification marks, route or direction boards, signals, floating buoys and lighting system are other important deficiencies. Lack of wayside amenities for tourists such as drinking water, clean eateries and adequate rest rooms make the tourist tied up in the boat with no interaction with local communities. These facilities are also lacking in terminal jetties.

Lack of adequate safety measures is another aspect pointed out by local people during interaction. In this context, a scheme on infrastructural facilities for cruising through the Pampa River developed by the National Transportation Planning and Research Centre (NATPAC) is worth mentioning. The infrastructure includes construction of terminal jetties at Alappuzha and Kottayam sides, construction of wayside jetties and eateries at several minor towns, construction of halting centres at R block, Vattakayal, Nedumudi, Kotharathodu, Kanjipadam, Pallathuruthy, etc. and construction of water sports complexes at terminals. Tourism development is alleged, justifiably, to have promoted land conversion for building resorts along with encroachments into the Vembanad Lake. Persistence of resorts to have widest possible waterfront with tight security is also increasing conflict with local fishermen. The present abysmally neglected state of these canals with prolific growth of waterweeds and stagnation of putrefied water are the causes for major ecologic disasters currently plaguing the region.

6.16. Decrease in Area and Production of Rice

The area under rice cultivation declined from 7.9 lakh ha in 1960 to 2.34 lakh ha in 2010 whereas the production of rice in the state found a decline from 10.68 lakhs tonnes in 1960 to 6.25 in 2010 despite a twofold increase in the productivity during the period. (Govt of Kerala, Directorate of E&S). The estimates of rice production and area under rice in Kuttanad region is given by Thomas (2002). According to him this region accounted for more than 18 percent of the paddy growing areas in 1990-91. Area under the crop declined from 101.17 thousand to 57.87 thousand hectares with in a period of ten years from 1990-91 to 1999-2000. Meanwhile, the percentage share of the region in the states total area under paddy declined to 16.54 showing that the rate of decline had been sharper in this region. In the same decade total production of rice in the region decreased from 227.61 thousand tonnes to 152.16

thousand tonnes demonstrating an aggregate decrease of 33.15 percent. He concluded that since the beginning of the nineties the performance of the region both in terms of area and production of paddy had begun to deteriorate at unprecedented levels.

Almost all the respondents of the present study expressed the concerns on decrease in area and production of rice in the Kuttanad region. Some of them sarcastically described it as “if this condition of agriculture continues in the region, paddy fields will disappear in Kuttanad within a decade”

6.17. Technology to Suit the Local Requirements

One of the main concerns expressed by farmers was the constraints/limitations of technology available in Kuttanad paddy areas. Almost all of them are of the view that there should be local innovations to develop technology to suit the local climatic and geographical conditions of Kuttanad. They reported frequent breakdown of combined harvester machine. The experience of farmer hailing from Karuvatta Kari Lands substantiates this “Combined harvester is beneficial to the farmer but its usage also depending on the climatic conditions. Sometimes machine sinks in the wet lands.”

6.18. Role of Labour Movement

It becomes all the more relevant to ask the role of trade union movements these days because the labour category has gained a high level of social mobility and status. Moreover, they are empowered in many forms compared to older days and have increased bargaining power. The respondents perceived the role of union movement in different ways. A farmer from Thottappally observed that union is mainly involving loading, unloading related matters. Wage demand is another issue by which unions are consistently involved in. Another farmer from purakad is of the view that “union has not much role. Because farmers don’t make any argument with the labourers or unions members as always their demand will be accepted.

More or less similar is the view expressed by our labourer respondents that the role of union is minimal and restricted. For them the reason is different. They contend that the category of labour is shrinking down. If there is no labourer then there is no survival for labour unions. Now a day the union's role is more of facilitating to get Welfare fund and issues related to loading and unloading." The trade union leaders also subscribe to this stance that the role of trade unions is minimum. A trade union leader from Neelamperoor safely expressed his perspective on the role of union "If labourer has any complaint then union will involve in the issue & make proper solutions"

6.19. Social Security

The focus of the union movement is shifted from land reforms to social security measures during the early 90s. The major social security schemes available to the agricultural workers include Welfare fund, pension, financial support for education of children and support for marriage of daughters. There are mixed responses to the social security provisions among the respondents. Some workers shared that lot of people are maintaining their identity only for the purpose of availing these schemes through membership in the welfare fund. Even trade unions are facilitating them to get such benefits. Some retired labourers reported that it is a source of support to them in the old age to have pensions if they receive it on time.

A labourer from Pulikunnu shared her experience as "I am getting the pension. But there is some delay in pension some times. Some occasions it will take 3 months delay in getting the pension amount. I am not very clear about the benefits of welfare board." The government support in the form of financial assistance to the farmers is provided during the end of the cropping season. The farmers prefer to get it sometimes during the course of the season so that they would be more benefited to use the amount more productively.

6.20. Agrarian Relations

The emergence of labour movements changed the agrarian relations in Kuttanad. The traditional *Janmi-adiyan* (land lord-labour) relationship is replaced by a contractual relationship between employee and employer. While describing about the social and agrarian relations in Kuttanad, Vallikapen (2012) noticed that the old attachment and intimacy to the land and the water and their traditional occupations is now mixed with caste feelings, the impact of education, urban contacts and the newly acquired wealth and social positions which has a tremendous influence on paddy cultivation and the present landlord-labourer relationship. The change is in such a way that irrespective of social divisions, those who have money own paddy fields and the others work in the fields. The author reported that with more money in more hands, there are no particular castes called landlords and labourers now.

According to a farmer from Purakkad “Nowadays there is no relationship between the farmers and labours. Now labours are also having agricultural land. Trade union destroyed the agriculture to a certain extent by conducting unwanted struggles. Now they also understood the present day requirements and concerns”

The words of another farmer 4 from Thottappally clarified it further as “Now there is no land owner. Now farmer is also a labour, ie, owner cum labour for example a person may have 1 acre own land the remaining is leased land”. A TU leader from Neelamperoor has a similar view on present agrarian relations. He commented “Today there is no strong relationship between farmers & labours. Today, No Janmi, only farmer. Only farmer – labour relationship and that is purely on the basis of agreement or only in terms of job and wage relationship. Land owner is liable to pay compensation if he removes any of his permanent labour. But now it is also not happening.”

6.21. Government Interventions: Kuttanad Package

The Kuttanad Package is a comprehensive project, the largest financial packages sanctioned to a single region. Designed by Dr.S. Swaminathan, it was expected to conclusively deal with the flood threats that were for long plaguing Kuttanad, and ensure overall development of the region. It is proposed to mitigate agrarian distress in Alappuzha & Kuttanad Wetland System which was approved by the Govt. of India. The Swaminathan Foundation recommended a Package with a total cost outlay of Rs. 1,840 crores which was accepted by the Govt. of India for funding under on-going Central Sector Schemes. The Kuttanad Package will help to preserve the unique Kuttanad ecosystem, increase the rice production and productivity and improve the standard of living of the farmers of the region by way of reduced cost of cultivation and improved income.

Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) prepared by the State Govt. for different activities envisaged in the Package are under different stages of implementation. There is no separate budget allocated for the Kuttanad Package. Funds are made available by the Govt. under on-going Central Schemes based on Projects prepared for each activity approved under the Package. The Kuttanad Package was approved by the Union Cabinet on 24th July 2008. The main components of the Package include Construction of outer bunds around padasekharams, Renovation of the Kuttanad Wetland System, Modernisation of the Thanneermukkam Barrage (TMB) & Thottapally Spillway (TSW), Regulation of floodwater near CD & Rani-Chitra Blocks, Establishment of agri-clinics in Kuttanad, Strengthening research & training, conducting a Research on TMB operation and kayal ecology etc.

The progress of implementation of the Kuttanad Package is monitored by the Task Implementation Committee, Coordination Committee & Prosperity Council of the Govt. of Kerala and by the Coordination Committee of the Govt. of India. The Project Officer will

coordinate and facilitate the implementation of the Kuttanad Package. The Kuttanad Wetland System as a whole would be expected to benefit from the Package. The farmers, fishermen and the general public also anticipated the benefit from the Package either directly or indirectly. The different activities recommended in the Package are being implemented based on the guidelines of the schemes which fund the activity. The public can avail of the benefits by contacting the Heads of the Departments / PSUs or the District level officers implementing the Package.

But there exists lot of confusions and complaints related to the implementation and progress of Kuttanad Package. Many of the works of Kuttanad Package are yet to be taken up and most of them, remain half way as the Central Government authorities have taken the stance that the Project no longer exists. Again, it was only in 2011 that the central government had sanctioned Rs.379 Crores for construction of outer bunds of 231 polders in Kuttanad. Implementation of most of the projects conceived under the Project was not time bound. The project, most of them related to the Agriculture Department are at different stages of completion. Out of the Rs. 200 Crores sanctioned till March 2012 only Rs. 56 Crores was expended by the Agriculture Department so far. In fact, the Rs.15 Crores earmarked for the Special Agriculture Zone has not been spent till now.

To mitigate the agrarian distress in Alapuzha and Kuttanad Wet Land Eco System MSSR foundation recommended 15 tasks out of which, measures for salinity control and flood management, provide infrastructure support to paddy cultivation are taken by the Irrigation Department under the Chief Engineer Kuttanad Package Alapuzha. But the amount sanctioned is very limited and the utilisation of amount is also very low. An amount of Rs.1266.68 crores had been sanctioned for the implementation of the package. But, only Rs.210 crore was used so far. Major projects under the package — the renovation of

Thottappally spillway, Thaneermukkom barrage and the Alappuzha-Changansserry (AC) canal —have not been started yet. The shoddy implementation also worsened the flood situation in Kuttanad. A package envisaged to save Kuttanad is now bringing only woes to the people of the region (Bablu, 2013).

The dissatisfaction with the progress and implementation of Kuttanad Package is unanimously expressed by almost all the respondents belong to the labourer, farmer and trade unions of the study irrespective of the category. The main activity that happened as part of the project is restricted to construction of outer bunds in certain areas. People also complaint that this sort of construction is not appropriate and sustainable.

Chapter 7

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter summarises the major findings and reflections based on the study. This is organised under four broad themes namely history of labour movements, change in agrarian relations, dynamics of the struggle and impact of labour movements. The chapter concludes with a description of the present scenario of Kuttanad by highlighting the major issues in the region.

7.1. History of Labour Movement

The dynamics of struggle in Kuttanad can be considered as a movement because the basic elements of a social movement were present there. There was a felt unrest from the part of a deprived category of labourers. At some point there had no choice but to react against the exploitation and torturing. They were highly united and strong enough to offer a resistance to their enemies; landlords and rich farmers. There was external support to the movement from caste and political sources. Finally the presence and committed involvement of the local leadership was another notable feature of the labour movement in Kuttanad.

The labour movement in Kuttanad has its origin in 1939. Several factors were contributing to such a dire need to unionise. These include the early proletarianisation of a large portion of the traditional work-force, the emergence of social-reform movements for attaining social dignity for the poor and those considered socially backward, the proximity to Alappuzha which is considered as the nerve centre of trade union movement in Kerala, quickly accompanied by a radical political movement which sought to incorporate all sections of the labouring poor, irrespective of their status as peasant, wage labourers, or self-employed in non-agricultural occupations. As a result the **first labour union among agricultural workers in Kerala was formed in 1939**. Organising the workers was a difficult task during the initial years as there

was a sense of resistance by them due to their attachment with the landlords. The landlords and farmers also used their power to resist such mobilisations. Instilling political and social consciousness and confidence among workers were the dominant aims of the union then. To take the words of Oommen it was more of an “idea marketing”.

Punnappra Vayalar upheaval in 1950 was a major **setback** because the Government has imposed a ban to the union activities. The first ministry under the leadership of Communist Party was **a progressive factor** for the workers movement. 1960s witnessed introduction of massive mechanisation of agriculture sector in the form of tillers and tractors. Enactment of Land Reforms Act, 1963 was another revolutionary measure in the history of labour movement in Kerala. The split of the communist movement in 1964 was yet **another setback** to the workers movement in Kerala. The movement **regained its momentum** in 1967 with the support of LDF ministry who got in power.

The union movement has undergone several ups and downs from then and reached its peak by early 70s. The political and caste support to the movement served as catalyst in the movement struggles in Kuttanad. There was a political agenda in organising struggles by different movement. The strategies were different depending upon the ruling government in power. Government in power always had supporting role to the struggles led by movements affiliated to them. More specifically, whenever the LDF ministry was in power there was acceleration in the labour movements in Kuttanad.

Another transition happened during 1960s was substantial increase in the number of agricultural labourers which in turn led to competition among the workers themselves on the one hand and struggle between the labourers and cultivators for employing the labourers on the other. By late 60s almost all the activities related to cultivation had become under the full control of the union militancy. The struggle between labourers and farmers became too

intensified to the extent that the farmers had to get prior support from the union offices to get the harvesting done hassle free.

In 1970, Land grab agitation was the major targeted event of the union movement. This was in a way a setback to the militant union because they could not get the full devotion of the labourers. Since the people had ownership of land their deprivation got mitigated and they were not fully available to the union activities. The struggles and agitations found to be disappeared to become a calm and peaceful period during 1974-75. This was partially because of the slowdown of activities of CPM led union and invasion of the other unions led by Congress and RSP in the Kuttanad region. Presence and interventions of IRC and collective negotiations helped to reduce the conflicts. Declaration of emergency in 1975-1977 was another hindrance on the rigour of labour movement. **This was an adverse time for workers movement.** But land owners tried to take advantage of this to the best of their capacity.

Early 80s witnessed the beginning of another era in the labour movements in the state. The focus of the agrarian mobilisations changed from working conditions and land reforms to the welfare of the agricultural workers. The first initiative in this regard was the introduction of a new social security measure in the form of Agriculture Labourer (*Karshaka Thozhilali*) Pension. This is the fruit of several years of struggle by the movements. In continuation of this in the year 1990 another social security measure in the forms of Labour Welfare Fund for agricultural workers was introduced.

Another major struggle by the labour movement was in 1992 where an anti reclamation stir under the left initiative. Popularly known as *vettinirathal*, under this move, union members forcefully entered into paddy fields having other crop cultivation in order to protect paddy land. A similar campaign in the name of 'Save Rice Field agitation (SRFA)' was launched

by KSKTU in 1997. This was highly controversial an issue during that time because of the dilemma projected upon by the farmers on this. Farmers were forced to shift to other crops on the grounds of low profitability, scarcity of labour and high wage rates.

The year 2000 was noted for the introduction of mechanisation in the form of threshing machines in Kuttanad. Since the harvesting was done by labours, they were eligible to get *patham & theerpu*. Hence without much resistance the labour unions had to oblige to this. This continued until the harvesting machine is introduced in 2005. This invited lot of resistance from the part of union movement in Kuttanad as a major measure of labour displacement. This led to frequent conflicts between farmers and labours to the extent that farmers had to take permission from local party leaders to use harvesting machine. But in the year 2007 because of the heavy unexpected rain harvesting could not be done properly. Despite concerted efforts even the union members could not mobilise adequate labour during this time. This incident made them to accept the harvesting machine as they realised this as an inevitable evil in Kuttanad. Thus the story of agrarian struggle changed between mere reactions against social oppression to militancy.

The militancy of the labour movement has created a counter force and reaction from the part of farmers. The earlier farmer tactic of unleashing organised repression on militant labourers via various social and economic sanctions became less effective. This emerging class of capitalist farmers in Kuttanad considered the trade unions a threat from the early days of mobilisation. The farmers had to form their own association to withstand the pressure. The most militant of this was Kuttanad Karashaka Sangam (KKS) in 1957. A federation of farmers' associations emerged in the 1960s called the *Akhila Kuttanad Karshaka Sangham* (AKKS) 'in the wake of the threat from organised labour unions sponsored by the communist parties'. This counter action from the part of the farmers was present in the SRFA struggle.

To a great extent the farmers succeeded in introducing the harvesting machine despite the powerful struggle from the part of labour unions during 2005.

7.2. Agrarian Relations

Traditionally the agrarian relations in Kuttanad was more of a patron-client relationship which is best described as *janmi-adiyan* relations. It was a modified form of master-slave relations where the workers were treated just as commodities. There existed a repressive caste system with the upper castes establishing their economic and social life based on land. The laws of pollution also prevented the *lower castes* from entering into any craft or trade which demanded transactions with the upper castes. This oppressive form of social discrimination was prevalent in its worst form till 1930s.

With the mobilisation of labour by the caste and political organisations, nature of this relationship also underwent transitions across time. Different forms of exploitation were prevalent during this time. The landlords used coercive means to suppress the reactions of the labours against this exploitation. The landlords compelled the labourers to work in inhumane conditions. The workers had to face physical and mental torturing in all possible forms. Many of the labours even had to sacrifice their life in the fight against the landlords. But the determination and concerted efforts of union leaders succeeded in changing the scenario as pro- labour. It was a story of about 25 years long struggle and sacrifice. Later stages, the struggles of labour movements became so frequent to get the basic rights of the labouring class. This included increase in wages and improvement in conditions of work. Thus the relationship became that of an employer-employee relations by mid 50s. Mechanisation of pumping for dewatering was another major factor influenced the agrarian relations in Kuttanad during early 20th century. The agrarian relations in Kuttanad got a reverse transition leading to the dominance of labour movement by the late 60s. In a place where landowners

were the dictators, they had to beg the mercy of unions to get sufficient number of labourers on time to carry out the agricultural operations hassle free.

7.3 Dynamics of the Struggles

The dynamics of struggles in Kuttanad is a story of pain, sacrifice and perseverance of dedicated people. It is the story of the contribution of the left movement in agrarian sector in Kerala. There were several isolated struggles in different places by different groups and were predominantly led by the left movement. Even for the same issue the struggle had to be repeated in several other parts of the region. This was mainly because the ultimate authority in determining the conditions of work was the landowner himself. Hence it became a continuous and persistent effort from the part of labour movements to fight against each and every landowner in getting the minimum conditions of work. It is clear from the history that a major chunk of the struggle was for getting a reasonable wage and ensuring equity in payment of wages across regions and gender. There were also struggles for improving the conditions of work such as regulating time and ensuring minimum level of welfare for laboures.

During the initial years of struggle it was more of a war against the dominating landowners. Thus it can be described as a struggle for survival and emancipation of the labour class by the left movements. The leaders of the struggle found it extremely difficult to get the labourers united as the prevailing social system was against challenging the landowners. Any attempts of organised movements from the part of labourers were vehemently suppressed by the landowners by force. They used all the possible form of revolt against the agitators. On several occasions they used the support of police force to repress struggles. The treatment was totally inhumane and cruel. As a result several labourers had to sacrifice their life for the

labour community. But gradually the determinant leadership fuelled by the left political parties had succeeded in getting their demands approved.

There was a clear class perspective in the struggles of Kuttanad. There was a broad congruence between party affiliations, caste identity and class background. For example, while most of the *Pulaya* participants are agriculture labourers and belonged to either CPI or CPM most of the *Cyrian Christians* are rich or middle level farmers and are affiliated to Kerala Congress. The *Nairs* and *Ezhavas* are more dispersed in terms of occupation and party affiliations. Initially it was a struggle by the oppressed labours belonging to the lower strata of the society. As and when the struggle got powerful from the working class the landlords also started reacting more or less in an equal force. At the peak of the struggles it was a fight between two equally powerful groups- the economically powerful landlords and the politically organised labourers. The strength and strategy of the struggles varied according to the political landscape of the state. That means, whenever left affiliated party was ruling the state the struggles got intensified.

7.4 Impact of Labour Movement

There is no doubt that the labour movement has impacted the agricultural sector particularly in Kuttanad and the state in general. The contribution of the left movement in improving the conditions of work in the agriculture sector cannot be understated. However, there are diverse views on the nature and type of impact the struggles created among the stakeholders of agriculture. Increase in wage rate is claimed to be most important and fundamental change brought in by the union movement in Kuttanad. This has made to the level of Kuttanad having the highest wage rates among the agricultural workers in the country. This was mainly because the union could succeed in influencing the govt to undertake periodic revision of the wage rates. Another major impact of the union movement was regulating conditions of work

in the agricultural sector in terms of hours of work. Union interventions could protect labour against exploitation by preventing the favouritism and subjectivity in selecting the workers. Resisting the labour saving technologies had been a priority of labour movement from time to time. Establishing a tripartite machinery to resolve the labour related disputes was a sign of government accepting the role of labour movements.

The much acclaimed Land Reform is yet another major accolade of agriculture movement in the state. This was a revolutionary measure as far as the working class is concerned. Legitimation of hutment rights and enactment of Agricultural Workers Act, in 1974 were counted as other major achievements of the unions. The unions were also instrumental in bringing development programmes in Kuttanad even though these projects could not bring the expected outcomes to the region.

The replacement of master slave relationship with an employee-employer relationship is a major gain of the struggles of labour class. The attached labour system with all inhumane treatment of the workers had been modified to casual labour system. This in turn brought out a transition in the social relations in the Kuttanad region. There existed a high level of social and caste based discrimination which later got disintegrated to a great extent due to the continuous struggles. The presence of an egalitarian worker-cultivator relationship and disintegration of jajmani relations are indicators of such achievements. Over the years the union could help the working class to liberate from the absolute subordination of the feudal relations.

Political mobilisation of labour and the marginalised category is yet another significant achievement of the union movement in agriculture sector. The story of the struggles of agricultural workers in Kuttanad is an example of emergence of powerful political force even

influential enough at the state level governance. Introduction of two welfare programmes to compensate the failure to effect the basic changes in agriculture sector.

Discussing about the setbacks, union movement was criticised for not maintaining the standard of living of the labourer in the face of dwindling days of employment. Agricultural labourers remained agricultural labourers even after the struggle and their political mobilisation. They remained a discontented lot. The decreasing area and production of paddy in Kuttanad raises serious concerns about the contributions made by the labour movements in the region. They could not influence the youngsters belong to the new generation in preserving the dignity and status of cultivation.

7.5. 70 Years of Labour Movement: the Debris

The focus of this subsection is to analyse the present scenario of Kuttanad, the birth place and battle field of labour union movement in the state. There were many positive changes that the labour movement could create, particularly in the region and generally in the agricultural sector of the state as a whole. These changes were mainly in terms of liberating the toiling masses of labour class from the clutches of dominant landlords, providing better wage rates and conditions of work. They have attained remarkable upward social mobility. The progress and empowerment that happened to the agriculture labours are incomparable. The power equation between the labours and farmers has reversed over time. The landowners who are dictators once upon a time have to follow the dictates of the militant unions now for almost all the agriculture related procedures.

Given these claims, the current landscape of Kuttanad gives us an alarming picture. This is explained in detail in chapter 6. To list a few this includes: increase in cost of cultivation, decrease in area and production of rice, decrease in labour requirement, job shift to non-agricultural sectors, predominance of lease cultivation, shift to cash crops, issues in

procurement of grains, declining number of agriculture labourers, lack of availability of quality seed, heavy use of pesticides and weedicides and environment issues related to fast development interventions of the region. These are issues threatening the paddy cultivation in almost all the stages of it.

While substantial progress has been achieved by the labouring class in terms of social mobility and conditions of work through the union movement, the paddy cultivation sector in Kuttanad has reached to a pathetic situation. In their attempt to bring 'gains' to the working class and their liberation, the movements and struggles could not treat preserving the paddy sector as a priority. This led to a scenario where farmers no more want to continue with the paddy cultivation, new generation no more prefer to work in paddy fields, the area of paddy fields are shrinking and ultimately paddy cultivation a 'less status' or unwanted work. Unions could realise this alarming transition very late. It is quite accidental to observe most of these are bye-products of militant labour movements in the region. It is in 1990s they organised a massive struggle against the conversion of paddy fields. This struggle could not gain its purpose on the grounds of convincing reasons proposed by the farmer's community. The balance sheet of labour movement can be described as strong political mobilisation and empowerment of working class contrasted by stagnation of agriculture as a primary occupation. A good number of people in Kuttanad now strongly feel that the labourers in Kuttanad are over conscious of their rights and privileges. The militancy has gone to unexpected levels. So in a couple of year's time the labour class in Kuttanad become an extinct species.

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List of Respondents

Category	SL NO	Name	Age	Place	Remarks
Laborer	1	Satheesh	70	Kainady	
	2	Sathi	71	Krishnapuram	
	3	George	73	Pallathuruthy	
	4	Kunjamma	72	Pulinkunnu	
	5	Gopi	75	Karuvatta	
	6	Soman	72	Karuvatta	
	7	Shanta	72	Veliyanadu	
	8	Chandrasekharan	75	Nedumudi	
	9	Gopalakrishnan	74	Ponga	
	10	Chadrabhanu	72	Karuvatta	
	11	Sahadevan	73	Pallom	
Farmers	1	Prabhakaran	70	Karuvatta	
	2	Thomas Mathew	73	Thottappally	
	3	Appachan	76	Purakad	
	4	Mr joseph puthenpuray	71	Kavalam	
	5	Mr Chachchappan	74	Ramankary	
	6	Mr Jose Vengattuthara	79	Mampuzhakary	
	7	Kuruppu sir	82	Lisue	
	8	Mr Jestin	72	Kainakary	
	9	Leelamma Easo	71	Pallom	
	10	Pavithran	75	Nattakom	
	11	Joseph	79	Kidangara	
Trade Union Representatives	1	Thankappan	73	Neelamperoor	
	2	Mr N A George	85	Mancombu	
	3	Rajendrakumar	74	Kidangara	
	4	A D Kunjachan	76	Champakulam	
	5	Vincent	73	Edathua	
	6	EaraViswanathan	72	Ramankary	
	7	Mr K D Mohanan	74	Mancombu	
	8	P J Kuttappan	78	Champakulam	
	9	Ithihas	51	Cherthala	
	10	Basheer	65	Kuthiathode	
	11	Ramachandran	78	Alleppey	
	12	Radhakrishnan	58	Kavalam	
	13	Prof Chandrasekharan	82	Alleppey	
	14	Vinod	72	Pallom	
	15	Vasudevan Nair	80	Cherukara	
Others	1	K V Dayal	71	Muhamma	Organic Farming activist
	2	Ms Nimmy	45	Macombu	Mancompu Rice Research Center
	3	Mr Rajesh	35	Alleppey	arshakathozhilali kshemanidhi board
	4	Mr Sirajudheen	72	Kavalam	Agricultural Officer
	5	Dr Shanas	38	Macombu	Mancompu Rice Research Center
	6	Dr Leena Kumari	55	Macombu	Mancompu Rice Research Center
	7	Fr. Abraham Karipping	45	Changanacherry	Changanacherry Social Service Society(CHASS)
	8	Mr Jayadevan	54	Nattakom	Secretary of Nattakom co-operative Bank
	9	Fr Saiju Ayyankary	48	Pallathuruthy	Changanacherry Social Service Society(CHASS)
	10	Adv Rojo	45	Krishnapuram	PZ Foundation
	11	Dhanya	35	Thakazhy	Research Assistant, Mancompu Rice Research Center
	12	Biju Manath	46	Kavalam	Congress Madalam Secretary
	13	N K Kamalasanan	85	Kurichy	Communist leader, author

Appendix III

PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE LABOUR UNIONS IN KUTTANAD

Kerala Karshaka Thozhilali Union (KSKTU)

The CPI (M), congress, CPI and RSP are the major contenders of the mobilisation of the agrarian poor in Kuttanad, with CPI (M) having the largest following. The first agricultural labour union in the state called the Thiruvithamkoor Karshaka Thozhilali Union (T K T U) was formed in 1940 under the Communist Party of India(C P I) with headquarters at Mancompu in Kuttanad Taluk. This became Kerala Karshaka Thozhilali Union (K K T U) in 1956 with the integration of Malabar- Travancore- Cochin into Kerala. The split in CPI in 1964 gave birth to Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Union (K S K T U) under CPI(M) in 1968 with headquarters at Alleppey. After the split in 1964, the centre of trade union scene in Kuttanad had been occupied by the union led by CPI (M). Almost all major struggles in Kuttanad had been initiated by this union only. Being the pioneer it had made remarkable strides in the agrarian movement in the region and the state as a whole. It is the largest number of membership in the state. Currently it is having around 22 lakh members in the state level, 1,70,000 in Alleppey district and around 50,000 members in Kuttanad Taluk. The union is coordinating its activities in village, area, district and state levels. Other political parties like the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), the Socialist Party, etc, are also trying to gain some influence among agricultural labourers. But most of these continue to be nominal unions, leaving the Kerala State Agricultural Labourers' Union affiliated to CPI(M) as the dominant force in the agrarian field of Kerala.

(source: Vincent(58)- KSKTU, Taluk Committee President- Pulincunoo, Vasudevan(87) Previous Leader Of KSKTU- Eara)

Deseeya Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (DKTF)

Deseeya Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (DKTF) is affiliated to congress party which is registered in the year 1975. It has been fighting for the rights of agricultural labors. The motive behind the formation of the union was to coordinate agricultural labours in Kerala hence to get significant role in the state politics instead of Marxist influence. The first president of DKTF was Mr P Balan. Union is having greater presence in the Districts of Alleppey, Thrissur and Palakkad. It is having around 5 lakhs members in Kerala having the claim of 3rd position in Kerala in terms of membership. Union is proposing the demands such as increase the working days of agricultural labours, increase the wage of labours periodically, increase the rates of amounts of welfare board and increase the amount of pension bonus as Rs. 1,00,000. Kerala agriculture sector and especially the agriculture trade union sector have historically been in the stronghold of the left parties. But DKTF is also has significant role in the agricultural labor sector in rural Kerala. DKTF's social base has steadily increased since those early days. The inroads made by the DKTF have helped the Congress party finally to influence years of the propaganda that the left parties had spread in the rural areas with regards the policies of industrialization, globalization, use of technology etc. union is having vibrant leaders in panchayat , taluk, district and state levels. They are organizing various programs for the agriculatural labours and also co-ordinating them to enjoy their rights.

(source: Visvanathan(62), Ramachndran(78)- District Leaders- Alleppey, and DKTF Website)

RSP Union

RSP has agricultural labours union such as Kuttanad Mekhala Karshaka Thozhilai Union(KMKTU) and Akhila Kerala Karshaka Thozhilai Union (AKKTU). While the former operates in the Kuttanad region later operates at the state level. Both these unions are affiliated to United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) and they are independent bodies but working together for various struggles and demands. Kuttanad Mekhala Karshaka Thozhilai Union(UTUC) registered in 1952 and the Akhila Kerala Karshaka Thozhilai Union (UTUC) started in 1970s. Political leadership of United Trade Union Congress is given by RSP. These trade unions have a very nominal role among the agricultural labours of Kuttanad. The major demands of unions are protection of agricultural labours, job security, protection of wage structure, betterment of infrastructure, periodical training programs to agricultural labours about new technologies and machineries etc. The union is supporting agricultural labours for their welfare by nominating them to the welfare board and helping them to get the government support on time.

(source: Prof Chandrasekharan- 82- RSP, Central Committee Member)

Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilai Federation (KSKTF)

The split in CPI in 1964 gave birth to Kerala State Karshaka Thozhilali Federation under CPI in 1968. It is the organization of CPI for agricultural labours. The Federation is affiliated to Bharatiya Khet Mazdoor Union (BKMU) — the apex agricultural labourers' organisation of CPI at the national level. KSKTF is having around 3 lakhs members in Kerala, 25,000 in Aleppey and around 8,000 members in Kuttanad Taluk. In the initial stage CPI got support from upper castes, but now it is working for agricultural labours and their growth. KSKTF gave a call for immediate enactment and the mobilisation of common masses in favour of it. The post emergency period witnessed a tremendous growth in agricultural labours movement and it was reflected in the struggles and the growth of membership of different unions. This is the second largest among the agriculture labour unions in Kerala. Federation affiliated to the CPI ensures the implementation of the legislations and agreements for the welfare of workers. But now it is mainly concentrating on the protection of paddy fields, increase in the amount of pension and other welfare measures to agricultural labours. The strategies include organizing strikes, dharna, processions, meetings etc

(source: K S Mohan- Champakulam-CPI Area Committee Leader)

Karshaka Thozhilai Sangham

To coordinate and support agricultural labours party is having Karshaka Thozhilai Sanghams at District level. Alappuzha district Karshaka Thozhilai Sangahm formulated in 1991. All these union are affiliated to central trade union Bharathiya Masdoor Sangham(BMS). All Kerala membership of Karshaka Thozhilai Sangham is around 25,000. The membership and the intensity are higher in Kasarkode, Alappuzha, Palakad, Vayanadu, Thrissur districts. Trade union is active in ward, panchayat, taluk and district levels. Union is always demanding the speedy delivery of financial support to agricultural labours. Increase in the welfare facilities to the labours, proper and adequate payment of pension, training programs to labours about the new machines and technologies, introduction of salary system to registered agricultural labours by the government, protection of agriculture and agricultural labours, collaboration of national employment guarantee scheme with agriculture are some of the demands of the trade union. To propose those demands and also to support agricultural labours union conducted various struggles ate different period of time.

(source: Radhakrishnan- BJP, Alleppey District Leader, 58 Yrs- Liseu)

Kerala Karshaka Thozhilai Union(KKTU)

The trade union of JSS is Kerala Karshaka Thozhilai Union(KKTU). The members of the union are around 10,000 in Kerala. Though the union is having presence all over the Kerala, it more aggressive in Alleppey, Malappuram and Kollam districts especially Aroor Chertahala regions in Alleppey district. Union formulated in 1994 after the split from CPM. Union is conducting various struggles for the welfare of agriculture as well as the welfare of agricultural labours. Currently union is demanding periodical enhancement of financial support such as the welfare facilities and pension to agricultural labours. Union also interested in the provision of proper infrastructure and subsidies from the government to convert barren land to cultivable land.

(source: Ithihas- JSS District Leader- Alleppey-51)

Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (STU)

The trade union of Muslim League for agricultural labours is known as Karshaka Thozhilali Federation (STU). The trade union is affiliated to Swathantra Thozhilai Union (STU). Union is having around 10,000 members in Kerala and in Alleppey districts the membership is around 1300. Union is having around 40 years of experience among agricultural labours and also very active in the districts Malappuram, Palakkadu, Wayanadu, Kannur, and Kozhokode. It is functioning and co-coordinating its activities under the guidance of area committee, Taluk Committee, District Committee and state committee. Union is supporting the labours in their day to day requirement. It is always helping them to register their names in welfare board, awareness creation among labours about various government schemes and support, welfare facilities, periodical revision of pension and other welfare measures etc.

(source: Basheer- 65 Yrs- Kuthiathode)

