



*WORKING PAPER*

Working Paper No.42

PALAKURICHI : A RESURVEY

by

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November, 1983



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## PALAKURICHI : A RESURVEY

### I. Introduction

Palakurichi in the Nagapattinam taluk of Thanjavur district is one of the five villages in Tamilnadu surveyed in 1916-17 by Prof. Gilbert Slater and his students.<sup>1/</sup> The original survey of this village was done in 1917 by K. Soundara Rajalu (hereafter, KS) a student of Slater's and a native of the village. The Madras University organised resurveys of the 'Slater villages' under the direction of Professors P. J. Thomas and K. C. Ramakrishnan in 1936-37 during which S. Tirumalai (hereafter ST) carried out the resurvey of Palakurichi.<sup>2/</sup> A brief note on the village was also prepared by M. R. Haswell from the University of Oxford in 1961.<sup>3/</sup>

This resurvey is part of a programme undertaken by the Madras Institute of Development Studies to study again all the five Slater villages in Tamilnadu. It follows that of another Slater village, Iruvelpattu in S. Arcot, which was brought out in September 1982.<sup>4/</sup> The resurvey was carried out by the present author and two other investigators, T. Ganesan and S. Vivekanandan between January and June 1983. My two colleagues spent most of their time in the village, I visited the village in three different stretches, and we kept in close touch with each other throughout.

In the first phase, we began with a detailed census of all the households in the village to elicit demographic particulars and data regarding housing, literacy and education, occupations, ownership and tenancy in land, ownership of other assets and a brief family history with special reference to migration. In the second phase, general enquiries were undertaken about the village as a whole with particular reference to facilities and institutions. In the third phase, two intensive sample enquiries were undertaken related to cultivators and agricultural labourers. These structured enquiries were

supplemented by numerous informal conversations. Data were processed as far as possible at the conclusion of each phase so that leads could be followed up and verifications made as the enquiry proceeded. We have also used a variety of secondary data from settlement reports, censuses, village accounts and government reports. Further methodological details will be found at appropriate places in this paper.

The 1937 resurvey was more detailed than the one in 1917 but neither involved enquiries at a household level. Other difficulties also exist in regard to their scope, coverage and comparability. Subject to these, and supplementing them with other sources, we have attempted to identify the main changes in the economy and society of the village since 1917, and more particularly since 1937 and to describe the village as we found it during our own survey.

Our outstanding debt is to the people in Palakurichi for their warm and generous cooperation. Government officials at different levels, particularly the Revenue Divisional Officer (G.Santhanam) and the Tahsillar of Nagapattinam (V.Tiruvannanathan), were very helpful. The survey was made possible by a grant from the Indian Council of Social Science Research for which we are grateful. I am indebted to Venkatesh Athreya of the Bharathidasan University and to my colleagues in the Madras Institute of Development Studies, C.T.Kurien, K.Nagaraj, V.K.Ramachandran, P.Radhakrishnan and K.Bharathan for comments on an earlier draft. J.Robinson has provided excellent support with his typing and K.C.Devassy has taken on the burden of cyclostyling.

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- 1/ These surveys were published in Gilbert Slater (ed) Some South Indian Villages Oxford University Press 1918. The five Tamilnadu villages are Iruvelpattu (S.Arcot district), Palakurichi (Thanjavur), Vadamalaipuram (Ramanathapuram), Dusi (N.Arcot) and Gangaikondan (Tirunelveli).
- 2/ P.J.Thomas and K.C.Ramakrishnan (ed) Some South Indian Villages : A Resurvey University of Madras 1940.
- 3/ M.R.Haswell Economics of Development in Village India Routledge and Kegan Paul 1961.
- 4/ S.Guhan and Joan P.Mencher Iruvelpattu Revisited Madras Institute of Development Studies Working Paper No.28 September 1982. Also published in Economic and Political Weekly issues of June 4 and 11, 1983.

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## II Characteristics of the Population

### Situation

Palakurichi is a medium sized village about 1250 acres in area with a present population of about 1400 persons. It is situated at a distance of 22 kilometres to the south west of Nagapattinam, the taluk headquarters and a minor port on the (eastern) coastline of Thanjavur district. Along with other taluks of Eastern Thanjavur, Nagapattinam shares certain general characteristics viz., high concentration in landownership, a high proportion of the work force in agriculture, within it a very high proportion of agricultural labourers, and among them a very high proportion of Harijans.<sup>1/</sup> Agriculture is predominantly paddy cultivation. Situated at the tail-end of the Cauvery delta, the tract faces problems of both irrigation and drainage. The extent of double cropping is limited. Ideologically, East Thanjavur has been active with a series of wage agitations under the leadership of the CPI, and later the CPM, since 1939.<sup>2/</sup> As we shall see, conditions in Palakurichi are quite typical of the distinctive political economy of Eastern Thanjavur.

### Settlement Pattern

In terms of its lay-out, Palakurichi is not a compact village. There are as many as seven separate habitations in which its households are located.<sup>3/</sup> Almost all of the caste Hindus live in a cluster of five streets which accommodates a total of 157 houses. There is no separate agraharam for the Brahmins but the five Brahmin families in the village live in the Perumal Koil street with neighbours belonging to the Naidu and Pillai castes. There are two Harijan families in the 'caste village', both employees of the health sub-centre living in official quarters provided for them in this area.

In 1937, ST noted that "the depressed classes are scattered in four corners and they are all at a considerable distance from each other. The reason ~~seems~~ to be that most of them being pannayals, the landlords so built the huts as to be situated near the lands on which they had to work."<sup>4/</sup> The same situation continues. The Harijans -- a total of 186 families -- live in five separate settlements at distances of up to two kilometres from each other and from the caste village. The main Harijan colonies are the South Street Colony (105 houses) and Ponnaganni Thidal (44 houses). The three other Harijan settlements -- Palakurichi East, Katcharakottagam and Palathadi -- are smaller ones consisting of 10 to 20 households.<sup>5/</sup> There are six non-Harijan households (two Padayachi, one each of Konar, Thevar and Kavara Naidu, and a Muslim) who live in the Harijan settlements.

Finally, there is a barrack-like structure with four large rooms in a place called Madathadi which houses two families with two other rooms being used as godowns. This construction has a reference in the first survey of 1917 when KS noted that "recently, rich landlords, in consequence of the trouble and expense of supplying their pariah padiyals with bamboos, palm leaves etc for the repair of thatched houses, are proposing to build tiled houses for them, something like barracks ...in this village, one proprietor has made arrangements to do so." Obviously, this proprietor implemented his idea only to a limited extent and other landlords did not follow in his footsteps.

### Caste structure.

Except for two Muslim households (7 persons) Palakurichi is entirely Hindu. Table 1 gives the caste-religious composition of the present population of 349 households and 1423 persons. Harijans (692), who account for 48.6 per cent of the total population, are the largest single caste group. They are split into two sub-castes, the Paraiyars (413) and the Pallars (279).

Table 1 : Caste-religious composition of Palakurichi 1983

Caste	Households	Persons
<u>Harijan</u>		
1. Paraiyar	114	413
2. Pallar	72	279
	-----	-----
	186	692
<u>Caste Hindus</u>		
3. Padayachi	52	252
4. Pillai	24	108
5. Naidu	26	91
6. Konar	18	87
7. Asari	12	56
8. Thevar	11	46
9. Brahmin	5	26
10. Chettiar	4	18
11. Vannar	2	13
12. Karaiyar	2	7
13. Desikar	1	5
14. Panikar	1	5
15. Goundar	1	4
16. Mudaliar	1	4
17. Navithar	1	2
	-----	-----
	347	1416
18. Muslims	2	7
	-----	-----
	349	1423

Among the caste Hindus, Padayachis (or Vannias) are the largest (252) followed by Pillais (108), Naidus (91), Konars (87), Asaris (56), Thevars (46), Brahmins (26) and Chettiars (18). Seven other castes (viz., Vannar, Karaiyar, Desikar, Panikar, Goundar, Mudaliar and Navithar) which mainly relate to traditional service occupations together account for 40 persons. Within the Hindu population, the "forward castes" consisting of Naidus, Pillais, Brahmins and Chettiars constitute 17.3 per cent; the "intermediate castes" mainly Padayachis, Konars, Asaris and Thevars account for 33.5 per cent; and the Harijans for the balance of 49.2 per cent.

In terms of socio-economic stratification, the caste structure of the village could be viewed in terms of five broad groups. The Naidus are by far the main land-owning caste, socially and economically dominant. In Palakurichi, out of 26 Naidu households, 24 belong to Kamma Naidu families and the other two are Kavara Naidus. The Naidus are traditional Telugu-speaking landowners who have settled in Thanjavur from the times of the Vijayanagar kings and their Nayak viceroys (in the 16th and 17th centuries). In Palakurichi, the two Kavara Naidu families are distinctly poorer than the Kamma Naidus. At the other end of the spectrum, the Harijans are numerically the largest group but socially and economically depressed, most of them being landless agricultural labourers. Among Harijans, the Pallars and Paraiyars do not generally inter-marry and the Pallars consider themselves to be a higher sub-caste as they do not handle dead cattle. Both sub-castes however live together in the same settlements which are separated from the caste Hindu habitation. In the middle, castes in Palakurichi would fall into three broad groups: (a) Padayachis and Pillais are the main Vellala or cultivating castes. They, along with the Chettiars, are the landowning cultivators in the village, next to the Naidus but trailing far behind them. The Chettiars are also in trade. (b) Konars (traditionally shepherds) and Thevars (who were migrated from Ramanathapuram) are poor peasants and agricultural labourers



and (c) Castes mainly engaged in traditional crafts and services. Of these, the Asaris (carpenters and blacksmiths) are the most important. The Brahmins in Palakurichi who are all temple priests or temple cooks would also belong to this group as also families belonging to such castes as Vannar (washermen) Karaiyar (fishermen) and Navithar (barber).

### Population trends

We shall attempt an analysis of demographic trends in Palakurichi in the hope that it might throw some light on the economic history of the village. Table 2 gives the population census figures for the village from 1901 to 1981. The population counts arrived at in the surveys of 1917, 1937 and in the present survey (1983) have also been included. Table 3, which is derived from Table 2, sets out the inter-censal growth rates in Palakurichi. For purposes of comparison, corresponding growth rates for Nagapattinam taluk and for the rural areas of Thanjavur are also given.

Taking the entire span of 80 years (1901-81), population growth in Palakurichi at 84 per cent compares with 81 per cent in rural Thanjavur and 73 per cent for Nagapattinam taluk. Palakurichi has had a relatively higher growth rate in 1901-11 and a steeper decline in 1911-21 as compared to the taluk. In 1917, KS had noted that "emigration of padials or poor tenants or peasant proprietors to foreign cities such as Colombo, Rangoon, Singapore and Penang is common". ST in 1937 recorded that the families of Christians and Oddans mentioned in the 1917 survey (31 persons) had left the village in 1920 and many 'caste families' had also moved out in 1911-21, especially in 1920. The survey of 1917 indicates that the decline was particularly steep in 1917-21. The influenza epidemic and a succession of drought years in the immediate post-war period would seem to be responsible for mortality and emigration leading to the decline in 1917-21. Although growth revived in 1921-31, it was only 2 per cent during this entire decade.

Table 2 : Population of Palakurichi 1901-83

Year	Male	Female	Total
1901	349	420	769
1911	406	463	869
1917	NA	NA	851
1921	366	383	749
1931	364	406	770
1937	426	443	869
1951	693	732	1425
1961	781	801	1582
1971	668	631	1299
1981	722	689	1411
1983	710	713	1423

Table 3 : Population Growth Rates 1901-81

(per cent)			
Period	Growth rates for		
	Palakurichi	Nagapattinam taluk	Rural Thanjavur
1901-11	13.01	7.2	5.3
1911-21	-13.7	-4.2	-2.3
1921-31	2.8	-1.3	2.0
1931-51	85.1	18.4	20.0
1951-61	11.0	6.9	7.5
1961-71	-17.8	15.4	18.1
1971-81	8.6	17.0	12.3
1901-81	83.9	73.4	80.9

Population figures at the village level are not available for 1941 but using ST's survey we can divide 1931-51 into two periods viz., 1931-37 and 1937-51. We find that Palakurichi's population increased from 770 in 1931 to 869 in 1937 i.e. by about 2 per cent per annum. Between 1937 and 1951 however it rose from 869 to 1425 or by nearly 4 per cent per annum. A measure of the natural rate of increase in population around 1937 can be worked out from birth and death rates for 1935 and 1936 furnished by ST. These work out respectively to 30.6 and 24.1 (per 1000) or to a natural rate of increase of 6.5 per cent for the decade, close to the taluk growth rate of 7.8 per cent in 1931-41. Assuming roughly a 7 per cent decadal growth from natural increase, it can be worked out that about 100 families must be the order of net in-migration into Palakurichi in 1937-51.

Changes in the caste composition of the village, available from the surveys of 1917, 1937 and 1983, given in Table 4 can carry the analysis a step forward. Amongst the populous castes, Naidus have declined and the relative increase in the case of Padayachis and Asaris does not indicate any in-migration in 1937-83. Growth is prominent in the case of the cultivator caste of Pillais and in the case of Harijans, Konars and Thevars who are largely agricultural labourers with the increase in numbers of the latter group accounting for 64 per cent of the increase in 1937-83 in total population. Our family history enquiries revealed that most of the Pillai in-migration was spread out between 1940 and 1980 and many Thevar families had moved in only in the 1970s having been recruited as village watchmen from Ramanathapuram. In 1937-51, it is largely the Konars and Harijans who had moved to Palakurichi in search of agricultural work. Enquiries among the older immigrants and residents gave some indications of why this influx might have happened. Primarily, with the completion of the Mettur project in 1934, irrigation in Palakurichi, previously subject to a cycle of floods and droughts,

Table 4 : Changes in Caste Composition

(persons)			
Caste	1917	1937	1983
1. Naidus	147	128	91
2. Brahmins	17	13	26
3. Chettiars	12	6	18
4. Pillais	9	2	108
5. Padayachis	83	181	252
6. Asaris	44	41	56
7. Konar	29	31	87
8. Thevar	--	6	46
9. Other caste Hindus	64	25	40
10. Harijans	430	432	692
11. Christians	4	--	--
12. Muslims	12	4	7
	851	869	1423

appears to have been stabilised rendering possible some steady growth in output. With a strong concentration in landownership, there were good work opportunities in Palakurichi for hired labour. The land-man ratio was relatively favourable and house-site land was available for putting up huts.

The growth in the population of Palakurichi slowed down in 1951-61 although at 11 per cent for the decade it was higher than the taluk rate of 7.5 per cent. In 1961-71 however there was a sharp decline of about 18 per cent indicating an out-migration of about 100 families in this decade. The main reason for this, as we were able to ascertain, was the wide-spread increase in demand for labour in the taluk as a result of the introduction of second cropping in the early 1960s associated with the Intensive Agriculture Development Programme (IADP or the "package" programme). Because of the influx in the earlier decades, Palakurichi seems to have been able to supply some of this demand. In this sense, 1961-71 has been a decade of adjustment.

In 1971-81, Palakurichi's population has recorded a growth of 8.6 per cent. This is consistent with the crude birth (23.1 per 1000) and death (14.8 per 1000) rates that can be derived from the vital statistics maintained in the village for 1972-82. However, the reliability of the village birth and death statistics is open to question. While the death rate of around 15 is consistent with sample registration (SRS) estimates for Tamilnadu in the range of 13 to 17, the birth rate of about 23 is too low in relation to SRS estimates in the range of 29 to 33. The growth rate in Palakurichi during 1971-81 at 8.6 per cent is also lower than 12.3 per cent for rural Thanjavur. It is possible that births have been under-registered and some emigration has continued in the 1970s as well. However, both the figures and our own enquiries suggest that it was piece-meal rather than steady and large as was the case in the 1960s.

To sum up : in the eight decades since the turn of the century population growth in Palakurichi has been at about the same rates as in Nagapattinam taluk and in rural Thanjavur. But within this span, there have been wide variations from one period to another. The population of the village was the same in 1937 as in 1911 at 869; it rose sharply to about 1400 in 1951; and it remains at the same level in the early 1980s as a result of a large out-migration in the 1960s offsetting natural increase in the last three decades. These fluctuations appear to be related largely to the demand for, and the emission of, agricultural labour in keeping with the tempo of agricultural activity in Palakurichi and surrounding villages.

### The Sex Ratio

Sex Ratios (i.e. number of females per 1000 males) in Palakurichi for 1901-83 are in Table 5 with the ratios for Harijans wherever separately available.<sup>6/</sup> There has been a general though uneven decline in the ratio during the last 80 years. The decline has been particularly sharp in 1911-21 coinciding with a period of distress and disease suggesting that in such times the female population is affected most. The stability of the ratio in 1937-51 when there was a large influx indicates that in-migration must have been of families. The decline in 1961-71 may be associated with the emigration of Harijan and Naidu families who have a better sex ratio than the others. The Table also shows that the ratio for Harijans has been consistently better than for the population as a whole. The caste-wise analysis of the sex ratio in the current population (Table 6) shows that Harijans at one end and the Naidus and Pillais at the other end of the caste spectrum have a higher than 1:1 ratio. It is the intermediate castes, particularly the Padayachis, who are responsible for bringing the average down.<sup>7/</sup>

Table 5 : Sex Ratios in Palakurichi

(No. of females per 1000 males)

Year	In total population	For Harijans
1901	1203	NA
1911	1140	NA
1921	1046	NA
1931	1115	NA
1937	1040	1107
1951	1056	NA
1961	1026	1047
1971	945	947
1981	954	1009
1983	1004	1041

Table 6 : Sex Ratios Caste Wise 1983

(No. of females per 1000 males)

Caste	Ratio
1. Naidus	1167
2. Pillais	1038
3. Padayachis	881
4. Other caste Hindus and Muslim	972
5. Harijans	1041
All	1004



Table 7 : Household Sizes Castewise 1983

Caste	Household size
1. Naidus	3.5
2. Pillais	4.5
3. Padayachis	4.8
4. Other caste Hindus and Muslims	4.6
5. Harijans	3.7
All	4.1

Table 8 : Age Distribution caste-wise 1983

(per cent)

Age group	Naidus	Harijans	Others	All
0 - 4	Nil	11.8	9.7	10.1
5 - 9	5.5	10.6	11.4	10.6
10 - 14	7.7	10.6	10.9	10.5
15 - 19	6.6	12.1	11.4	11.5
20 - 29	8.8	17.8	19.1	17.8
30 - 39	14.3	14.7	11.3	13.1
40 - 49	17.6	11.3	10.9	11.5
50 - 59	14.3	6.2	7.0	7.1
60 - 69	13.2	3.3	5.2	4.8
70 & above	12.0	1.6	3.1	3.0
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

### Household Sizes and Age Distribution

Household sizes caste-wise are given in Table 7. It is 4.1 for the population as a whole, low in the case of the Naidus (3.5) and Harijans (3.7) and ranges from 4.5 to 4.8 for the other castes. In many Naidu families, younger people have left the village and the general pattern is that of small families consisting mainly of older couples with one or two grown up children. Table 8 on the age distribution caste-wise will show that while 15 per cent of the population in the village is above 50 years of age, the corresponding proportion for the Naidus is as high as 40 per cent. It also indicates an absence of young children in their families. While it is not uncommon in Padayachi families for two generations to live together, for most part, Harijan families are nuclear. With wives earning, sons move out into separate households as soon as they get married: they seek privacy and wish to avoid disputes in regard to the sharing of earnings with the larger family.<sup>8/</sup> The smaller size of Harijan families may also indicate a lower rate of natural increase in their case.<sup>9/</sup>

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- 1/ In the 1971 Census, agricultural workers (i.e. cultivators and agricultural labourers) constituted 78 per cent of the total work force in Nagapattinam taluk as compared with 71.4 per cent in Thanjavur district and 61.7 per cent in Tamil Nadu. Agricultural labourers were 76.6 per cent of the agricultural work force in the taluk as compared to 59.1 per cent in the district and 49.4 per cent in the State. Over 80 per cent of agricultural labourers were Harijans in Nagapattinam. For a useful introduction to the district and to East Thanjavur see Kathleen Gough Rural Society in Southeast India Cambridge University Press 1981 (Part I, and Chapter 18 in Part III).
- 2/ See in this connection Andre Beteille 'Agrarian relations in Tanjore district' in Studies in Agrarian Social Structure Oxford University Press 1974; K.C.Alexander Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur National Institute of Community Development Hyderabad 1975; and Kathleen Gough op.cit. (Chapter 22).
- 3/ Throughout we use 'households', and 'families' synonymously ignoring the exceptional cases in which they differ according to strict definitions.
- 4/ Pannayals or padials are attached, and generally bonded, agricultural labourers. See Chapter VII also.
- 5/ Of these, Palathadi (literally, foot of the bridge) is technically an encroachment on the banks of the river Vellayer, adjacent to a bridge across it. Some ten huts put up here in 1968 were pulled down by the Public Works Department in 1976 in the course of the "cleaning up" operations under the Emergency. Fortunately, following the cyclone in 1977, the residents were able to reconstruct their huts with aid from a Christian charity.
- 6/ In our survey (1983) the total population count at 1423 was very close to the 1981 Census figure of 1411 but the male-female figures were slightly different (see Table 2). Consequently, the current sex ratio is 1004 rather than 954 reported in the Census. This illustrates that in dealing with demographic data at a village level, small differences in the gender count could shift the ratio from below to upwards of 1000 and render conclusions as to trends risky.
- 7/ A relatively high ratio among Harijans vis-a-vis caste Hindus and low ratios for Padayachis were also noticed in Iruvelpattu. See S.Guhan and Joan P. Mencher op.cit. p.9.
- 8/ The disinclination among Harijans to live in joint or extended families adversely affects their savings potential. See Chapter VI, footnote 4.

### III The Occupational Pattern

In this chapter we shall review the occupational pattern in Palakurichi with special reference to changes that can be noticed over time and the caste-wise stratification of occupations. In a subsequent chapter, the conditions of agricultural labour, the largest occupational category, will be discussed in detail.

Table 9 will show that the Crude Worker Ratio (i.e., of working to total population) has varied from about 43 to 49 per cent in 1961-81. The ratio for males has been in the range of 55 to 63 per cent and for females between 31 and 36 per cent. Occupation in agriculture predominates with those engaged in it as cultivators or as agricultural labourers being about 80 to 89 per cent of all workers. Corresponding ratios for rural Thanjavur in the 1981 Census, given in the Table, show that the participation rate, and particularly the female participation rate, in Palakurichi is relatively high vis-a-vis the district average.

#### Agricultural work-force

We have classified the working population as falling within the agricultural work force or in non-agricultural occupations in terms of the source of main earnings. In Palakurichi there are not many cases where the same person is engaged in both. A simple three-fold classification, in relation to land and labour has been used to analyse the agricultural work-force. Those cultivating owned land with hired labour with no personal participation in manual operations, have been classified as 'landlords'. The only case of a landowner who has fully leased out his holding has also been included in this category. 'Cultivators' are those owning and/or leasing land who cultivate it with some physical participation in manual field operations. 'Agricultural labourers' are those

Table 9 : Worker Participation Ratios

(Per cent)

	<u>Total workers/Population</u>			<u>Agricultural</u>
	Male	Female	Total	workforce/ Total workers
<u>I Palakurichi</u>				
1961	60.3	32.2	46.1	89.4
1971	54.8	31.1	43.3	80.1
1981	59.4	35.8	47.9	87.4
1983	62.5	35.3	48.9	80.2
<u>II Thanjavur Rural</u>				
1981	58.2	24.9	41.6	83.7

Note: Derived from population census figures for 1961, 1971 and 1981 and the survey figures for 1983. In 1981, marginal workers have been included as agricultural labourers.

Table 10: Analysis of the agricultural work-force 1983

	Naidus	Pillais	Padaya- chis	Other caste Hindus & Muslims	Harijans	Total
1. Landlords	28	3	2	3	--	36
2. Cultivators	--	10	35	19	16	80
3. Agricultural Labour	--	6	35	23	412	476
	28	19	72	45	428	592

with little or no land (owned or leased) whose main earnings come from agricultural wages. For the purposes of this classification, the fact of land owned or leased in other villages by residents of Palakurichi has been taken into account.

Table 10 classifies the agricultural work-force on this basis and also gives a caste-wise breakdown. Out of 592 in agricultural occupations, 476 or 80.4 per cent are agricultural labourers, 80 or 13.5 per cent are cultivators and 36 or 6.1 per cent are landlords. In 1917, KS reported 132 resident landowners, 19 cultivating tenants, and 120 padials in Palakurichi. The 1937 survey of ST reported 119 landowners, 10 tenants, 95 padial families and 8 agricultural labourers who were not padials in the village. While there has been no great decrease in the numbers of landlords and cultivators over the years, both the numbers of agricultural labourers and their proportion in the agricultural work-force have sharply increased.<sup>1/</sup> The latter proportion is at 80.4 per cent now as compared to 60.6 per cent in 1937 and 44.3 per cent in 1917 as brought out in the figures available in the earlier surveys. In terms of numbers, the trend is shown in Table 11 incorporating census figures from 1961 onwards. While measurement and definitional problems remain, the broad trend indicates a sharp increase in 1937-61 (which mostly overlapped with the period of in-migration), a decrease in 1961-71 (a period of emigration) and an increase again in the 1970s. Both the 1981 census and our survey converge closely in indicating a current total of about 480 agricultural labourers with about 250 male and about 230 female workers.

Going back to Table 10, the broad caste-wise stratification of economic status in relation to land will be apparent. In the agricultural work-force, all Naidus are landlords and 78 per cent of landlords are Naidus. Among cultivators, 56 per cent are Pillais and Padayachis, 24 per cent are other caste Hindus and

Table 11 : Number of Agricultural labourers 1917-83

Year	Male	Female	Total
1917	NA	NA	120
1937	103	95	198
1961	312	236	548
1971	211	172	383
1981	251	229	480
1983	249	227	476

Note: Census figures have been used for 1961, 1971 and 1981 and survey figures for 1917, 1937 and 1983.

Table 12 : Analysis of non-agricultural workers 1983

Category	Naidus	Pillais	Padaya- chis	Other caste Hindus & Muslims	Harijans	Total
1. Trade and services	3	5	6	31	5	50
2. Salaried	1	5	9	9	4	28
3. Tractor & other agro- related	1	4	5	10	-	20
4. Casual	-	2	3	1	-	6
	5	16	23	51	9	104

20 per cent are Harijans. Of the 476 agricultural labourers, 412 or 87 per cent are Harijans. And, of 428 Harijans in the agricultural work-force, 412 or over 96 per cent are agricultural labourers.

### Non-agricultural Occupations

In 1937, there were very few who were engaged in non-agricultural occupations and even those who were combined it with agriculture. ST noted that "there are eight persons who combine agriculture with other main occupations. Two of them act as commission merchants for the sale of paddy. Four of them carry on moneylending business in the village and the other two are the karnam and the village munsiff". In 1983, there are 104 persons in non-agricultural occupations constituting 15 per cent of the total work-force. Table 12 which gives a breakdown of the non-agricultural work-force will help to analyse this striking change. Except for a small rice mill, Palakurichi has no industrial units. By far the largest category, about 48 per cent of non-agricultural workers, are those engaged in a variety of professions, services and trade. Some of these reflect growth and diversification in economic activity in the village in terms of shops, tea stalls, vegetable-vending, tailoring and domestic services. Others are more traditional services such as those provided by carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, barbers, washermen and temple servants. Over the years, the numbers of those in such traditional crafts and services have remained stagnant but some of them have moved to more "modern" occupations (e.g. the tailoring families are from the Vannar or washermen caste). The second largest contingent, about 27 per cent, are salaried employees. They include traditional officials like the village officers and the Postman but also those employed in more recent institutions such as schools, balwadi, dispensary, health sub-centre, veterinary sub-centre and the cooperative society. The third segment of non-agricultural occupations, in our classification, consists



mainly of those in agro-related occupations: tractor drivers and cleaners, kariakkarars (i.e., labour-supervisors) and village watchmen. Together they account for about 19 per cent of non-agricultural workers.

Table 12 also indicates the caste-wise composition of non-agricultural workers. Caste Hindus account for 91 per cent of the non-agricultural work-force. Among them, the bulk of those in trade and services are Chettiars, Asaris and other traditional service castes rather than Naidus, Pillais or Padayachis. The participation of Harijans in occupations outside of agriculture is extremely limited. However, they have, no doubt due to the reservation policy, some representation in the salaried category with two of them being health assistants and two of them being clerks.

### Non-workers

Non-workers who constitute 51 per cent of the total population consist of students (17 per cent) and of other dependants such as housewives, non school-going children, unemployed youth, girls awaiting marriage, and the old. (34 per cent). Table 13 gives the number of workers per household and the dependency ratios (i.e. non-workers to workers) for different castes. In the population as a whole, there are about 2 workers per household. The ratio is highest for Harijans (2.35) and lowest for Naidus (1.27). In Harijan families, a good proportion of children above the age of 14 work in the field. The dependency ratio is 1:1 on the average but only 0.58:1 in the case of the Harijans. It varies between 1.7 to 2.1 for other castes.

About 8 per cent of the population (110 persons) are above the age of 60. Of them, 34 are Harijans half of whom are too old for manual work and also lack support from earning children or relatives. They clearly deserve old age pensions. At present there are only 5 persons in the village, four of whom are Harijans,

Table 13 : Worker and dependency ratios 1983

Caste	Workers per household	Ratio of dependants to workers
Naidus	1.27	1.76
Pillais	1.46	2.09
Padayachis	1.83	1.65
Other caste Hindus & Muslim	1.57	1.92
Harijans	2.35	0.58
All	1.99	1.04

who get old age pensions. If the scheme is to meet the real demand, its coverage in the village will need to be at least trebled.<sup>2/</sup>

One also finds an emerging category of educated unemployed in the village. We were able to identify 19 young men who were neither willing to work on land nor able to find non-agricultural employment in or outside the village. Ten of them had come up to class X but not passed through high school; 4 had graduated from high school; 4 were technically qualified in industrial training institutions; and one was an arts graduate. Nearly 80 per cent of them belonged to the Pillai and Padayachi castes. These are the castes in which a thrust for upward and outward mobility is most visible with the younger Naidus having largely moved out, the Harijans being mostly confined to agricultural labour, and many of the other castes continuing with their traditional craft and service occupations. But, job opportunities have not opened up for them consistent with rising expectations and the trouble that they have taken to acquire scholastic or technical qualifications.

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1/ 'Landowners and tenants' in earlier surveys can be taken to be equivalent to 'landlords and cultivators' in our classification.

2/ Although those above 60 who have no means of support are eligible to old age pensions, the coverage is restricted in practice because of taluk-wise ceilings on the number of such pensions that can be given. Benefits to existing pensioners have however been increased in recent years.

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#### IV Social Services

In this chapter we discuss a variety of social indicators such as literacy, schooling and educational facilities; housing; health; sanitation and water supply focussing on the access which different castes and economic groups have to these basic needs.

##### Literacy

We adopted a summary criterion in the household census for estimating literacy. Children in school, and others who had gone to school at all, were treated as literates. Pre-school children and those who had not gone to school were classified as illiterates with the exception that those who claimed to be literates were included as such. As it happened, the literacy estimates in the survey turned out to be the same as in the 1981 census: 44.5 per cent for the total population, 57.3 per cent for males and 31.1 per cent for females. This is very close to the literacy rates for rural Thanjavur viz., 44.4 per cent for all, 57.6 per cent for males and 31.2 per cent for females in the 1981 census and distinctly higher than the averages for Tamilnadu which are 37.7 per cent, 50.2 per cent and 25.1 per cent respectively.

Literacy rates in 1937 from ST's survey and at decadal intervals in 1951-81 from the Censuses are given in Table 14. In the last four decades or so from 1937, the literacy rate has more than quadrupled from about 13 to about 44 per cent. The relative increase in female literacy from under 5 per cent in the late 1930s to over 30 per cent in the early 1980s is striking. The growth in literacy from decade to decade has however been uneven; in particular, the stagnation in 1951-61 is puzzling. On a simple average, one finds percentage point increases per annum of 0.8 for males, 0.6 for females and 0.7 for both in the last 44 years.

Table 14 : Literacy rates in Palakurichi

(Per cent)

	Male	Female	All
1937	22.3	4.7	13.3
1951	34.9	13.3	23.8
1961	35.2	13.1	24.0
1971	47.0	24.9	36.3
1981 <sup>1/</sup>	57.3	31.1	44.5

<sup>1/</sup> The survey figures for 1983 are the same as in 1981.

Table 15: Caste-wise changes in Literacy 1917 and 1983

(per cent)

Caste	<u>Males</u>		<u>Females</u>		<u>All</u>	
	1937	1983	1937	1983	1937	1983
1. Naidus	64.1	97.6	15.6	77.6	39.8	86.8
2. Brahmins	66.7	81.8	57.1	86.7	61.5	84.6
3. Padayachis	31.9	69.4	9.1	51.7	20.7	61.1
4. Other caste Hindus and Muslim	34.1	71.0	1.3	57.7	18.0	64.6
5. Harijans	--	42.8	--	12.5	--	27.3

A caste-wise breakdown of literacy levels is available in ST's survey of 1937 and it is compared with the present position in Table 15. We find that the Brahmins had reached a fairly high level of literacy even in 1937 and that relative increases, particularly in female literacy, since then are most visible in the case of other caste Hindus. Overall at present, Naidus and Brahmins have literacy rates of 80 to 90 per cent and other caste Hindus are in the range of 60 to 70 per cent. Male literacy for all of them is 70 per cent or more. When we come to Harijans, the male literacy rate falls to 42.8 per cent and for females it is at an abysmally low level of 12.5 per cent. The overall literacy rate for Harijans at 27.3 per cent is about one-third of that for Naidus and Brahmins and about a half of that for other caste Hindus. At the rate at which Harijan literacy has grown in the last 46 years, they are several decades behind other castes with Harijan women being more than a century behind their caste Hindu sisters.

### Schooling

Levels of schooling are given in Table 16 caste wise for all except pre-school children, children in schools at present, and those who have had no schooling. Here again caste-wise differentials conform to what might be expected. Naidus have the highest percentage in the post-school level (i.e. class X) with other caste Hindus coming behind. The Brahmins in this village who are all attached to temple service have not gone beyond school. Harijans have a negligible number who have gone beyond school and about two-thirds of Harijans who have had schooling at all have stopped at the primary level.

### School facilities

A good improvement can be noticed with reference to conditions observed in earlier surveys in school facilities in Palakurichi. The village school in 1917 was an unauthorised

Table 16: Levels of Schooling, 1983

(per cent)

	Upto Primary	Upto Middle School	Upto High School	Post- School	Total
1. Naidu	29.4	32.4	29.4	8.8	100.0
2. Brahmin	25.0	37.5	37.5	-	100.0
3. Other caste Hindu and Muslim	43.4	28.1	25.2	3.3	100.0
4. Harijans	65.8	23.4	9.9	0.9	100.0

Table 17: Housing in 1937 and 1983

	<u>1937</u>	<u>1983</u>
Thatched	161	292
Tiled	52	49
Terraced	3	8
	216	349

Table 18: Caste and Housing 1983

	Terraced or tiled	Thatched	Total	Electri- fied	Private toilets
1. Naidu	23	3	26	21	17
2. Brahmins	5	-	5	1	--
3. Chettiars	4	-	4	3	1
4. Other caste Hindus and Muslims	23	105	128	58	3
5. Harijans	2	184	186	55	-
All	57	292	349	138	21

one with 36 boys and 4 girls in it looked after by a single unqualified teacher. KS noted that "the rich send their children to school in adjoining towns". ST informs us that a Board School had been opened in 1925 with a strength of 70 of whom 19 were girls. Its strength seems to have dwindled to 27 including 4 girls in 1937. None of the Parayar and Pallar children were admitted into school until 1937. This school was in the charge of two teachers. In addition, there was a private school conducted on a pial (i.e., veranda) which ST reports was 'more popular' than the Board school but he does not tell us how many children attended it.

By 1961, the primary school (classes I to V) was upgraded into a middle school (classes I to VIII). In 1966, classes IX and X were added to make it into a high school. Simultaneously, the primary classes and the higher classes were separated to form two schools. There is thus a primary school and a separate high school (for classes VI to X) in Palakurichi. The primary school has 163 boys and 121 girls on its rolls. The middle and high school levels have a strength of 70 boys and 26 girls. Of the 380 children in the two schools, 240 belong to the village and the rest come from surrounding villages. There are 7 teachers in the primary school and 9 in the high school.

Attendance in the primary school is on the average 63 per cent of enrolment varying between 69 per cent for boys and 55 per cent for girls. It increases progressively from 50 per cent in class I to 75 per cent in class V. Attendance in the higher classes is much better and is in the range of 80 to 90 per cent. From the houselisting, we found that 89 per cent of caste/Hindu children and 58 per cent of Harijan children in the age group 5 to 14 were attending school. While there was no significant difference in this proportion as between boys and girls among caste Hindus, the proportion of Harijan girls in school in the age group 5 to 14 was only 38 per cent.



Facilities in both schools -- drinking water, toilets, furniture, library -- are very poor. The flooring of the primary school is dilapidated. A building donated for the middle school has had to be abandoned because it was damaged in the cyclone of 1977 and has not been repaired since then. This neglect is in part due to the lack of involvement of the rich and influential higher caste families of the village in its schools. Given the exodus of the younger generation of Naidu families from the village, very few school-going children are left among them. In fact, 'children's education' is a major reason for the Naidu families to move residence to Nagapattinam or Madras. Among some of the Pillai families as well we found children being sent to private schools in neighbouring villages in the interests of 'better discipline'. Some of the teachers themselves felt that it was more difficult for them to be strict with local students because of close parental interference. It was apparent also that some of the affluent parents did not wish their children to mingle freely in the local school with those of the poorer families and the Harijans. One of the landlords had even complained that the high school was a 'nuisance' since it affected the availability of docile agricultural labour.

The noon-meal scheme was very popular and was being well implemented.<sup>1/</sup> On an average, 140 children in the primary school, including 78 Harijan children, benefited from it. In addition, about 50 pre-school children were being fed in the Balwadi. Most of them however turned up only at meal times and there was little pre-school education. The attendance sharply dropped during harvest months (January-February) when mothers were too busy to bring the children to the Balwadi.

#### Newspapers and magazines

Over the years, there has been a significant growth in the readership of newspapers and magazines. In 1917, KS noted that

'one of the villagers subscribed for an English daily newspaper, two others for Tamil newspapers and magazines'. In 1937, ST found that there was only one person subscribing to the Dinamani, a Tamil daily. We found that there were 29 subscriptions in Palakurichi to daily newspapers (3 English and 26 Tamil) and 12 subscriptions to a popular Tamil weekly. This included five of the tea stalls who regularly obtained newspapers for their clients to read.

### Housing

The settlement pattern in the village has already been described. The area reserved for housesites in the village resettlement (1924) was 28.53 acres; in the 1970s, another 5 acres were added mainly from poramboke land classified earlier as threshing floors. Since 1937, the number of houses in the village has increased roughly in proportion to population growth but as Table 17 will show almost the entire increase in 1937-83 has been in terms of thatched huts. The number of houses in tiled or terraced in 1937 was 55 and it was about the same, viz., 57, in 1983. Natural increase and in-migration has been mostly of agricultural labour families who can only afford to have huts but even among the more affluent, few have invested in upgrading their houses. Most of the houses in the village had been built decades ago; extensions or improvements had been made only in a few cases; and only a couple of terraced or tiled houses had come up in the recent past.

The extent of land available for house sites being limited, congestion has increased over the years. Referring to the caste village, KS reported in 1917 that "every house has a good-sized compound". In 1937, ST found that "more than 50 per cent of the houses have gardens attached, where some of them grow vegetables. There are 12 houses where crotons and other plants adorn the front". At present, very few of the houses in the caste village have compounds attached to them and no crotons were

visible. The pressure on house-site land is also evident from the fact that while building sites sold for Rs.1000 to Rs.2000 per acre in 1917, current prices are at the levels of Rs.24,000 per acre (Rs.80 per kuli or 1/300 of an acre) in the main habitation and Rs.7500 per acre (Rs.25 per kuli) in the two main Harijan colonies.

On the Harijan colony, KS noted in 1917 that "all the houses are thatched; they are exceedingly small and crooked". ST in 1937 observed that "the dwellings of the depressed classes are very incommodious and the surroundings extremely untidy. The average area of a hut is 375 square feet. There are no tiled houses in any of the four cheris". Conditions remain pretty much the same in 1983. All houses in the Harijan settlement are thatched and most of them are "small and crooked".

The caste-wise status of housing and of the availability of electricity and of private toilets is shown in Table 18. All the Naidus, with the exception of the Kavara Naidu and one other family, the Brahmins and the Chettiars live in tiled or terraced houses. All Harijans, except two families of government employees who have been given quarters, live in thatched huts. Among other castes, 82 per cent are in thatched housing. Depending upon the size, it costs anywhere from Rs.300 to Rs.2000 to put up a hut and about Rs.150 once in two years to keep it in repair. This is a significant item of expenditure for the poorer families.

### Electrification

A total of 138 houses or nearly 40 per cent are electrified. The proportion is 30 per cent for Harijans. These figures are definite signs of improvement. The village has also been provided with a number of street lights, 90 in all of which 33 are in the Harijan colonies but during our survey period as many as 78 of them were not burning. Due to voltage fluctuations, the bulbs get burnt out and because it happens so frequently there is no incentive or even a demand to have them replaced.

### Sanitation

Private toilets are to be found only in 21 houses (or 6 per cent of the total) and most of these belong to Naidu households. A public toilet with 6 seats is now being constructed in the South Street Harijan colony; even if it is made usable with provision of water supply, it will be woefully inadequate for the 105 families in this settlement catering, as it will have to, in the ratio of one seat per 65 persons.<sup>2/</sup>

### Water supply

Both KS (in 1917) and ST (in 1937) deplored the poor state of drinking water supply in Palakurichi. To quote them: "The quality of the water supply is bad (KS)... The quality of the water is so bad that it must naturally cause illness. The villagers use the same tank for bathing and drinking... in summer the depth of the water in the tank is just a foot; and below that it is all mud (ST)". Drinking water facilities in Palakurichi continue to be seriously inadequate. The main source consists of two handpumps in the Iluppai Thope (i.e. orchard of Illupai trees) at one end of the village supplemented by two other handpumps in the caste village. Two handpumps in the East street Harijan colony which is in an isolated corner are mainly used by the residents of the neighbouring village of Ottathattai.

Salinity has been the main problem in developing adequate water supply facilities for the village.<sup>3/</sup> Work on an overhead tank was begun in 1968. A large well was constructed in the Illupai thope and the tank was built, at some distance from it in the village site, in 1971-72. Due to cost escalation and disputes between the contractor and Government authorities, the pipe connection between the well and the overhead tank was completed only in 1979-80 i.e. more than a decade after the whole project was initiated. Nine pipe connections in the caste village and three to the South street Harijan colony were given.

Additional connections to the Harijan colony in Ponnaganni Thidal, although originally envisaged, could not be provided because funds had run out. The water supply system has been functioning intermittently since 1980 subject to frequent mechanical and electrical breakdowns in the pumpset. Meanwhile, the well water has become brackish due to a saline spring rendering the system useless for drinking water purposes. All families in the village, particularly the Harijans and the women, are put to considerable trouble in fetching water from the handpumps. To some extent, hardship is relieved by the use of cycles to transport water but this facility is naturally available only to those who can afford to own or hire a bicycle.

### Health

In 1937, ST reported that "there is no hospital within easy reach of the village nor are there local physicians. The barber's wife attends to cases of delivery". Since then health facilities in the village have improved with the establishment of a maternity sub-centre in 1974 and a Panchayat Union dispensary in 1977. The staff in the maternity sub-centre attend to deliveries but most deliveries are still managed by untrained dais. Some DPT inoculations have been given to children. In the last few years, on an average 6 to 8 family planning operations, almost all of them vasectomies, have been arranged. The women are mostly Harijan who have had 3 or 4 children.

The Panchayat Union dispensary deals with about 3000 cases per month, from Palakurichi and neighbouring villages, as out-patients. Monthly figures go up to 4000 in the wet season (October-January). In 1917, the village was reported to be free from malaria and plague but cholera and small pox were incident. Cholera deaths were reported in 1936 and 1937 and ST noted that "cholera takes its toll once in 2 or 3 years". Even now, cholera has not been fully eradicated as there was an outbreak a few

years ago. The most common complaints are malnutrition, diarrhoea, dysentery, anaemia, scabies, hookworm, filariasis and minor injuries. For serious illnesses, people go to the Primary Health Centre at Thevur (12 km) or to the taluk hospital at Nagapattinam (22 km). Despite free treatment at the dispensary, drugs constitute a major item of expenditure. The annual allocation to the dispensary for the free supply of drugs is only Rs.50,000 which comes to Rs.1.3 per patient per annum. This meagre amount is further eroded by the indenting of expensive antibiotics by the doctor in charge. In the private sector, the village is served by an allopathic practitioner, a visiting ayurvedic and a local landlord who practices Siddha as a hobby. Injections, charged at Rs.3 per stab, are the favourite form of treatment of the allopath as well as the ayurved. Among the poorest people in the village, medical expenses add up to about Rs.50 to 100 per annum accounting for a not insignificant part of their total consumption expenditure.

### Communications

In 1937, ST commented on the poor state of communications linking Palakurichi with the outside world : "The village is not well connected by road with the commercial centre of Negapatam. There is no bridge over the Vellayar in the south.... this is the place where people on either side cross the river. This is a dangerous spot especially for the labourers (both men and women) ... who work on the border lands of the village and must perforce swim across the river often times.. The roads are in a very bad condition, narrow and tortuous". There has been a great deal of change for the better. A bridge across the Vellayar was constructed in 1961. The roads are tortuous, as in most of Thanjavur, but they are motorable. Palakurichi was linked to Tiruvarur by a bus service in 1975 which plys two trips a day. The town bus from Nagapattinam has been running via Palakurichi to the nearby village of Mohanur since 1978.<sup>4/</sup> It does 6 trips each a day up

and down. Movement of inputs, paddy, retail goods and of people, particularly labour, have all benefited from the vastly improved road and bus facilities.

There are three telephones in Palakurichi one in the Post Office for public use and two in the houses of the two leading Naidu landlords. The public phone is much in use for emergency services and by political party activists, officials and visitors. The private phones enable the landlords who own them, and their non-resident kinsmen, to be in touch with agricultural operations, labour matters, marketing and so on. The bus and the phone were referred to as significant signs of progress in our conversations with all sections in the village.

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- 1/ The noon meal scheme was introduced in 1982 by the Tamilnadu Government and provides a midday meal to children in the age group 2 to 5.
2. The original site marked out for the public toilet slightly abutted into unused waste land belonging to a non-resident landlord. He had orders sent from Madras to stop work and to shift the site.
- 3/ An observation made by M.R. Haswell in her note on Palakurichi (Haswell, op.cit. p.31) is relevant here. She says: "An interesting slant on the continued rigidity of the caste structure was observed during the writer's visit (in 1961). A scheme for sinking a bore well for drinking water had reached a stage of deadlock because it was found after successive attempts that all areas were brackish except the Harijan quarter ...; social barriers prohibited the use of this quarter, though it contained almost half the population."
- 4/ Incidentally, Mohanur is the village of a close relative of a senior official who was dealing with bus routes in Tamilnadu.

## V Agriculture

### Soil, rainfall and irrigation

Soils in Palakurichi have been predominantly classified under regar clay. They are poor in drainage and not particularly fertile. The average annual rainfall is of the order of 1300 mm. Two-thirds of it occurs during the northeast monsoon months of October to December which period also accounts for more than half the number of rainy days in the year.

Palakurichi is irrigated by channels which take off from two of the many minor rivers which branch from the Cauvery in its lower delta and empty into the Bay of Bengal. The main source is the Kudirai Sevaganar Podu Vaikal, from the Odampokki, which enters the village at its northern end, runs across it to the south and falls into the Vellayar which cuts across the village along its southern boundary. This channel irrigates about 800 acres (net area) in the village, while the other channel the Terkodi Podu Vaikal from the Kaduvayar irrigates about 150 acres (net). It too runs from north to south along the western edge of the village, traversing a smaller distance inside the village, before discharging into the Vellayar. A number of small channels branch off from these two vaikals (i.e., bigger channels) conveying the water to field channels. Irrigation also takes place from field to field. The drainage falls again into the vaikals and finally in the Vellayar.

Prior to the construction of the Cauvery-Mettur scheme in 1934 Palakurichi was frequently subjected to floods. The waters of the Odampokki, the Kaduvayar, the Vellayar and a stream called the old Yedaiyar (now abandoned) used to combine and form one sheet of water at the time of heavy floods or rains. With greater regulation and a more intensive use of water in the last five decades, the problem now is one of too little water arriving too late and being withdrawn too soon in the agricultural season.



Being at the tail-end of the delta, the village receives water in a normal year three weeks after the Mettur Dam is opened for irrigation which is normally in mid-June. At the other end of the season, the channels become dry in late February or early March. The flow of water in the main channels is not plentiful. Besides, some of the fields are situated at a higher level than the vaikals. For both these reasons, baling has to be resorted to in order to secure adequate irrigation. The poor drainage impedes field-to-field flow. Salinity has made it impossible to have wells to supplement the unsatisfactory surface irrigation on which the village is entirely dependent.

### Land utilisation

As per the land revenue resettlement (1924) out of a total village extent of 1242.21 acres, 1056.36 acres or 85 per cent is cultivable, the balance of 186 acres being poramboke (i.e., communal) lands. The latter are mainly parts of the Vellayar, the irrigation channels, the village site, roads, and several small ponds. Of the cultivable lands, about 76 acres were classified as 'dry' and the rest as 'wet' in the settlement. Except for a few mounds and threshing floors, most of the dry lands have now been levelled and almost all the cultivable lands benefit from irrigation and are 'wet' on ground.

### The Cropping Pattern

Table 19 gives the cropping pattern in net cultivated area for 1922-23, 1935-37 and in 1974-78. Net cropped area has increased from 890 acres in the early 1920s to 1006 acres in the late 1970s. Paddy has throughout accounted for 98 to 99 per cent of net cropped area so that agriculture in Palakurichi is mono-cultural. In addition to paddy, pulses and grams are grown over a small area. This varies widely from year to year; the annual average in the last five years has been 11 acres or about one per cent of net area.

Table 19 : Cropping Pattern

(net acres)

	1922-23	1935-37 Average	1974-78 Average
Paddy	879	942	995
Millets & Pulses	2	4	11
Oil seeds	2	0.1	-
Other crops and trees	7	13	-
	890	959	1006

Source: Figures for 1922-23 and for 1935-37 are from the survey by ST. Figures for 1974-78 are from the Village Statistical Register.

### Intensity of cropping

The significant change that has occurred since the early 1960s is the introduction of a second crop of paddy and this is the result of the Intensive Agricultural Development Programme (the IADP or package programme). In 1917, KS remarked that "about half the land can yield two crops per annum but many cultivators are too indolent to grow two crops." A similar observation was made in 1937 by ST: "The whole of the area actually yields only one crop per annum. More than 50 per cent of the lands can bear a second crop". In 1935-37 we find that out of 942 acres in which paddy was grown, 839 acres were planted with Samba (September-October to February). The balance of 103 acres were accounted by Khar (August-January) for 41 acres and the short-term Kuruvai crop (August-October) for 62 acres. Although crops of different durations were thus grown, there was no double cropping on the same area. It was also the practice to sow and transplant seeds for both Kuruvai and the Ottadan or Khar at the same time in August. Kuruvai was harvested in October but the Ottadan will remain in the field and get harvested in January-February.

It is difficult to believe that indolence, or indolence alone, was responsible for cultivators being content with a single crop under conditions which would have permitted a greater intensity of cropping. The fact is that the irrigation-cum-rainfall pattern in this part of Thanjavur sets serious constraints on raising two crops of paddy. Being at the tail-end of the delta, water is received in the canal only by about mid-July delaying the commencement of agricultural operations. The north-east monsoon sets in late October - early November and the rains are particularly heavy in this coastal taluk. Thirdly, the availability of water gets restricted beyond February. Under these circumstances, the first crop or Kuruvai has to be of the sufficiently short duration so as to be ready for harvest before the onset of the northeast monsoon. Thereafter, the transplanting

of the second Thaladi crop can take place only after the rains cease in December but if the Thaladi stays too long on ground, it can not get a final wetting before the channels dry up in March. This means that for both Kuruvai and Thaladi short-duration seed varieties and agricultural practices that promote early maturing are a necessity. It was the popularisation of such seed varieties combined with the package of chemical fertilisers, credit and extension in the IADP that finally persuaded farmers in Palakurichi, and in Nagapattinam taluk generally, to take to a second paddy crop in the 1960s.

While we know that a second crop viz., Thaladi had begun to be planted from 1963-64 or so, data is not available on the pace of its introduction in the village in the 1960s. In Nagapattinam taluk as a whole, Thaladi was being planted on 16 per cent of the net sown area in the late 1960s.<sup>1/</sup> Taking the average of the last five years, the net sown area for paddy in Palakurichi consists of 307 acres of Kuruvai and 688 acres of Samba with most of the Kuruvai being replanted again with Thaladi in a normal year. Thus 31 per cent of the net sown area comes under the second crop. This represents a major change with reference to conditions noticed in earlier surveys.<sup>2/</sup>

### The Agricultural Calendar

In a normal year agricultural operations begin around mid-July with the arrival of water.<sup>3/</sup> Ploughing and preparation of seedlings for Kuruvai and Samba are taken up together. Kuruvai is transplanted in late July or early August. A second ploughing is then done and Samba is transplanted in end August. The Kuruvai harvest is taken up in the last week of October and completed by the first week of November with ploughing for Thaladi being done in sequence in the fields in which Kuruvai is harvested. Transplantation of Thaladi takes place in December. The Samba harvest begins in the second week of January and continues up to the end of the month. The Thaladi harvest begins in the second

week of March and is completed late in the month. With the re-threshing of the Thaladi crop, agricultural operations come to an end by the first half of April. From then on there is some employment on fencing, repair of sheds and implements, desilting of field channels and the village ponds, land-levelling and land preparation for the next season. Table 20 gives the crop calendar.

The pattern of agricultural activity under the cropping conditions of Palakurichi is brought out in Table 21. Agricultural work of one kind or another takes place for an estimated 221 days of the equivalent of about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  months between May and March. The Tamil month of Chitrai (mid April to mid May) is completely off-season. The busiest periods are October-November and January-February. In other months, work goes on typically for 15 to 18 days. Agricultural work and the lack of it are thus dispersed through the best part of the year. This has certain implications. It limits the scope for seasonal migration of labour in search of work elsewhere, the avenues for which are also limited by the prevalence of a similar paddy-based cropping regime in the surrounding area. To some extent, this pattern of activity days evens out seasonal poverty since wage incomes are spread out. At an impressionistic level, both cultivators and labourers feel that they are busy around the year.

### Mechanisation

At the present time, there is a substantial mechanisation of ploughing, rethreshing and farm transport in Palakurichi through the use of tractors. Almost all the first ploughing in Palakurichi and a substantial part of the second ploughing for Samba are done by tractors. The field bunds are cut open for this purpose and re-formed after the tractor has ploughed the field. Bullock ploughing is confined to very small fields and is undertaken to a large extent in the second ploughing. Tractors are also used by those who own them for re-threshing

Table 20 : Crop Calendar

Month	Operation
July	Ploughing and preparation of seedlings for Kuruvai and Samba. Preliminary weeding. Fertiliser application. Kuruvai transplantation.
August	Weeding. Fertiliser application for Kuruvai. Second ploughing for Samba. Samba transplantation. Fertiliser application.
September	Irrigation and weeding for Kuruvai and Samba.
October	Irrigation and weeding. Kuruvai harvest. Rethreshing. Thaladi ploughing in sequence.
November	Completion of Kuruvai harvest. Preparation of seedlings for Thaladi.
December	Thaladi transplantation. Fertiliser application.
January	Samba harvest. Rethreshing.
February	Thaladi irrigation. Some Samba harvest may continue
March	Thaladi harvest.
April	Thaladi rethreshing
May-June	Fencing. Repair and maintenance. Desilting. Land levelling. Some application of organic manure.

Table 21 : Pattern of agricultural activity days

Operation	Days	Months
1. Land preparation	20	May and June
2. Manuring	37	June - September, December - January
3. Preparation of Seedlings	15	June - July, November - December
4. Weeding	24	June - August, September - November
5. Transplantation	24	July - September, November - December
6. Irrigation	14	September - October, February - March
7. Harvest	59	October - November (Kuruwai) January - February (Samba) March (Thaladi)
8. Rethreshing	28	October - November (Kuruwai)
	----- 221	January - March (Samba and Thaladi)

but seldom taken on hire for this purpose. They are however widely rented out for transporting manure and paddy.

Tractors have come to be owned and hired from the mid-1970s: there are 9 tractors in the village, 7 of which are owned by large Naidu landlords. Three of them were acquired in 1976 and the rest during 1980-82. All except two have been financed by the Land Development Bank (LDB) or by Commercial Banks.<sup>4/</sup> Tractor owners besides using them on their own lands hire them out widely in the village. The ownership of tractors has been promoted by institutional credit from the LDB re-financed by World Bank credits for agricultural development in the early 1970s. Wage agitations, particularly a strike in the ploughing season in 1978 in the village, has been another factor acting on landlords towards mechanisation; 6 out of 9 tractors were purchased since then. The use of tractors for first ploughing has become almost universal because it helps to overcome the constraints imposed by the short span available for Kuruvai and Thaladi which we have already described. In terms of the rental cost, they are competitive with that involved in the use of bullocks at the prevailing wage rate.

In terms of mechanisation, another development has been the replacement of manual methods of baling with diesel pumpsets in the last ten years or so. Twenty five diesel pumpsets are owned in the village and they are used for baling water from the two irrigation channels, particularly at the beginning and end of the season.

#### Inputs and Credit

Improved seeds - IR 20, IR 50, CO 25 and Ponni - are widely used. Even small cultivators apply some chemical fertilisers and pesticides in addition to organic manure, although they tend to use more of the latter. The Thaladi crop, which



is particularly susceptible to pests, attracts a heavier application of pesticides. The general use of chemical inputs is in striking contrast to conditions reported in earlier surveys. In 1917, KS recorded that "for insect pests and plant diseases no remedy is possible or conceivable to the villagers; many look upon the havoc wrought as punishment from Heaven." Even in 1937, ST found that no chemical manures were being used. According to him, chemical manures were tried by two families and given up after two years.

The Agricultural Services Cooperative Society in Palakurichi provides short-term production credit to cultivators. The loans are recovered at the end of the season and the rates of interest are 10.5 per cent for small farmers and 12 per cent for others. The annual average amount lent in the last three years is of the order of Rs.1,23,000 of which over 93 per cent has been to medium and large farmers. So far, there are no large outstanding arrears.

#### Levels of gross output

We have no estimate of paddy yield or output in the earlier surveys. In 1917, KS reported that the average rent per acre was 270 Madras measures of paddy equivalent to 11.25 local kalams per acre.<sup>5/</sup> As the estimate is in terms of quantity, it presumably pertains to the Kuthagai rent.<sup>6/</sup> In 1937, ST found that average kuthagai rent came to 23 kalams per acre. He also noted that the share of rent under Varam was 70 per cent. It can be assumed reasonably that rents under Kuthagai would work out to be lower than under Varam; on this basis, output of paddy per acre could be estimated at 33 kalams (0.94 tonnes) or more in 1937. In the nearby village of Kiruppur, Kathleen Gough reported yields of 30 to 42 kalams (0.86 to 1.2 tonnes) per acre in 1952.<sup>7/</sup> In her note on Palakurichi relating to 1961, M.R.Haswell reported yields equivalent to 28 kalams (0.8 tonnes) per acre under traditional cultivation,

39 kalams (1.1 tonnes) if improved practices were adopted and 56 kalams (1.6 tonnes) under the Japanese method.<sup>8/</sup> On the basis of test harvests conducted during the course of his enquiry, S.Ganapatia Pillai estimated yields in Nagapattinam taluk at 37 kalams (1.1 tonnes) per acre in 1968.<sup>9/</sup> These different estimates converge in suggesting that between the late 1930s and the late 1960s, average yields of paddy were in the range of 30 to 40 kalams (0.86 to 1.14 tonnes) per acre.

The earlier surveys do not help in deducing any trend in the growth of output during 1917-37. Since it is unlikely that the rate of rent would have doubled between 1917 and 1937, the doubling in the quantum of Kuthagai rents from 11.25 kalams in 1917 to 23 kalams in 1937 may reflect in large measure an increase in gross output of a like order between these two particular years; this will not however indicate a trend since output in 1917, which was a year of adverse seasonal conditions, was perhaps particularly low.

We surveyed a sample of 19 cultivators in an effort to obtain some idea of output levels and the structure of costs and returns in paddy cultivation. The sample covered more than a third of the 52 resident cultivators in the village and was so chosen that it included two of the largest landlords cultivating 60 acres or more, two with 10 acres or more, four with between 2.5 and 5 acres, seven in the 1.0 to 2.5 acres range and four who were cultivating less than an acre each. Cultivators in each group were randomly chosen except that those who were known to be non-cooperative were excluded. The numbers in the sample in each size class did not however bear a uniform proportion to their number among cultivators. Since 1982-83 was a year of drought, enquiries pertained to 1981-82. As far as possible, we had the estimates furnished by the respondents cross-checked with such accounts of agriculture operations that were being maintained by them.

Gross output estimates ranged widely : between 36 to 72 kalams of paddy (1.03 to 2.05 tonnes) per acre for kuruvai, between 36 to 54 kalams (1.03 to 1.54 tonnes) for Samba and between 30 to 45 kalams (0.86 to 1.28 tonnes) for Thaladi. There was no systematic differentiation as between large, medium and small farmers in per acre productivity and, if anything, small farmers reported fairly high yields of the order of 60 kalams (1.71 tonnes) in Kuruvai and 40 kalams (1.14 tonnes) in Thaladi. As a rule, Thaladi yields were lower than in Kuruvai or Samba because of a higher incidence of pests and poorer water availability towards the end of the cropping season. General enquiries with a number of cultivators in the village confirmed that it would be reasonable to take average yields per acre at 54 kalams of paddy (1.54 tonnes) for Kuruvai, 45 kalams (1.28 tonnes) in Samba and 36 kalams (1.03 tonnes) in Thaladi. Multiplying these by the area under each crop, the total gross output of paddy in Palakurichi can be estimated at about 59,000 kalams as compared to 31,000 kalams in 1937.<sup>11/</sup> This represents an increase of about 90 per cent in 1937-83 made possible by both the new technology and an increase of about 30 per cent in gross cropped area as a result of the introduction of second cropping. In the same period, population has increased by 64 per cent. Per capita grain output has gone up by about only 16 per cent in more than four decades.

### Costs and returns

The sample survey gave some broad idea of costs and returns relating to paddy cultivation under the conditions in Palakurichi. The results we were able to obtain are tabulated in Tables 22.1 (for Samba), 22.2 (for Kuruvai) and 22.3 (for Thaladi). Some of the difficulties we encountered in collecting this data must be referred to at the outset as they have a bearing on their reliability. Although every attempt was made to verify the figures furnished by the informants with reference to accounts maintained by them and through cross-corroboration, dependence on

Table 22.1 Average costs and returns for Samba 1981-82  
(Per acre)

Item	Large Farmers <sup>1/</sup>		Medium Farmers <sup>2/</sup>		Small Farmers <sup>3/</sup>	
	Rs.	Per cent	Rs.	Per cent	Rs.	Per cent
1. Wages	655	58.3	797	61.2	761	63.9
2. Seeds and organic manure	35	3.1	62	4.8	119	10.0
3. Tractor	94	8.4	87	6.7	59	5.0
4. Fertiliser & Pesticides	211	18.8	292	22.4	214	18.0
5. Other costs (including supervisory labour)	99	8.8	38	2.9	11	0.9
6. Land revenue	30	2.6	26	2.0	26	2.2
A. Total costs	1124	100.0	1302	100.0	1190	100.0
B. Gross income	1881		2337		1973	
C. Net income (B-A)	757		1035		783	

1/ 2 cases

2/ 2 cases

3/ 7 cases.

Table 22.2 Average costs and returns for Kuruvai 1981-82

(Per acre)

Item	Medium Farmers <sup>1/</sup>		Small Farmers <sup>2/</sup>	
	Rs.	Per cent	Rs.	Per cent
1. Wages	841	52.5	699	55.4
2. Seeds and organic manure	67	4.2	85	6.7
3. Tractor	80	5.0	85	6.7
4. Fertilisers & Pesticides	565	35.2	342	27.1
5. Other costs (including supervisory labour)	24	1.5	24	1.9
6. Land Revenue	26	1.6	26	2.2
A. Total costs	1603	100.0	1261	100.0
B. Gross income	2225		2231	
C. Net income (B-A)	622		970	

<sup>1/</sup> One case<sup>2/</sup> 9 cases

Table 22.3 : Average costs and returns for Thaladi 1981-82  
(per acre)

Item	Small Farmers <sup>1/</sup>	
	Rs.	Per cent
1. Wages	619	55.8
2. Seeds and organic manure	87	7.9
3. Tractor	66	6.0
4. Fertiliser & Pesticides	295	26.6
5. Other costs	21	1.9
6. Land Revenue	20	1.8
A. Total costs	1108	100.0
B. Gross income	1571	
C. Net income (B-A)	463	

1/ 9 cases

memory, and consequently recall lapses, could not be avoided since ours was a one-point enquiry relating to the past year viz., 1981-82. Some of the returns which were patently unrealistic had to be rejected. The two large landlords who were canvassed reported costs and returns for all three crops since they did not have separate accounts but since 74 per cent of the area cultivated by them was under Samba we have included their estimates under that crop. We also suspect that they have underestimated their sale prices and hence the gross income. In presenting the data, the costs of own labour, owned bullocks and owned seeds have been imputed at prevailing market prices. Actual costs on tractor use was taken into account in the case of the two large landlords who owned them. Maintenance and depreciation costs on the tractors as well as earnings from tractor hiring were not included. Interest on working capital has not been taken into account.

The data is neither adequate nor refined enough to obtain a differentiated picture as between large (over 30 acres), medium (5 to 30 acres) and small (less than 5 acres) farmers but it can give some broad idea of the dimensional magnitudes of net returns from each of the three crops and of the structure of costs. Net returns from an acre of Samba or Kuruvaï could be taken as being in the range of Rs.750 to Rs.1000. Net income from Thaladi is distinctly lower and of the order of Rs.500. In the structure of costs, wages account for 50 to 60 per cent, land revenue for only around 2 per cent and the balance goes into inputs viz., seeds and organic manure, tractors, fertilisers and pesticides with the modern inputs viz., tractors and the chemicals typically accounting for about a third of total costs of cultivation.

The data as well as our enquiries indicate some relative differences in the cost structure as between large and medium farmers and others. Large farmers were able to reduce wage costs through the use of pannayals and by hiring labour at lower rates

in the summer for land preparation and preliminary manuring. They benefit also from economies of scale in deploying hired labour and from the use of own tractors. On the other hand, they spend more on supervisory costs incurred on labour managers (Kariakkars). Small farmers incur less cash costs on wages where their own labour is involved. They also tend to use more organic fertilisers vis-a-vis chemicals and their outlay on overall input costs is lower.

The prevailing price for an acre of wet land in Palakurichi is Rs.7500 per acre. The best net returns that are reported come to Rs.1000 per acre for Samba and Rs.1500 from both Kuruvai and Thaladi. On investment, these correspond to about 13 per cent if a single crop is grown and to 20 per cent if two crops are raised. Prima facie, they are not high especially considering the labour and uncertainties involved in agriculture.

#### Some trends in the 1970s

There are no comparable data in the earlier surveys on costs and returns. An illustrative comparison between the late 1960s and the early 1980s, or roughly of trends during the 1970s, could be attempted using the estimates furnished in the Ganapatia pillai report. His estimates relate to 1968 and are in respect of farmers owning 5 acres of land. They are based on "intensive investigations made in all the taluks of East Thanjavur, the result of discussions and interviews, and also based upon the experience of State Seed Farms and other institutions who have maintained accounts". Table 23 compares in real terms (i.e. deflated by paddy prices) the cost structure in 1981-82 with that reported by Ganapatia Pillai in 1968, both being for the main Samba crop and the same category of farmer. The trend that emerges for the 1970s from this comparison is as follows. While gross income has gone up in real terms by about 26 per cent, real net income has improved by only 14 per cent because of a 38 per cent increase in real costs. In real terms, wage costs have increased by 30 per cent and input costs



Table 23 : Cost structure in 1968 and 1983

Item	1968		1983		Per cent change of (5) over (3)
	Rs.	Kalams	Rs.	Kalams	
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1.0 Wages	207	15.3	797	19.9	+30.1
2.0 <u>Inputs</u>	<u>98</u>	<u>7.2</u>	<u>441</u>	<u>11.0</u>	+52.8
2.1 Seeds and manure	15	1.1	62	1.5	
2.2 Tractor	--	--	87	2.2	
2.3 Fertiliser and pesticides	83	6.1	292	7.3	
3.0 Other costs	--	--	38	1.0	
4.0 Land Revenue	15	1.1	26	0.7	-36.4
Total costs	320	23.6	1302	32.6	+38.1
Gross income	625	46.3	2337	58.4	+26.1
Net income	305	22.7	1035	25.8	+13.7
Wages/Value added		0.40		0.52	

Source: Figures for 1968 are from the report of S.Ganapatia Pillai pp.11-12. The price of paddy is Rs.13.5 per kalam. For 1983, the estimates are based on Table 22.1 with the price of paddy being taken at Rs.40 per kalam.

by as much as 53 per cent, reflecting higher costs on chemical inputs and on tractor use. The incidence of land revenue has decreased by 36 per cent. These comparisons can not be taken literally but they do suggest with some plausibility that in the 1970s real costs of the modern inputs have increased out of step with productivity and price increases reflected in real increases to gross income. Wage costs appear to have kept in line with gross income; due to increases in input costs, the share of wages in value added has gone up from around 0.4 to 0.5.

### Marketing of paddy

The marketed surplus varies from farmer to farmer depending on his cash requirements, needs for household consumption related to family size and in the case of large landlords, the extent to which wages are paid in kind. In general, smaller farmers sold a higher proportion in the market. Kuruwai paddy was mostly disposed off as it did not keep well. The largest landlords in the sample reported marketed surpluses of 50 to 55 per cent while some of the small farmers had sold up to 80 per cent of their output. Apart from direct sales by producers, paddy was also sold in small quantities and periodically by agricultural labourers to grocery shops and tea stalls as payments for their purchases. These were bulked and sold by the latter to paddy merchants, the margin between the selling and buying prices being about 10 per cent.

The paddy is normally disposed of through sales to private traders working through commission agents in the village or by offering it to the levy centre operated by the Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation (TNCSC).<sup>11/</sup> Ruling prices for a bag (of net weight 57 kg) in 1981-82 were Rs.65 for Kuruwai and Rs.80 for Samba and Thaladi. Small farmers who were constrained to sell immediately after harvest reported realisations as low as Rs.55 for Kuruwai and Rs.70 for Samba. Large landlords were able to sell

during the lean season and also directly transport the paddy outside the district for sales in more remunerative markets. For Samba, they were able to obtain prices in the range of Rs.105 to 110 per bag as compared to a best price of Rs.80 available for sales in the village.

There are four Commission agents for paddy in Palakurichi. Two are purely commission agents and the other two are also medium farmers. They intermediate in effecting sales between producers in the village and wholesale traders and millers in Tiruvarur and Nagapattinam. The traders take the responsibility to collect and transport the paddy from the village, and they pay a commission of 25 paise per bag to the agent which amounts to 0.3 per cent of the price of Rs.80 per bag in 1981-82.

#### Cattle and Veterinary Services

We conclude this chapter with a brief review of matters concerning livestock. Table 24 gives the trends in 1971-83 in the stock of cattle, sheep and goats and poultry in Palakurichi and also figures for carts and ploughs. With the coming into use of tractors in the 1970s, there has been a sharp decrease in the number of draught cattle and of ploughs. Subject to this, the proportion of iron and rotator ploughs has increased. Most of the draught animals in the village are owned by the large landlords while the distribution in the ownership of milch cattle is less skewed (see also Table 30 below). There is an increase in the 1970s of milch cattle, sheep and goats, and poultry. This is an encouraging development in so far as it relates to Harijan and poor peasant families who derive a supplementary income by keeping livestock or poultry either on a ownership or varam (sharing) basis. Under the latter arrangement, sheep, goats or poultry are given by a richer landlord to the varam holder on condition that he maintains them at his cost and shares the offspring or eggs on a 50:50 basis.

Table 24 : Livestock and Poultry 1917-83

	1917	1937	1970	1983
1. Draught cattle	199	234	327	76
2. Milch cattle	175	211	160	269
3. Calves	NA	131	173	206
4. Sheep and Goats	427	259	282	498
5. Poultry	NA	NA	682	797
6. Carts	29	52	24	30
7.0 Ploughs	91	128	<u>182</u>	<u>86</u>
7.1 Wooden			150	43
7.2 Iron			32	24
7.3 Rotator			--	19

Source: Surveys in 1917, 1937 and 1983 and the Cattle Census in 1970.

Palakurichi has had a veterinary sub-centre under the charge of a livestock inspector since 1969. The sub-centre serves Palakurichi and eight other villages. It provides services for inoculation, first aid and de-worming. The annual allotment for drugs for all nine villages is only Rs.1200. The turn over of livestock inspectors has been high and the present one does not reside in the village. Periodically, his services are also mobilised for activities such as small savings and family planning drives which are quite unconnected with veterinary aid. The sub-centre has also been involved in extending subsidies for growing fodder grass and for the construction of poultry houses. We found that in all cases the beneficiaries were the affluent farmers of the village.

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- 1/ This is the estimate given in S.Ganapatia Pillai Report submitted by the Commission of Inquiry into Agrarian Labour Problems of East Thanjavur District, Madras, 1969. We shall refer to this hereafter as the report of S.Ganapatia Pillai.
- 2/ Even M.R.Haswell in her note on Palakurichi of 1961 does not refer to a second crop.
- 3/ In a normal year, the Mettur dam is opened for irrigation in mid-June. In bad years, there have been delays of a month or more.
- 4/ The Land Development Bank has financed tractors at interest rates of 9 to 11 per cent and maturities of 7 years while commercial banks have charged 12.5 per cent with a repayment period of 5 years.
- 5/ One Madras measure is equal to two local or Tanjore measures. A local kalam is 48 local measures of 0.59 kg. each or 28.5 kg. Two kalams make a bag of paddy of 96 measures equal in net weight to 57 kg.
- 6/ Kuthagai is fixed rent. Varam is share rent.
- 7/ Kathleen Gough op.cit. p.378.

- 8/ M.R.Haswell op.cit. p.30.
- 9/ Report of S.Ganapatia Pillai op.cit. p.5.
- 10/ For 1937, an average yield of 33 kalams per acre on a cropped area of 942 acres has been assumed.
- 11/ In 1983 due to the drought, restrictions were placed by Government in Thanjavur district both on sales to private millers and traders and on movement of paddy so as to monopolise procurement through the TNCSC. The procurement price for paddy (II sort) worked out to Rs.80 per bag. Small farmers found this acceptable but large landlords were holding out grain and agitated through legal and other means for permission to move the paddy out for sales at higher prices outside Thanjavur.

## VI Land Ownership

### Distribution of Ownership

Writing of Palakurichi in 1917 KS observed that "evidence from tradition shows that the whole village was for generations in the hands of large landlords". The concentration of land ownership in Palakurichi continues to be striking. Out of 1052.8 acres held in patta, 80.3 acres are owned by a dozen institutions.<sup>1/</sup> The largest land owner among them is a local chatram (or choultry) owning about 34 acres followed by four temples which between them own about 42 acres. The rest of the institutional holding is with a number of small village shrines. Of the balance, 52 acres are in joint pattas held by two or more owners. Individual private ownership in the village therefore pertains to 920.6 acres. Table 25 gives the distribution of this area according to ownership size class of holdings and the number of households (resident and non-resident) owning land in each of these size classes. We have not included joint holdings in this analysis as it was difficult to trace and apportion the individual shares in them and they constitute only about 5 per cent of non-institutional holdings.

The extreme concentration of landholdings in the village will be readily apparent. The table shows that marginal farmers (i.e., those who own up to 2.5 acres) constitute 57.8 per cent of households but account for only 8.8 per cent of land owned. Small and marginal farmers (owning up to 5 acres) form 73.7 per cent of households and account for 18.3 per cent of land owned. At the other end of the spectrum, 8 households who own 30 acres or more (4.2 per cent of all households) claim 36.7 per cent of land. Table 26 show that non-resident landholders constitute 64 per cent of all households owning land in Palakurichi with their ownership amounting to 34 per cent of land individually held. Within Palakurichi, only 52 of the resident households own land in the village. Another 44 of

Table 25: Distribution of land ownership 1983

Size class in acres	No. of House- holds	Extent	Households cumulative per cent	Cumulative per cent of land held
0.01-0.99	49	19.74	33.7	2.1
1.00-2.49	35	61.67	57.8	8.8
2.50-4.99	23	87.24	73.7	18.3
5.00-7.49	8	46.37	79.2	23.3
7.50-9.99	8	73.19	84.7	31.3
10.00-14.99	7	84.61	89.5	40.5
15.00-19.99	3	50.98	91.6	46.0
20.00-24.99	3	65.73	93.7	53.1
25.00-29.99	1	25.02	94.4	55.8
30.00-39.99	2	68.68	95.8	63.3
40.00-49.99	2	80.63	97.2	72.1
50.00-59.99	2	108.80	98.6	83.9
70.00-79.99	2	147.97	100.0	100.0
	145	920.63		



Table 26: Caste wise distribution of landownership in 1983

Caste/Community	Residents		Non-residents		Total		Share in area owned
	House-holds	Extent	House-holds	Extent	House-holds	Extent	
1. Naidus	23	529.44	52	266.78	75	796.22	86.50
2. Pillais	7	26.24	11	12.43	18	38.67	4.20
3. Padayachis	11	24.37	14	13.69	25	38.06	4.13
4. Chettiars	1	17.31	--	--	1	17.31	1.88
5. Konars	4	8.76	7	3.20	11	11.96	1.30
6. Muslims	1	0.90	1	5.89	2	6.79	0.74
7. Asari	2	0.91	4	3.57	6	4.48	0.49
8. Harijan	3	1.84	1	2.05	4	3.89	0.42
9. Christian	-	--	1	2.70	1	2.70	0.29
10. Nadar	-	--	1	0.32	1	0.32	0.03
11. Brahmin	-	--	1	0.23	1	0.23	0.02
	52	609.77	93	310.86	145	920.63	100.0

resident households own land outside. This leaves 253 out of 349 households in Palakurichi, or 72.5 per cent of them, entirely landless.

### Caste-wise position

Land ownership in Palakurichi is predominantly in the hands of Naidu families -- inside and outside the village -- as Table 26 will also show. As much as 86.5 per cent of land under individual ownership is held by Naidu households. The Pillai and Padayachi communities each of them account for about 4 per cent of land-ownership. Other caste Hindus (viz., Chettiars, Konars, Asaris, Nadar and Brahmins) with Muslims and Christians together account for about 5 per cent of land. This leaves only 0.4 per cent of land in the hands of Harijans.

Table 27 gives the caste-wise position of landownership and of landlessness among resident households in Palakurichi. All but one of the 26 Naidu households own land and together 25 Naidu households in the village claim 87 per cent of resident ownership of land in the village. At the other end of the spectrum, 92.5 per cent of resident Harijan families own no land at all either within or outside the village. Harijans constitute 48.6 per cent of the village population and own 0.3 per cent of land in the village. Among resident Pillai and Padayachi households about half of them in each case are landless. The proportion of landless households is about two-thirds among other caste Hindus.

Palakurichi is thus very much of a "Naidu village". Most of the Naidu families in Palakurichi are related with each other in more than one way. They are also kith and kin to non-resident Naidu owners of land in the village. The leading landlord in Palakurichi who owns 72 acres in the village is the brother of the largest non-resident landholder in Palakurichi owning 76 acres in the village. Many other non-resident Naidu landholders are close relatives -- brothers, sisters, brothers-in-law,

Table 27: Landownership and landlessness castewise 1983

Caste	Share in population (per cent)	Share of resi- dents in land owned in village (per cent)	Proportion of landless households (per cent)
1. Naidu	6.4	86.8	3.8
2. Pillai	7.6	4.3	54.2
3. Padayachi	17.7	4.0	50.0
4. Other castes Hindus & Muslims	19.7	4.6	67.2
5. Harijans	48.6	0.3	92.5
All	100.0	100.0	72.5

nephews -- of resident Naidus. Although Palakurichi does not have a single overwhelmingly large landlord, ownership of land is thus highly concentrated in a fairly small group of Naidu families which shares the characteristics of an extended family.

### Trends in ownership concentration 1896-1983

The original settlement register for the village of 1896 gives the patta-wise holding of land and the names of the pattadars. It can reasonably be presumed that household holdings at that time had not been divided up in the names of family members and, therefore, that pattadars represented different households. Table 28 gives the distribution of land among landholders in 1896. The Gini coefficient as high as 0.69 in 1896 has further increased to 0.71 in 1983. Given also the increase in its productivity in the meanwhile, the concentration of wealth in land is entrenched at strikingly high levels.

The original settlement register also makes it possible to attempt a caste-wise classification of pattas for about 90 per cent of land under individual ownership in 1896, the balance being in the names of women in the case of whom caste surnames have not been furnished. Table 29 compares caste-wise landownership in 1896 arrived at in this way with the position in 1983. In this span of about 90 years interesting changes have occurred in terms of land held by different caste groups. Pillais, Brahmins and the craftsmen caste of Asaris have lost land. Padayachis have emerged as land owners but given their numbers in the village their collective share is very small; other castes have also to an extent entered the landowning category. It is the Naidus who have tangibly improved their position.

Table 28: Distribution of land ownership 1896

Size class in acres	Pattas	Extent	Cumulative per cent of pattas	Cumulative per cent of land held
0.01 - 0.99	13	3.74	14.3	0.40
1.00 - 2.49	28	50.75	45.1	5.84
2.50 - 4.99	16	55.94	62.6	11.83
5.00 - 7.49	6	37.02	69.2	15.80
7.50 - 9.99	8	70.83	78.0	23.39
10.00 - 14.99	3	36.17	81.3	27.27
15.00 - 19.99	5	83.19	86.8	36.18
20.00 - 24.99	2	42.69	89.0	40.75
25.00 - 29.99	3	79.49	92.3	49.27
30.00 - 34.99	1	30.63	93.4	52.55
35.00 - 39.99	1	37.84	94.5	56.60
40.00 - 44.99	2	86.19	97.7	65.83
80.00 -	3	318.82	100.0	100.00
	91	933.30		

Table 29 : Castewise landownership 1896 and 1983

Caste	(per cent)	
	Share in landownership (resident and non-resident)	
	1896	1983
1. Naidus	78.8	86.50
2. Pillais	11.4	4.20
3. Brahmins	5.1	0.02
4. Asaris	3.9	0.49
5. Padayachis	0.8	4.13
6. Others		4.66
	100.0	100.00

### The Ceiling

No land has been declared as surplus under the land ceiling laws in Palakurichi.<sup>2/</sup> In terms of average land revenue assessments in the village, the ceiling of 15 standard acres, with a standard acre being equivalent to an ordinary acre bearing an assessment of Rs.10, works out to 67.2 acres of dry land or 21.75 acres of wet land. This is not ungenerous. With land being shown under the names of say five members of a family, it is possible for a household to own more than 100 acres of double crop land without attracting the ceiling. The largest resident landlord, for instance, owns 68 acres of wet land and 4 acres of dry land. His holding is equivalent to 47.5 standard acres and is distributed in the names of himself, his wife, two sons and a daughter. There are some benami holdings as well. In one case we found that a landlord had registered a piece of 2 acres in the name of one of his pannayals but later had had the land sold to another person under duress. The Chatram in Palakurichi which owns 34 acres provides another interesting example. It was endowed by a leading Naidu family nearly a hundred years ago for feeding pilgrims to the annual festival in the neighbouring village of Ettukudi. This charity is being continued but the substantial surplus that remains from the output on the Chatram's land goes to the family who are the trustees of this institution. They are the descendants of the original donor who had the effective foresight to create this 'endowment' long before land ceilings were thought of.

### Land Sales and Prices

In recent years there have been few land sales in Palakurichi. There are constraints that operate both on the selling and buying of land. Despite the migration of the younger generation to towns, the Naidus are deeply attached to land and seldom part with it much as they may bemoan the poor and fickle returns from agriculture.<sup>3/</sup> Besides, social position inter-se

among landholders in the village is closely related to the amount of land they own. Consequently, the large resident Naidu landlords do not readily dispose of land; and when they sell at all, tend to do so to non-residents. They also prefer to sell land within their own caste. Along with family ties, this explains the large element of non-resident ownership of land, particularly among Naidus, in Palakurichi.

There are few among the other castes in the village who have been able to improve their ownership of land. In the middle category of 5 to 30 acres of ownership, a Chettiar and a couple of Padayachi families stand out. Two of these have purchased land from earnings made in Singapore; the other has bought land over a few years by borrowing heavily from the Land Development Bank and by pledging jewels. Among the Harijans, the largest landowner has about 4 acres in a neighbouring village. This he has accumulated over 20 years or so as a member of a thrifty joint family and by working hard both as an agricultural labourer and on a variety of non-agricultural jobs.<sup>4/</sup> In turn, some of the Naidu landlords give the lack of purchasing power in the village as one reason for their being "forced" to hold on to their land.

The current price of wet land is Rs.25 per kuli (300 kulis = an acre) equivalent to Rs.7500 per acre. In 1917, KS reported an average price of Rs.575 per acre which was equivalent to 5.5 tonnes of paddy at the paddy prices then prevailing. In ST's resurvey, an acre of wet land was worth 7.4 tonnes at 1937 paddy prices. Both land prices and the paddy price dropped sharply in 1937 following the depression but the latter more steeply than the former. The price of land reported by him may also refer to an earlier year as he notes that there has been only one land sale since 1925. In 1983, we find once again the equivalence of an acre of wet land to be 5.5 tonnes of paddy, the same as it was in 1917. This long-run stability in the land-paddy price ratio may be due to a combination of reasons:



slow growth in real net returns from land, the sluggish land market, and distress sales which entail low prices.<sup>5/</sup>

### Land and other assets

The distribution of livestock and poultry, of farm equipment, and of consumer durables such as radios and bicycles vis-a-vis size class of holdings in Palakurichi is set out in Table 30. The data having been compiled from the household census relate only to residents and does not include land or assets held outside the village.<sup>6/</sup> In this sense, it is an incomplete comparison. It will be clear from the table that farm equipment - tractors, diesel pumpsets, carts and ploughs -- are concentrated with landholders owning 7.5 acres or more. Two tractors have been shown as being owned by persons who are landless or own less than an acre but this can be misleading because these two persons own about 10 acres each in neighbouring villages and the tractors involved are second-hand ones. The other seven tractors are owned by six large Naidu landlords. The Table indicates however that the ownership of livestock especially milch cattle and poultry and of consumer durables is less skewed than that of land. In addition to owned stock, landless and marginal farmers have access to animals and poultry under the varam system described earlier. In the last two years, 48 milch cattle have been provided to Harijans under the Intensive Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and this has helped some of the poorest families in the village to own some assets. The extent to which radios and bicycles are owned by the landless and by small and marginal farmers is a sign of economic betterment.

Tractors are an important surplus-generating asset. As compared to the hire charge of Rs.60 per hour for ploughing, we estimated that actual costs including maintenance and depreciation would be of the order of Rs.22.<sup>7/</sup> This means that on an 8 hour day, about Rs.300 would be the surplus. On an average, tractor owners hire out their machines for ploughing

Table 30: Land and holdings of other assets 1983

Size class (Acres)	House- holds	Extent (Acres)	Live- stock	Milch cattle included in live- stock	Poultry	Trac- tors	Diesel pumpsets	Carts	Ploughs	Radios	Bicycles
Landless	297	-	606	133	586	1	-	-	13	65	35
0.01-0.99	12	6.19	58	12	16	1	-	2	4	5	7
1.00-2.49	10	17.05	49	15	44	-	1	1	6	4	3
2.50-4.99	7	27.36	51	15	29	-	1	3	9	5	2
5.00-7.49	1	5.37	4	1	--	-	-	-	1	1	-
7.50-9.99	4	37.66	67	13	15	-	4	2	14	4	3
10.00-14.99	5	62.70	39	10	28	1	2	3	12	5	1
15.00-19.99	2	33.07	44	17	40	-	3	3	7	1	1
20.00-24.99	3	65.73	40	12	6	1	4	4	5	2	2
25.00-29.99	1	25.02	8	4	8	-	-	1	2	-	1
30.00-39.00	2	63.68	24	8	20	1	3	2	2	2	1
40.00-49.99	2	80.63	29	12	5	2	3	3	4	2	4
50.00-59.99	2	108.80	25	15	--	1	1	4	3	3	3
70.00-79.99	1	71.51	5	2	--	1	2	1	4	-	-
	349	609.77	1049	265	797	9	25	30	86	99	63

in Palakurichi and outside for 30 to 40 days in the year. Tractors are also hired for cartage. Annual net earnings reported by tractor owners were in the order of Rs.10,000 to 12,000. Although this may not be more than a fair return on the investment of Rs.80,000 to 90,000 on a new tractor, it represents a transfer of resources from small farmers who hire tractors to the large ones who own them.

### Tenancy

Historically, tenancy has not been prominent in Palakurichi. KS reported 29 tenants in 1917 and the average rent at 11.25 kalams per acre. In 1937, ST reported 105.9 acres (i.e. about 10 per cent of land under patta) as being under tenancy but he did not give the number of tenants except to say that ten of them did not own any land. At that time, average rents under Kuthagai came to 23 kalams per acre; under Varam, the tenant's share was 30 per cent. He also got the straw. The tenant bore all costs of cultivation except the land revenue which was paid by the landlord.

We found a total of about 45 acres, mainly land belong to temples, being cultivated by 34 tenants with no land of their own. In most of these cases, there was a main lessee who was usually a resident Naidu landowner connected with the temple as a trustee. He sub-let the land to a number of his pannayals or other workers attached to him on Kuthagai at rates varying from 5 to 7.5 kalams per mah (1/3 of an acre) equivalent to 15 to 22.5 kalams per acre per annum. Agreements were annual and oral and tended to be extended on good behaviour. These tenants and their womenfolk performed free domestic services to the main lessee.<sup>8/</sup>

Tenancy was worthwhile only if two crops could be grown as otherwise the rent was about a third to one half of gross output and over three-fourths of the net return on a single

crop. Apart from the fact that some tenancies had been resumed in the early 1950s with the passage of legislation for the protection of tenants, the current cost structure of cultivation (see Tables 22.1 to 22.3 above) has rendered tenancy uneconomic to tenants.

The low incidence of tenancy in Palakurichi despite a high proportion of non-resident landownership needs explanation. The non-resident owners living in adjacent villages directly cultivate their lands. Others cultivate their lands either through paid agents or through relatives resident in the village. The largest non-resident owner with 76 acres, for instance, operates through an agent. Many Naidu landlords in the village "looked after" the lands of their relative either gratis or for a small compensation towards management services.

### Fragmentation

Both KS (1917) and ST (1937) commented on the inconvenience caused by fragmentation or "the inter-mixture" of operational holdings. They also referred to the practice of 'Parivarthanai' (or mutual exchange) through which ryots sought to consolidate operational holdings. As KS noted, "Parivarthanai is a difficult process... The rich proprietor will frequently refuse to exchange in such a way as to convenience a small neighbour; and the small proprietor is very much at the mercy of a rich man who holds adjoining land". In 1937 itself, ST noticed that "there has been no case of Parivarthanai in the last ten years."

We did not come across any case of mutual exchange in recent memory. In terms of the number of sub-divisions in the village accounts, there are now 987 sub-divisions for a total extent of 1052.8 acres under patta which gives an average size of 1.07 acres for an operational plot. There has been no appreciable increase in the number of plots since 1937 because ST reported a total of 976 even then. We found that the large landowners

operated on groups of contiguous plots although the holdings figured under numerous sub divisions in the village accounts. The adoption of tractors for ploughing has in a large measure mitigated the inconvenience of fragmentation. As mentioned earlier, the tractors operate over large contiguous blocks with the field bunds being cut open for them to move around and being closed again after ploughing. The fact that Palakurichi has no irrigation wells but only field-to-field surface irrigation is also responsible for fragmentation not being perceived as a live issue.

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- 1/ In East Thanjavur generally, institutional landholdings by temples are prominent. See Report of S.Ganapatia Pillai p.5.
- 2/ The Tamilnadu Land Reforms (Fixation of Ceiling on Land) Act of 1961 fixed the ceiling at 30 standard acres. This was reduced to 15 standard acres in the Tamilnadu Land Reforms (Reduction of Ceiling on Land) Act of 1970.
- 3/ KS, himself from a Naidu landowning family of the village, wrote about them in 1917 thus: "By custom and instinct they are agriculturists ... They think and pride themselves upon the thought that agriculture is the noblest, the least harmful and the most independent of all professions ... In these circumstances the feature of almost permanent ownership of land is not surprising. They do not ordinarily sell their land except for debts. But they buy lands wherever and whenever possible."
- 4/ Speaking of his experience, this Harijan who had made good felt that the preference in his community for setting up a separate family soon after marriage was a great hindrance to savings.
- 5/ A similar feature was noticed in Iruvelpattu. See S.Guhan and Joan P. Mencher op.cit. p.41.
- 6/ The large Naidu households own land substantial real estates, financial and other assets outside of Palakurichi.
- 7/ The breakdown is: operational expenses on diesel and oil - Rs.14; salary expenses on the driver and cleaner - Rs.3; depreciation at 10 per cent - Rs.3; and maintenance at 5 per cent - Rs.2.
- 8/ Landlords assigning small amounts of land to their pannayals for tenancy was also noticed in Iruvelpattu. See S.Guhan and Joan P. Mencher op.cit. p.43.

## VII Agricultural Labour

### The composition of agricultural labourers

We had earlier in this paper drawn attention to the fact that about 85 per cent of the workforce in Palakurichi is engaged in agriculture and that 80 per cent of the agricultural workforce consists of agricultural labourers. The growth in the numbers of agricultural labourers from 120 in 1917 to nearly four times that number now was also noted. The count of agricultural labourers in our survey was a total of 476 consisting of 249 males and 227 females.

In 1917, agricultural labourers in Palakurichi consisted entirely of padials or pannayals. KS described padials as those "who are compelled to give personal service to proprietors in return for payments in kind. They are transferred with the land." In 1937 as well agricultural labourers were almost entirely pannayals. There were, according to ST, 95 families of them but he also counted 8 agricultural workers who were not pannayals. Describing the situation of the pannayal in 1937 ST wrote: "A pannayal when he binds himself to a landowner gets Rs.75 for his marriage. The landlord also builds a hut for him. This is the nucleus of the perpetual debt of the pannayal who becomes a territorial serf. He can be transferred with the land and the landlord can get him back even if he runs away... At the time of my visit I was told one Pannayal had run away and the master was trying to get him back by force."

Legislation was passed in 1952 in the Tanjore Tenants and Pannayal Protection Act to provide security of tenure and dispute settlement arrangements in respect of pannayals attached to landlords owning more than 6 2/3 acres of wet land and 20 acres of dry land. This led to a large scale retrenchment of pannayals and to a reorganisation of employer-labour arrangements. The pattern of these arrangements will be evident from the situation in Palakurichi which is described below.

There are three categories of agricultural labourers in Palakurichi. Firstly, the pannayals, they consist of both old retainers who have continued with individual families of landlords for years and of men and women, usually couples, who join up as pannayals and leave after some time. In both cases, the informal contract or arrangement is for one year at a time. Wages paid to pannayals are a combination of cash and kind payments. On a daily basis, the wage levels are lower than the prevailing rates for non-pannal workers but at harvest time, lumpsum payments called pattakal and kalavady are made. In the past, a small extent of land, usually a quarter of an acre, was assigned to pannayals for cultivation. They retained the produce and the landlord bore the costs of cultivation. The pattakal, a fixed payment, has replaced this practice. The kalavady is worked out at 3 to 4 measures per kalam of harvest but is limited to the harvest from 6 mahs or 2 acres of land. In addition to farm work, pannayals are also used for minding cattle, cleaning cattle-sheds, and domestic work of various kinds for which they are not separately paid. One meal a day and a payment of 12 measures of paddy a month are given to women pannayals who collect and carry cowdung. At Pongal, a saree and a dhoti are given to the couple. Landlords extend loans to the tune of Rs.1000 to 2000 to pannayals, who have been with them for some time, to meet expenses connected with marriages, funerals etc. Such loans are nominally interest free and are generally recovered within two or three years from wages. First preference is given to pannayals when labour is required on the farm and as a consequence, pannayals as a category have the largest number of days of agricultural employment. Long-term debt bondage and transferability with land, which were characteristics of the pannal system in the past, do not obtain at present.

The second category is known in the village as "permanent labour". It consists of men and women, usually couples, who are informally attached to a single landlord. After giving work to his pannayals, the landlord gives the next preference to his

permanent workers in regard to farm work. Reciprocally, the permanent worker is required first to meet his landlord's requirement for labour before he takes up work elsewhere. Permanent workers are paid at the prevailing daily and harvest rates in varying combinations of cash and kind. They are also given small consumption loans of the order of Rs.200 to 500. They have no obligation however to attend to domestic work.

The third category consists of casual labourers. They are called upon only if needed after the supply of pannayal and permanent labour is exhausted or by medium and small farmers who do not have the first two categories of workers at their command. Except for harvest and re-threshing payments, their wages are paid entirely in cash. Duration of employment is least for this category.

Table 31 gives the composition of agricultural labourers in Palakurichi according to these categories. Out of the total of 476, pannayals constitute 80 or about a sixth, permanent labour accounts for 314 or about a two-thirds, and casual labourers are 82 or about a sixth. Among pannayals, there are more women than men while the reverse is the case with the other two categories.

#### Duration of employment

In order to estimate the duration of agricultural employment for each category, we under took detailed enquiries among 6 families each in the pannayal and casual labour categories (a 7.5 per cent sample) and among 12 families in the permanent labour category (about a 4 per cent sample). In these enquiries, we tried to ascertain separately for men and women the duration of employment in each operation viz., land preparation, manuring, preparation of seed beds, weeding, transplantation, irrigation, harvest (including the first threshing and bundling) and re-threshing. Wages and earnings corresponding to each such operation were also ascertained



Table 31 : Composition of Agricultural Labourers 1983

	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Total</u>
1. Pannayals	31	49	80
2. Permanent Labour	171	143	314
3. Casual Labour	47	35	82
	- - - - -	- - - - -	- - - - -
	249	227	476

Table 32 : Duration of employment 1982-83

(Days in a year)

Operations	Pannayals		Permanent labour		Casual labour		All categories (weighted average)	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
1. Pre-harvest cultivation	195	92	100	50	85	43	109	58
2. Harvest	30	29	33	30	27	15	32	28
3. Rethreshing	11	10	17	15	10	3	15	12
	236	131	150	95	122	61	156	98

as well as annual pattakal and kalavady payments to pannayals. The estimates pertain to 1981-82.

Table 32 presents the data on duration of employment for each category of workers and separately for men and women under three main groups of operations viz., cultivation (covering all pre-harvest operations), harvest and re-threshing. The weighted average for all three categories for each operation is also furnished. As might be expected, the duration of employment is highest for pannayals and lowest for casual workers with that these for permanent labour coming in between. The variations between/three categories and male-female, are mainly in pre-harvest cultivation operations. In all three categories, women have less employment than men. The weighted average for all three categories shows that male agricultural labourers have 156 days of employment and female workers 98 days of employment in a year. This includes about 30 days in harvest and about 15 days in re-threshing for both. As between the three categories, pannayals have about 50 per cent more days of employment than permanent labourers and twice as much as that for casual labour.

Although, as mentioned earlier, agricultural operations in Palakurichi span a period of about  $7\frac{1}{2}$  months in the year, days of work available to agricultural labour in the village is thus of a relatively low order. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, output levels and the intensity of cropping in Palakurichi are relatively low. Secondly, the use of tractors has eliminated labour requirements for ploughing and also to some measure in rethreshing. Third, and most important, are factors related to the agricultural regime. Transplantation and harvest for Kuruwai need to be completed within a limited period so that the crop is harvested before the northeast monsoon sets in October-November. Thaladi transplantation has to be gone through in as short a time as possible so that a final wetting prior to harvest can be given before the channels dry up in February-March. There is pressure also to complete the Samba harvest by the end of January so that labour can be released for the Thaladi harvest in February.

In effect, this has meant that a considerable number of workers from surrounding villages are engaged by Palakurichi landlords for transplantation and for the harvests. Our estimate is that about two-thirds of the women labour force for transplantation and about two-fifths of couples required for harvesting come from the surrounding villages. On the other hand, only a small proportion of workers in Palakurichi appear to seek or find work in the neighbouring villages. This may be due to the fact the density of population on cultivable land in surrounding villages is higher than in Palakurichi rendering it a labour-taker than a labour-supplier.<sup>1/</sup> Fourthly, the forms of employer-labour attachment have certain implications. Mostly pannayals are used for land preparation and summer work like fencing, repairs etc.; it suits landlords to do so as pannayals can be paid at lower rates. This mainly explains the differentials in employment between them and permanent labourers and a consequent loss of work days for the latter. Also, to some extent, permanent labourers are not able to avail themselves of casual employment opportunities in surrounding villages because they have to respect the first call of employers to whom they are attached.

### The level of wages

East Thanjavur has been the theatre of a series of wage agitations led by the Communist Party of India (CPI), and later by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (the CPM), since 1939. Following a conference of agricultural labourers held in Thanjavur in 1939, the traditional wage of one marakkal of paddy for men (equivalent to 4 local measures or 2 Madras measures) - which was noticed as far back as 1917 in Palakurichi - was increased by 20 per cent. Consequent to a number of further agitations, this was further increased to two marakkals (8 local measures) in the Mannargudi agreement of 1944. Many landlords however did not give effect to the enhanced wages. A second conference in Mayuram in 1948 confirmed labour's demands and provided for a further

increase. The early 1950s witnessed agitations for reduction in rents and for protection of pannayals and these resulted in the passage of the Tanjore Tenants and Pannayals Protection Act in 1952. Except for sporadic agitations, the later 1950s and early 1960s were a period of comparative lull. Wage agitations became a feature again from 1965-66. In this phase, they culminated in two important agreements reached in Mannargudi in 1967 and in Tiruvarur in 1968.<sup>2/</sup>

The Tiruvarur agreement brought the norm of daily wages to 6 measures of paddy plus Rupee one, or Rs.2.68, for men and to 5 measures of paddy plus Rs.0.25, or Rs.1.65, for women. This was equivalent, at prices prevailing then, to 9.6 measures for men and to 5.9 measures for women. In many areas, actual wages paid continued to be lower. Harvest payments in 1968 remained in theory at 5 measures of paddy per a kalam of 48 measures i.e. at 10.4 per cent or the same proportion reported in 1917. In actual practice, this proportion was reduced by landlords by a variety of means such as including the wage payment in the denominator in arriving at the ratio (i.e. 5/53 instead of 5/48), deducting payments for kalavady and to village servants from the harvest heap, and manipulating the measure used for wage payments.<sup>3/</sup> The agitations of 1967 and 1968 reached a boiling point in a gruesome incident that occurred in the village of Kilvenmani about 10 kilometres from Palakurichi in which, in response to a claim for higher wages by a group of Harijan agricultural labourers, goondas set up by local landlords, burnt to death 42 men, women and children of agricultural labour families.<sup>4/</sup> A response of the Government was to appoint a Commission of Inquiry into the agrarian labour problems of East Thanjavur under S.Ganapatia Pillai, a district judge. His report submitted in May 1969 led to the enactment in September 1969 of the Tamilnadu Agricultural Labourers Fair Wages Act under which minimum wages for agricultural labour were notified for the first time in the eight taluks of East Thanjavur.<sup>5/</sup>

The daily wages recommended by Ganapatia Pillai in 1969 were Rs.3 for men and Rs.1.80 for women equivalent to 10.7 and 6.4 measures of paddy at the price of Rs.13.5 per kalam prevailing then. Harvest payments were fixed at 6/54 or 11.1 per cent. These rates were revised from time to time regularising wage agreements reached as a result of a series of agitations in the 1970s, mainly aimed at increasing harvest payments. In Palakurichi itself there was a major strike for three weeks in 1978 by the agricultural labourers under the leadership of the CPM.<sup>6/</sup>

The current level of notified minimum wages that applies to East Thanjavur is 7 litres (1 litre = 1.1 measures) of paddy plus Rs.2.80 per day, or Rs.9, for ploughing, sowing, plucking of seedlings, trimming and maintenance of lands and channels, preparation of land for sowing and transplantation, and manual transport (i.e., occupations in which men are generally engaged) and 6 litres plus Rs.1.80 per day, or Rs.7, for transplantation, weeding or other agricultural operations not specified (i.e. for operations in which women generally participate). In effect, this means Rs.9 for men and Rs.7 for women if paid in cash. Where payment is partly in kind and partly in cash, the norms have been taken to be 7 measures of paddy plus Rs.2.80 for men and 6 measures of paddy and Rs.1.80 for women.<sup>7/</sup>

In actual fact, the minimum wages are deviated from, with variations always downward, as between categories of labour and different seasons. For summer work, daily rates range between Rs.5 and Rs.7 for men and Rs.3 and 5 for women. Throughout the year, depending on the demand-supply situation, casual labourers get hired at Rs.7 to Rs.9 (men) and at Rs.5 to Rs.7 (women) Daily payments to pannayals are 4 measures of paddy and rupee one for men and 3 measures of paddy with no cash supplement for women. Allowing for annual pattakal and kalavady payments for pannayal couples, each of which range between 10 to 12 kalams, the compensation for pannayals works out 10 to 15 per cent below

what they might earn if minimum wages are paid. For pre-harvest cultivation operations, permanent workers are paid Rs.9 (men) and Rs.7 (women). Many of the large landlords pay them at these rates in cash on alternate days and in a combination of cash and kind on alternate days. In the latter case, the rates are 7 measures of paddy and Rs.2.80 per day for men and 6 measures of paddy and Rs.1.80 for women. Harvest payments are uniform for permanent and casual labour and for men and women among them. It now stands at 7 measures per one kalam harvested (i.e. 7/48) or 14.6 per cent. For re-threshing, the prevailing rates are  $3\frac{1}{2}$  marakkals (14 measures) for men and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  marakkals (10 measures) for women.

In 1937, ST reported that "labourers work for 10 hours". At present, hours of work for pannayals vary between  $7\frac{1}{2}$  to 9 hours. For permanent labourers, the norm is 7 hours distributed generally as 7 am to 9 am, 10.30 am to 12.30 pm and 2.30 pm to 5.30 pm. It is not unusual however for this to be extended by about  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour in the evening during the busy season.

### Annual earnings and the trends

Based on the sample survey, we have estimated the annual earnings of couples in each category in Table 33. As earnings are both in cash and in kind, it is necessary to choose a price for paddy for converting cash into kind and vice-versa. We found that the retail price at which agricultural labourers exchanged paddy at the village shops and tea-stalls to meet their consumption needs ranged between Rs.0.70 and Rupee one per measure along the year and we have taken Rs.0.85 per measure, the mid-point of this range, as the rate for conversion. On this basis, the average annual earnings for an agricultural labourer couple in Palakurichi can be estimated at Rs.2257. For pannayal couples it is Rs.2,645, for permanent labourers Rs.2,325 and for casual labourers Rs.1,616. Table 34 gives the structure of earnings in cash/kind and for different operations for permanent labourers. Earnings during harvest and re-threshing account for about 50 per cent of total annual earnings. Average

Table 33 : Annual earnings of agricultural labour couples  
1982-83

	In terms of paddy (kalams)	In cash (Rs.)
1. Pannayals	64.8	2645
2. Permanent	57.0	2325
3. Casual	39.6	1616
4. All (weighted average)	55.3	2257

Table 34 : Structure of annual earnings of permanent labour  
couples 1982-83

	Cash (Rs.)	Kind (kalam)	Cash equivalent (Rs.)	Kind equivalent (kalam)
1. Preharvest cultivation operations	832	7.6	1142	28.0
2. Harvest	-	20.8	849	20.8
3. Re-threshing	-	8.2	334	8.2
	832	36.6	2326	57.0

daily earnings during harvest for a permanent labour couple is of the order of two-thirds of a kalam (i.e. 32 measures). Since harvest wages are  $7/48$  of the quantity reaped, it can be worked out that 10 couples are engaged for harvesting an acre with an output of 45 kalams in a day. In terms of physical productivity, both landlords and labourers were of the opinion that 6 couples would be able to harvest 45 kalams and the excess number employed was due to work sharing among those who turned up for harvest. In bad years, when both work opportunities and output were low, work-sharing at harvest tended to considerably depress per capita earnings spreading a smaller case among a larger number of claimants.

The annual earnings of an agricultural labourer couple at about Rs.2300 could be compared to the net income from cultivation. We saw that at the most this was likely to be Rs.1500 from an acre if two crops were grown and Rs.1000 with a single Samba crop. Income-wise, a small peasant with less than 1.5 to 2.5 acres who depends entirely on land, will be as badly off as an agricultural labour family. This recalls ST's observation in 1937: "The small pattadar has no other avenue for employment, except working under the well-to-do landlords as field labourer. Here too the chance of his getting regular work is uncertain as every landlord has his own pannayals. Possessing neither initiative nor training nor resources to take up any other occupation, the small pattadar really leads a miserable life."

In 1917, KS noted that "the usual daily wage for a padial is one Madras measure of paddy worth (retail price) two annas. In addition, the padial is allowed about a quarter of an acre to cultivate for himself. Women of padial families are paid a little more than half a measure of paddy per day." He also mentions that "for a free labourer the daily wage is four annas or two Madras measures of paddy." In 1937, the only information on wages that we have from ST is that "wages are paid in kind



supplemented by cash occasionally. Only 75 kulis (one-fourth of an acre) of land are given to him for cultivation for his own family. The expenses of cultivation are borne by the landlord. At intervals of two or three days he is given annas two or three for drinking or he may take two marakkals of grain. On occasions, ceremonies and social functions he is rewarded in grain and cash according to the generosity of the landlord". Harvest wages both in 1917 and 1937 were  $2\frac{1}{2}$  Madras measures (i.e. 5 local measures) for a kalam (or 48 local measures) or 10.4 per cent. Altogether, ST estimated that "on the whole a pannayal can get at the most 60 kalams of grain and Rs.8 in cash i.e. about Rs.75 in all". This works out to 67.2 kalams per annum and relates presumably to the earnings of a pannayal family with two workers. If so, it is distinctly higher than the average annual earnings in paddy terms of 55.3 kalams for an agricultural labourer couple now and also higher than the level of 64.8 kalams for a pannayal couple (see Table 33).<sup>8/</sup>

One explanation for the higher level of family earnings in 1937 could be that there were more days of employment then as compared to now. This is suggested by piecing together different bits of information in the 1937 survey. ST reports, for instance, that harvest work was available for 45 days. He also mentions that the working day lasted for 10 hours and that eight labourers could reap one acre per day. Assuming an output of 33 kalams per acre, we can estimate harvest earnings of a pannayal couple at 38.6 kalams from 90 days of harvest work for both.<sup>9/</sup> The output from the quarter acre of land given to them could be estimated at 8.3 kalams. This would leave a balance of 20.3 kalams to be earned from daily wages of one Madras measure for the male and half of that for the female and would correspond to 325 days of work on non-harvest days for both. In all, including harvest days, our estimates would lead to 415 days of work in a year for a couple. ST's passing observation that "there is no unemployment among agricultural labourers" could not have been

literally true but would seem at least to reflect a perception that there was a fair amount of employment. In contrast to these figures, our estimates for 1983 add up to only 367 days of work for a pannayal couple, and an average of only 254 days for all agricultural labourer couples (see Table 32). Within this, harvest work comes to only 60 days and per capita earnings on harvest are also depressed due to work-sharing.<sup>10/</sup> Clearly, despite higher output, the increase in the supply of labour in the last four decades or so has cut into the availability of work and the level of earnings per capita. A second explanation is that taking agricultural labourers as a whole about one-third of earnings now are in cash while the proportion of cash earnings in 1937 for Pannayals was only about 10 per cent. Due to the depression, the price of paddy was particularly low in 1937. These two factors will also tend to depress somewhat real earnings reckoned in terms of paddy in 1983 vis-a-vis 1937.

The minimal conclusion that emerges is that in the long span of more than four decades since ST's resurvey in 1937, real earnings of agricultural labourers have not gone up even if they have not decreased. This is corroborated for the past 15 year period by the estimates available in Ganapatia Pillai's report. This is so despite, and because of, the long process of wage agitations since the 1940s which have resulted in raising normative daily wage rates for men from 4 to over 10 measures, of women from 2 to over 8 measures, and of harvest shares from 10.4 to 14.6 per cent. The reasons for this depressing conclusion are not difficult to identify in broad terms. The growth in output (90 per cent in over 40 years) and the level of output are low; meanwhile, the labour force has very significantly increased (by 140 per cent); average wage realisations are below legally prescribed levels; the mode of payment of wages has shifted more towards cash; and inflation has eroded the real value of cash earnings.

### Supplementary incomes

There being no industrial units in or around Palakurichi, non-agricultural sources of income are confined to salaried workers and to those owning the cycle, tailoring, textile, grocery and tea shops. Avenues for casual non-agricultural employment in or around the village are very limited. As far as agricultural labour families are concerned, milch cattle and poultry provide a useful but not a very significant source of supplementary earnings. Typically, the gross income from a milch buffalo is around Rs.1200 per annum. Out of this, about Rs.800 goes towards loan repayment leaving a balance of Rs.400 for maintaining the animal. Actual feed costs come to Rs.500 to Rs.600 with the result that the "beneficiary" is left with no surplus, or even burdened with further debt, in the initial years in which the loan is being repaid. His consolation is that once the loan is discharged, he can expect a net income of about Rs.600 for the rest of the yielding life of the animal. 30 milch animals have been provided to Harijan families in Palakurichi under the IRDP and for 18 of them a second animal has been financed to help tide over the income shortfall when the first one goes through its dry period. A net income of Rs.15 to 25 a month is realised from poultry by the families who keep them on a ownership basis. It is half of this if the birds are held on varam.

Cowdung which is sold at 8 to 10 paise per cake is another source of supplementary income to agricultural labour families who own cattle. Their own fuel requirements are largely met by gathering twigs, brushwood and agricultural waste supplemented by limited quantities of kerosene. Fuel wood is bought only by the tea stalls. Four large Naidu landlords have gobar gas plants financed by loans and subsidies from the Khadi and Village Industries Commission.

### Pattern of consumption

In the family enquiries we also attempted to gain some idea of the pattern of household consumption among agricultural labour families. Taking adults as one unit and children as 0.8 units of consumption, cereal (i.e., rice) consumption levels came to 677 grams per consumption unit per day in pannayal families, to 665 grams in permanent labour families and to 536 grams among casual labourers. These figures are not averages but relate to days when the family has two full meals and keep apart some rice for the next day's breakfast. As a norm, 500 to 600 grams of rice (or 550 grams) was considered to be the daily requirement for an adult.<sup>11/</sup> For a family size of 3.7, as is the case with Harijans in Palakurichi, the annual requirement for cereals can be worked out as Rs.1450 for the household.<sup>12/</sup> To meet this level of subsistence, family incomes will have to be of the order of Rs.3,000 as compared to the average annual earning level of Rs.2257 we have reported for agricultural labour couples.<sup>13/</sup>

Typical family budgets were at the level of Rs.2500 per annum distributed somewhat as follows. Rs.1500 was on food of which rice would account for Rs.1150. This would work out to about 440 grams of rice per adult unit per day. In the expenditure of Rs.1000 on non-food items, the principal items that figures (in that order) were (i) clothes (ii) tea, cigarettes, betel leaf and nuts and tobacco (iii) liquor (iv) travel and expenses connected with festivals and family functions (v) house repair (vi) fuel and lighting, mainly kerosene and electricity (vii) medical expenses and (viii) entertainment. Table 35 provides an illustrative breakdown.

The pattern of consumption has clearly become more diversified since 1937 and even in comparison to the late 1960s. In 1937, ST remarked that 'tea is used only rarely'. There are now a dozen tea stalls in the village, all of which are well attended round the day. Drinking in 1937 "was a regular habit among pannayals" and continues to be so among agricultural

Table 35 : Typical pattern of consumption expenditures for an agricultural labour family 1982-83

(Per annum in Rs.)		
	Rs.	Per cent
1. Rice	1150	46.0
2. Food items other than cereals	350	14.0
3. Clothes	250	10.0
4. Tea, betel leaf and nuts, tobacco	225	9.0
5. Liquor	125	5.0
6. Travel, functions and festivals	100	4.0
7. House repair	75	3.0
8. Medical	75	3.0
9. Electricity and fuel	75	3.0
10. Entertainment	75	3.0
	2500	100.0

labourers. There is an arrack shop and a toddy shop in the village both of which are well patronised by the Harijans, especially during the harvest season. Incidentally, both shops are owned by rich landlords and liquor profits are an important form of the reverse flow of resources from the poor to the rich. Family budget estimates provided in S.Ganapatia Pillai's report for Harijan agricultural labour families in Nagapattinam taluk in 1968 provide another interesting point for comparison. In paddy terms, his estimate of the overall annual consumption level for agricultural labourers at Rs.731 in 1968 (54.2 kalams) is about the same as our current estimate of 55.3 kalams. However, as Table 36 indicates, a change in consumption patterns away from food seems to have taken place even in the last 15 years. Visible signs of this are also apparent in the village. About 30 per cent of the thatched huts of Harijans are electrified and about a third of them own radios or cycles. Palakurichi now has a local textile shop which makes brisk sales of sarees and dhotis on credit.<sup>14/</sup> Utensils are bought on instalment payments and are often also mortgaged for meeting consumption needs. Fish, bread, ice and simple perfumes are marketed in the Harijan colonies by vendors and face powder is a fast-moving item in the grocery shops. Such a diversification in the pattern of consumption, within a stagnant overall level, would entail a lesser expenditure on food and/or greater indebtedness.

### Debt and Savings

We have no data to study changes in the volume or proportion of debt. Indebtedness reported among the 24 agricultural labour families in the family survey was in the range of Rs.1000 to Rs.2000 excluding interest dues. This is apart from institutional borrowing on account of milch animals. Debt had been incurred to meet consumption requirements as well as expenses contingent on marriages, deaths, medical expenses and repair to huts. Most of the debt was owed to landlords and to the textile and grocery

Table 36 : Consumption pattern of Agricultural labour households 1968 and 1983

	(Per cent to total)	
	1968	1983
1. Food	84.4	60.0
2. Clothes	4.3	10.0
3. Tea, betel leaf and nuts, tobacco	NR	9.0
4. Liquor	NR	5.0
5. Travel, functions and festivals	5.0	4.0
6. House Repair	4.7	3.0
7. Medical	1.6	3.0
8. Electricity and fuel	NR	3.0
9. Entertainment	NR	3.0
	100.0	100.0

Note: Source for 1968 is report of S.Ganapatia Pillai p.25 relating to the budget of Harijan agricultural labour families in Nagapat-tinam taluk. NR is 'not reported'. Item 1 in his table might sub items 3, 4 and 8 as well.

shops. The quantum of indebtedness per family, representing average earnings for 6 to 12 months in terms of principal dues alone is quite significant.

Rates of interest vary. Borrowing in the form of paddy in the lean season, when it sells at Rupee one a measure, repaid after harvest when it sells at Rs.0.70 per measure, bears an implicit real interest rate of about 40 per cent for 3 to 4 months. On consumption loans taken in cash, the usual rate is Rs.10 per month on Rs.100 equivalent to 120 per cent per annum, or one bag of paddy for Rs.100 at the end of the year equivalent to 80 per cent per annum. In general, Palakurichi landlords do not indulge in professional money lending but there are two exceptions, one of whom is also the owner of the toddy shop. These two lend money on the mortgage of utensils and jewels. Some professional money lenders visit the village every month by bicycle and give small sums, usually Rs.50 to Rs.100, to women in the Harijan colony on what is known as instalment credit. Under this, a loan of Rs.10 has to be returned in 10 weekly instalments of Rs.1.25 which is equivalent to an interest rate of 250 per cent per annum.

A few families of Harijan labourers have some savings but of meagre amounts in the range of Rs.100 to Rs.200. In the last three years, the average balance kept by Harijans (186 families) in the village Cooperative Society in all accounts -- current, savings and deposits -- is a total of Rs.12,200 in contrast to an amount of Rs.1.36 lakhs by the Naidus (26 families), not to speak of substantial Naidu investments outside of the village.

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- 1/ According to the 1971 Census figures population per hectare of cultivable land as compared to 3.26 in Palakurichi was in the range of 3.27 to 4.12 in Thannilapadi, Sholavidyapuram, Iryankudi and Madapuram which are the main villages that surround Palakurichi.
- 2/ For a fuller account on which this is based see K.C.Alexander Agrarian Tension in Thanjavur, National Institute of Community Development Hyderabad pp.40-46.
- 3/ See Report of S.Ganapatia Pillai op.cit. pp.14-15.
- 4/ This incident has had two sequels. In a controversial judgment the Madras High Court in 1973 acquitted all the landlords who were accused for the murder of these families, including Gopalakrishna Naidu the prime suspect. See in this connection Gentlemen Killers of Kilvenmani Economic and Political Weekly May 26, 1973 which also gives an account of the original incident. On December 25, 1980, the 12th anniversary of the incident, Gopalakrishna Naidu was murdered in his village by unknown assailants.
- 5/ Minimum wages for agricultural labour were notified for the first time in Tamilnadu in November 1959 but E.Thanjavur was kept outside the coverage of this notification and it was not until 1969 that minimum wage legislation was extended to East Thanjavur.
- 6/ The strike is discussed in the following chapter.
- 7/ It should be noted that this norm is slightly below the statutory minimum wage since one measure is only 0.93 of a litre.
- 8/ S.Ganapatia Pillai's estimates of annual earnings for a worker couple in 1968 was Rs.731.46 equivalent to 54.2 kalams. This was on the assumption that wages agreed to in the Tiruvarur Agreement were actually being paid. See his report p.10.
- 9/ Harvest wages being 5 measures in a kalam of 48 measures and 8 persons being employed for reaping one acre of output 33 kalams in a day, per capita harvest earnings would be  $33/8 \times 5$  or 20.625 measures. For 90 days, this would be equivalent to 38.6 kalams.
- 10/ Ganapatia Pillai's estimates of duration of employment for agricultural labour couples in 1968 were also in the range of 205 to 272 days including 30 to 40 days of harvest. See his report p.10.

- 11/ In Iruvelpattu, the daily requirement for an adult was estimated at 400 grams of rice. See S.Guham and Joan P.Mencher op.cit. p.53.
- 12/ A family of 3.7 persons is equivalent to  $2+1.7 \times 0.8 = 3.36$  Consumption Units. Rice is costed at the average price of Rs.2.15 per kilo.  $3.36 \times 0.55 \times 365 \times 2.15 = 1450$ .
- 13/ Cereals are taken to constitute 48 to 50 per cent of overall consumption expenditures following NSS estimates. Rs.3000 per annum for a household of 3.7 will work out to Rs.67.6 per capita per month, well below the Sixth Plan estimates of Rs.76 per capita per month for rural India in 1979-80 prices. This is therefore a conservative estimate of the poverty line.
- 14/ This shop which caters to Palakurichi and other villages has an annual turnover of Rs.100,000. Most of the sarees sold are synthetic fabrics.

### VIII Power Structure and Social Relations

In terms of its polity, the world of Palakurichi is somewhat of a bi-polar one. At one end are the Naidus with their overwhelming share in landownership and the economic and social dominance that they gain from it. The Harijans at the other end, although economically and socially down-trodden, are not without countervailing power given their numbers and more important, their unity under the leadership of the CPM. Within these two foci, the several middle-castes have situated themselves in a spectrum of relationships vis-a-vis both.

The Naidu dominance of the village power structure at a political level can be traced in the history of the Panchayat between 1950, when it was first established, and 1977 since when, along with all other Panchayats in Tamilnadu, it has been under supersession. Between 1950 and 1965, KA the second largest local Naidu landlord (owning 57 acres) was the President, occupying that position for three successive terms. Initially, of 10 members in the Panchayat 6 were Naidus, one was a Harijan and 3 came from other castes. In 1960, there was a move from the Padayachis supported by some Harijans to contest the elections but the Naidus secured a "compromise" and avoided a contest. The quid pro quo was to include a Harijan as the Vice-President replacing one of the 6 Naidu nominees and raising Harijan representation to two. From 1965 to 1977, VRR the largest local Naidu landlord (owning 72 acres) was the President. For part of his first term (1965-70), the Vice-President was a Padayachi but he was replaced by a Naidu in a couple of years. This brought Naidu representation to 5 with the balance being made up of 2 Harijans and 3 from other castes. In 1970-77, a CPM activist belonging to the Isai Vellala Community became the Vice-President. The size of the Panchayat was enlarged to 12 in which there were 5 Naidus, 2 Harijans and 5 from other castes.

Thus, throughout the 27 years of the Panchayat, the Presidentship of the Panchayat and about 50 per cent of its membership has been with the Naidus who constitute about 6 per cent of the population while the Harijans, who are nearly half the population, have had no more than 20 per cent of the seats. Throughout also, members to the Panchayat have been nominated without contest under Naidu tutelage, though not without negotiation or compromise. In all this, an informal Naidu-Harijan accommodation has been a feature.

Naidu leadership in the Panchayat, at least in the later period, has not been a passive one. During his long tenure of 12 years, VRR-a Congressman and Philanthropist - was able to exert his influence to secure a number of amenities to the village. The fact that he was President of the Panchayat Union in 1970-77 also helped. The overhead tank (1968), the veterinary sub-centre (1969), the high school (1970), the maternity sub-centre (1974), the bus stand and a bus route through the village (1975), the balwadi (1976), the teachers' quarters (1976) and the Panchayat Union dispensary (1977) are an impressive list of his achievements. They incidentally illustrate that Government facilities that are meant to serve a number of villages, such as health and veterinary centres and high schools, tend to be clustered in the native village of the Union President; but, this has been Palakurichi's fortunate accident.

The Agricultural Services Cooperative Society which serves Palakurichi and 7 other villages is also located in Palakurichi. Its entire board of directors consists of Naidu landlords from Palakurichi and neighbouring villages. It is not an accident that only 7 per cent of its lending in the village has been to small and marginal farmers. Until the abolition of village officers in Tamilnadu in 1980, the post of Village Munsiff has been traditionally shared between two or three leading Naidu families. The Karnam or Village Accountant has been a Brahmin who has had a tenure of about 40 years in that position; by all accounts, he knew his place vis-a-vis the large landowners of the village.

Along with their hegemony over these formal institutions and positions, the Naidus also control the informal government of the village. They manage the disposal of the communal income and appoint the village thalaiyaris or common watchmen. These activities are managed by a Grama Seva Sangham (Village Service Society) consisting entirely of Naidus. The communal income is quite small, of the order of Rs.1000 per annum, from fishery auctions in 16 small ponds in the village. Out of these, the income from 12 ponds have been formally assigned to the Sangham in a Government order with that from the rest being left to traditional village servants like the poosari (priest), vannan (washerman) melakaran (drummer) and vettiyan (lower village official). These funds supplemented by donations and collections are used partly for desilting the ponds and mainly for the conduct of festivals to the smaller village shrines, the two larger temples being taken care of by the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board. The Naidus have contributed liberally to capital expenses connected with these temples such as renovation and Kumbhabishekam (consecration). The village thalaiyaris appointed by the Seva Sangham operate a simple turn system of irrigation. Their main duty is to watch crops from theft and to chase way cattle. Palakurichi has an old dilapidated cattle pound. The Naidus want it repaired but the Harijans do not since they fear, with some justification, that it is their straying cattle which will get mostly impounded by the thalaiyaris.

Contracts from the Public Works and Highways Departments are a sign of prestige as well as a source of income to Naidu landlords. One of them is also closely connected to a senior engineer. The bridge over the Vellayar, road works in and around the village and the Government, Panchayat Union and Panchayat constructions in the village have all had contractors among two or three of the Naidu landlord families. With well placed relatives in Nagapattinam, Thanjavur and Madras, the Naidus maintain good liasion with different levels of the Government at the State, district, divisional and taluk levels.

Their traditional affiliation with the Congress Party has cramped their influence somewhat with DMK and AIADMK Governments since 1967 but they still exert a great deal of weight in anything that concerns them at sub-political levels of the administration.<sup>1/</sup> Local Palakurichi landlords are not particularly active in the Thanjavur District Agriculturists' Association, which is a lobby group for rich mirasdars, but a kinsman of theirs in a neighbouring village is its President and takes good care of their interests.

KS, himself a scion of an important landlord family in the village, commenting on the Naidu ethos wrote in 1917 that "Education they do not want - at any rate higher education, for this higher education involves dependence, absence from the common hearth and consequent anxiety and care on the part of the elders. This conservatism is their main strength as well as their main weakness. It serves as a strength in so far as it keeps them aloof from the ultra-materialistic tendencies of the cities and in so far as it prevents them from becoming bankrupt through doubtful enterprises. Their conservatism is their main weakness, in as much as it keeps them behind, notwithstanding the progressive movement of the times". There was perhaps a note of the young rebel in these words since KS himself was one of earliest cases of a Naidu from Palakurichi taking to higher education.<sup>2/</sup> In the years since, many others from his community have followed him, securing for themselves successful careers in law, medicine, engineering, universities, commercial banks and government. This has left the Naidu households in the village largely impoverished of a younger generation. The older generation is still attached to land, to the extent of feeling in some sense tied to it, but they are worried as to what will happen after their time. Some hope that their sons will return to the village on retirement but few, despite these uncertainties, seriously contemplate parting with land and moving into towns. At best, the most affluent of them, like VRR, divide their time between Madras or Nagapattinam and the village.

KS' observation that the Naidus are "emphatically not a trading class" still remains true, but perhaps with less emphasis. There are no paddy traders among them in the village but the textile, arrack and toddy shops are owned by Naidus, in addition to the coolie rice mill. Only two of them are professional moneylenders and one of these, being the owner of the toddy shop, has also established a logical nexus between his pawning operations and his liquor business. Apart from tractors and diesel pumpsets, Naidus have invested very little of their surpluses in land, houses or other investments in the village in the last few decades. Most of it has gone into real estate in Madras, financial assets, and childrens' education and none into direct industrial investments.

We shall now turn to the Harijans who, as previous chapters have shown, stand in stark contrast to the Naidus in their economic status, social position and living standards. Numerically, they are the largest caste group accounting for nearly half the village population. However their strength comes not from numbers alone but from an impressive unity forged by the Communist Party (M) which has been active in the village notably in the last 15 years. The party has its committed members both among Harijans and some of the caste Hindus and its operations in the village are guided by the Thanjavur Vivasaya Thozhilalar Sangam (Thanjavur Agricultural Labour Association), a mass front of the CPM.

In the perception of Harijans, a very significant contribution of the party has been to free them <sup>from</sup> traditional repression by landlords. Older pannayals recalled how 20 to 25 years ago, it was normal for landlords to flog their pannayals, physically tie them to ploughs, and make them drink cowdung soaked in water as a punishment. In Palakurichi itself, we encountered a few cases of pannayals who had run away from the village due to harassment, and had returned a few years later, as also some

who had come to the village in similar straits from neighbouring villages. If today these practices were things of the past, the credit went largely to the party. 'We have no fear as long as the red flag flies' was a statement that was frequently repeated.

One can also see definite progress in Palakurichi in regard to non-discrimination against Harijans in matters of daily life, in contrast to the situation elsewhere in Tamilnadu.<sup>3/</sup> We have already noted that there is no absolute segregation in habitat with two Harijan families living in the caste Hindu village and six non-Harijan families living in the colony; no doubt a small sign of intermixture but not to be ignored. There have been two cases of Harijan-Padayachi inter-marriage. In all the tea shops, and in the liquor shops, Harijans and Caste Hindus are treated alike. In fact, it is the tea stalls in the Caste Hindu village, and particularly one run by a Padayachi, which are frequented most by Harijan agricultural labourers because it is there that they get most information of daily work opportunities. Harijans still have their separate burial grounds but a few months ago when one of their funeral processions had to go through the caste village there was no trouble. They have free access to the handpumps in the Iluppai Thope along with caste Hindus. They enter Naidu households, and through the front door; and face no discrimination in the bus.<sup>4/</sup>

The most recent major wage agitation in the village also illustrates changing modes of behaviour. In 1978, during the ploughing season, there was a strike by Harijan agricultural labourers who demanded an increase in wages. One of the landlords then tried to import caste Hindu workers from outside the district in a lorry. This was stopped by the Harijans and a clash between the two sides, both of whom were armed, seemed imminent. RK, one of the Naidu landlords (with 20 acres),



intervened and used his good offices for a peaceful settlement. It was at this time that the agricultural labourers succeeded in getting wages of men revised to Rs.9 (from Rs.7.80) and of women raised to Rs.7 (from Rs.6). The next major demand was to improve harvest wages from 6 to 7 measures per kalam in 1981. This was settled on the basis of negotiation with once again RK playing the role of an intermediary. The attitude of the major Naidu landlords towards RK is ambivalent: they feel that he is a little too supportive of demands from agricultural labour but they find him a useful link with the adversary. His role is however appreciated by the Harijans. One indication of this is that the local CPM legislator allows himself to be hosted by RK for a meal whenever he visits the village. We were told by more than one party activist in the village that they would prefer to settle issues through negotiation, resorting to agitations only if unavoidable. In this context, the Kilvenmani tragedy -- both the original incident and the subsequent reprisal -- have had a great impact on the minds of all. Both in the treatment of pannayals and of Harijans, and in the settlement of wage agitations, it is clear that status has yielded to contract, brought about by effective unionisation.

A most important contribution that the party has made towards promoting a living sense of unity among Harijans is to institute excellent procedures for dispute settlement among them. This takes place in monthly meetings of the entire Harijan Community, represented by its heads of households, held on New Moon or Amavasai days which are holidays for agricultural labour. A jury of 7 or 11 persons is constituted. Complainants and the alleged offenders are given a hearing on the dispute involved -- encroachment of housesites, a loan overdue, theft of poultry, sexual offences, and the like. The jury then retire amongst themselves and come back with a judgment that is acceptable and is accepted.<sup>5/</sup>

Two episodes that occurred during our survey provide illustrations. K a Harijan, had taken great pains to educate his son up to class X only to find that the boy was more interested in a neighbour's daughter than in his studies. The youngsters made known their desire to get married but K was firmly opposed. This matter was brought to the Ammavasai meeting which took the rather sophisticated decision that the young couple may live together in a separate hut but may get married only after K had had time to 'cool off'. After a couple of months, however, the girl's parents had had enough of the boy and the boy himself wanted to end the arrangement. He went back to K and the girl's side brought the matter up again to the Ammavasai meeting claiming compensation for the injury to their family honour. This time the decision was a heavy fine on K. He had expected to be fined about Rs.500 but the jury levied a fine of Rs.2500. K's own explanation for the severity of the sentence was that they had to make an example of him because he was a member of the party; in dealing with its own members, the party had to appear to be especially strict.

The second was the boycott of the toddy shop. The owner of this shop (to whom we have already referred) operated his pawning business through a Padayachi 'agent' who lived in the Harijan colony. This man's comparative advantage was that he was a eunuch and so could freely move among the womenfolk. His function was to collect monthly repayments from them and pass them on to the lender, apart from collecting and returning the pawned articles. During this year's harvest season, when debtors who had fully repaid their loan dues claimed their articles back, it was discovered that the 'agent' had not been passing on their repayments to the toddy shop owner but had misappropriated them. The Harijans were naturally furious at the agent who moved to the Naidu owner's house for sanctuary. The Harijans then decided at the Ammavasai meeting to boycott the toddy shop. It was a total and successful boycott that lasted for three weeks ending with the owner-lender returning all the pawned articles.

The Ammavasai meetings are also the occasion for discussion of wage demands and of strategies for agitating them but political unity for these purposes is forged on a solid basis of social cohesion secured through the timely, appropriate and systematic settlement of family disputes. The party has also been actively working among the women through the Madar Sangham (Womens' Association). The main topics of propaganda here are directed against drink and against taking instalment credits on usurious rates of interest. The Madar Sangham furthermore plays a vigilant role against sexual exploitation of women labourers. Of the dozen tea stalls in the village, four in the Harijan colonies and two in the caste village are run by party sympathisers. This network provides the infrastructure for exchange of information, dissemination of news on party activities, and a continuing awareness.

The non-Naidu, non-Harijan caste Hindus are not a homogeneous group, socially and economically, they occupy an uneasy space in the village. In terms of land ownership, they are nowhere near the Naidus: they are 45 per cent of the village population and claim only 15 per cent of the land. In terms of occupation they span a wide spectrum. A few are medium landowners and 28 per cent of workers among them are agricultural labourers; however, mostly they are either small peasants or in non-agricultural and service occupations. The upper strata among them resent Naidu dominance in village affairs. Equally, they do not take easily to what they see as the social assertiveness of the Harijan in domains -- schools, tea stalls, shops, buses -- in which they, more than the Naidus, are thrown in close contact with the erstwhile "untouchables". They frequently refer to Harijans being pampered by Naidus in respect of social relations and wage demands. These sentiments on their part have found expression in the Grama Narpani Manram (Village Good Works Society) and a youth version of it, the Grama Ilaignar

Manram (Village Youth Association). The Narpani Manram originally included Naidus but later the Naidus excluded themselves; no Harijan has been a member of it; and with nearly a hundred members it now functions very much as a caste welfare association for the upper strata of the middle castes. Based on an annual subscription of Rs.6 per member and some donations, there is a fund for extending small loans to its members. The Sangham leadership, for the last several years under the leading Padayachi cultivator, settles disputes amongst its members. It also interests itself with minor common works like desilting the ponds.

These attitudes and activities of the upper strata among the middle castes -- mostly the Chettiars, Pillais and the more affluent Padayachis -- are not however shared by the poorer third viz., the poorer Padayachis, most of the Asaris, the Konars and the Thevars who belong, more or less, to the same economic strata as the Harijans, being full-time or part-time agricultural wage earners or craftsmen. Many of them, especially among the Asaris and the Konars, are also affiliated to the CPM. They meet and mingle freely with the Harijans in the tea shops and lend active support to wage demands although they may not be in the forefront. It is also worth mentioning that the party cadre member who looks after Palakurichi affairs, and comes from a neighbouring village, is a Konar. Two other leading resident activists are a Padayachi and an Asari. During the 1978 strike, and for many years previous to it, a CPM sympathiser from the Isai Vellala community was the organiser and spokesman of Harijan agricultural labourers. He was also one of the chosen representatives of the Harijans on the Village Panchayat and its Vice-President in 1970-77. One does get the impression from all this that with the strong unionisation of labour in Palakurichi, class affiliations have visibly eroded caste barriers; and more perhaps among the poor than among the rich.<sup>6/</sup>

In terms of political parties, there is once again some sort of a broad line-up. The Naidus have been, and remain, Congress sympathisers and VRR actually stood for (and lost) an election to the State Assembly as a Congress candidate. The Harijans are, of course solidly behind the CPM which represents the constituency now. Others are divided among the Congress, the DMK, the AIADMK and the CPM. The local worker for the AIADMK informed us that all other parties were united amongst themselves in resisting the influence of the CPM. Because of the AIADMK-CPM alliance in the 1980 elections, he had to support the CPM candidate. His grievance was that after the elections, CPM workers in the village had not been grateful to him. He clearly saw himself as a power-broker between Government officials and the people. His regret was that the people preferred to approach their elected representative rather than the local pillar of the ruling party for various amenities and favours, but his consolation was that the officials at least were more respectful

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- 1/ The incident referred to in the first footnote in Chapter IV is one illustration.
- 2/ After graduating as Prof. Slater's student, KS became a successful lawyer and a member of the Justice Party.
- 3/ For instance, in Iruvelpattu. See S. Guhan and Joan P. Mencher p.64.
- 4/ Kathleen Gough (op.cit. p.406) writing of Kiruppur says: "Of equal importance /i.e. to wage improvements/ were improvements in working hours and conditions. The eight-hour day; the public holiday on New Moon Day, and the stoppage of flogging and other degrading punishments greatly improved the workers' morale and dignity. Along with these rights came others, not measurable but much valued, such as the right to walk freely on the roads, to wear clothing as one pleased, to attend public rallies far away, to ride on buses and to go to cinemas. Above all the workers had

learned that struggle was possible and with unity they might win a decent life. There is no wonder that, symbolizing all this, the red flag was their most prized possession".

- 5/ See also Kathleen Gough op.cit. pp 400 to 404 for an account of Ammavasai meetings in Kiruppur, a village close to Palakurichi.
- 6/ In this connection, the perceptive observations of Dagfinn Sivertsen in his study of a West Thanjavur village are relevant: "People ... are intensely engaged in what they explicitly recognise as political activity, with wealth and poverty in combination providing the main incentives and external ideologies lending direction and coherence.... the people have come far in defying the principles of caste. But as regards the actual process it is not possible to distinguish absolutely between caste and non-caste. Caste barriers are broken and the conflicts are actions between party and counter-party, but caste still remains important as a form of social identity". Dagfinn Sivertsen: When Caste Barriers Fall Scandinavian University Books, 1963 p.9.

IX Palakurichi : Then and Now

The motivation for the resurvey has been to study growth and change in Palakurichi with the help of earlier surveys, secondary data and a field investigation. There are limitations attached to each of these sources in terms of conceptualisation, data, method and competence. Well recognising them, we shall try to summarise some major findings or hypotheses "with a view" in Slater's phrase "to subsequent correction or verification". In any event, an attempt will have to be made to see the wood through the trees.

The Census series gives the long term trend in population levels but in the absence of corresponding data on vital statistics and migration, a systematic analysis of demographic change is not possible. Informational inadequacies also make it difficult to relate demographic change to the changing fortunes of the village, so that any conclusions that are offered can only be suggestive, if not speculative. We find that in a long span of 80 years, population growth in Palakurichi has tended to conform to that in the wider area of the district and the district and the taluk in which the village is located. But within this span, certain definite phases of the absorption and discharge of agricultural workers, who are those who count most, can be discerned. Roughly, in the inter-war years (1917 to 1937) zero-growth in population coincides with a period of economic stagnation. Factors leading to enhanced and more stable output, in particular improved irrigation, have induced large scale in-migration in the 1940s which has tapered off in the 1950s. The 1960s represent a process of adjustment ; population density seems to have found its own level within a wider area through out-migration stimulated by second cropping. The demography of the village raises certain other questions. The Harijans tend to have smaller families. Lower life expectancy and higher death rates among them sound plausible but is also

lower fertility the case? Better sex ratios among Harijans have been noticed in Palakurichi and elsewhere: is it the reason that to them a woman is an economic asset rather than a liability?

In Palakurichi, agriculture is almost the only activity, paddy about the only crop, population density is high and concentration of landownership is extreme. In these circumstances, high participation rates, a very high proportion for the agricultural work force and of agricultural labour in that is not surprising. At the same time, a growth in non-agricultural employment over time arising from Government facilities, trade and services, and mechanisation can be identified. These reflect both general growth in economic activity and a growth in State intervention in development. A broad correspondence between castes and occupational patterns holds. Within the agrarian economy, a land-owning caste and a labouring caste clearly identify themselves in the Naidus and in the Harijans. The others sort themselves out as small and medium peasants, workers in trade and services and as salary earners in public institutions. A thrust for upward and outward mobility is evident among the latter but this gets constrained on two fronts. The low level of assets owned by these 'middle castes' do not yield much surplus for the acquisition of land, and given also a strongly entrenched landowning class, it is not easy for them to graduate as larger peasants or as landlords. The State has provided facilities for scholastic and technical education but these have not been matched with employment opportunities limiting the scope for non-agricultural employment. Educated unemployment is no longer a purely urban phenomenon and is becoming a feature in rural areas as well. The problem of the unemployable old should also cause concern. Old age pensions in principle provide some social security but their availability is far below established need. Agricultural labourers, men and women, when no longer fit for manual work have no other course except to face destitution which gets relieved only by death.



There are striking changes in the social infrastructure of Palakurichi in the last two decades or so. Communication with the outside world has vastly improved due to the Vellayar bridge, better roads, the bus route and telephones in the village. Literacy -- male and female -- has registered tangible improvement. Schooling facilities have expanded to class X. There are many more children in school, including girls. Caste barriers in schools in relation to Harijans, so strong in the 1940s, have been broken. Harijan children, though not as many girls as should, come to school and are treated and fed alike with the rest. The noon-meal scheme provides a real benefit. Health, maternity and veterinary services have come to the village. Electricity represents a major change; a fair number of houses, including quite a few in the Harijan colonies, have been electrified. More newspapers and magazines are read and people travel more to towns for work and entertainment. Altogether there is more welfare and participation in a wider world.

However, there are gaps and inadequacies in this picture. The Harijans, and especially their women, are decades behind the other castes in literacy. With the rich sending their children to school in towns, there is no effective community involvement in the educational facilities in the village. No durable solution has been found in all these years to the drinking water supply problem. Public sanitation facilities are totally absent. Medical advice is free but drugs are expensive. Preventive health care is negligible and the death rate remains high. Veterinary aid is thinly spread and does not really help the poor who have come to own milch cattle and poultry. The village is liberally endowed with street lights but they burn by exception rather than as a rule. Now that many public facilities have come to the village, the issue is one of their efficiency and the effective access provided to the poor. Even in regard to their availability, Palakurichi is not typical; it enjoys a cluster of these facilities, and benefits from the

employment they create, largely because it has happened to be the native village of an active Panchayat Union President who has had a long tenure.

The big change since the earlier surveys in the agrarian economy of the village is the introduction of second cropping in the 1960s. This has been made possible by technology and agricultural extension provided through the IADP. In the last four decades, per acre yields have gone up by about 40 per cent and the cropped area by about 30 per cent. The use of improved seeds and of chemical fertilisers and pesticides has become universal. Yet, in absolute levels, the general yield of 1.3 tonnes of paddy (or about 850 kg of rice) per acre is just about the average for Tamilnadu and quite low on any reckoning. The timeliness and quantum of irrigation are the main constraints on improving yields and the cropping intensity; and they can be tackled only if there is a modernisation of the delta irrigation system in Thanjavur that can improve supplies to the tail end by effecting economies of water in the upper reaches.

A second major change is the advent of tractors promoted by institutional credit. It is in part a response to the compressed Kuruvai-Thaladi cropping regime and in part to labour agitations. Tractors have reduced draught cattle stock and displaced labour but they also provide some non-agricultural employment and might have improved cropping intensity, adding also in that process to agricultural employment. They have certainly increased cultivation costs and also shifted them from ploughing wages for the poor to a surplus to the tractor owners who hire them out. The new technology has entailed sharply increased costs on chemical inputs reducing gains both to landowners and to labour. Government policies have traditionally kept output prices low in Thanjavur. The landlords argue that higher output prices are a matter of common interest to them and to their workers who may thereby hope for better wages. Agricultural labour is not convinced. They see

higher output prices increasing the cost of food to them but feel it unlikely that real wages will correspondingly keep pace. However, in some measure, steadily increasing input costs have entangled the terms of trade issue and the issue of securing greater gains to labour.

Over nearly a century, a very high concentration in landownership within a relatively few families of a single caste has persisted and has in fact become more entrenched. There is a substantial proportion of absentee ownership and this is not unrelated to the caste oligarchy. Land ceiling legislation has provided enough loopholes whereby substantial amounts of land can be closely held, even without much infringement of the law. There are few poorer peasants who have acquired land over time; they have lacked surpluses to do so and those who have land do not easily part with it. Some have lost land, such as craftsmen, and some others, like the Brahmins, have given it up and moved to towns. Landlessness is nearly total among the Harijans. Tenancy -- which has never been very high in Palakurichi -- is now quite insignificant. Some tenancies have been resumed, most absentee owners have found means to get land cultivated directly or by proxy, and traditional rents and increasing costs have in any case rendered tenancy uneconomic. To the extent that tenancy remains it is one form of binding labour.

Agricultural labourers have become strongly unionised under Communist leadership in Palakurichi. This too is a major development. It has brought gains on many fronts. Crude landlord repression prevalent for centuries in Thanjavur can no longer be practised. The worst forms of social discrimination against the Harijans are also a thing of the past. A series of agitations in the 1940s and again from the mid 1960s have improved wages from 4 measures prior to 1940 for men to about 8 measures in 1945 to about 10 measures in 1968 but it has not gone up very much since

then. Relatively, wages for women have shown greater improvement, from 2 to 8 measures. Harvest shares have increased from about 10 to over 14 per cent. Working hours have been reduced to 7 from 10 hours in the old days. These gains have been secured every time through agitation rather than State intervention. Progressively, incremental gains have been smaller. Demographic pressure has reduced employment despite the growth in output. Inflation has acted to keep real wages down. The hard-won wage improvements have only served to maintain year-round real earnings at most at about the same level as they were four decades ago. Annual earnings of agricultural labourers come to no more than 75 per cent of what can be considered a minimal poverty line. Supplementary incomes from milch cattle or poultry have made little difference. To some extent, radios, cycles, better textiles, electricity, tea, cinema and bus travel have introduced a greater liveliness into the lives of the poor but all these have to be paid for through less of basic nutrition and more of borrowing.

Local self government in the village through the Panchayat has been inoperative for some years now. In the nearly three decades for which it has functioned, it was clearly dominated by a small land owning coterie who were successful in coopting the Harijans. Caste consciousness is still strong but unionisation and labour struggles have eroded it among the poor. In their working at the village level, all parties that have so far ruled Tamilnadu -- the Congress, the DMK and the AIADMK -- have shown little involvement with the real concerns of the downtrodden.

Slater hoped that village studies might help his students to understand the "causes of and remedies for Indian poverty". Whatever they be, Palakurichi surveyed again, nearly 70 years after Slater sent K.Soundara Rajalu back to it, shows that undeniably there has been some growth as also changes at many levels -- technological, governmental, social and political. However, they have not undermined the hard core of poverty and inequality which have remained intact.