

**HIRED LABOURERS
IN PEASANT
AGRICULTURE
IN SRI LANKA**

**U.L. Jayantha Perera
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Research Study No. 40

May 1980

**AGRARIAN RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE
COLOMBO, SRI LANKA.**

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**A STUDY OF HIRED LABOURERS IN PEASANT AGRICULTURE
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F O R E W O R D

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS CONSTITUTE AN IMPORTANT SEGMENT OF THE LABOUR FORCE IN SRI LANKA WHERE WITH ITS 'DUAL AGRARIAN STRUCTURE' THERE ARE TWO DISTINCT CATEGORIES OF SUCH LABOUR. THE FIRST CATEGORY, PLANTATION LABOUR, CONSISTS LARGELY OF PEOPLE OF INDIAN ORIGIN AND ARE RESIDENT ON THE ESTATES DEPENDING ON REGULAR EMPLOYMENT AND PERMANENT INCOME. THEY ARE ORGANISED AND THEIR CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT, WAGES AND OTHER BENEFITS ARE DETERMINED BY LAW. THE OTHER CATEGORY CONSISTING MAINLY OF RURAL PEOPLE IS CHARACTERISED BY IRREGULAR EMPLOYMENT, POOR WAGES AND LACK OF ORGANISATION.

THIS STUDY PRIMARILY AIMS AT THROWING SOME LIGHT ON THE CATEGORY OF RURAL AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS WHO ALTHOUGH NEGLECTED UP TO NOW FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER CONSIDERATIONS ARE A SIGNIFICANT SECTION OF THE POPULATION. THE STUDY WAS CONCEIVED WITH TWO PURPOSES IN VIEW. FIRSTLY, IT WAS TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION OF THE OFFICIALS AND POLICY MAKERS INVOLVED IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES TOWARDS THIS CATEGORY OF AGRICULTURAL WORKERS. SECONDLY, IT WAS TO COLLECT SUFFICIENT BACKGROUND INFORMATION NEEDED FOR PREPARATING GUIDELINES FOR THE FORMULATION OF POLICIES AND LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE THEIR SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS.

EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE PEASANT SECTOR, THEIR CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT AND REMUNERATION AND GENERAL LIVING STANDARDS FORM THE THEME OF THE STUDY. IT REVEALS THAT THE POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES LAUNCHED BY SUCCESSIVE GOVERNMENTS SINCE INDEPENDANCE TO COMBAT RURAL POVERTY HAVE HAD ONLY MARGINAL IMPACT ON THIS GROUP OF PEOPLE WHO STILL REMAIN BELOW THE POVERTY LINE. THE LACK OF REGULAR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, LOW WAGES AND THEIR FAILURE TO ORGANISE THEMSELVES ARE FOUND TO BE THE MAIN REASONS BEHIND THIS SITUATION.

SINCE THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS ARE EXPECTED TO PLAY A VITAL ROLE IN THE GENERAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR IN THIS COUNTRY, IT IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO DECIDE ON EFFECTIVE POLICIES TO BETTER THE EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS AND WAGES OF THIS CATEGORY OF PEOPLE. IT IS OUR HOPE THAT THIS REPORT WILL STIMULATE SUCH ACTION ON THE PART OF THE AUTHORITIES CONCERNED.

OUR THANKS ARE DUE TO THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE (IDRC) OF CANADA, FOR PROVIDING A GENEROUS GRANT TO MAKE THIS STUDY POSSIBLE. THE STUDY WAS CONDUCTED BY MESSERS U.L.JAYANTHA PERERA AND P.J.GUNAWARDENA, RESEARCH AND TRAINING OFFICERS OF THE INSTITUTE. MR.PERERA FUNCTIONED AS THE CO-ORDINATOR OF THE PROJECT. THIS REPORT WAS SUBJECTED TO A CRITICAL ANALYSIS AT A SEMINAR HELD IN AUGUST 1980. THE SUGGESTIONS MADE AT THE SEMINAR WERE NOT INCLUDED IN THIS REPORT, AS THE SEMINAR PROCEEDINGS ARE PUBLISHED AS A SEPARATE PAPER.

T B SUBASINGHE
DIRECTOR
AGRARIAN RESEARCH AND TRAINING INSTITUTE

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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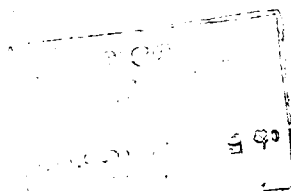
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CONTENTS

	PAGE
FOREWORD	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF TABLES	iv
CHAPTER ONE : THE SETTING	1
CHAPTER TWO : STUDIES OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN SRI LANKA (A SUMMARY)	14
CHAPTER THREE : EVOLUTION OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN SRI LANKA	28
CHAPTER FOUR : OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN IN THE STUDY VILLAGES	48
CHAPTER FIVE : ASPECTS OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOUR MARKET	57
CHAPTER SIX : EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS	75
CHAPTER SEVEN : LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS	87
CHAPTER EIGHT : EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP	116
CHAPTER NINE : CONCLUSIONS	121
APPENDIX : LOCATION OF THE STUDY VILLAGES	135
REFERENCES	136



LIST OF TABLES

Table No :	Title	Page
CHAPTER ONE		
1.1	Persons Employed in Agriculture	2
1.2	Total No: of Households and Population in the Study Villages	9
1.3	Sample Size of Labour Households and Hired Labourers	11
1.4	No: of Operators in the Study Villages and the Sample Sizes	12
CHAPTER FOUR		
4.1	Economically Active Population Engaged in Various Activities in the Study Villages	49
4.2	Persons Engaged in Agricultural Occupations Classified According to Tenurial Status	52
4.3	Persons Engaged in Non-agricultural Activities Classified According to Occupational Status	54
CHAPTER FIVE		
5.1	Average Daily Wage Rates of Hired Agricultural Labourers According to Type of Work and Sex Groups (Cash Wages with Meals, Maha 1978/79)	71
CHAPTER SIX		
6.1	Number of Agricultural Labourers in the Sample and Periods of Survey in Each Study village (Labour Records on Employment)	76
6.2	Agricultural Labourers Employed in Each Operation as a Percentage of Sample Labourers in Each Locality	78-79
6.3	Average Number of Hours and Days Worked by the Sample Agricultural Labourers During Maha 1978/79	80
6.4	Percentage of Work Time Spent on Different Types of Work by the Agricultural Labourers During Maha 1978/79	82-83

Table No :	Title	Page
CHAPTER SIX(CONTD.)		
6.5	Average Number of Days on which the Sample Agricultural Labourers were out of Work According to Reasons (Maha 1978/79)	86
CHAPTER SEVEN		
7.1	Extents of Agricultural Land Operated by Various Types of Households	88
7.2	Ownership of Various Agricultural Implements by Agricultural Operators	89
7.3	Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households Owning Consumer Durables	90
7.4	No: of Houses of Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households According to Total No: of Rooms	94
7.5	Number of Houses Belonging to Agricultural Labour Households and Non-Labour Households According to Materials used in Wall Construction	95
7.6	Number of Houses Owned by Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households According to Materials used for Roof Construction	96
7.7	Number of Houses of Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households According to their Status of Repairs	97
7.8	Number of Houses of Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households According to the Source of Obtaining Drinking Water	98
7.9	Number of Houses of Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households According to Conditions of Lavatories	99
7.10	Average Monthly Income of Agricultural Labour Households According to Sources of Income (Maha 1978/79)	104
7.11	Expenditure Pattern of Agricultural Labour Households (Monthly Average Expenditure Per Household)	107
7.12	Difference between Gross Monthly Average Income and Expenditure of Agricultural Labour Households (Average Per Household)	108

Table No :	Title	Page
CHAPTER SEVEN (CONTD.)		
7.13	Monthly Average Borrowings of Agricultural Labour Households According to Sources	110
7.14	Monthly Average Borrowings of Agricultural Labour Households According to Purpose of Use	111
7.15	Classification of Population Aged 10 and Above of Agricultural Labour Households and Non-labour Households, According to Level of Education	113

CHAPTER ONE

THE SETTING

1.1 Background:

About 40% of the households which can be categorised as belonging to the rural wage earning class are well below the so called 'poverty line'. "These workers try to eke out a meagre living in low productivity activities" and "have been in existence for long under conditions of unemployment, underemployment, exploitation and resultant poverty."¹

However, it appears that little is known about their socio-economic conditions, employment characteristics, wages, etc.

A study conducted by the Central Bank of Ceylon on Land and Labour Use in 1975 estimates that the landless agricultural labour group alone constitutes about 36% of all persons employed in agriculture. An additional 22% of agricultural workers are composed of labourers owning some land. The above study, however, was an all-island survey on land and labour use in broad terms and was not designed to study the specific problems of the landless labour groups in the peasant sector.

¹ Gunawardena (1979) p. 188.

The following table based on the data of this study presents an overview of the situation so far as the agricultural labourers are concerned.

TABLE 1.1 PERSONS EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE¹

	<u>Rural Sector</u>	<u>All Island</u>
1. Self employed agricultural operators.	733,120 (55%)	762,082 (42%)
2. Agricultural Labour (hiring out)	595,546 (45%)	1,044,016 (58%)
a) Owning land	270,620 (24%)	390,544 (22%)
b) Landless	324,926 (20%)	653,472 (36%)
Total	1,328,666 (100%)	1,806,131 (100%)

By any standard, this phenomenon - i.e., hired labour in agriculture deserves the attention of those interested in development planning or labour policies, in the agrarian sector in particular.

1.2 Objectives of the study:

The study does not deal with 'labour' in its abstract form. It is concerned with labourers (i.e. People who obtain at least part of their income from the sale of their labour). The main rationale for the project, as stated above, is the paucity of information on this category of workers in the peasant sector. This situation makes us unaware of the lot of the hired workers in the peasant sector and leads us to the issue why a certain segment of the workforce is deprived of enough work and income for their sustenance.

¹ Central Bank of Ceylon (1975).

The study seeks to ascertain the living conditions of the hired labour in the peasant sector, their employment characteristics, wages, income, consumption, savings and their broad economic and social needs. Thus, the objectives of the study can be specified as follows:

- (a) To ascertain the size of the hired labour population in the localities studied, and to examine the process which generates the need for hired labour.
- (b) To evaluate the socio-economic conditions of the hired agricultural labourers and the impact of various government programmes and legislation on this class.

1.3 *Definitions of terminology*

- (a) The terms Peasantry and the Peasant need definition. In the study, Peasantry or Peasant Sector means the traditional, domestic food crop cultivation sector. It is understood by the very term that it is a social and a cultural system which has not gone through the phases of modernization. It exists vis-a-vis the other modern sectors such as the urban and the estate sectors.
- (b) The key theme of the study is labourer. "Labourer" is a person who is working for wages, work that requires physical strength or patience rather than managerial skill or training. "He/She hires out his/her labour for somebody who buys it and pays for it". This aspect of "hiring" assumes greater importance in relation to the subject of the study.

When a labourer earns the major share of his income from selling his labour to a landlord, or a tenant or a leaseholder for the purpose of cultivating land, he becomes a hired labourer in agriculture. He sells his labour for the day or for a fixed job

and is paid a wage for that. He is not affected by good or bad crop turnouts. His income is fixed in the sense that he is paid for the labour he puts in. Some of the important characteristics of this group are:

- (i) They sell their labour for wages and do not hold any supervisory role over the operation and production aspect of the land;
- (ii) They are not affected by risks associated with the production (except being out of work);
- (iii) They are not locally bound. Their migratory role in search of employment in several seasons is clearly noticeable;
- (iv) They are not the job hunters always. At times the farmer-operators seek their services;
- (v) They belong usually to a lower social and economic group.

(c) Village Level Activities

Since our approach is to identify the group of hired labour through their activities, it is necessary to discuss briefly various categories of village level activities.

- (i) Family Labour : The family labourers are not paid wages either in kind or cash. They are excluded from the study.
- (ii) Work in the village: Workers in non-agricultural activities: Various types of workers who are involved in work related to agro-based industries and services e.g, coir making, transport etc., Workers who produce other goods and services for the use of villagers e.g, blacksmiths, barbers, tailors, potters and artisans of all types, village professionals, i.e., teachers, midwives, minor government officials, etc., are also excluded from our study.

(iii) Work outside the village ranges from seasonal work to permanent or circular migratory work. It varies in nature from agricultural or non-agricultural casual work to professional work of all sorts. A person who works outside his own village, in relation to paddy and other food crop cultivation, is considered as an agricultural labourer for the purpose of this study.

(iv) Housework includes many activities like cooking, collecting firewood, fetching water, mending the roof and child-rearing. Some work e.g, cooking food is mostly associated with farm work but is not included in our study although sometimes this type of activity does involve some hired labour.

(d) Sub-Groups of Hired Agricultural Labour

The main thrust of the study is on 'hired labour in peasant agriculture'. It is possible to differentiate between sub-groups of hired labour in agriculture.

(a) Persons who earn a major portion of their income from and spend a major part of their working time on hiring out their labour in agricultural activities. Mostly landless peasants constitute this sub-group.

(b) Persons who hire out their labour in agricultural activities to earn an additional income over and above what they earn from their main employment in non-agricultural activities.

(c) Tenants, ownerfarmers and leaseholders operating small holdings also work as hired agricultural labourers, especially during the peak periods in agriculture, to supplement their income.

1.4 Representativeness of the Labour Situation

A review of available literature and several reconnaissance surveys to various regions enabled the researchers to ascertain the following types of labour patterns and accordingly nine villages were selected which were considered to be representative of the labour situation types in Sri Lanka.

- (1) Regions which are the destination for labour migration from other regions, e.g, the dry zone settlements which attract labourers at certain times from other distant areas e.g, from the wet zone. To represent this type we selected one of the largest tract in Polonnaruwa called Kusum-pokuna. It is a dry zone settlement and has a high labour demand for seasonal hired labourers, especially during peak periods of paddy cultivation. Migratory labour from distant wet zone districts e.g, Kandy, Kurunegala and Kegalle provides a major proportion of the hired labour in these settlement schemes.
- (2) Localities with a high labour surplus, e.g, parts of the wet zone where the land is scarce and the pressure on land is high. Palliporuwa of the Kegalle district and Yakkavita of the Kurunegala district were selected to represent this pattern of labour. The labourers in these villages migrate seasonally to work in paddy cultivation during busy cultivation seasons in the dry zone.
- (3) The third pattern of labour is seen in localities where there is a demand for hired labour and which is fulfilled within the area itself. East Coast, North Central Province and the Jaffna Peninsula are examples, where labour migration is from the area itself and generally is in the nature of organised groups which circulate periodically depending on the demand for their labour.

- (a) From East Coast, two small interrelated villages - Malcolmpitty and Nainakaddu of Ampara district were selected. The hired agricultural labourers in these villages are mostly from a special community of Muslims who commute daily from nearby areas such as Kalmunai, Samanthurai and Akkaraipattu.
- (b) From the North Central Province, Kirimetiya - a purana village was selected to represent the hired labourers who work exclusively in 'chenas'.
- (c) Thirunelveli, a village from the Jaffna Peninsula was studied to understand the labour demand in the area as the pattern of labour utilization in Jaffna differs from that of other areas in the island.
- (4) Lastly, the regions where opportunities are likely to be available for non-agricultural employment as a result of proximity to urban centres. The selected two villages are Bolana and Godawaya in the Hambantota district. Godawaya is entirely a labour colony and many of the residents are employed in paddy fields, metal quarries, brick making, PWD and salterns in Hambantota. At times some of them are employed in agriculture as part-time labourers, while some others work as hired labourers in chenas. However, the majority of them work as full-time agricultural labourers in nearby paddy tracts e.g, Kariwila and Dehigahalanda.

As mentioned earlier, the selection of the study villages was done on the premise that they broadly represent the different labour situations in the peasant sector.

The nine villages can be studied in terms of three clusters. First, Kusumpokuna on the one hand and Yakkavita and Palliporuwa on the other allow us to crosscheck such data as wages, migratory

arrangements and facilities provided for the labourers and other patron-client relationships such as contracts, obligations and preferences of both operators and labourers. Thus, the above cluster provides us with information about the interzone migratory patterns of labour in rural Sri Lanka.

Secondly, Kirimetiyawa, Thirunelveli, Malcompitty and Nainakaddu permit a comparison of various aspects of labour situations in the dry zone where intra-zone migration of labour prevails. Jaffna is an exception and so are the last two villages described above. Such special situations allow us to understand divergent causes which promoted the rise of hired labour.

Finally Bolana and Godawaya are examples of the influences of proximity to urban centres and are studied to gauge the impact of the government's village expansion schemes etc., on the agrarian relations. Further, patron-client relations between the land owners and hired labourers are important in the understanding of the socio-economic conditions of the latter. These aspects are looked into mainly with the findings of this cluster of study villages.

1.5 Design of the Enquiry

The study went through four main phases. They are:

- (a) Preliminary Survey;
- (b) Total enumeration of households in the study villages;
- (c) Record keeping of selected sample of individual hired labourers and their households over a full cultivation season (Maha 1978/1979); and
- (d) Sample Survey of agricultural operators.

(a) Preliminary Survey

From September to December 1977, the study team reviewed the literature on the labour situation in Sri Lanka, selected the villages and finalised the research outline and the methodology.

In the light of general data gathered from officials and villagers in as many villages / possible, the final research proposal and its methodology were drawn up.

(b) Village Survey

Without preconceived notions of definitions or categories of labour, 850 households comprising 5276 persons in 9 villages were studied to identify the hired labour class in the broad context of socio-economic conditions in the villages concerned.

TABLE 1.2 TOTAL NO. OF HOUSEHOLDS AND POPULATION IN THE STUDY VILLAGES

<u>Village</u>	<u>No. of Households</u>	<u>Population</u>
1. Kusumpokuna	133	983
2. Palliporuwa	87	571
3. Yakkavita	65	337
4. Kirimetiya	25	152
5. Thirunelveli	112	617
6. Malcompitty	11	58
7. Nainakaddu	41	230
8. Godawaya	146	833
9. Maha Bolana	<u>230</u>	<u>1495</u>
Total	<u>850</u>	<u>5276</u>

Source: Village Survey

The following aspects of each study village were studied (a) Distri-

bution of population by age and sex and the level of education, (b) The activities and occupations of population; (c) Land tenure and landownership pattern - both paddy and highlands; (d) reasons for using hired labour in agriculture; and (e) living conditions of villagers.

Based upon the data collected in the village survey households were categorised according to primary employment (i.e. activity). For example, non-labour households where no one hires-out his/her labour (i.e. white collar employees), agricultural households who cultivate their own paddy lands with family labour and hired labour, and agricultural labour households where the chief of the household (and several others) sell their labour for wages which constitute a major portion of their income, and non-agricultural labour households where one or more members are mainly engaged in hiring-out labour in non-agricultural activities.

(c) The Record keeping Programme (Maha 1978/79 i.e., from September 1978 to March 1979)

This exercise had two parts. Part A was designed to collect data about the labourers of selected agricultural labour households relating to such matters as the nature of activity, place of activity, distance to workplace from home, how, and where work is found number of hours of work per day, wages, basis of payment (in cash / kind, with or without food) procedure of payments (e.g., advances paid if any, and whether wages were paid daily or monthly etc.,) and number of non-working days.

Part B of the record was concerned with data of hired labour households (as a separate economic unit) expenditure (e.g., on food, travelling, clothing, medicine, education, housing, etc.,), income (wages from paddy field work, chena etc.,), indebtedness and savings.

TABLE 1.3 SAMPLE SIZE OF LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND HIRED LABOURERS

Name of the Village	No. of Hired Labour Households	Sample No. of Labour Households	No. of Hired Labourers	No. of Hired Labourers in the Sample
Kusumpokuna	29	13	236	31
Palliporuwa	35	08	70	21
Yakkavita	24	05	24	08
Kirimetiyyawa	18	18	18	14
Thirunelveli	26	26	165	30
Nainakaddu	22	--	8	--
Malcompitty	04	--	57	--
Godawaya	79	16	146	31
Maha Bolana	80	18	179	43
	===	===	===	===
Total	317	104	903	178
	===	===	===	===

Source: Village Survey

The sample size in each study village varied from 20% - 100%. For example, in small villages such as Kirimetiyyawa, Thirunelveli and Nainakaddu, all the agricultural labour households were studied. In Maha Bolana, Godawaya, Kusumpokuna, Yakkavita and Palliporuwa, 20% of the labour households were included in the sample. This exercise was successful except in one region; the two study villages in the Eastern Coast - Malcompitty and Nainakaddu were completely destroyed by the 1978 cyclone. The maintenance of records had to be abandoned in these two villages, and only the data of the village survey survived.

In addition, information was collected on the factors contributing to the emergence of agricultural labour, effects of technological change in agriculture and government policies on labour, organisations of labour and social relations between labourers and various others, through a guided questionnaire and informal interviews.

(d) Sample Survey of the Operators

The final phase of the survey i.e. the collection of data from the operators began in April 1979. Size of operated land, land tenure, labour use, wages paid for hired labourers, production and marketing, expenditure on inputs, livestock etc., were the areas covered by this Survey. A sample of operators who lived in the study villages were interviewed at this phase. It was expected that some of the data gathered from the operators could be used to check the accuracy of the data furnished by the labourers themselves. Furthermore, the effects of high yielding varieties and related inputs and tractor use on employment of hired labourers were expected to be covered in this survey.

TABLE 1.4 NO. OF OPERATORS IN THE STUDY VILLAGES AND THE SAMPLE SIZES.

1 Name of the Village	2 No. of Operators	3 No. of Operators interviewed	4 3 as a % of 2
Kusumpokuna	44	44	100
Palliporuwa	58	58	100
Yakkavita	42	41	99
Kirimetiyawa	15	15	100
Thirunelveli	97	93	96
Nainakaddu	--	--	--
Godawaye	21	21	100
Maha Bolana	35	21	60
Total	<u>312</u>	<u>293</u>	<u>94</u>

Source: Record Keeping Survey

1.6 Limitations of the Study

- (i) This study is not concerned with the "Labour Situation" in the traditional peasant sector of Sri Lanka. It is limited to the labour situation in the following areas: (a) paddy production and its related areas such as transport, processing, etc., (b) Chena cultivation, vegetable cultivation on highlands and (c) other non-agricultural activities in which many hired agricultural labourers may engage in slack periods in paddy cultivation.

- (ii) Ideally the reference period of the study should have included the two paddy cultivation seasons of the year, Maha and Yala. Our study concentrated only on Maha although an attempt was made to collect information about previous seasons too. But such data are often subject to memory lapses.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDIES OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN SRI LANKA: A SUMMARY

2.1 Introduction

No separate comprehensive study has so far been done to understand the various facets of the socio-economic conditions of hired agricultural labourers in the peasant sector of Sri Lanka.¹ However, almost all the reports, books and papers on Sri Lanka's economy and society have mentioned the phenomenon of hired labour often without defining the term 'hired labour'. Most of this literature specifically deal with the labourers' relations to various aspects of paddy production e.g., various field operations and their demand for hired labour, impact of NHYV rice on the hired labour and wages, etc. This Chapter gives an overview of the main points brought out by these earlier studies in relation to hired labour, especially in the paddy sector.

2.2 Paddy Cultivation and Hired Labour

Paddy cultivation in Sri Lanka has been an economic enterprise characterised by small holdings. The Census of Agriculture (1962) revealed that the 11,35,188 acres of land under paddy cultivation were divided into as many as 5,67,653 separate holdings.²

¹ Crooks and Ranbanda (forthcoming), Wickramasekara (1977) and Gunawardena (1979) are a few exceptions.

² Department of Census and Statistics (1966) p.38

In 1950s, the insecurity of small holders and tenants in the paddy sector was recognised by the government and the Paddy Lands Act in 1958 was enacted to provide security of tenure. The Act made specific provisions to fix the wages of agricultural labourers through the Cultivation Committees and for the appointment of such labourers as tenant cultivators and collective farmers when the need arose.

Section 17 of the Agricultural Lands Law of 1973 discusses in detail the powers of the Cultivation Committees to appoint agricultural labourers as tenant cultivators. Further, section 18 specifies how to determine the wages of agricultural labourers. "Any persons who employ an agricultural labourer shall pay such labourer wages at the appropriate rate out of the rates of wages fixed for agricultural labourers by the Agricultural Productivity Committee in consultation with the cultivation Committee...."¹

But hardly any action was taken to regularise the wages of the labourers by the Cultivation Committees instrumental in carrying out the objectives of the Act. Soon after the enactment of the Act, several thousands of tenants were evicted and many of them became labourers. Between 1958-67, 23,000 and between 1968-77, a further 12,400 evictions were reported.²

Hired labour is a major component in paddy cultivation. A cost of Production study for Maha 1972/73 shows the following ratios of hired labour to total labour inputs.³

Polonnaruwa	78%
Hambantota	86%
Kandy	59%
Colombo	56%

¹ Agricultural Lands Law, No. 42 of 1973.

² De Silva, K.M. (ed) (1977) p. 249

³ Izumi and Ranatunga (1974) quoted in ARTI (1975d) p.18

Even in a rather remote district such as Anuradhapura, the pattern of labour use in paddy cultivation shows a high degree of dependence on hired labour, specially during peak activity periods.¹

The vital place occupied by the hired labour in paddy cultivation has been demonstrated in several studies by analysing the proportional cash outlay per acre for hired labour in the total costs of paddy production. It was 44% in Kandy, 41% in Hambantota, 61% in Polonnaruwa, 42% in Anuradhapura and 47% in Colombo². Owner operators used more hired labour than tenants.³ Proportion of cash outlay for hired labour varied according to the tenurial status of the farmer. For example, in Kandy district it was as high as 61% for owners, 47% for owner-tenants, 29% for tenant-owners and 26% for tenants.⁴

Of the inputs, hired labour is the most costly. The quantity of hired labour used depends on the size of the holding and the proportion of family labour employed, and the expenditure would under normal circumstances fall within the farmers' anticipated costs, which are usually met either from savings or by borrowing. However, in any delays in farming operations or shortfalls in family labour, the farmer has to employ extra labour leading to an unexpected increase in labour costs. This is true for both paddy and chena cultivation in Hambantota.

The importance of hired labour in paddy cultivation is also attributed to the gradual decline of traditional attan labour (exchange labour.)⁵

¹ ARTI (1975b) p. 93

² See ARTI (1974b), ARTI (1974a), (1975a), (1975b), & (1975c)

³ ARTI (1974b) 27% and 12.5% respectively, p. 109

⁴ ARTI (1974b) p. 124

⁵ Gunasinghe (1975a) has presented a theoretical discussion on this subject.

Attan (labour exchange) can be practised only when the participants can reciprocate the services they received from each other. In an asymmetrical distribution and ownership pattern of paddy land (which is now widely found) the attan system cannot be easily practised. The decline in the use of attan is due to several related factors. Most of the time-specific activities in paddy farming render it impossible for one to wait for others for mutual help. Further, many farmers, specially rich, do not like to depend on others on a mutual basis. The "work-leisure preferences" and the social status of the farmers, specially the youth of farm families who have developed negative attitudes to manual work by way of family labour, have aggravated the problem further.¹

The high reliance on hired labour is sometimes attributed to the differences in cultural practices involving labour use; and to the fact that certain field operations e.g., land preparation requires the services of male labour.²

Land preparation and harvesting are two tasks calling for peak labour demands in paddy farming, specially under irrigated water supply.³ Polonnaruwa, Hambantota and Minipe are some of the examples.

¹ Amarasinghe (1974) p. 87

² ARTI (1975d) p. 18

³ ARTI (1974a) pp 116-117

2.3 Cultivators as Hired Labourers

Cultivators work as hired labourers to supplement their meagre income from their own small holdings particularly in slack periods in farming.

"Overwhelmingly the picture is of many people cultivating small extents of land and gaining extra income outside and of others totally dependant on labour earnings, while there may be some 400,000 people in the former category (not all of whom would be recorded as engaged in agriculture) there may be half that number in the latter category."¹

Since tenants are economically weaker than the owner cultivators, they are found to be augmenting their earnings from outside work especially because they earn little or no income from highland.²

Within the rural economy, casual labourers are the worst off. 1963 Consumer Finance Survey showed that the main occupational income of a rural unskilled labourer to be Rs.123/- for two months, compared to Rs.233/- for a cultivator.³

In Hambantota, paddy is not the only sector which provides employment either as a major or subsidiary source of income for those who seek jobs in agriculture. Chena cultivation has become profitable in the recent years, inducing many paddy cultivators to rely on some form of hired labour for operations such as clearing and weeding so that they can direct their attention to chenas.

¹ Richards (1971) p.93

² ARTI (1974a) p. 119

³ Richards (1971) p.93

An author casts doubt on the threatened competition between paddy and chena cultivation in the sphere of labour attraction. But, he himself concludes that when paddy cultivation coincides with that of chena, the farmer gives first preference to paddy.¹

At Kurundankulama in the dry zone, out of 48 farmers, 20 worked as hired labourers when no work was available in their own farms. Another 4 worked as masons and carpenters; 2 in animal husbandry and 18 did not engage in any work during that time. A further 65% of owner cultivators never hired out their labour.² As Amerasinghe points out, paddy cultivation requires constant attention and although, there is apparent unemployment and underemployment during the slack periods in the cultivation season, it is difficult to utilize this labour for other purposes, particularly for non-farm activities away from the farms. Therefore, he suggests the only productive way on which this labour may be better utilized is to fit in other crops into the cultivation cycle to take up the slack period.³ This is obviously what the paddy farmers do in the Hambantota area. As Silva suggests, they move into chenas of their own or as hired labourers, to take the advantage of high demand for labour in chenas during the slack period of paddy cultivation.

In Hambantota, agricultural labour as a source of off-farm employment is relatively unimportant. But agricultural and non-agricultural labour taken together account for 51% of off-farm work.⁴ In Kandy

¹ Silva, W.P.T. (1977a) pp 86-87

² Goonaratne, et al. (1972) p. 28.

³ Amerasinghe (1972) p. 74

⁴ ARFI (1974a) p. 119

the off-farm employment of the cultivator is somewhat complex. "In a district like Kandy where the agricultural landscape is largely dominated by plantations and where the villages suffers from the burden of a heavy agricultural population on limited resources, one expects the plantation sector to be an important source of off-farm employment for the rural population. But the data of the study showed a different picture. Only 3% of those engaged in off-farm work find employment as agricultural labourers in both the estate and non-estate sectors."¹

Many tenants and small holders are poor and their lower educational levels have denied them the opportunities available in the areas of skilled and white collar jobs. Industries which normally pay a higher remuneration to labourers are rare in the rural scene and the only sources of off-farm employment are confined to seasonal and unskilled labour.

2.4 Demand For Hired Labour

For want of an assured water supply and the difficulties encountered in finding labour for transplanting which is inherently labour intensive, the traditional broadcasting of paddy has continued to persist. Until recently farmers depended mainly on their family members and attan (exchange labour) for field work.²

The greater importance the hired labour component has now assumed in paddy production has been the subject of several studies.³ Some of the factors that gave rise to this situation are listed below:

- (a) The reduction in the cattle population due to indiscriminate slaughter for meat purposes.⁴

¹ ARTI p. 113

² De Silva, K.M. (ed.) (1977) P. 334

³ See ARTI (1974 a & b), ARTI (1975 a & b) and Amerasinghe (1974)

⁴ De Silva, K.M. (ed.) (1977) . 244 20

- (b) Rising costs of tractor hire due to price increases in fuel and spare parts. The balance between the machine and hired labour will soon be tilting in favour of hired labour. In fact, according to this argument, mechanisation of paddy cultivation became popular because of the rising costs of hired labour. This has a circular effect.¹
- (c) The disappearing attan labour system has called for more paid (hired) labour in many areas.²
- (d) The adoption of HYV has necessitated farmers to hire labour for various operations irrespective of their farm size. In Hambantota, over 80% of the farmers had depended on hired labour, either exclusively or in combination with family labour for important field operations other than weeding.³ In Polonnaruwa also, there was a heavy dependance on hired labour for major operations.⁴
- (c) The use of hired labour is more intensive in major irrigation schemes mainly due to the fact that assured water supply in major schemes encourages the systematic farming for profit.⁵ This is also due to lower resident population density/acre of paddy.

¹ De Silva, K.M., (ed) (1977) P.245

² ARTI (1975a) p.82 See also (1974a) and (1975b)

³ ARTI (1974a) p.117

⁴ ARTI (1975a) pp 91-94

⁵ ARTI (1975a) p. 113

Sometimes the income levels of the households influence the demand for labour. As Wickremasekera pointed out, the relationship between increasing levels of income and rate of reliance on hired labour was clear-cut in relation to both gross farm and total household income. The presence of part-time farmers such as teachers, mudalalis also increases the existing hired labour. Many of those part-time farmers work only in a supervisory capacity.¹

Available family labour is not enough in most of the operations irrespective of the type of seeds and the technology used in the production of paddy. It has to be supplemented with hired labour or exchange labour or both. This is especially true to cope with the demand for labour under the new varieties. Amerasinghe pointed out that in Minipe, 43% of the total labour component came from hired/exchange labour.²

A priori, each of those NHYV practices such as proper land preparation, transplanting and weeding, generates a demand for extra labour, further high yields mean more work at harvest time. For transplanting and to some extent for harvesting, there is a general tendency to hire female and young casual labourers. This is especially true of Kandy, Hambantota, Polonnaruwa and Minipe areas.

Some researchers contend that the increased demand for hired labour is not solely due to the introduction of NHYVs.³ The proportion of people finding jobs in paddy cultivation is relatively low and much of the demand for hired labour appears to have come not, as an outcome of the practising of new technology or NHYV but from operations that have traditionally been consumers of labour. But some other studies suggest that in recent times the demand for hired labour has increased, as a result of the application of new technology and the NHYVs.⁴ According to Amerasinghe, the labour requirement in Post NHYV era has increased by 31% above that in the pre

1 Wickramasekera (1977) p.83

2 Amerasinghe (1972) p.73

3 Silva, W.P.T (1977b)

4 ARTI (1974a & b) and (1975a, b & c).

NHYV era, in Minipe.¹

A direct relationship is seen between the farm income and the number of labour days hired. In nine Colonisation Schemes it was revealed that highest per^a acre gross farm income is associated with the largest number of labour days hired (and the lowest family labour input). On the other hand, lowest income is associated with lowest number of hired labour and higher family labour used in the cultivation.²

2.5 Sources of Hired Labour

One can broadly recognise two sources of hired labour:

(a) within the village itself or (b) from outside the village. The latter category includes (i) Labourers from within the district, (ii) Outside the district, but within the agro- climatic zone and (iii) Outside the zone. A village study shows that 26 farmers out of 57, hired their neighbours in the village for their field operations and another 10 farmers found hired labourers from closeby purana villages. 21 farmers recruited their hired labourers from far away places, but within the dry zone. Only 12 households (20%) experienced a difficulty in hiring labourers because of the high wages involved.³ Another purana village study in Anuradhapura shows that there were 30 agricultural labourers available for peak priods within the village itself.⁴ The norm still existing in the purana villages is not to hire labour from outside when village labour is available. In Batticaloa and Ampara districts, farmers

1 Amerasinghe (1972) p.73

2 Amerasinghe (1972)

3 Gooneratne, et.al (1977)

4 Lebbe, et.al (1978)

recruit labour from the area itself. In Hambantota, hired labour is recruited from the nearby villages or from Matara and Galle districts.

As several authors pointed out, the hired labourers in recent times have achieved a degree of geographical mobility.¹ Seasonal migration of labour from/wet zone to the dry zone, is often quoted as an example. This aspect sometimes could be considered as a liberation of rural workers. "Though the middle and poor peasants tend to limit their economic activities to the village, the rural workers increasingly tend to liberate themselves from this narrow context."²

For Polonnaruwa, the prominent source of hired labour is the wet zone villages in Kandy, Kegalle and Kurunegala districts. Thus, the inter zone migration has become very important in paddy cultivation in the dry zone. Migration occurs on the basis of the socio-cultural links between the settlers in the dry zone settlements and the villagers in the traditional wet zone. Normally, there are two cycles of migration from the wet zone to the dry zone in a given season. The first cycle lasts 4-5 weeks, while the second about 2-3 weeks. In the first, the migrant labourers go to the dry zone to work in the preparation of land and the transplanting of paddy, and in the second to involve in work relating to harvesting.

2.6 Wages of the Hired Agricultural Labourers

There is no uniform wage rate for hired agricultural labour in Sri Lanka. Agricultural wages display considerable variation even within a cultivation committee area suggesting the influences of some rigidities in the rural labour market. Gunawardena points

¹ Silva, A.T.M. (1975) See also, Gunasinghe (1975b)

² Gunasinghe (1975b) p. 138

out several factors which contribute to this situation. They are: (a) basic differences between individual workers in terms of sex, age, etc., (b) the traditional regard for some labourers of specific areas who are supposed to be efficient and skilled in specialised operations, (c) different degrees of relationships between the employers and the hired labourers.¹

In 1976/77 Maha season, the following rates of daily wages were paid in different districts.²

DAILY MODAL WAGE RATES OF HIRED LABOUR IN PADDY

<u>Area</u>	<u>WAGES</u>		
	<u>Men</u> Rs.	<u>Women</u> Rs.	<u>Children</u> Rs.
Polonnaruwa	10.00	8.00	7.50
Hambantota	10.00	8.00	7.00
Kegalle-Kandy	9.00	7.00	4.00
Colombo	6.50	5.00	4.00

In addition to the above wage rates, a midday meal was given by the employer. It is customary in all areas.

In several dry zone districts, eg., Polonnaruwa and Hambantota, "the migrant labour is on-farm-resident and in such cases Rs.3.00 - Rs.4.00 are set off against daily wages in respect of meals provided."³

2.7 Theoretical Analysis of Hired Labour Situation

The aspects of hired labour situation in Sri Lanka's paddy sector within a theoretical frame have not received adequate attention

¹ Gunawardena (1979) Pp 195-197

² Ranatunge & Abeysekera (1977) p. 33

³ Ranatunga & Abeysekera (1977) pp 33-34

by the researchers. Three notable exceptions however, are Gunasinghe (1975), Wickremasekara (1977) and Gunawardena (1979).

Gunasinghe's approach is much more theoretical and shows a marxist-stance. He places hired labour in a evolutionary perspective and recognises it as a form of surplus extraction in the rural economy which has both feudal and bourgeois characteristics. Five different forms of surplus extraction have been recognised by Gunasinghe in Kandyan areas, i.e., labour rent, produce rent, money rent, small peasant proprietorship and wage labour. The wage labour is not a residual category, but a crucial aspect of social transformation. "Once wage labour (hired labour) is introduced, it has a tendency to disrupt all the previous patriarchal forms of social interactions in the country side". He shows a class hierachy in the area and wage labourers occupy the lowest stratum in the hierachchy. He recognises the basic trend in Kandyan rural society as "the uninterupted and inevitable expansion of the number or proportion of rural workers." ¹ This argument has the support of several others. ²

Wickramasekara holds the view that "the role of hired labour in the village economy cannot be discussed in isolation of the pattern of labour use in the area." He categorises the major types of labour into three, exchange (attan) labour, hired labour and family labour. He argues that hired labour can not be regarded as a residual category, that is "a labour force drawn upon only after family and exchange labour have been utilised." ³

The supply aspects of hired labour has been briefly discussed by Wickremasekera. The main factors that determine the supply of labour for hire are:

- (a) degree of landlessness, (b) socio-economic status

¹ Gunasinghe (1975b) p. 138

² See ARTI (1974b)

³ Wickramasekara (1977)

of family, (c) subsistence constraint (compelling need to hire out labour to meet day to day family requirements, (d) low incomes from agricultural enterprises and (e) the raising of working capital for agriculture. Thus, annually an increasing number of rural people come out as hired labourers seeking employment in various activities, especially in the paddy sector.

Gunawardena has attempted to show the inadequacy of policies and programmes to combat the exploitation and poverty of the hired agricultural labourers while presenting a broad picture of socio-economic conditions that govern the lives of the rural wage earners. He suggests that the organisation of the rural workers into politically motivated "trade unions" would not be a feasible solution. Instead, he argues that the landless labourers and marginal farmers could be organised under separate co-operatives. He recommends three supplementary measures which would help the class concerned: (a) Overall development of rural areas, (b) integration of economic, social and political activities in estate, village and urban sectors, and (c) the development of the dry zone irrigation settlements for the benefit of landless families.¹

¹ Gunawardena (1979) pp 215-216

CHAPTER THREE

EVOLUTION OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN SRI LANKA

"The average villager does not choose the occupation of the labourer. His preference is to be either a farmer, artisan or a trader. Only as a last resort he takes up the occupation of a labourer" (Sessional

Paper, 1954, p.29)

"Due to the seasonal nature of paddy cultivation, employment of a certain amount of hired labour to complete field operations within a limited time period becomes necessary. This is a common feature in paddy cultivation." (ARTI : Agrarian Situation Study - Kandy District, Part 2 - 107 p.)

3.1 Theoretical Issues

"Peasant mode of production" is considered as an egalitarian system where exploitation or unequal division of labour does not occur as in feudal or capitalist modes of production. In that sense, "peasant mode of production is neither feudal nor capitalist, but a special mode with its own characteristics". The concept of the peasant mode of production presupposes private property, a fairly developed social division of labour, and production for consumption and for sale by individual producers with their families who own the means of production, i.e., land resources. The labourers who hire their labour to others, are looked after by their masters. Both groups are functionally integrated to form a natural economy and community. The subsistence ethics which prevail in the community insulate the less advantaged groups against hardships and misery.¹

1 Scott (1977)

As an economic unit of agricultural production, peasantry has been deeply elaborated by classical writers such as Chayanov. According to Chayanov, the primary economic activities of this mode of production occur in the family-labour farm. It has several characteristics: (i) that production is carried out mainly by the labour of the 'family', cooperation with other 'families' or with wage, servant or slave labour is secondary to this; (ii) the land held by the unit in general can be worked by family labour under the prevailing conditions of production; (iii) that the family farm is a unit of production and consumption, exchange at best mediates between these two functions of the family unit."¹

Thus, the category of family is central to this enterprise. The whole gamut of other social, political and structural variables are dominated by the institution of the family. This presupposes kinship relations as its condition of existence. Both Lenin and Kautsky wrote extensively on the subject of the transformation of the so-called peasantry into a capitalist agricultural system under the wider socio-political and economic forces. But, neither of them saw any point or relevance in elaborating a category called "peasant economy" and "the concepts deployed in the course of their analysis at no point posed the peasantry as an object of study".² "They (peasantries) represented rather a heterogeneous collection of groups and classes which could only be conceived as existing in quite specific relations and the crucial point was that these relations are increasingly capitalist relations".³ Thus, both of them rejected the 'peasantry' as a separate and unique mode of production.

¹ Ennew, et.al (1977) pp 309-313

² Ennew, et.al (1977) p. 296

³ Ennew, et.al (1977) p. 297

All the characteristics of so called peasant economies could be analysed within the frame either of pre-capitalist mode of production or capitalist mode of production. Wherever we can identify some form of division of labour in a society, we could see the elements of capitalism in the society although the whole system is not capitalist. Lenin and Kautsky both recognised two dynamics which set a simple agricultural production (i.e., peasant economy) to evolve into a capitalist system. They are the division of labour and the market.

"The basis of commodity economy (i.e., capitalist economy) is the social division of labour. Manufacturing industry separates from the raw materials industry, and each of these subdivides into small varieties and sub-varieties which produce specific products as commodities, and exchange them for the products of all the others. Thus, the development of commodity economy leads to an increase in the number of separate and independent branches of industry: the tendency of this development is to transform into a special branch of industry, the making not only of each separate product, but even of each separate part of the production/^{and} not only the making of a product, but even the separate operations of preparing the product for consumption. Under the natural economy, society consisted of a mass of homogeneous economic units (patriarchal peasant families, primitive village communities, feudal manors), and each such unit engaged in all forms of economic activity, from the acquisition of various kinds of raw material to their final preparation for consumption. Under commodity production heterogeneous economic units came into being, the number of separate branches of economy increases, and the number of economic units performing one and the same function diminishes. It is this progressive growth in the social division of labour, that is the chief factor in creating a home market for capitalism".¹

¹ Lenin (1960) III, pp. 37-38

Durkheim discussed this idea by using the core concepts of mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity. Under mechanical solidarity, people of a community lived a natural life doing most of the work required for the existence by themselves. In other words, there was no marked division of labour. With the evolution of the society, the division of labour became prominent as a causative factor of social change and existence and the specialisation and differentiation of tasks on the economy became vital. Thus, for the survival, the members of a community have to depend on each other. Thus, there developed a functional unity or an organic solidarity. Lenin very clearly demonstrated the transformation of the homogeneity of the natural economy to the heterogeneity of commodity economy. The function of the division of labour is to differentiate the tasks that would have been done by the same person or family in the peasant economy.

The division of labour creates the market because the products of the division of labour are commodities or use-values, which have exchange values that is to be realised, to be converted into money.¹ Kautsky elaborated the relations of the peasant economy to a commodity and the creation of free wage labour. He emphasised the confrontation between small and large enterprises in a commodity market. He clearly shows the growth of the market and the subordination of agriculture to competition, which forced the changes and specialisations.² "In the feudal epoch the only agriculture was small-scale agriculture, for the landlord cultivated his fields with the peasant's implements. Capitalism first created the possibility for large-scale production in agriculture, which is technically more rational than small-scale production."³

¹ Lenin (1960) IV pp 113-114

² Lenin (1960) IV p. 114

³ Lenin (1960) IV p . 115

"Without money, modern agricultural production is impossible or what is the same thing, it is impossible without capital. Kautsky shows further that whether it is tenant farmer system or lease system, in essence means one and the same process; viz: the separation of the land from the farmer.¹

The differentiation of tasks transforms agriculture itself into an industry, into a commodity producing branch of the economy. Thus, we can identify instead of simple commodity producers who produce mainly for consumers, the owners or managers of means of production, e.g., land, water and implements, etc. On the other hand, there are various categories of non-owners of means of production; tenants, wage labourers-the sellers of labour power. The conversion of the small producer into a wage-worker presumes that he has lost the means of production-lands, tools, workshops, etc., that is, he is "impoverished or ruined". Capitalism is a system of social relation of production where commodity production is based on wage labour. "The capitalist system of production subordinates other forms of possession and other labour processes by integrating them into its process of exchange and, through circulation, imposes on them the logic of its process of production."²

What is really interesting for our purpose is what Lenin identified as the characteristics of the capitalist formation in the pre-revolutionary peasant society of Russia. They are closely applicable to Sri Lankan recent history and to the present situation. What we can see from the trends of the increasing proletarianisation of the small holders and the marginal farmers is the process of "depeasantising" rather than a consolidation of the old traditional system of economy and society. By "depeasantising" Lenin meant the differentiation

¹ Lenin (1960) IV, p.116

² Ennew, et.al (1977) p.306

of the old peasantry where simple commodity production predominated. Upon the old feudal, primordial relations there developed new types of groups. They are the rural bourgeois and the rural proletariat - a class of commodity producers in agriculture and a class of agricultural wage-workers.

The differentiation of tasks does not necessarily start only in the capitalist mode of production. Long before an economy reaches the thresholds of the capitalist mode of production, it shows various elements of capitalism. The class differentiation existed in every epoch of history, and the classes were determined by the production and exchange relations which constitute a region in the wider continent of the mode of production.

Definite groups (e.g., wage labour and tenants) of individuals who are productively active in a certain way enter into definite social and political relations. This is what we try to understand in this chapter; the process by which a rather homogeneous community has been differentiated and how a class of wage labourers developed in paddy sector vis-a-vis the other rural classes.

There are records of wage labour in Sri Lanka in ancient times. But what is well documented is the feudal forms of surplus extraction. "Wage labour in agriculture is not a new phenomenon. Apart from the peasant cultivators, there were the labourers who worked for wages. There were slaves who, like their Indian counterparts, toiled for their masters and were owned by individuals and monasteries.¹ We can identify several types of surplus extractions in the sphere of paddy production.

They are labour rent, produce rent, money rent, small peasant proprietorship and wage labour. Since our study concentrate on full-time as well as part-time casual labourers, all the five catego-

¹ Thambiah, (1968) p. 174

ries of labour surplus extractions are to be discussed briefly.¹

Labour Rent

Surplus labour is extracted as labour without being converted into any other form e.g., into money. Labour rent is based on the separation of the plot belonging to the landlord from the plot possessed by the cultivator. This system is still prevalent in the Kandyan villages where the Buddhist temples play the role of large landowners. A classic example is the Tooth Relic Temple in Kandy and its land tenure system. The Temple needs many types of supporting services. "Today there are two categories of people playing this supportive role. First are the inhabitants of ten villages which are the property of the Temple. Secondly, there are people hired on a short term wage basis,.... This latter category is a modern development following the decay of the old land tenure system."² This shows that labour rent existed before the emergence of wage labour and as Gunasinghe said labour rent is a primitive feudal form of surplus extraction.

Produce Rent

This form of surplus extraction is somewhat more advanced than the labour rent. During the British period, "ordinary holdings were small and were cultivated by their owners, but there were owners of 1,000 acres (mostly highlands) in the maritime provinces, and of 200 or 300 among chiefs in the Kandyan provinces - The bigger proprietors employed cultivators or goiyas - a kind of tenant - at-will paying a share of the produce to the landowners."³ These practices have been regularised by various laws and enactments, such as the Paddy Lands Act of 1958 and Agricultural Lands Law of 1973. Various types of ande tenancies fit this category of rent. The general rule is to pay only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the net harvest to the landlord.

¹ Gunasinghe (1975b) pp 119-122

² Seneviratna (1979) p.35

³ De Silva, C.R (1953) p. 359

But in many places tenants have paid rent as high as 75% of the harvest.

Money Rent

Money rent implies the existence of commodity exchange as well as monetary circulation. This system is less prevalent in Sri Lanka among the tenants. But the lease hold system and Badu system come closer to this type of rent. That is leasing of land to actual producers for a stipulated period of time for a given amount of money. In recent times, many tenants of temple lands have refused to involve in traditional rituals taking various roles stipulated by the temples such as drummers, dancers and washermen. Instead, they pay a rent to the temples. This practice has put the traditional feudal landlords into trouble. In fact, the main cultural pageant of Sri Lanka - Esala Perahera is now threatened by the lack of servants, whose services are essential for the holding of the processions. Those traditional servicemen now prefer to pay their rent with money and to get themselves redeemed from the Rajakariya (compulsory services).

Small Peasant Proprietorship

This is the prevalent State Land Policy of Sri Lanka with regard to agriculture and tenancy. "The cultivation of small plots by peasant owners came into existence in the bases of commodity production and the predominance of bourgeois exchange relations".¹ As early as 1805, Governor North attempted to promote small peasant proprietorship. "As the decay of irrigation works has limited the area of cultivation, so inefficient methods had lowered the productivity of the fields. The average harvest yield was only six to ten fold the best field giving more than twenty and the worst

¹ Gunasinghe (1975b) p.121

as little as three. As one means of improvement, North tried to introduced the system of transplantation as practised in India."¹ Even if the cultivator was willing, he lacked the capital to follow the example. The collector of Colombo found hardly any capital being expended in agriculture and a money rent for arable lands almost unknown for to hire labour and make land pay is impossible. "Proprietorship of land parcels by its very nature, exclude the development of social productive forces of labour, social forms of labour, social concentration of capital large scale cattle raising and the progressive application of science".²

Since 1940, there have been several attempts to colonise some parts of the dry zone and we can notice a gradual change of the size of alienated units in the colonisation schemes.

<u>TYPE OF LAND ALIENATED:</u>	<u>PERIOD</u>					
	<u>1941</u>	<u>1952</u>	<u>1953</u>	<u>1956</u>	<u>1963</u>	<u>1979</u> ³
Paddy Land (irrigable, acres)	5	5	3	3	2	2½
High Land (non-irrigable, ")	3	3	2	2	2	½

This type of land tenure systems are expected to preserve the peasantry at present and in future.

Wage Labour

Here the actual producer is completely alienated from the means of production. Wage labour does not have any specific role or risk in the production. All types of operators (i.e. owners, tenants,

¹ De Silva, C.R. (1953) p 359

² Marx (1962), III, p.787

³ Under the Mahaweli Development Project

and leaseholders) use them for their operations with specific payments, mostly with money. Many affluent rural households depend mainly on wage labour to cultivate their lands.

As Gunasinghe pointed out, semi-feudal relations do not exhaust the totality of production relations even in the limited sphere of paddy cultivation.¹ The small owner cultivators and tenants are not in such a disadvantaged position as wage labour. They often employ labourers for various operations in the paddy fields. This is especially true where the cultivation is done according to a time-table and where high yielding varieties of rice and new technologies are used and in those instances where pre-capitalist systems of labour mobilisation such as attan (exchange labour) have disintegrated. The owner cultivator himself may become a partial wage labourer in order to supplement his income.

3.2 *The emergence of Wage Labour in Agriculture*

The emergence of a wage labour class in the peasant sector is often attributed to changes in the economic structure of the local communities under the British rule in 19th and 20th centuries. The Soulbury Report (1945) observed how the indigenous populations in rural Sri Lanka had become poor and displaced under the spread of the plantation economy in the wet zone. "We cannot doubt from the evidence before us that especially in the latter half of the 19th century, the establishment of the plantation reacted unfavourably on the Kandyan landowners. By various means which, to say the least, were prejudicial to the latter, land was acquired to form large estates, first for the planting of coffee, and later tea and rubber...The plantations established in their territory....deprived the Kandyan peasantry labour of some of their land and resources, brought no compensatory benefit in the way of employment as for various reasons imported Indian and not local Kandyan labour was used by the planting industry".²

¹ Gunasinghe(1975b) pp 124-125

² Soulbury Report (1945), Para 182, quoted in Kandyan peasantry Commission (1951)

The penetration of the plantation economy into the old peasant villages disturbed and disrupted the village society and economy. The old peasant villages had the following characteristics: The rural population resided in villages in which the family lived as a unit. The main occupation of the older members of the household was agriculture and the social status ^{was} and/determined by ownership of land. There were other occupations all geared towards supplying the needs of a peasant economy. The basic principle that underlined this economy was self-sufficiency in food and employment. "The nucleus was the paddy field which supplied the main article of diet. Gardens and chenas produced additional supplies of food, and the village forests, the building material for the village home. Sufficient employment was found in agricultural operations and subsidiary pursuits and it could be said that for agricultural people with a primitive peasant economy, there was a sufficiency of food and employment."¹ All these characteristics were destroyed by the impact of a plantation economy based on exploitation of cultivable land for commercial purposes in the hill country. Most of the forests, chenas and uncultivated land passed into the ownership of the Crown. Several ordinances and laws were enacted in the latter half of the 19th century, to accelerate this process. They were the Crown Lands (Encroachments) Ordinance, No.12 of 1840, Waste Lands Ordinance, No.1 of 1897 and the Registration of Temple Lands Ordinance, No.10 of 1856. "According to the 1840 Ordinance, all forests, waste, unoccupied or uncultivated lands was to be presumed to be the property of the Crown until the contrary is proved."² 1897 Ordinance declared that "whenever it so appeared to the Government Agent of the Province or the Assistant Government Agent of the district that any land or lands situated within his province or district is or are forest, chena waste or unoccupied" he was empowered by the issue of notice to compel any claimant to appear before him and prove his title, in

1 Kandyen Peasantry Commission (1951) p.10

2 Kandyen Peasantry Commission (1951) p.71

default of which the land would be declared the property of the Crown.¹ The 1856 Ordinance stated that all lands claimed by temples had to be surveyed at the expense partly of the temple and partly of the government. Some of the temples owning large extents of land, in order to escape the heavy survey charges, were compelled to omit claims to large portions of their temporalities. Thus, large amount of land came under the Crown. Further, many villagers sold their holdings because of the uncertainty created by the new laws.

With the removal of the restriction imposed on the Europeans acquiring land outside Colombo in 1812, plantations of coffee, cotton, sugar and later tea were started by Europeans. Labour for the plantations had to be found from neighbouring villages. "Nothing was more exasperating, or more puzzling to the British planters in Ceylon at this time that the fact that with the great majority of their plantations established in the heart of the Kandyan Kingdom, they were still as dependent on immigrant labour as their contemporaries in the West Indies or Mauritius".² Two contemporary writers wrote that no temptation of wages and no prospect of advantage has hitherto availed to overcome the repugnances of the Sinhalese and the Kandyans to engage in any work on the estate, except in the first process of felling the forests."³ Boyd observed that the Kandyans had no incentive to work on the plantations. "They have as a general rule, their own paddy fields, their own cows, bullocks, their own fruit-gardens; and the tending and managing of these occupying all their attention. Their wants are few and easily supplied."⁴ Therefore, it soon became necessary to import cheap labour from South India on a mass scale.

¹ Kandyan Peasantry Commission (1951) p.72

² De Silva, K.M. (1961) p.106

³ Tennent : Ceylon II, pp.235ff, quoted in De Silva, K.M. (1961) p.106

⁴ Boyd, W. " Autobiography of a Peria Durai", Ceylon Literary Register, First Series, Vol.2 pp 249 ff. quoted in De Silva, K.M. (1961) p.107

The disintegration of the old peasantry is described in the Report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission as follows. "The village itself could not withstand these new forces and was broken up. The importation of Indian labour took away the opportunity for subsidiary forms of employment, the high lands and paddy fields became insufficient with the growth of population. Private capitalist began to buy up all available land/^{and}the villagers were unable to protect even their rights to the property which they owned. The prospect of the Crown claiming jungle and chena prompted numerous sales of land to speculators."¹

During the coffee mania of the 1840's over 250,000 acres of land were alienated most of which was bought by the British. Only a few Ceylonese entrepreneurs bought land during this period. But Crown land alienation continued throughout the century and in later periods the Ceylonese too bought these lands. According to calculations, between 1860 and 1889 about 620,000 acres of Crown Lands were sold under the Waste Lands Sales Scheme. Of these, the greatest number of plots sold were small grants to Ceylonese, but the largest grants went to the Europeans. The following table based on a one percent sample shows the pattern of distribution of these purchases among Ceylonese and Europeans in relation to size of plots:

SIZE OF CROWN GRANTS TO CEYLONESE AND EUROPEANS

<u>Acreage</u>	<u>Ceylonese</u>	<u>Europeans</u>	<u>Total</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
0.0- 0.9	37.3	18.2	36.0
1.0- 4.9	39.4	18.2	38.0
5.0- 9.9	10.6	4.5	10.2
10.0-49.9	10.1	34.1	11.8
50 and over	2.5	25.0	4.0

Source : Land Commission (1957)

¹ Kandyan Peasantry Commission (1951)

As the table shows, a large percentage of purchases made by Ceylonese are in small plots of less than 10 acres. However, the local investors also developed a fair extent in acreage into plantations. Using an arbitrary definition of 'large plots' as those sold for Rs.500 or more, Peeblef found 1/3 rd of such plots were purchased directly by Ceylonese investors. These purchases constituted 1350 deeds totaling in 83,700 acree of land."¹ In the beginning of the 20th century, there were, at least, three classes of landowners in the rural areas. The existence of these classes was accepted by the government and has been reflected in several reports published between 1920 and 1950. The third Interim Report of Land Commission(1928) refers to three main classes in the rural sector; the peasant, middle class Ceylonese and the capitalists. "In the underdeveloped villages in Ceylon, there should be little difficulty in distinguishing between a 'peasant' and a 'capitalist'. It is tentatively suggested that a 'peasant' is a person who cultivates his land by the labour of himself and his family whether with or without the aid of paid labour, and that a 'capitalist' is a person or company whose primary object in acquiring the land is to produce economic products on commercial lines."² Middle class Ceylonese are "professional classes". In the alienation of Crown Lands, some consideration is paid to the "requirements of peasants". The committee recognised ^{that} the more urgent need in connection with Crown Lands is to make adequate reserves for the present and future requirements of the "indigenous cultivators of Ceylon."³ The middle class is an interim category. Those in this class are richer than the average villager but not rich enough to compete with big investors for land. Capitalist farmers were allowed to buy the residual large surplus area of Crown Lands. Sales of these lands were open to free competition, the highest bidder being the purchaser.

1 Lebbe. (1979)

2 Land Commission (1928) p.10

3 Land Commission (1928) p.6

All the above three classes would have lands of their own. But hardly any mention was made of the residual category of landless villagers who had to sell their labour for subsistence. However, the existence of a hired labour class has been taken for granted since all the land owning classes needed additional help to work their lands. The peasants sometimes need paid labour. As mentioned earlier, the middle class employ peasants as tenants and labourers. The capitalists obviously depend entirely on paid labour. It is interesting to note that the paid labour category was included in the class of peasants. Landlessness or near landlessness of the rural poor can be understood by studying the average size of holdings in Sri Lanka in different periods. The problem of landlessness emerged as early as 1920.¹ For example, Census of 1946 revealed that average size of the paddy holdings in the wet zone was below one acre, with the exception of Kalutara and Galle.

<u>District</u>	<u>Average Size</u>
Kandy	3/5 acre
Matale	3/5 acre
Nuwara Eliya	7/10 acre
Badulla	4/5 acre
Colombo	9/10 acre
Kalutara	1½ acres
Galle	1½ acre

In Kandy district, over 82% of the holdings were below one acre in extent in 1946.

Absolute landlessness was reported in several regions in the Central Province in 1946. For example :

Kotmale	36%
Harispattu	22%
Udunuwara	36%
Yatinuwara	25%

¹Land Commission (1928-1929)

The interim reports of the Land Commission in 1927 discussed several ways in which a small holding peasant could become a landless or paid labourer.

- (a) He may be tempted to sell his land to a capitalist,
- (b) He may mortgage his land and the land be sold at the suit of the mortgagee,
- (c) His land may be sold for debt at the suit of an ordinary creditor,
- (d) Owing to the operation of the Law of Intestate succession, his land may in the course of one or two generations become owned by so many co-owners that its proper cultivation and management becomes difficult and impossible,
- (e) By successive petitions among co-owners, the land may become sub-divided into plots of such small sizes as to be of very little use.¹

The report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission noted that "the passing of village land into the hands of outsiders is a process which has been going on for a number of years. The necessity for the preservation of the peasantry and, of arresting the process which turns the peasant into a landless labouring class has received the attention of the Land Commission and the Mortgage Commission of 1946."²

In 1957 Land Commission adapted a New Class System for the purpose of the tenure of lands.

- (a) peasants;
- (b) educated youth;
- (c) lower middle-class and
- (d) middle-class³

¹ Land Commission (1929) p.17

² Kandyan Peasantry Commission (1951)

³ Land Commission (1957) p.14

The Commission had given more precise definitions of the classes, than that of 1927 Land Commission. It defines 'peasant' on three criteria:

- A Peasant (1) is willing and able to cultivate his land in person, with the assistance of his family,
- (2) does not possess more than 2 acres of irrigable land or 3 acres of highland and,
- (3) does not have a family income in excess of Rs.1,800/- per annum.¹

The educated youth is considered as a separate class. It comprises persons who are the children of peasants or of the lower-middle class and who have studied up to the S.S.C. or such other examination as is decided on from time to time.

The middle class was given a more elaborate definition in the 1957 report. They are considered too well off to be treated as peasants. A family earning a total income of less than Rs.4800/- per annum is considered as a lower-middle class family.² Rs.1800/- was the dividing line between a peasant and a lower-middle class family.

The paid agricultural labour was not treated as a separate category in the 1957 report.

The classification given in the 1957 report does not analyse in depth, the class system in Sri Lanka, except shedding some light on the problems associated with landlessness and the socio-economic conditions of the landless.

"It has long been recognised that colonial land policy discriminated against the small peasant inclusive of the landless. In the first place, it was relatively expensive and risky for a poor man to go

¹ Land Commission (1957) p.15

² Land Commission (1957) p.15

through the land alienation procedures if his requirements are only for a few acres. In the second place, in its desire to protect Crown land and especially the Reserve Forests, the Crown fought a continual battle against peasant encroachers. This century witnessed the progressive withdrawal of the Crown from its hard line position of attempting to exclude the peasantry almost entirely from Crown lands. The major cause has been the increasing demonstration of political life, and thus the progressively increasing weight of the interests of the poorer mass of the population in policy making. The major landmark in this relaxation was the report of the 1928 Land Commission which resulted in the 1935 Land Development Ordinance.¹ Until the 1972 Land Reform Act hardly any major changes occurred in the land policy especially with reference to the landless poor. The Ordinance of 1935 had provided the frame work for alienating lands to the peasants i.e. through Village Expansion Schemes and the opening of new settlements in the Dry Zone.

The first was meant to provide the landless poor at least, with a homestead within the district where they live and if possible adjacent to their villages. In 1969-70 the average allottee received about one acre of land. By 1970, over 776,600 acres had been alienated to 580,104 allottees under the schemes.² This is equivalent to about 5% of the total surface area of the country.

The second is the Major Colonisation Schemes in the Dry Zone. Major Colonization Schemes were undertaken for various reasons. At the beginning it was thought as a remedial measure to the growing unemployment in the densely populated Wet Zone. The emphasis was later shifted to food production as a result of the 2nd World War. The size of holding varied from time to time, from 8 acres at the outset to 5 acres in 1956, 3 acres in 1957 and 2 acres in 1963. But under the Mahaweli Development Project each settler will receive

¹ Moore and Perera (1978) p.39

² Moore and Perera (1978) p.41

3 acres. Selection of settlers has hitherto been based on consideration of family size, landlessness and unemployed rather than on experience in farming. Recently, the process has been changed and preference is given to married applicants in the younger age group with small families. Knowledge in agriculture and experience in paddy cultivation and highland cropping as well as animal husbandry are given due weight on the basis of a points system.

Total number of allotments alienated under Major Colonisation Schemes as at end of 1974 was 79,005; 2,21,805 acres of paddy and 124,073 of highland.¹ Despite all these attempts of the governments since 1935 to ameliorate the conditions of the poor in rural areas, the last 3-4 decades saw the rural areas becoming poorer and poorer. This process has been quickened by several other factors such as land fragmentation, evictions of tenants and the sale of lands.

This problem is very acute, especially in the wet zone, where a subsistence farming system exists. "In 1973, 767,000 or 47% of all agricultural holdings were less than 1 acre in size and a further 42% between 1-5 acres. Owners of very small holdings, e.g. under one acre, do not have the resources or knowledge to carry out proper cultivation practices, e.g. fertilizer application, intercropping, livestock rearing, and since they spend most of their time looking for work, have little opportunity or capacity to develop their plots intensively."²

Land sales and mortgages by the small owner cultivators have contributed significantly to the emergence of landless and near landless wage labourers and part-time agricultural wage labourers. Many small farmers mortgage their lands to tide over financial difficulties and very often the conditions of such mortgages are to the advantage of the mortgagee. Ultimately the small farmer becomes a tenant

¹ Land Commissioner's Annual Report (1974)

² Karunatilake (1978) p. 275

or a paid labourer tilling the land once he owned.

Other employment opportunities are hardly available in rural areas for the unskilled and often illiterate small farmers. Landlords do not want to have "registered" or regular tenants because of the various tenancy regulations which make tenancy rights heritable.

In colonisation schemes the second generation has already encountered the issues of landlessness. The children (except the eldest) have no rights to the lands of their parents and with no other resources available many of them join the rank of job seekers or work as paid labourers. Thus, the poor wage labourers have increased rapidly in the recent years, and many of them cannot get out of the vicious circle where poverty - illiteracy - unemployment, prevail.

work... are also considered... cooking, housekeeping... work etc... not remunerable... showing the high position of pressure on labour... of job opportunities...

The agricultural occupations can be classified into two broad groups... farmers (operators) and agricultural labourers... can again be categorized as owner farmers, tenants, employers and... based on their tenurial status. Agricultural labourers can be...

Excluding the young, too old, disabled and student population.

CHAPTER FOUR

OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN IN THE STUDY VILLAGES

4.1 General

As stated in chapter one, the study villages were purposively selected to represent different systems of hired labour situations in peasant agriculture. Thus, the economy of the study villages is primarily based on agriculture, which is characterised by the cultivation of paddy and other subsidiary food crops, mainly on permanent lowlands and to a lesser extent on chenas (slash-and-burn). The non-agricultural pursuits also exist in the study villages, but these are less significant compared with agricultural occupations. This becomes clear when we examine the significance of each activity in which the economically active¹ population of the study villages is engaged (See table 4.1).

In this discussion, the persons engaged mainly in household work are also considered as employed. Such work generally includes cooking, housekeeping, helping in farm and other family enterprises' work etc. Unemployment among other economically active persons is not remarkably high. However, it should be noted that such unemployment is comparatively higher in Palliporuwa, Yakkavita and Kirimetiyawa showing the high population pressure on land and relative lack of job opportunities in these three villages.

4.2 Agricultural Occupations

The agricultural occupations can be classified into two broad groups i.e., farmers (operators) and agricultural labourers. The farmers can again be categorised as owner farmers, tenants, encroachers and so on, based on their tenorial status. Agricultural labourers can be

¹ Excluding too young, too old, disabled and student population.

TABLE 4.1 ECONOMICALLY ACTIVE POPULATION ENGAGED IN VARIOUS ACTIVITIES IN TEN STUDY VILLAGES.

ACTIVITY GROUP	VILLAGES																	
	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiyyawa		Thirunelveli		Malcompitty		Nainakaddu		Bolana		Godawaya	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Agricultural	262	50.4	53	16.3	63	32.6	11	12.4	123	32.8	10	26.3	24	17.8	307	37.9	113	25.2
Agricultural and Non-Agricultural	26	5.0	53	16.3	18	9.3	14	15.7	49	13.1	7	18.4	27	20.0	53	6.5	60	13.3
Non-Agricultural	26	5.0	71	21.8	32	16.6	1	1.1	69	18.4	3	7.9	24	17.8	159	19.6	117	26.1
Mainly engaged in household work	176	33.8	80	24.5	59	30.6	49	55.1	121	32.3	15	39.5	53	39.3	248	30.6	126	28.1
Unemployed in any of the above activity, but in the labour force.	30	5.8	69	21.1	21	10.9	14	15.7	13	3.4	3	7.9	7	5.1	44	5.4	33	7.3
Total of each village	520	100.0	326	100.0	193	100.0	89	100.0	375	100.0	38	100.0	135	100.0	811	100.0	449	100.0
Economically active population as % of total population	52.9		57.1		57.3		58.6		60.1		63.8		58.7		54.2		53.9	

Source : Data gathered during phase 2 of the survey.

both full-time and part-time labourers as "hired labourers in agriculture", they constitute more than 50 percent of the total engaged in agricultural occupations in all the villages, except in Yakkavita, Kirimetiyawa and Malcompitty. These three villages are less important compared with others, as far as the extent of hired labour is concerned. The total number engaged in agricultural activities within the Malcompitty village is very small. Most of the land of the village is owned by outsiders, and the owner cultivators within the village are also small in number. The majority of outside-landlords bring their own labourers from outside into this village during busy periods of agriculture. Tenant cultivation is relatively widespread in Yakkavita and Kirimetiyawa, next to Bolana.

Being a Colonisation Scheme, Kusumpokuna consists of the highest proportion of owner cultivators. But on the other hand, the number of agricultural labourers in this Colony exceeds its farmers. The majority of the second generation settlers have become agricultural labourers due to non-availability of cultivable land within the colony. Some have encroached on crown land in the peripheries or reservations of the colony. Still some others cultivate land under various tenancy arrangements. However, the available labour force within the village is still inadequate to cope with the peak period activities in agriculture and labourers are brought in from outside.¹

A fairly large number of encroachers are also present in Bolana village. Agricultural labourers resident in the village constitute more than 50 percent of those engaged in agricultural occupations, but still outside labour is required in peak agricultural seasons, as in the case of Kusumpokuna.

¹ See Aspects of Migratory Labour.

TABLE 4.2

PERSONS ENGAGED IN AGRICULTURAL OCCUPATIONS CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO TENURIAL STATUS

V I L L A G E	Total No: engaged in Agricultural Occupations	1 Owner Cultivators		2 Tenant Cultivators		3 Encroacher Cultivators		4 Part-time Agricultural Labourers		5 Full-time Agricultural Labourers	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
		Kusumpokuna	398	127	31.9	24	6.0	11	2.8	87	21.8
Palliporuwa	121	30	24.8	21	17.4	0	0	26	21.5	44	36.3
Yakkavita	86	32	37.3	30	34.9	0	0	12	13.9	12	13.9
Kirimetiyawa	37	8	21.6	9	24.3	2	5.4	8	21.6	10	27.1
Thirunelveli	188	8	4.3	14	7.4	1	0.5	21	11.2	144	76.6
Malcompitty	18	9	50.0	1	5.6	0	0	0	0	8	44.4
Nainakaddu	93	19	20.4	9	9.7	8	8.6	19	20.4	38	40.9
Bolana	321	38	11.8	62	19.3	42	13.1	34	10.6	145	45.2
Godawaya	182	9	4.9	9	4.9	18	9.8	27	14.8	119	65.6

Source: Data gathered during phase 2 of the Survey

4.3 Non-Agricultural Occupations

Non-agricultural occupations or employment avenues open to the villagers in our study localities include a number of activities, which are randomly spread. And, understandably each and every person does not have the capacity to move over to do all kinds of these jobs except in case of a few types of unskilled labour. Among non-agricultural occupations, sale of labour is looked down upon as the work of the lowest rank.

The non-agricultural occupations were classified into 5 major groups for the purpose of this discussion. They are:

- i. Self employment in non-agriculture,
- ii. White-collar jobs,
- iii. Workers in trade and commerce,
- iv. Skilled jobs, and
- v. Non-agricultural labourers.

In general, self-employed persons include traders, owners of rice mills, transport services and small rural industries and other business enterprises. Examples of white collar jobs are clerical assignments in the government services and the private sector, teaching and other professions. Salaried workers in trade and commerce belong to the third category. Skilled jobs in the rural setting include masonry, carpentry, blacksmithery and craftsmanship. Non-agricultural labourers are usually engaged in some activity or other relating to timber-sawing, stone quarrying, brick making, road and building construction, and transport services.

The non-agricultural occupational classification made on the basis of the above categories is presented in Table 4.3.

However, the above occupational structure, as prevailed during the time of our field surveys, should not be treated as persistent over time. This situation is subject to change. For example, it is possible

TABLE 4.3 PERSONS ENGAGED IN NON-AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES CLASSIFIED ACCORDING TO OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

VILLAGE	Total No. engaged in Non-Agricu- ltural Occu- pations	1		2		3		4		5	
		Self employed		White Collar jobs		Workers in trade and commerce		Skilled jobs		Labourers (Non-Agri- cultural)	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kusumpokuna	48	3	6.2	9	18.8	12	25.0	1	2.1	23	47.9
Palliporuwa	89	2	2.3	19	21.4	23	25.8	21	23.6	24	26.9
Yakkavita	42	0	0	35	83.3	1	2.4	0	0	6	14.3
Kirimetiyawa	22	2	9.1	0	0	1	4.5	0	0	19	86.3
Thirunelveli	49	7	14.3	7	14.3	9	18.4	17	34.6	9	18.4
Malcompitty	12	9	75.0	0	0	2	16.7	0	0	1	8.3
Nainakaddu	53	30	56.6	5	9.4	9	16.9	1	2.0	8	15.1
Bolana	189	20	10.6	79	41.7	26	13.8	11	5.8	53	28.0
Godawaya	153	3	2.0	26	17.0	26	17.0	11	7.2	87	56.8

Source : Data gathered during phase 2 of the Survey

that the owner farmers become landless labourers by the influence of various effects of agrarian transformation. The number of labourers engaged in agriculture and non-agriculture may also shift their activities interchangeably depending on the changes in relative significance of agricultural and non-agricultural sectors in the villages.

4.4 Agrarian Structure

The agrarian structure of the study villages can be studied at several levels i.e. (i) individual level, (ii) household level and (iii) group level. But the basic levels are the individual level and the household level.

At the individual level, it may seem easy to identify various classes based on their primary occupations i.e., as farmers and agricultural labourers. But, farmers consist of various categories such as landlords, tenants, rich and poor farmers, etc. Similarly, the category of agricultural labourers consists not only of landless, but also of marginal owner-farmers, tenants and other non-agricultural workers. Two distinct classes, however, can be identified as landlords operating large land holdings and agricultural labourers. The former cultivate their land with the assistance of family and/or hired labourers while the latter work as hired labourers. Some of the latter group also cultivates land with the aid of hired and/or family labour but majority of them are not operators.

The operators who also work as part-time agricultural labourers, irrespective of the size of their land holdings prefer to identify themselves as "farmers" and not as "labourers". Thus, it is the landless who really forms the "class" of full-time agricultural labourers. Land ownership (pure ownership and access to agricultural land) is an important criterion to identify class relations in agriculture. Landlessness has to be interpreted so as to mean the access to operational ownership (either on owner, rented-in or leased-in basis) since

absolute landlessness at the household level is rare in rural Sri Lanka. At the level of each individual, however, absolute landlessness is also present since all the members do not have access to cultivable land. It is these members who form the major portion of the class of landless labourers in agrarian societies in rural Sri Lanka.

At the household level, the occupationally based class structure becomes obsolete. For example, in our study villages, there are many households where members are engaged in different agricultural occupations. Even in households classified as "agricultural labour-households", tenant cultivators and small owner farmers can be found including one or more who sell their labour in agriculture. The "non-agricultural labour-households" do not have any member working as an agricultural labourer. The basic unit of consumption, decision making and living is not the individual, but the household. The total income of the household is made up of the aggregate income of all the members of the household. Therefore, occupational groupings of individuals into different "classes" seems irrational. The living conditions of the agricultural labourers have also to be examined on a household basis.

Our argument here is that, at the household level, distinct classes, based on land ownership, tenurial status etc., cannot be easily identified for reasons, given above. The occupational groups are also inter-related to each other in many ways because of the involvement of "household" as a unit in the rural socio-economic setting. Therefore, at the household level, any socio-economic grouping has to be done after a careful examination of the household income, expenditure patterns, debt position, accumulation of land, capital and other assets and general living conditions.

CHAPTER FIVE

ASPECTS OF THE HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOUR MARKET

5.1 Types of Hired Labour

Hired labourers in peasant agriculture mostly work on a casual basis,¹ both full-time and part-time. Full-time agricultural labourers are often landless and earn a major proportion of their income by spending their "earning time" as agricultural labourers. Part-time hired agricultural labourers are mainly the farmers who operate minute land holdings which do not give them a sustainable income. They work as hired labourers especially during peak periods to supplement their income.

Hired labourers can again be classified as those who work in their own villages and those who seasonally migrate to other districts to obtain temporary employment in paddy cultivation.

Example of the first category, in our study villages, are the labourers in Samanthurai, Kusumpokuna, Kirimetiya, Thirunetveli, Bolana and Godawayam. Labourers in the second category come from Polliporuwa and Yakkavita.

5.2 Hired Labour Within The Villages

Hired labourers within the village(s) are employed on a day-work basis and they are normally involved in land preparation, transplanting, application of fertilizer and agro-chemicals, harvesting etc. Such piece-work may last a normal working-day in most of the wet zone land holdings. The labour households in the villages are generally

¹ In exception to this, there is a small number of labourers who work in government farms on a permanent basis, particularly in Thirunetveli village. They are also paid on a day-work basis. They can work throughout the year except on Sundays. In other areas, some labourers work permanently but irregularly, on adjacent estates and are paid daily.

known to the employers (i.e. operators of land) who usually inform several labourers in advance of their labour requirements. The labourers abide by this informal agreement and do not violate it even for higher wages since they want to uphold their relationship with the employers. There is a contract system of labour recruitment too. The contracts are made between the employer and an agent in order to complete certain pieces of work within a specific time period for a decided payment. The agent employs the needed number of wage labourers for the task and pays the wages.

In Bolana (Hambantota district) the Gambaraya¹ system of paddy production is dominant. Many of the Gambarayas live away from the lands and employ labourers of their own villages to operate the paddy fields. However, for additional hands, they depend on labourers in the villages where the paddy fields are located.

In Kirimetiya (Anuradhapura district) most of the villagers are landless in the sense that they rarely get an opportunity to cultivate those paddy lands available in the village for want of water. Many of them find employment as hired labourers in paddy as well as in chena in surrounding purana (traditional) villages.

5.3 Seasonal Migrant Labour

A broad pattern of seasonal migration of hired agricultural labour from the wet zone districts to the dry zone districts has been observed. Landless hired labourers and marginal farmers in the wet zone districts migrate seasonally to the dry zone districts in search of work in farming. This is possible because the peak farming

¹ The term "Gambaraya" is used for anybody who possesses wealth and power in the area (i.e., Hambantota district). Earlier they were the Managers of large holdings of paddy owned by absentee landlords. Now even merchants who operate large amounts of paddy lands are called Gambarayas.

activities in the two zones fall at different times.

Initially, the flow of labour from the wet zone was limited to the relatives of the original settlers of the dry zone colonization schemes. Today, the process has been more commercialised and does not operate only ^{on} a kinship network. It was observed that some youth gave up the practice of migration once they got married.

The nature of the seasonal migrant labour contracts varies from one region to another. In the study, Hambantota and Polonnaruwa regions can be considered as recipient villages of seasonal migrant labour while Palliporuwa and Yakkavita villages can be considered as 'donor' villages. Operators of Hambantota send messages to Akuressa, Matara and Galle areas in the wet zone (from where they migrated) inviting their friends and relatives to work in Hambantota.

In Polonnaruwa, the recruitment of seasonal migrant labour takes many forms.

- (a) The operators in Polonnaruwa inform their friends and kinsmen in their original villages (birth places) in the wet zone of their labour requirements. Those "contract" individuals in turn inform the labourers who, if interested, readily get employment in Polonnaruwa. In this case, the labourers have to bear their travelling costs.
- (b) Sometimes cost of travelling are remitted either by post or through a messenger to the villages in the wet zone by the operators. In this way a continued relationship is established over years between some operators and labourers. This is direct recruitment. Sometimes the operator in Polonnaruwa sends a motor vehicle - a lorry - to transport the labourers.
- (c) There are some contractors who recruit labourers from their own villages and transport them to various points in Polonnaruwa to be

meet the demand of the needy landlords. This hiring out is done on a piece rate level. For example, in 1977 a contractor charged Rs.250/-to transplant an acre with the services of his labourers. The initial financial transaction in this form of recruitment is always between the contractor and the operator, and the former pays the labourers on daily basis.

- (d) Sometimes the operators write directly to the labourers in their villages inviting them to come and help them in peak periods of paddy cultivation.
- (e) Some of the labourers themselves go to Polonnaruwa seeking jobs. This practice is common in towns like Hingurakgoda and Sewagama, and is observed in Hambantota too.

Palliporuwa and Yakkavita are donor villages providing labourers to the operators in Polonnaruwa at the request of the latter. Those migrants of Palliporuwa usually go only to two or three employers known to them. The 'agent' system has failed several times in Palliporuwa since the new recruits 'just disappear' once they are paid in advance to go to Polonnaruwa.

Migration to Polonnaruwa from Yakkavita is during the peak period to seek jobs as agricultural labourers. Young men and women mostly go in gangs often under the direction of a contractor who has contacts with the operators in Polonnaruwa. The activities in which they involve are land preparation(men), transplanting (women) harvesting and threshing (both men and women). The contractor, very often a villager of Yakkavita, is aware of the individuals available for work during a season. He pays their traveling costs etc., to be reimbursed from their first month's wages.

Many labourers prefer to migrate seasonally to distant places for several reasons.

- 108
- (a) In the distant places, a more egalitarian atmosphere prevails. The labourers are stationed close to the fields they work, in huts. There they eat, sleep and live together with the employers. No distinction is made between them. Everybody works hard.
 - (b) In these places food, lodging, betel and beedi etc., are supplied by the employer. There are few extra expenses and sometimes a labourer can save about Rs.250/-, per month.
 - (c) It is a new experience to many people, often to the youth to move away from their village surroundings and to be involved in a full-time job in a new place. Many housewives would like to go out with their daughters into far away places. This relieves them of monotonous housework and allows them an opportunity to make pilgrimages.

5.4 Conditions of Work

The conditions of work such as hours of work and facilities extended to hired agricultural labourers by the employers are discussed below. Aspects of the wages need separate attention and are discussed in section 5.8 of this chapter.

Generally, a hired labourer works from 7.00 a.m. to 5.00 p.m. in the fields with a one hour break for mid-day meal plus half an hour for morning and afternoon tea breaks. The labourers also take short rest-pauses at their will because of the arduous nature of the work, and the average effective working day consists of about $7\frac{1}{2}$ hours. In the absence of legislation to regulate the number of working hours, the agricultural labourers have to work longer hours than their counterparts in industrial and service sectors in Sri Lanka. The hours mentioned above are effective only for operations such as land preparation.

But there are other time-specific activities, e.g., transplanting, harvesting, threshing etc. In such cases, the labourers have to work longer hours—sometimes over 15 hours a day—and they are encouraged to do so by the higher remuneration, not necessarily in terms of cash wages but in terms of other benefits such as getting a part of the harvest.

It is customary in many rural areas of Sri Lanka to provide food, beverages, tobacco and even liquor by the employers to the labourers who work in paddy fields, in addition to daily wages. If these are not provided, an additional amount of cash is paid, but not up to the total value of food. Usually, breakfast, mid-day meal and morning and afternoon tea are provided to casual day labourers. The migratory labourers generally enjoy these provisions as well as temporary housing facilities. This is a necessity since such labourers often come from distant areas. Travelling expenses are at times paid by the employer, and at other times deducted from wages. In case of an illness of a resident labourer he gets paid for treatment. But there is no any wage payment for the non-working days. There are instances of extra payment as an inducement for the labourers to come to the same employer over seasons.

5.5 Demand for Hired Labour

The evolution of hired labour in an historical perspective is discussed in chapter 3. Historically, the primary reason for the emergence of hired labour has been the development of capitalist production relations in peasant agriculture as against the traditional relationships such as attan, kayya (exchange labour systems) etc. The significance of the exchange labour system has decreased remarkably, except in a few wet zone areas.¹ Near-absence of these systems in the dry zone colonization schemes is due to several reasons. Firstly, all the

¹ For example in Palliporuwa and Yakkavita, exchange labour systems are still present.

colonists have to complete work in the paddy fields at the same time in keeping with the schemes of supplying irrigation water. Secondly, at later stages when land distribution became more uneven, the reciprocal help in terms of exchange labour was difficult. Finally, the colonists came from various areas and were mostly unknown to each other before.

Specifically in the dry zone areas, as mentioned earlier the family labour available for farmwork during peak activity periods is inadequate. Thus, the farmers, with no possibility of getting exchange labour, hire labour to supplement available family labour. Even in other areas, irrespective of the size of the farms, the farmers employ hired labour, specially during the peak activity periods to complete certain time-bound operations.

Thus, the demand for hired labour stems from the diminishing importance of exchange labour and the inadequacy of family-labour, especially for time-bound operations.

The operations in paddy cultivation are highly seasonal and accordingly, the demand for hired labourers is also seasonal. In almost all areas of Sri Lanka, the major paddy growing season is Maha which usually extends from September to April. The Yala season usually extends from May to August. However, paddy cultivation is often successful in Yala in irrigated areas whereas it is not so in rainfed areas. Although Maha is the major labour demanding season, the labourers do not find much work in paddy fields in between transplanting and reaping of paddy. During such lean periods they have to find some work in chena cultivation¹ and / or in non-agricultural activities. But, in a village, such opportunities are not readily available. Thus, a considerable proportion of labourers remain unemployed during the lean periods in paddy cultivation.²

¹ Possibilities for chena cultivation are being constrained by the regulations of the government which prohibit clearing of the jungles.

² See Chapter 6 for Employment Aspects.

Vegetable and other subsidiary food crop cultivation in and around Thirunelveli village (Jaffna) is mainly done under irrigation in the Yala season. The crop normally succeeds better during the Yala than in the Maha. In vegetable cultivation the peak activity periods are the planting and the harvesting times. In between planting and harvesting the demand for labour is lower. During Maha, the cultivated lands get water-logged leading to substantial losses of harvest. Thus, although there is a relatively high demand for labour at the beginning of the Maha season for land preparation and planting, this demand drops to very low levels towards the mid season and rises again at the harvesting stage, but not to the same extent as in Yala.

Toddy tapping provides a subsidiary employment only to a minor proportion of the labourers in Thirunelveli during lean seasons in vegetable cultivation.

5.6 *New Agricultural Technology and Demand for Hired Labour*

The spread of the new high yielding varieties of paddy (NHYV) is the major breakthrough in the technological change in paddy cultivation. This and the associated practices such as tractorisation, use of agro-chemicals and improved cultural practices like transplanting and mechanical milling are the aspects that need consideration in this discussion.

The NHYVS, a priori, lead to increased labour demand through increased cropping intensity, given favourable other conditions eg., irrigation, infrastructure, input supplies etc. They directly demand more labour for land preparation, transplanting, application of fertilizer, weeding, harvesting, transport and processing of produce. The NHYV's have mainly concentrated in the dry zone areas where assured irrigation water is available. Examples are Kusumpokuna and Bolana. Kusumpokuna, in particular faces labour shortages during peak periods and demands for hired labour. However, it is observed that the increasing demand

for hired labour comes from traditionally labour intensive activities such as transplanting and harvesting. There is a significant demand for female labour for such activities in almost all the areas. The hired labourers, especially males, claim that the use of the tractors and chemical weed-killers has led to a decrease in demand for hired labour in land preparation, threshing, winnowing and weeding. Paddy processing is done at small rice mills or at large milling complexes in all the areas. Hand-pounding is minimal.

The indirect employment opportunities created by the NHYV's and related innovations such as tractor driving, motor mechanism etc., are peripheral. Tractor driving is mostly undertaken by a family member of the tractor owner leaving little room for the hired labourers.

5.7 *Supply of Hired Agricultural Labour*

Giving a numerical statement of hired agricultural labourers in a given locality at a given point of time and concluding that the supply is fixed at that level seem not a rational approach. The total number of hired labourers who worked in agriculture (full-time and part-time) were 903 in our study localities during the time of the enquiry. This number may remain constant or grow larger or even decline, and a prediction is impossible without ascertaining the factors contributing to such changes. What really happens is that the number of such labourers changes depending on many other variables.¹ Thus, the supply in a quantitative sense should be regarded as a highly changing phenomenon. Furthermore, as stated earlier, the measurement of supply of labour is made difficult by the involvement of diversified categories, i.e., landless labourers and marginal farmers who may withdraw from and enter into the hired labour force depending on their willingness to and necessity for work as hired agricultural labourers.

¹ See the factors influencing the supply of labour discussed later in this section.

Thus, qualitatively and more realistically, it can be said that the supply of hired agricultural labour depends on the individuals' need and willingness for work under someone else for wages. The need and willingness are determined by one or more of the following factors.¹

- (a) Degree of Landlessness,
- (b) Need for supplementary income for subsistence,
- (c) Socio-economic status of family .

These factors are discussed below in detail:

(a) Degree of Landlessness

At the household level, almost every household has, at least a house and a home garden, whatever the conditions and tenurial status of these may be. At individual level, it is difficult for the head of the household to assure every grown-up member of the family a plot of land for cultivation and hence, many individuals become landless. Some of them may rent-in, leased-in or encroach^{on} agricultural land while the others look for paid employment. When other job opportunities are limited (due to low-level of education etc.), they invariably join the rank of landless agricultural or non-agricultural labourers. The majority of full-time agricultural labourers consist of such landless individuals.

Landlessness is a result of the interaction of several reasons. The commonest reasons are fragmentation of inherited land, sale or mortgage of land and other assets in lieu of debt and the influence of social stratification in the agrarian scene. In broad terms, opening up of plantations in the wet-zone areas has led to an increasing pressure on cultivable land in the villages ultimately causing fragmentation to a considerable extent. The little patches of land

¹ See also Wickramasekara (1977), pp 79-82.

inherited by those in the later generations are not viable enough to raise a sustainable income. In the dry-zone areas, the second generations of original settlers do not have new land and the only alternative source of income available for them is to hire their labour.

In Kusumpokuna, landlessness was not a problem in the early stages of the settlement. Some of the original owner settlers have gradually mortgaged their plots of land for a variety of personal needs. Paddy income is seasonal and during the off seasons the settlers, having no savings on their part miserably fall indebted to merchants, landlords and government officials who provide credit on land mortgages. This results in the concentration of real ownership of land among a few leading many a persons to join the rank of landless hired labourers. Today, many young men having no lands of their own or even a little learning to do some other job, fall back on the sale of their labour in agriculture.

The majority of the hired labour families in Yakkavita do not have access to cultivable land. Land they have been provided with is also not suitable for cultivation. In Kirimetiyawa, most people do not own any hereditary land while those who have the land operate tiny plots which have been subject to severe fragmentation over generations.

In Bolana, some villagers have either sold or mortgaged their land to the businessmen of Ambalantota who gradually became large landowners. This process quite often ends with the original owner becoming a hired labourer tilling the land once he owned.

In Godawaya, each family (landless and unemployed) was given $\frac{1}{2}$ acre of highland under the Village Expansion Scheme. The majority of the original settlers were landless labourers from nearby areas such as Tangalle, Walawe and Rakawa. In early stages there were only 25-30 houses on 50-60 acres of highland. At present, the number of houses has increased to more than 100 reflecting the intensive fragmentation of land. The major reasons are the growth of village population and

further encroachments by outsiders. Labourers' access to cultivable land in the village is limited since the owners of paddy land are reluctant to rent-out such land. They prefer to lease out their lands, for 2-3 years and get a lump sum of payment altogether. The opportunities for becoming the operators of chena land are also limited for the lack of initial and operational capital and government regulations which prohibit encroachments and clearing of jungle.

In general, the major demand of most landless labourers is for agricultural land under existing and new colonisation schemes.

(b) *Need for Supplementary Income for Subsistence.*¹

Marginal farmers and non-agricultural labourers too resort to work as hired labourers in agriculture mainly to supplement their income for households' consumption needs, the major source of income being inadequate to meet such requirements. This is also associated with the number of dependants in the family. When the income generated from little patches of land is inadequate to meet the consumption needs of the family members, the head and grown-up members of the household engage in hiring-out labour.

(c) *Low Socio-Economic Status*²

The labour households in a village in general, occupy lower social and economic rungs in the rural society, a situation emanating basically from the problem of landlessness. Relatively more affluent and educated people prefer salaried white collar jobs and self-employment in farming, trade, industry etc. The labourers perpetually remain in the vicious circle of no land and low income and it is taken for granted, both by the landed gentry and the labourers, that hiring out the labour is the legacy of the latter.

¹ See Chapter 7 for details

² See Chapter 7 for details

5.8 *Wage Determination and Wages*

Here we present a broad frame-work within which the wages of hired agricultural labourers in the study villages are determined. Supply and demand conditions in the labour market determine the wages. But these wages vary from one area to another depending on such variables as (a) regional differences in demand and supply, (b) sex-age differences, (c) efficiency considerations, (d) patron-client relationships (e) mobility of the labourers and (f) different type of operations.

(a) Regional Differences in Demand and Supply

Regional differences in wages broadly reflect the regional differences in demand and supply of labour. In broad terms, the wages in wet zone areas are lower than those in the dry zone irrigated areas. This is because, as discussed earlier, the labour in the dry zone is seasonally scarce and the productivity of labour there is higher under assured water supply conditions. The spread of NHYV and associated cultural practices, e.g. transplanting have created a high seasonal demand for labour.

(b) Sex-Age Differences

Sex-age differences in wage reflect the customary considerations rather than the notion of differential efficiency and productivity. Thus, females are paid lower wages, and children are paid less than those paid to both adult males and females.

(c) Efficiency Considerations

Hired labourers in some areas are regarded as more efficient and are paid higher wages. For example, male labourers among certain communities in Ampara district are regarded more skilled than females in reaping paddy, an operation which is mostly done by females in other areas. Paddy farmers in the dry zone colonization schemes prefer to

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employ migrant labourers for transplanting and reaping of paddy, from certain villages of Kurunegala, Kegalle and Matale districts. Certain activities such as transplanting, application of agro-chemicals and harvesting etc., are regarded as "skilled" warranting higher wages.

(c) Employer-Employee Relationships¹

Differences in wages within a small area such as a village are also dependent on various socio-economic relationships between the employers and the hired labourers. Credit obtained by the labourers from their employers are repaid by way of supplying labour. Through these relationships, the employers are assured themselves of a regular "clientele" of labourers who would rarely bargain for wages.

(d) Mobility of the Labourers

The low socio-economic status and low educational attainments of the hired agricultural labourers act as constraints to change over to alternative and better jobs allowing room for employers to pay lower wages not in keeping with the labourers' productivity.

The wage data that were collected during Maha 1978/79 show the differences according to areas, sex groups and different types of operations. These wage data are presented in table 5.1.

The wage structure is rather complex because of the involvement of many forms and methods of paying wages. For example, wages are paid in cash with meals and in cash without meals, in kind, piecework-contract basis or in combination of two or more of these. It is the tradition rather than the rule to pay wages in kind for certain operations. For example, it is customary in some areas to pay a share of the harvest for threshing of paddy. In Samanthurai area of the

¹ See Chapter 8 for details.

TABLE 5.1 AVERAGE DAILY WAGE RATES OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS ACCORDING TO TYPE OF WORK* AND SEX GROUPS (CASH WAGES WITH MEALS, MAHA 1978/79 (Rs.))

TYPE OF WORK	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Kirimetiyyawa		Thirunalveli		Bolana		Godawaya	
	M +	F+	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Land Preparation	8.00	7.50	5.50	-	10.00	-	10.00	8.00	10.00	8.00	10.00	-
2. Transplanting/ Planting	8.00	8.00	7.00	4.00	-	-	9.00	7.00	9.50	-	-	-
3. Sowing	9.00	-	5.00	-	10.00	-	8.00	-	10.00	-	10.00	-
4. Application of Fertilizer	-	-	4.00	-	10.00	-	8.00	6.00	10.00	-	10.00	-
5. Application of Agro-Chemicals	8.00	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.00	-	15.00	-
6. Weeding	7.50	7.00	-	5.00	-	-	9.00	7.00	7.00	7.00	-	-
7. Reaping	8.00	8.00	8.00	4.00	10.00	7.00	12.00	7.00	8.00	-	9.00	-
8. Stacking	9.00	8.00	5.00	5.00	10.00	-	-	-	9.00	-	9.00	-
9. Threshing	9.00	-	10.00	-	15.00	-	-	-	10.00	-	10.00	-
10. Winnowing	10.00	7.00	-	5.00	10.00	-	-	-	10.00	-	10.00	-

Notes: * Type of work related to Paddy Cultivation in all villages except Thirunelveli.

Type of work related to Subsidiary Food Crop Cultivation in Thirunelveli.

M=Male

F=Females

Wage data for Yakkavita are not available.

Ampara district, 8 Koththus of paddy are given per labourer per day for threshing. In Hambantota, 5 Kurintak of paddy are paid to thresh one stack of paddy. However, commercialization of the rural economy has to some extent reduced the 'in kind' component of wages paid to labourers in many areas. Today, the widespread practice is to pay wages in cash with meals at work. If meals are not provided, a higher cash wage rate is paid.

Transplanting, reaping and threshing of paddy are done on the contract basis in some rural areas. In these instances, the employer pays a fixed amount of money to the contractor who in turn pays his labourers on daily-work basis. As mentioned earlier, in some areas piece-work system exists, where the labourers individually complete pieces of work e.g. reaping an acre of paddy, threshing a stack of paddy etc. There is a maximum that a normal labourer can do in a working day of 8 hours. Thus, it is not difficult to convert all the wage rates into per day, per labourer basis.

Daily wages with meals represent the real value of money wages after making adjustments for the cost of food (mostly two meals) of the working day of individual labourers. However, this real value has little meaning when one considers the general cost of living of the households of the labourers, if not of the individual labourers. The individual labourers, except migrant labourers, mostly have to pay for themselves and for the family members for their evening meals. It is the common practice to deduct a sum of Rs.1.50-3.00 for the meals provided during a day. This additional sum deducted in respect of food does not however represent the actual cost of food and other victuals provided for the agricultural labourers during a working day. In other words, an extra cost of meals is incurred by the employers, which is not included in money wages paid to labourers. During the survey, some farmers reported that they had to spend about Rs.5/- per day, per worker, for meals, though they deduct only about Rs.2/- per worker in respect of meals.

In fact, this subsidization of food is more advantageous to the employers rather than to the labourers. It is not purely due to the reason that, if meals are provided at work then the labourers become nutritionally more efficient leading to higher labour productivity. The efficiency at work is specifically individual and does not depend solely on the quantity or the quality of meals. On the other hand, it is meaningless to argue that the labour productivity goes up immediately after the mid-day meal. From the employer's point of view, a long lunch interval is obviously wasteful. Therefore, the meals are provided to save time. From the labourers' point of view "bringing lunch is hard when one has to start for work before dawn or when there is not any food at home."¹ Moreover, the provision of food is a custom in many rural areas and sometimes labour supplied to a particular employer in another season depends, among other things, on the quantity and quality of food he gives to the labourers in the current season. Therefore, the employers often make sure to supply quality food to the labourers even at an extra cost. The migrant labourers are often on-farm residents and they are mostly provided with all meals. An additional sum of about Rs.1.50 is deducted for "board and lodging". Provision of meals is essential in this case because the migrant labourers come from distant areas. Moreover, there are no places where they can buy food stuff in the remote rural areas. Hence, most employers have built permanent huts with cooking facilities, closeby the farms.

However, there are exceptions in providing the meals. For example, female labourers engaged in transplanting and reaping of paddy in Bolana and Godawaya villages are not provided with any meals, by the employers. In these villages, about Rs.8/- is paid per day for such activities, without meals.

¹ Bardhan, Kalpana (1977)

Occasional increases in wages have occurred recently due to increases in guaranteed price of paddy. But the real value of wages is low due to price increases in most food items in the open market. Most labourers claim that the employers prefer to pay in cash rather than in kind. In kind payments are made mostly to relatives of the employers.

In the absence of organised or collective bargaining, the labourers are not in a position to take the full benefits of increasing product prices or productivity of labour. Even these slight increases are off-set by the increasing cost of living. Effects of increased wages are also constrained by the unjustified action by some employers. For example, although the payments for reaping of 1/6 of an acre of paddy (alli) in Hambantota has increased from Rs.7/- to Rs.15/-, some employers still pay only Rs.10/- by marking about $1\frac{1}{2}$ allies as one alli.

CHAPTER SIX

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the employment characteristics of the agricultural labourers in the study villages. The data on these aspects were collected through a record keeping exercise of a sample of 178 agricultural labourers from 7 villages. The sample size and the period of survey varied from one village to another. (See Table 6.1). The data gathered in this exercise is confined to Maha 1978/79.¹

Maha is the main cropping season of paddy cultivation. The employment prospects of agricultural labourers are generally higher in Maha than in the rest of the year, when unemployment is relatively high. However, it must also be emphasised that the monthly variation of employment within the season is considerable. Even in Maha, as pointed out in chapter 5, the peak periods of activities are planting and harvesting. In the middle stages, the employment opportunities for labourers become generally less.

In Thirunelveli also, where vegetables and other subsidiary food crops are mostly grown, the labourers had found more employment in land preparation, planting and harvesting periods. However, in between these periods a relatively higher labour use pattern is seen here since after-care operations in vegetable cultivation call for more work. In paddy cultivation the labour use per acre for such operations is much less (See chapter 5).

¹ Though the researchers originally intended to keep records for a full cropping year, it was not possible due to time and manpower constraints.

TABLE 6.1. NUMBER OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE SAMPLE AND PERIODS OF
SURVEY IN EACH STUDY VILLAGE (LABOUR RECORDS ON EMPLOYMENT)

Village	No. in the Sample			Period of Survey			Number of Months and Days	
	Males	Females	Total	From	-	To	Months	Days
Kusumpokuna	13	13	31	78/11/04	-	79/03/29	4	25
Palliporuwa	13	8	21	78/10/09	-	79/03/30	5	21
Yakkavita	7	1	8	78/10/08	-	79/02/24	4	16
Kirimetiyawa	11	3	14	78/11/02	-	79/03/29	4	27
Thirunelveli	24	6	30	78/11/04	-	79/03/01	3	27
<u>Bolana</u>								
Sample A	15	13	28	78/10/07	-	79/02/14	4	7
Sample B	11	4	15	78/10/07	-	79/03/07	5	0
<u>Godawaya</u>								
Sample A	5	6	11	78/10/09	-	79/01/06	2	28
Sample B	9	11	20	78/10/09	-	79/02/14	4	5
Total	113	65	178					

6.2 Employment

The agricultural labourers worked in each activity as a proportion of sample in each area, is given in Table 6.2. The three main activities relate to paddy cultivation, cultivation of other field crops and non-agricultural work. A considerable percentage of labourers having not specifically mentioned the activity, the data does not show a complete picture of the situation.

The labourers have found different types of employment depending on the major economic activities prevailing in the study villages. A fairly larger group has got jobs in agricultural activities, as expected. But Yakkavita is an exception. Excluding Thirunelveli, in all other villages paddy cultivation has offered more avenues of work. Cultivation of vegetables and other subsidiary food crops has been the major activity of the labourers in Thirunelveli.

A considerable number of labourers had found employment on chenas in the villages Kirimetiyawa, Bolana and Godawaya. Activities such as brick making, timber sawing and stone quarrying, mainly in the villages of Palliporuwa, Yakkavita, and Godawaya too have offered some employment opportunities to the labourers.

The data given in Table 6.2. does not make a distinction of participation between males and females. But, as shown in Table 6.4, males engage, in general, in all the activities while females usually work in transplanting, weeding and harvesting. Exceptionally, a few female labourers of Godawaya village work in brick-making and stone-quarrying.

The number of days on which the employment records were kept varied from 100 in Kirimetiyawa to 166 in Palliporuwa (see Table 6.3.). The average number of days worked by the labourers (both males and females) varied from 38 in Yakkavita (33%) to 90 in Thirunelveli (81%). The average number of days worked by males varied from 37 in Yakkavita (32%) to 92 (83%) in Thirunelveli. The corresponding numbers and

TABLE 6.2.

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS EMPLOYED IN EACH OPERATION, AS A PERCENTAGE OF
SAMPLE LABOURERS IN EACH LOCALITY

(Total sample for each operation and each locality = 100)

Locality and Percentage

Nature of work	Kusum pokuna	Palli poruwa	Yakka vita	Kirimeti yawa	Thirune lveli	Bolana	Goda waya
<u>(a) Work relating to Paddy Cultivation</u>							
1. Land Preparation	51.6	47.6	12.5	78.6	-	59.9	20.8
2. Transplanting	54.8	52.4	12.5	-	-	50.1	34.4
3. Sowing	6.5	4.8	-	7.1	-	34.5	20.0
4. Application of Fertilizer	-	4.8	-	64.3	-	17.1	4.5
5. Application of Agro-Chemicals	9.7	-	-	28.6	-	8.5	8.6
6. Weeding	16.1	4.8	12.5	-	-	20.7	28.6
7. Watching	3.2	-	-	-	-	13.9	2.9
8. Reaping	58.1	61.9	-	92.9	-	66.5	28.3
9. Stacking/Assembling	22.6	9.5	-	7.1	-	54.5	36.7
10. Threshing	22.6	4.8	-	21.4	-	35.4	20.0
11. Winnowing	9.7	23.8	25.0	28.6	-	33.8	2.8
12. Transport	6.5	4.8	-	-	-	23.8	2.8
<u>(b) Work relating to cultivation of other field crops</u>							
1. Land Preparation	-	33.3	12.5	57.1	80.0	38.3	16.7
2. Planting	-	-	-	-	56.7	-	-
3. Sowing	-	-	-	14.3	6.7	-	2.8
4. Water supply	-	-	-	-	76.7	-	-
5. Application of fertilizer	-	-	-	-	26.7	-	5.8
6. Application of agro-chemicals	-	-	-	7.1	-	-	-
7. Weeding	-	-	-	-	13.3	-	-

continued/..... 79

Locality and Percentage

Nature of work	Kusum pokuna	Palli poruwa	Yakka vita	Kirimeti yawa	Thirune lveli	Boalna Goda waya
8. Watching	-	-	-	-	6.7	9.3
9. Harvesting	3.2	9.5	12.5	71.4	63.3	2.3
10. Transport	-	-	-	-	3.3	8.7
(c) Non-Agricultural work						
1. Brick making	6.5	19.0	25.0	-	-	4.6
2. Timber sawing	-	19.0	25.0	-	-	-
3. Stone-quarrying	3.2	-	25.0	-	-	2.8
4. Toddy tapping	-	4.8	-	-	-	8.6
5. Building construction	-	-	-	-	3.3	-
Total No: of labourers in the sample:	31	21	8	14	30	43
						31

Source: Data gathered during phase 3 of the Survey.

TABLE 6.3 AVERAGE NUMBER OF HOURS AND DAYS WORKED BY THE SAMPLE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS DURING MAHA 1978/79.

Village	Number of labourers			No. of days on which records were kept.	No. of hours worked			No. of days* worked (Average)			No. of days worked as a % of days on which records were kept.		
	Males	Females	Total		Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
Kusumpokuna	18	13	31	125	330	360	343	41	45	43	32.8	36.9	34.4
Palliporuwa	13	8	21	166	549	354	452	69	44	56.5	41.6	26.5	34.0
Yakkavita	17	1	8	116	299	340	304	37	43	38	31.9	37.1	32.8
Kirimetiyawa	11	3	14	100	445	241	397	56	30	50	56.0	30.0	50.0
Thirunelveli	24	6	30	111	714	738	718	92	89	90	82.9	80.2	81.1
Bolana	26	17	43	141	408	334	386	51	42	48	36.2	29.8	34.0
Godawaya	14	17	31	113	569	384	467	71	48	58	62.8	42.5	51.3

Source: Data gathered during phase 3 of the Survey

* = Days were worked out by dividing the hours by 8, the number of hours in a normal effective working day.

percentages for females are 30 (30%) in Kirimetiyawa and 89 (80%) in Thirunelveli.

Notably, females have worked on average for more number of days than the males in Kusumpokuna, Yakkavita and Thirunelveli. But the samples of these villages contained a fewer number of females.

A striking feature that can be discerned from table 6.3 is that the average number of days worked by the labourers are relatively higher in the localities where labour intensive farming is widespread, e.g. Thirunelveli, Palliporuwa and Kirimetiyawa. Evidence from the localities where mechanized farming is widespread e.g. Kusumpokuna, and Bolana however, supports the contrary. Godawaya and Yakkavita are exceptions. In these two villages labourers have been engaged in brick making, stone quarrying etc., for a relatively longer period.

Predominance of certain activities in providing employment to agricultural labourers is also obvious from the distribution pattern of work time among different activities (Table 6.4). Land preparation and harvesting rank first amongst the classified activities in this regard, with the exception in case of the labourers in Yakkavita where the highest proportion of work time there had been spent on non-agricultural activities.¹

Females have spent a major proportion of their working time on planting and harvesting in paddy cultivating villages. They also spend their work time mostly on weeding, planting and harvesting in villages where chena and other highland crop cultivation are present (e.g. Thirunelveli and Kirimetiyawa). These observations further support the view expressed

¹ This perhaps may reduce the validity of inclusion of this village in the sample of "agricultural" labourers. However, in this village, a substantial proportion of work time (39%) has not been classified into any of the major activity. These may be predominantly agricultural or non-agricultural or both. Therefore, we still consider this as a sample of agricultural labourers.

PERCENTAGE OF WORK TIME SPENT ON DIFFERENT TYPES OF WORK BY THE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS DURING MAHA 1978/79.

Nature of work	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiyyawa		Thirunelveli		Bolana		Godawaya	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
(A) Work relating to Paddy cultivation														
1. Land Preparation	35.8	3.9	27.1	-	1.2	-	36.9	-	-	-	34.2	-	14.2	-
2. Transplanting	6.3	62.3	9.7	71.6	-	100.0	-	-	-	-	1.1	46.5	-	30.0
3. Sowing	0.3	0.3	0.1	-	-	-	4.0	-	-	-	5.5	-	6.2	-
4. Application of fertilizer	-	-	0.9	-	-	-	5.0	-	-	-	1.3	-	0.3	-
5. Application of agro-chemicals	2.4	-	-	-	-	-	2.0	-	-	-	0.3	-	0.3	-
6. Weeding	1.3	1.5	-	0.3	3.1	-	-	-	-	-	3.9	10.8	-	3.9
7. Watching	2.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.8	-	0.2	-
8. Reaping	13.9	18.7	17.0	-	-	-	10.5	58.0	-	-	7.5	40.2	-	21.1
9. Stacking/Assemblying	1.7	3.5	-	19.3	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	14.0	-	31.0	28.7
10. Threshing	4.5	-	0.3	-	-	-	8.6	-	-	-	50.4	-	4.1	-
11. Winnowing	0.6	0.2	-	3.5	3.8	-	0.9	-	-	-	2.0	-	0.4	-
12. Transport	0.2	-	0.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.3	-	0.9	-
(B) Work relating to cultivation of other crops.														
1. Land Preparation	-	-	3.2	3.0	1.2	-	17.6	23.0	33.7	3.0	10.0	2.4	14.8	2.1
2. Planting	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7.3	18.4	-	-	-	-
3. Sowing	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.0	-	0.7	-	-	-	0.7	-
4. Watering	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.5	-	-	-	-	-
5. Application of fertilizer	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.7	0.5	-	-	3.1	-
6. Application of agro-chemicals	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.5	-	1.3	-	-	-	-	-

Continued...../83

Nature of Work	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiyyawa		Thirunelveli		Bolana		Godawaya	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
7. Weeding	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	35.7	56.4	-	-	-	-
8. Watching	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.3	-	0.5	-	-	-
9. Harvesting	1.2	-	0.1	-	0.4	-	13.5	17.7	3.5	13.4	6.4	-	1.6	-
10. Transport	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	-	0.1	0.1	0.5	-
(C) Non-Agricultural work														
1. Brick making	6.7	-	5.7	-	20.5	-	-	-	-	-	0.6	-	8.6	1.5
2. Timber sawing	-	-	24.3	-	16.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.2	-
3. Stone quarrying	0.6	-	-	-	14.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10.4	8.9
4. Toddy tapping	-	-	4.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Building Construction	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1	-	-	-	-	-
(D) Unclassified	22.4	9.6	7.0	2.3	39.0	-	2.4	1.3	5.1	8.3	5.1	-	-	3.7
Average Number of working days per labourer.	41	45	69	44	37	43	56	30	92	89	51	42	71	48

Source : Data gathered during phase 3 of the Sruvey

earlier about the sex differentiation prevailing in certain agricultural operations. However, reaping and collecting of harvest have been done by both females and males alike, eg., in Kusumpokuna and (paddy)/Kirimetiyawa (chena). Weeding in Thirunelveli and stone-quarrying in Godawaya are other examples.

6.3 Unemployment and Underemployment

The percentage of sample agricultural labourers who were without any work during the record-keeping period was, on average, 74 which is high by any standard. However, this figure varied from 62 percent in Kirimetiyawa to 86 percent in Godawaya. This can be taken as the rate of unemployment among the agricultural labourers. But these figures are confined only to days on which the records were kept. Any conclusions drawn on open unemployment based on these would not be realistic since our enquiry does not cover pre and post-record keeping periods.

The more apparent feature is the prevalence of underemployment. On average, about 55 percent of the record keeping days have been reported as non-working days. This percentage however, varied from 19 in Thirunelveli to 67 in Yakkavita. Underemployment in the sense of working half days or less due to the nature of work during the slack period (eg., application of fertilizer, application of chemicals) is also a possibility.

Involuntary underemployment of all sample labourers was considerable where the highest percentage of non-working days has been attributed to bad weather and to the fact that the labourers simply could not find work though they were actually seeking work. These two factors accounted for about 64 percent of average non-working days reported by the sample labourers in the seven villages. This varied from 51 percent in Kusumpokuna to 78 percent in Godawaya.

Working in one's own enterprise (own account work) has been an

important factor for not working as hired labourers on certain days as the case of the labourers in Kusumpokuna, Yakkavita and Bolana where some of the sample labourers were also the part-time farmers. It is notable that in Kirimetiyawa and Thirunelveli, none of the labourers has avoided hiring out their labour because of such own account work (table 6.5). The other important reason is the illness of the labourers or their family members. Social obligations like attending weddings and funerals too have kept them away from work.

The labourers need, apart from all above, rest-days because of the arduous and strenuous nature of their work in paddy fields, chena, stone quarries etc.,. However, during a peak season such as planting and harvesting, the rest days are not availed of. It is during the slack period that rest is taken. Such rest days have been of particular importance in Thirunelveli where 5 labourers who work in a government farm had taken rest in about 7 days each. None of the labourers in Kirimetiyawa and Godawaya had reported "rest days".

The involuntary underemployment of the agricultural labourers is also a result of the seasonality in most agricultural activities in the villages. As far as paddy cultivation and chena work in Maha season are concerned, the peak activity periods in general, are the months of September, October, and February. The slack period also covers three months, i.e., November, December and January.

AVERAGE NUMBER OF DAYS ON WHICH THE SAMPLE AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS WERE OUT OF WORK, ACCORINNG TO REASONS (Maha 1978/79).

REASONS	VILLAGES AND NUMBER OF DAYS													
	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiyawa		Thirunelveli		Bolana		Dodawaya	
	Days	%	Days	%	Days	%	Days	%	Days	%	Days	%	Days	%
Could not find work	40	48.8	71	64.8	42	53.8	32	64.0	4	19.0	50	62.4	30	54.5
Bad weather	2	2.4	4	3.7	3	3.8	3	6.0	7	33.4	7	7.5	13	23.6
Bad health	14	17.1	10.5	9.6	4	5.1	10	20.0	2	9.4	7	7.5	7	12.7
Social functions	3	3.7	6	5.5	2	2.6	5	10.0	1	4.8	2	2.2	-	-
Own account work	18	22.0	10	9.1	24	30.8	-	-	-	-	19	20.4	3	5.4
Rest days	5	6.0	8	7.3	3	3.9	-	-	7	33.4	-	-	2	3.8
Total	82	100.0	109.5	100.0	78	100.0	50	100.0	21	100.0	93	100.0	55	100.0
Non-working days as a % of the number of days on which records were kept.	65.6		66.0		67.2		50.0		18.9		66.0		48.7	

Source: Data gathered during phase 3 of the Survey

CHAPTER SEVEN

LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS

This chapter discusses the living conditions of the agricultural labour households in the study villages. The discussion is based on the household level, taking it as a unit of living. Towards an understanding of the living conditions of the agricultural labour households, a comparison is attempted with the non-labour households and the arguments centre on the following basic points:

(i) ownership of land, (ii), ownership of other assets, (iii) ownership of consumer durables, (iv) housing conditions, (v) income-expenditure patterns, (vi) debt position, (vii) savings, (viii) educational level of the members, and (ix) health and nutritional aspects.

7.1 Ownership of Land

It is observed that the majority of agricultural labour households owns only their dwellings and home gardens, which are mostly below ½ acre in size and often uncultivable. There are instances where some of these households operate little land and very often the part-time agricultural labourers come from such households. The extents of agricultural land operated by various categories of households in the study villages are given in table 7.1.

As shown in table 7.1, Palliporuwa, Malcompitty, Nainakaddu and Godawaya are villages where farming land is scarce. It is noted that except in Palliporuwa, the non-agricultural labour households are worse off than the agricultural labour households when sizes of agricultural land operated by them are concerned.¹ In Kirimetiyawa, exceptionally the agricultural labour households have the highest proportion of agricultural land. The majority of Kirimetiyawa villagers are farmer-operators of paddy land most of which lie fallow throughout a good

¹ However, the number of such non-agricultural labour households is negligible in these villages.

TABLE 7.1 EXTENT OF AGRICULTURAL LAND OPERATED BY VARIOUS TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS

Locality	Agricultural Labour Households		Non-Agricultural Labour Households		Non-Labour Households		Total Extent
	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres	%	Acres
Kusumpokuna	77.25	19.7	0	0	315.25	80.3	392.5
Palliporuwa	1.76	8.2	4.56	21.2	15.18	70.6	21.5
Yakkavita	20.74	36.6	0.75	1.3	35.24	62.1	56.73
Kirimetiyawa	27.5	64.7	2.0	4.7	13.0	30.6	42.5
Thirunelveli	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.
Malcompitty	0	0	0	0	0	100.0	4.0
Nainakaddu	3.0	50.0	0	0	3.0	50.0	6.0
Bolana	11.12	8.8	2.5	2.0	113.25	89.2	126.87
Godawaya	6.0	33.3	2.0	11.1	10.0	55.6	18.0

Source : Data of Phase 2 of the Survey

N.A. : Not available.

part of the year for want of water. Therefore, they engage in agricultural hired labour activities in villages in the vicinity and in chenas during such periods.

7.2 Ownership of other Assets

Ownership of such assets as farm machinery and stores/buildings cannot be taken as a correct yardstick to measure the living conditions of agricultural labour households, for the simple reason that they do not possess such items.

However, the position of the agricultural operators as regards these assets, particularly the farming tools, is reflected in table 7.2. Commonly available implements are such simple and traditional tools as sickles and mammoties which are even owned by the agricultural labourers. These help the labourers in their work in the fields of others too.

TABLE 7.2. OWNERSHIP OF VARIOUS AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS BY AGRICULTURAL OPERATORS

VILLAGE	AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENTS (TOTAL NUMBER OWNED BY OPERATORS)										
	1 Build- ings/ Stores	2 Mammo- ties	3 Sick- les	4 Harr- ows	5 Plou- ghs	6 See- ders	7 Weeders	8 Spra- yers	9 Water pumps	10 2 Wheel tractors	11 4 Wheel tractors
Kusumpokuna	2	150	194	44	60	-	2	9	-	3	3
Palliporuwa	22	51	N.A.	19	24	-	-	-	-	-	-
Yakkavita	14	84	217	24	47	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kirimetiyyawa	4	25	21	8	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Thirunelveli	2	180	-	-	-	-	-	10	-	-	-
Bolana	3	103	N.A.	2	9	-	2	6	-	4	2
Godawaya	-	42	13	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-

Source : Data gathered during Phase 4 of the Survey

N.A. : Not available.

TABLE 7.3. AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS OWNING CONSUMER DURABLES

VILLAGE	1. RADIOS				2. SEWING MACHINES				3. PETROMAX LAMPS			
	Agricultural Labour Households		Non-labour Households		Agricultural Labour Households		Non-labour Households		Agricultural Labour Households		Non-Labour Households	
	No.	% *	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kusumpokuna	8	27.6	62	59.6	4	13.8	38	36.5	4	13.8	46	44.2
Palliporuwa	6	18.8	24	68.6	4	12.5	22	62.9	2	6.3	22	62.9
Yakkavita	15	58.3	27	72.9	5	20.8	15	40.5	7	18.9	17	45.9
Kirimetiyawa	N.A.	-	N.A.	-	N.A.	-	N.A.	-	N.A.	-	N.A.	-
Thirunelveli	18	25.7	9	34.6	0	0	1	3.8	0	0	1	3.8
Malcompitty	1	25.0	1	25.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nainakaddu	0	0	4	57.1	0	0	1	14.3	0	0	3	42.9
Bolana	29	36.3	105	82.0	21	26.3	90	70.3	15	18.8	79	61.7
Godawayya	29	36.7	32	76.2	9	11.4	19	45.2	11	13.9	17	40.5

* % denotes the percentage of each type of households having each item.

Source: Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey.

N.A. : Not available

7.3 Ownership of Consumer Durables

Radios, sewing machines, pressure lamps, wall clocks, carts, bicycles, kerosene oil cookers etc., are some of the standard indices in terms of which living standards in rural areas are measured. A comparison is attempted here with the first three items since they are the consumer durables owned by most of the agricultural labour households (table 7.3.).

As shown in table 7.3, the non-labour households are obviously better off with regard to the ownership of consumer durables. In Nainakaddu village, none of the agricultural labour households has any of these items. In almost all the other villages a higher concentration of all such items is evident in non-labour households pinpointing the socially and economically depressed situation of the agricultural labour households.

7.4 Housing Conditions

The meagre income of the agricultural labour households does not allow them a sufficient investment to have a decent house. Comparatively, their places of dwelling are of a very low quality by any acceptable standard of housing. Conditions of houses can be discussed on the basis of (i) space available by way of rooms. (ii) quality of construction, (iii) the repairs needed and (iv) the availability of facilities (e.g. water, electricity, lavatories etc.,).

The possession of a three-roomed house¹ in the rural setting speaks of a fairly high living condition. Of the study villages, Kirimetiya, Thirunelveli and Malcompitty do not have even a single house containing more than three rooms. The small number of houses with three or more rooms in other villages too belong to the non-labour households. Except in Kirimetiya and Malcompitty, in all the other villages the proportion of agricultural labour households having

¹ Total number of rooms including the kitchen.

structures with only one room for dining, living and even cooking purposes is higher compared to that of non-labour households.

The non-labour houses at Kusumpokuna have 2 or more rooms, while the majority of those of Bolana has more than three rooms.

Houses with brick and cement walls, are believed to be indicative of relatively higher standard of living in the rural setting. In this regard, the agricultural labour-houses are poorer than the non-labour households. A considerable proportion of houses that belong to the agricultural labour households are structures with wattle and daub walls. In the villages of Palliporuwa, Thirunelveli, Nainakaddu, Bolana and Godawaya, the houses owned by this category have even their walls improvised with cadjan (see table 7.5.).

Almost in all the study villages excluding Kusumpokuna the agricultural labourers cannot afford to have for their houses tiled roofs, a sign of a better standard of living. A considerable number of these houses in Kirimetiyawa (100%) and Malcompitty (50%) are straw-thatched. Majority of houses of the labourers in other villages have cadjan roofs.

On the other hand, the majority of non-labour families in Kusumpokuna, Palliporuwa, Malcompitty and Bolana own houses with tiled roofs. But in Yakkavita, Nainakaddu, Thirunelveli and Godawaya their houses have roofs thatched with cadjan. This situation underlines the relatively lower standard of living for both agricultural labour and non-labour households in these villages.

On the whole, the number of non-labour households which own tile-roofed houses is relatively higher than that of agricultural labour households in most study villages. (see table 7.6.)

Table 7.7. shows the percentage of houses indicating the state of repairs, separately for agricultural labour households and non-labour households. Impecunious conditions of the agricultural labour

households have prevented them from spending on housing,¹ and except in case of Yakkavita and Palliporuwa, a large number of these houses has remained in a bad state of disrepair.

Contrary to this, the necessary repairs for the majority of houses of non-labour households (except in case of Kirimetiyawa, Thirunelveli and Godawaya where all the villagers are generally poor) have been effected at the time of our investigation.

Whether agricultural labour or non-labour, not a single house has pipe borne water supply. This is not surprising, given the remoteness of the villages from the major administrative cities. Godawaya represents a special case in this regard. The majority of the villagers there obtain drinking water from road water mains built and maintained by the Ambalantota Town Council. No ground wells are sunk in Godawaya due to ^{the} arid nature of the soil. In other villages, secured wells serve as a source of drinking water.

The majority of the agricultural labour and non-labour households of Thirunelveli obtain their drinking water from rivers, canals etc. However, the proportion of agricultural labour households obtaining drinking water from such sources is higher than that of non-labour households. The majority of agricultural labour households in Nainakaddu and Bolana also resort to such sources, which often cause health hazards.

All the agricultural labour households and non-labour households in Palliporuwa, Yakkavita and Nainakaddu obtain drinking water from wells, where wells can be easily sunk and the quality of water is also generally better than that in the arid areas such as Thirunelveli and Godawaya.

On the whole, the proportion of non-labour houses which obtain drinking water from wells is higher than or equal to that of agricultural labour households in all the study localities except in Godawaya (See Table 7.8.)

¹ See Section 7.5

TABLE 7.4.NO. OF HOUSES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO TOTAL NO.OF ROOMS

VILLAGE	TYPES OF HOUSEHOLDS AND TOTAL NO. OF ROOMS*															
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS								NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS							
	No. 1		%		No. 2		%		No. 3		%		More than 3		%	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kusumpokuna	2	6.9	12	41.4	11	37.9	4	13.8	-	-	29	27.9	51	49.0	24	23.1
Palliporuwa	3	9.4	11	34.4	13	40.6	5	15.6	3	8.6	4	11.4	9	25.7	19	54.3
Yakkavita	3	12.5	7	29.2	12	50.0	2	8.3	1	2.7	10	27.0	12	32.4	14	37.8
Kirimetiyawa	3	16.7	15	83.3	-	-	-	-	2	66.7	1	33.3	-	-	-	-
Thirunelveli	59	84.3	9	12.8	2	2.9	-	-	15	57.7	6	23.1	5	19.2	-	-
Malcompitty	-	-	4	100.0	-	-	-	-	1	25.0	-	-	3	75.0	-	-
Nainakaddu	17	77.3	5	22.7	-	-	-	-	3	42.9	-	-	3	42.9	1	14.2
Bolana	2	2.5	27	33.7	39	48.8	12	15.0	2	1.6	23	18.0	32	25.0	71	55.4
Godawayya	9	11.4	52	65.8	15	18.9	3	3.8	3	7.1	20	47.6	13	30.9	6	14.3

Source : Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey

* : The total number of rooms also include the kitchen

TABLE 7.5. NUMBER OF HOUSES BELONGING TO AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO MATERIALS USED IN WALL CONSTRUCTION

VILLAGE	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND MATERIALS USED											
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS						NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS					
	Brick and Cement		Wattle and Daub		Cadjan		Brick and Cement		Wattle and Daub		Cadjan	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kusumpokuna	21	72.4	8	27.6	-	-	97	93.2	7	6.7	-	-
Palliporuwa	10	31.3	21	65.6	1	3.1	26	74.3	9	25.7	-	-
Yakkavita	15	62.5	9	37.5	-	-	33	89.2	4	10.8	-	-
Kirimetiyyawa	-	-	18	100.0	-	-	-	-	3	100.0	-	-
Thirunelveli	4	5.8	63	91.3	2	2.9	8	32.0	16	64.0	1	4.0
Malcompitty	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-
Nainakaddu	2	9.5	16	76.2	3	14.3	3	42.9	3	42.9	1	14.2
Bolana	26	32.5	53	66.3	1	1.2	86	67.2	42	32.8	-	-
Godawaya	11	14.0	62	78.5	6	7.5	16	38.1	25	59.5	1	2.4

Source : Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey.

TABLE 7.6

NUMBER OF HOUSES OWNED BY AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO MATERIALS USED FOR ROOF CONSTRUCTION

VILLAGE	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND MATERIALS USED															
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS								NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS							
	Tiles		Asbestos		Cadjan		Straw		Tiles		Asbestos		Cadjan		Straw	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Kusumpokuna	21	72.4	-	-	8	27.6	-	-	93	89.4	4	3.8	7	6.7	-	-
Palliporuwa	14	43.8	1	3.1	16	50.0	1	3.1	27	77.1	2	5.7	5	14.3	1	2.8
Yakkavita	3	12.5	-	-	21	87.5	-	-	13	35.1	-	-	24	64.9	-	-
Kirimetiyawa	-	-	-	-	-	-	18	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	100.0
Thirunelveli	3	4.4	-	-	62	91.2	3	4.4	7	5.5	-	-	14	94.5	-	-
Malcompitty	-	-	1	25.0	1	25.0	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	-	1	25.0	4	25.0
Nainakaddu	1	4.8	-	-	20	95.2	-	-	3	42.9	-	-	4	57.1	-	-
Bolana	17	21.3	2	2.5	61	76.2	-	-	75	58.6	2	1.6	51	39.8	-	-
Godawaya	4	5.1	1	1.3	74	93.7	-	-	9	21.3	1	2.4	32	76.2	-	-

Source : Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey

TABLE 7.7. NUMBER OF HOUSES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS

ACCORDING TO THEIR STATE OF REPAIRS

	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND STATE OF REPAIRS											
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS						NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS					
	Satisfactory		Fair		Poor		Satisfactory		Fair		Poor	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Kusumpokuna	1	3.4	6	20.7	22	75.9	6	5.8	59	56.7	39	37.5
Palliporuwa	-	-	16	5.0	16	50.0	8	22.9	18	51.4	9	25.7
Yakkavita	1	4.2	17	70.8	6	25.0	14	37.8	18	48.6	5	13.5
Kirimetiyawa	-	-	1	5.6	17	94.4	-	-	1	33.3	2	66.7
Thirunelveli	1	1.4	12	17.1	57	81.5	3	11.5	10	38.5	13	50.0
Malcompitty	-	-	4	100.0	-	-	-	-	3	75.0	1	25.0
Nainakaddu	-	-	1	4.8	20	95.2	1	14.2	3	42.9	3	42.9
Bolana	3	3.8	32	40.0	45	56.2	41	32.0	56	43.8	31	24.3
Godawaya	1	1.3	13	16.5	65	82.3	3	7.1	18	42.8	21	50.0

Source : Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey

TABLE 7.8 NUMBER OF HOUSES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS
ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE OF OBTAINING DRINKING WATER.

TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND SOURCE OF OBTAINING DRINKING WATER												
AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS						NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS						
	Pipes*		Wells		Rivers, Canals and Tanks		Pipes*		Wells		Rivers, Canals and Tanks	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
86 Kusumpokuna	-	-	16	55.2	13	44.8	-	-	77	74.0	27	26.0
Palliporuwa	-	-	32	100.0	-	-	-	-	35	100.0	-	-
Yakkavita	-	-	24	100.0	-	-	-	-	37	100.0	-	-
Kirimetiyawa	-	-	10	55.6	8	44.4	-	-	2	66.7	1	33.3
Thirunelveli	-	-	4	5.9	64	94.1	-	-	6	26.1	17	73.9
Malcompitty	-	-	4	100.0	-	-	-	-	4	100.0	-	-
Nainakaddu	-	-	2	9.5	19	90.5	-	-	5	71.4	2	28.6
Bolana	-	-	16	20.0	64	80.0	-	-	76	59.4	52	40.6
Godawaya	72	91.1	1	1.3	6	7.6	39	92.8	-	-	3	7.1

* = This should not be treated as "pipeborne water inside the house". "Pipes" here mean the "piped tanks" along the main roadside, built by the Local Government Institution concerned.

Source = Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey.

TABLE 7.9 NUMBER OF HOUSES OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS

ACCORDING TO CONDITIONS OF LAVOTORIES

	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND CONDITIONS OF LAVOTORIES											
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS						NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS					
	Permanent structure		Temporary structure		No. structured lavatory		Permanent structure		Temporary structure		No. structured lavatory	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Kusumpokuna	7	24.1	15	51.7	7	24.1	38	36.5	59	56.7	7	6.7
Palliporuwa	2	6.3	29	90.6	1	3.1	25	71.4	10	28.6	-	-
Yakkavita	4	16.4	19	79.2	1	4.1	19	51.4	16	43.2	2	5.4
Kirimetiyawa	-	-	-	-	3	100.0	-	-	-	-	18	100.0
Thirunelveli	4	6.2	-	-	61	93.8	7	30.4	-	-	16	69.6
Malcompitty	-	-	-	-	4	100.0	-	-	-	-	4	100.0
Nainakaddu	-	-	-	-	21	100.0	2	28.6	-	-	5	71.4
Bolana	7	8.8	59	73.8	14	17.4	63	49.2	56	43.8	9	7.0
Godawaya	-	-	25	31.6	54	68.4	11	26.2	18	42.9	13	30.9

Agricultural labour households in Kirimetiyawa, Malcompitty and Nainakaddu have no permanent lavatories. The majority of these households in Kusumpokuna, Yakkavita and Bolana had temporary structures - often open pits surrounded with mud walls. The majority of the non-labour households in Kirimetiyawa, Thirunelveli, Malcompitty and Nainakaddu also has similar kind of toilet facilities.

However, comparatively, the non-labour households have a larger number of permanent - structured lavatories. (See table 7.9.)

Electricity is not available for any of the households in any of the study villages. Kerosene oil is mainly used for lighting lamps. Pressure lamps are regarded generally a high utility item. However, in all the study villages, only 39 of the agricultural labour households own pressure lamps.¹ More often cooking is done with firewood, and there were no instances where kerosene cookers were used. However, agricultural labour households are in a relatively more disadvantageous position in obtaining even kerosene oil and firewood since they have low incomes; and they can spend only a little share of their income on these items.²

7.5 *Income Position and Expenditure Pattern of Agricultural Labour Households*

7.5.1 *Income Position.*

The income data³ of agricultural labour households, collected during the phase 3 of the study through records maintained daily by the

¹ The number of non-labour households having pressure lamps is 189.

² See Section 7.5. Kerosene oil is now issued on free coupons to households with a monthly income of Rs. 300/- or below. Agricultural labour households are eligible for this. Firewood is mostly collected from surrounding jungle.

³ Data on expenditure pattern, debt position and savings were also gathered in the same way.

investigators stationed in each of the study villages relates to the Maha season 1978/79. However, the reference period varies from one village to another due to variations in the season and the problems in the organisation of our field work. Furthermore, two study villages - Malcompitty and Nainakaddu were not taken up in this exercise because of the damages wrought on the two villages by cyclone. The reference periods for income data pertaining to other seven villages are given below.¹

Village	No. of Labour Households in the Sample.	Time Period From - To	Number of Month & Days	
			Months	Days
Kusumpokuna	13	4/11/78-29/3/79	4	25
Palliporuwa	8	9/10/78-30/3/79	5	21
Yakkavita	5	8/10/78-24/2/79	4	16
Kirimetiyawa	12	2/11/78-29/3/79	4	27
Thirunelveli	23	4/11/78-01/3/79	3	27
Bolana Sample A	9	7/10/78-14/2/79	4	7
Sample B	9	7/10/78-07/3/79	5	0
Godawaya Sample A	8	9/10/78-06/1/79	2	28
Sample B	9	9/10/78-14/2/79	4	5
Total	96			

A limitation in the analysis of income data arises from the fact that the data covered only the Maha, the main cultivation season in which the employment of labour is generally higher than in the rest of the year. However, the monthly income calculated in this manner can be safely assumed as the maximum monthly average income that labour households can earn during the year.

Another limitation is that failure to measure the income levels of non-labour households for a corresponding period of time permitting comparisons. However, empirical evidence brought out by earlier

¹ Same applies to the analysis of expenditure patterns, debt and savings position too.

studies have shown that the agricultural labour households generally are the lowest income earners in the villages.

The incomes of the agricultural labour households were studied according to five sources, i.e. (i) wages from paddy cultivation, (ii) wages from highland work, (iii) wages from chena cultivation, (iv) wages from non-agricultural work, (v) other sources, eg., cultivation, petty trade, craftsmanship, government service etc. The first three categories are the major sources of the income of agricultural labour households. On the contrary, in some instances the last two sources may be more important because of the presence of a larger number of people engaged in such activities. It is worth recalling our definition of agricultural labour households here i.e., "the households which are having one or more members engaged in working as agricultural labourers".

In a socio-economic survey, the income data tends to be biased making a true assessment difficult. However, the daily wages earned from first 4 sources were recorded daily for the purpose of this study and hence, they can safely be regarded as fairly accurate. Interpretation of data on income from other sources, i.e., farming and trade, needs a little caution.

No attempt was made to compute the value of items produced and consumed by the family unit, eg., rice, coconut, etc., or subsidized consumer goods, eg., sugar, rice, flour etc. Imputed rent on owner-occupied houses was also not computed. Both cash and kind incomes obtained from the five sources are taken together to form "cash income" after converting "in kind" components also into cash values at current market prices.

1 See for example, Wickramasekara (1977) p.88

The estimated average monthly income (during Maha 1978/79) of the agricultural labour households is presented in Table 7.10. The average monthly income varied from Rs.296/- in Bolana to Rs.613/- in Yakkavita. This does not reflect the typical monthly income of the agricultural labour households since Maha season is generally a better period as far as work opportunities for labourers and harvest conditions for the farmers are concerned. This could therefore be treated as the maximum possible monthly cash income for these households.

Of the income derived from wage labour, the agricultural wages (including paddy and highland work) are the most important. Understandably, in all the villages except Thirunelveli, the wages from paddy cultivation dominate the income sources. In Thirunelveli, vegetable cultivation is the most prominent activity and wages from highland work are the most important.

Wage income from chena work is seen only in Kirimetiya and Bolana but it is less significant when compared with wages associated with the work related to paddy farming. This is mainly because of the fact that paddy cultivation was successful in these two areas during this particular Maha season (1978/79) and it has been the major source of employment for wage labour. However, in these two particular locations, the chena work as a source of income exceeds the significance of work related to other highland agricultural activities.

Wages from non-agricultural labour activities such as brick making, stone-quarrying, timber sawing etc., have been of particular importance in Palliporuwa and Godawaya. In fact it has exceeded even the significance of work related to paddy cultivation in Palliporuwa. In all the other villages, excluding Thirunelveli, wages from non-agricultural work exceed the wages from work related to highland agriculture.

Some earlier studies which dealt with the living standards of agricultural labour households have suggested that these households' average monthly income is below the so called "poverty line"¹ which the

¹ Wickramasekara (1977), Gunawardena (1979).

TABLE 7.10

AVERAGE MONTHLY INCOME OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO
SOURCES OF INCOME (MAHA 1978/79).

VILLAGE	INCOME ACCORDING TO SOURCES (AVERAGE PER HOUSEHOLD)											
	Wages from paddy cultivation work		Wages from highland work		Wages from chena work		Wages from non-agricultural work		Other Sources*		Total	
	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
Kusumpokuna	128.19	32.0	17.90	4.5	-	-	31.70	7.9	222.52	55.6	400.31	100.0
Palliporuwa	75.68	25.5	31.32	10.6	-	-	105.22	35.5	84.32	28.4	296.54	100.0
Yakkavita	125.00	20.4	7.72	1.3	-	-	104.51	17.1	375.68	61.2	612.91	100.0
Kirimetiyawa	113.35	30.3	2.55	0.7	44.32	11.8	21.79	5.8	192.70	51.4	374.71	100.0
Thirunelveli	33.33	5.9	461.61	82.5	-	-	1.41	0.3	63.29	11.3	559.64	100.0
Bolana	153.92	51.9	6.32	2.1	14.06	4.7	44.55	15.1	77.64	26.2	296.49	100.0
Godawaya	200.35	43.0	43.55	9.3	-	-	143.27	30.8	78.65	16.9	465.82	100.0

Source: Data gathered during the Phase 3 of Survey

* These include in general, the activities such as crop farming, livestock rearing, petty trade, craftsmanship, government service, etc.

government adopts as Rs.300/- per month.

But as argued by Wickramasekara (1977) and Gunawardena (1979), the demarcation of poverty line at this level is debatable considering the recent increases in costs of living. Again when viewed from the perspective that increasing incomes are outweighed by price increases in essential consumer items, it can strongly be argued that the real income of the agricultural labourers is below the poverty line.

7.5.2 Expenditure pattern

The monthly average expenditure of the sample agricultural labour households varied from about Rs.200/- in Bolana to about Rs.300/- in Palliporuwa (Table 7.11).

Food accounts for the highest monthly expenditure. In poorer villages such as Thirunelveli and Kirimetiya, the proportion on food is higher.

The consumer durables, entertainment, religious activities and functions, gold and jewellery etc., consume the next largest share of their income. However, it should be mentioned that religious activities absorbs a considerable portion of the expenses on this category. Many households did not spend any money on consumer durables during the survey period except a few in Yakkavita and Thrunelveli.

The next important items of expenditure are clothing, tobacco, betel and liquor. Many individual agricultural labourers have taken to liquor as a "refreshment after a day's hard work" and liquor amounts to a considerable proportion of the household income. The itemised proportions of expenditure on fuel, travelling, education, medicine and housing are lower than that on tobacco and liquor in most of the study villages.

It is quite natural that all the agricultural labour households in the reference areas have spent more on food and fuel. The other

basic needs such as clothing, medicine and education are not reported to have taken in much of the expenditure in the sample households during the reference period. It is also noted that no household in Yakkavita, Kirimetiya and Thirunelveli had spent on housing. In other villages too such expenditure is almost negligible.

The most important trend which emerges from the expenditure pattern of agricultural labour households is that only a very little is left of their income for housing and education, after meeting the needs of food, fuel, clothing, travelling, medicine etc. Tobacco, liquor, religious activities and social functions are also high priority items of expenditure for these households. This explains why they lag behind in educational attainments and why their places of dwelling are in a bad state of disrepair.

The general trend in similar surveys is the over-reporting of expenditure and the under-reporting of income. But in this particular survey, the reverse has occurred i.e., the monthly average expenditure in all the study villages except in case of Palliporuwa, is lower than the monthly average income. However, even after making due allowances for monthly average borrowings, repayments and savings by the agricultural labour households, the income is still higher. (See Table 7.12) This could be attributed to the under reporting of savings and the over-reporting of borrowings by the respondents. In some villages, none of the sample households reported savings during the reference period. In the case of Palliporuwa, under-reporting of income and over-reporting of expenditure is apparent and none of the sample households reported any savings.

The sample respondents have under-reported the savings by the amounts given in column 5 of table 7.12.

TABLE 7.11

EXPENDITURE PATTERN OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS:
(Monthly Average Expenditure Per Household)

VILLAGE	Monthly Average Expenditure (Total on all items) (Rs.)	1. Proportion spent on various items 2. Percentage of agricultural labour households reporting expenditure on each item.																	
		Food		Clothing		Housing		Medicine		Education		Travelling		Fuel (Mainly Kerosene Oil)		Tobacco & liquor		Other *	
		1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2		
Kusum-pokuna	292.27	53.9	100.0	8.7	34.6	4.0	38.5	2.3	92.3	2.6	92.3	1.9	84.6	2.8	100.0	6.7	45.2	17.1	38.5
Palli-poruwa	394.73	58.0	100.0	9.4	100.0	1.7	25.0	2.2	50.0	1.4	75.0	4.2	100.0	1.7	100.0	5.7	50.0	15.7	58.3
Yakka-vita	329.58	39.1	100.0	6.5	100.0	0	0	3.6	100.0	2.3	60.0	5.7	100.0	2.0	100.0	9.0	50.0	31.8	33.3
Kirime-tiyawa	399.61	72.5	100.0	5.7	100.0	0	0	0.9	83.3	0.2	25.0	1.3	91.7	1.6	100.0	3.9	29.2	13.9	33.3
Thirun-veli	385.77	80.2	100.0	2.8	73.9	0	0	2.5	60.9	3.5	39.1	0.6	34.8	3.9	100.0	1.3	23.9	5.2	43.5
Bolana	209.29	62.6	100.0	5.5	88.9	0.3	11.1	4.0	88.9	2.9	83.3	4.0	100.0	3.1	100.0	4.6	30.6	13.0	46.3
Goda-waya	316.07	57.0	100.0	5.5	81.9	4.8	17.6	2.9	88.9	2.4	71.6	3.3	100.0	3.5	100.0	7.7	45.9	12.9	49.5

* Other category includes expenditure on consumer durables, entertainment, religious activities, functions such as weddings, ceremonies, funerals, etc., gold and jewellery etc.

Source : Data gathered during Phase 3 of the Survey.

TABLE 7.12

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GROSS MONTHLY AVERAGE INCOME AND EXPENDITURE OF
AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS (AVERAGE PER HOUSEHOLD)

	1	2	3	4	5
	Gross Income (Direct Income + borrowings) (Rs.)	Gross Expenditure (Direct expendi- ture + repayments of loans (Rs.)	Average monthly probable savings (Rs.) (1-2)	Average monthly reported savings (Rs.)	Difference between reported and probable savings (Rs.) (4-3)
Kusumpokuna	695.16	572.71	+ 122.45	100.34	- 22.11
Palliporuwa	399.24	431.00	-	-	-
Yakkavita	614.00	427.74	+ 186.26	46.76	- 139.50
Kirimetiyawa	544.68	539.11	+ 5.57	0	- 5.57
Thirunelveli	636.54	400.77	+ 235.77	53.40	- 182.37
Bolana	331.82	267.35	+ 74.47	0	- 74.47
Godawaya	562.41	354.13	+ 208.28	0	- 208.28

Source : Calculated on the basis of data gathered during Phase 3 of the Survey

7.6 Deb. Position

Although the income-expenditure patterns of agricultural labour households except in Palliporuwa, do not point to the necessity to borrow money, there were instances where households have resorted to borrowing during the period under review. This is mainly in order to bridge the gaps in income-deficit months.

The monthly average borrowings of the agricultural labour households are analysed on the basis of the sources, which are classified into five groups. (See table 7.13). The significance of each source varies from village to village. Friends and relatives formed the major source of borrowings for those in Palliporuwa, Yakkavita, Thirunelveli and Godawaya. These loans were often interest free and without specific repayment periods. In Kusumpokuna it was the Banks. Landlords were the major source of borrowing in Bolana. In all the other study villages, none of the households had borrowed from Banks. Professional money lenders and traders had also played a vital role in lending to these households, except in Bolana.

The average monthly borrowings per household varied from Rs.35/- in Bolana to Rs.295/- in Kusumpokuna. Loans are both in cash and in kind, but for the purpose of analysis both are considered only in money terms. The cash component of the loans were larger than the kind component in all the study villages. However, loans in kind were mostly provided by the traders.

The borrowings of the agricultural labour households are also analysed according to the purpose for which loans were utilised. (Table 7.14). Food and clothing form the most important purpose in all the study villages, except Kusumpokuna and Palliporuwa. In the latter two villages, loans are mainly for cultivation. In Kusumpokuna Banks are the major source which further confirms cultivation as the purpose for which the loans were utilised. In Bolana also, this feature is present where landlords provide most of the inputs (to the tenants) on credit basis.

TABLE 7.13

MONTHLY AVERAGE BORROWINGS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS ACCORDING TO SOURCES

SOURCE OF BORROWINGS	VILLAGES AND MONTHLY AVERAGE BORROWINGS PER HOUSEHOLD													
	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiya		Thirunelveli		Bolana		Godawaya	
	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
Friends and Relatives	58.06	19.7	55.26	53.8	67.06	61.5	0	0	41.83	54.4	14.02	39.7	51.24	53.0
Landlords	9.69	3.3	6.14	5.9	0	0	0	0	0	0	21.31	60.3	24.00	24.8
Professional money lenders	26.07	8.8	29.83	29.0	0	0	57.14	33.6	24.36	31.7	0	0	6.11	6.3
Traders	39.66	13.5	11.47	11.3	41.91	38.5	112.83	66.4	10.71	13.9	0	0	15.24	15.9
Banks	161.37	54.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	294.85	100.0	102.70	100.0	108.97	100.0	169.97	100.0	76.90	100.0	35.33	100.0	96.59	100.0

Source : Data gathered during Phase 3 of the Survey.

Table 7.14 MONTHLY AVERAGE BORROWINGS OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS
ACCORDING TO PURPOSE OF USE

PURPOSES FOR WHICH LOANS WERE UTILISED	VILLAGES AND MONTHLY AVERAGE BORROWINGS PER HOUSEHOLD													
	Kusumpokuna		Palliporuwa		Yakkavita		Kirimetiyawa		Thirunelveli		Bolana		Godawaya	
	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%	Rs.	%
Food and clothing	85.21	28.9	6.78	6.6	65.06	59.7	88.38	52.0	22.76	29.6	16.43	46.5	66.74	69.1
Education and Health	7.67	2.6	7.81	7.6	4.36	4.0	1.87	1.1	17.61	22.9	3.78	10.7	29.85	30.9
Consumer Durables	0	0	0	0	13.29	12.2	0	0	17.76	23.1	0	0	0	0
Housing	41.28	14.0	15.51	51.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Functions & Religious activities	23.29	7.9	15.30	14.9	8.06	7.4	8.33	4.9	14.46	18.8	0	0	0	0
Debt Redemption	34.20	11.6	4.93	4.8	0	0	25.84	15.2	4.31	5.6	0	0	0	0
Cultivation	103.20	35.0	52.37	51.0	18.20	16.7	45.55	26.8	0	0	15.12	42.8	0	0
Total	294.85	100.0	102.70	100.0	108.97	100.0	169.97	100.0	76.90	100.0	35.33	100.0	96.59	100.0

Source : Data gathered during Phase 3 of the Survey

The labour households in Yakkavita and Thirunelveli have utilised the loans only to buy consumer durables, and in Kusumpokuna and Palliporuwa, house repairs have been done on loans.

A fairly good-proportion of the loans are also utilised for debt redemption, social functions and religious activities in all the villages leaving out Bolana and Godawaya.

7.7 Savings

Although, the monthly average income and expenditure figures show some chance for savings, the income-deficit situations do not allow any saving. Even the little savings if any are sooner or later used for immediate purposes such as food, medicine, etc. Often such savings are in the form of cash at home, with the exception of one household in Yakkavita which had Rs.62/- at the Post Office Savings Bank.

Even the savings at home were reported only by 5 agricultural labour households in Kusumpokuna, 2 in Yakkavita and 2 in Thirunelveli. The monthly average reported savings varied from Rs.47/- in Yakkavita to Rs.100/- in Kusumpokuna.

However, during the months they have to spend over their income even these savings are inadequate and the households are compelled to resort to borrowings.

7.8 Educational Level

Educational attainments of the agricultural labourers partly explain why they resort to work as labourers whose work demands no formal education. Low incomes precludes them from pursuing learning for a career and even to get into a minor employees' grade in the government service, it would become necessary to go beyond at least the senior secondary education. However, as shown in table 7.15, only about

TABLE 7.15 CLASSIFICATION OF POPULATION AGED 10 AND ABOVE OF AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS AND NON-LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS, ACCORDING TO LEVEL OF EDUCATION

VILLAGES	TYPE OF HOUSEHOLDS AND EDUCATIONAL LEVELS																			
	AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS										NON - LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS									
	No Schooling		Up to Grade 5		Grade 6 to GCE (O.L)		Passed GCE (O.L) & Higher		Technical and Professional		No Schooling		Up to Grade 5		Grade 6 to GCE (O.L)		Passed GCE (O.L) & Higher		Technical and Professional	
No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	
Kusumpokuna	31	17.1	87	48.1	59	32.6	3	1.7	1	0.6	43	8.2	233	44.5	241	46.0	7	1.3	0	0
Palliporuwa	23	13.6	65	38.5	72	42.6	9	5.3	0	0	18	8.8	53	25.8	92	44.9	36	17.6	6	2.9
Yakkavita	8	6.3	42	32.8	69	53.9	8	6.3	1	0.8	14	9.1	39	25.3	62	40.3	39	25.3	0	0
Kirimetiya	21	30.4	48	69.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	16.7	15	83.3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Thirunelveli	66	17.3	215	58.1	83	22.4	6	2.2	0	0	23	21.1	40	36.7	34	31.2	11	10.1	1	0.9
Malcompiatty	3	13.0	14	60.9	6	26.1	0	0	0	0	1	5.0	14	70.0	5	25.0	0	0	0	0
Nainakaddu	45	47.9	44	46.8	0	0	5	5.3	0	0	15	20.8	36	50.0	21	29.2	0	0	0	0
Bolana	94	21.6	203	46.7	124	28.5	12	2.8	2	0.4	75	12.1	149	24.0	273	44.0	115	18.5	9	1.4
Godawaya	91	27.3	167	50.1	71	21.3	4	1.2	0	0	21	13.8	54	35.5	56	36.8	21	13.8	0	0

Source: Data gathered during Phase 2 of the Survey.

25% of the members of agricultural labour households in the 9 villages has passed the G.C.E. (O.L) and pursued further education. None of the members of such households in Kirimetiya and Malcompitty had attained similar qualifications.

It is our observation that most of the children of agricultural labour households drop out from schools by the time they attain their 10th year of age for various reasons. Even in education the non-labour households are better off. For example, the percentage of those who have had no formal education whatsoever is higher among the agricultural labour households, except in Yakkavita. The majority of the members of agricultural labour households has had only primary education, again except in the case of Yakkavita. It is noticeable that none of the members in either category of households in Kirimetiya has had secondary or higher education.

229 (87%) members in non-labour households in the 9 villages have passed G.C.E. (O.L) and pursued higher education as against 47 (25%) in agricultural labour households. This shows that the non-labour households are better placed in securing jobs of "higher status".

Many children in agricultural labour households end their formal education after a few years in primary grades. Therefore, they have a low mobility as far as job opportunities are concerned. Some of the major reasons for this situation are : (i) low economic status of the family which allows very little money to be spent on children's education, (ii) need of child labour to supplement the household income, and (iii) the need for help in household work such as cooking, looking after young members while parents are away, etc.

7.9 Health and Nutrition

Expenditure data showed that the agricultural labour households spend a very low proportion of their income on medicine. (See table 7.11). Free medical facilities provided by the government hospitals and dispensaries are a real concession to them. The Government Medical Institutions are often located far away from the study villages

and in case of emergencies the villagers are at the mercy of the private medical practitioners, in their villages. The expenditure on medicine indicates the fees paid to them.

However, the labourers are often exposed to diseases because of the environment in which they work; sun and rain hold no bar for them. Days not worked by the labourers due to ill-health highlight this situation further (See table 6.5).

It was observed during the survey that many children of the agricultural labour households are not properly and adequately fed. Malnutrition is a possibility though it has not taken alarming dimensions. These households do not get a nutritionally balanced diet; and even the cheap and readily available nutritious food items^{are} overlooked for want of awareness of the nutritional value of such food items.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP

8.1 Introduction

Many cultivators become hired agricultural labourers compelled by sheer economic needs and social pressure. Lack of adequate self employment forces many landless villagers and near landless cultivators to work as tenants and hired labourers. In the case of labourers, we can call the process "voluntary servitude".¹

In understanding the socio-political and cultural aspects of the relations between the employers and the hired agricultural labourers, in this chapter we employ patron-client relations model and the relationships can be studied in several ways. Labour recruitment schemes adopted by the land operators and the nature of contracts throw some light on these relationships. As discussed in Chapter 5, the recruitment procedures and contracts are informal and casual, with personal attachments and employer - employee preferences playing a wider role.

8.2 Hired Labourers' Attitudes towards their Employers

Generally the labourers prefer to work for some of their relatives and friends. For example, many labourers in Hambantota stated that seasonally they were offered work by their friends. A labourer skilled in a particular job like transplanting is in higher demand. A voluntary attachment to one particular employer or to a particular place is emphasized in several occasions. Labourers who work for managers of coconut estates and operators of large paddy extents in the villages adjacent to Godawaya, can be cited as an example. In Godawaya, the agricultural labourers depend on three key patrons to obtain help

¹ Breman (1974) p. 12

other than work, eg., loans, political contacts etc. These patrons are the Grama Sevaka, the ex-Village Headman and the ex-Manager of a coconut estate in the village.

Labourers who work in their villages or in nearby villages normally prefer to work for relatively small farmers. In such cases, the negotiations are easier and the labourers too are treated better. Four or five Kurunies of paddy¹ after the harvest is a bonus that the labourers can hope to get. This never happens where they work for rich landlords.

In Hambantota, the general feeling of the labourers towards their masters is somewhat ambiguous. They feel that they are being exploited. One labourer in Bolana illustrated this as follows: "Landlords here do not desire the well-being of the labourers. They do not want the labourers to do better than they are, for the simple reason that the landlords want a labour gang to work their lands. Any attempt on the part of the labourers to improve their lot is met with strong resistance by the land lords." A case in point was the proposed alienation of the Pollierwatta in Ridiyagama among the landless. This did not happen because a minor village official intervened and saw to it that the land was alienated to the outsiders, so that the status quo in the village remained undisturbed.²

It is observed that the seasonal migrant labourers are better-off in getting credit from their employers. This is due to the fact that they go to their employers to borrow money only when they need a fairly large sum. The credit binds the labourer with an obligation to work for the creditor, and in this way the employer is assured of the services

¹ About half a bushel of paddy

² The house of the Oppisara Mahathmaya (a minor village official) was on the side of the path which leads to the paddy field. He had apparently said to the officials who visited the lands, "do not give lands to those landless. If land is given, they will cultivate those lands and the harvest will be transported with the help of carts from the field. Normally, that will happen in the night. Then how can I sleep?" The conversation is still remembered by some old villagers of Bolana-Ridiyagama.

of the labourer. Normally, the employer does not charge any formal interest, but the labourer is indirectly compelled to work for the employer.

8.3 Employers' Attitudes Towards Hired Labourers

Some employers in Hambantota feel that it is profitable to employ village labour because of the inexpensive nature. Those who come from outside have to be provided with lodging, morning tea, breakfast and at times beedies and betel too. In case of illness they have to be looked after. Since they are invitees, whether they work or not they have to be fed. In addition, the employer is often expected to give some bonus in the region of Rs.10/- to Rs.15/- to each of his employee at the end of the harvest. Sometimes, he has to incur the travelling expenses of the labourers. Above all, most of the invited labourers are from his native village and they are often his relatives among whom he has to safeguard his image. This is, however, not to deny that some employers would be compelled to employ outside labourers. In Polonnaruwa, for example, seasonal migrant labour is an indispensable condition in view of the tight cultivation calendar which is planned-out with the irrigation water issues in mind. Since the homesteads are situated away from the paddy fields and the labour gangs are quite often large, the employers cannot accommodate all the labourers at their homes. Instead, huts are made close to the fields. Food stuff, cooking facilities, separate rooms for women and toilet facilities etc; are provided.

In the villages where the employers do not make a distinction between their relatives and others in recruiting labourers, they are faced with certain problems. In Hambantota, several farmers who recruited such non-relatives as labourers encountered supervisory problems. Some of these labourers threatened to leave their employers in the middle of the operations and demanded equal rates of wages irrespective of their abilities, skills and age. This bargaining atmosphere is not there when an employer recruits his relatives as labourers.

8.4 Vertical Dependency Vs. Horizontal Alliances

The kinds of relations that exist between landlords and their labourers are still to some extent personal and continue to involve obligations of mutual help. They still have a kind of moral obligation towards each other which characterises the patron-client relationships. As we saw earlier, there is a range of values surrounding the labour-master relationships which we loosely called patronage. But that value frame does not explain why such relationships exist. Although there are exploitative elements, the clients show respect and a sense of trust towards their patrons and have shown this feeling in several ways.

The patron-client type of relations disappear mainly because of the uneven distribution of land and the commercialisation of agriculture, especially in paddy production. It has become necessary with the adoption of new technology and seed varieties to complete some activities in time. This compels operators of paddy fields to develop a rather individualistic life style with more depersonalised relations with the workers. On the other hand the agricultural wage labourers cannot effectively influence the landlords over the wages unless there is a great hurry to finish some urgent work in the field. The poor economic status and the low level of education of the labourers place them in a disadvantageous position. Nor can they organise any group effort because of the presence of many "hungry" workers who are willing to work at the going wage rate.

However, there is now evidence of horizontal alliances among certain rural occupational groups. For example, at Godawaya, there is a Society of Quarrymen. They meet and discuss their problems as a group, and attempt to influence their employers. There is a Paddy Measurers Association at Ambalantota. It is rather a professional association. To become a member one has to pay Rs.100/- as membership fees. Then he will be accepted as a qualified measurer of paddy in any store.

Recently, a youth group of the United National Party in Ambalantota has attempted to obtain some lands for chena cultivation and has sent petitions to the authorities concerned. Hariss reports of a "Labourers and Tenants Association" in Hambantota. "Of great significance than all these legal and administrative developments, and the rhetoric of national politicians, is evidence of a degree of consciousness of their common interests among the poorer cultivators. An agricultural labourers' and tenants' union has recently been formed by a group of young men who have achieved large public meetings in favour of a slow and careful building up of a network of activities, and who have been careful to avoid infiltration by Gambarayas (unlike another union set up recently in the same area which works through large public meetings and is represented in localities by the former cultivation officers). The Union has already had some success in protecting tenant farmers."¹

¹ Hariss (1977)p. 251

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS

GENERAL

A typical characteristic in many South and South-east Asian countries is the development of a dual economy with the penetration of the capitalist agriculture introduced by the colonial powers. A classic example is Sri Lanka, where two parallel economies, i.e., (a) export oriented estate sector and (b) the traditional peasant agricultural sector can be identified. This study is preoccupied with the socio-economic conditions of the hired agricultural labourers in the peasant sector of Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, at least 40% of the rural households are agricultural wage earners whose income is well below the poverty line. However, there is a dearth of empirical evidence about the socio-economic conditions of this group, despite enquiries dealing with other aspects such as seasonal migration, wages etc. It is the consensus of those earlier studies that various legal and institutional measures of successive governments since 1948 to improve the welfare of the rural masses have hardly had an impact on this class, which is often attributed to the difficulty in identifying them as a distinct class in the rural employment setting. The rural wage earners are in the lowest stratum of the village hierarchy and therefore are not benefitted by the state welfare measures or institutional reforms which are administered by those in higher strata. This study began in 1977 with a view to (a) ascertaining the origin of the class of agricultural hired labourers, (b) measuring the size of its population and, (c) evaluating their socio-economic conditions. For the study, four major labour situations were identified. They are (a) an area with a high labour demand, which is met by migrant labourers, (b) an area with a demand for hired labour which is fulfilled within the area itself, (c) an area with a high labour

surplus and (d) an area where there are opportunities for non-agricultural employment. Polonnaruwa, Kegalle, Kurunegala, Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Ampara and Hambantota districts formed the study locale.

EVOLUTION OF HIRED LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE

One of the theoretical arguments observed in the review of literature on the origin of hired agricultural labourers and their continuity as a disadvantaged class is the view that the hired agricultural labourers form an integral part of the agricultural scene - as an input in the paddy cultivation. This thinking has crept into the planning of the agricultural development policies in the post-independent Sri Lanka. A recent example is the Mahaweli Development Project. Their existence is an outcome of land policies of pre-independent and post independent governments. The colonial land policies clearly discriminated against the small peasants inclusive of the landless. The desire of the Crown to promote large scale farming had its adverse effects on the small farmer. These policies contributed to the emergence of a sizeable group of landless or near landless peasants who have no other alternative but to sell their labour to survive.

The Waste Land Ordinance of 1940 and its subsequent provisions and opening up of large dry zone settlements after 1920 set in motion the process of the capitalisation of agriculture leading to large scale farming, requiring the services of wage labourers. For example, Abeygunawardena (1979) states that " a large seasonal labour input is required (for the Mahaweli Project) for intensive cultivation of crops such as tobacco, vegetables, chillies, onions, cotton and paddy etc." This recognition of the role of hired labour in agriculture has not been supplemented with at least, regulations pertaining to their wages, working hours and general well-being etc.

OCCUPATIONAL PATTERN IN THE STUDY VILLAGES

The villages studied were Kusumpokuna in the Polonnaruwa district, Palliporuwa in the Kegalle district, Yakkavita in the Kurunegala district, Kirimetiya in the Anuradhapura district, Thirunelveli in the Jaffna district, Nainakaddu and Malcompitty in the Ampara district and Godawaya and Bolana in the Hamabantota district. The entire study area has an agriculture based economy. Cultivation of paddy and other subsidiary food crops is the major economic activity in the villages. Five broad groups can be identified within the agricultural occupational structure. These are (i) owner cultivators, (ii) tenant cultivators, (iii) encroacher cultivations (iv) part-time agricultural labourers and (v) full-time agricultural labourers. Full-time hired labour is at its highest in Thirunelveli, followed by Godawaya and Bolana. When both full-time and part-time labourers are taken together, they constitute more than 50 percent of all engaged in agricultural occupations in all the villages except in Yakkavita, Kirimetiya and Malcompitty. Non-agricultural occupations in the study villages are (i) self-employment in non-agriculture, (ii) white-collar jobs, (iii) trade and commerce, (iv) skilled jobs and (v) non-agricultural labour.

AGRARIAN STRUCTURE

The agrarian structure of the study villages consists of farmers (operators) and agricultural labourers. However, identifying distinct classes even on the basis of occupation is difficult due to interrelations between the groups. Landownership, defined as operational ownership, and access to agricultural land serve as more realistic criteria than the occupation in identifying classes in the agrarian sector. However, at the household level, even this is not a perfect yardstick because a single household could have both large farmers and agricultural labourers as its members. Thus, it can be said that rather than distinct classes, interrelated socio-economic groups are found in the agrarian societies in Sri Lanka.

TYPES OF HIRED LABOUR

The hired labourers in the peasant agriculture mostly work on a casual basis, both full-time and part-time. Full-time labourers are often landless and mainly depend on agricultural wages for their income. Part-time labourers are mostly those farmers who cultivate minute land holdings. Non-agricultural labourers too come under this group. They work as labourers in agriculture during peak agricultural activity periods to earn an additional income. Adult males and females as well as children work as agricultural labourers, females usually specializing in planting, weeding and harvesting. However, this varies from region to region.

SEASONAL MIGRATION

Some labourers migrate from the wet zone to the dry zone seasonally. Differences between cultivation seasons, wage differences, productivity differences and demand and supply situation of labour in the two zones condition such movements. Efficiency, intermediaries preference, kinship ties and so on are the factors that govern the recruitment procedures for migrant labour. The majority of seasonal migrators belongs to young and unmarried groups. When they get married or become old, they prefer to migrate permanently to the dry zone, if they are given land under colonisation schemes.

RECRUITMENT PROCEDURES AND CONDITIONS OF WORK

The casual agricultural hired labourers are recruited on (i) days' work basis and / or (ii) piece-work basis, former being the widely adopted practice. Direct recruitment by the employers, recruitment through an intermediary and the contract basis are the prevailing modes of recruitment. Generally, a hired labourer has to work about 7½ hours in the field, excluding the time for meals, tea breaks and rest. They have to work longer than their counterparts in the urban and estate sectors.

Activities such as transplanting, harvesting and threshing of paddy keep the labourers occupied for a longer period in a day for which they are given incentives. The hired labourers in paddy fields are generally provided with meals, refreshments, tobacco, etc., in addition to daily wages. However, female labourers in most of the areas do not get such fringe benefits.

DEMAND FOR HIRED LABOUR

The demand for hired labour stems from the diminishing importance of exchange labour (attam) and the inadequacy of family labour, especially for peak agricultural activities. Seasonality of cultivation makes the demand too seasonal. The major labour demanding season is Maha, which usually extends from September to April. However, between the time of planting and the time of harvesting the demand falls considerably. The spread of New High Yielding Varieties of paddy (NHVY) has increased the demand for hired labour in the dry zone areas. Demand for female labour has increased for activities such as transplanting and harvesting of paddy. However, the demand for male labour has decreased in all areas due to the mechanisation of land preparation, threshing and winnowing. The use of weedicides has also replaced the human labour.

SUPPLY OF HIRED LABOUR

The measurement of the supply of labour in agriculture is made difficult by the presence of different categories, i.e., landless labourers and marginal farmers who may withdraw from and enter into the hired labour force from time to time. The supply of hired agricultural labour will depend on the individual's consent and the need to work as hired labourers. The consent and the need are conditioned by (i) the degree of landlessness, (ii) the need for supplementary income for subsistence, and (iii) the socio-economic status of the household.

The majority of full-time hired agricultural labourers come from landless category. A variety of reasons have given rise to landlessness, i.e.

(i) the fragmentation of inherited land, (ii) the sale or mortgage of land to repay debts, (iii) manoeuvrings of the landed class to prevent the poor from acquiring agricultural land, and (iv) the eviction of tenants and encroachers. Landless people join the ranks of agricultural labourers for they find it difficult to get other jobs, having no acquired learning, skills or capital.

WAGES

Wages paid to the hired agricultural labourers vary from one area to another depending on the factors influencing the supply of and demand for labour in each locality. The wage differences depend on (i) regional differences in labour demand and supply, (ii) sex-age differences, (iii) efficiency considerations, (iv) patron-client relationships, (v) degree of mobility of the labourers, and (vi) different types of operations. The average daily cash wages with meals for males were Rs.8/- - Rs.10/-, while the same for females were Rs.7/- - Rs.8/- in the dry zone villages, and Rs.7/- for males and Rs.5/- for females in the wet zone villages. Of course, there are variations for different types of work. Wages are higher for land preparation, application of fertilizer, and agro-chemicals, reaping, threshing and winnowing of paddy. On the other hand, wages are lower for transplanting/planting, weeding, and stacking of paddy, which are mostly done by females. In any activity, females are generally paid lower.

If meals are not provided, a sum of about Rs.1/50 - Rs.3/00 is added to the daily wage. This does not represent the actual cost of food and vituals. Provision of meals brings greater advantages to the employers than to the labourers by saving time and fostering goodwill between the labourers and the employers. Females are not provided with any meals in some localities when they are engaged in transplanting and reaping of paddy.

In the absence of collective and organised bargaining, the hired labourers do not reap the full benefits of increasing agricultural product prices. Though slight increases in wages have occurred following the increases in the guaranteed price of paddy, even these increases are outweighed by rising cost of living. The real value of wages has also gone down since most employers now do not like to pay wages in kind, i.e., from a part of the harvest. For the employer it is more advantageous to pay in cash.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF HIRED AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS

Except in Yakkavita, the highest percentage of the labourers found employment in agricultural work, mainly in paddy cultivation. The predominant activity in Thirunelveli is the cultivation of vegetables and other subsidiary food crops. A considerable number of labourers had found employment in chena cultivation in Kirimetiyawa, Bolana and Godawaya. Non-agricultural work such as brick-making, timber sawing and stone-quarrying et . . . provide employment for a relatively small percentage of labourers in Palliporuwa, Yakkavita and Godawaya. As expected, the employment data reveal the fact that males have been engaged in almost all types of employment available while females have concentrated more on transplanting, weeding and harvesting. However, females have also equally participated in certain non-agricultural work such as brick-making and stone-quarrying in Godawaya.

The number of days on which the employment records were kept varied from 100 in Kirimetiyawa to 166 in Palliporuwa. The average number of days worked by both males and females varied from 38 (33%) in Yakkavita to 90 (81%) in Thirunelveli. There is no marked difference between the days worked by males and females. However, the number of females in the samples was very small compared to that of males. The labourers have, in general, found employment on a greater number of days in localities where labour intensive farming is practiced e.g., Thirunelveli, Palliporuwa and Kirimetiyawa. Conversely, where mechanised farming is more popular,

the labourers have worked for a smaller number of days i.e., Kusumpokuna and Bolana. Exceptionally, labourers have worked longer periods in localities where non-agricultural employment opportunities exist. Godawaya and Yakkavita are examples.

On average, 74 percent of the sample labourers were without any sort of work during the record-keeping period. This varied from 62 percent in Kirimetiya to 86 percent in Godawaya. This however, cannot be treated as a perfect indicator of open unemployment since the data does not cover the pre and post-record keeping periods.

The more apparent feature is underemployment or seasonal unemployment. About 55 percent of the record-keeping days in all sample villages had been reported as non-working days, the figure varying from 15 percent in Thrunelveli to 67 percent in Yakkavita. The highest percentage (64%) of non-working days has been attributed to non-availability of work and to bad weather, though the labourers were actually seeking work. This represents the degree of involuntary underemployment. Where part-time farmers who are also labourers are present, e.g, in Kusumpokuna, Yakkavita and Bolana own account work has been an important contributory factor towards not hiring out labour on certain days. Other important reasons for not hiring out labour on certain days, in order of significance, are bad health conditions of the labourers or of their family members, social functions of the labour households or of the neighbours, and rest days.

Seasonal nature of most agricultural activities contribute to involuntary underemployment of the labourers. As far as Maha cultivation season is concerned, the peak activity months are September, October and February. November, December and January cover the lean period. Where highland work or non-agricultural employment opportunities are lacking, the labourers have to remain unemployed during the lean period.

LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE AGRICULTURAL LABOUR HOUSEHOLDS

(i) Ownership of land

When compared with non-labour households, the agricultural labour households own lesser extents of land in total. The majority of the agricultural/^{labour}households owned only their dwellings and home gardens which were mostly below $\frac{1}{2}$ acre in extent. The home gardens are also often uncultivable.

(ii) Ownership of other assets

Almost all the agricultural labour households do not possess assets such as building, farm machinery etc. Also, many average farmers/operators cannot afford to own such items. Most commonly owned agricultural implements, both by the operators and by the labourers, were the sickles and mammoties.

(iii) Ownership of consumer durables

Non-labour households are obviously better-off than the agricultural labour households as far as the ownership of consumer durables such as radios, sewing machines, pressure lamps etc., is concerned.

(iv) Housing Conditions

Poor housing conditions of the agricultural labour households result from their inability to make even a minimum investment on improvement of housing. Compared to non-labour households the dwelling places owned by the agricultural labourers cannot be taken as decent by any standard. Measured in terms of the number of rooms, brick and cement walls and tiled roofs which are generally taken as standard housing indices, the agricultural labour households fall far below the non-labour households. On the contrary, wattle and daub walls, cadjan roofs, congested rooms and even walls improvised with cadjan are common features that characterise the dwelling places of agricultural labourers.

In all the study villages, except in Godawaya, secured wells serve as a source of drinking water. None of the households, whether agricultural labour or non-labour, had pipe-borne water supply. Godawaya people obtain drinking water from the main pipe-lines maintained by the Ambalantota Town Council. More agricultural labour households obtaining drinking water from rivers and canals in Thirunelveli, Nainakadu and Bolana.

The majority of agricultural labour households had temporary structured lavatories with open pits surrounded with mud walls. The non-labour houses had a higher percentage of permanently structured lavatories.

Electricity is not available to any of the households in study localities. Thus, the main sources of power for lighting and cooking are kerosene oil and firewood respectively. Not a single kerosene oil cooker was reported in the study villages. Pressure lamps were also available to only 39 of the agricultural labour houses as against 185 of non-labour houses.

(v) *Income position*

The average monthly income varies from Rs.296/- in Bolana to Rs.613/- in Yakkavita. When one considers the increases in cost of living the real value of the income figures comes down to very low levels. Thus, it may be argued that the agricultural labour households live well below the poverty line which has been defined as Rs.300/- or below per month. Understandably, the agricultural wages are the most important among the wage-income earned by the agricultural labour households. Wages from non-agricultural activities have also been of importance, particularly in Palliporuwa and Godawaya. Income from farming etc., exceeds the importance of wage-income of the agricultural labour households in Kucumpokuna, Yakkavita and Kirimetiya where one or more members of such households are also engaged in jobs other than agricultural labour.

(vi) Expenditure pattern

(XIV)

The monthly average expenditure of the sample agricultural labour households varies from Rs. 200/- in Bolana to Rs. 300/- in Palliporuwa. The proportion of expenditure spent on food and fuel is the highest of all items. This is even higher in the poorer villages such as Thirunelveli and Kirimetiya. The next priority items for expenditure are religious activities and social functions, and clothing, tobacco, betel and liquor, follow in that order. Interestingly, the proportional expenditure on tobacco and liquor is higher than the itemised proportions spent on fuel, travelling, education medicine and housing. This explains why the educational level and health conditions of the members of these households are low and conditions of their houses are poor compared to non-labour households.

(vii) Indebtedness

Although the average figures of direct income and expenditure do not reveal a necessity for credit, the labour households had made borrowings during the period of record-keeping. This is mainly in order to bridge the gap of income and expenditure in income deficit months. The average monthly borrowings vary from Rs. 35/- in Bolana to Rs. 295/- in Kusumpokuna. The major source of borrowings is friends and relatives in case of Palliporuwa, Yakkavita, Thirunelveli and Godawaya. Landlords and banks are the important sources of credit in Bolana and Kusumpokuna where the major proportion of such borrowings has been utilised for cultivation purposes by the part-time farmers who are also part-time agricultural labourers. Professional money lenders and traders provide credit to the households in Kirimetiya. The agricultural labour households in relatively poor villages have utilised the major proportion of loans on food and clothing. This also confirms the low economic status of these households.

(viii) *Savings*

Although the monthly average data on income and expenditure shows some chance for savings, this is not possible due to income deficits in certain months. Savings, if any, are confined to small amounts of money kept at home, which will be sooner or later utilised for immediate purposes such as food, medicine etc.

(ix) *Educational level*

Many children of the agricultural labour households end their schooling after a few years of education in primary grades. The most important reasons for this are:

- i) Low economic status of the family which allows a very low proportion of money to be spent on education,
- ii) Need of child's labour to earn money for subsistence,
- iii) The need to have helping hands in household work such as cooking, looking after young members of the family while parents are away etc.

Resulting from these, the educational levels attained by the members of the agricultural labour households are generally lower than those of non-labour households. For example, the number of members who had passed G.C.E.(O.L) and pursued higher education is 229 (87%) in non-labour households whereas it is only 29 (25%) in agricultural labour households.

(x) *Health and nutrition*

The expenditure on medicine by the agricultural labour households covers the fees paid to private medical practitioners since government medical services are provided free of charge. However, the government medical institutions are often situated far away from the villages. The labourers are quite often exposed to diseases

(such as malaria as in the case of dry zone villages) due to the nature of their work and the nature of environment in which they work.

Many children of the agricultural labour households are not properly and adequately fed due to their low economic status and hence, malnutrition is an apparent characteristic. This is also a result of the low educational levels. For example, cheap and readily available nutritious food items are not consumed adequately, because of their unawareness of the nutritional value.

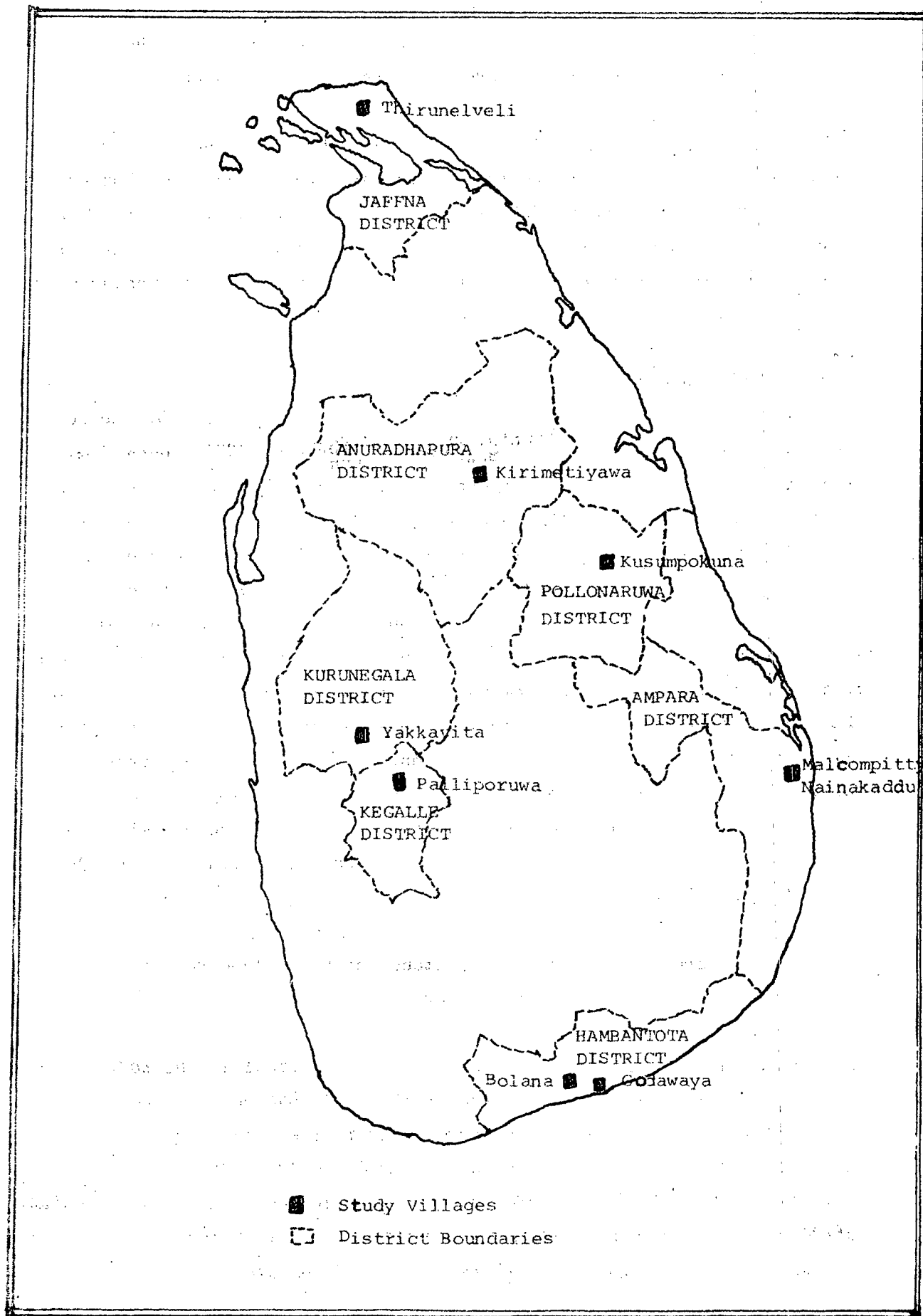
EMPLOYER - EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIP

Perhaps one of the over emphasised factor in the studies of peasant societies in the South and South-East Asian region is the existence of a strong bondage between the landowners and their employees such as tenants and labourers. It follows that although the employers exploit their employees in an objective sense, often the latter fail to realise this exploitative situation. Subjectively, both groups (employers and employees) look at their relationship as a patron-client relationship where subsistence ethics predominate. Our experience is, however, that the lower groups (i.e., employees) are distinctly aware of their lower status and the exploitation by their employers. From the employers' point of view, the moral grounds which lead them to employ friends and relatives are often mentioned but their objective is the maximisation of profit and the efficiency of the operations of cultivation through primordial relations.

But there is hardly any organisation among the hired labourers to safeguard their rights or to bargain over wages.

In concluding this report, we would also like to emphasize the following: There is now a growing realisation of the contribution of hired labourers to the agricultural development in this country, and in the future they are expected to play an even more vital role. There is thus a case, both from development and welfare viewpoints, to formulate policies and implement effective programmes to better their employment prospects and wages and hence, their general living standards.

APPENDIX : LOCATION OF THE STUDY VILLAGES



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