

**Paradoxes of Agricultural Transformation: changing
gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India**

Asha Gangadharan

Thesis submitted to the
University of Leicester, Department of Geography
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2008

ABSTRACT

Paradoxes of Agricultural Transformation: changing gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India

This research examines the paradoxes of agricultural transformation of national and Indian) and local (Kerala) in the post-reform period of economic liberalisation since 1990 in Kerala, India. The research was conducted in four locations in Kerala - Ambalavayal and Thomatchal (composite village) in the highland region, Thathamangalam in the midland region, Karamuck in the lowland region and Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. It employs a mixed methodological approach and takes a poststructuralist feminist stance focussing on women's differences. It addresses current gaps in the literature on women's informal agricultural and key issues of space, differences and power relations and makes a contribution to gender, development and globalisation debates in South Asia

The research reveals that women have generally borne the brunt of agricultural transformation and the impact on their farm roles has been paradoxical in terms of their inclusion and exclusion. However, these impacts vary across different geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland and for women of different caste and ethnicity groups, although marginalised low caste remain particularly affected. Changes to farm roles have been paralleled by shifting gender power relations at the household scale, which varied for women of different age groups. Old and middle-aged women have experienced a reversal in gender equalities whilst young women are withdrawing into domesticity and have limited economic empowerment, despite gaining considerable social empowerment. This reveals a paradoxical situation of (some) women becoming socially empowered alongside their inability to bargain on the farm and within the household. In particular, the research identifies a shift from caste to class-based alliances of 'Sanskritisation'. These debates of crisis of development and paradoxes of women's empowerment in Kerala have much to contribute to general debates about gender and development elsewhere.

Asha Gangadharan

DEDICATION

To my Father, Mr. Gangadhara Panicker, for his encouragement, unstinting support and care throughout my research.

To my Guru, Prof. N.S. Ramaswamy, for inspiring and instilling in me the confidence and courage to initiate this research on women in agriculture in Kerala, India.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I start writing this thesis by the Indian tradition of paying reverence to “Guru” (teachers) for imparting knowledge and wisdom. I am deeply indebted to my Supervisor, Dr. Clare Madge, for providing expert guidance and widening my horizon on feminist research and gender and agriculture. Without her enthusiastic support and positive outlook this thesis would not have reached its completion. I am also thankful to Dr. Clare Mercer, Co-Supervisor for her guidance and critical and constructive feedback on my thesis, from which I have greatly benefited. I also wish to thank Prof. Mike Bradshaw, Dr. Ian Bowler and Dr. Anna Bee, who guided and supervised me in the early stages of my research. My appreciation also goes to colleagues and staff in the Department of Geography and Library for their support and help.

My initial impetus to conduct research on women in agriculture was due to my research experience in the Centre for Action Research and Technology for Man, Animal in Nature (CARTMAN) in Bangalore India. Working for multidisciplinary projects instilled in me a desire to do research on gender and agriculture in India. I am thankful to the Director of CARTMAN, Padma Bhushan Prof. N.S.Ramaswamy, Founder Director of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore for giving me the privilege and opportunity to work closely with him. Prof. Ramaswamy was awarded the prestigious Padma Bhushan award for his outstanding contribution to social services in research and management and also appointed as a National Professor in Management by the Government of India recently.

I am privileged and thankful to receive guidance from the eminent Agricultural Scientist and father of India’s green revolution Prof. M.S.Swaminathan (and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation, Chennai) and introducing me to Kerala Agricultural University and relevant NGOs in Kerala for my field study. I also wish to thank my father’s former colleagues and friends of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Dr. K.K.Iya and his son Dr. Kilara and also Dr.R.M.Acharya, Dr. R. Nagarcenkar, Dr.S.D.J Bohra and Dr.Arun Varma for their encouragement for initiating this research in India.

The former Vice Chancellor, late Dr. K.N. Shyamasundaran Nair, of Kerala Agriculture University has shown great interest and provided me with indispensable guidance for my fieldwork in Kerala. His passing away in the midst of my research in Kerala meant a great personal loss to me. The researchers of Kerala Agricultural University have also given their generous time and support during different stages of data collection in Kerala. I am particularly thankful to Dr. C.Bhaskaran and Dr. C.Shilaja of Trivandrum and Dr. Radhamma Pillai of Wayanad for extending help and support. Other researchers, such as Dr. Sosamma Ipe and Dr. D. Sree Kumar of Thrissur, Dr. Mridul Eapen from the Centre for Development Studies Trivandrum, Dr. Puspangadhan, Cochin and Dr. Geetha Kutty of the Centre for Gender Concerns, Thrissur, Kerala Agriculture University have also provided useful information. Dr. Michael Tharakan gave guidance while the Kerala Institute of Local Administration provided institutional support during my field study in Kerala. I thank them all for their help and cooperation. Above all, I thank the many women labourers and the farming communities and specialists for sparing their valuable time without whose help and support the data collection for this research would have never materialised. Special thanks to Mr.T.A. Viswanathan, Secretary of Pataasekhara Committee, Paruthikavu, Palakkad who was awarded the best farmer award, for his enthusiasm and interest in introducing me to farming communities.

Financial support and help from various institutions for my study is also gratefully acknowledged. Dr. T.A. Varghese and the Inter-cooperation NGO programme, a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, in Trivandrum, Kerala sponsored the data collection. The Churches Commission for International Students, Students Union and Welfare of Leicester University, Charles Wallace India Trust, North Brooke Society, Professional Classes Aid Council, Curzon Wyllie Memorial Fund and Geetha Bhavan, Leicester, also contributed through the provision of hardship grants.

Additionally, the Animal Welfare Organisation in the UK has been supportive and helpful to me during my stay in UK. I would like to particularly thank Mr. Clive Woodham of Hardwick Court Farm, Surrey, Mrs. Janice Cox and Wendy Smith of Compassion in World Farming, Hampshire and Prof. Paul Starkey, Animal Traction Development, Reading. My deep appreciation and thanks also go to my friends and well wishers in UK for their help and encouragement. Special thanks to Mr. Harcharan

Singh, Senior Pathologist, Cambridge, for his help and encouragement. Ash is noted for graciously supporting me during times of financial hardship. Mrs. Subhadra Nair provided maternal care and Cousin Dr. Asha Nair's help and positive suggestions for solving my difficulties is appreciated. Mr. Hashmukh Chandrana, of Leicester College Mrs. Aruna Patel and family, Sulekha and Sunil, Dr. Pradeep Vasudavan and Dr. Archana Vasudavan are appreciated for always giving me moral support.

Finally, I wish to thank all my family - my father, Mr. Gangadhara Panicker, my sister, Dr. Usha and my brother-in-law, Dr. Sanjeev and family for encouraging me and helping me with my studies. My respect for the memory of my late mother. Mrs. Lakshmy Kutty who was always a source of inspiration. I also acknowledge the hospitality and help of my Uncle, Mr. Tharanathan and his family, my cousin Rajini and brother-in-law Baburaj during my field visits to Palakkad, Kerala. Thanks are also due to my cousin brother, Mr. Arvind, for helping me in collecting information in Kerala. Uncle Mr. A.K. Menon also provided scholarly insight for my research. Uncle Mr. Arvind and family in Bangalore, Aunt Dr. Subhadra Nair and Uncle Mr. Goplakrishnan of Trivandrum are also noted for their positive encouragement for completing my research.

ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

Terms

CDS	Centre for Development Studies
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
SAPs	Structural Adjustment Policies
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KAU	Kerala Agriculture University
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Translations

<i>Krishi Bhavan</i>	Local government agricultural office
<i>Kole</i>	Bumper yield
<i>Panchayat and Taluk</i>	Lowest level of local administration and governance
<i>Tali</i>	A small jewel of gold tied to a silk thread
<i>Adivasis</i>	Original inhabitants

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction to Thesis

This thesis is the outcome of emerging concerns of the neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation of agriculture of Kerala, India and its paradoxical impact on gender roles and power relations. Although the research draws on an inter-disciplinary approach from the different fields of geography, sociology, anthropology, agriculture and economics, the thesis remains essentially grounded in feminist geography. It reviews various contextual issues and theories of gender, development and globalisation related to the key themes of space, differences, and power relations. The research by focussing on women's informal work takes a poststructuralist feminist stance, focussing not simply on women as a homogenous entity but also on their differences in terms of caste, class, age and ethnicity. The ultimate aim is to contribute to debates about crisis of Kerala's development and paradoxes of women's empowerment during the post-reform period since 1990.

The research makes three key contributions. First, it examines the agricultural transformation of Kerala using the interacting international, national (Indian) and local (Kerala) scales in the post-reform period of economic liberalisation since 1990. It reveals the crisis associated with neo-liberal policies for agriculture in Kerala, although economic liberalisation has helped India out of its rigorous debt crisis. It then explores the impacts of this agricultural transformation on labourers and women in particular, which is paradoxical in terms of their inclusion and exclusion in the development process. Secondly, it examines the spatial variations of agricultural transformation and its impacts on women's farm roles, which varies across different geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland and for women from different social groups. However, despite tracing women's differences in terms of class, caste and ethnicity, the research also reveals that women experience common concerns of discrimination and marginalization with the lower caste women being mainly affected. After examining spatial variations of gender role on farms, it thirdly explores the consequences of

agricultural transformation for gender power relations within the household. The research uncovers a move away from agricultural work by many women in Kerala, especially the younger ones, and this move is paralleled by a redistribution of power relations at the household level. It shows how agricultural transformation of international, national and local state policies filtered down to affect the gender power relations at the household level. The reduced ability for women to bargain within the household has resulted due to the process of 'Sanskritisation'. A paradoxical situation has therefore arisen: despite women in Kerala apparently being highly socially empowered, at the farm and household level, this empowerment has done little to increase women's bargaining power and their control over economic resources.

The southern Indian state of Kerala provides an original and interesting location to study the paradoxical impacts of economic liberalisation on gender roles and power relations through the lens of agricultural transformation. The research was conducted in four location sites - Ambalayval and Thomatchal (composite village) in the highland region, Thathamangalam in the midland region, Karamuck in the lowland region and Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala. Triangulation techniques were utilized, which combined both quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover crisis of agricultural transformation and to examine changes to gender role on farms and power relations in the households in Kerala in the post-reform period since 1990. The thesis provides multiple insights into the ways in which the development process continues to cause gender discrimination and subordination for many women in Kerala, although generally women here have achieved a very favourable social empowerment of education and health compared to women in other states in India. These paradoxes of the women's empowerment through various development processes form a key conclusion of the research.

The chapter is organised as follows. Following the introduction to thesis in section 1.1, the objective and principal aims of the research are described in section (1.2), before setting out the research context and rationale in section (1.3). In the fourth section (1.4), the rationale for choosing the location of Kerala is discussed. Finally in section (1.5), the layout and organisation of the thesis is presented.

1.2 Objective and Aims

The overall objective of the thesis is to examine how economic liberalisation has transformed agriculture in the post-reform period of 1990 in Kerala, India, and to explore how these transformations have impacted on gender roles on farm and power relations within the households. This objective will be pursued through three interconnected aims: The first aim of the thesis is to explore the crisis of agricultural transformation of neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation and to examine its impact on farm labourers. The economic liberalisation is examined in the context of Structural Adjustment Policies and Agreement of Agriculture (AOA) of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, to explore these changes to agriculture in Kerala, an analysis has been made based on the interrelated spatial scales of the international policy agenda, which has filtered down to the Indian national government and down again to the local state government of Kerala. Together these international, national and local policies have transformed agriculture, resulted in serious problems and have had numerous paradoxical impacts on labourers and women in particular. This aim is pursued in Chapter 5.

The second aim of the thesis is to further disentangle these impacts of agricultural transformation on women's farm roles. This will be done through examining the spatial variations in the impact of agricultural transformation on women's farm roles in three diverse geographical locations of the state of Kerala. This aim will show how the impacts of agricultural transformation have varied spatially across the different geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland. But also, in examining the diverse voices of women of different castes and ethnicity groups in different locations, a poststructuralist approach exploring women's differences will be employed. It will help in revealing how agricultural transformation varies in different locations and has affected women differently, although the burden of agricultural transformation had fallen on marginalized lower caste women. This aim is addressed in Chapter 6.

These differences among women are examined in more depth through the third aim of this thesis, which focuses on the household level and examines the gender power relations. It will highlight issues of women's changing farm roles interacting shifts in

gender power relations within the households. However, this impact has varied for women of different age groups, with old and middle aged women experiencing a reversal in gender equality in the households, while young women despite being socially empowered have not experienced economic empowerment. An exploration of shifting power relations is vital for explaining the paradoxes associated with women's empowerment in Kerala. This aim is considered in Chapter 7.

Overall, these three aims will help to build up a complex picture of the paradoxes of agricultural transformation and its impacts on gender roles and power relations in Kerala in the post-reform period. These three research aims were addressed by empirical research and secondary data, which combined both qualitative and quantitative techniques. The first aim involved 8 formal interviews with specialist, researchers and policy planners conducted in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala and the UK and also comprehensive secondary data collection. The second aim was addressed through extensive empirical research which combined detailed questionnaire survey with 45 farm owners and semi-structured interviews with 180 women labourers in the three geographical locations noted previously (Ambalayval and Thomatchal in the highland region, Thathamangalam in the midland region and Karamuck in the lowland of Kerala). The third aim was addressed through a detailed case study of the midland village of Thathamangalam and it involved in-depth focus group discussions with 4 male and female labour households separately (12 members in total). This variety of methods has enabled the aims of the research to be addressed effectively and thoroughly.

1.3 Research Context and Rationale

This thesis contributes significantly to understanding the impacts of neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation for promoting globalisation in Third World countries. When we use the term "globalisation", we are referring to the ways in which 99% of human beings on this planet are affected by this global economy and its social and political implications (Okongwu and Mencher, 2000:p108). However, there is not generally a broad consensus of the impacts of globalisation neither being uniformly positive nor negative and defining globalisation continues to be a contested area (Srivastava, 2004; Scholte, 2005). According to Robinson (2003), globalisation is a set of processes not restricted just to a single sphere, but rather spans across economics, culture and politics.

Srivastava (2004: p3) argued that globalisation signals a logical progression of the free-market capitalist ideology. In contrast, critics of globalisation, such as Eschle (2004), consider it a profoundly damaging and exploitative process, which functions to increase inequality, poverty, conflicts and environmental degradation. Global neoliberalism has involved twin dimensions, rigorously pursued by global elites with the backing of a powerful and well organised lobby of transnational corporations according to Robinson, (2007:p1056). Chossudovsky (1998) goes as far as to portray globalisation as far more problematic, and like imperialism, a product of the western desire to subject and exploit the Third World.

One aspect of neo-liberal globalisation has been the introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). These were imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund as a part of their condition-based lending approach (Beneria, 1999). SAPs were aimed to free markets from government regulations and subsidies, to promote labour market flexibility and privatise services (Mukhopadhyay, 1994). The WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) seeks to regulate three aspects to reduce trade distortions and remove non-tariff barriers to trade, which include: market access, domestic support and export subsidies (competition) (Munzara, 2006:p4). In general, Gwynne and Kay (2000) indicate economic liberalisation has achieved rapid economic growth in some countries, but with increasing income inequality and more exclusion and less social protection in many other countries. Development remains highly uneven and unequal due to the different ways in which countries are incorporated into globalisation processes (Whitley, 1999; Hirst and Thomson, 2000). Giffin (2004: 8-9) goes as far as to suggest that the “imposition of SAPs on countries with large external debts could be seen as ‘business as usual’ from a perspective that privileges corporate profits above all else”. Harvey (2006) concludes that the tactics of neo-liberalism and its associated policies of economic liberalisation have been wide-ranging, frequently masked by ideological stances, though devastating for the dignity and social well being of vulnerable populations and territories. The economic crisis of Southeast Asia has been critical for drawing attention to some of these negative consequences of neo-liberalism (Hewison, 2001).

More specifically the thesis sets out to examine the gendered impacts of economic liberalisation on women’s productive farm roles and reproductive area of the household.

While there have been notable gains for women ten years after the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, gender inequalities persist and today there is a less favourable economic and political environment for promoting equality than ten years ago (Mukhopadhyay, 2007: p1). Economic liberalisation has exacerbated and created gender inequalities due to the restructuring of the global market economy and the disproportionate impact of IMF and World Bank driven Structural Adjustment Policies on women. Such gender inequalities have been documented by several commentators (See for example, Beneria, 1995; Karshenas, 1997; Fontana et al, 1998; Eschle, 2002, Momsen, 2004). Riley (2007) has stressed that women's paid employment is affected more than men by the policy prescriptions of neo-liberalism. A further range of work has revealed issues associated with liberalisation including household poverty, reduction in social expenditure, increasing women's double burden and persistent male unemployment, often resulting in a crisis of masculinity (Kabeer, 2003; Elson, 1991; Karshenas, 1997; Giffins, 2004; Dasgupta, 1999; Cagatay and Erturk, 2004; Mills, 2003; George, 2000). This integration of women's productive market and non-market reproductive spheres, vital for considering the dynamics of women's role in development and for examining the overall outcome of globalisation is gaining grounds in ILO research (Momsen, 2004; Fontana et al, 1998; Chant and Pedwell, 2008). Indeed, a focus on the gender implications of economic liberalisation is an important topic worthy of in-depth analysis.

The initial impetus and inspiration to conduct research on women in agriculture in India began over seven years ago, while I was working as a Researcher for an NGO, entitled the Centre for Action Research and Technology for Man, Animal and Nature (CARTMAN) in Bangalore, India. Working for the Government of India on projects of environmental and rural development thus exposed me to the inequality and oppression rural women suffered, particularly in the Indian context (though Indian civilization had traditionally accorded the highest status to women). Although gender bias is a contemporary universal phenomenon, in a Third World country like India, this bias is much more glaring and significant. This made me want to further my understanding of this topic and gave me the necessary energy, enthusiasm and dedication to do this research on women in agriculture in Kerala, India.

In addition to this, initial reading made me realise that there was much scope for research on women's informal agricultural work in Kerala, India. Most work women perform in agriculture in Kerala is casual, based on daily wages or piece rate work, without any social protection except in the agro industries of coir and cashew. As women's agricultural work is mostly informal, it has to a large extent, gone undocumented. Bagchi and Raju (1993) argue that women's work often remains invisible in the official statistics and development research, with the published data being dogged with problems of irregularity and under-enumeration. This invisibility has resulted in the serious underestimation of the economic significance of women's labour, particularly in the production, collection, and preparation and processing of food (Sklair, 2002). According to Arun (1999), there is limited research on the way in which economies like India are gendered and thus the central role that women play in the agricultural sector has been disguised. So, in practice, research on women in agriculture is still a developing area of research in India, despite decades of rhetoric on women, gender and development in international policy and development circles.

The focus on women's informal work is also relevant since it has persisted on international scale and has expanded and appeared in new guises in the context of neo-liberalism, globalisation and cross-border and rural-urban migrations, all of which are highly gendered processes (Bach, 2003; Carr and Chen, 2002; ILO 2002 b, 2007a; Valenzuela, 2005). However, the gendered outcome of economic liberalisation has received scant attention. Eschle (2004), for example, suggests that despite academic and activist interests in economic liberalisation, feminist intervention in the debate remains marginalized. This is also the case in India since assessing the gendered outcome of economic liberalisation is beset with methodological problems of evidence, information and extracting meaning from the available data (Jackson and Rao, 2003). Further, much of the current work on economic liberalisation is quantitative and focuses on women's farm work at the aggregate state level. Qualitative data on the household are limited and gender relation analysis at the intra-household scale remains rare (Jackson and Rao, 2003). This research will address these gaps in household scale analysis and capture shifting power relations to build up a picture of the complex paradoxes of women's empowerment associated with the economic liberalisation of agriculture in Kerala, India.

In an attempt to reveal the paradoxical impacts of economic liberalisation on gender roles and power relations, the thesis will focus on four inter-related issues and debates. First, it develops an understanding of the complexity of agriculture transformation of national and local scale during the post-reform period. Massey (1991) has argued that localities are produced by the intersection of global and local processes, as social relations operate at a range of spatial scales. This correlation between the global and local, resulting in what is sometimes referred to as the 'glocal', has received increasing attention among human geographers to capture changes in the nature of productive and reproductive activities (Cloke and Johnston, 2005; Okongwu and Mencher, 2000). Feminist researchers have also drawn attention to associated global/local restructuring, which many conventional representations and interpretations of global restructuring have failed to capture, being narrowly economistic (Marchand and Runyan, 2000). Laurie et al (1999), for example have recognised the construction of femininities across the world reflect gender inequalities, which remain embedded within global/local geographies of economic and social change. Indeed, scale has been a major preoccupation of the field and the local/global is one way of approaching the issue (Cox, 2005). However, there is limited research on the mutual influences of global and local scales of analysis in producing economic liberalisation and forms the main theme for examining gender roles and power relations of the locality of Kerala.

Second, the thesis departs from the usual focus on women as a homogenous category to examining their differences. Walby (2002) notes how addressing differences between women concurrent to their similarities has been a key debate of contemporary feminist research. Yet there is still only a small (but growing) literature taking a poststructuralist approach examining differences as Chant and Pedwell (2008) indicate most studies treat women as a homogenous group. This focus on differences is significant according to Kilborn (1999) since differences among women are increasing globally, with some women successfully benefiting from economic liberalisation while other women are finding themselves in a position of increasing poverty. Carr et al (2000) have described how global trade and investment are having a dramatic impact on women's earnings and employment around the world, with the outcome being both negative and positive and differing by context in terms of industry, trade and employment status. Examining such differences is crucial in India, since development has led to uneven results for different categories of women and has affected different classes of women in different ways

(Ghosh and Roy, 1997). This encouraged me to follow a poststructuralist feminist approach in this research and to look for complex and material interactions between gender, race, class and age rather than focussing on women as a singular category (Blunt and Wills, 2000).

The third focus of the thesis is on the spatial variations in gender inequalities across different geographical locations. This was considered of vital importance, for McDowell (1999) argues that the aim of feminist geography is to investigate and make visible the relationship between gender divisions and spatial divisions. Kabeer (2003) also notes that the nature of gender relationships and inequalities varies considerably in space and time, which leads to geographies of gender inequalities. Radcliffe (2006) further ascribes this to globalisation processes working by accumulation occurring across differentiating and uneven land where certain women and men benefit relative to others. This approach to gender analysis paying careful attention to the differences within particular social, geographical and political contexts is gaining importance in ILO research according to Chant and Pedwell (2008). Yet much of the research on gender and economic liberalisation that does exist remains geographically undifferentiated. This paucity of attention to spatial variations is a major problem in addressing gender inequality in development for policy planning and implementation, and for this reason it formed a major aim of the research.

The final focus of the thesis is to examine gender power relations within the households for women of different age groups. As Schuurman (2001) has observed, global restructuring involves transformation of not just state, market and society but also of gender relations and re-working of masculinity and femininity. Geographers and other social scientists have therefore recently started to examine how gender relations are transformed and how identities are shaped as women and men embrace and/or contest this globalisation process influencing their lives (see for example, Laurie et al, 1999; Zurzhenko, 2000; Momsen, 2004). This focus on power inequalities and empowerment are vital for addressing power imbalances at the individual level and women's decision making and reallocation of resources at the household level (Holmes and Slater, 2008:p37). This is particularly important in the Indian context, due to the complexity and contradictory impacts of globalisation at the local level and due to the significant social and cultural changes that are occurring there due to the emergence of the global

market economy (Scrase, 2001). But, according to Garikipati (2006) debates on the process of feminization in India has largely ignored the institution of patriarchy and domestic gender relations. The findings of this research will therefore contribute to this growing body of literature, which endeavours to show how seemingly abstract global processes are embedded within local relationships. Specifically, it will reveal complex links between changing farm roles and shifting power relations since practically nothing at the household scale of analysis exists in Kerala, India. The focus on women of different age groups is relevant and gaining importance in ILO research according to Chant and Pedwell (2008).

1.4 Justification of Location

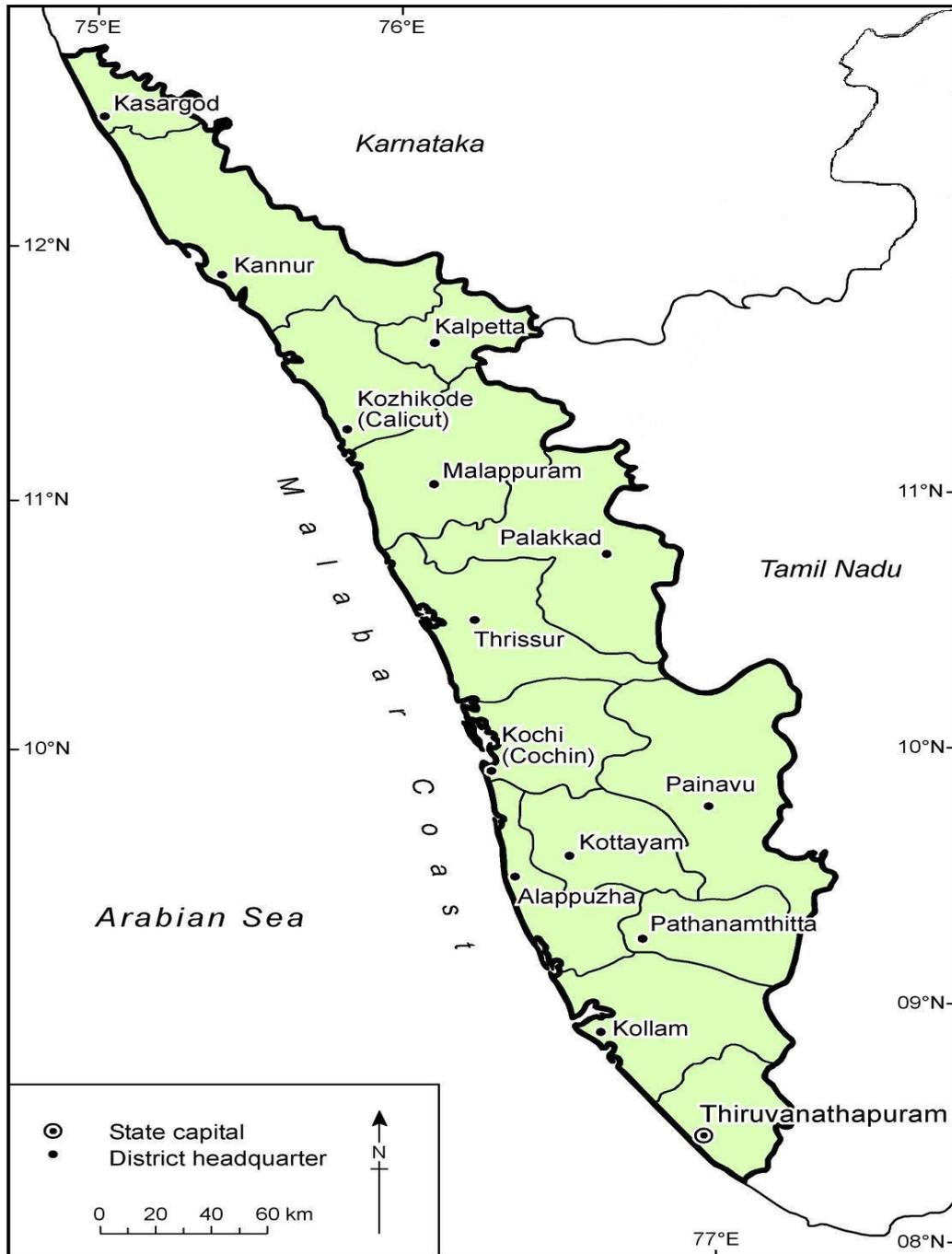
The location of Kerala, the southern Indian state of South Asia offers an interesting area for this research for four main reasons. First, Kerala has experienced a radical strategy of social redistribution measures and agrarian reforms. These reforms have resulted in Kerala being listed as having both the highest positions on the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index (GDI) in India by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1997; and Chacko, 2003). The demographic features of Kerala are thus more typical of a middle-income country, whilst North Indian states find themselves among the world's least developed in terms of the same indicators (Murthi et al, 1995). Kerala was even cited as an example and model for the 'South' to follow at the United Nations Conference on Population and Development (1994) held in Cairo (Erwer, 1999). The impressive human development and gender development indicators have attracted attention from researchers, development agencies and policy planners, despite Kerala's low per capita income. These accomplishments in Kerala have continued despite the apprehension that the 'model of development' experience was not sustainable. Indeed, according to the Human Development Report of Centre for Development Studies prepared for Government of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram (2005: p200), "Kerala's experience occupies a significant place in the chain of intellectual events that culminated in a paradigm change in development thinking". For this reason, Kerala is an ideal location to expose the gendered impacts of economic liberalisation.

A second reason to focus on Kerala is that numerous commentators (e.g. Krishna, 2004; Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003; Joseph and Joseph, 2005) suggest that the new phase of

economic liberalisation since the 1990s has presented Kerala's agrarian economy with stark challenges, and that integration into the global economy has affected Kerala more seriously than other states of India. An acute decline in commodity prices coupled with high price instability could have an adverse impact on the regional economy (Joseph and Joseph, 2005:p48). This is combined with serious concerns about the decline in rice cultivation area and productivity, with the cultivated area of rice falling by more than 50 percent (0.88 million ha in 1975-76 to 0.26 million ha in 2006-7) during the last fifty years (Narayanan 2006; Government of Kerala, 2007). Kerala is traditionally a predominantly rice growing region, although its geographical diversity and historical development have resulted in a varied cropping pattern of cash crops including tea, coffee, pepper, rubber and cardamom. This decreasing area of rice cultivation and declining prices of exportable cash crops associated with the crisis of economic liberalisation in Kerala clearly warrants further research.

A third criterion for choosing Kerala is the fascinating position of women within the state. However, a paradoxical situation regarding women's empowerment exists due to their simultaneous favourable social empowerment alongside their economic marginalization. On the one hand, Kerala is upheld as an exemplar of women's empowerment in terms of social development indicators of high education levels, good health indicators and favourable sex ratio, which is based on the unique system of matriliney that existed there. Mitra and Singh (2007:p1231) claim that matrilineal society in Kerala has emphasized the attainment of literacy and education among women for centuries. Women in the matrilineal Nair caste of the Hindu community of Kerala also had greater freedom, choice and respect in marriage according to Jeffrey (1992) even during the eighteenth century compared to elsewhere in the world. By contrast, women in other Indian states have remained submissive to the traditions like *sati*, (the practice among some Hindu communities whereby a recently widowed woman would immolate herself on the funeral pyre of her husband), dowry deaths and early marriages. India's consistently falling sex ratio and female infanticide clearly indicates the oppressed status and discrimination of women in access to health care and nutrition (Bhan, 2001). Indeed, women's favourable position in terms of social empowerment, which is reflected in health and education indicators in Kerala is exceptional! (see Figure 1.1),

Figure 1.1 Map of Kerala, India



But on the other hand, a closer scrutiny of labour force participation, unemployment rates and prevailing cultural mores of Kerala, particularly marriage practices and family structure, reveal a less promising picture (Chaco, 2003; GOK, 2006). Patriarchal traditions have given primacy to women's domestic role and men's 'public role', reinforcing women's inferior position (Eapen, 2004). Women return to the domestic sphere, hence not making use of the education (Erwer, 2003:p131). Thus a high level of literacy and better access to health care have not brought greater mobility to women or expanded their range of life choices (Devika, 2006). In this context, Erwer (1999) has argued that empowerment (in terms of control and autonomy) cannot be taken for granted for women in Kerala where access to basic needs is available but marginal control and independence of women's own lives exists. Indeed, as Mitra and Singh (2007:p1227) note, beneath the fabric of development lie some disturbing economic, social, and cultural trends that contradict the impressive statistics. This research will probe deeper into these paradoxes of women's empowerment of Kerala while examining the impact of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations.

In addition to these paradoxes of women's empowerment, a fourth reason for selecting Kerala is that women form a significant proportion of the labour force and play a crucial role in wetland farming, though their role varies in cash crop cultivation. There is a diversity of geographical locations in the state, with different agrarian structures, which are crosscut by women belonging to different castes, classes, ages and ethnicity groups. This makes it ideal to examine the spatial variations in the development process and to address poststructuralist approaches for understanding women's differences. For all these reasons, Kerala is an ideal location to explore issues of gender and development in the context of neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation.

Finally, this research location was selected as Kerala is also of great interest to me as an insider, being a woman from a Third World country and from the matrilineal Nair Hindu caste of Kerala. This was also a motivation for my research on women and agricultural transformation in Kerala, my home state. The field visits to Kerala gave me an insight for recapturing and expressing a sense of belonging to my home state. It meant an opportunity to trace the buried roots of matrilineality and to explore the current socio-political situation of the state. The issues of my positionality were relevant for this

research due to my interest in feminist geographer's ideas about how gender, caste and ethnic identity of the researcher can influence and shape the research process (England, 2006). Easy access to information and data collection in Kerala as a result of my positionality clearly facilitated useful research insight for this research.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis has eight chapters to examine the impact of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala in the post-reform period of 1990. Following the introductory Chapter 1, Chapter 2 reviews various contextual issues and theories of gender, development and globalisation related to the key themes of the thesis: space, differences and power relations. The focus is particularly on neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation that have been used to promote globalisation and its consequences for women's productive farm roles and their reproductive sphere within the households. Reviewing the literature has helped in exploring the inclusionary, exclusionary and contradictory impacts of economic liberalisation on women. The chapter forms the background context for this research on women and agricultural transformation in Kerala.

Chapter 3 highlights the methodology deployed, illustrating the research strategy, data collection methods and analysis employed. The issues of gaining informed consent and anonymity are discussed within the wider ethical debates of social research. It also examines issues of positionality and the consequent power relations shaping and re-shaping the outcomes of the research. Overall, deploying triangulation methods and appropriate data analysis techniques has helped in addressing the diverse aims of the thesis and in gaining valuable insights into the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala.

Chapter 4 locates Kerala by exploring its geography, politics, development, agriculture and transformation of society and culture. Examining the overall development and transformation of the state from a long historical timeframe is pertinent for gaining insight into contemporary women's changing positions. It thus forms the historical and geographical context and starting point for this empirical research on the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India.

Chapter 5 attention is focused on examining how economic liberalisation has transformed agriculture, which has permeated from the global level to the national scale (India) and down to the local level (Kerala). Examining its implication for the labourers helped in revealing the inclusionary, exclusionary and contradictory impact for women. It forms the context for examining the spatial variations of agricultural transformation across the diverse geographical locations in the following chapter.

Chapter 6 attempts to uncover the spatial variations in the impact of agricultural transformation on women, focussing on women's farm roles in three geographical locations (highland, midland and lowland) of the state. Examining the diverse voices and experiences of women of different castes, classes and ethnicity followed the poststructuralist feminist approach of exploring women's differences. However, all women in general experienced common concerns of gender discrimination and it was the marginalized lower caste women who were particularly affected in all locations.

Chapter 7 sets out to descend to the household level. It attempts to understand how agricultural transformation and the changing farm roles outlined in the previous two chapters have resulted in the shifting power relations within the households in the midland village of Thathamangalam. It explores in particular the process of 'Sanskritisation', which has generally resulted in a reduced ability for women to bargain within the household. The result is that old and middle aged women despite having overcome barriers of feudalistic system are experiencing a reversal of gender inequality, while young women are increasingly lacking economic empowerment. So, regardless of women being socially empowered as evidenced by the exceptional education and health indicators in Kerala, this chapter illustrates the paradoxical situation many women of the state find themselves in.

Chapter 8 finally concludes the empirical findings of the research on the paradoxes of agricultural transformation and changing gender role and power relations in Kerala. The key findings of the research are reviewed within the context of the broader debates on gender, development and globalisation in the Third World to highlight the contribution of the thesis. The chapter concludes by summarising the broad review about the crisis of Kerala's development, particularly agriculture and paradoxes of women's empowerment during the post-reform period since 1990s.

CHAPTER TWO

Conceptualising Gender, Development and Globalisation

This chapter aims to locate my research on the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on changing gender roles and power relations within the broader debates of gender, development and globalisation by reviewing various relevant debates and theories. In highlighting key research gaps in the literature, the chapter forms the background context for the thesis and thereby illustrates the significance and the originality of this research. The chapter is divided into five sections. In section (2.1), development is viewed through the frame of the uneven and unstable neo-liberal globalisation policies of economic liberalisation, which have greatly transformed agriculture in many Third World countries. Section (2.2) analyses the implications of economic liberalisation for Indian agriculture. In the processes, it examines agricultural transformation from the pre-colonial period of 1600, through the pre-Green revolution period after India's independence in 1947 and the green revolution period of the 1960s to the current economic liberalisation era of the 1990s. The section (2.3) explores various broad theories and debates surrounding gender, development and globalisation, focussing particularly on the key research themes of the thesis: space, differences and power relations. The fourth section (2.4) turns to concentrate more explicitly on the inclusionary, exclusionary and contradictory impacts of economic liberalisation on women's productive and reproductive spheres. Finally, the fifth section (2.5) provides a summary of the chapter.

2.1 Assessing Development through Globalisation

This section first examines development, specifically drawing out the implications of the policies of economic liberalisation, which have promoted the globalisation of agriculture in many Third World countries. This focus on globalisation is relevant since globalisation provides an important historical context and framework through which development has been understood and experienced (Power, 2005). It is therefore vital to first unpack the definition of globalisation before examining its impacts. Davids and

Driel (2001) have described globalisation as the increased inter-connectedness of the world through technology and flows of capital, commodities, people and culture. Eschle (2002) strongly links globalisation to the distribution of neo-liberal economic orthodoxy articulated through international financial institutions, market integration and the rise of transnational corporations. From an economic perspective, Beneria (1999:p1) notes the basic features of globalisation as:

“The transformations linked to ever-expanding markets and the rapid technological change in communications and transportation that transcend national boundaries and shrink space”.

The globalisation process can thus be conceptualised as a process transforming people’s everyday lives across the planet in the most multifaceted and conflicting ways (Herod, 2003). Woods (1998), for example, suggests that the contemporary process of globalisation has brought speedy changes to government, business and for ordinary people. Hirst and Thompson (1996), in contrast, argue that globalisation is only a myth which, when observed on the ground, cannot be really proved to be present.

On the whole, the process of globalisation has deeply affected the lives of men and women of all ages, nationalities, societal classes and ethnicities. The proponents of globalisation during the early 1990s called it the ‘end of history’ and the commencement of the ‘new world order’ (Lechner and Boli, 2000). On the one hand, those keen to promote corporate capitalism extolled the virtues of globalisation by arguing that, ‘the imminent borderless world is a pinnacle of progress’ (Hewison, 2000: p1). On the other hand, critics argue that globalisation is extremely damaging and exploitative, and that it increases poverty, inequality, environmental degradation and conflicts both in industrial and Third World countries (Eschle, 2004; Kaplinsky, 2001). In examining the uneven development of globalisation, Khor (2000) and Nayyar (1997) indicate that globalisation has mostly benefited Developed Countries and only a few Third World countries, while most Third World countries have been unable to reap the gains from globalisation. The globalisation process has thus resulted in sharp differences in income and resources between countries. Further, Deaton and Dreze (2002) and Kanbur and Xiaobo (2001) indicate not only has the gap between countries become wider but the regional disparity within countries has also widened. As globalisation progresses, an increasing number of countries are getting poorer in their daily battle

with hunger, poverty, cultural deprivation and death (Costa and Costa, 1995; Swaminathan, 1999). The year 2000 marked the fifth anniversary of the Copenhagen Social Summit, which had warned that social disintegration and conflicts would become widespread unless poverty and deprivation were eradicated soon (Swaminathan, 2000). But despite these warnings, widespread poverty and deprivation still continue into the twenty-first century:

“The notion of a ‘shrinking world’ has been important in discussions of the impacts of globalisation, but patterns of global inequality have not shrunk after 50 years of development theory and practice” (Power, 2005: p207).

The impact of globalisation is thus complex and contested, based on multi-faceted factors of economics, ecology, society, politics and culture. But much of the recent academic discussion appears to agree that:

“Globalisation’ catches the essence of a historical movement, a triumph of a neo-liberal and characteristically Anglo-American ideology, a more intense stage of capitalism, a confluence of events and technologies, or some combination of these” (Hewison, 2000:p1).

This uneven and unequal development of globalisation is particularly debated in this thesis in the context of the economic liberalisation of agriculture in the Third World, as highlighted in the following sub-section.

2.1.1 Economic Liberalisation of Agriculture

This section seeks to unravel the economic liberalisation policies for promoting neo-liberalism and globalisation, in the context of the agricultural transformation of Third World countries, which have been a topic of immense debate and gaining importance in development studies.

The transformation of agriculture from subsistence to a capitalist mode of production has been an ongoing process in many Third World countries. It has led to an overall improvement for some countries, which adapted successfully to global market demands, but it also impoverished many in the Third World and mainly hit subsistence farmers as also indicated by Sklair (2002). The period of the 1960s witnessed an increasing transfer of technology from the west, labelled the ‘Green Revolution’. The major thrust of the

Green Revolution was on high-yielding varieties, mechanized farming practices and intensive uses of inputs, like chemical fertilizers and pesticides. Swaminathan (2000) claims that the Green Revolution clearly marked a significant landmark by providing a breathing space for countries to achieve a balance between population growth and food production. However, the Green Revolution technology at the same time had also significant environmental and social costs and did little to counter conflicts due to increasing inequality, unemployment and displacement (Swaminathan, 2000; Shiva, 1991). So it is safe to conclude that the transfer of technology to the Third World has clearly been a difficult and contested subject, with some justifying it for promoting economic modernization and enhancing living standards, while others opined it has been a mistaken path (Stewart, 1997).

The period since the 1980s for Third World agriculture has been an era of globalisation led by neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation. World trade was formally regulated after the formation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) though subsequently the World Trade Organization (WTO) replaced GATT in 1995. The WTO has accelerated trade liberalisation across the globe and integrated new sectors into liberalisation schemes, like intellectual property rights and services not included previously in GATT (Beneria, 1999). The neo-liberal turn thus ushered in policies of liberalisation which were driven by privatisation, switching from production for domestic consumption to export and rolling back the state to encourage private capital investment (Jackson and Rao, 2004; Laurie et al, 1999).

These policies of neo-liberalisation were increasingly adopted in many parts of the world with the collapse of the Soviet system during the 1980s and 1990s and the associated growing inflation rates and declining output levels for economies across all regions (Gwynne and Kay, 2000; Centre for Economic Policy Analysis, 1998). Adapting to these policies of economic liberalisation also helped many Third World countries in Asia and Latin America to initially free themselves from the rigorous debt crisis due to relaxation on restrictions on external borrowing. These policies were imposed through the conditionality of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Afshar and Barrientos, 1999; Costa and Costa, 1995). SAPs were thus an important parcel of economic liberalisation

policies. The primary focus of SAPs was to modify production market structures in order to foster rapid growth and increase exports (Hoeven, 1996). The member countries of the WTO were expected to adhere to three tenets of the Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) – market access, domestic support and export competition (Joseph and Joseph, 2005:p39).

The economic liberalisation policies that were promoted by neo-liberalism were presented mostly as a logical progression, though in reality globalisation has been a contested, partial, uneven and unstable process (Whatmore and Thorne, 1997). However, Swaminathan, (2000) notes heavy debts and debt-serving burdens have prevented many countries from making the kind of investments required for improving rural and marketing infrastructures to enable small-scale producers to gain competitive efficiency. Moreover, Evans (1990) and Taylor (1988) note structural problems and historically driven uneven development have made it difficult for Third World countries to fully reap the potential gains of economic liberalisation.

Consequently, many rural livelihoods have become more precarious with cutbacks in state support for domestic agriculture coinciding with the removal of quantitative restrictions and increasing exposure to competition from large subsidised producers (UNRISD, 2005; Sharma, 2005). For instance, reduction in domestic subsidies had serious consequences for millions of small-scale farmers in Third World countries due to their inability to compete with cheaper imports from global markets (Khor, 2000). The turning of production towards exported-oriented agriculture and food products has also reduced the land available for subsistence crops (Giffin, 2004). Further Gills (2002) noted that the relative exchange values of subsistence and capitalistic production are set differently, and thus uneven exchange occurs at the cost of subsistence production.

On the whole, liberalisation policies have therefore left poorer countries in a situation of economic decline, while large, rich and industrialized countries have experienced favourable economic growth (World Bank, 1988; 1990; UN, 1996). At the same time, Developed Countries have breached the underlying trust of free trade by further strengthening protectionism (Sharma, 2005). Subsidies in Developed countries have increased despite promises to the contrary to cut down. Shiva (2002), for instance, notes

that the United States has increased its farm subsidies, amounting to USD 20 billion annually, with most of it for agribusiness and for capturing export markets. This protectionism has exacerbated problems for Third World agricultural producers.

A further impact of liberalisation is through the enforcement of labour standards, which have led to declining employment and the transfer of jobs to the informal economy, which has reinforced and exacerbated social inequalities (Kabeer, 2004). Liberalisation has also not eliminated poverty or gender inequality, although it was argued that it would help in more efficient use of resources and exchange of technology and better economic opportunities (Wills, 2005). SAPs and similar policies and programmes were clearly planned for the needs of the Developed Countries and international financial institution. According to Khor (2000), Third World countries were not only unprepared but also lacked bargaining and negotiating strength for supporting such economic reforms, while the Developed Countries had great strength for promoting liberalisation and for using it for their own advantage. Thus Shiva (2004) argues the result is a genocidal trade system, where small peasants are increasingly wiped out and domestic food production is dismantled to create the monopolies for global corporations.

Most Third World countries have thus witnessed deepening inequalities due to the policies of economic liberalisation, which have sidelined earlier values of equality and redistribution (UNRISD, 2005). For instance, many African nations, such as Ghana, Uganda and Kenya, have suffered severe problems due to Structural Adjustment Policies sapping their economic vitality (Sharma, 2005). Similarly, Latin American economies, being more closely integrated into the global economy, have become more dependent and hence vulnerable to global economic shifts (Gwynne and Kay, 2000). Cagatay and Erturk (2004) have stated that the crisis of economic liberalisation is also severe in East Asia, despite the region generally sustaining high economic growth rates.

Depicting economies and societies of South Asia in a uniform manner would be wrong, yet common problems indicate that economic liberalisation has brought disaster, with all countries in this region caught in the debt crisis and the region emerging as the 'most deprived region of the world' (Khor, 2000).

Krishna (2004:p4) recorded the situation in India as:

“Unemployment has increased; food grain availability has declined (despite plentiful reserves); real wages have not increased in poorer states and there is increasing dependence on non-agricultural casual employment.”

This has lead Bhan (2001) to wonder for whom the new economic reform policies were actually intended, since India’s poor have seen little of the purported gains of liberalisation. Hewison (2001) goes as far as to argue that the Asian economic crisis is clearly seen to be evidence of the failure of economic liberalisation. This crisis of economic liberalisation in many Third World countries has thus lead many to question the validity of development itself. Feminists in particular, have been strong critics of the ambiguous and destabilising effect of global restructuring, drawing attention to exploitative (and sometimes advantageous) effects on women (Eschle, 2004). These will be further explored in section 2.3.

2.2 Agriculture Transformation of India

After examining neo-liberal policies of economic globalisation for Third World countries, this section inspects economic liberalisation of Indian agriculture while examining the transformation from the pre-colonial to colonial period and through the pre-Green revolution period to the current era of liberalisation.

2.2.1 Overview of Agriculture and Labour Scenario

Before examining the agriculture transformation, it is vital to review the agriculture and labour scenario in India. Agriculture in India comprises of crop and animal husbandry, forestry, agro-forestry, agro-processing and agri-business, in-land and marine fisheries, and forms the backbone of the economy (Swaminathan, 2001). India has a variety of crops grown in irrigated and rain-fed areas, with the main food grains being wheat, rice, maize, *jowar* and *bajra* (millets). Oilseeds, sugar cane, cotton and jute are important cash crops, and plantation crops include tea and coffee and also a wide range of horticultural crops (FAO, 1998). Wheat is cultivated mainly in the northern Punjab and Haryana states, while rice is grown in the southern states like Kerala and Andhra Pradesh and also in the northern and northeastern states. Indian agriculture is characterised by extreme inter-regional disparities including variations in land

distribution and tenure and also a wide diversity of agro-climatic conditions and resource endowments (Smith and Urey, 2002). Agriculture is referred to as the 'unorganised sector' by the Indian government, which implies it is informal, while the 'organised sector' refers to large units with formal conditions of work, pay, benefits and other legal protection.

The majority of the workforce in Indian agriculture is employed in one of three categories; cultivators, labourers and other workers. More than 55 percent of female agricultural workers are considered casual (informal) labourers compared to one third of male workers, which suggests that women's work is concentrated in the low- skilled, lower paid sector and they tend not to be supervisors or owners of capital (Dunlop and Velkoff, 1998). Nevertheless, women are extensively involved in the agricultural process, from planting to harvesting to post-harvesting operations, with variations between regions and different crops in India. For instance, women provide half of the labour in rice cultivation, while in the case of the plantation sector, they are crucial labourers (FAO, 1998; Unnevehr and Stanford, 1985). The regional variations among female labourers in India, according to Raju and Bagchi (1993:p241), has resulted from, "the general complex mix of ecological, economic, caste/class and gender-specific factors which are at work and get mediated through space differently in different regions". Generally, northern states fall into plough agriculture, with a limited role for women, compared to the wetland rice farming of south and northeastern Indian states. In addition, women have a key role in livestock management, which forms part of the agricultural sector. For instance, women accounted for 93 percent of total employment in dairy production and they perform tasks like collecting water and fodder, processing and carrying dung to the fields, despite the fact that their control over livestock and related products is negligible (FAO, 1998).

In general, the labour market in India is characterised by two structural features. First, working conditions are deeply segmented along caste, gender and regional lines, and second, the dependent contractual relations of labour recruitment have arisen due to the oversupply of unskilled labour (Mies, 1982; Harris et al, 1991; Singh, 1991). Labourers mostly belong to the untouchable caste and the tribal groups listed in Article 312 of the Indian constitution as 'Scheduled Tribes' (ST) and 'Scheduled Castes' (SC). The SC comprises about 16% and ST around 8% of the population (Census of India, 2001). The

caste system, officially prohibited by the Constitution of India is still prevalent and reflects religiously and occupational defined hierarchies (FIAN, 2007:p12). There are 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes in India, which fall under the basic groups of Brahmins (priests), Kshatriyas (warriors), Vaishyas (traders) and Shudras (labourers and sweepers). The caste system, though prominent among Hindus, is also observed by some groups of Christians and Muslims in India. Vijayan (1998) notes that caste and class are two important dimensions of social stratification. Class identity is based on economic valuations of upper, middle and lower class, in addition to profession and social standing. While in the caste system, a person's identity within a particular caste is determined by birth and recognized by traditional occupation. A number of caste groups in India (such as the forward, Scheduled Castes (SC) and backwards) are engaged in production; on the contrary, a number of class categories like landlord, rich, middle, poor peasant and agricultural labourers form an agrarian social structure (Vijayan, 1998). However, according to Swaminathan:

“Caste originated millennia ago, based on the attributes of occupations, interest, inclination, tendency, etc. But, over centuries, these became solidified as birth based. Rigidity set in as there was no education and vocational training institutions in India” (*Personal Interview, March 2008*).

The lower castes had suffered extreme form of exploitation and social segregation and were treated as untouchables. However, the caste system underwent transformation during colonial rule with the association of the caste system to class, although generally the British did not approve of the discrimination against the lower caste. The caste identities strengthened during this period due to introduction of census and listing of castes with vast details, which resulted in the lower castes organising themselves to improve their ranking in the census (Jaffrelot, 2000). After India's independence, reservations and quotas were introduced for low caste groups in government jobs and public Universities for rectifying previous caste discrimination. Despite enjoying special status under the Constitution of India, SC and ST still face discrimination (FIAN, 2007). The agricultural labourers belonging to the lower caste groups too have had policies framed to ensure their better access to education, jobs and other opportunities, though in reality they get few privileges and benefits being part of the 'unorganised' agricultural sector (Unni, 2001). While most welfare measures in labour market interventions are intended to cover those working in the organised factory sector (GOK, 2006).

The reservation for the lower caste, which was based on caste rather than individual's merit displeased higher caste and also caused wide spread protests in India. Further changes have occurred, as the caste boundary is getting subverted and replaced by class as a definer of a position in the society. Like for instance the Brahmins, who were originally priest by caste, have now become merchants and professionals. The lower castes also try raising their inferior status by emulating not only higher caste culture of Brahmins, but also of the Kshatriyas or Vaishyas. Jaffrelot (2000) indicated that the lower castes might follow vegetarianism, the most important characteristics of the Brahmin's diet. This process is described as "Sanskritisation". The Indian sociologist M.N. Srinivas coined the word Sanskritisation and McGilvray (1988:p99) describes this process as:

"A specific type of Hindu reference-group behaviour where the values, beliefs, and rituals of orthodox Brahmanical Hinduism, often (but not always) embodied in Sanskrit texts is adopted by lower ranking castes in status emulation of those higher ranking castes that already display them".

However, the usage of Sanskritisation is contested, as Swaminathan (*Personal Interview, March 2008*) stated:

"Sanskritization is not the right word to denote the processes of lower caste emulating the upper caste since Sanskrit is a scientific, rational, logical and refined language. Many Christian and Muslim scholars are adept in Sanskrit. It is not only a perfect language of the upper castes but also of all classes".

Other alternate word was to use Brahmanization, usage of which is again problematic, according to Srinivas (1956:p481):

"Despite Brahmanization being considered in the wider processes of Sanskritisation at some points the two are different. Again agents of Sanskritisation were (and are) not always Brahmans. Had the term Brahmanization been used, it would have been necessary to specify which particular Brahman group was meant, and at which period of its recorded history."

The word "Sanskritization" is as a result used to denote the processes of lower caste emulating customs, traditions and ways of higher caste for joining the mainstream. It is also used in this thesis though it does not relate to Sanskrit language or its idealism. Further, Srinivas (1956:p486) describes how westernization of India has helped Sanskritization, though there is a conflict between Sanskrit and western values.

This trend is not recent but had also increased during the colonial rule:

“The development of communications carried Sanskritisation to areas previously inaccessible, and the spread of literacy carried it to groups very low in the caste hierarchy. Western technology – railways, the internal combustion engine, press, radio and plane – has aided the spread of Sanskritisation”.

(Srinivas, 1956:p486)

However, the low caste emulating the higher caste traditions and culture in the absence of economic and political power has its limitations. The exclusion of lower caste people from their basic human rights is still a reality in many parts of India (FIAN, 2007:p12). This discrimination continues to persist more in the rural than urban areas of India. Nevertheless, caste as a sub-division of religion is more or less transcended in Kerala, which is unlike in other parts of India, where caste and religion based prejudices is more obvious (Swaminathan, *Personal Interview, March 2008*).

2.2.2 Agriculture Transformation

After examining the agriculture and labour scenario, the focus of this section is on the agriculture transformation of India. The transformation from subsistence farming to a capitalist one is an ongoing process of agriculture development in India. During the two centuries of colonial rule (which started in 1600), with the creation of a monopoly trading company, the East India Company, irrigation was extended and the focus was primarily on cash crop cultivation like cotton, indigo, poppy and sugarcane, although the bulk of the country remained involved in subsistence farming (Maddison, 1971). Many of the inequalities of the feudal structures and regional differences were further exacerbated during colonial rule (Muller and Patel, 2004). As a result, India remained subject to recurrent famines, with the famines in 1876-1878 and 1899-1900 and the Bengal famine of 1944, killing millions of people (Maddison, 1971).

After independence from the British in 1947, India was an amalgam of autonomous political entities with divergent economic and social development paths and so attempts were made to consolidate a monolithic development strategy modelled after the Soviet experiment (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). India pursued an import substitution policy of industrialization aimed at providing employment and increasing self-reliance, with the state playing a dominant role in the economy, the foundation of which was laid prior

to independence (Srinivasan, 2003). Nevertheless, the inequalities of the colonial period continued even after independence, with India experiencing famines and food shortages. Thus, Swaminathan (2001) claims the first 60 years of the 20th century was a period of misery, when India's potential to achieve stability between population and growth of agriculture was frustrated. As a result, agricultural development remained the main focus and priority for the Indian government after independence. However, the agricultural development policy of the post-independence period was based primarily on a food-grain production strategy rather than technological reforms (Mellor, 1976; Mellor and Desai, 1985). Consequently, a number of institutions were established such as Indian Agricultural Research Institutes and Agricultural Universities and programmes like the Intensive Agriculture District Programmes (IADP) and the Public Distribution System planned for solving the food crisis. This period between 1947 and 1965, usually referred to as the pre-Green Revolution period, saw a policy push towards land reform and irrigation development (Mahadevan, 2003). But, despite an overall agricultural growth rate of 3 percent per year during the pre-Green Revolution period, there were still large fluctuations in agricultural output, with India facing famine problems during drought years (Smith and Urey, 2002).

The period of the 1960s was famously known as the 'Green Revolution' in agriculture, which was highly successful in India among Third World countries. Large increases in wheat and rice yields were achieved, though the introduction of technology was initially concentrated in the irrigated areas of Punjab and Haryana states and later extended to central, eastern and rain-fed farming areas (Smith and Urey, 2002). During the period of the Green Revolution agriculture grew at a rate of 3.2 percent and brought dramatic improvements to food security at the national level (Economic Survey, Government of India, 1950-1991; Smith and Urey, 2002). According to Swaminathan (2001), a pioneer of the Green Revolution, this transformation of agriculture helped India to strengthen its national sovereignty in many areas and the mood of despair and difficulty gave way to optimism and self-confidence.

But, the Green Revolution also resulted in serious environmental problems, widened differences between the favourable and less favourable regions and between the rich and poor farmers. The majority of India's rural population were neglected in this process, with most farmers having little access to irrigation, electricity and input subsidies

(Muller and Patel, 2004). In terms of its impact on women, the Green Revolution generated employment for some categories of female labour, while others were displaced, although the unpaid work of post-harvest processing and storage intensified (Sen, 1982).

Since the 1990s, national policies of Indian agriculture have been guided by economic liberalisation in order to achieve greater integration with the global economy. This shift towards economic liberalisation arose partly because the Indian economy faced serious problems, which were exacerbated by the Persian Gulf crisis of rising oil prices and the reduction of remittances from non-resident Indians, decreasing foreign exchange income worth US\$1 billion dollars (World Bank, 1999b; Das, 2003). The collapse of India's key trading partner, the Soviet Union, also affected the country since it had built its economy partly on Soviet industrial and scientific aid and public sector investment (Franke, 1994; Kannan and Pillai, 2004). By early 1991, the inflation rate was high at 14 percent and India was on the verge of defaulting on external debts (Agarwal et al, 1995). This forced the Indian government to seek external assistance from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The IMF loan package involved two prerequisites. First, that 28 percent of export revenues were directed for servicing the US\$63.40 billion foreign debt, and, second, that India implemented a Structural Adjustment Policy (SAP) (Das, 2003; Muller and Patel, 2004). According to Bhan (2001:p17), Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) include, "not only a change in the country's economic paradigm but also specific changes in the processes of production, the sectoral break-up of the economy, the role of the state within the new economy, and the introduction of a new culture of consumerism". Reforms were thus introduced for transforming the economy from a controlled one to an open economy more integrated into the global economy (Kapila and Kapila, 2001; Vyas and Reddy, 2002). In this outward-looking approach, different sectors of the Indian economy were linked with the outside world through their direct involvement in international trade or indirect linkages with export or import transactions (Islam, 2003). The agricultural sector was drastically transformed after the introduction of Structural Adjustment Policies and India's joining of the World Trade Organisation. The WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) includes market access (tariffication), domestic

support (aggregate measure of support given by the government to the agriculture sector) and finally export competition (export subsidies) (Joseph and Joseph, 2005).

In sum, liberalization of the Indian economy has generally evoked a mixed response of success and failure. The optimistic view of the reform claimed that it had been successful and had helped India solve its balance of payment crisis (Vyas and Reddy, 2002). The growth-oriented reform of the decade helped India speed up its economic growth. India has become one of the world's fastest growing economies of the world, with the economy growing at the rate of 8 percent per annum (Kohli, 2006; GOI, 2008). While the pessimistic view, such as that expressed by Dutt and Rao (2000) describe the detrimental effects on poverty, income inequality, employment and quality of life for the majority of the people in India. A major concern is that economic liberalization has greatly focussed on industrial and trade policy, while it has neglected agriculture, the key sector of the Indian economy. The acceleration in the growth of industry and service sectors widened the gap between the agriculture and non-agriculture sector since 1996-97 (GOI, 2008). Further, it has exacerbated inequality between and within Indian states according to Muller and Patel, 2004). However, according to Mathew (2008:p10) during the 10-year period after the start of liberalisation, rate of agricultural growth declined to two per cent and as a result the per capita availability of foodgrains decreased. As Shiva (2004:p1) puts it:

The very viability of national agriculture and food security system is being ruptured as high cost, capital intensive, corporate farming displaces small farmer centred agriculture and trade replaces food rights of the poor as a policy.

Thus according to Kumar and Mishra (2008:p291), "India offers an excellent case to study the effects of trade liberalisation since the magnitude of trade liberalisation in India was very big and the reforms were exogenous and came as a surprise to the policy makers". These impacts of economic liberalisation of Indian agriculture are further examined in detail in Chapter 5.

2.3 Gender, Development and Globalisation

This section reviews and conceptualises various debates and theories surrounding gender, development and globalisation, which have been influential in focussing

attention on the gendered impacts of neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation in this research.

This research is relevant since focusing on women and making them visible has for some time been an anchor within the existing framework of feminist research. The redefining of geography to include 'women's issues' was a major achievement of the first stage of feminist geography, since prior to the 1970s, the focus of the social sciences was mainly on men and their paid work (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004; McDowell, 1992). The initial focus of feminism in the development field was exclusively on women, and a field of study termed 'Women in Development' (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) arose. In the 1980s this shifted to 'Gender and Development' (GAD) as the importance of recognising and dealing with gender roles and power relations arose. Gender cuts across race and class and is the one of the most fundamental ways in which the market allots jobs and resources (Rai, 1991; 1992; Einhorn, 1992 and Gilmartin, Rofel and Tyrene, 1994). Whelehan and Pilcher (2004) suggested that this focus on gender was one way of addressing the critics of a monolithic model based on women, which could exclude and assert inequality. Chant (2000a) also notes that the inclusion of men may strengthen the fight for gender justice and could therefore be a potentially unifying force for men and women. This position was also supported earlier by Madge (1990), who argued that focussing on women could lead to explaining what women do rather than justifying why they do it, which in turn is governed by gender power relations. These debates to include gender, rather than focussing exclusively on women, also make compelling grounds to focus on gender and to examine power relations in this thesis. This is significant as gender inequality is one of the most invasive features of all societal relations:

"Pervasiveness of gender inequality cuts across all other forms of socio-economic differentiation. It is a feature of rich as well as poor groups, racially dominant as well as racially subordinate groups, privileged as well as 'untouchable' castes" (Kabeer, 2003: p2).

The focus of this thesis is on gender inequalities in agricultural development, which received particular attention after Boserup's publication 'Women's role in Economic Development (1970)' and stimulated the United Nations Decade for Women (1975-1985). Boserup's publication contributed to a positive correlation between women's role in agricultural production and their status vis-à-vis men and challenged the conventional

knowledge of women being less productive and therefore being allocated more limited resources (Razavi and Miller, 1995; Jaquette, 1990). The Rome Declaration on World Food Security (1996), signed at the World Food Summit, also acknowledged the primary contribution of women to food security and the need to ensure gender equality. It was recognised that women produced a major part of the food consumed in the world as food gatherers some 1,000 years ago, and they still continued to play a crucial role by producing more than half of all the food in the world today (Momsen, 2001). Some historians even believe that it was women who first domesticated plant crops and initiated the art and science of farming (Swaminathan, 1985). They still have a key role in rice farming, particularly in Africa and Asia, due to the prevailing cultivation practices demanding a higher level of women's participation in weeding, transplanting and harvesting operations (Dey, 1984; Boserup, 1970). The involvement of women in agriculture has 'broadened and deepened' in recent years (World Bank, 2007). Women bear the burden of farm and off-farm work and their work burden still averages 20 percent more than that of men in rural areas in Third World countries (Momsen, 2001).

Further, despite women's central role in production, their agricultural work is still largely unremunerated and so is undervalued and often unrecorded (Momsen, 2001). The World Bank Report (2001) indicates even at the end of the twentieth century, only a few countries have time series data on gender patterns of employment in agriculture. Invisibility in national accounting has also resulted in women's work (in subsistence production, informal markets, households and communities) falling outside the conventional sphere of wage labour (Sklair, 2002; Koczberski, 1998). Conceptual and theoretical norms are at the root of these statistical biases and they continue to lead to the underestimation of women's work in the labour force and national accounting statistics (Beneria, 1999). For instance, Beneria (1995) has revealed the underground and undocumented character of much of women's work in the informal sector. As Robinson (1998: p454) observes:

“The breadth of women's domestic work is overlooked in Third World countries where it embraces a broader set of activities than normally associated with it elsewhere.”

Male-dominated organizations, like the national statistical services and the World Bank, also underrate the real economic activity of women (Boserup, 1989). This invisibility of women's work is particularly serious in South Asia. This is a result of women's

participation, its identification and presentation being influenced by societal norms and biases, which has caused more distinct regional and sub-regional variations within and between countries (Agarwal, 1985; Bardhan, 1985; and Saradamoni, 1987). For instance, in India, more women than documented may be involved in agricultural work due to an estimated 90 percent of women working in the informal sector not being included in the official statistics (World Bank, 2001). Most work women perform associated with the household, such as livestock rearing, fodder and fuel wood collection is not considered economically productive work and therefore not recognized as work (Muller and Patel, 2004). Thus according to Nandal (2005:p183) “ it is no exaggeration to say that the unorganised sector in India is the women’s sector since the Indian Census (2001) estimates that 80 per cent of economically active women are engaged in agriculture”. Indeed, this research is potentially valuable and goes some way towards achieving this goal of capturing women’s informal agriculture work in Kerala, India.

The focus of this thesis is on gender inequalities arising from neo-liberal policies of economic liberalisation. Feminist debates have repeatedly raged about the gender biases associated with Structural Adjustment and macroeconomic stabilization policies, which have also found some place in policy-making and international mandates, such as the Beijing Platform for Action (Cagatay and Erturk, 2004). Shiva (1995) sees globalisation as a masculine project of the northern patriarchal powers such as the World Bank, IMF and WTO deepening gender inequality. Chant and Pedwell (2008: p13) argue “feminisation” of informal labour has served to exacerbate gendered, sexualised, radicalised and classed inequalities”. Further, Thorin (2003) indicates the gender differential impacts of economic liberalisation had resulted mostly from the disadvantageous economic position of women and continuing gender discriminating ideologies, which assigned men and women differential positions and responsibilities in the productive and reproductive spheres. These constraints mean that women face greater difficulties than men in translating their labour into paid work (Kabeer, 2008:p3). However, Fontana et al (2004) view the consequences of liberalisation for women both absolutely and relative to men, have been overall mixed, with both positive and negative effects depending upon a range of factors and preconditions.

Despite gender inequalities and gender differential impacts affecting trade performance, gender awareness is not a factor in the negotiations of trade policies and agreements (UNDP, 2001). The dominant discourse of rights remain a feature of, rather than a challenge to globalisation and global governance, which according to Robinson (2003) is visible in the recurrent silencing of the needs and interests of women, especially in Third World countries. The human rights movement, which privileged the public sphere over the private, has thus failed to reach many women and consequently women's exclusion is still common, while constraints and abuses against them are not recognised or protected despite the rhetoric of gender and development (O'Hare, 1999). This has led to an attention and entrenched debate on gender and empowerment in recent years.

Empowerment, particularly social and economic has become a key tool in attempting to address and change the current marginalization of women in the development process. Social empowerment implies women's equal access and improvement to social development indicators of health and education, while economic empowerment is one of the essential building blocks for the overall empowerment of women. McWhirter (1991: p25) defines empowerment as:

“The process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others and support the empowerment of others in the community.”

Nevertheless, some authors contest this definition. For example, Rowlands (1995) noted that empowerment in development thinking is recently being challenged as power, the core concept of empowerment, is understood and experienced in diverse ways by different people. Malhotra et al (2002) also argue that there is a tendency to use the term 'empowerment' slackly and there is a need to understand it in a larger theoretical framework. They and others argue that empowerment should emphasise agency about decision-making and control and should elaborate on the process of making choices for challenging and getting rid of discrimination (Malhotra, A; Schuler, S.R and Boender, C, 2002; Keller and Mbwewe, 1991).

The need to empower women and to address gender inequality in development and globalisation by reforms and legislation were also discussed in UN institutions, feminist

network groups, development agencies and various conferences like Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and the Earth Summit in Rio (1993) and Beijing (1995). However, despite these advances, progress has been slower than expected and the difficulty of opening the way for women's empowerment and advancement has proved to be much more demanding than initially anticipated (Riley, 2007:p18). Gender inequality is still an integral feature of the contemporary world, and thus research on this topic is certainly still valid and important. The gender inequality is pursued in this thesis through three key interrelated issues: space, differences and power relations, which are introduced in the following sub-section.

2.3.1 Gender and Space

The first key theme of the thesis is to explore gender and space. This is attempted by incorporating the spatial dimensions of global and local in trying to unpack the causes of agricultural transformation in Kerala for examining the gender inequalities that are associated with different economic and social structures of labour markets in different places. This is important, for Marcus (1995) describes attention to multi-sited global and local scales in which global becomes a vital part of local rather than remaining external or monolithic. This global/local nexus is also vital to human geographers, according to Graham (2002) and Cloke and Johnston (2005), for understanding globalisation and its various economic, cultural and environmental implications since what is seen from a 'global perspective' may appear different when viewed from a 'local perspective'. Thus from a geographical perspective examining different scales of relationships between global, national and local is imperative for understanding the economic liberalisation policies of globalisation (Young, 2001).

Tickamyer (2000) has also called for this need to integrate spatiality into study of power and inequalities and has noted that to date limited research focuses on how socio-spatial processes are entrenched in nested and overlapping spatial scales of global and local. This focus on mutually constitutive relationships between the local and global will endeavour to show how seemingly abstract global processes are embedded within local gendered relationships (see Eschle, 2004). Given the complexity of globalisation at the local level due to the integration of India into the global market economy, the implications of national and local policies on Kerala's agriculture and women labourers

requires thorough investigation. This thesis will go some way towards addressing this research gap.

2.3.2 Gender and Differences

The other theme related to gender and space of this research is of comparing differences between geographical locations. Feminist geographers have contributed to debates about spatiality by noting how gender power relations between men and women may be experienced and expressed differently in different places (Momsen, 2004). Similarly, Boserup's seminal study (1970) had also earlier drawn attention to the correlation between different forms of agricultural production and women's positions in different geographical spaces. She argued that in Asian-male-plough agriculture systems, women had a relatively minor role in cultivation and greater restrictions on their mobility, such as veiling, while in female-hoe agriculture systems of Africa, women played a predominant role and had reasonably powerful, though subordinate, position in the household (Pankhurst, 1992). Blunt and Wills (2000) and McDowell and Sharp (1997) also view this complexity of masculine and feminine identity being more or less socially sanctioned in particular spaces, placing geographical research right at the centre of current feminist research.

Even within India, there are marked differences between regions, with the northern states of India showing greater degrees of gender discrimination than the southern states, where there is greater participation of women in wetland farming. The gendered division of labour even within a state can vary from village to village and from caste to community, as is the case in the wetland state of Kerala (Mencher, 1993). McDowell (1999) had explored how these differences are the outcome of the particular structured sets of inequalities, which have resulted in women's oppression being different in different places. Indeed, this focus on place can be vital to address how the particular context influences women's lives and can be the basis of cross-cultural comparisons for any number of research problems (Dixon and Jones, 2006). However, despite these suggestive debates of gender and spatiality, very few studies have actually analysed the spatial variation of women's role in agriculture in India and none, to my knowledge, in Kerala. Studies focusing on the gendered implications of agricultural liberalisation on

women are rare and mostly based on quantitative secondary data and research examining spatial variations of these impacts in different geographical locations virtually non-existent in India. For this reason, capturing the spatial variations and sketching the complexities of geographical differences clearly matters and form one of the core themes of this thesis.

Finally, examining spatial variations in different geographical locations also involved focussing on women's differences, which has been associated with the poststructuralist 'turn' to examine differences among women in terms of age, caste, class, ethnicity and wealth. This approach challenges essentialist ideas of gender, which emphasize the category of women without tracing its complex differentiations (Blunt and Wills, 2000). Robinson (2003) regards this shift away from universalism towards differences and addressing inequalities of power, as vital for re-conceptualising feminist rights and for addressing the needs and interests of women. Indeed, differences are an important aspect of feminist understanding, though we should not lose sight of the economic, social, political and physical realities that produces a shared oppression for many women (Scranton, 1993).

The recent wave of feminist literature exploring globalisation has also examined the gendered impact of economic restructuring and has looked at the effects of this restructuring upon different women in different areas (Eschle, 2004). ILO research has also examined how different groups of women are situated differently within (and are affected differently by) local and international socio-economic and political power relations, structures and process (Chant and Pedwell, 2008: p8). Addressing differences among women is particularly significant in the Indian context since variations in caste, class and ethnicity constitute very different gender relations (Jackson and Rao, 2004). Ghosh and Roy (1997:p1) for instance, note how development and urbanization have uneven impacts for different categories of women:

“While the poor women in rural India were left behind, the middle class educated women were able to improve their economic and social status. Again, Muslim women were unable to make as much social progress as did the Christian and Hindu women.”

Further, research suggests that economic liberalisation affects various classes of men and women differently in India and this has led Ghosh (1996) to call for an urgent need

for data on these differential impacts. Indeed, according to Walby (2002:p547), there is a need to capture the multiple and overlapping nature of social differences, the way that individuals are simultaneously located within several different social groupings.

Yet, despite these calls to focus on women's differences, there is still a general lack of information on how economic liberalisation has affected different groups of women in different locations in India (although they experience common concerns of discrimination and marginalization). This thesis will therefore highlight the importance of differences between women, while examining the gender implications of agricultural transformation during the post-reform period of economic liberalisation in Kerala, India.

2.3.3 Gender and Power Relations

The final theme of the thesis is to explore gender and power relations. This is essential since increasingly feminists are apprehended that in succeeding in the battle for recognition of gender discrimination, the feminist social movement is losing in terms of redistribution of power relations (Fraser, 1997; Hoskyns and Rai 1998). Analysing gendered power relations and their transformations, is important and has also been acknowledged by researchers working on men and masculinity (see Brandth, 1995; and Liepins, 2000). Waylen (1996) describes the notion of power as part of gender and as a primary way of signifying power. Fishman (1978: p397) pointed that power is the "ability to impose one's definition of what is possible, what is right, what is rational and what is real, imposing one's will can be much more than forcing someone else to do something". According to Connell (2002:p58) power as a dimension of gender was central to the Women's Liberation concept of patriarchy:

"Social analysis that flowed from the idea of men as a dominant 'sex class', the analysis of rape as an assertion of men's power over women, and the critique of media images of women as passive, trivial and dumb."

However, Rowlands (1995) argued that the concept of power itself is contested and it is understood and experienced by different people in different ways. Anderson and Bohman (2000) and Kabeer (1994) view that existing gender power relations are able to continue because both the subordinate and dominant parties accept the social structure, which is so deeply entrenched that both parties may not even realise the inequalities. At the same time, Butler (1990) is concerned with the difficult relationship between

gendered power relations, which can be rigid and difficult to change and the diverse opportunities already existing in the present for transforming them. For instance, Blunt and Wills (2000) point out how it is unusual now in developed countries for a man to be the sole 'breadwinner' in a family and more women than before work outside the home, though they remain disproportionately responsible for childcare and domestic work. Moreover, social norms of femininity, women's work and wifely dependence continue to operate in many places within the so-called informal markets to create separate male and female realms (Elson and Pearson, 1981; Joekes, 1985; Kabeer, 1989). However, there are significant gaps in the literature on the interaction between economic liberalisation and gender power relations in the household. Malhotra, Schular and Boender (2002) indicate that despite data collection and analysis at the household level being critical for measuring women's empowerment, research related to these issues is very limited. Less attention is also given to social institutions that impact on gender equality such as informal family laws, cultural traditions and social norms (Drechsler, Jutting and Lindberg, 2008:p10). Further, the definition and interpretation of empowerment and its measurement vary across different studies according to Swain and Wallentin (2008:p20). In particular, Malhotra, et al (2002) suggest that there are few studies addressing agency or process directly and in most studies empowerment is often based on arbitrary choices and mostly on indicators of women's education, employment and legal rights. The scant data on inequalities within households prevent certain knowledge (Chant, 2008: p26). Thus, according to Scrase (2001), it is still unclear the extent to which this globalisation will lead to the empowerment of women. Conducting a literature review also supports the view that there is very limited research on this topic in India and Kerala in particular. Examining gender power relations at the household level for exploring women's empowerment clearly requires more thorough investigation and remains significant for this research.

2.4 Gender and Economic Liberalisation

After examining the key themes of gender and development focussing on space, differences, and power relations, which form the backbone of the thesis, the discussion that follows explores the gendered implications of economic liberalisation within the context of productive roles and the reproductive sphere of the households. As Okongwu and Mencher (2000:p112) indicate, movement from local to the global perspective has

generated new concepts designed to capture changes in the nature of productive and reproductive activities and therefore remains fundamental for this research.

2.4.1 Productive Roles

The debates of gendered implications of economic liberalisation in relation to productive role have been discussed generally in the context of two issues – informalisation of work and feminisation of labour, which have resulted from the restructuring of global economy and labour markets. In general, there are debates that the feminisation of labour has increased women's economic activities in most parts of the world, though there are exceptions and notable reversal of trends in the transitional economies of Eastern Europe and Central and Western Asia, and they also remain very low in the Middle East and North Africa (ILO, 2003). Fontana et al (1998:p10) have described this overrepresentation of women in the context of economic liberalisation:

“It has created many jobs for them (both absolutely and relative to men) often drawing them into paid work for the first time, at wages which although lower than those of men, are often higher than women would have earned in the alternative form of work open to them.”

Women are mostly preferred to men for keeping labour costs down and productivity up in the informal sector of the global capitalistic economy (Marchland and Runyan, 2001). Generally speaking, gender inequalities remain strong despite women being incorporated into the economic liberalisation process in many places, as men and women are differently located in the labour market. For instance, while women dominate some areas of the trading sector or particular commodities in West Africa and in Tanzania, they are mostly found in the low profit areas, while men are located in the wholesale trading areas (ILO, 1995b; Baden, 1998; Bryceson, 1993). In Asia, SAPs have had asymmetric impacts, and according to Dewan (1999) the negative impacts outbalance the positive ones and the harsh experience women share for example in India is similar to experiences of women in other Third World countries. Women's work, being temporary, with low wages, few benefits and low unionisation in the informal sector is clearly influenced by women's identities associated with their domestic-and care-taker roles in many Third World countries.

Further, feminisation of labour, despite having positive implications for some women, is also recognised as being short-lived, like in Latin America and the Caribbean due to the possibility of it reversing as production moves up the skill ladder in the later stages of export promotion (Fontana et al, 1998; Joekes, 1995 and 1999; Ghosh, 2001; Fussel, 2000). Karshenas (1997) has demonstrated how gender segregation of adjustment policies has restricted the upward mobility of women across sectors and adverse impacts are more likely when women are primarily concentrated in the non-tradable sectors. Finally, women remain susceptible to labour market fluctuations, as Winters (1999) describes in India skilled workers were making significant gains, while employment losses mounted in the informal sector.

However, this trend towards the feminisation of labour has been weaker in predominantly agricultural economies, where liberalisation has stimulated production of cash crops and has jeopardized women's livelihoods and well being, while at the same time it has caused the risk of increased imports of food crops (Cagatay and Erturk, 2004). In this context, Fontana et al (1998) and Gladwin (1991) note that women have been adversely affected in many places because they are mostly small-scale farmers engaged in food crop production and have little control over cash crop production. Shiva (1999) for instance, noted that the import liberalisation and monoculture displaced the livelihood of poor peasants and has deepened gender inequalities in India.

The increased economic opportunities for some women have resulted in increasing family migration with families or in groups to cities. For example, in India, migration has increased recently although female labour migration was previously rare and associated with derogatory status (Viswanathan and Shanthi, 2005; Shanthi, 1991; Sardamoni 1995). In addition, unfavourable conditions of export agriculture have also created migration trends, prompting women to join the burgeoning sex tourism trades in cities to meet the financial needs of their families (Jagger, 2001; Oliveros, 1997). Nevertheless, there are conflicting opinions regarding the implications of economic liberalisation on women's work in India, with some arguing that it does not fit into the 'feminisation of labour' experience of other Third World countries. By contrast, others claim rural India is still witnessing a feminisation of agriculture (Agarwal, 2003; Corta and Venkateshwarlu, 1998). This thesis will investigate this topic while examining the

impact of economic liberalisation on women's farm role in Kerala and will elucidate the contentious issue of the feminisation of labour in India.

In addition to the feminisation of labour issue, the other impact of economic liberalisation on women is of the increased informalisation of work. Increasing flexibility has resulted in a shift from full-time employment, with protected regulations, to less protected patterns of contract, casual and home-based work (Kabeer, 2004). Women in the informal economy find they are the 'weakest links' in global value chains according to Chant and Pedwell (2008:p1). Beneria (2001: p48) argued that this informalisation of work represents a massive redistribution of resources away from labour and an increase in social inequalities across the countries. Even in the once-rapidly growing economies of East and South East Asia, a significant proportion of women workers are outside the formal sector, where considerable growth in employment in the modern sector has taken place prior to the recent economic crisis (Carr et al, 2001). Indeed, women dominating in low-paid seasonal and casual labour markets remain a signification challenge (Holmes, 2008:p36).

Jokes (1999) indicated that the few studies that do exist on the informal sector reveal that the negative impacts of economic liberalisation are more visible in predominantly agricultural economies. Carr et al (2001) and Fontana et al (1998) also identify that gaps in the literature on the informal sector are particularly strong and little has been written about the impacts of globalisation on women working in the informal sector. These debates have been influential in focussing attention exclusively on women's informal agricultural work in Kerala, India in this thesis.

Overall, the flexibility of labour market practices, deemed necessary to compete in global markets, has also resulted in highly exploitative working conditions in number of industries in many Third World countries (Kabeer, 2003). For example, women in Chile and South Africa end up working in the fruit sector, without the protection of long-term work and are more likely to be hired on casual, short-term or seasonal basis, compared to men (Oxfam, 2004). Women in the agricultural sector of India, South Asia suffers a higher incidence of occupational health problems than men, such as allergies related to the respiratory system, coughs and body aches (Ghosh, 2001; Swaminathan, 2004).

Thus increased level of employment combined with lower labour standards has created new health risks for women (Gideon, 2007).

Further gender inequalities of informal work are related to the wages of agricultural labourers. The UN Millennium Project (2005), for instance, indicates that gender gaps in earnings exist in all countries, with men earning more than women across different groups of agricultural workers in different types of earnings such as hourly, monthly and salaried. The trend towards corporate agriculture and the exploitation of casual labour has been severe in Latin America and for longer durations than elsewhere (UNRISD, 2005). Here the hourly wage earnings of women are radically lower than men due to women's concentration in unskilled jobs, with widening wage inequalities between skilled and unskilled workers (World Bank, 1995; Cagatay and Erturk, 2004). In Sub-Saharan Africa, women in casual piece-rate work are paid one-third to one-half of men's wages and engaging in this kind of work is a sign of extreme poverty (Whitehead, 2001; UNRISD, 2005). Asian economies have the widest gap in wages between men and women, although according to Seguino (2000), the debates about the role of gender inequality on the determinants of rapid Asian growth are mostly absent. For example, in India, women earn 60 percent of male wages according to the Ministry of Labour, while the Indian Labour Journal notes that women receive 75 percent of men's earnings (Talwar and Ganguly, 2002). Sweden, Sri Lanka, and Vietnam are at the upper and more egalitarian end of wage inequalities (90 percent), while Bangladesh, Chile, China, Cyprus, South Korea, Philippines, and Syria are at the lower and more unequal end of the wages (42–61 percent) (UNDP, 1995; Moghadam, 1999). The unequal wages are the result of gender segregation by occupation, divergence in skills and education and differences in the ability to organise as workers (Cagatay and Erturk, 2004). They are the result of gendered ideologies which value women's work less than men's as Moghadam (1999: p375) summarises: "the social relations of gender accounts for the pervasive income gap between men and women workers, a gap that is detrimental to women but lucrative to employers." However, a reduction of gender gaps in wage and participation Costa and Silva (2008: p9) argue can result in higher economic growth as well as reduced poverty and inequality.

In general, much empirical evidence on the impact of economic globalisation on women's production indicates further exploitation and impoverishment rather than their empowerment and emancipation (Gill, 2002:p114). Market liberalization has thus caused polarization among women as it creates "winners" and "losers", even where female labour participation and employment has risen in aggregate and compared to men (Cagatay and Erturk, 2004). The gendered pattern of employment and women's disadvantageous position in the labour market has resulted in their being more vulnerable to poverty than men in the Third World, a feature that is particularly strong in the agricultural labour market (Baden and Milward, 1995; Fontana et al, 1998; ILO, 1995b). In this context, Kabeer (2003) had argued that the goals of both poverty eradication and gender equality is not only to privilege women in access to employment, but also access to decent forms of work and on the same terms with men, without which, according to Beneria (2001), such programmes will clearly prove to be inefficient. It can therefore be concluded that the patriarchal structure of the labour market continues to operate despite having been transformed through the demands of the capitalist system (Afshar and Barrientos, 1999; Schuurman, 2001).

2.4.2 Reproductive Sphere

After examining the gendered implication of economic liberalisation for productive work, this section turns to examining the impact on reproductive sphere given that the household is a key site for examining the effects of external global impacts. This follows the feminist ambition to transform gendered power relationships by contesting inequalities, not only in employment and institutional representation, but also at the level of the household (Robinson, 2000). As Chant (1996: p10) forcefully demands, "gender analysis of economic restructuring must go beyond economic indicators of empowerment, and focus on changing gender relations as much as on changing gender roles." This is only possible through a household scale analysis. The need to explain women's position within the household is also required in terms of understanding the wider social and economic structures of society according to Arun (1999). However, Wolf (1994) notes households are obviously the place to start (but not stop) in examining the effects of external economic changes on internal hierarchies, which need, in turn, to be questioned.

Despite the importance of the household as a major site for examining external changes, there has been very little attention paid to household level analysis. The scant data on inequalities within households prevent certain knowledge (Chant, 2008:p26). McDowell (1992) argued that this has resulted from methodological limitations of geographical studies, which have not focussed on the household as the appropriate unit of analysis and the unproblematic definition of the male partner as the head of household resulting in the internal power relations within the household remaining unexamined. Less attention is given to social institutions that impact on gender equality such as informal family laws, cultural traditions and social norms (Drechsler, Jutting and Lindberg, 2008:p18). This lack of work on the household is deep-seated and the Gender Empowerment Measurement and Human Development Report of the UNDP also remain largely confined to conventional measures rather than to examining household dimensions (Eapen and Kodoth 2002; Panda and Agarwal, 2005).

In order to address this information gap, this research will focus on gender power relations as a result of changing farm roles within the households in the post reform period of economic liberalisation. Such changes have been noted elsewhere. For instance, Moghadam (1999) observed that increasing job opportunities as a result of economic liberalisation enabled some women in the Third World to earn and control income, which has helped in loosening the traditional patriarchal structure within the household in some places. By contrast, Dasgupta (1999) showed that in other places as demands increase for women's labour in the informal sector, this could weaken women's bargaining power within the household. In response, Moghadam (1999) noted that many women accept informal work with low wages and absence of benefits to carry on with their domestic and child care responsibilities at the same time. However, as Cagatay and Erturk (2004) and Vickers (1991) observe, combining paid employment without a corresponding reduction in time consuming and physically demanding household work has also intensified women's work burden in many places. Additionally, many of the costs associated with economic reforms can be transferred onto households and increase vulnerability of some households, which are mainly absorbed by women (UNDP, 1999; Beneria, 2001). Rai (1998) has noted that Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and the ensuing privatisation, casualisation and

feminisation of some sectors resulted in tensions, as gender relations get reconfigured within the household.

The other impact of economic liberalisation on the household is of the cutbacks in social welfare as a result of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). This has left women more vulnerable due to the losses to their families and it has also affected their children's education, particularly girls (Jagger, 2001; Beneria, 1995). As Moghadam (1999:p370) points out:

“Women have had to assume extra productive and reproductive activities in order to survive the austerities of adjustment and stabilization policies, including higher prices, and to compensate for the withdrawal or reduction of government subsidies of food and service.”

At the same time, men are no longer been able to achieve economic security and fulfil their traditional 'provider roles', which has often compelled them to renegotiate their status and authority within households (Mills 2003; George, 2000; Goldring, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Rouse, 1995). This situation can result in a crisis of masculinity emerging because men are not able to fulfil their breadwinner role. Tinsman (2000), Berger and Giffin (2004), for example, claim that domestic violence is also linked to unemployment and poverty among men and the decline of patriarchy cannot be comprehended as the end of male domination. On the other hand, increasing poverty and worsening conditions for some female-headed households, such as in the case of Peru, clearly indicate that SAPs and other forms of neo-liberalisation is a major cause of the 'feminisation of poverty' and is an unwelcome feature of economic globalisation (Moghadam, 1997b; 1999). Added to this, male out-migration has also increased women's burden in the absence of well-remunerated employment in the families headed by women in Asia, Africa and Latin America (Afshar and Maynard, 1999). In general, the number of female-headed households in rural areas of the Third World has increased substantially in recent years, for instance 31 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa, 17 percent in Latin America and the Caribbean and 14 percent in Asia, due to men migrating in search of employment (World Bank, 2001). However, the current situation in Sub-Saharan Africa has also resulted due to the spread of HIV/AIDS epidemic. Indeed as Afshar and Barrientos (1999) argue in some cases globalisation has created opportunities and greater empowerment of women, whilst in others it has increased

women's subordination. These debates of economic liberalisation in relation to women's productive and reproductive spheres are vital and are further included in the substantive chapters of this thesis while examining paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has reviewed various theories and debates about gender, development and globalisation. The focus was mainly on the uneven and unstable processes of globalisation associated with economic liberalisation of agriculture in the Third World. It reveals that although for some the need to liberalise was thought to be essential for economic growth and development, it has also produced negative results and marginalisation for many people (Khor, 2000). The liberalisation of Third World agricultural economies including India mostly presents a bleak picture of debt and dependency. It clearly suggests that the outcome of liberalisation for promoting globalisation have often been difficult and have not materialised practically in most places.

The gender implications of this economic liberalisation process were particularly explored by examining the inclusionary, exclusionary and contradictory impacts on women. Overall, the literature review highlights that women's informal work is still mostly excluded by national accounting statistics resulting in both under-estimation and gross under-counting of women's contribution to agriculture in many parts of the world, but particularly in India. This research will address the methodological problems of extracting meaningful data owing to the lack of information about women's informal agriculture work. Examining the three key themes of gender - space, differences and power relations, the chapter identified important gaps in the literature, which form the background for this thesis, and further reference to this literature is also cited in consequent chapters. First, research suggests there are contentious debates about the impact of liberalisation on women's work in India, particularly in the agricultural sector. This needs to be explored in the Kerala context, as limited work on this topic is presently evident. Secondly, uncovering the interconnectedness of global and local scale processes of economic liberalisation and its consequent impacts on agriculture and

labourers, particularly women have not yet been successfully achieved. Thirdly, while there has been some research on the spatial variations in women's work in the different states of India, the smaller scale spatial variations within different geographical locations of a state remain unexamined. Fourthly, research highlighting differences among women (whilst keeping gender inequalities in mind) of different age, caste, class and ethnicity remains unexplored. Capturing these differences among women in Kerala is vital for exploring poststructuralist approach of examining differences between women of different socio-economic groups in India. Finally, there has been little explicit attention on the household level of analysis, particularly on the interaction between women's farm roles and gender power relations within the households for examining women's empowerment. This research aims to address these information gaps while examining the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

This chapter discusses and evaluates the methodology deployed for collecting and analysing data for the research on the paradoxes associated with agricultural transformation and its impact on gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India. The chapter is organised into five sections. The first section (3.1) covers the preparatory phase of developing a research strategy including selection of research methods and site selection for undertaking the field study. The second section (3.2) illustrates the research methods deployed and data collection in Kerala. It also outlines problems encountered during piloting and the measures taken to offset them. The third section (3.3) describes techniques used for interpreting and analysing the data and the results. The fourth section (3.4) examines the ethical issues of the research and reflexivity and positionality shaping the outcome of the research. Finally, in the conclusion section (3.5), a summary of the research methodology is presented.

3.1 Research Strategy

This section describes the preparatory phase and developing a research strategy prior to actually undertaking data collection in Kerala, India. Formulating a fixed research strategy prior to field study, according to Few (2000) is vital both for practical reasons and to enhance the empirical grounding of the research. Developing a research strategy for collecting primary data in Kerala was difficult and involved a lot of hard work of correspondence, meetings and discussions with specialists in India. Specific questions to examine the impact of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations during the post-reform period of economic liberalisation were framed by reviewing the literature more generally in the Third World context. Discussions were also held with researchers of the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU), Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Extension Officers of KAU and NGOs, such as the Centre for Action Research and Technology for Man, Animal and Nature (CARTMAN) and Centre for Development Studies (CDS) in India. In addition, consultations were held with the

members of the Inter-cooperation NGO Programme, a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and with policy planners from the State Planning Board, Government of Kerala. Attending a workshop held by the Kerala Agricultural University in Thrissur introduced me to some of the major issues confronting women labourers in Kerala. Prominent specialists attended this workshop from relevant NGOs, government departments and women's labour union representatives in Kerala.

Ultimately, a research project was designed employing a feminist methodology with the aim of enabling women's voices to be heard while examining the implications of agricultural transformation on gender roles and the consequences for power relations within the households. Cancian (1992:p640) indicates how "feminist social scientists have developed distinctive methodological approaches that fit the feminist goals of opposing inequality and doing research that empowers women, validates their experiences, and improves their daily lives". At the same time as Madge et al (1997) observe that feminist methods and methodologies have changed over time and have often attempted to use multiple modes: doing, hearing, seeing, writing and reading in different ways in order to uncover women's multiple and varied experiences. However, Moser (2001), Reinharz (1992) and Mason (1997) suggest that there is no research method that is exclusively made for, and used by, feminist researchers.

The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods of triangulation was practicable for this research. The data collection involved formal interviews, questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews and in-depth focus group discussions, with a wide range of research participants from specialists (researchers and policy planners), farm owners, female labourers and male and female labour households (Table 3.1 summarises the research method and section 3.2 provide details of each method). Overall, the research methods employed for the thesis thus varied with the aims and location of the project and differed according to the intended audience and recipient of the research product (Madge at al, 1997). Distinctive methods can thus be combined with methodological flexibility by employing triangulation, which is commonly used by social science researchers for maximising the understanding of research questions according to researchers like Scheyvens and Storey 2003 and Moser, 2001. Rose (1993) has thus stressed combining both quantitative and qualitative techniques have benefits since

using a single method can be overcome by the counter-balancing power of the other. At the same time, it was also imperative since each technique addressed a different question than being repetitive (Valentine, 2001). Researchers like Lawson (1995) noted that it is also pertinent and employed by feminist geographers, particularly by poststructuralist feminists, since historically the link between quantitative methods and masculinist science has not been adequately interrogated.

Table 3. 1 Summary of research methods

Aim	Method	Location	Participant
Interacting Spatial Scales	- Qualitative (8 Interviews) - Secondary Data	Thiruvananthapuram Kerala, India	Specialists (Gender and Agriculture)
Geographical Differences	- Quantitative Data (45 questionnaire survey) - Qualitative Data (180 semi-structured interviews)	AML, Wayanad, TTM, Palakkad and KMK, Thrissur in Kerala, India	Farm Owners Female Labourers
Shifting Power Relations	- Qualitative (4 focus group discussions with male & female labourers, 12 members in total)	TTM, Palakkad, Kerala, India	Labour Household (Male and Female)

3.1.1 Site Selection

After developing a research strategy for data gathering, the next stage was site selection. It involved first selection of three districts of diverse geographical regions of Kerala – Wayanad, a highland district, Palakkad, a midland district and Thrissur as an example of the lowland district. This will enable a detailed analysis to be made of the spatial variations of agricultural transformation on labourers and women in particular across the different geographical locations in Kerala. The selection of these districts was based on information gained from the State *Taluk* and *Panchyat* Office (the lowest level of local administration) and *Krishi Bhavan* (the local government agriculture office) and from advice from researchers at Kerala Agricultural University. Then one village was selected from each of these districts: Ambalayval & Thomatchal (AML), a composite highland village in Wayanad, Thathamangalam (TTM) midland of Chittor Block in the Palakkad, and lowland village Karamuck (KMK) of Manalur Panchayat of Thrissur

district (see Figure 3.1 for the map of location villages and Table 3.2 for profile of three location villages).

The first AML village of Wayanad district selected is a highland and was part of the revenue districts Kozhikode and Cannore and was directly under British administration until 1947 (Bijoy, 2003). It has less of urban influence and a long cash and plantation crop history of tea, coffee and cardamom, opened up since the colonial rule. This had resulted in increased migration of peasants from the midland and coastal tracts over the past century, although the population density of this region is still the lowest (GOK, 2006). The soil, with a high organic content, is suitable for a diversity of cash crops like rice, coffee, tea, rubber, pepper and cardamom. Scarcity of labour here during the 18th century resulted in landlords bringing in large numbers of the tribal population from the neighbouring forests of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu and extensive tribal lands have also been surreptitiously acquired or seized by cultivator immigrants from the plains (Bijoy, 2002). A major section of the tribal population (including the *Paniya*, *Adiya*, *Kurumba* and *Kurichia* groups) of Kerala are concentrated in this region, resulting in Wayanad being declared a 'backward area' by the government of India (See Figure 3.2 for an indigenous tribal household in Wayanad). The indigenous people are also referred to as *Adivasis*, which means original inhabitants and comprise about 68 million, 8 percent of India's population (FIAN, 2007).

The second midland village TTM of Palakkad district of Chitoor block is a plane with small valleys and is a major producer of rice often termed the 'rice bowl' of Kerala. Palakkad was part of Madras presidency during British rule and after independence it remained initially under the Madras state and later formed one of the districts of Kerala state. The district Palakkad was first to adopt the 'Green Revolution' package in Kerala and agriculture remains the major source of employment and the district has a substantial number of agricultural labourers. The region has a laterite soil suitable for a variety of annual, seasonal, and perennial crops like rice, coconut, sugarcane, rubber and ginger. The third KMK village of Manalur Panchayat in Thrissur district selected, in contrast, is lowland, with a heavy annual rainfall of over 2500 mm and a risk of flooding during peak monsoon periods. Thrissur district played an important role in promoting trade links with the 'outside world' during the medieval and ancient periods.

Figure 3.1 Locations of Villages within the Districts

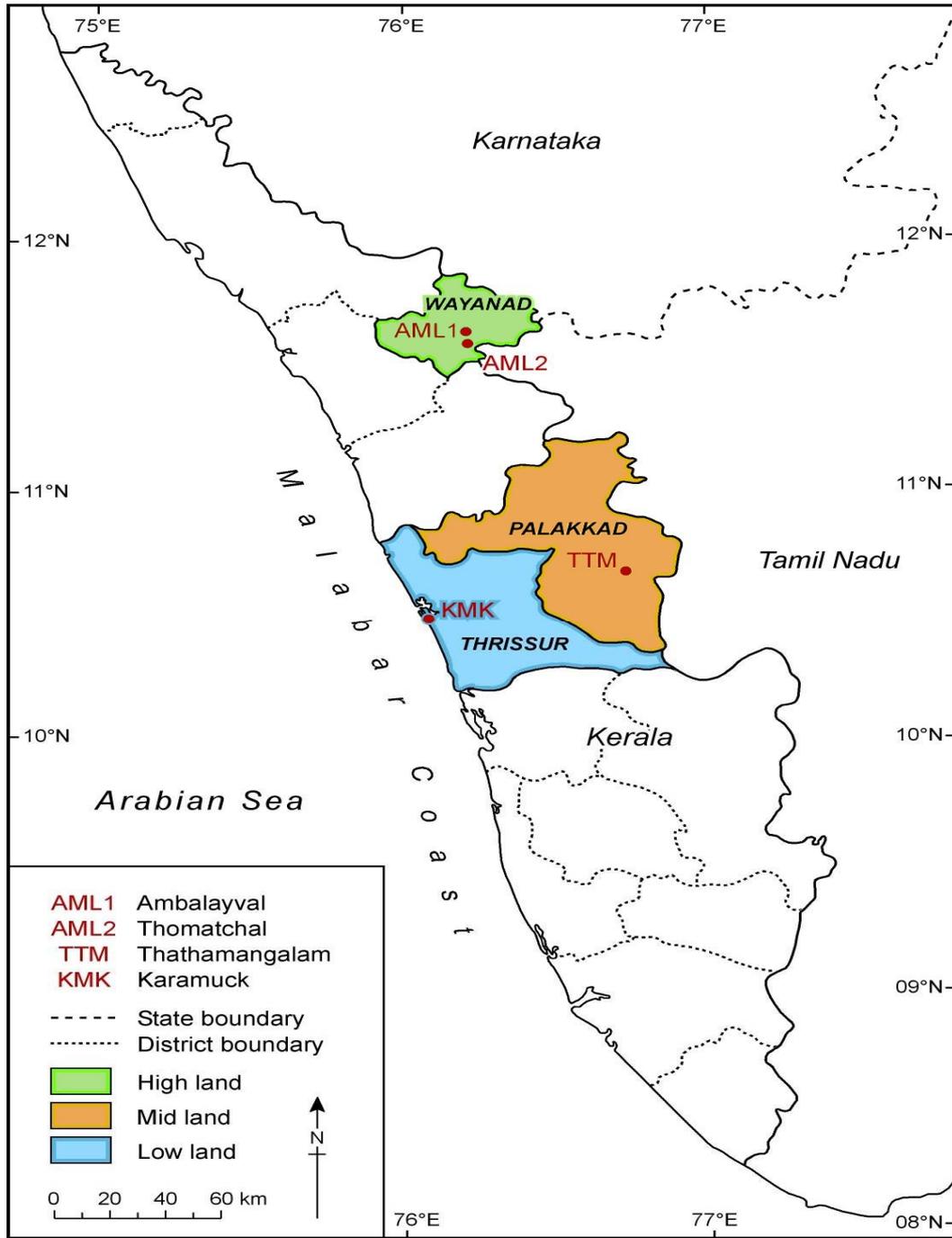


Table 3.2 Profile of three location Villages

Village	District	Topography	Area (ha)	Population	Cropping Pattern
Ambalavayal & Thomatchal (AML)	Wayanad	Highland (700-2100 meters)	37, 308	30, 442	Rice, Coffee, Tea, Cardamom, Pepper, Rubber and Pepper
Thathamangalam (TTM)	Palakkad	Midland (Hills and Valleys)	1, 447	40, 937	Rice, Coconut, Sugarcane, Rubber and Ginger
Karamuck (KMK)	Thrissur	Lowland (Arabian Sea Coast)	723	14, 162	Rice, Coconut, Banana, Arecanut and Cashew

(Source: GOK, 2006 & Registrar General of India, 2001)

During, British rule, and prior to independence, it formed part of the princely ruler state of Cochin. The three districts and villages selected thus represent not only the diversity of geography and cropping patterns found in Kerala, but they also have different histories of agricultural development. The rice is cultivated in all locations, though the cultivation of cash crop varied in the different locations. Other differences were also evident within the three geographical locations: women belonged not only to different communities, such as Hindu, Muslim and Christian, but also to different ethnic castes within the Hindu community. This diversity will enable the research to take a poststructuralist standpoint, which focuses on the diverse experiences of women of different caste and ethnicity group. The following section describes broadly the data collection in Kerala, India.

Figure 3.2 Indigenous tribal household in Wayanad



(Source: Fieldwork Kerala, 2001)

Figure 3.3 Tea plantation farm in Wayanad



(Source: Gabrielle India Wayand)

3.2 Data Collection in Kerala

The primary data was collected during eleven months (between April and June 2000; October 2000 and March 2001; and April and May 2004). It involved triangulation technique of combining both quantitative and qualitative methods, as noted earlier in section 3.1 and detailed below.

3.2.1 Formal Interviews

The first aim of the thesis is to explore the crisis of agricultural transformation occurring in Kerala in the post-reform period and to examine its impact on agricultural labourers and women in particular. This required the qualitative technique of formal interview with specialists and utilised a series of questions which looked at how economic liberalisation policies had filtered down from the international level to the national (Indian) scale and, together with state (Kerala) policies, collectively transformed agriculture and affected labourers. Indeed, as Kitchin and Tate (2000: p213) indicate, “Interviewing is probably the most commonly used qualitative technique, it allows the researcher to produce a rich and varied data set in a less formal setting”.

The interviews were undertaken between April and May 2004 and were unstructured and lasted for at least an hour and were recorded for transcribing later (Appendix – 1 gives an example of interview transcript with specialist). The 8 specialists interviewed involved key researchers in the field of gender and agriculture in Kerala and also policy planners from Thiruvananthapuram, the district head quarters and the capital city of Kerala, India. Additional interviews were also conducted with specialists and policy planners after returning from fieldwork in Kerala to address later identified gaps in information (see Table 3.4 and Table 3.5 for details of specialists interviewed and their affiliation to different organisations). However, identities of research participants had to be concealed through pseudonyms to protect the rights of those involved in the research process and to avoid violation of ethical codes of practice. The sampling for interviews was based on a non-random sampling method of ‘snowballing’, based on asking the initial contacts for the name and address of any other person who might fulfil the sampling requirement (Kitchin and Tate, 2000).

Table 3. 4 Interviews with specialist in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala

Status	Organization	Pseudonym
Researcher, Agriculture	Centre for Development Studies	Madhavan
Researcher, Gender Studies	Centre for Development Studies	Geetha
Agriculture Specialist	Kerala Agricultural University	Shekhar
Policy Planner	Kerala State Planning Board	Bhaskaran
Researcher	Kerala State Planning Board	Archana

Table 3. 5 Additional interviews with specialist in India and UK

Status	Organization	Pseudonyms
Principal Secretary	Government of Kerala, India	Ravi
Management Professional	Government of India, Bangalore	Swaminathan
Researcher (Gender Studies)	UK University	Usha

Additionally, the primary data gained through the interviews with specialists were supplemented by secondary data from research papers, theses, official reports and other statistical publications. The secondary data thus supplemented the primary data (quantitative and qualitative) collected for the original research.

3.2.2 Questionnaire Survey and Semi-structured Interviews

The second aim of the thesis, to investigate the spatial variations of agricultural transformation on women in three geographical locations, was addressed through a combination of both quantitative (questionnaire survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) methods. The three location villages of AML, highland, TTM, midland and KMK lowland represent the true diversity of cropping patterns and geography of the state, as examined earlier in Sub-section 3.1.1. Before data collection, a three-month pilot study was undertaken first between April and June 2000 in the lowland Karamuck village of Thrissur district. It was vital to test the sampling techniques and to check the format of the questionnaire and interviews on a small group of farm owners and women labourers. Sampling on a small group is vital for checking the questions, responses and layouts to guarantee successful implementation of a questionnaire (Robinson, 1998). A number of problems were

encountered during this stage. First, the initial idea to select farms based on a stratified sampling of small, medium and large size was not feasible. All the rice farms belonged to the small size, because of the minimum size restriction placed on rice farms by the land reform policies, while in the case of cash and plantation crops, there was no such restriction. As a result, the stratified sampling of grouping on size had to be changed to a random sampling of farms. Secondly, selecting women respondents by categorising them into permanent, daily and casual labour categories was not feasible. This posed a major problem since in reality women mostly belonged to the casual labour category, though there was some variation between the locations. I therefore shifted to a random sampling strategy to include women of all labour categories. The third problem was the difficulty in getting more than four women labourers from each sampled farm since the same women often worked for different farms; as a result, it was decided to select only four women from each selected farm.

Given these potential difficulties, the sampling strategy of farms and women respondents designed prior to piloting had to be altered to suit the local conditions. These changes were inevitable due to the problem of conceptualising the actual field situation in Kerala, India from the UK. The final sample of farms involved 15 farms within each locality village of the district, a total of 45 farms in 3 locations. These were selected by assigning a number and then drawing the necessary sample size from the list of the farms. A list of women working on the farms was compiled and four women were randomly selected from each sample farm. A total of 180 semi-structured interviews were in total undertaken, i.e. four women in each of 15 farms in each of the three villages (totalling 60 in each village). The sampling was followed by a six-month intensive study between October 2000 and March 2001 in the three geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland in Kerala (see Table 3.6 for the final sampling strategy).

Table 3. 6 Sampling for questionnaire and semi-structured interviews

Selection	How	Why Selected	Number
Districts	Random	Geographical diversity	3
Villages	Random	Cropping diversity	3
Farms	Random	Farm Size	45 (15 in each village)
Women	Random	Labour Category	180 (4 in each farm, 60 per village)

Questionnaire Survey

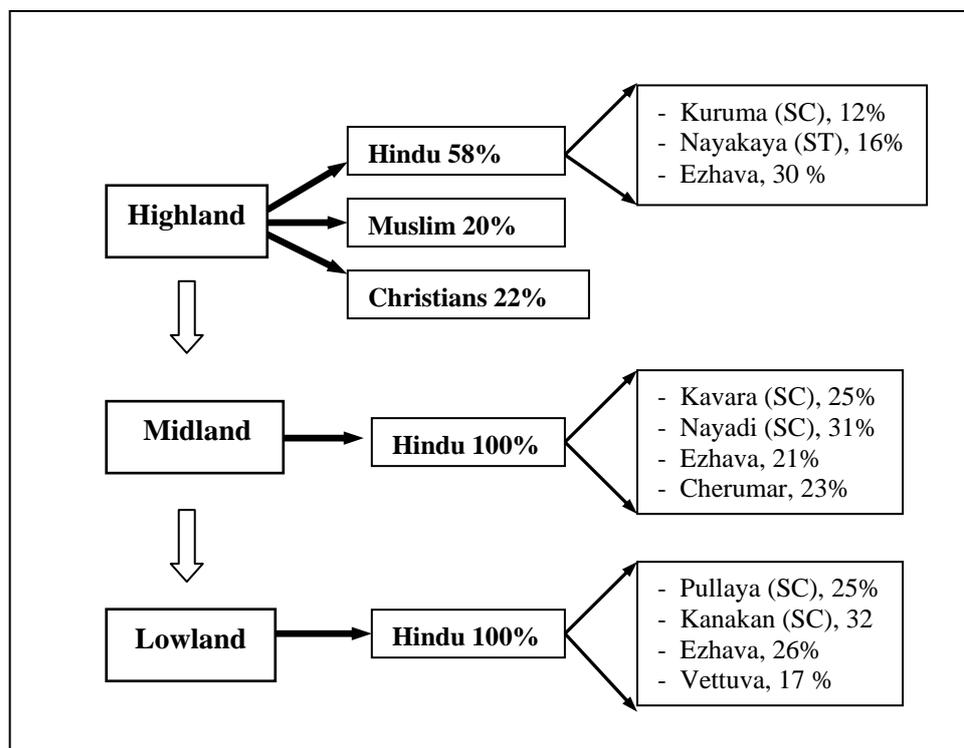
The questionnaire survey generated information on the agricultural setting and labour scenario on farms in different locations. Overton and Diermen (2003) regard quantitative techniques as an appropriate method of doing research in Third World countries if precise, objective and replicable answers are needed. Scheyvens and Storey (2003) note how they have the particular strength of being verified and replicated. Similarly, McLafferty (1995: p438) emphasises that quantitative methods can expose “the broad contours of difference and similarity that vary not only with gender but also with race, ethnicity, class and place”. Quantitative techniques can thus form, according to Lawson (1995) and Moss (2001) an important component of feminist poststructural research and are appropriate and useful in analysing complex spatial relations of geographical events. It is for this reason that quantitative methods were used in this study through the use of formally structured questionnaires with farm owners.

Semi-structured Interviews

The qualitative approach of semi-structured interviews was required for gaining a more in-depth insight into the spatial variations of agricultural transformation on women’s roles. These interviews were conducted with women by visiting them in their households on a daily (see Appendix – 4 for an example of semi-structured interview with a woman labour). Often women returned late from farm work, especially during the harvesting season, and most of the interviews had to be conducted in the early morning or late evening when they were available in their households. The semi-structured interviews were also guided by the poststructuralist paradigm of transforming gender dimensions by understanding differences in caste

and ethnicity among women while uncovering the discrimination involved in agricultural transformation (see Figure 3.3 for the details of varying castes and ethnicity of women involved in the semi-structured interviews in different geographical locations). Overall, interviews documented women’s rich, contextualized experiences in different locations. It allowed a wide range of experiences to be documented, voices to be heard, representations to be made and interpretations to be extracted as also indicated by Smith (2001).

Figure 3.4 Varying castes and ethnicity of women



3.2.3 Focus Group Discussions

The final aim to investigate the impact of changing roles of agricultural transformation on power relations for women of different age groups at the household scale of analysis involved focus group discussions. A case study approach was adopted. As McDowell (1999:p236) has stressed:

“Qualitative, detailed, small scale and in-depth case studies use to best advantage skills of listening, empathy and the validation of (shared) personal experience”.

Further, Valentine (2001) notes in focus group discussions, there is a dialogue between people, with individuals free to challenge the interpretation or assumptions of the other group members, enabling the researcher to explore how meanings and experiences are negotiated and contested between the participants. Burgess (1996) also makes a related point about focus groups being ideal when limited time can be spent in the field. Indeed, the case study based on in-depth focus group discussions was appropriate for getting views from a smaller group of men and women labourers within the limited finance and time available to conduct the interviews in this research.

These group discussions were conducted during April and May 2004 in the midland village of Thathamangalam. The midland village was chosen for the case study because it is a major rice growing region, often referred to as the 'rice bowl', and the earlier practice of hiring permanent labourers is still practised in this region. The focus group discussions were held with household members of men and women separately (2 women's group (8 women) and one men's group of (3 men), i.e. 12 people in total). This inclusion of men, according to McDowell (1999), is a 'must' to bring out the comparative position of women. Further, within the groups, members represented different age groups of old, middle and young (see Table 3.8 for details).

The sampling for the focus group discussions involved the selection of four households using quota sampling, where stipulated quotas of cases were sampled without a random selection procedure (De Vaus, 1991). Although according to De Vaus (1991) by not using random sampling the cases may 'self-select' because they will be the kind of people who will most readily agree to be interviewed, this intensive case study approach was deemed appropriate in this instance. However, some limitations arose during group discussions due to the generation gaps, with elderly members dominating and disagreeing with young participants on a few issues. But this was not a serious issue and younger participants were able to defend or revolt because they were mostly educated and outspoken even in the remote rural areas of Kerala. Further, it would have been useful to expand the number of focus group interviewed but time and monetary restrictions precluded this. However, as Robinson (1998) observes, the smaller the group, the greater will be the participation of all members.

Table 3.7 Household members selected for group discussions

Household	Pseudonym	Age
1 Female	Kunchi, Dhanam, Lata	70, 48, 30
2 Female	Chella, Lakshmi, Gita	65, 43, 26
3 Female	Ponamma, Devaki, Sarla	63, 46, 23
4 Male	Kandan, Vellan, Ravi	73, 41, 27

3.3 Data Analysis and Results

After describing the data collection in Kerala India, the focus of this section is on the different ways of analysing and interpreting data for gaining a deeper understanding of the quantitative and qualitative data generated by the fieldwork. Quantitative data collected from the questionnaire surveys with farm owners are presented as tables in Chapter - 6. The classification process allowed interpretation of the quantitative data (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). The questionnaire survey generated four major categories of agricultural transformation of cropping patterns and farming practices; of declining area of rice production; farm fragmentation; changing labour recruitment practices and gender role alterations. In addition to generating information on the agricultural setting, the questionnaire survey also helped in examining labour scenario including labour recruitment, gender roles and wages of male and female labourers on the farms in the different geographical locations of Kerala (see Appendix – 2 for a sample of questionnaire survey with farm owner). Examining farm size revealed extreme fragmentation of rice farms compared to cash and plantations farms. The latter had no size restriction placed on them by the land reforms of the Communist government, which by contrast had restricted the size of rice farms. As the highland village AML of Wayanad district had more plantations, farm sizes here were consequently larger than the other two locations of TTM and KMK (see Table 3.8).

Table 3.8 Percentage of farm by size in different locations

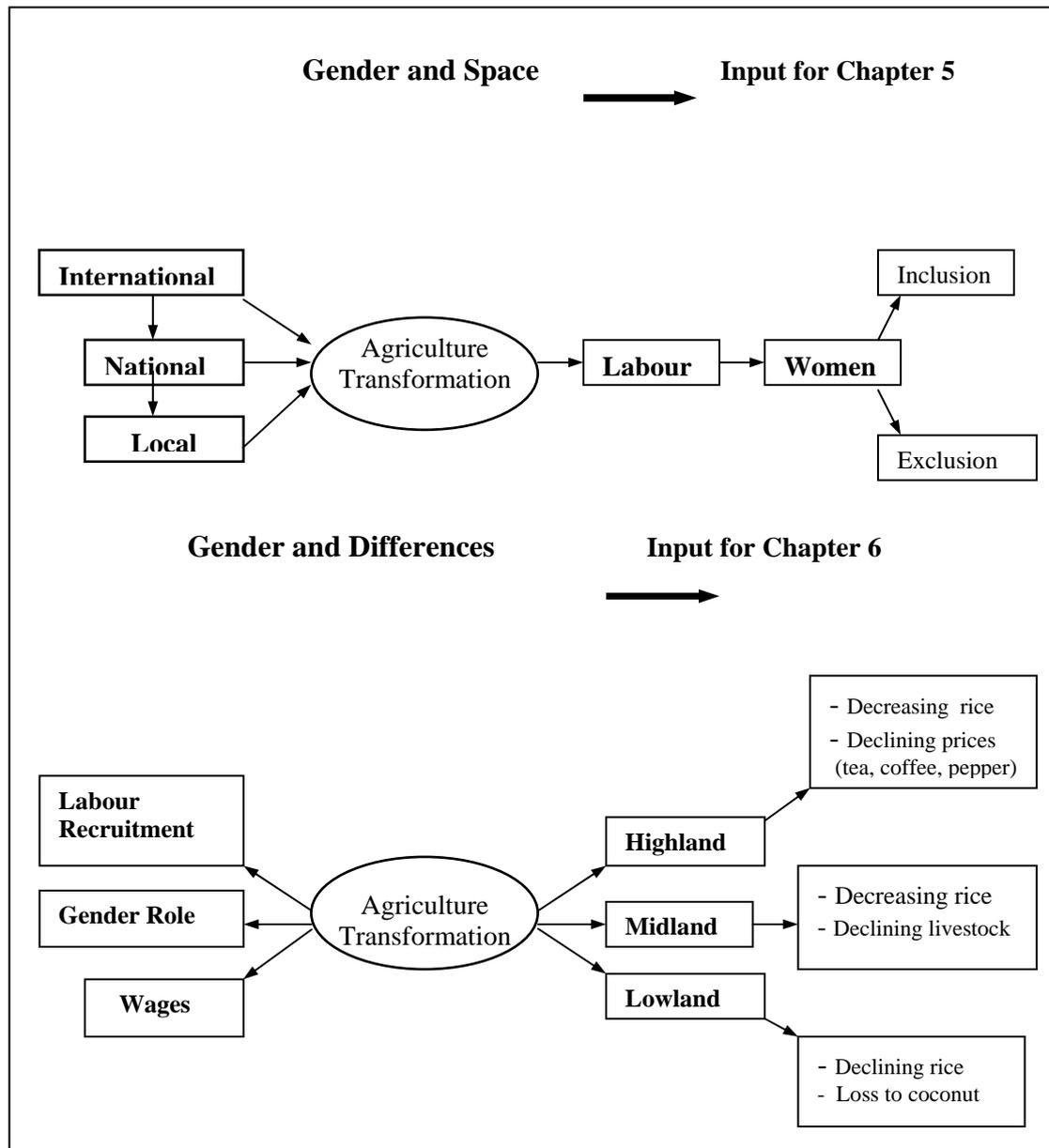
Location	1 – 1.99 hectares	2 hectares	> 5 hectares
AML, highland	46 %	33%	21%
TTM, midland	41%	59%	-
KMK, lowland	37%	63%	-

Analysis of the qualitative data of semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were not rigid. Crang (1997) had noted that there are no hard and fast rules for the precise mechanism of analysis adopted for qualitative data analysis and it tends to be what people are comfortable with. The semi-structured interviews were analysed using Dey's (1993) qualitative data analysis technique of description, classification and interconnecting. The first step involved the transcription of the information by collating the responses to each question separately, which had the advantage of viewing the responses of all the women to each question together (Kitchen and Tate, 2000). After the description of qualitative data, the classification into constituent parts was attempted by categorising them into similar classes for interpretation. Dey (1993) describes this classification of qualitative data, of making connections and fitting together and relating to one another, as analogous to the structure for building a house. Out of semi-structured interviews with women, four key issues were revealed through the classification process: wage discrimination; casualisation of work; changing crop and declining rice production and out-migration from farm work.

The analysis of formal interviews and focus group discussions began by listening and transcribing the taped discussions. However, the technique of listening and transcribing tapes was intrinsically exhaustive, difficult and also time consuming. Burgess et al (1988) estimate a ratio of ten or twelve hours of transcription for an hour of discussion. Indeed, according to Dahlgren (1988), transcribing the tapes, though a vital but essential process is a very tiresome and tortuous technique of data analysis. On the whole the transcribed qualitative data produced a large amount of transcripts and to extract meaningful data from these transcripts, a coding technique was used. It involved marking-up the transcripts with a series of codes and labelling particular words and phrases for later analysis (Seale and Kelly, 1998). See Figure 3.4 for the key themes generated by formal interviews, questionnaire survey and semi-structured interviews. Robinson (1998: p428) notes, "Coding is a means of conceptually organising material". Whilst Crang (1997:p188), referring to coding, stresses that:

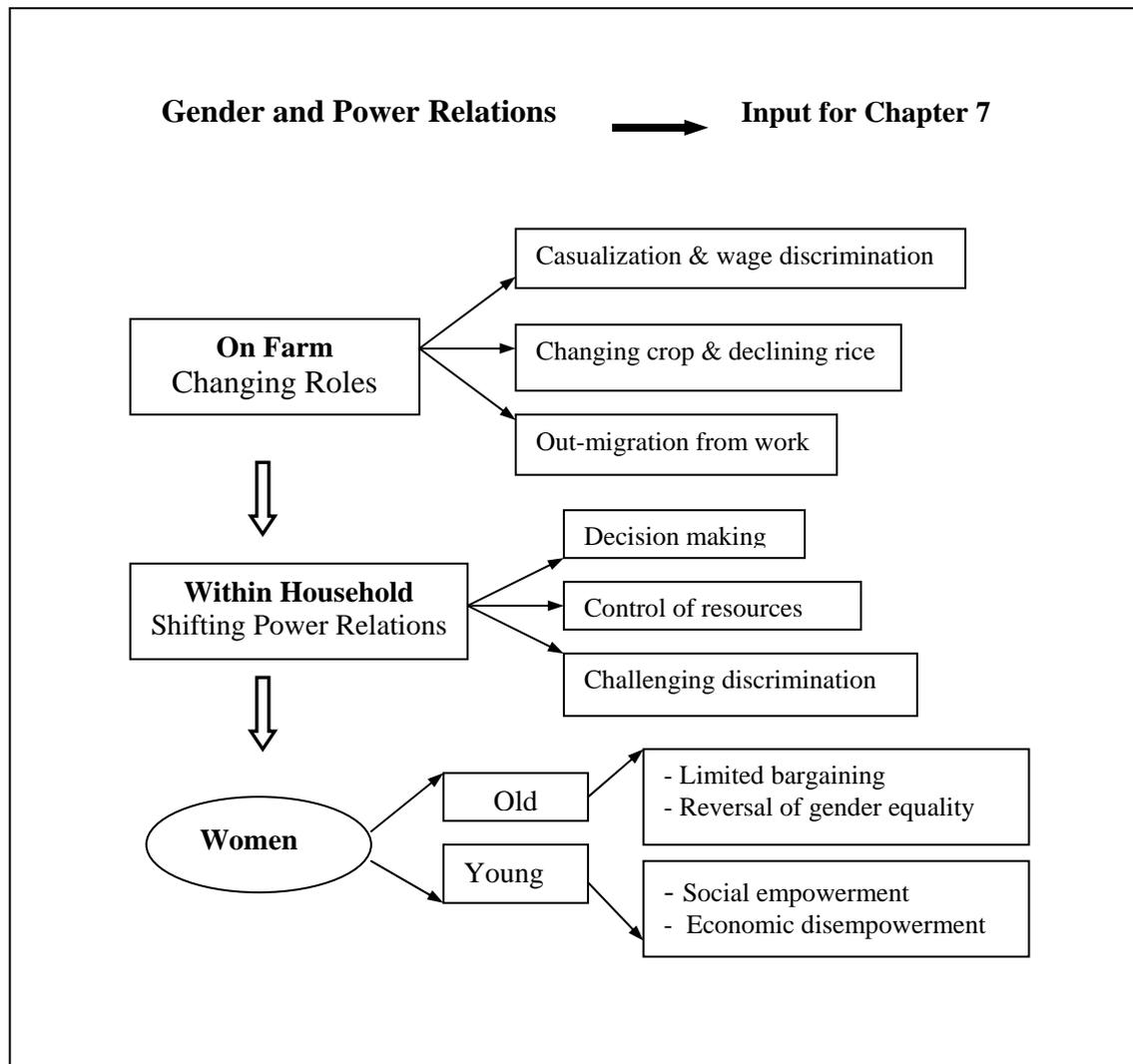
"It is not the codes themselves that are of interest but the text they denote, not how often they occur but what is in them. The codes are not there to be reproduced, but as an aid to the researcher in making sense of the material".

Figure 3.5 Key themes of interviews, survey and semi - structured interviews



However, analysis of in-depth focus group data differed from the interviews as there was additional interest in the interaction between different positions and the arguments marshalled, with an overall aim to understand the spectrum of different views a group of individuals have on an issue (Flowerdew and Martin, 2005; Krueger, 1998d). Moreover, the recording of notes and comments in the field during conversations throughout the course of the fieldwork also helped in adding further meaning to the collected data. The key issues generated from focus group discussions are highlighted in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.6 Key issues generated from group discussions



3.4 Ethical Issues, Reflexivity and Positionality

This section moves on to a deeper understanding of the various ethical issues and positionality and the consequent power relations shaping and re-shaping the outcome of research on paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala.

The ethical issues of gaining informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity were relevant to this social science research. O'Reilly (2005) and Alderson (2004) note ethics is about the awareness of the effects of the research on the participants and data by ensuring right-based approaches of respect for individuals, protection from harm and participation in research. Nevertheless, Madge (1997: p115) states "conducting

ethical research in the Third World does not involve a simple, fixed set of formulae; rather it entails thinking through the process of working and living with people”. There is widespread debate about the need for ethical regulations and the conflicts and difficulties in adhering to these guidelines. For instance, Small (2001) and Goodwin et al (2003) note ethical approaches do not always translate well to social research because the ethical dilemmas of social research are context-specific. Others like Smyth and Williamson (2004:p10) feel that “guidelines are intentionally vague and have left researchers able to interpret them in ways that fit the needs of the specific research they are undertaking”. However, Tinker and Coomber (2004) argue researchers in the future will not be able to self-regulate their research to this degree due to increasing regulation and governance of social science research. Wiles et al (2005) and Coomber (2002) also note it is likely that social research will be increasingly subjected to ethical review and that regulations will increase in the future despite having been met with resistance by some social scientists. Adhering to ethical guidelines and regulations was therefore essential for this research.

The first ethical issue was of gaining informed consent from research participants, which has become a guiding principle of social research. Most guidelines including the British Sociological Association (BSA) and the Institute of British Geographers (IBG) urge researchers to conform to the principle of voluntary ‘informed consent’ by advocating that the researcher should achieve full, informed and meaningful consent from the participants for the research (British Sociological Association, 2002; O’Reilly, 2005). Accordingly, the specialist and the farming communities in this research project were well informed about the research topic, purpose of study and asked for their consent before interviewing and conducting group discussions. However, seeking consent was influenced by certain aspects of my positionality of being an insider, my ancestry of belonging to Kerala and previous contacts of working with research organisation in India. Further, conforming to informed consent and the decision to participate need to be examined in the social context in which the consent took place. For example, the tribal groups in the highland Wayanad village belonged to a more vulnerable group so might have been less aware of the impact of research but they trusted me as a researcher as I was introduced to them by their farm owners. The motivation to participate by most farm owners and labourers could have been influenced by the hope that their voices would be heard, which otherwise remained

silent. Similar instances were noted by Wiles et al (2006:p296) who argue “informed consent procedures have limited ability to impact meaningfully on participants’ decisions around participation, formalized consent procedures do not provide an answer to the problems of ensuring potential study participants make truly informed choices”.

The other ethical issue is of confidentiality and anonymity to avoid violation of ethical codes of practise, which was essential due to the sensitivity of this research examining the implications of national and local state government policies. Identities of research participants were concealed through pseudonyms being an integral feature of ethical research, which assumes anonymity, should be maintained wherever possible (Grinyer, 2002). However, there is debate about concealing identity, with Wiles et al (2006) stating it is problematic when the research community in a specific area are quite small and many of the participants were well known and easy to identify. Others like Thomson and Bzdel (2004) argue that the greater the level of anonymity, the further it would shift from its original context. Ensuring anonymity might require removing so much detail that the data are rendered meaningless and also the research participants do not always want their identity concealed and there is a move towards greater identification of participants in some areas of research (Parry and Mutineer, 2004; Wiles et al, 2006). The participants of this research also did not want their identity concealed. Farming communities, farm owners and agricultural labourers welcomed this opportunity to share their experiences since no one else had approached them and asked them about their problems. Most specialists interviewed also did not believe in the formal processes of respecting participant’s confidentiality and rights to privacy. Concealing the identity certainly meant the dilemma of displeasing the research participants and also not being able to acknowledge their contribution wholeheartedly.

The final ethical issue related to this research is of the different power relationships existing between the researcher and informants in human geography, which in recent years is getting increasing recognition. Cloke et al (2004) note the attempts within human geography to focus on ‘research alliances’ between researcher and researched, and in particular between interviewer and interviewee. Similarly, Aitken (2001) strongly argues that the interviewers are more than researchers with clipboards and

tape recorder, and that interviewees lead complex and plural lives, most of which remain hidden. These debates resulted in the concepts of positionality and reflexivity being the most influential elements in feminist theorizing about the research process (England, 1994; Rose, 1997; Falconer Al-Hindi and Kawabata, 2002). Reflexivity is defined as, “self-critical, sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as a researcher”(England, 1994: p82). Cloke et al (2004:p29) visualized it as an emerging model of intersecting positions:

“The researcher should aim to clarify his or her position in a wider societal hierarchy of power, status and influence, thereby ascertaining the different sorts of relationships - complete with the many differing roles, responsibilities and possible limitations to what can and should be ‘exposed’ about the researched - which may surface in a given research project”.

Positionality is thus about how people view the world from different embodied locations and includes other’s reactions to us as researchers (England, 2006), although it may be difficult for us to ascertain this.

These issues of positionality and the power relations between researcher and the research participants were particularly relevant for this research. Data collection in Kerala advanced smoothly due to my past experience, personal contacts and cordial relationship with the specialists and research organizations. My ethnicity, gender and background also had significant effect and influenced my fieldwork. It facilitated gaining easy access to information and in approaching specialists and getting introduced to farming communities in Kerala. During my six months fieldwork to examine the spatial variations of the impact of agricultural transformation on women in three geographical locations of Kerala, I also worked as a Consultant for the Inter-cooperation NGO Programme, a project of Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Data collected was used by SDC for formulating policies to mitigate the negative implications of agricultural transformation on women. During the course of fieldwork, I purposefully chose to live in the Kerala Agricultural University (KAU) guesthouses, which was advantageous in many ways. First, it was very economical and a safe place to live during the data collection in rural areas. Secondly, the vast network of agricultural stations of KAU in almost all the regions of the state gave me an opportunity to stay constantly in contact with the farming communities and closely in touch with the KAU researchers and specialists which

helped in building up my networks and alliances. Overall, I was overwhelmed by the support and encouragement extended to me by the specialists of KAU, NGOs and individuals during my field visits to Kerala.

Once in the field, I tried my best to present myself as an 'insider' by sticking to the traditions and culture, like dressing in the Indian dress *saree*, despite not being used to this attire and also the impracticality of managing the seven metres of dress particularly during field visits to the water-logged paddy fields during the monsoon season. Yet, I still continued wearing a *saree*, despite the difficulties since I had realized that wearing a *saree* is the best way to acquire help and respect from local communities. Wearing any other Indian dress signifies less respect for women, particularly in rural Indian communities.

My ethnic background of belonging to a matrilineal Nair Hindu caste of Palakkad, the erstwhile Malabar region of north Kerala, was a motivating factor to do research on women in agriculture though I was born and spent most of my life outside Kerala, in North India. However, I must admit that I grew up with absolutely no feeling of having been born in a matrilineal family. The tradition of matriliney was practiced only to the extent of tracing ancestry through the mother, or to the extent of a daughter getting an equal share of property for her and her children, while the son gets only a small share for himself and nothing for his children. I also vividly remember having played as a child in the sprawling matrilineal household of my grand parents during our visits to Kerala. These traces of matriliney slowly disappeared as I grew up. The matrilineal household of my grandparents got partitioned and was finally disposed off. Tracing ancestry through the mother is also not very relevant after the dissolution of matriliney in 1976 and now both sons and daughters have equal property rights (see for instance Menon, 1994; Jeffrey, 1990; Eapen and Kodoth, 2002; Sudha et al, 2005). Further among Nairs, daughters are now given substantial dowries at marriage, which comprises of cash, jewellery, household good etc (Sudha et al 2005). Clearly, for me, matriliney and the powerful position of Nair women existed as a tradition of the past or historical artefact of the past and often I wondered whether the tradition was actually glorified in the anthropological literature. Indeed, I wished to trace my buried roots of

matriliny by researching women in agriculture in Kerala and also to venture to my home state to which I originally belonged, but in which I rarely lived.

My belonging to higher matrilineal Nair Hindu caste did not create problems with the farm owners and agricultural labourers of the low-castes perceiving me as 'superior'. The farming communities responded enthusiastically to my questions and slowly I developed a rapport with them. They were pleased by my efforts to travel long distances to the rural areas to interview them and to listen to their problems. I was amazed to see a broad sense of awareness among men and women labourers in responding to my questions which was something I never expected before going to the field. This is seldom the case, particularly among women in the rural North India, where they are mostly uneducated, veiled and restricted. I therefore had to challenge some of my pre-conceived ideas about rural women of Kerala. The social transformation and up-liftment of the lower caste and higher literacy rate of Kerala has generally resulted in such awareness. On the whole, I was successful in building up trust and dialogue with the farming community in Kerala. I did not feel out of place nor did I experience the problem of venturing alone as a woman in rural areas, even in the remote highland region of the state.

The only problem I experienced was in the highland village of Wayanad due to some of the labour households in the steep and hilly terrain being difficult to reach, though the marvellous beauty of the hills with tea gardens was enchanting. Gaining access to the tribal women for interviewing was also difficult as the relative isolation of tribal people meant that they had limited contact with the 'outside world'. Women particularly felt vulnerable and hesitant when an unexpected visitor like me approached them for an interview. There was also once an incident when a male member of a household got upset, assuming me to be a government official, as he was unhappy about the government not giving them the benefits they were entitled to as a tribal community. On such occasions I had to approach the farm owner to accompany me to win the confidence of the tribal communities and to re-visit the family for interviewing them.

In this context, Nast (1994:p57) has rightly noted:

“We can never not work with ‘others’ who are separate and different from ourselves, difference is an essential aspect of all social interactions that requires that we are always everywhere in between or negotiating the worlds of me and not me”.

Madge (1997:p121) also notes in the context of her research in Gambia “ethical research consists of acknowledging how what we produce as knowledge is an outcome of a set of unequal power relations which operate at a variety of scales”. Indeed, negotiating the power relations of similarity and differences in our research is essential whether these cultures are ‘remote’ or close at hand (Smith, 2003).

My appearance of being a North Indian and an outsider also created some initial problems in gaining access to the local community in Kerala. Hapke and Ayyanketil (2001:p10) note this distinguishable identity of being a Keralite (one who belongs to Kerala):

“A person’s identity in Kerala as both a Keralite and a member of a particular caste-religious community tends to be fairly clearly marked on a person’s body in terms of dress, hairstyle, and mannerisms, and by language and linguistic practices”.

Clearly, I lacked this distinguishable identity of being a Keralite since I was born and spent many years of my life outside Kerala. However, this appearance of being an outsider disappeared once I was introduced by the farm owner as being a *Malayalee* (one who speaks the local language Malayalam and belongs to Kerala) and also my conversing with men and women in Malayalam. The farming community felt free talking in their own language and they appreciated my conversing fluently in Malayalam despite having not lived in Kerala. Conversing in the local language Malayalam not only helped in understanding respondent’s views, but also in my being understood by the rural communities. The knowledge of the local language clearly enabled richer and more textured data to be collected and generated greater opportunities to interact and enjoy the company of others in the researched community (Devereux and Hoddinott, 1992). However, translating the words instantaneously into English was sometimes problematic. My inability to write in Malayalam obviously resulted in more effort and time while interviewing and I regretted for the first time not having learnt how to write in Malayalam.

Other factor of my positionality is gender and my being a woman shaping my interviews and discussions with men and women labourers and having a significant effect on my fieldwork. However, interviewing and conducting group discussions with men was a different experience than with women labourers. Men and women generally expressed their emotions differently while talking about the same issues. Further, women became more emotional than men and also paid more attention to the smallest of details. Clearly it meant a chance for women to share their problems with me being an empathetic listener while discussing issues that primarily affected women. My being a woman thus helped me to fully empathise with the women labourers I interacted with while voicing their experiences. Women were often curious to know about my life experiences, particularly my being a single woman living in a foreign country. There were occasions when women insisted that I have my dinner with them and even cooked special food for me. This encouragement and support from the rural women did give me the much needed boost for motivating me to keep on going even during moments of despair of travelling between the locations within the limited time period of field study. In this context, Gilbert (1999) emphasises how feminist research is supposed to be ideal for women. Likewise, Stanley and Wise (1983) note that a feminist epistemological standpoint sees women as the most appropriate researchers for dealing with women's issues, since only women can truly understand women and their unique position. This is particularly the case in rural North India, where patriarchal traditions strictly restrict women's interaction with strangers including men. However, the situation of Kerala, though different due to the higher literacy rates and general improvement in rural communities, yet, women still feel more comfortable being interviewed by women. It is also claimed by some researchers (Gilbert, 1994) that feminist methodology is by women and for women and involvement in such research can be significant in the lives of individual woman. My rank of being an insider (partial) undoubtedly helped in gaining access to rural communities that other researchers from the outside would probably have been denied. This support and encouragement from farming communities and researchers clearly helped my fieldwork in Kerala, and it has been a humbling experience for me. This is similar to the experience of Robina Mohammad (2001) who belonged to the local Pakistani community and this belonging seemed to endow a superior, almost organic knowledge of the community not accessible to outsiders. Sharing the same background or a similar identity to the researched community thus facilitated the

development of a rapport between interviewer and interviewee for producing a rich, detailed conversation based on empathy, mutual respect and understanding (Mohammad, 2001). However, some researchers like Hapke and Ayyanketil (2001:p342) argue this is not true in all situations:

“Complex personal politics surround interpersonal interactions in research. People are sometimes more willing to share certain types of information with outsiders, who pose no social threat to them, and then they are with insiders, particularly when they trust the outsiders”.

Indeed, Acker (2000) argues that it is the goals of the insider that remains crucial for the validity of the research and it is important to question the extent to which we can actually have real empathy when we do not share exactly the same characteristics of those we interview.

After conducting research for a prolonged period in Kerala, I developed a greater emotional attachment to the community and the state to which I belonged. Returning to the UK after the completion of the fieldwork was very upsetting and difficult. This sadness or grief of leaving with relationships and routines changing as we return from the field to other ways of living and being has been noted by Kindon and Cupples (2003). Clearly, for those researching in their own culture, the feeling of leaving is even stronger as they face the prospect of returning to the University in a foreign country (Kindon and Cupples, 2003).

3.5 Summary

This chapter has sought to unpack the complex methodological processes used to collect data for the research on paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala, India. Following a three month piloting between April and June 2000 in the lowland Karamuck village of Thrissur, a six-month intensive fieldwork of questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews was carried out between October 2000 and March 2001 in the three geographical locations. Subsequently, a return visit of two months was undertaken in Kerala between April and May 2004 for the case study based on intensive focus group discussions in the midland region and to conduct the specialists' interviews in Thiruvananthapuram.

Addressing the research aims and data collection required combining both quantitative and qualitative methods of triangulation, drawing on a series of methods including interviews, questionnaire survey, semi-structured interviews and in-depth focus group discussions. Considerable value was gained by focussing on multiple methodologies, which deployed different techniques at different stages of the research process (Philip, 1998). Choosing logical methods for data collection and analysis clearly helped in generating relevant, pertinent and interesting data for the thesis. Adhering to ethical guidelines was essential for this social science research. While the positionality and consequent power relations shaped and re-shaped the outcome of the research. It helped in overcoming difficulties of crossing hierarchies and reaching elite top-level officials to the ordinary labourers. Such an alliance clearly entailed a process for creating the interview as a 'safe space' in which deep, mutual and trustworthy interactions and understandings emerge (Cloke et al, 2004). The following chapter turns attention to the location Kerala, the study area of this research.

CHAPTER FOUR

Locating Kerala

This chapter locates Kerala, the study area, by exploring its geography, politics, development, society and culture, before analysing the empirical data in detail. Understanding the specific locational context is essential to gain an informed insight into women's position as the state developed, agriculture was transformed and society and culture altered. So this chapter outlines the context into which the detailed empirical study of the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations in Kerala is embedded.

The chapter first explores the geographical location and diversity of the state (4.1). It then examines the political background of Kerala from the time of the early kingdom (3000 to 5000 BC), through the feudalistic age and the various foreign invasions, until the independence of India in 1947 (4.2). Having examined the political background, the chapter then probes deeper into the social and economic development including agriculture and also assesses concerns of Kerala's 'model of development' (4.3). The chapter then goes further by examining the transformation of society and culture, which have resulted from these economic, social and political changes of the state (4.4). The last section (4.5) concludes the chapter.

4.1 Geographical Location and Diversity

Kerala is one of the 28 constituent states of India, located in the southwest and sandwiched between the Lakshadweep Sea and the Western Ghats on the southwest, and the Arabian Sea on the west coast. Karnataka state borders Kerala to the north and Tamil Nadu borders Kerala in the east. The state is divided into 14 districts running from north to south, with Thiruvananthapuram as the capital of Kerala (see Figure 4.1).

Kerala has a total area of 38,863 sq km and is the smallest state in India. It has a population of 31.8 million, and despite Kerala being the smallest state it has the highest population density in the country, 819 persons per km compared to 267 for India (Registrar General of India 2001; GOK, 2006). This is an outcome of wet rice cultivation, which produces higher yields than other grains, and throughout history regions of wet rice production have sustained dense populations in rural India (Veron, 2001; Mencher, 1993). The population is also spread across the state and as such there are no big urban agglomerations and it is essentially a 'rurban' state due to the absence of a clear demarcation between the urban and rural area (GOK, 2006; Ramchandran, 1996). In addition, Kerala has the distinction of having an extensive network of roads connecting all the 1452 villages in the state, as well as good rail connections. The state is a tropical land of coconut palms, sandy beaches and lagoons and is often referred to as "God's Own Country" and is a place of tourist attraction in India (see Figure 4.2 below).

The land use pattern of the state is presented in Table 4.1. Out of a total geographical area of 3.8 million ha, net sown area is 54 percent and forest occupies 27.83 percent forming a thick canopy of fauna and flora (GOK, 2007; Mahesh, 1999). The state is one of the richest biodiversity centres in India, possessing a minimum of 40,000 species of flowering plants and several diverse groups of fauna (MSSRF, 1998). The topography of the state varies from below the mean sea level (MSL) to 2694 metres above MSL and geographically the state can be divided into the three zones of highland, midland and lowland. Variations in the topography and physical characteristics from the eastern to the western region, as well as high rainfall and rich soil, have resulted in a unique diversity of fauna and flora. Agro-climatic conditions are favourable for both food crops and cash crops, with rice, coconut and tapioca (cassava) common in all regions, though the cash crop varies. In the highland, soil has high organic content and is suitable for cash and plantation crops like coffee, tea, rubber and cardamom. The three locations highland, midland and lowland representing diversity of geography, cropping pattern and having different histories of agricultural development were noted earlier in Chapter 3, Sub-section 3.1.1.

Figure 4.1 Location map of Kerala



Figure 4.2 Tropical landscape of Kerala



(Source: Joshi Manjummel, Invis Multimedia 2006)

Further, the Agro-Climatic Regions and Cropping Pattern Committee (1974) of the Kerala Government has also divided the state into five zones - central, northern, southern, high range and problem zones on the basis of soil, climate, rainfall, elevation and topography (NARP, 1982). The coastal area and its rather isolated location have resulted in the particular climatic, economic, socio-political and religious characteristics of Kerala (Justino, 2000). The state has an abundance of water resources including 44 rivers, extensive backwaters and canals. Being the 'Gateway of the monsoon in India', it receives high rainfall (maximum annual rainfall of 3000 mm) (Peter and Rao, 2005).

Table 4. 1 Land use pattern of Kerala (2006-07)

Land Classification	Ares in ha	Percentage
Total Geographical Area	3886287	-
1. Forest	1081509	27.83
2. Non agricultural use	438839	11.29
3. Barren and uncultivated land	26125	0.67
4. Permanent pastures and grazing land	301	0.01
5. Miscellaneous tree crops	8959	0.23
6. Cultivable waste	90288	2.32
7. Fallow other than current fallow	47144	1.21
8. Current fallow	81651	2.10
9. Net area sown	2111471	54.33
10. Area sown more than once	806034	20.74
11. Total Cropped Area	2917505	75.07
12. Cropping Intensity	138	-

(Source: Government of Kerala (GOK), Economic Review, 2007)

Even during times of severe drought, the state receives sixty inches of rain due to the mountains of the Western Ghats capturing the southwest monsoon (Prakash, 1999). The abundance of natural resources including timber and ivory, sandalwood and spices like pepper and cardamom, combined with the easy accessibility of Kerala via the Arabian Sea, has attracted traders and foreign rulers from distant lands such as the

Arabs, Jews, Portuguese, French, Dutch and British. These foreign interventions into Kerala are discussed in the following section.

4.2 Political Background

The focus of this section is to present an overview of the state's politics from the period when it was an ancient kingdom to the various foreign rulers who controlled Kerala prior to independence, which is then followed by an inspection of the politics after the formation of state.

4.2.1 Ancient Kingdom and Feudalistic Age

The origin of Kerala is shrouded in myth and it is believed that *Parasurama* (the reincarnation Hindu god Vishnu) was struck by remorse after fighting a series of wars with the *Kshatriyas* (warrior caste) and offered a penance on top of a mountain and in deep atonement threw his mighty sword into the Indian Ocean and the waves foamed and frothed as the crescent-shaped land of Kerala surfaced (MSSRF, 1998). However, the physical antiquities of the state can be traced back as early as 3000 to 5000 BC (Arya, 2000).

The remote geographical location of Kerala meant that it remained unaffected or only moderately affected by the many wars in India and in maintaining early contacts with foreign cultures (Pillai, 1994). Long before the arrival of the Europeans, geography, language and customs defined Kerala as a distinct entity, with high caste chiefs participating in a common political system and although they fought with each other, they did so according to recognised rules (Jeffery, 1992). The first five centuries of Christian era, called as Sangam age was dominated by Chera kings (Abram, 2007). Abram (2007) noted that the Dravidian form of worship similar to Brahmanical Hindu caste was practiced during the Sangam age in Kerala. While Christianity has a history dating back to the first century AD, some three centuries before it received official recognition in Europe and the beginning of Islam is dated to 622 AD, Jainism and Buddhism also existed though eventually died out later (Abram, 2007).

The turbulent period between sixth and eighth century came to an end by the rise of Brahmin caste (Abram, 2007). The socio-economic and political set-up in Kerala during this time was similar to medieval Europe, with a three-tiered system of high castes (*Namboodiri* Brahmins or special categories of Nair) at the top, followed by tenants and sub-tenants and agricultural labourers (Mencher, 1978). Each caste and religious group had their own economic, social and ritual roles, though they were interdependent (Kurien, 1994). Among the Hindu caste, the Brahmins were at the top mostly priests and landlords. Nairs were at the bottom employed as clerks and accountants by the mobility, though many Nairs families became powerful landlords (Abram, 2007). The land was transferred to Brahmin temples and acquired by the Nairs and leased out to lower groups like *Ezhavas*, *Theeyas*, Christians and Muslims (Arun, 1999). While the lower castes like *Ezhavas* were landless farmers, *Theeyas* were manual labourers involved in tending coconuts (tapping toddy and coir making), the lowest outcaste (slave castes) *Parayas* and *Pulayan* were *butchers* or scavengers and Christians and Muslims (*Mappilas*) were mostly traders. The tribal societies in the hills in contrast lived as they had for centuries scarcely known to the mainstream of Kerala society (Jeffery, 1992).

The distinction of caste was practised to an extreme form, with the dominant caste of the Brahmins and Nairs enjoying customary obligations and rights to extract the major share of cultivator's products (Jeffery, 1992; Desai, 2002). Low castes like the *Ezhavas*, *Parayan* and *Pulayans* were not only untouchables but were also to approach their high-caste landlords with the most exaggerated deference and obedience (Jeffery, 1978). Jeffery (1992: p19) points out, "Old Kerala was a place of boundaries and constraints - boundaries on where particular people might go; constraints on what they might do". The high caste using extreme intimidation towards the lower castes was the norm of society those days. The low castes were in many ways helpless and could not discard or get away from the oppression of feudalism. As Jeffery (1992:p20) observes:

"Geography hemmed them in. The Western Ghats barred the way to the rest of India; to the West laid the Arabian Sea. Out of the Ghats flowed more than thirty subdividing rivers, which reinforced the discreteness of petty chiefdoms. Road were rare".

Thus, the idea of ritual pollution developed to an extraordinary degree and the caste system was well entrenched by the end of eighteenth century AD (Abram, 2007).

Women's position in the society also varied as the social structure varied from matriliney to patriliney among different castes and groups. Matriliney was practised mostly by Nairs and also by other less prominent groups like the *Theeyas*, *Mappilas* and the Sunni Muslims (Agarwal, 1994; Jeffrey, 2004). According to Jeffrey (2004) about half the population of old Kerala (population of the three units was 2 million during beginning of nineteenth century) followed matriliney and 20 percent were Nairs. However, the matriliney of the Nair caste is the most extreme form recorded in the anthropological literature and hence is examined in detail (Neff, 1994; Moore, 1988). Tracing the customs and practices of matriliney is particularly significant for this thesis despite it being practised by the high caste. It was a key factor, which enabled women's equal access to health and education (Arun, 1999). Improvement in women's status is seen to have contributed greatly to Kerala's distinctive social development, though matriliney was not the only factor in the "Kerala model". However, without it, it is hard to envisage such a development taking place (Panicker and Soman, 1984). Tracing the history of matriliney and its disintegration is also of particular interest to me since I belong to a matrilineal Nair family of Kerala. Anthropologists and historians have documented the matrilineal traditions of the Nairs, referred to as *marumakkattayam* in Malayalam, although the ceremonies and practices varied from one region to another within the state. Jeffery (1992; 2004) notes matriliney originated in the tenth or eleventh century and was well established by the time Europeans arrived in the 1500s. It was practised mostly by the high-status class Nairs, the chiefs and their soldiers (Jeffery, 1992).

The system was matrilineal, families organized through female lines and were matrilocal, with the bridegroom moving to the bride's household after marriage. Tracing its origin, Jeffery (1992) points out that during the hundred-year war between the *Chola* and *Chera* kingdoms during the eleventh century, the increasing need for Nair soldier men required the constant management of family properties and inheritance via women who remained in the household. Nair women could have relations with one or more *Namboodiri* Brahmin men and had greater freedom for making marriage decisions (Ramachandran, 1997; Agarwal, 1994). However, some

argue that the sexual freedom of the matrilineal Nair women has been exaggerated, and the system was practised only by a few high caste Nairs, who had warrior titles. Further, cross cousin marriages were permitted among the matrilineal Nairs of Kerala.

However, marriage of Nairs was simple and involved no transfer of wealth or power as in the dowry system, with a man from the *Namboodiri* Brahmin family usually tying *tali* (a small jewel of gold tied to a silk thread) to the Nair bride in a simple ceremony (Agarwal, 1994). The bride also did not move into the bride-groom's house as was the case in North India, where women had limited contact with their family due to their marital home being outside the village (Panda and Agarwal, 2005).

The ancestry was traced through the mother and the children born of *Namboodiri* men belonged to the Nairs and women had full responsibility for them. The *Namboodiri* man continued to live in his household and only occasionally visited the Nair woman in her household. Among *Namboodiri*, only the eldest son was allowed to marry, while the younger ones were to remain celibate and devote life to religion, although in practice they could have liaisons with the matrilineal Nair women (Mencher and Goldberg, 1967). Women's mobility within the *Namboodiri* family was strictly prohibited and marriage with a distant family was preferred to breaking off ties with the girl's household and absorbing them into their husband's family (Mencher and Goldberg, 1967). This is similar to the patrilineal families of North India as Sudha et al. (2005:p4) note "women are symbolically cut off from their natal families after marriage and discouraged from returning even when needing shelter; and are strictly regulated in divorce, widowhood, and remarriage". Further, the custom of paying a huge dowry for a girl's marriage was prevalent among the *Namboodiris* and getting a daughter married often became a liability.

In contrast, Nair women were the heads of the giant extended households. However, Jeffery (2004) argues that the Nairs were not matrilineal in a real sense since the controllers and decision-making power ultimately rested with the men rather than with the women. Nevertheless, the birth of a girl was a welcome jubilation in the Nair family, which eliminated the extreme form of gender discrimination found elsewhere in North India (Alexander, 2000; Jeffery, 1992). In this context, Alexander (2000:p10)

points out how patriarchal traditions of North India hindered women by “no exercise of feminine wiles, no female divorce, and no female remarriage”. But for the matrilineal Nair family in Kerala:

“Female, from the moment of her birth, was perceived as the potential purveyor of prosperity, fertility, and good fortune, the female is an auspicious category” (Tourreil, 1995:p17).

Women of Nair families were highly knowledgeable and skilled in art and music. This favourable position of women was unique, as researchers like Jeffery (1992) observed that Nair women had already lived in their matrilineal joint-families for six hundred years during the eighteenth century, when even English-speaking American husbands had total authority over their wives and their property. Indeed, women’s status in the matrilineal Nair caste was favourable!

Among the tribal groups of Hindu castes also there was more gender equality (Von Furer, (1960) 1983). While succession laws among Christians and Muslims, and women’s position within these groups in Kerala were different from that followed in other countries. For example, Chacko (2003) describes the Christian laws in Kerala being blatantly biased against women, giving widows a right to maintenance only if her late husband died without making a will. They followed a patrilineal, patrilocal system of extended family and pre-puberty marriages, with marked gender differences, though it changed during the turn of twentieth century (Kurien, 1994). Normally, Muslim women were governed by Islamic laws whereby a man was legally allowed to marry four wives, though the practice of giving bride a *mehr* (bride price) was replaced by dowry, the transfer of wealth from a wife’s natal to conjugal household, though, the *Mappilas* community of Muslims in northern Kerala practised a matrilineal system (Chacko, 2003). Indeed, it is clear that women’s position in the early society of Kerala shows a complex array from matriliney to patriliney to patriarchy and is relevant for this research. The following section turns to examining various foreign invasions prior to Kerala’s independence.

4.2.2 Foreign Invasions

The European traders came to Kerala for trading between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries (Kurien, 2000). However, great wealth of spices, teak and ivory, together

with the location of Kerala on the western coastline, resulted in the trade links with Arab traders of Middle Eastern countries as early as the first millennium B.C (Kurien, 1994). Thus, pepper and cardamom have attracted foreigners for at least 2000 years and Kerala became part of the world economic system long before Britain or America (Jeffery, 1992). These traders subjugated much of the surplus agriculture, though they introduced new types of crops, which increasingly transformed Kerala agriculture into a capitalist mode of production. Among the western traders, the Portuguese were the first to come to Kerala with Vasco da Gama arriving in Calicut district in 1498 and taking over the spice trade by displacing the Arabs and the *Mappilas* (Muslims) and integrating the state into a western capitalist system (Kurien, 1994; Kurien, 2000; Sreekumar, 1993). The Portuguese thus left the most lasting legacy on the Malabar Coast in Kerala (Abram, 2004). The Portuguese were then driven away by the Dutch, although the Dutch did not remain long due to the rivalry between the British and the French (Kurien, 2000).

However, British were the real colonizers of Kerala, who arrived and established the East India Company Limited during the beginning of the seventeenth century. During British rule, Kerala was divided into three regions with different administrative set-ups: Malabar in the northern part of the British empire, while the states of Travancore in the south and the smaller Cochin in the central middle were ruled by the princely rulers and were indirectly under colonial rule following treaties with the British (Kurien, 1994; Jeffery, 1992; GOK, 2006) (see Figure 4.3). The Colonial rule extended for 150 years and had a major impact on Kerala's economic, social, and political system, in addition to the developments and changes of the princely ruler states of Travancore and Cochin. In general, Kurien (1994) describes colonialism in Kerala as consisting of two phases: first the harnessing of existing social arrangements to necessitate revenue generation and political control, which caused increasing exploitation of the lower income strata and empowerment of elites. Second, the capitalist phase, which involved an increase in the market and required overthrowing the earlier social structure (Kurien, 1994).

The agrarian economy of Kerala underwent major transformations for incorporating into the world economy during the colonial rule. Hilly regions were used for growing plantation crops valuable in Europe and America, such as coffee and tea and cashew

nuts also became a major cash crop. By contrast the locals started planting rubber, although coconut still remained the most important cash crop (Jeffery, 1992). Agrarian legislation was also altered for maximising land revenues and by granting private property rights to the landlords, while the security tenure of tenants was reduced (Logan, 1951; Desai, 2002). Transport facilities like roads and railways were improved, linking the region with major agricultural centres and cheap labour was fully exploited for cultivating land (Mohan, 1991; Kurien, 1994). This increased wage labour demanded by the capitalist economy also necessitated freeing the labourers from their feudal bondage.

The agrarian structure, economies and land tenure of the three regions varied considerably, with the development of Travancore and Cochin states being more favourable for growth and development. For example, in the Malabar region under British control, commercialisation was restricted to the landlords, rich upper caste tenants and traders in urban areas, and there were no serious legislative measures for tenancy reforms in this region until the second decade of the 20th century (GOK, 2006). Jeffery (1978) has observed how the Great Depression of the 1930s further affected Hindus in the Northern Malabar region under the British, who were already disturbed by the breaking-down of matriliney, while in South Malabar region the agrarian conditions were bad. By contrast, in princely Travancore state a substantial proportion of the land was brought under state control, plantations and agri-based industries were expanded and commercialisation raised the incomes of different sections of the community (GOK, 2006; Tharamangalam, 2002). The princely state of Cochin also conferred ownership rights to tenants, but the region formed only small parcels of cultivable land and the expansion of plantations along the hilly tracts were less compared to the other two regions (GOK, 2006).

The colonial rule brought about further expansion in education and health systems. However, hospitals, educational and charitable institutions were also set up Christian missionaries in different regions (Mohan, 1991; Kurien, 1994). Yet, the British-ruled Malabar region lagged behind the two princely states of Travancore and Cochin with little progress in education and other areas in particular due to prevailing social relations and the agrarian structure (GOK, 2006; Kabir, 2002). The princely rulers in contrast pioneered education and public health policies, which resulted in Travancore

becoming a native model state as early as 1867 and Cochin following the elements that made Travancore a model state (Tharamangalam, 2002). This distinctive development of the princely states contributed to Kerala's unique post-independence 'model of development' experience, which is examined in the following section 4.3. Taken as a whole, colonial rule had various impacts, but the dismantling of the existing social, economic and political structures by the British caused ethnic formations and mobilisation of different groups (Kurien, 1994). For instance, both Brahmins and Nairs were deprived of their earlier occupational role, and also of their caste system, such as the polygyny of the Brahmins and the polyandrous marriages of the Nairs (Kurien, 1994). The changing economic, political and social order of the state caused problems for the matriliney of Nairs to survive. Agarwal (1994b) and Menon (1994) note that the land ceiling laws reduced the amount of available land for the joint family system, and with the economic situation worsening, partitioning into nuclear households was more realistic and economical.

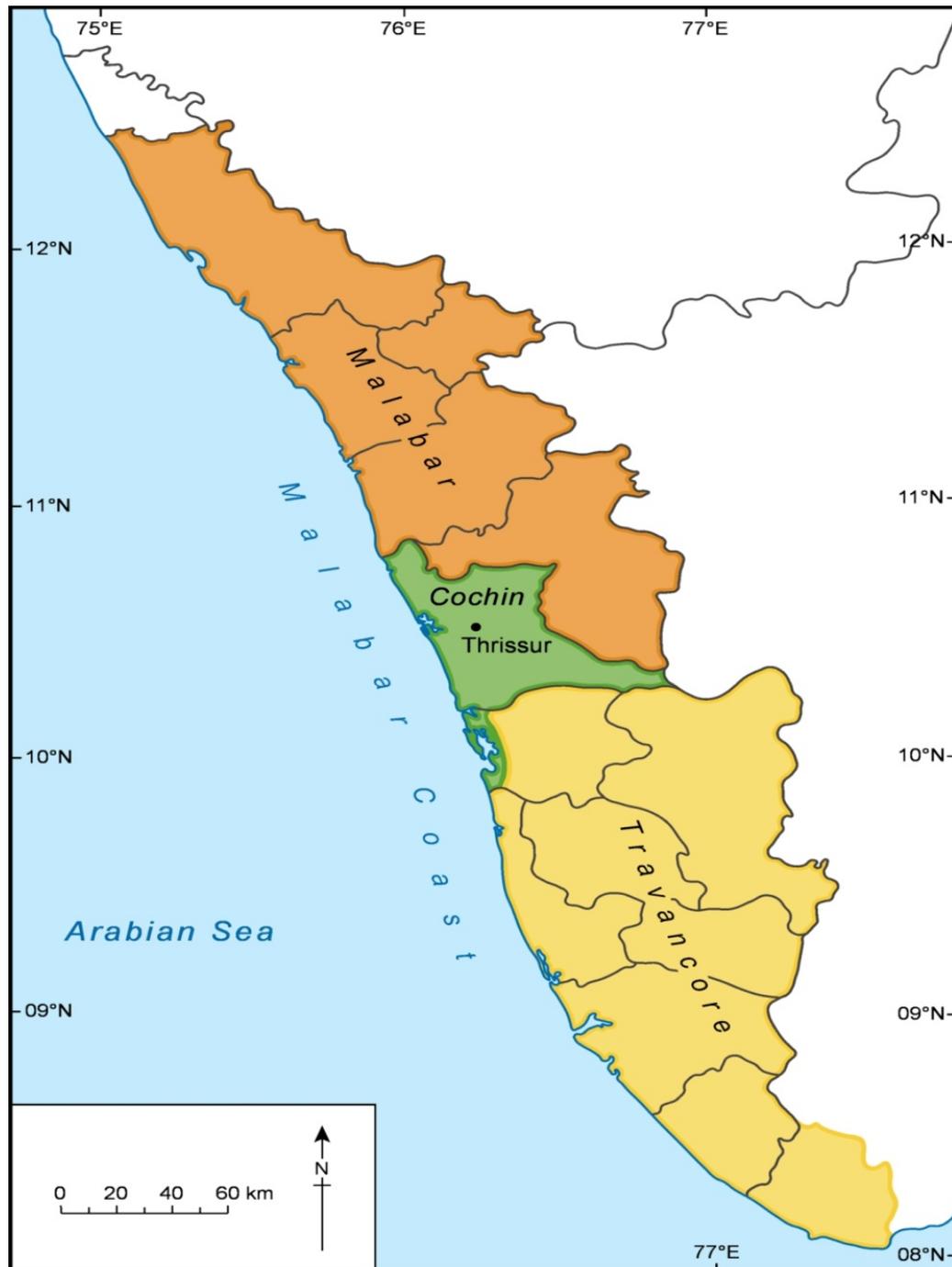
Agarwal (1994) indicates how class differentiation and poverty increased with some matrilineal families becoming landless and poor. Clearly, the collapsing joint family led to increased litigation and intrigue among the Nairs:

“These men and women generally had neither property in their own right nor a father or maternal uncle ready to take responsibility for them. There was no place for them in the collapsing society of their forebears, yet new forms of social organization had scarcely begun to evolve” (Jeffrey, 1978: p81).

Thus the dissolution of matriliney had begun in Kerala.

Similarly, the dissolution of slavery and greater participation of *Ezhavas* due to commercialisation of agriculture improved their conditions. Slowly the caste movement of the low castes widened for claiming greater social and political status. For instance, *Ezhavas* mobilized with the reformer Sree Narayana Guru (1854-1928) and fought against discrimination by the upper castes (Cairo, 2000; Kurien, 1994; Mohan, 1991). However, despite gaining some economic power, the deprived sections of the society were not able to influence the social structure and hierarchies in any significant manner (Sreekumar, 1995).

Figure 4.3 Three regions of Kerala during British rule



Other groups, like Christians and Muslims, also agitated for representation in state legislative assemblies (Sreekumar, 2003). The rift between the Hindus and *Mappilas* (Muslims) also widened and took a religious turn with the total control of land granted to Hindus, while the peasants were mostly Muslims (Kurien, 1994). Thus, agitators against the colonial rule included not only different castes within the Hindu group, but also other groups like Christians and Muslims. But, this caste mobilization did not cause problems of inter-religious hostility in Kerala. Further, education was the common feature of all movements. For the low outcastes, education was the route to liberation, while for others it was meant to improve their social position (GOK, 2006). Indeed, according to Jeffrey (1978), the period of colonial rule was a period of agitation, insecurity and undefined hunger (hunger which cannot be assessed or measured) characterised by civil disobedience. Gradually, caste-based movements gave way to organised political movements, though initially each group raised its demands independently, without forming any association (GOK, 2006). Movements, mainly in the princely Travancore state, transformed into a broad platform of struggles for social and economic equality and democratic rights (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). Finally the Communists emerged and, according to Jeffery (1978:p98), it filled the void keenly felt by thousands of alienated and educated people in Kerala:

“With old constraints destroyed, the poor were ready and eager to accept the new certainties and absolutes which Marxism offered. And educated, upper - class people, as deeply affected by the same social crisis, were able and willing to take Marxism to the poor”.

The success of the Communist movement was rooted in the large reservoir of mobilized groups of the social reform movements from the two princely Travancore and Cochin states and the peasant rebellions of the British-inhabited Malabar region (Heller, 1995). The rebellion of Kerala society also gained legitimacy and support from the nationalist freedom movement of the Indian National Congress party of Mahatma Gandhi (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003; Jeffrey, 1978; GOK, 2006). A combination of the nationalist movement for freedom, together with the Communist state movement of Kerala, was eventually successful in weakening colonial rule. The Communist movement, though barred and persecuted during colonial rule, found a constructive environment to grow and strengthen in post-independent Kerala (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). The Communist rule in Kerala, and the development

experience of the state after independence is further elaborated in the following section.

4.2.3 State Formation and Post-Independence Politics

Following India's independence in 1947, the state of Kerala was formed in November 1956. The three regions of Malabar, Travancore and Cochin under British rule were organized into a uniform system of local administration (Mahesh, 1999). The first democratically elected Communist government in the world, the Communist Party of India (CPI), came to power in Kerala in 1957 under the leadership of E.M.S. Namboodiripad. The party then split during 1965, with the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) emerging as the dominant party (Mohan, 1991; Desai, 2002; Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003; Nossiter, 1983; Heller, 1995). The two Communist allies then ruled the state of Kerala for eight terms between 1957 and 2001 (1957-59, 1967-69, 1969-70, 1970-77, 1978-79, 1980-81, 1987-91, 1996-2001). However, the Communist government was successful in implementing a number of reforms and undertaking measures associated with social justice and economic equality, as examined below.

Land Reform

Among the Communist reforms, land reform was a remarkable one and has been more far reaching than anywhere else in India (Pillai, 2000). Implementation of land reform in Kerala has been most radical in reducing land and income inequality, with land transferred to 1,630, 000 households destabilizing the material basis for caste and class inequality (Radhakrishnan, 1989; Franke, 1993). This reform came into force during the 1970s, though the Agrarian Relations Bill was introduced in 1958. Land reform eliminated landlords by giving them minimal compensation and 40 percent of agricultural land was transferred to tenants, which reduced the proportion of landless workers from 30 to 8 percent and improved the overall situation of tenants (Prakash, 1999; Parayil, 2003). Ramachandran (1995:p3) noted the success of this land reform:

“The people of Kerala have altered radically a system of agrarian relations that was among the most complex, burdensome, and exploitative in India, and have won important victories against some of the most monstrous forms of caste oppression in India”.

However, critics of land reform have also noted a number of problems. For example, it only provided a small piece of land for agricultural labourers and size restrictions were imposed on food crops, the rice fields. Yet, the land reform in Kerala is still cited as one of the most successful one compared to the land reforms undertaken in other states in India.

Another successful programme of the Communist government was the Public Distribution System (PDS) which supplied food grains and other commodities at a fair price through ration shops and the School Meals Programme, distributing free lunches for primary school children and for women and their infants (Kannan, 2003; Justino, 2003). This certainly helped people to access food to alleviate poverty (GOK, 2006). Further, settlements were created for the Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) members, with land and other facilities and social security and welfare schemes for weaker ones (GOK, 2006; Kannan and Pillai, 2004). The SC and ST represent the untouchables and indigenous tribals under the Indian constitution and have special privileges and reservations. The Scheduled Caste in Kerala includes *Kavara*, *Pulayan*, *Kanakan* and *Cherumar* and the Scheduled Tribe of indigenous population includes *Paniya*, *Kurichia*, *Kuruma*, *Naiykaya* and *Irular*.

Measures of redistribution followed the empowerment of the labouring classes. Movements of workers and peasants and the subordinate classes were organised to promote social and political empowerment (Jeffery, 2003; Desai, 2002; Dreze and Sen, 1991). The trade unions were controlled by the Communists, whose ideology led them to resist or eliminate any bias or discrimination or partisanship (Swaminathan, Personal Interview, December 2006). The Agrarian Act (1958) and the Kerala Agricultural Workers Act fixed working hours, improved working conditions and increased wages, introduced social security schemes and formed labour cooperatives (Kannan and Pillai, 2004; Kannan, 1998). Mencher (1993) notes how agricultural labourers in Kerala had earlier lived under conditions of rural servitude similar to slavery prior to nineteenth century (as noted earlier) though Mahesh (2002) argued under this system the labourers had regular work, while the farm owner was able to meet his labour demands during peak seasons. On the whole, the abolition of rural servitude by the British and the labour empowerment policies of the Communist government after independence, the social and economic conditions of labourers in

Kerala have greatly improved. Kannan's extensive research (1988; 1992; 1998) summarises how the policies of the Communist government safeguarded labourer's interests by introducing measures such as: land reform, relieving labour from slavery, increasing wages and introducing fixed working hours. The wages of labourers increased nearly nine times for men and over eight times for women respectively over the past sixteen years (GOK, 2001). The wages of agricultural labour in Kerala is therefore high compared to other states of India.

Likewise, the state in contrast as a whole, provides protective social security measures like pension schemes, housing security schemes and have 23 welfare funds and boards (GOK, 2006). Examining the history of lower class mobilization shows there is a double transition, from a pre-capitalist social order to capitalism and from a landlord-dominated exclusionary society to a more democratic one in Kerala (Heller, 1999). However, despite the empowerment of low caste labourers by the Communist government, gender discrimination in wages still exists in Kerala (as in the other Indian states) and women are paid less than men. Further, there are claims that the union promote wage monopolism and inefficiencies, with Kerala ranking highest in terms of working days lost due to incidence of riots, strikes and lockouts in India throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s (Justino, 2000). Indeed, the Communist empowerment of labourers has not in the long run resulted in an overall improved position for agricultural labourers:

“Slaves may have become owners in Kerala, and the state's land reform, driven on by organised, demanding citizens, may have achieved more than similar programmes else where. But to own a patch of ground not large enough to cultivate profitably or to be granted a minimum wage but unable to find sufficient work is to exchange the problem of feudalism for those of capitalism” (Jeffery, 1992:p185).

Other successes of the Communist government involved the People's Campaign for Decentralized Planning, which was undertaken between 1996 and 2001 to empower local bodies (*panchayat raj* institutions) and resist the IMF/World Bank process of globalisation (Hari, 2003). Decentralization was successful because the state took serious steps to bring the government closer to the people to ensure better results, though earlier track record of the *panchayat* institutions was poor (GOK, 2006). The programme had 40 percent of the state budget to formulate and implement projects and transfer resources to local bodies (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). However, this

experiment to decentralize based on well-built local institutions had both successes and failures. For instance, while some thought it was the best hope for the future, others thought it was a floundering experiment due to the delays and difficulties in project implementation (Franke and Chasin, 2000; Das, 2000).

Taken as a whole, the redistribution and welfare policies generally benefited even the lowest strata of society. These policies were sustained by higher state government spending for social development, but were also supplemented by remittances from abroad, all of which contributed to Kerala's exceptional 'model of development' experience. Nevertheless, the most important factor in Kerala's democratic achievement is undoubtedly a high level of consciousness among the masses of their rights and the legitimacy of their struggles to achieve these rights (Mohan, 1991). However, despite the success of the policy reforms, the Communist government could rule the state only for eight terms and not concurrently after the formation of the state. Tharamangalam (2002) notes the diminishing popularity of the Left Democratic Front (LDF) due to its increasing fragmentation and inability to replenish itself with fresh recruits and energy. While Heller (1995) blames the Communist demise on their weak consideration for industrialization and the impediments which ex-tenants faced during the implementation of land reforms. Consequently, the LDF lost its seat to the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF), a congress-led coalition government, in 2001, though LDF, Communist government returned to power in the state assembly election of 2006.

Overall, Kerala has seen 18 governments since the formation of the state in 1957, with many of them coalitions rather than a single party government (Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004). The inability of a single party to form a government has resulted from the differences among parties and the high degree of political activism, with Kerala being often referred to as 'a problem state' in India (GOK, 2006; Devika, 2006). However, the redistributive and welfarist policies were still sustained, according to Heller (1996), amidst a turbulent history of coalitions and despite frequent changes of government. As Desai (2005:p1) notes:

The form and content of welfare policies are shaped by the exigencies of state formation, as state autonomy theorists would argue, however, it shows that political factors are the decisive determining factors of the former.

The following section makes an assessment of Kerala's economic and social development in detail.

4.3 Social and Economic Development

Kerala has increasingly drawn applause and has been of interest to researchers and international development agencies for achieving high levels of human development despite low per capita income. Success in development is revealed in its exceptional development indicators, including high literacy, low infant mortality, low birth rates and long life expectancy (see Table 4.2). Kerala ranks first among the Indian states in terms of performance on the Human Development Index (HDI), Gender Equality (GEI) and Gender Empowerment Measures (GEM). These human development indicators are also on a par with richer countries, such as the US (despite the per capita income of about one sixtieth of US), which has resulted in Kerala being hailed as a 'model for development' (New Internationalist, 1993; Devi, 2007; Sen, 1999; Veron, 2001).

The population 31.8 million (2001 census) and the zero population growth rate of Kerala is the lowest among Indian states. The dramatic decline in poverty levels compares favourably not only with other Indian states, but also with other developing countries according to researchers like Dreze and Sen (1995). The political resistance to pre-existing caste inequalities also resulted in the implementation of universal free basic education, with exceptional emphasis on female education in Kerala, which took place much earlier compared to other states in India (Sen, 2000; 2001). Almost equal distribution of development benefits exist between males and females, high and low castes and the urban and rural population in terms of literacy, life expectancy and sex ratio and more than half of the low caste population of Kerala being literate is laudable (Franke and Chasin, 1992; Tharamangalam, 2002). In contrast, India shows wide disparities in human development not only within states in terms of districts, but also between states and also between rural and urban areas (GOI, 2002).

Table 4. 2 Exceptional human development indicators of Kerala

Indicator	Kerala	India
1. Birth rate (per 1000)	18	27
2. Infant mortality (per 1000)	14	71
3. Life expectancy		
Male	70	60
Female	76	62
4. Literacy (total)	91	65
Male	94	76
Female	88	54

(Source: GOK, 2006; Census of India, 2001)

Kerala's high levels of human development, gender development and the consequent gender empowerment are the result of its achievements in the field of health and education (Devi, 2007: p3). The Gender Empowerment Measure includes women's basic capabilities to gain economic and political decision-making powers (GOK, 2006; Mehta, 1996). The favourable position of women in the state is partly due to lower gender gaps in higher education and the favourable sex ratio as well as women's greater access to food, education and health care within the matrilineal system (Kodoth and Eapen, 2005; Thresia, 2004; Agarwal, 1994; Tharamangalam, 2002). Women also marry at an older age in Kerala, with the average age of marriage being twenty-two compared to nineteen years in India (GOK, 2007). Erwer (1999) points out how these four years can make a difference in the possibilities of choice, bargaining power, mobility and completion of education, which means women give birth at an older age, to fewer children, who have greater survival chances. Kerala has also earmarked ten percent of development funds of each local council for 'women's development', which is managed by representative female groups of the village assembly (Kabeer, 2003). Further, *Kudumbashree*, an innovative women-centred poverty eradication programme was carried out during 1998 and 2000 in rural and urban areas and has helped women's groups in gaining access to loan facilities and lease land farming and training in various entrepreneurial skills (GOK, 2006; GOK, 2006a).

A favourable female sex ratio of 106 to 100 males in all the districts of Kerala (2001 Census) is in sharp contrast to the 93 females per 100 males for all of India, and has been the most widely discussed indicator of the favourable status of women (Sen, 1999; GOK, 2006). Sen (2002) points out a sex ratio score of less than 100 indicates gender inequality characterised by women's subordination, limited opportunities and exposure to male violence. This is clearly visible in excess female mortality due to sex determination and sex selective abortions in the North Indian states of Gujarat, Haryana and Punjab (Arnold and Roy, 2002).

More intangible quality of life indicators of Kerala likewise include high levels of social mobilization and democratic participation, an exceptionally high readership of newspapers and magazines, a writer's cooperative that may be the world's first and most successful (Tharamangalam, 2002:p3). A number of scholars and researchers have praised this remarkable development experience in Kerala. Parayil (2000) and Heller (1999) note that Kerala's 30 million people have the social indicators of first world populations despite the problems associated with a high population density, the lack of a rich mineral resource base, and low per capita income. Jeffery (1992) stresses that this unique development experience has emerged without the chaotic violence of a political revolution or the environmental degradation of the industrial world, and it has involved no large transfers of funds from wealthier countries. Sen (1993) indicates that Kerala is an exceptional case of improved social indicators that many Developing Countries in East Asia have not yet achieved, despite higher economic growth. According to Parayil (2000), given the failings of many Less Developed Countries and former Soviet Bloc Countries, Kerala's 'model of development' can be seen as a way out of poverty without following the socially disruptive and environmentally threatening policies of the New World Order!

It is pertinent now to examine some of the main factors that have made the development of Kerala a success. Justino (2000) claims the foremost factors of Kerala's development model are the comprehensive social security programmes accompanied by an extensive rural development agenda, which contained the most successful land reforms in the world. These wide-ranging welfarist measures of the Communist government after independence were noted earlier. Further, historical factors dating from the pre-independence period have also helped shape Kerala's

unique development model. These include: greater attention to health and education within the matrilineal system, the efforts of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin and the impact of colonial rule and missionary activities (Ramachandran, 1995; Chandran, 1999). Increased access to and awareness of, health services also resulted in a highly health conscious and literate population, in addition to greater awareness among women of health issues (Ramachandran, 1995; Panicker, 1979; Sen, 1992).

In explaining Kerala's success, Maddox (1996) and Jeffery (2004) place particular emphasis on matriliney, without which they argue it is difficult to imagine such a development taking place. Some residues of the matrilineal system still remain. For example, Swaminathan notes that (*Personal Interview, December 2006*), women are able to occupy senior positions with men working under them in government, hospitals, educational institutions, politics, police and the judiciary as a result of the property inheritance of the matrilineal system. The worship of the mother goddess and a ritual *Pongal*, at the Attukal temple in the capital Trivandrum, where thousands of women perform the ritual cooking as an offering to the goddess *Bhagavati*, reflects an ongoing culture of sexual equality and free agency for women in the state (Jenett, 2005). According to Maddox (1996:p1), the legacy of matriliney is not totally lost and even today in Kerala there is no neglect of the girl child as found elsewhere in North India:

“Conspicuous by their absence in Kerala were the doctor’s sign elsewhere in urban India advertising “ultra-sound”- the scanning that helps families eliminate the unwanted female sex before birth”.

Taken as a whole, it is possible that the various factors leading to Kerala's transformation and model of development are replicable. This is aptly summed up by Ramachandran (1995:p1):

“They were possible because there was mass literacy; because agrarian relations were transformed; because there were important changes in the conditions of unfreedom of the people of the oppressed castes; because of enlightened social attitudes toward girls' and women's survival and education, and because of the public policy interventions of governments in Kerala”.

4.3.1 Contribution of Agriculture

This section looks at the contribution of agriculture to the Kerala economy since the agricultural sector plays a vital role to Kerala's economy, accounting for 14 percent of the state income and 54 percent of the land area is under agriculture (Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2003; GOK, 2007). The state falls within the wetland region of rice cultivation in India and rice is the staple crop, followed by tapioca (cassava). Rice forms the routine diet of people and is used for making a variety of pancakes, steamed rice and cakes and also has a special significance as an offering during festivals and rituals in temples, marriages and social functions. The two major festivals of Kerala *Vishu* (New Year) and *Onam* are strongly related to rice cultivation. *Vishu* (around mid-April) is associated with ploughing while *Onam* (August to September) is a major harvest festival (Moore, 1985). Folk songs sung by women while harvesting paddy also indicate the significance of rice to the culture, tradition and society of Kerala.

However, despite being a wetland area of rice cultivation, the diverse soils and ecological conditions provide a high degree of variability of cropping patterns in different geographical locations. The cash crops of rubber, tea, coffee, coconut and spices of Kerala earn considerable foreign exchange for the national economy (GOK, 2006). As Joseph and Joseph (2005:p45) note: Kerala has near monopoly in the cultivation of rubber, pepper and cardamom, accounting for 92, 82 and 72 percent of national production respectively and its share in coconut (46 percent) and coffee (23 percent) is also considerable. A major strength of agriculture in Kerala is its long tradition of export, bequeathed with a chain of institutions and networks for collection and transport from the port through merchants, retail traders at the villages, wholesale traders of *thaluk* (local administration) and district towns and commission agents and exporters at the ports (GOK, 2001). Most of the coconut oil and rubber for soaps and automobiles are produced in Kerala, though they are processed in the multinational factories outside the state (Mohan, 1991). Endowed with rich biodiversity, Kerala has rich medicinal plant resources and the state has inherited thousands of years of knowledge in traditional medicinal herbs including Ayurveda (GOK, 2001). Indeed, the contribution of agriculture to the state economy is all the more significant for Kerala with low industrial development and mineral resources.

4.3.2 Assessment of Kerala's Development Model

This section turns attention now to the divergent views and concerns that have also emerged about the problems confronting the model of development examined earlier, despite the fact that the envisaged collapse of the 'model of development' has not occurred. These surround problems of economic stagnation, crisis of agriculture sector, fiscal deficit and unemployment, exclusion of groups and the marginalization of women, as detailed below.

Economic Stagnation

A major problem that confronted Kerala's development is that of the dismal performance of the economy. This is reflected in the low performance registered in the primary, secondary and tertiary economic sectors of the state (Justino, 2000). For example, the economic performance of Kerala for almost 30 years (between the late 1950s and late 1980) was rather dismal, although it started to recover slowly in the mid 1970s (GOK, 2006). Of particular concern is the stagnation and declining income from agriculture, which is serious in view of its significant contribution to the economy. Set back to the economy also resulted partly from the low levels of industrialization, with Kerala lagging behind other states in India. This has resulted from the unionisation of labour in the state. Heller (1995) observes that the absence of formal regulations, insecurity of employment and the militant forms of trade unionism often produced chaotic and violent labour relations. These include *gheraos* (a form of aggravation by protestors surrounding and keeping officials or leaders until their demands are met), stoning of public buses and other disorderly methods (Tharamangalam, 1998). Opposing technological change has clearly not helped in job protection, but resulted in industries and activities moving away from Kerala, such as the coir processing and cashew processing industries, which had employed large numbers of workers (GOK, 2006). During the decade that followed the peak of class mobilization in 1975, the state domestic product grew at a frail rate of 1.76 percent a year, with insignificant national and international investment and declining capital from the traditional industries of cashew and beedi production (Kannan, 1990a; Heller, 1996). These problems were also exacerbated by a lack of capital investment from public or private sources and further limited the state in pursuing industrialisation (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003).

Critics of the Communist government policies thus blame the redistribution policies as being the root cause of the problem. For instance, Tharamangalam (1998) and Heller (1995) note that over-politicisation of the state has caused economic stagnation, with the political logic of class struggle being slowly exhausted and the redistribution policies extended to the limit. Yet Mohindra (2003) indicates that, despite these problems, the absolute poverty seen elsewhere in India and other poor countries is not common in Kerala. Further, the state's economy has significantly improved from the late 1980s (see Table 4.3). It is interesting to note that the growth rate of Kerala's economy caught up with the national annual growth rate, increasing from 1.9 percent to 5.8 percent between 1970 and 2003 (GOK, 2006). The increased remittances from Gulf emigrants were vital for this resurgence of Kerala's economy. The remittances as a percentage of Net State Domestic Product (NSDP) increased from 11 percent to more than 21 percent for the period 1991-92 to 1999-2000, which reflects faster remittance growth than the NSDP (GOK, 2006). During this period, the service sector has grown, human development and income growth have synergised and social security measures have to great degree eradicated poverty (GOK, 2006). The total remittances of Rs. 245 billion (\$5.8 billion) during 2007 was 3.8 times more than the funds Kerala received from the central government by way of its share of taxes and grants (Zachariah and Rajan, 2008). However, the impressive economic growth noted above is less so in the decreasing plan expenditure of less than 5 percent due to fiscal squeeze of economic liberalisation policies of national government according to the GOK, Draft Approach Paper (2006: p1-2) for Eleventh Five Year Plan (2007-2012).

Table 4. 3 Recovering economic growth of Kerala (in percentage)

Sector	Kerala		India	
	Period 1 1971-1987	Period 2 1988-2003	Period 1 1971-1987	Period 2 1988-2003
Primary	- 0.14	2.90	2.69	3.47
Secondary	2.38	6.13	5.02	6.53
Tertiary	3.28	7.55	5.19	7.48
Aggregate	1.89	5.79	4.08	5.98
Per capita SDP/GDP	0.52	5.03	1.87	4.01

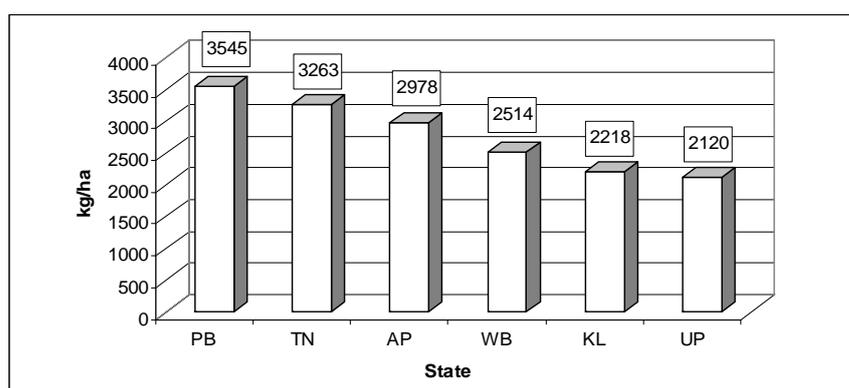
(Source: Estimated from CSO, National Accounts Statistics, cited in GOK 2006)

Such meagre plan outlays, according to the report, if sustained over the years will impinge negatively on economic growth. Tharamangalam (2002) also indicates Kerala not receiving a fair share of central government funds. The integration of the Indian economy into the global economy has caused vulnerability due to the sensitivity of Kerala to external markets (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). The agriculture sector is facing a serious crisis. The fall in export earnings from marine products due to regulatory policies, and the sharp decline in out-migrants and the increase in the number of Arabian Gulf returnees have also exacerbated recent problems (Nair, 1999). Further, the recent slowdown of the world economy and recession of US economy could also adversely affect the economy of the state (GOK, 2007). Thus the future economic scenario in Kerala is uncertain.

Crisis of Agriculture

It is pertinent to examine the crisis of agriculture sector, which is a major concern of the state economy. The agricultural economy of Kerala has been undergoing structural transformation from the mid seventies and a large proportion of the area under subsistence crops like rice and tapioca (cassava) has been converted to more remunerative crops like coconut and rubber (GOK, 2007). The area under rice cultivation has drastically declined from 0.88 million ha to 0.26 million ha between 1975-76 and 2006-07 (Narayanan, 2006; Department of Economics & Statistics and UPASI 2006-07). It has caused a 75 percent deficit in rice production for domestic consumption, which is likely to go up to 80-85 percent of the requirements in the next few years (GOK, 2003). As a result, more than 80 percent of the food grain requirements of Kerala are now being met through imports, which is inclusive of the imports of private traders (Kurien, 1995; Prakash, 1994; Kannan, 2000). This evidence clearly supports the view of Kerala (KL) being a 'food deficit' state, even though the average productivity of rice is higher than the national average of 1874 kg/ha, but lower than the levels achieved by the major rice producing states of Punjab (PB), Tamil Nadu (TN), Andhra Pradesh (AP), Uttar Pradesh (UP), West Bengal (WB) and Uttar Pradesh (UP) (see Figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4 Rice productions of major Indian states

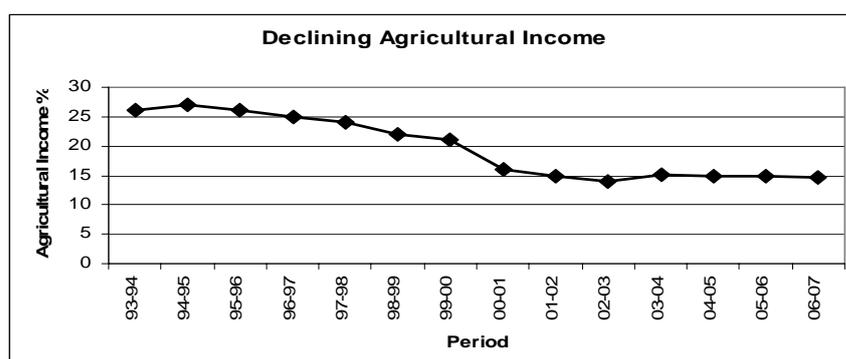


(Source: Government of Kerala (GOK), Economic Review 2003)

These problems of Kerala's agriculture have been further accentuated after the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) associated with economic liberalisation of the national government since 1999-00. There has been a steady decline in commodity prices of coffee, tea, pepper and cardamoms, which are either export oriented or import subsisting since 1999-2000 due to economic liberalisation and the conditionality forced by WTO Agreement of Agriculture (AOA)(GOK, 2001; 2006). This crisis is alarming since cash and plantation crops are not only Kerala's largest economic activity, but also the main source of income to buy food (Justino, 2000). Indeed, according to Parayil and Sreekumar (2003:p12), "Kerala is threatened by the erosion of even the meagre benefit it had enjoyed in the past in terms of export of primary commodity".

The livestock sector, which is part of the agricultural sector, has also shown a declining trend in the number of livestock compared to the year 1996. For instance, the livestock census of 2000 shows a decline of 24 percent of cattle, 43 percent of buffaloes and 34 percent of poultry (GOK, 2003). On the whole there has been decline in the contribution of agriculture to the state income from 21.45 percent in 1999-00 to 14.55 percent in 2006-07 (Figure 4.5). Indeed, the agriculture sector of Kerala is facing a serious crisis and the collapse of food self-sufficiency due to economic liberalisation and others factors such as low productivity and high cost of production, including wages of labourers are examined in detail in the following Chapter 5.

Figure 4.5 Declining agricultural income in Kerala



(Source: Directorate of Economics and Statistics, 2003; Economic Review, 2006-07)

Fiscal Deficit and Unemployment

Overall, the long periods of economic decline and stagnation discussed above caused fiscal deficits. The debt burden of Kerala has been growing annually at the staggering rate of 25-29 percent between 1996-97 and 2007-08, according to the Economic Review (2007), Government of Kerala (GOK). The current debt of Rs.571 billion (\$14 billion), which include borrowings on account of internal debt treasury savings, provident fund and loans, advances from Government of India is a serious concern. Justino (2000) indicate fiscal deficits arose because Kerala used its capital surpluses to finance its recurrent revenue deficits, while other Indian states use their revenue account surpluses to meet recurrent capital deficit. The fiscal deficits peaked during 1999-2000 due to fiscal squeezes of the Tenth Five Year plan outplay. The central government only provided Kerala state worth Rs.16105 crores (\$402 crores) against the original projected amount of Rs.24000 crores (\$600 crores), which greatly exacerbated the fiscal deficits (GOK, 2006a). Thus Kerala's position is lowest compared to the neighbouring states of South India, though central government transfers to the state continued to fluctuate throughout the years since 1996-97 and 2007 (GOK, 2007).

A further associated problem of development is of unemployment, particularly among the educated population (GOK, 2006). The unemployment rate of Kerala is high compared to other states in India. For example, in 1999-2000, unemployment rates among the economically active population were 11 percent and 13 percent respectively for rural and urban areas, while in contrast; the corresponding national averages were only 2 and 5 percent for India (NSSO 2001 as quoted in Thomas 2005).

The unemployment rate in rural Kerala is higher than the all-India level, though the rural-urban continuum of the state makes this highly visible, while in the case of India it is 'disguised unemployment' due to significant rural-urban difference (GOK, 2006). Tharamangalam (2002) has shown that not only are a great number of educated people unemployed, but also the uneducated such as agricultural workers, construction workers and coconut pickers are jobless. Overall the unemployment rate of 31 percent of the state is high, with 14 percent of males and 48 percent of the females being unemployed though Kerala accounts for only 4 percent of India's population (NSSO, 2000 as quoted in Mazumdar and Guruswamy, 2006).

The problem of unemployment has resulted in out-migration of people to other states of India. In addition to large percentages of people migrating to the Gulf, particularly during the 1970s, when the booming oil-producing countries created employment opportunities (Justino, 2000). However, there was a decrease in the number of skilled and semi-skilled workers who migrated during the 1980s and 1990s (Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). This arose from the global economic downturn and the Arabian Gulf problem, such as Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Despite this decrease, the migration of workers to Gulf countries is an important feature of the labour market and the number of workers outside Kerala during 1999 (1.3 million) was larger than the number in the organized sector of the state (1.2 million) (Zachariah, Mathew and Rajan, 1999; Thomas, 2005). In general, the number of emigrants 1.8 million (mostly men) of Kerala has virtually remained the same since 2003 (Zachariah and Rajan, 2008; Mazumdar and Guruswamy, 2006).

Exclusion of Groups and Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment

A final criticism is also levelled at the Kerala development model for excluding certain important social groups. These groups include fishing communities, female agricultural labourers, stonecutters and domestic servants (Frank and Chasin, 1996). There are also vibrant debates about the 'paradoxes of women's empowerment' in Kerala and the economic and political marginalization of women, despite favourable social development indicators. These paradoxes of women's empowerment despite favourable social development indicators have particular bearings for this thesis, which are evident in a few key areas. First, the work participation rate of women in

Kerala is the lowest compared to other states in India. The overall male work participation rate of 55 percent is double that of the female rate of 23 percent and this disparity has increased since 1987-88, while female work participation has remained constant during the 1990s, though in agriculture the decline is more alarming (GOK, 2006). According to 2001 census, the male work participation rate has increased to 50 percent (47 percent in 1991 census), while the female work participation has declined slightly to 15.4 percent (15.8 percent in 1991 census) (GOK, 2007). The 50 percent male work participation rate of Kerala compares with the national estimates of 52 percent, while the female work participation rate of 15 percent is far below the all-India figure of 26 percent (DGCO, Kerala, 2001). The unemployment rate for females is thus high, 2-3 times higher than male unemployment. As Mitra and Singh (2007: p1233) review debates and issues regarding female unemployment in Kerala and note:

“Women are expected to be the primary caretakers at home and encouraged to get a general education rather than a technical degree and pursuing a challenging career that would distract their attention from being housewives and mothers”.

Another impact of the transformation of institutions and the introduction of reforms since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been on the relations of power between men and women (Devika, 2002). The amendments to the matrilineal system started in 1896, although the final bill for abolishing matriliney was only introduced in 1976. This breaking up of matriliney was inconceivable for the joint family system of the Nairs and other castes. Yet, Menon (1994:p26) notes that no one really protested or shed tears over its abolition:

“What was the use of keeping the shell when the contents had gone? There was not enough property for the system to survive in the old style. Protests could not get them more land or money. There were too many persons to share what was left over and it was not worth it”.

Women lost more due to the inheritance and succession practices weakening their access to and control of land (Jeffrey, 1990; Eapen and Kodoth, 2002). Legal dismantling of matriliney has thus rendered women’s situation more ambiguous, as fathers and husbands have come to exert more authority over their daughters and wives (Jeffrey, 1992; 1990). Among the patrilineal traditions of earlier groups of *Namboodiris* Brahmins and Syrian Christians were further reinforced (GOK, 2006). For the low caste women, Lindberg (2004) observes that ‘Sanskritisation’, the process

by which higher Hindu castes has led to restrictions on women's freedom though femininity and masculinity of the low caste was not dichotomised during the first half of the twentieth century. This shifting ideology of women as dependent housewives of the low caste resulted in their acceptance of low wages and seasonal work (Lindberg, 2004).

On the whole, Kodoth and Eapen (2005) view the shift to the patrilineal nuclear family has increased dowry practices in Kerala and gender based violence is on the increase despite the continuing rise in education levels. The suicide rate 2437 of women during 2006 is very high and on a typical day about eight women commit suicide in Kerala (GOK, 2007; Mitra and Singh, 2007). Likewise, in terms of measures of autonomy for married women, for the 25 states of India, Kerala is behind Gujarat, Goa, Tamil Nadu and the Northern Eastern states of India according to Kishore and Gupta (2004). Some anticipate a masculinisation of the juvenile sex ratio in the future, despite sex-selective abortions and female infanticide not being widely reported in Kerala (Rajan, Sudha and Mohanchandran, 2000). This could be the consequence of fostering patriarchy and the weakening of women's position among different castes and groups of the state. Finally, there is also the criticism that the Communist government quietened down the issue of gender as a power relation, with the dominant discourse of class silencing women's voices and the differences between men and women (Erwer, 1999). According to Erwer (1999:p7):

“The space for women in the political sphere, politics concerning women's interest, and for feminist politics have until now been silent in Kerala's low participation. This problem has in itself not been an open topic for discussion”.

The political exclusion of women from mainstream politics has been visible in the small number of women in formal politics. This has arisen from 8 to 13 women in the house legislators (out of a total of 140) and around 1 to 2 female members in the Parliament since Independence (GOK, 2006a). It is probably true to assert that this worsening situation of women in Kerala, despite favourable indicators of health and education, is similar to the Indian situation due to the recent social and economic developments (Eapen and Kodoth, 2002; Rajan, Sudha and Mohanchandran, 2000). These paradoxes of women's empowerment and the numerous disadvantages women continue to face today in Kerala despite favourable social development indicators has particular bearing for this thesis.

It is pertinent to examine the shifting identity and status of women in India, in general, with patriarchy gaining increasing dominance. There are debates that during the early Vedic and Rig Vedic period (4000-100 BC) in India, women held equal status with men and the derogatory patriarchal system, including early marriage and self-immolation of the widow (*sati*), started only in 300 BC (Kuppuswamy 1975; Choudhury, 1978; Devi, 1993). Swaminathan (*Personal Interview, March 2008*) also noted that Hinduism gave a highly honourable place to women:

“Manu, the law giver has written, “God resides in homes where women are respected. Ultimate power *parasakthi* is conceptualised as women. Education and wealth are represented as Saraswathi and Lakhmi, female goddesses. We all call our country motherland. Rivers also have a feminine connotation and are referred to as women”.

Overall, thousand years of foreign rule is believed to be the main cause for such degeneration of women’s status in India (*Swaminathan, Personal Interview, March 2008*). Muslim rulers ruled India for 800 years, British for 300 years and 100 years by Portuguese. The Muslim invasions increased the sense of threat to the purity of caste, as Hale (1989:p373-374) notes:

“The patriarchal Brahmin culture responded to external threats and resistance by becoming increasingly more rigid. Class hierarchy, which emerged with capitalism is similarly built on gender hierarchy, and reinforces women’s subordination, although in a changed form”.

Hale (1989) thus argues that higher the caste status, the greater the constraints demanded. According to some, the British introduced the alien western notion of women as inferior, and so added a derogatory component to women’s subordination (Hale, 1989:p374). Further, the two religions - Christianity and Islam together with westernization had profound influence on India’s culture and traditions and on women’s status according to Swaminathan (*Personal Interview, March 2008*). Christian succession laws were prejudiced against women, while among Muslims gender differentials were sharply marked (Chacko, 2003; Kurien, 1994). Taken as a whole Sudha et al (2006:p3) stresses that the historical, cultural and economic factors work together to initiate, perpetuate and intensify gender bias in India.

4.4 Kerala Society and Culture

This section finally gives a brief summary of Kerala society and culture since several issues related to it have already been considered in earlier sections. The original *Malayalee* culture of Kerala is that of the Dravidians, who were the early inhabitants and colonizers of most regions of south India. The foreign rule and influence brought about a tremendous impact upon the society and culture of Kerala. As (Abram, 2007:p253) puts it:

“For thousands of years, merchants, adventurers, religious refugees and colonizers crossed the Arabian Sea to trade in spices and settle on the so-called “Malabar coast”, giving rise to one of the most heterogeneous cultures in the ancient world”

The state has not only substantial population of Hindus of different castes, but also significant percentages of other communities like Christians and Muslims. Hindus represent 57 percent (83 percent in all-India), while Christians represent 22 percent (2 percent in India) and Muslims 21 percent (11 percent in India) and the rest belong to minor groups like Buddhists and Animists (Pillai, 1994; Justino, 2003). These main groups and castes are further divided into sub-castes depending upon status, education, occupation and economic conditions. However, despite this diversity, Heller (1999) notes that Kerala never had the problems of sectarian and caste-based violence, which recently have been rising throughout India. Thus, the political ideology and trade unionism cut across all barriers and Kerala has an excellent record of communal harmony according to Swaminathan (*Personal Interview, December 2006*):

“Muslims and Christians spoke Malayalam, which was a uniting factor. Christians and Muslims were equally adept in music, dance, art, literature and performing arts. Though music and dance were in Hindu themes, Christians and Muslims took to them as Hindus did. These united the population”.

However, Gulati (1995) views social transformation taking place within a short period of 150 years and the society of Kerala as having remained relatively insulated for hundreds of years. The process of colonialism resulted in the transformation of the pre-colonial social structure and brought about an ethnicization of Kerala society (Kurien, 1994:p408). Additionally, the redistributive measures and welfare policies that followed after independence resulted in favourable health and education of the

population. The class mobilization and state intervention dissolved the social relations and institutions of the pre-capitalistic economic order (Heller, 1995). It helped the lower caste occupy a better status and position in Kerala, which is generally not the case in most other regions of India despite reservations and quotas introduced by the central government for rectifying previous caste discrimination. The upward mobility of the lower caste resulted in their over-consumption including construction of luxurious houses and the lavish use of gold and jewellery (Osella and Osella, 1999). Taken as a whole, the interaction of social, cultural and political factors of Kerala society with foreign rulers since the last century has thus shaped the process of social change (Cespedas, 2001). In the process Kurien (1994) indicates the identity of an individual has altered from social and cultural differences based on caste and communities, to individual identities based on class status and educational achievement. Yet, Abram (2007:p7) argues that while innovation has always been central to Kerala's prosperity, *Malayalis* remain staunchly conservative. Thus, the core of ethnicity is still composed of cultural elements such as "customs, norms, beliefs and traditions, language, religion, food ... folklore, music and residential patterns" (Kurien, 1994; p388).

However, this transformation of society and the development of the state have had its limitations. For instance, Tharamangalam (2002; 1998) argues that over-politicisation has caused over-reliance on politics and is mainly responsible for the state's failure to effectively take up individual or collective initiative to become entrepreneurs. Bureaucratic interference has often affected the orderly functioning of civil society and undermined the efficiency of economic enterprises and the education system (Tharamangalam, 2002). Further, increased remittances from the Gulf did not increase investment or generate employment, which caused more damage in the long run by creating a consumer society without a productive base (Sebastian, 1991; Parayil and Sreekumar, 2003). Land prices increased with the remitters willing to buy land at higher prices in the wake of limited land and high demographic pressure in the state. Indeed, as Cespedes (2001) argues, sustaining human development clearly requires articulating redistribution with growth.

4.5 Summary

This chapter has probed deeper into the many extraordinary anthropological, historical, religious, political, demographic and educational features of Kerala (Hill, 1986). Geographical location and abundance of resources attracted foreigners from the Arabs to the Portuguese, the Dutch, French and finally the British. Yet, the colonial rule had a major impact and transformed the agrarian economy and altered traditional social, economic and political order of the state. These changes caused the mobilization of social groups, which slowly transformed into social and political movements, and finally the Communist movement emerged, which assumed the struggle for freedom by joining the Indian national movement. After independence, successful redistributive and welfarist measures have resulted in Kerala's development model of high Human Development and Gender Development Indexes. These achievements have continued to disprove those who doubted the sustainability of the 'model of development', with human development and economic growth mutually reinforcing (Justino, 2003; GOK, 2006). However, there are concerns of development of agriculture and paradoxes of women's empowerment, which have exacerbated after the integration of the Indian economy into the global economy. Addressing these concerns of development still remains imperative for the state to sustain its 'model of development'. As the state has developed and society transformed from alliances based on caste to class, women's position has changed within the changing system of matriliney to patriliney. As Devika (2006: p54) argues, "While female agency has indeed contributed to the 'Kerala Model' it is vital to note that this does not indicate a loosening of patriarchal control". This changing position of women has resulted in a paradoxical situation of women's empowerment and forms the context and starting point for an inquiry into this research on gender role and power relations in Kerala in the context of agricultural transformation of post-reform period.

CHAPTER FIVE

Uncovering Agricultural Transformation in Kerala

This chapter seeks to understand the intersection of national and local policies for agricultural transformation in Kerala in the context of the post-reform period of the 1990s. The aim of the chapter is to demonstrate how economic liberalization policies of Structural Adjustment and WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) permeated downwards from the global to the national (Indian) level and, together with local (Kerala) state government policies, transformed agriculture. I consider the implications of this transformation for agricultural labourers, in particular, the crisis of agricultural transformation and its inclusionary, exclusionary and paradoxical impacts on women is identified, forming the context for the chapter that follows.

The introductory section (5.1) reviews first the agricultural transformation in national context, the impact of the economic liberalization policies of SAPs and WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) for Indian and Kerala state agriculture. Having analysed the effects of Indian national policy, the discussion then turns to examining the effects of local Kerala state government policies on agricultural transformation (5.2). The implications of national and local state policies for labourers and women in particular are examined in section (5.3). The last section (5.4) sums up by taking stock of the various international, national and local influences on agricultural transformation and labourers in the post reform period in Kerala.

Throughout the chapter, ‘national’ or ‘central’ refers to the Indian government, while ‘state government’ refers to the Kerala government ruling at the local state level. The chapter is based on formal interviews with specialist, key researchers and policy planners conducted during a field visit to Kerala during April 2004 and additional interviews conducted in the UK and India between 2006 and 2007 after the fieldwork. This is supplemented by extensive secondary data from the literature, and statistical data from the Registrar General and Census Commission of India, Central Statistical

Organization, Government of India, Directorate of Economics and Statistics and State Planning Board, Government of Kerala.

5.1 Agricultural Transformation in National Context

This section reviews the major debates surrounding the Indian national policies of economic liberalization during the post-reform period of the 1990s, in an attempt to evaluate the implications for agricultural transformation and for the labourers in Kerala. This is vital since Kerala is a federal republic state of India under the central government, which makes it imperative to examine agricultural transformation in Kerala within the wider context of the changing national policies of Indian agriculture.

The national policies of economic liberalisation of the post-reform period involved implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies imposed by global institutions of the World Bank and IMF, which were also discussed earlier in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. India gradually opened up its agriculture to international trade by signing the Uruguay Round of Agriculture (URA) of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) situated within WTO (Jackson and Rao, 2004). The Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) of WTO has three main tenets – market access, which is aimed at removal of all quantitative restrictions on trade in agricultural commodities; domestic support, which relates to reducing Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS) given by the government to the agriculture sector and export competition of decreasing the value of export subsidy (Joseph and Joseph, 2005). The national policy of economic liberalization has had serious consequences for Kerala agriculture, which can be examined in the context of five major issues which include the growth of commercial crops, removal of quarantine restrictions, elimination of subsidies, reduction of export subsidies and restructuring of Public Distribution System, which are elucidated in detail below.

5.1.1 Growth of Commercial Crops

The key focus of the economic liberalization policies has been the commercialisation of agriculture by growing cash crops of greater value addition for export. The promotion of export crops on the one hand has eroded the food security of households

and the nation, while on the other hand it has pushed many farmers into 'distress sales' due to the limitations of storing perishable cash crops of fruits and vegetables (Shiva, 2004). The total food grain area of India has declined by more than 5 million ha between 1990 and 2001, with food grain production for the first time falling short of population growth according to researchers like Muller and Patel (2004). The food grain production is expected to fall short of the target by 2.2 million tonnes in 2007-08 according to the Economic Survey, Government of India (2008).

This shift towards contract farming by large national and multi-national corporations rather than growing food crops for sustenance and livelihoods is primarily for the commercialisation of agriculture. The traditional staples, such as pulses and edible oils, have been increasingly replaced by cash crops such as tea, nuts, sugarcane and horticultural products (Muller and Patel, 2004). Sharma (2005:p3) also notes cultivation of staple foods being replaced by cash crops like tomatoes in place of wheat, durum wheat (for bakery purposes) replacing wheat as a staple diet in the northern Indian states of Punjab, and flowers in place of rice. Similarly, cotton and oilseeds also witnessed increase in area between 1990 and 2006 (GOI, 2008).

Overall the commercialisation of agriculture has mostly benefited large-scale producers instead of small-scale subsistence farmers in India. Shekhar, Researcher of the Kerala Agriculture University (*Personal Interview, April 2004*), notes the problems of marginalized holdings and very 'primitive' farming techniques, which have been major constraints on growing export commodities by small farmers. Additionally, stringent standards have been required for assuring the global consumer of the quality, safety and environmental standards of the production process in distant locations (Reardon et al, 2002). But, achieving global standards for commodities have been difficult due to the poor and inefficient marketing system dominated mostly by middlemen and small-scale entrepreneurs in India. For example, 78 percent of the farmers in India are smallholder farmers, although they cultivate only 33 percent of the total farmland, but they have a crucial role in sustaining the food supply of the country (Muller and Patel, 2004). These small and medium farmers continue to face constraints due to the lack of resources like water, technology and capital (Vyas and Reddy, 2002). Further, the sharp increases in the cost of cultivation have pushed the poor peasantry deeper into indebtedness and penury (Sharma, 2005). The conversion

from food to cash crops has on the whole distressed subsistence farmers in India. The increased risks in the event of drought and crop failure have also left most farmers heavily indebted, driving thousands to commit suicide. There were reports of suicide from the 4 states in India - Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Kerala (GOI, 2008).

Clearly adapting to shifting production, technology and marketing practices for commercialisation is difficult for most Indian farmers. However, it must be noted that this shifting cropping pattern of commercialisation from food to cash crops has been going on since the colonial period and after independence, when India adopted Green Revolution technologies. These patterns have only been further amplified during the post-reform period of economic liberalisation of agriculture.

This commercialisation of agriculture by shifting to cash crops has also been taking place in Kerala, with vast tracts of forests and paddy fields being converted for growing coconut, rubber, tea, and coffee (Sharma, 2005). During the post-reform period of 1992 and 2007, the rice production has declined from 1.06 million tonnes to 0.64 million tonnes (GOK, 2007). However, Ravi, policy planner of the Government of Kerala, argued that the structure of Kerala's agriculture had changed fundamentally even before liberalization:

“Historically, Kerala had modified its agriculture to suit exports rendering international or national markets. This accounts for the predominance of the cash crop economy especially, rubber, pepper, cardamom, production of tea, coffee, and other spices” (*Personal Interview, March 2006*).

For instance, the share of commercial crops in the net sown area increased from 57 percent in 1970-71 to 84 percent in 2001-02 and out of the gross cropped area of 2.91 million ha, only 12 per cent is under food crops and Kerala faces serious challenges in retaining even this meagre area (GOK, Economic Review Issues 2000 to 2007). This shift towards less labour intensive commercial crop of Kerala may be seen also as an adaptation to cope with the rising costs of cultivation and wages (Joseph and Joseph, 2005). So the national process of economic liberalisation has only further intensified the state's shifting trend to cash crop production.

The farming communities of Kerala also face constraints, as do other Indian farmers, which limit their participation in agricultural commercialisation. Madhavan, a researcher at the Centre for Development Studies (*Personal Interview, April 2004*) views the problem of inadequate infrastructure and incentive support from the government as being a major limitation for commercialisation. Further, Joseph and Joseph (2005) has stressed that the commercial crops have long gestation period (being perennial crops), which pose obvious limits to specialization in the short run. Thus, the production, storage and processing facilities in Kerala are increasingly short of international quality requirements (GOK, 2001). An examination of the export structure shows limited share of value added items (Joseph and Joseph, 2005:p48-49). So clearly, there are limitations to the commercialisation of agriculture given the realities of India, and more specifically of Kerala agriculture. The reasons for this are complex, as noted by Shekhar of Kerala Agriculture University:

“Coconut cultivation, for example, can be remunerative only if we reduce the cost of cultivation, which is difficult due to domestic conditions and increasing production also becomes a problem sometimes, like for instance, the problem of the root wilt disease and due to old senile unproductive and diseased affected plants. The only other alternative to enhance returns from coconuts is to go for value addition, for which again investment is required in terms of incentives and infrastructure facilities (*Personal Interview, April, 2004*)

Overall, the shift to cash crops and the decrease in the area of rice fields has resulted in major environmental problems, which in turn have also caused crop failure:

“We had lot of rice lands, which we have failed to view as a reservoir of water. The topography of Kerala is very distinct, with midland, highland and lowland, one with limited land, undulating topography and lots of diversity of cropping pattern, soil types and farming techniques. We have failed to maintain the rice land required both for agro-edaphic and socio-economic reasons. As a result, we have floods when there is more rain and if there is no rain, we have drought, which was not the case in Kerala in the recent past” (*Shekhar, Personal Interview, April 2004*).

5.1.2 Removal of Quantitative Restrictions

This subsection examines market access, the first tenet of AOA, which is aimed at eliminating all quantitative restrictions on trade in agricultural commodities and replacing them with tariffs (Joseph and Joseph, 2005). It contemplated the removal of all import restrictions over a period of ten years (1995-2004), with 714 items freed of

import restrictions, of which 229 are agricultural commodities (GOK, 2001; Mahadevan, 2003). These are particularly significant as earlier trading was mostly restricted between the states of India and also outside the country. Only plantation crops and a few commercial crops had no restrictions in the past. This lifting of import restrictions resulted in an uncontrolled flow of commodities into local Indian markets. The agricultural imports thus doubled between 1990 and 2001 (GOI, 2001). For example, Sharma (2005) notes that cheaper imports of edible oil, sugar, skimmed milk powder, tea and coconut have flooded the Indian market. Imports of edible oils exceeded 4 million tonnes in 2001-2002, severely eroding India's self-sufficiency from 97 per cent in 1993 to only 55 per cent in 2001 (Muller and Patel, 2004). This price crash of oil was so serious that it resulted in even farmers of the Andhra Pradesh in South India committing suicide during 1990. While imports of pulses, the important staple food of India, grown mostly by small farmers, also increased drastically and both edible oil and pulse imports together make up more than two thirds of total imports (Muller and Patel, 2004).

Similarly, cereal prices also crashed during the 1990s, while the increasing import of food grains has had serious consequences for the income and employment of producers and workers due to the existing favourable price-ratios vanishing (Gulati and Mullen, 2003; Vyas and Reddy, 2002). Gulati (2002) argues that this price decline is more alarming when other exporting countries are subsidizing exports or compensating farmers for the falling global prices. Further, according to Mahadevan (2003), India is also paying more for increasing imports of primary and processed items rather than importing lower value-added products and processing them locally and meeting the global standards. In total, declining global prices and increasing imports have caused a fall in prices in the domestic market, which has caused hardship for many Indian farmers, who are poor and have few resources to protect themselves.

This removal of quantitative restriction had serious consequences for Kerala state due to its major share of export-oriented crops. In particular, the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Treaty, and the Regional Trade Agreements relating to coconut, pepper, tea and edible oil, have had serious repercussions for Kerala's agriculture, as policy planner Ravi claims (*Personal Interview, March, 2006*). Madhavan, a researcher at CDS, also expressed concern about the consequences of the markets

being open to unrestrained exploitation by foreign exporters (*Personal Interview, April 2004*). For instance, the major farm commodities of Kerala are facing intense competition, for example rubber from Malaysia, coconut from Sri Lanka and the Philippines and cardamom from Guatemala, which have caused the prices of export commodities to fall below the cost of production (GOK, 2001).

In sum, flooded with cheap and subsidised imports, many different cash crops have been negatively affected including: palm oil, rubber, coffee and spices in Kerala (Sharma, 2005). The sharp decline in the prices of coconut have also resulted in a loss of Rs. 1, 291 crore (\$ 32 crore) to the state (Hindu, 2004; Shiva, Bhar & Jafri, 2002). Coconut oil prices were also badly hit due to a reduction of import tariffs on edible oil and the free import of soybean and palm oil and the total loss incurred amounting to Rs.17, 800 crore (\$ 440) in 2000 (Shiva, Bhar and Jafri, 2002). Indeed, this is a serious blow to Kerala, with coconut occupying 41 percent of the net-cropped area and being a major source of livelihood for 3.5 million people and accounting for 40 per cent of the farm income of the state (GOK, 2007; Shiva et al 2002).

The unit value of coffee, with 80 percent of the domestic production exported, also declined drastically (GOK, 2003). The tea industry in Kerala is also in crisis. Sharma (2005:p5) adds:

“Over a million people depend on tea plantation for their living, out of 32 tea factory functioning in the popular tea growing region Peermade Taluk, 18 have pulled down the shutters, leaving some 30, 000 people jobless in high ranges alone”.

Even spices have not been spared, with pepper prices falling steeply from Rs.200 (\$5) to Rs.100 (\$2.5) per kg each consecutive year between 1999 and 2001 (Sharma, 2005). As Shekhar (*Personal Interview, April 2004*) endorses:

“It is actually a crisis permeating through the country and state where small and marginal farmers and landless agricultural labourers are finding agriculture a non -remunerative enterprise because whatever they produce here involves more costs than they are able to get in world market in sell away prices, because of the trade liberalization and competition from the international market”.

Similarly, large-scale import of rubber caused decline of domestic rubber prices. However, the prices of rubber has increased in recent years due to increased demands of automobile industries, which has resulted in the increasing shift towards rubber cultivations by farm owners now in Kerala. On the whole, the price fluctuation of plantation crops coffee, tea, cardamom etc has devastated nearly 1.4 million families in Kerala, who are dependent on the plantation sector (GOK, 2007; Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004). The total agricultural exports for Kerala have fallen from 37 percent in 1990-91 to 24 percent in 1996-97 and the state incurring a loss of about US\$800 million a year, which has risen to US\$1300 million in the year 2001 (GOK, 2001). See Table 5.1 for the declining prices of commodities – cardamom, pepper and tea between 2000 and 2007. This decline in agricultural prices in Kerala is of a severe magnitude and has affected all commodities from domestic to industrial raw materials to export commodities (GOK, 2001; 2007). However, the price decline of the commodities of the state prior to economic liberalization did not affect all commodities at the same time, which had helped in balancing losses and profits. Dozens of farmers in Kerala have committed suicide due to debts, a result of the combination of falling prices and drought and diseases and this sad situation was reported from within six of the 14 districts of the state (Verma, 2004; Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004).

Table 5.1 Declining prices of commodities between 2000 and 2007

Commodity (Per Kg)	1999- 00	2000- 01	2001-02	2002-03	2003- 04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Cardamom	Rs.400	Rs.570	Rs.622	Rs.561	Rs.361	Rs.330	Rs.217	Rs.312
Pepper	Rs.205	Rs.124	Rs.67	Rs.76	Rs.68	Rs.60	Rs.59	Rs.107
Tea	Rs.62	Rs.51	Rs.52	Rs.47	Rs.45	Rs. 52	Rs.54	Rs.54

(Source: Government of Kerala, Economic Review, 2007, Hindu and Malayalam Manorama, 2008)

5.1.3 Reduction of Subsidies

The second tenet of AOA, domestic support relates to Aggregate Measure of Support (AMS) and reduction in domestic support given by the government to the agriculture sector (Joseph and Joseph, 2005, Sharma, 2005). Input subsidies for irrigation, power and fertilizers were withdrawn from increasing public investment in infrastructure, in research and extension (Rao and Dutt, 2001). However, subsidies that were available earlier to Indian farmers were already below the permissible limit (GOK, 2001). According to Sharma (2005:p4), India provides only one billion dollar worth of indirect subsidies to 550 million farmers. Shekhar (*Personal Interview, April, 2004*) thus describes the subsidies as 'pitable' and that "they cannot be called a subsidy at all", compared to the subsidies of farmers in other Third World countries. The total amount of subsidy has continued to rise during 2000-01, 2001-02 and 2002-03, but state-wise allocations of subsidies do not seem to be related to the poverty levels (GOI, 2008). Further, Developed Countries, instead of reducing subsidies have in reality increased them. This clever manipulation of the subsidy situation has resulted in the polarization of trade in favour of the Developed Countries and has been particularly disadvantageous for a Third World Country like India (Sharma, 2005; GOK, 2001).

The reduction of agricultural subsidies followed credit cuts by the central government and cooperative banks extended to farmers. This left farmers without access to affordable loans due to the declining government sector investment in agriculture by 29 percent, with private banks directing only 11 percent of the total credit to agriculture, which is well below the government requirement of 18 percent (Muller and Patel, 2004). This situation has forced farmers to turn to private moneylenders charging significantly higher interest rates for loans (Shiva, 2000; Muller & Patel, 2004). By and large, the growing indebtedness and helplessness to pay back loans has driven more and more farmers in various Indian states to commit suicide (Sharma, 2003). This crisis of credit cuts is most devastatingly manifested in Kerala, with farmers in the highland district of Wayanad and the midland region of Palakkad committing suicide in recent years for not being able to pay back loans due to problems of severe drought and crop failure.

This situation is also observed by Madhavan (*Personal Interview, April 2004*):

“The Banks in Kerala are flooded with deposits of the Non-Resident Indian and the State Government also gives credit through the cooperative banks. But, over the period of time, interest rates have gone up and the terms and conditions are difficult. Now farmers depend upon the moneylenders, who have a very cruel way of taking money back”.

Indeed, the withdrawal of subsidies and credit cuts for the agricultural sector by the national government has further impoverished the farming communities of Kerala.

5.1.4 Reduction of Export Subsidies

The third tenet of AOA, export competition of reducing export subsidies has also not proved to be advantageous. It was argued that reduction in AMS by Developed Countries would increase India's competitiveness in the agriculture sector (Joseph and Joseph, 2005:p420). But, India's share of exports in the global market is marginal (2 to 3 percent), which has fallen from 20 per cent in 1996-1997 to 14 per cent in 2001-2002 and India has seen a massive increase in the imports (Mahadevan, 2003; Shiva, 2002; Sharma, 2005). Exports to Southeast Asian countries like Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia have declined from 6 percent to 5 percent, which though small, has had serious consequences due to the balance of payments crisis of the Indian government (Vyas and Reddy, 2002). The export competitiveness of India was hit badly due to the composition of commodities not changing and the slow progress in lessening import duties, which has resulted in higher costs of production and modest export performance (Mehta, 1997; 2000a; Ahluwalia, 2002). Further, many Developed Countries continue to extensively use export subsidies to promote their exports.

Shiva (2002) points out how each period of large exports has resulted in acute food shortages, with India importing often at higher prices. Like the export of 1.8 million tonnes of wheat in 1996-97 resulted in the subsequent import of 1.5 million tonnes of wheat during 1997-98. Paradoxically, the period of increasing exports (2000-03) also caused a tremendous growth in food stocks of 63 million tonnes in India (GOI, 2003b).

Swaminathan (2001:p948) points out the need to arrest this trend immediately:

“Indian farm families are in deep economic and psychological distress. This trend, if not arrested immediately, will lead to social chaos, since agriculture is not just a food producing machine, but is the backbone of the livelihood security system for nearly 700 million children, women and men in the country”.

The export scenario of Kerala is also similar to the national situation, with none of the traditional agricultural commodities enjoying comfortable advantage over other countries due to the high production costs (GOK, 2001). It is worth noting here that exporters in Kerala do not receive any direct subsidies, except income tax exemption, which again is negligible, while the non-product-specific subsidies of the state are still lower than the national average, which has further worsened the export situation (Mattoo & Subramanian, 2003; GOK, 2001). In addition, the state does not have a cost advantage of products for maintaining its competitiveness with the emerging competitors due to high wages of the labourers (GOK, 2001). This dilemma of Kerala's commodities experiencing severe competition was also indicated by most of the researchers interviewed.

5.1.5 Restructuring of Public Distribution System (PDS)

Finally, export subsidies of AOA have also circumscribed the capacity of the government to intervene in the market to ensure needs of the food security (Sharma, 2005:p5). The Public Distribution System (PDS) is a public safety net programme, which buys agricultural products from farmers to protect them against large losses during periods of excess, and also sells them to consumers to protect them against high prices in India (Rao and Dutt, 2001). But, the restructuring of PDS has resulted in only a fraction of the population being eligible for receiving subsidised food and food grain prices have also increased considerably (Muller and Patel, 2004). It has not only affected the poor, but both poor and non-poor due to the overall increase in food grain prices and other essential commodities (Kannan, 2000). Muller and Patel (2004) also note how, on the one hand, a decline in the PDS of more than 20 percent in less than four years has excluded millions of the poor, while on the other hand, millions of tonnes of rotten grain were thrown into the sea.

This was occurring while starvation deaths were being reported for the first time since the 1960s in several states in India (Muller and Patel, 2004). This shift from self-sufficiency to food dependency in India has caused concern in the wake of under-nutrition and the historical marginal food self-sufficiency in the country (Sharma, 2000). As noted by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2001), over 225 million Indians remain chronically undernourished, which represents an alarming increase of 5 percent since 1991 (Muller and Patel, 2004; FAO, 2001). Indeed, according to Shiva (2004), the government dismantling of the PDS has taken affordable food out of the reach of millions, with the co-existence of burgeoning food stocks amidst mass starvation.

The restriction of the PDS has also had serious consequences for the state of Kerala. The efficient PDS in Kerala, with an extensive network of ration shops and school lunches, had benefited 37 percent of the population during 1986-87 for buying the staple food rice and had also worked as a price check in the open market (Thankappan, 2001; Nair, 2000). However, PDS coverage has been restricted now to the 25 percent of the population below the poverty line and clearly the poverty line is an inappropriate measure. As Srinivasan and Sukumar (2004) notes majority of people work in the informal sector with fluctuating incomes and those on the margins could be pushed below the poverty line at any time. Indeed, as the Economic Review report of Government of Kerala (GOK) (2007:p7) puts it “PDS itself is in shambles being influenced by the neo-liberal apotheosis of the free market”. This could pose problems for Kerala to sustain model of development. As Kannan (2000:p1) has rightly argued:

“At a time when the food security system in Kerala is poised for quantitative as well as qualitative improvements, the changes in national policy that are patently anti-poor have dealt it a devastating blow”.

5.2 Agricultural Transformation in Local Context

Having examined national policies and its implications for agriculture, this section further endeavour to explore the consequences of the local state government policies for agricultural transformation in Kerala. This is essential as David and Driel (2001) has shown that the local remains crucial in the analysis of global process.

Debates concerning the impact of Kerala state government policies on agricultural transformation have mostly focussed on the re-distribution and welfarist policies of the Communist Party, which were also sustained by other governments. These still have implications for agricultural transformation in the post-reform period of the 1990s, though they were initiated since the formation of the state in 1956. Foremost among these policies is the land reform, which eliminated landlordism and conferred tenants ownership. The reform excluded plantation crops like tea, coffee and rubber from the land ceiling, while food crops, such as rice had a ceiling limit of two hectares, in addition to the absence of subsidies for rice cultivation (Sebastian, 2002). Interviewees criticised land reform for being biased against food crops. For instance, Madhavan, Researcher of CDS points out that the abolition of tenancy invariably targeted rice farming because of the predominance of tenancy in the rice crop (*Personal Interview, April 2004*). This contention is also supported by Kannan (2004) who observed that there was no need to grant exemption from ceiling limits for growing cash and plantation crops like cashew, vanilla and medicinal plants since these grow equally well even in small holdings. Further, Mohan (1991) has argued while landlords were well compensated and full ownership rights were granted to the tenants, a vast number of sub-tenants and landless agricultural workers received absolutely nothing.

This size restriction on rice farms clearly has implications, with small and fragmented holdings limiting production potential and making rice economically non-viable. This fragmentation is clearly evident since marginal holdings below one hectare represent 48 percent of all holdings in Kerala, compared to only 15 percent in India as a whole, and also medium-sized (4 to 10 hectares) farms account for only 6 percent of holdings in the state, compared to the Indian average of 27 per cent (Lok Sabha, 2002). Fragmented and small-sized rice fields thus resulted in rice farming being less profitable, in addition to limiting the adoption of mechanization for farming. Thus any significant Improvement to food production remains bleak particularly in Kerala since new technological advancement has not occurred in agriculture (GOK, 2007). This resulted in big landowners mostly shifting to cash/plantation crops, particularly rubber and coconut, which has caused the increased dependency in Kerala on external markets benefiting global capitalism rather than benefiting the actual farmers and cultivators of the state (Mohan, 1991; Sebastian, 2002). Most of the large plantations

of Kerala are dominated by multinationals, for instance the Harrison Malayalam Ltd. and Tata Tea Limited hold over 50, 000 hectares, which is twice the land area redistributed under the ceilings legislation and Tata Tea's integrated plantation block of 25, 000 hectares is the single largest tea holding in the world (Mohan, 1992: p2)

In addition, specialists interviewed supported the argument that unequal land distribution has resulted in the concentration of land in the hands of those who had other sources of income and less interest in farming. Tharamangalam (1998) has revealed that many agricultural families had considerable remittances from abroad or employment in the extremely bloated service sector. As a result, agricultural land is often left fallow and Sebastian (2002) notes that the agricultural land is becoming an object of speculation by the real estate business, which is signalling a most dangerous trend. This trend has continued as Lukose (2005:p924) describes "land prices have shot up due to intense land speculation by migrants eager to build their "Gulf houses".

Another factor triggering agricultural transformation is related to higher wages and labour shortages in Kerala. Mechanization has been attempted in the wake of these problems, though the use of technology is minimal due to fragmented holdings and uneven topography and also the opposition of labour union. These contributed to the shift to export crops with less labour requirements although the preference for cash crops is ever changing, depending upon profitability, as noted by Bhaskaran of Kerala State Planning Board (*Personal Interview, April, 2004*):

"The shift was from paddy to rubber and coconut some years ago. But, when coconut prices dropped, they shifted to cocoa cultivation. And now they have shifted to vanilla cultivation, which also might not be profitable in the future, and they might shift to some other crop".

On the whole, these debates clearly indicate that the integration of Kerala agriculture into the global system has also resulted from state government policies, though it has further intensified during the post-reform period. Further, specialist interviewees criticized not just the Communist government state policies, but also successive Kerala governments for formulating policies only during crisis periods. They vehemently criticized the recent priorities of the state government, as dictated by the World Bank and IMF. For instance, the Tenth Five Year Plan, "The National

Agricultural Policy 2000' of the central government for Kerala state is criticised for being formulated for fulfilling the objectives of the WTO rather than for solving the problems of the state. Madhavan, Researcher of CDS (*Personal Interview, April 2004*) stressed most policies of the Tenth Five Year Plan were focussed on infrastructure development and not directly on agricultural development. According to many of the specialist interviewees, it is imperative therefore to formulate policies based on the realities of agriculture and not simply aiming at a policy designed in and for the advancement of developed nations. They cite the government's recent failure to sustain rice fields or to provide subsidies for farming or incentives for animal husbandry, which provide a major source of employment in rural areas. Attempts to improve land quality through integrated watershed management also did not take off due to issues of inter-departmental coordination and lack of farmer demand, as noted by Ravi, policy planner (*Personal Interview, March 2006*). Moreover, the inability of the Kerala government to resolve some of its agricultural problems is also partly due to the inconsistency of the plans and approaches of consecutive governments. For instance, changing governments has thwarted successful state government programmes such as the decentralization of the Communist government to infuse new dynamism into agriculture. The decentralisation programme, though not been universally effective has thrown up successful local models has been noted by Ravi, policy planner of Government of Kerala:

“With decentralization the government has transferred agriculture staff to the *panchayat raj* institutions and mandated setting apart 30 percent of the resources for the productive sector (predominantly agriculture and allied activities” (*Personal Interview, March 2006*).

Shekhar of Kerala Agriculture University (*Personal Interview, March 2004*) explained that changes to the state government were also often exacerbated by changes to the national government:

“One government comes and looks at the agricultural development plan in particular way and implements a programme, with the next government it is totally changed. All this is also happening at the central government level and they have to adjust with the changes at the international level, particularly having signed the WTO agreement of agriculture”.

Yet some successes have been noted, for example, Ravi did claim that state policies have tried to protect paddy fields by diversification, inter-cropping and value addition.

So despite not yielding the intended results, two successes of recent state policy for agriculture can still be noted according to Ravi:

“The first is the participatory, farmer-centred Horticulture Development Project implemented in the 1990’s with the European Commission support which really helped farmers. The second is the recent initiative of the State Poverty Eradication Mission (*Kudumbashree*) to harness the potential of lease land farming using women self-help groups, which has yielded promising results. Already 50,000 acres are under cultivation by the women groups through informal leases” (*Personal Interview, March 2006*).

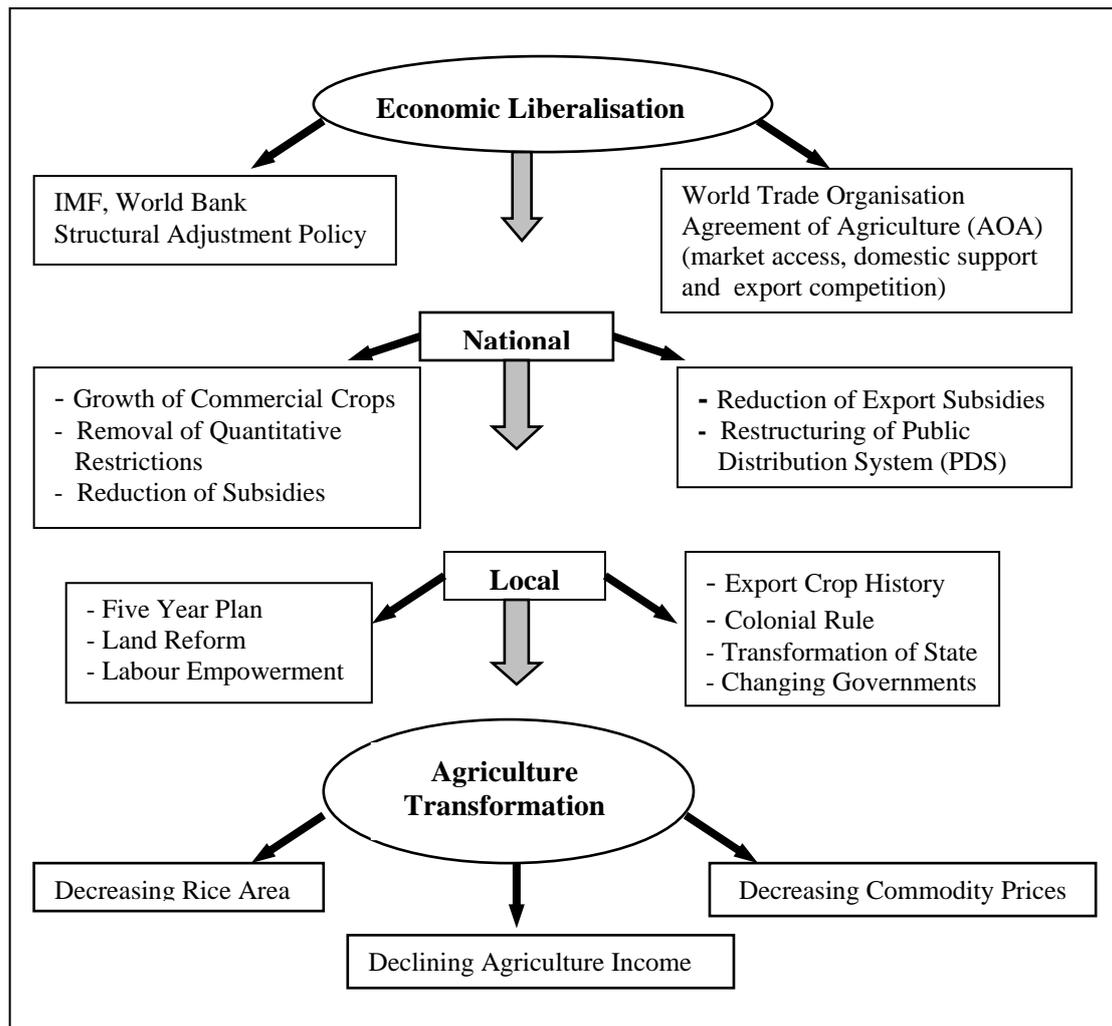
The higher procurement price announced by the government in 2007-08 has also helped slight increase in rice production, which might help in reviving of food grain production to some extent, but a jump in procurement prices at this juncture could only worsen inflation in the coming period (GOK, 2007).

However, Kannan (2003:p4) reminds us that it must be recognised that the state government’s strategic choices were limited and largely dictated by national and international forces:

“International factors exert a much more crucial influence on the Kerala economy than is realised because Kerala’s integration with the outside world is much deeper than for India as a whole”.

Thus, it can be concluded that within the constraints of macroeconomic policies of central government and limited resources of the Kerala state government, any large-scale intervention by the state government is undoubtedly difficult (Draft Approach Paper for Kerala’s Plan, Kerala state Planning Board, GOK, 2006b). Nevertheless, interviewees like Madhavan of Centre for Development Studies, Kerala (*Personal Interview, April, 2004*) stressed that it is the responsibility of the state government to take the initiative of presenting the severity of the problems to the central government and to get assistance from central government in time when required. In general, the specialist interviewees emphasised and called for immediate action to solve the crisis of the agricultural sector of Kerala (see Figure 5.2 for the agricultural transformation of Kerala due to national and local policies).

Figure 5.2 Consequences of national and local policies for agriculture



5.3 Implications of National and Local Policies for Labour

After examining the national and local policies for agricultural transformation of Kerala, this section finally examines the implication for labourers and women in particular. Examining the national policies indicate the changes to agricultural labourers have been most evident in the plantation sector, as noted by policy planner Ravi (*Personal Interview, March 2006*). Srinivasan and Sukumar (2004) have illustrated that the tea plantation sector employs 84,000 labourers in large and small newer plantations but the recent crisis of the tea industry has resulted in smaller ones being abandoned, while others cut down their workforce or stopped paying wages. Owners cutting back on wage labour and thereby forcing people out of work was also noted in coconut cultivation, which was also hit by price declines in the global

economy, although it has partly recovered, it still has problems of disease reducing the value of the crop, with (Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004). In this context, Srinivasan and Sukumar (2004) argue that the national government requires the state to follow the fiscal disciplines of the SAP and there will be pressure to change labour legislation to enable industries to shut down more easily. This is supported by Ravi (*Personal Interview, March 2006*) who stresses that the welfare provisions of the Plantation Labour Act have started collapsing in the wake of price crashes of coffee and tea. However, cutting down the workforce will increase the workload of remaining workers and also limit their health and education services. This could seriously undermine women since the majority of labourers working in the tea estates and cashew industries of Kerala are women (Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004).

Existing working conditions of plantation factories in Kerala are also poor and below standard, and this impoverishment of women, for instance in cashew factories, has been noted by Geetha (*Personal Interview, April 2004*). Further, women labourers are also paid less than men. Thomas (2003) supports this view, arguing that women who form the major part of the labour force in the cashew processing industry are from the oppressed and most highly exploited of Kerala's society. SAPs have created job insecurity and loss of livelihoods and the impact is mostly visible among small marginalized groups like tribal communities, with an increased incidence of starvation and death being reported among them (Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004; Raman, 2002).

The restricting of the PDS by the national government is also bound to affect women labourers and their households in Kerala. This is because the ration shops, school lunches and agricultural labour pension mainly benefited female-supported (Franke and Chasin, 2000). In general, the crisis of agricultural transformation due to economic liberalisation has led to the greater vulnerability of women due to declining employment opportunities in farming:

“Structural Adjustment Packages and other neo-liberal policies have affected the agricultural sector in general through reduction in farm subsidies, increase in price of farm input such as fertilizers, fluctuation in prices of farm outputs such as tea, pepper, coconut and rubber, all of which have affected incomes and employment” (*Usha, Personal Interview, March 2006*).

Indeed, according to Shekhar, “globalisation of the economy is nothing but the feminisation of poverty; we had poverty earlier, but it was not gender specific, now it is more gender specific” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

In the rest of this section, the impact of agricultural transformation resulting from state government policies on labourers, and particularly on female workers, is examined, as they have a crucial role in agriculture compared to male labourers in Kerala. Overall, these impacts are paradoxical, with decreasing work for labourers and a shortage of labourers for farming coexisting. On the one hand, a move from permanent to casual labour has decreased work and increased job insecurity for labourers. Employment opportunities were also lost due to the union opposing mechanization with the fear of labourers being displaced. For instance, the coir production industry, which employs half a million workers in Kerala, is in crisis due to the halting of mechanization and the reduction of support price controls on the supply of husk, which has resulted in the state not only losing employment, but also the world market share of coir (Heller, 1995; Heller, 1999). So whilst employment in agriculture is declining, this is paralleled by out-migration from farm work, which has caused problems of labour shortages on farms. The labour shortages have emerged due to the seasonal peaking of labour requirements during the harvesting season and to a lesser degree during the sowing season (Mahesh, 2002). This labour shortage is also particularly acute in tasks, like coconut harvesting and rubber tapping, which requires specialized skills of male labourers. Thus the mobility out of agriculture due to declining work is more prominent in the case of men than women, as Geetha, Researcher of CDS describes it:

“In fact, if we look at the census data, over a period of time, there is much less migration of women out of agriculture than men. Also it is much slower for women agricultural labourers than for the cultivators. Women seem to be taking on men’s space and work. So agriculture is still an important sector employing women” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

Strong preferences for jobs exist even among the uneducated on the basis of social status and class consciousness (Devi, 2002). Madhavan also stressed (*Personal Interview, April, 2005*) that Kerala has advanced social development compared to other states and it is unrealistic to expect a situation, as previously, when people would be willing to do the manual and messy jobs. According to Kodoth and Eapen (2005) and Kumar (1992), due to their high literacy, agricultural labourers

increasingly no longer wish to do agricultural work. Specialist interviewees also noted the low prestige and status of farm work in the contemporary period compared to other professions, due to socio-economic values becoming consumer-oriented and not pro-agriculture. Geetha stressed that, “earlier generations would have worked in agriculture and still continue to work, but the new educated generation do not want to work in the fields because of the status problem” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*). This changing job preference has resulted in the younger generation taking up permanent jobs than non formal agriculture work. Shekhar also indicates the negative status of agricultural work:

“The average age of agricultural labour in Kerala is 45 years, which means young people are not taking up agriculture either as farmers or farm labour and as a result there are 4 million unemployed people in the live registers of the employment exchange today” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

Turning now to women labourers in particular Gulati (1983) points out that gender wage discrimination exists in Kerala and the overwhelming absorption of women into casual and seasonal work has resulted in their work being under-valued. The wage discrimination continues despite the Equal Remuneration Act of 1936 (GOK, 2007). It indicates the failure of the state government to address the issue of unequal wages of labourers, despite the rhetoric of empowering labour. So while agriculture still remains important to women, the rapid decline in area under rice cultivation and other rural industries have also generally reduced women’s work participation, according to Usha a researcher at UK University:

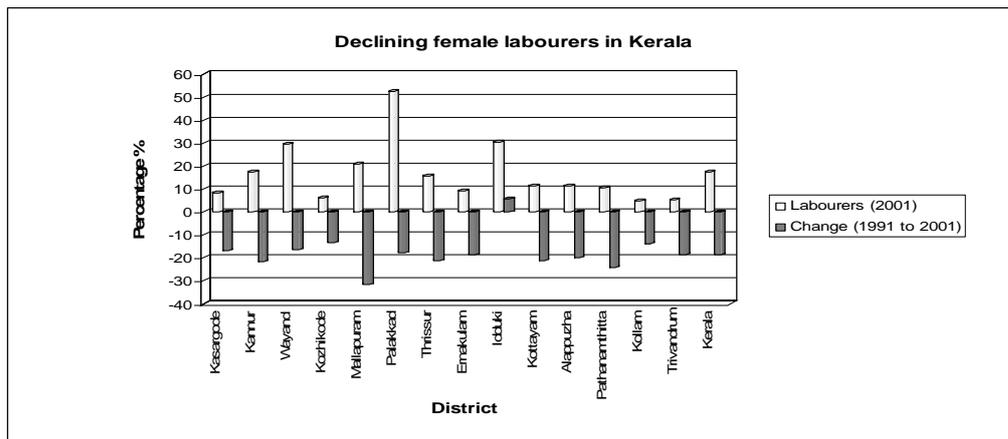
“The continuous decline in food crops and traditional industries such as cashew and coir, where women have had higher work opportunities has affected income and employment for women. On the other hand, the increase in cash crops such as rubber, coconut etc has less demand for female labour as it employs male skilled labour” (*Personal Interview, March 2006*).

Usha (*Personal Interview, March, 2006*) traces this to the inability of state government policy and programmes to take appropriate measures to protect women labourers. This serious implication of declining areas of rice production on women is summarised by Shekhar of Kerala Agriculture University:

“The major causalities of decline in rice land in Kerala have been women because rice is one crop providing a lot of employment to women. If rice land is wiped away from the state, it is nothing but wiping away of women agriculture labour in Kerala” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

However, while women who continue to work on the farms experience declining opportunities, there is a preference among young women of low caste labour caste for white-collar salaried jobs like women of higher castes. As Tharamangalam (1999) observes, labour shortages and high unemployment and underemployment coexist not only due to the perception of farm work not being economically viable, but also due to these low status jobs being no longer culturally desirable. This has resulted in the very serious decline of women labourers in Kerala, which is different from the usual feminisation of labour experience of most Third World countries. Overall, differences between the male and female workforce participation rate has intensified between 1991-2001 and only 4 per cent of cultivators and 18 per cent of labourers in Kerala are women (Census of India, relevant volumes) and there is a decline of 2 per cent and 19 percent for cultivators and agricultural labour respectively between 1991 and 2001 (Mazumdar and Guruswamy, 2006). According to Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006), the marginalization of women remains the same in all the districts of Kerala, but the situation is bleaker in the Southwest and Northern parts of the state, as apparent from the Figure 5.1. Studies reveal the intersection of class and caste in influencing women's work in general. A predominance of women from the backward and Scheduled Castes is found in the most poorly paid agricultural labour work (Kodoth and Eapen, 2005; Den, 1995; Thresia, 2004). There has also been a shift among female labourers from agricultural to non-agricultural work, with a steep rise being noted in the case of construction work (Mahesh, 2002). The shortage of female labourers for farming in Kerala is often met by hiring workers from neighbouring states like Tamil Nadu. Indeed, according to Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006; p17), "agriculture is no longer the most significant channel of female employment in Kerala, at least from the employment point of view". The result is that while farm owners experience shortage of labourers, large-scale unemployment and underemployment concurrently exist in rural areas (Mahesh, 2002).

Figure 5.1 Female workforce participation in Kerala (1991-2001) (%)



(Source: Census of India, 1991 to 2001, Cited in Mazumdar and Guruswamy, 2006)

Shekhar sums up the paradoxical implications of agricultural transformation for labourers, in terms of their inclusion and exclusion:

“We have a paradoxical situation of farmers complaining that they don’t get agriculture labour and agriculture labour telling that they don’t get work and people outside the agricultural sector harping that wages are very high for labour in Kerala” (*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

Overall, the national and local policies together have transformed agriculture of Kerala and had paradoxical impact on the labourers and women in particular.

5.4 Summary

This chapter has revealed how national policies of economic liberalisation and local state policies have, together and individually, transformed agriculture in Kerala. The national policy of economic liberalization of SAP and WTO Agreement of Agriculture (AOA) has particularly affected Kerala due to its major share of export crops and the consequent dependency on the global market. First, commercialisation has mostly benefited large producers and multinationals, while the majority of small and medium farmers face constraints of inputs, subsidy and credit. Secondly, elimination of quantitative restrictions has distressed small producers due to increasing cheap imports declining prices in local markets. Thirdly, the export potential of Kerala remains largely unexploited. A fourth consequence is the reduction in agricultural subsidies and credit cuts for rice cultivation, which has

devastated farm owners. Finally the dismantling of the efficient PDS is a serious blow in the wake of declining food crops and food deficiency in the state. In sum, the price decline of agricultural commodities, coupled with the declining exports has only worsened Kerala's agricultural situation. Thus according to Sharma (2002:p7), the agrarian economy of Kerala is thrown 'out of gear' and the crisis of the plantation sector in an era of globalisation symbolises the tragedy of unjust trade. Indeed, the economic-driven adjustments of liberalisation for closer integration into the world economy have been disappointing for Indian and Kerala agriculture in particular.

Nevertheless, this chapter argues that national policy is not the only factor causing the crisis of agriculture in Kerala. Local state government policies of re-distribution such as land reforms and labour empowerment have also prompted a transformation in agriculture, though initiated prior to post-reform period. In addition, the state government's efforts to sustain policies have often been thwarted by changing and short-lived state governments and their choices have also been limited and influenced by national government policies. This crisis of agriculture sector of Kerala of diminishing area and productivity of rice and declining prices of exportable cash crops has resulted in farmers committing suicide. The implications of the current constraints and challenges of agriculture could be devastating for Kerala with the high level of dependency of the state economy on agriculture (GOK, 2001).

The impacts of this agricultural transformation of national and local policies on labourers are paradoxical, with unemployment and labour shortages co-existing. These problems have caused out-migration from farm work, though out-migration has also been exacerbated by higher education and low status and lack of preference for farm work. However, the crisis of agricultural transformation has particularly affected women and more research is needed to unravel such contradictory impacts of agricultural transformation on female labourers in Kerala. Taking up this theme of the impact of agricultural transformation on female labourers, the following chapter examines the spatial variations of women's experiences in different geographical locations in Kerala.

CHAPTER SIX

Space Matters: Agricultural Transformation in Different Geographical Locations and on Different Women

Drawing on the earlier chapter, which highlighted the interconnectedness of national and local policies and their implications for women labourers, this chapter will unravel the spatial variations in agricultural transformation within different geographical locations of the state of Kerala. The research goes towards addressing the research gap of the invisibility of women's work in agriculture and the spatial variations of the gender implications of agricultural transformation in Kerala. Documenting women's work is essential for recognising their valuable contribution to agriculture and examining the spatial variations will contribute to feminist debates about the intimate relationship between spatiality and gender. Unravelling the diverse experiences of women is vital for a poststructural feminist approach exploring the differences between women in terms of caste and ethnicity. Overall the agricultural transformation of shifting crop production and declining area of rice fields varied across the geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland and so did the gender differential impact of these changes on agricultural labourers. Women have, however, mostly borne the brunt of agricultural transformation, though the impacts have varied among women of different caste, community and ethnic group, with the marginalised low caste women being particularly adversely affected in all locations.

The chapter is based on both questionnaire surveys with farm owners and semi-structured interviews with women labourers undertaken between October 2000 and March 2001. The first section (6.1) examines labour scenario on farms focusing particularly on three geographical locations in terms of labour recruitment, gender roles and wages of labourers. The following section (6.2) delves deeper, in exposing how national policies of economic liberalisation and local state policies have impacted differently and resulted in different forms of agricultural transformation in different locations. The next section (6.3) then turns explicitly to examining these spatial variations of the impacts of agricultural transformation on different women's farm

roles in the different geographical locations. These impacts are examined in the context of increasing work casualization, shifting cropping patterns, declining area under rice cultivation and out-migration of women from farm work (6.4). The last section (6.5) summarises the spatial variations in the impact of agricultural transformation on different women in the different locations of highland, midland and lowland in Kerala.

6.1 Labour Scenario on Farms

This section attempts to sketch the labour scenario on the three location villages selected, which represented the true diversity of cropping patterns and geography of the state. The agricultural settings of these three locations were detailed earlier in Chapter 3, Sub-section (3.1.1). The labour scenario is examined by inspecting labour recruitment, gender role and wages of labourers on the farms. This focus on gender, by including both men and women, sets the scene for further examining the impact of agricultural transformation particularly on women in the following section 6.3.

6.1.1 Labour Recruitment

Examining labour recruitment on farms revealed that it had changed over the years from permanent to temporary category in all locations (see Table 6.1). Under the early feudalistic system in India, most agricultural labourers were bonded labour attached to the landlords. But the transformation during the colonial period and the labour empowerment policies after independence in Kerala altered labour recruitment from being permanent or bonded to becoming more temporary and casual. This casualization of labour recruitment practices had also become more evident with the introduction of economic liberalisation policies, although the extent of casualization varied across the locations. For example, in the highland AML, some large farms hired women workers on a contractual basis to guarantee assured numbers of labourers during the peak season while there was no restriction on hiring casual and seasonal labour from other states and districts here.

Table 6.1 Labour recruitment on farms in different locations

Location	Labour Recruitment
AML, highland	Casual, Seasonal and Contractual
TTM, midland	Casual, Seasonal and Permanent
KMK, lowland	Casual and Seasonal

In the midland TTM, in contrast, permanent labourers still existed on some farms, though were increasingly replaced with casual labour by paying compensation, between 5,000 (\$125) to 10,000 rupees (\$ 250). There was a restriction in this region on the hiring of labourers from neighbouring states and districts. While in the lowland KMK, a different picture again emerged whereby there was no such restriction on hiring labours from outside and all the labourers belonged to the casual and seasonal. The normal working hours of an agricultural labourer was eight hours a day, although it varied according to seasonality and requirement on farms in different geographical locations. The following section examines gender roles on farms.

6.1.2 Gender Roles

The work participation on farms showed a distinct division of labour along gender lines in rice and cash crop cultivation, which are considered in turn below. Firstly, major activities in rice farming normally included land preparation, application of fertilizers, sowing, weeding, transplanting, harvesting and post-harvest activities, as outlined in Table 6.2 below.

Table 6.2 Gender roles in rice cultivation

Activity	Highland	Midland	Lowland
Ploughing & land preparation	m, mh, dp	m, mh	m, mh
Pesticide & fertilizer application	m	m	m
Organic manure application	w	w	w
Sowing	m	m	m
Transplanting	w	w	w
Weeding	w	w	w
Harvesting	w	w, m	w, mh
Post-harvesting	m, w, mh	m, w	m, w, mh

(Note: **m**- men, **w**-women, **mh**-machine, **dp**-draught power)

It is relevant to note that the transformation of agriculture from subsistence to a more capitalistic mode of production has produced differential gender roles for men and women. Earlier subsistence farming had mostly relied on the use of bullock and buffaloes for ploughing and the levelling of land. But with the introduction of mechanization, the hiring of tractors for land preparation became common on all farms, though buffaloes and bullocks were still used in some highland AML farms due to the small farm size and difficult terrain not being feasible for tractor use. Men did the ploughing of fields and land preparation, sowing, application of fertilizer and pesticides, while women applied organic manure like dung and dried leaves, as they had in the past. Women in all areas, as in the traditional farming system, mostly still did transplanting, weeding and harvesting manually. However, in the midland TTM both men and women occasionally did harvesting jointly and in the lowland KMK, harvesting was both mechanized and also done by women using their hands. Threshing of paddy was still done by women, carried out by beating the grain on a hard surface in midland TTM and by using feet in the lowland KMK, though it was mechanized and threshed using tractors in highland AML. While men transported the paddy in all locations after women had harvested it.

The gender division of labour on farms for rice farming revealed that women performed the most skilled and arduous jobs, requiring continuous bending and standing in deep water-logged rice fields, while men mostly used machines and also did some manual jobs. This delegation of the most arduous tasks to women, while men dominating physically demanding work involving machinery has been noted by Muller and Patel (2004).

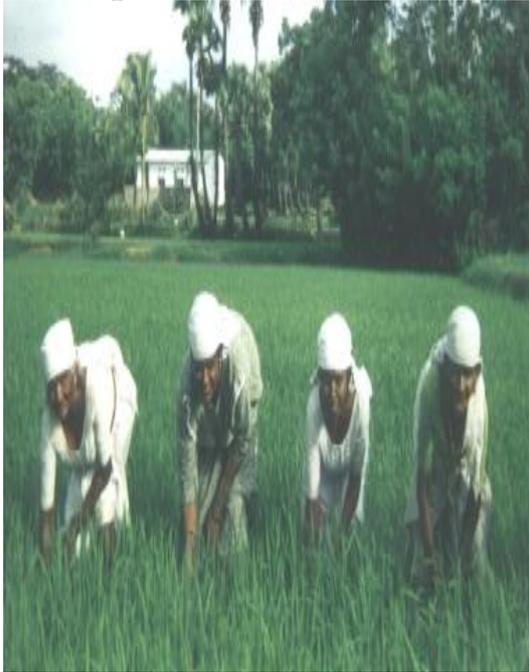
Secondly, gender roles in cash crop cultivation on the farms also varied, with differences in the type of crops cultivated in different geographical locations. For example, in highland farms of AML, with the shift from rice to plantation crops, women had a major role in harvesting coffee and tea leaves, while men's role was limited to digging and land preparation, cutting branches and the application of fertilizer. However, in pepper cultivation, women's role was restricted to cleaning pepper after men had harvested it. By contrast, in the lowland KMK and midland TTM, with the increasing shift from rice to coconut, men had regular work of climbing coconut trees for plucking coconuts and toddy tapping, while women's role

was limited to watering trees and collecting harvested coconut on farms. However, coir making from coconut husk was a major off-season work for women, especially in the lowland KMK village.

In general, as agricultural transformation has progressed, the area under rice/paddy cultivation and productivity has declined, while the area under cash crop production has increased in all locations. These changes have influenced gender roles in agriculture, and such changes show different characteristics in the different geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland. Indeed, as Momsen (2004) rightly observes, gender roles are neither fixed nor consistent, but become more flexible when changes are brought about by economic development. This is certainly the case in Kerala, India.

Figure 6.1 Women's role in rice farming

Weeding in rice field



Harvesting paddy



Transporting paddy



Threshing paddy



(Source: Fieldwork Kerala, India)

Figure 6.2 Women plucking tea leaves



(Source: Fieldwork, Kerala, India)

Figure 6.3 Women harvesting coffee



(Source: Fieldwork, Kerala, India)

6.1.3 Wages of Labour

Agricultural transformation has also altered wages on farms in all the locations. Wages under the feudalistic system were mostly paid in kind, a certain measure of rice for the day-to-day survival of the household. However, this mode of payment has changed from kind to cash, except for harvesting which is still paid in kind. Agricultural wages of men and women labour as recorded by the survey in the different locations are shown in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3 Daily wages of male and female labour in different locations

Location	Wages (in rupees)		Wages (in kind) Para = 12 kg
	Men	Women	
AML, highland	120	70	One for 6 para
TTM, midland	100	50	One for 7 para
KMK, lowland	140	80	One for 6 para

Generally, the wage rates remained constant throughout the year, though they varied according to different activities. The significant point to note is that women were paid lower than men in all locations. In highland AML, men's daily wage rate was 120 rupees (\$3), with higher wages occasionally paid for heavy work. While the daily wage rate of women was 70 rupees (\$ 1.7) with food provided on plantation farms of tea and coffee. In midland TTM, while men were paid 100 rupees (\$2.5) to 120 rupees (\$3), women earned only 50 rupees (\$1) a day. In the lowland KMK, the daily wage rate for men stayed constant at 140 rupees (\$3.5) throughout the year with occasional payments of 175 rupees (\$4) for heavy manual work like digging of wells, while women's wage rate was 80 rupees (\$2) a day, with food provided, during the harvesting period. However, the payment for harvesting was higher than for other activities, with the amount paid in kind directly related to the amount of paddy harvested by women. On average a women labourer got one *para* (12 kg) for every six *para* of paddy harvested in both highland AML and lowland KMK villages, while it was lowest in midland TTM of one *para* (12 kg) for every seven *para* of paddy harvested.

The different agricultural development histories and economic situation of the three regions have resulted in different wages in these diverse geographical locations. The wage rate of labour remained the lowest in the midland region of TTM. This observation has also been pointed out by Kannan (1983) and Thresia (2004), who record low wages continuing in the Palakkad midland region despite state-wide increases in wages. The low wages are due to the region forming part of Madras state during colonial rule and the increasing number of cheap labourers coming from the neighbouring border state of Tamil Nadu willing to work for low wages. Low wages, coupled with limited work in this region, has forced agricultural labourers to migrate to the neighbouring lowland Thrissur district for work (Thresia, 2004).

However, it must be stressed that gender discrimination in wages continues to exist in all the locations, though the Equal Remuneration Act (1936) states that it is illegal to pay lower wage to a female worker doing hard manual labour like agricultural work (GOK, 2007:p494). Mencher (1993) notes this wage discrimination in the minimum wage law passed in the early 1970s and 1980s, with the wage rates varying considerably from village to village within the state of Kerala. Kannan (1997) has also recorded this while observing the daily wage rates of fifteen occupations in Kerala, with all the occupations of women such as agricultural work, cashew processing, tea plantation and construction being paid the lowest.

After examining the labour recruitment, gender differential role and wages of agricultural labour on farms, in the following section an assessment of the impact of agricultural transformation in the post-reform period in the different geographical locations is attempted.

6.2 Agricultural Transformation in Different Locations

The material for this section comes from both the questionnaire survey and discussions with 45 farm owners during fieldwork. These farm owners were not only involved with different cropping patterns of rice and cash crops, but also different sizes of farms. Big plantation farms of tea and coffee in highland AML are managed and owned both by individual owners and by estate agents, whereas rice farms in all locations are predominantly small in size and owned by individuals. The produce from

the farms is sold by farm owners directly from the farms or to the cooperatives or sold to the markets, where trading is carried out mostly by middlemen, who get a larger share of the profit than the actual producers. The central (Indian) government provides subsidies for farm inputs like fertilizer and credit through cooperative banks for farming. While the Kerala state government supplies subsidies for farm machinery, chemical fertilizers, high yielding varieties of seeds, water and electricity for irrigation.

On the whole, it was clear that agriculture was transforming on the farms in all three locations. Consequently farm owners were facing a number of constraints and challenges associated with agricultural transformation as a result of national policies of economic liberalisation interacting with local state government policies, although these played out differently across the different geographical locations of the state. This is partly because the evolution of land tenure in Kerala had different histories resulting to a large extent in differences in pattern of agricultural growth in different regions of the state.

For instance, in the highland AML region, agriculture was facing a serious crisis due to the national policies of economic liberalisation. The area had witnessed an increasing shift from rice to cash crops of tea, coffee and pepper during the post-reform period since 1990 (although it must be noted that the conversion of evergreen forests for cash crop in Wayanad has been on-going since the 19th century). Farm owners reported devastation due to increasing imports of export goods to the local market with the consequent price decline of tea, coffee pepper and cardamom. For instance, the prices of pepper had declined from Rs. 124 to Rs.67, coffee from Rs. 39 to Rs.28 and tea from Rs.52 to Rs. 51 per kg between 2000 and 2001 (see Table 5.1) (GOK, 2001). This had resulted due to removal of import duties and signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Treaty by the Indian national government (Srinivasan and Sukumar, 2004). The associated threat to the agricultural exports of Kerala has also been noted by Parayil and Sreekumar (2003:p12):

“Kerala farmers are being pauperised by the onslaught of market competition for primary commodities. It is estimated that the loss to Kerala farmers in 2000-01 due to fall in the prices of primary goods in the international market amounts to about US \$1.5 billion, and approximately 5.5 million farmers are affected by the decline in prices due to trade liberalisation”.

This crisis of agricultural exports resulted in farm owners in AML increasingly abandoning and shutting down their plantation farms in the region. There have also been reports of increasing number of farm owners committing suicide in Wayanad district recently. At the same time, very limited area of the AML farms were under rice cultivation but these farms were also experiencing problems of low profitability and labour shortages. The shortage of labourers were particularly felt due to increasing preference among labourers to work in tea and coffee plantations, which provided regular employment throughout the year than the seasonal work associated with rice farming.

The situation was quite different in the midland TTM region. In this region traditionally known as the 'rice bowl' of Kerala, rice cultivation had been greatly affected. Historically, this area was generally less favourable for intercropping with cash crops compared to the other locations of highland and lowland and so rice still predominated as the main crop. Farm owners reported serious losses in rice production and considered that they had borne the brunt of the reduction in subsidies and the credit cuts associated with economic liberalisation. However, this non-profitability of rice cultivation was also due to extreme land fragmentation caused by the Communist state government's land reform policies and the high cost of inputs including labour wages, again associated with Kerala state's labour empowerment policies. Hence the selling price of agricultural produce had not increased substantially compared to the increasing prices of inputs. Most farm owners reported problems in repaying their loans, which they had borrowed from private moneylenders charging high interest rates. Shortage of labour was also experienced for rice cultivation due to the restriction of hiring permanent labour from outside the district. Further, these problems were exacerbated by the delay in getting inputs like seeds and irrigation water in time from the local state government. A few farm owners also complained that the funds for paddy cultivation provided by Kerala state government had not reached them. This lack of subsidy and credit, together with high cost of inputs and problems of labour shortages resulted in low profitability which meant that for most farm owners it was no longer worth cultivating rice in the midland TTM region.

These constraints in rice farming had resulted in some farm owners in TTM starting to practice intercropping, whereby they combined rice with cowpeas or sugarcane, though marketing facilities for selling these intercropped products were insufficient and mostly middle men profited rather than the farm owners. For others, mechanization was their only option and this was attempted jointly through group farming. However, uneven topography and small and fragmented farms often limited the use of such technology in rice farming. Consequently, rice fields were often left fallow or it was increasingly being sold for house construction due to the growing demand for land from Gulf migrants.

A different response to economic liberalisation occurred in the lowland KMK region of the state. There had been an increasing conversion and shift from rice to coconut cultivation and pepper, particularly during the post-reform period of 1990. However, owing to economic liberalisation policies the increase in external imports had greatly hit coconut and pepper prices. For instance, in this region import of palm oil was flooding into the local market and it had affected and decreased coconut oil prices. In addition, the coconut root wilt disease of *mandari* had reduced crop value of coconuts and had caused a major set back to coconut and coir production. The average productivity of coconut had become very low and the Kerala government's effort of replanting strategies was limited. Pepper prices had also sharply dropped due to pepper from Vietnam entering local markets through Sri Lanka. As Shiva (2002:p27) aptly argues:

“The market access rules of WTO are not wiping out poverty, they are wiping out the poor. They have not opened up Northern markets to the poor of the South but hijacked domestic markets of the South that served the rural poor for the super profits of agribusiness and commercial trade”.

The rice cultivation farms on *kole* land in KMK also experienced similar constraints to other locations, due to national and local state government policies reducing subsidies and cutting access to loans and increasing the costs of inputs. In addition to the associated non-profitability of rice, this crop also faced damage and losses due to flooding owing to labour shortages on the farms for timely operation of harvesting paddy during the monsoon season. Most families in the lowland village of KMK had family members who had migrated to Gulf countries and the improvement to

economic conditions of their households had resulted in many from the labour class withdrawing from agriculture work. Indeed, such labour shortages were a serious problem and most farm owners of *kole* land had opted to use mechanical harvesters for timely harvesting of paddy.

However, rice cultivation on the *kole* land of KMK used to be profitable and the productivity was highest in the state (*'kole'* in the local language denotes 'bumper yields' or 'high returns' under favourable conditions). The *kole* lands are located on the outskirts of the village and form the rice granary of Thrissur and comprise a unique system of cultivating rice under submerged conditions. These lands with high salinity were traditionally reclaimed from submerged areas by building temporary bunds, and at the end of the monsoon season water was pumped out using water wheels or power-driven pumps and stored in canals and together with rain water used for farming.

In general, the constraints and problems farm owners faced in all three locations indicate the problems of the agricultural sector in Kerala have further deteriorated after the implementation of economic liberalisation policies of the Indian national government. The non-profitability of rice cultivation has further exacerbated the already declining area under rice cultivation (see Appendix - 3 for the estimated cost of rice production). Further, the declining price of export crops and the flooding of cheap import crops due to economic liberalisation now pose new challenges to the agricultural economy in Kerala.

6.3 Spatial Variations in Different Women's Farm Roles

This section moves on to explicitly examine spatial variations in the process of agricultural transformation resulting from national and local policies on women's farm roles in different locations of highland, midland and lowland. Semi-structured interviews, with 180 respondents, including women respondents from a broad range of communities of varying caste and ethnicity, were used to uncover the diverse voices of agricultural women labourers in Kerala. Women were predominately Hindus, although in the highland some women interviewed were Muslim and Christian and Further, most women of Hindu caste were from the Scheduled Caste (SC) and

Scheduled Tribe (ST) category, as these were the groups most usually undertaking agricultural work. High caste Hindu women seldom worked as labourers (as illustrated by Table 3.6 in Chapter - 3). For instance in the highland they belonged to the ST communities of *Kuruma*, *Naiykaya*. In the midland to SC communities of *Kavara*, *Nayadi* and *Cherumar* and in the lowland women represented *Pullaya*, *Vettuva* and *Kanakan* SC communities. Kodoth and Eapen (2005:p3283) indicate this over-representation of women of SC/ST categories among agricultural labourers:

“The low work participation rates of women other than Scheduled castes and Scheduled tribes, in all likelihood constituting the bulk of educated unemployed women in the state, reflects the ‘option’ to seek work on different terms from poor women”.

This focus on different categories of women in different geographical locations is vital for addressing a poststructural feminist approach of examining differences among women. Further, this approach of differentiating among different ethnic groups is important, for Jackson and Rao (2004) note that understanding the impact of economic liberalisation in the context of class and ethnicity is rare and remains limited in work on India. This diversity of women from different caste and ethnic groups will clearly help in addressing differences among women while examining the gendered implications of agricultural transformation in the post-reform period in Kerala. Most women welcomed this opportunity to share their experiences through interviews, having not had the opportunity to do so in the past. Major themes that emerged from the interviews included: casualization of work and wage discrimination, shifting crop patterns including declining areas of rice production and out-migration from farm work, each of which are discussed in turn below.

6.3.1 Casualization of Work and Wage Discrimination

A major consequence of agricultural transformation on women in all locations was of casualization of work. Mahesh (2002) notes this shift from attached labourer to casual labourer has resulted from the local Kerala state government’s implementation of land reforms and transfer of land ownership to tenants. Further, Jackson and Rao (2004) claim this demand for women’s causal (non-formal) labour in India has increased more generally following the economic liberalization policies of the Indian national government. Women are being increasingly drawn into informal sector and share the

harsh experience of SAPs (Dewan, 1999). Clearly, the need for a flexible and cheap female labour force becomes vital in the situation of tough competition in the global market place.

“Female labour is relatively cheap, hard to unionise and through contractual practices can be hired to work at their homes or adjoining industrial premises. By doing so and by keeping the size of individual enterprises small, the employers can easily escape protective labour legislations of ‘formal’ settings and can dispense the female labour when their services are no longer required” (Bagchi and Raju, 1993:p249).

Overwhelming absorption of women into casual and seasonal work is disadvantageous for women labourers in many ways. This has resulted in women’s agricultural work being undervalued and grossly underestimated by policy planners and development agencies. Casual work also implies the absence of benefits such as maternity pay, sick leave and insurance, which was a feature of even the regular long-term employment of women in the plantation farms of highland AML. Further, gender wage gaps remain, according to Jackson and Rao (2004), despite increasing demand for women’s casual labour after the liberalisation of Indian economy. In addition, the local Kerala state government policies have not addressed the issue of unequal wages, despite the rhetoric of empowering labourers of the state. This is clearly evident in the unequal wages of male and female labourers on the farms in all the geographical locations. Eapen and Kodoth (2002) suggest such inequalities in wages are a reflection of prevailing notions of masculinity and femininity, which privilege the male working subject and deny the importance of female domesticity. Panda (1999) argues that gender discrimination in the labour market has contributed to low levels of economic participation of women in Kerala. Moreover, Agarwal (1985) indicates that ‘sex typing’ and women dominating in certain tasks also causes problems in efficient work measurements and makes it difficult to obtain a comparative picture of the value of work of the different genders.

Women interviewed in all the locations in this research also voiced their concern about wage discrimination despite their performing laborious work, particularly in rice farming. This wage discrimination was commonly justified on the grounds of unequal work. Kodoth and Eapen (2005) indicate how the occupational segregation of male and female labourers makes lower wages paid to women often less noticeable. It was

therefore vital to investigate if women were willing to do men's work if relevant training was provided to them. Of the women interviewed, 67 percent in highland AML, followed by 58 percent in midland and 48 percent in lowland KMK, stated their willingness to do men's jobs, which was mainly fuelled by a desire for higher wages, as evident from the following quotes:

“Yes, I will do men's jobs if I am trained to use a machine and if I am paid more like them. Even now I am doing their job, cutting branches and sometime levelling, though I don't get the higher wages of men. Transplanting is very hard, but still I get fewer wages” (*Naikaya woman, highland AML*).

“Yes, I will try if they pay more. I know it is hard, but men mostly start their work like watering fields or ploughing early morning, but we are mostly working in the scorching sun the whole day” (*Kavara, woman, midland TTM*).

“Yes, I want to see if their work is harder. I think I can do it if some one shows me how to do it. I will try doing levelling which is not very difficult”.
(*Ezhava woman, lowland KMK*)

In contrast, the Muslim women of highland AML village who refused to do men's work did so particularly because they perceived themselves to be physically weaker as noted:

“No, I won't do it because my mother told me that we women are not strong to do digging work. Men are strong and they can do it. But, I have heard from my friends these days things are changing, some women are doing digging work” (*Muslim woman, highland AML*).

While for other women, the inability to do men's work was as a result of time constraints:

“No, I don't think I can do men's job like digging of fields. It is very difficult and sometime they do it till late evening. I have lots of things to do at home after I finish my farm work” (*Pullaya woman, lowland, KMK*).

Furthermore, the social and cultural perceptions of different gender roles also resulted in some women's refusal to do men's work, as noted by an elderly Hindu *Nayadi* woman in midland TTM:

“I don't want to do men's job. Men and women have different work and that is our age-old tradition. I don't want to change those old traditions, but these days some young women are doing men's jobs” (*Nayadi, woman, midland TTM*).

Mencher (1993:p105) also attributed gender differential roles to cultural practices in her study of the rice growing Southern Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala:

“In many areas where only women are expected to transplant, most men will not do this work even if there is no other work for them. They will explain carefully that only the women know how to do it or that it is ‘women’s work’ or ‘easy work’ - even though in another region the task might be classified as ‘men’s work’ or as gender neutral”.

Similarly, Arun (1999) describes how women in her study area of midland and northern Kerala, despite doing some male supervisory jobs, declined to take up other male jobs like harvesting of coconut and rubber and purchasing inputs, and instead men were hired to do these jobs.

Generally speaking, the reasons for women not wishing to take up men’s work were a complex mix of patriarchal mores and also due to their own perception of being physically weaker. Indeed, patriarchal culture and traditions still have important implications on the type of work women perform in agriculture. So despite Kerala’s remarkable social development and gender development indicators, the underlying patriarchal culture still ensures that women’s work is still considered to be subordinate (Eapen, 2004). This is aptly summed up by Kannan (1997:p12):

“It is difficult to argue that Kerala society’s perception of the role of women is qualitatively different from the rest of India as far as issues such as autonomy and participation are concerned. I would argue that such a situation emanates from segmented view of the role of women (‘this is suited for women’, this is not suited for women’) than a societal position of active discrimination against women or an underlying idea of exclusion”.

But, there are not only complex gender differences in activities between men and women but also differences within the caste system of India according to (Beteille, 2002: p142):

“Ploughing was forbidden to members of the highest caste, but it was also forbidden to women irrespective of caste. Among the highest castes, women were forbidden to work in the fields and generally outside the home. At the other end of the scale, among the lowest castes, the most onerous tasks, such as weeding and transplanting, were mainly left to women”.

So gender and caste intersect to produce particular patterns of work participation for particular women in Kerala. Ultimately, the end result of gender segregation and the perception of women being weaker results in wage discrimination. As

Balasubramanian et al (2002: p1), argue, “Gender division of labour taking place is due to the stereotyping perception that all men do heavy work, some women do skilled work and most women do light work”. This is despite the fact that there is considerable empirical evidence that women’s work in rice cultivation is skilled and hazardous:

“One might even argue that higher wages should be paid for work which requires bending over most of the time while standing knee-deep in water, having one’s legs attacked by leeches, and often not being allowed to straighten out one’s back even for a few minute by an over-zealous superior. Transplanting is both hazardous and a skilled job. It is hazardous because of the illness to which it exposes the women, which include a variety of intestinal and parasitic troubles, infections, splitting heels (from standing in muddy water for hours on end) and ultimately the possibility of crippling ailments like rheumatic joints and arthritis” (Mencher and Saradmoni, 1982:p 153).

This gender inequality clearly borne out in the differences in wages for male and female labourers in Kerala indicates that the Communist government policies, despite their rhetoric of egalitarianism, have reproduced a culture of patriarchy, which has assigned women a subordinate position, as aptly summarised by Brydon and Chant (1989:p114):

“An assumption that under socialism, class equality would mean gender egalitarianism is potentially over-optimistic, as indigenous cultural constructions of gender do not disappear with the advent of socialist policy, nor, where socialist policies have intervened have they necessarily improved the conditions and status of women”.

In sum then, regarding work casualization and gender differential wages, it appears that although the situation is complicated by the variety of views expressed by the women, it is clear that gender inequalities exist in all three geographical locations of the state. Explanations of these inequalities varied, with Muslim women perhaps being most vociferous in upholding the patriarchal traditions and holding the most trenchant views regarding fixed gender roles.

The casualization of work has also resulted in the absence of unions to represent agricultural labourers in general and women in particular, as one woman of the *Ezhava* Hindu community of the midland illustrated:

“There is no union meeting for agricultural labour. We are only causal labour working for different farms. How can we have union when there is no permanent work or permanent owner”? (*Ezhava Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

There are no organised union on farms to represent agricultural labourers, though most labourers on the farms are usually attached to one or other of the state Trade Unions of the Communist Party, with the men occasionally attending the meetings. But it is very rare for a woman to attend union meetings due to the cultural prejudice of only men attending such meetings:

“I don’t think women go for union meetings. Our men go once a year or so for procession or during election time when they come and tell us to join. But they told me our problems are not discussed much” (*Cherumar Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

In addition, domestic responsibilities are a priority that limits the time women can spend on activities like attending the union meetings:

“We have no time for union activities. I am a woman and my family does not want me to attend any union meeting. I have to do my household work. There is no time for me. Only my brother or husband goes for the meeting” (*Kuruma woman, highland AML*).

Nevertheless, a few young women in midland TTM and lowland KMK reported their attendance at union meetings - “Yes I, and my neighbour, attend the union meetings occasionally, but earlier going for a meeting was not decent” (*Kavara woman, midland TTM*). This breaking of the cultural prejudice by younger women annoyed some of the older women as noted below:

“We were told only men go, but now things have changed and my daughter-in-law has started going. You see, these young women don’t bother about what others think, they do what they want to” (*Ezhava woman, lowland, KMK*).

However, despite attending the union meeting, women did not speak in these meetings, nor did the meetings address their specific problems, as the following remark of *Cherumar* Hindu woman labourer of midland TTM shows:

“I go and listen to what others talk. I am afraid to talk. I might say something wrong. Some time they ask us our problems. I told them about my mother not getting pension. I don’t know if they will help”.
(*Cherumar Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

Women’s union representation in many traditional industries like coir is namesake regardless of their predominance in these industries. Lindberg (2004) considers that the institutionalisation of trade unions has made them ‘more masculine’ due to the prevailing discourse of men as the bread winner, which assigns men the roles of

radical workers and loyal unionists, leaving them to pursue their political aims, even to the detriment of their family obligations. Trade unions thus remain indifferent to women's problems of wage discrimination in Kerala (Thresia, 2004). Although lack of trade union involvement by women was noted in this case study, some differences between women of different ages were also revealed, with a few young women attending trade union meetings indicating changes in the future, with younger women being more willing to engage with formal politics.

This increased casualization of work and lack of unionisation was paralleled by the perceived neglect of women by the state government, with the majority of women respondents questioning the effectiveness of the state government. Most women observed that the government's efforts in safeguarding their interests were limited, with common remarks like:

“The government has not helped us, they don't care for us. They only look after other workers and never did anything for us” (*Christian Woman, highland, AML*).

Additionally, women also lamented that the state government's old age pension was pitiable 100 rupees (\$2.5) and that too was not paid in time, like for instance a *Kanakan* Hindu woman in the lowland had not received her pension for three months. However, women belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) of the highland region of AML did recognize certain benefits provided by the government, for example the provision of loans for their houses. But, others not belonging to SC/ST complained of this discrimination in giving benefits only to certain communities:

“Only scheduled castes and scheduled tribe people benefit mostly. For others like us there is no help. No one has ever come to ask us our problems. They don't care for an agricultural labourer like me” (*Ezhava woman, midland TTM*).

At the same time, women also voiced their dissatisfaction about the working conditions on farms due to the lack of basic facilities and infrastructure. For example, women in the highland AML faced the problem of walking long distances through difficult terrain in the absence of a road to reach the plantation farms. While, women in midland TTM lamented about carrying the produce long distances due to storage areas being located away from farms. In the lowland KMK, women complained about

being exposed to the scorching sun while threshing due to the lack of a shed/shade in the *kole* land. Overall, according to the women, these conditions and problems resulted in their enduring hardship, while older women working for a longer duration in the rice fields complained of health problems like severe backache and rheumatic pain of joints, particularly during old age.

Despite these problems of casualization, it must also be noted that women preferred eight fixed hours of work a day compared to the longer working hours and bondage of feudalism. However, during the harvesting period most of them reported working round the clock since the amount paid (as paddy in kind) was related to their efficiency and time rather than to a fixed wage. The harvested paddy also served as a reserve for the households during rainy seasons, when women had no work on farms or income to survive. Overall, women indicated their workload was less compared to previous times, as is evident from the following remarks:

“My work load is less now. I now work only limited hours. I have more time for my family, but earlier, I didn’t have time for anything and had to go anytime my owner wanted me” (*Ezhava, Hindu woman, highland AML*).

“Earlier we were never allowed even to stretch our backs and the owners used to treat us very badly, but now things have changed, we are freer” (*Kavara, Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

“Yes, the owner never allowed us to go home till we finished our work, now we stop after eight hours and go home even when work is not finished” (*Kanakan, Hindu woman, lowland KMK*).

However, despite the freedom from the earlier system of attached bonded labour, job insecurity is now a major disadvantage of the present system, as described by a woman in highland AML:

“The work load is less but there is no security of job. One day I work on one farm, the other day I have to look for work on another farm. Sometimes I have no work and have to go home” (*Nayakay Hindu woman, highland AML*).

This situation has only further been aggravated during the post-reform period. Women reported the increasing surveillance maintained now by the farm owners for increasing their work efficiency:

“These days the work burden is less, but we have no regular work like before. The owner also keeps a strict vigil and wants us to work fast and finish the job quickly as wages are high now” (*Nayadi woman, midland TTM*).

In general, women in all areas faced increasing work casualization as a result of agricultural transformation. This resulted in an absence of benefits, unequal wages and job insecurity and these problems affected all women irrespective of their caste and ethnicity in all the locations of the state. However, some differences were noted between the women in terms of their attitudes towards gender roles and unions, with younger women generally being more liberal and Muslim women generally being more ‘traditional’. Yet, it is probably correct to conclude that despite some spatial differences being apparent in the impact of agricultural transformation in different locations in the state, the impacts on all women in all areas were fairly standard and consistent, with the similarities between them being greater than their differences with respect to work casualization.

6.3.2 Changing Crop Patterns and Declining Rice Area

After examining the implication of agricultural transformation on work casualization and wage discrimination, this section examines another important consequence of agricultural transformation, that of shifting cropping patterns from rice to cash crops and its impacts on women in different geographical locations of the state.

The shifting cropping pattern from rice to cash/plantation crops resulting from agricultural transformation due to national and local policies has had important implications for gender role on farms. As a part of the questionnaire survey, women were asked how this shifting cropping pattern from rice to cash crops had affected their opportunities to work on farms. In the AML highland location, the cash crops of coffee and tea plantations had increased employment opportunities, as the following comment explains:

“The rice area is declining and there is no work. But, it is better after my owner started growing tea and coffee. There is more regular work now in tea and coffee harvesting, though it was difficult first to do the work. I didn’t know how to pluck tea leaves. My work was very slow. But, now slowly I am learning” (*Muslim woman, highland AML*).

Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006) have also observed high levels of female workforce participation in the tea estates of Wayanad highland district. However, most women working on the plantation farms of tea and coffee belonged to Christian, Muslim and *Ezhava* Hindu caste. Few women belonging to the *Kuruma* or *Naikaya* tribal communities worked on the cash crop farms.

This employment in the plantation farms of tea and coffee of the highland AML was vital for (some non-tribal) women in the context of declining work in rice farming. However, women's work in this sector was mostly casual with few benefits or social security. In addition, the crisis of the plantation sector owing to declining commodity prices since 1990 had caused set-backs, which had resulted in a reduction in labour costs by farm owners. A *Naikaya* Hindu woman labourer in the highland AML observed this process:

“My owner says he gets fewer prices in market for tea. So it is all changed now, but earlier also we had problem, when the rubber prices was not good. So, I don't know what will happen in future and if I will get work or not” (*Naikaya* woman, *highland AML*)

This uncertainty of work in the plantation farms of tea and women's role here in the future has been questioned by Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006). While most women working in the rice fields of AML were generally concerned about declining employment opportunities and that more and more rice land had been converted to plantation crops like tea, coffee and pepper during the post-reform period. Moreover, the clearing of forests to allow for the expansion of cash crop of tea and coffee had serious implications particularly for women of the indigenous Scheduled Tribal communities, who had been displaced of their forestry-related livelihoods. But the shift to cash crop cultivation, and the reduction of indigenous rice varieties owing to the Green Revolution, had severely affected the livelihood of these traditional communities (Padmanabhan, 2004). In this research women of tribal households working on rice farms also stressed the declining work in rice while being interviewed:

“There is no work now like olden days in rice farms, everything has changed. We somehow manage and survive with goat rearing which the Agriculture University people gave us recently” (*Kuruma* woman, *highland AML*).

Interviewing and getting responses from those few indigenous adivasi tribal women working on the rice fields of AML village was difficult. But, the subsistence lifestyles and deprived living conditions of the tribal households clearly indicated their extreme exclusion from the development process. Kjosavik and Shanmugaratnam (2007) also claim the view of the neo-liberal policies generating a process of exclusion and the indigenous communities finding themselves at the losing end of socio-economic changes. There were reports of kidney transplant rackets, starvation death and tribal labourers forced into prostitution from different parts of the tribal regions of Kerala in recent times, which indicative this exclusion (Krishnakumar, 2002; National Commission of Women, 2001). By contrast, women of other communities like Christian, Muslims and *Ezhavas* still managed, with intercropping and selling of coffee and tea produce on their homestead farms. Further, the Christian and Muslim women labourers had members of their families who had migrated to Gulf countries, though the situation of Christian women was generally better due to greater size of land holdings, than that of Muslims.

In general, the crisis of cash crop of tea and coffee and declining area under rice cultivation since economic liberalisation had caused job uncertainty and loss of livelihood for many women on the AML farms. As Srinivasan and Sukumar (2004) have cautioned, women workers in plantation export zones are particularly vulnerable to adjustment policies causing price fluctuations, weakening labour enforcement regulations and reducing existing social support. This is certainly the case in the highland plantation zone region of Kerala, although the situation varied among these women, according to their ethnic backgrounds.

In the midland TTM, the conversion of rice fields for house construction and land being left fallow due to non-profitability had reduced employment opportunities in rice cultivation. Further to Intercropping of sugarcane, cowpeas and coconuts displacing women's work. Women reported getting on an average four months work in rice cultivation in a year compared to six or seven months prior to the post-reform period in TTM midland village, a major rice growing region of Kerala.

This declining work in rice farms was noted by a woman:

“We don’t have work. My owner is not interested in farming and he says he doesn’t get much profit. There is no water during summer. He did not do the sowing this time. You see it is difficult for him to continue like this” (*Kavara woman, midland TTM*).

Moreover, some women also pointed to decreasing work resulting from the growth of high yielding rice varieties of the Green Revolution:

“These days there is less work. New paddy varieties are ready for harvest at same time. But, in olden days the traditional varieties had different harvesting times and we had more work then” (*Ezhava woman, midland TTM*).

Most importantly, women reported that the decline in the area under rice cultivation and the conversion of grazing lands to non-agricultural purposes had also reduced the availability of straw for livestock. The rearing of livestock such as cattle, bullocks and buffaloes provided a major means of employment for women due to their multiple roles in livestock rearing. Besides, with the shift of livestock from local to cross-bred, the rearing of cows had become increasingly difficult for households due to the high cost of maintenance, as reported by a woman labourer:

“We used to own a lot of cows in our households. We had regular work of cleaning sheds, collecting dung and collecting fodder for cows. But, now no one keeps them. There is no fodder available, the better breeds need lots of fodder to eat. There is also a problem in taking them for grazing since these days no one wants to do grazing work” (*Kavara woman, midland TTM*).

By and large, the declining area of rice cultivation had mostly affected the *Nayadi* and *Kavara* women of the Scheduled Caste communities in TTM. The former had mostly survived on begging and the latter on basket weaving, though decreasing bamboo availability has greatly decreased their off-farm livelihood of basket weaving. But the condition of the *Charmar* SC was better due to greater privileges from the government for this group compared to the non-SC *Ezhava* women. Thus, decreasing work in rice farming was a major concern for women on the midland TTM farms.

In the lowland KMK, a dramatic shift from rice to coconut had been taking place on many farms. Women complained that this shift to coconut had limited their work opportunities while men had regular work climbing coconut trees and tapping for toddy, though most farms faced a shortage of men for harvesting coconuts regularly.

Arun and Arun (1997), for example, indicate how in the case of coconut, 77 percent of male labour and 14 percent of family labour is employed compared to only 9 percent of female labour. The incidence of unemployment among women is higher than that of men and double in the rural areas of Kerala according to Arun (1999), with 75 percent of the 47 million days lost due to a shift from labour intensive crops like rice, to cash crops like rubber and coconut.

However, the crisis of economic liberalisation and declining coconut prices had affected the labour households involved in coir making in the lowland KMK. Coir making was a major source of livelihood for women of Scheduled Caste (SC) *Vettuva* communities especially during off-season monsoon. Coir is made from the husk of the coconut left to decay in the backwaters of the village. After the softer parts decay, the fibre is collected and woven into ropes by both hand and on indigenous machines (see Figure 6.4 and 6.5). Fibre is used for making a variety of items like mats, rugs, bags, beds, cushions etc. The coir industry of Kerala, though accounting for 80 percent of the total coir industry of India, has a long history of trade union struggles and problems (Bajaj, 1999). These industries became part of the large co-operative sector and had severely limited women's employment opportunities. Additionally, coir prices had dramatically fallen in recent years and the quality of husk had been greatly affected due to coconut mite disease.

This declining employment in coir making in KMK lowland village had greatly impoverished the *Vettuva* community, as one woman explained:

“See the whole husk discarded on the banks. Not many women are making coir now. Earlier, our whole family was involved for generations in this work. We had about four months to six months of work during the rainy season. But, the factory is closed. No one buys coir now in the market”.

Shivandan's (1999) study of a south Travancore village of Kerala has also indicated the decreasing participation of women in coir making from 43 per cent in 1961 to 27 percent in 1999, while women withdrawing into household work increased from 16 per cent to 32 percent during the same period. Moreover, gender discrimination continued to flourish in the coir industry, in terms of wages and benefits, with men handling the raw material and finished products, while women were confined to the most arduous and time-consuming jobs of lowest pay (Bajaj, 1999).

Figure 6.4 Coconut husk left to decay in backwaters



(Source: Fieldwork Kerala, India)

Figure 6.5 Women making coir from coconut husk



(Source: Fieldwork, Kerala, India)

Women of other communities of the SC, such as the *Pullaya* and *Kanakan* in the lowland *KMK* were also affected by the declining area under rice cultivation and the shift in crop from rice to coconut. However, *Pullaya* women still survived by fishing whilst women of *Kanakan* Scheduled Caste (SC) were surviving by undertaking construction work. In addition to these factors of decreasing work in rice farming, women in all areas also indicated that their work in rice farming had also been displaced due to changing farming practices associated with rice cultivation. For instance, in the highland village of AML, the threshing of paddy using tractors instead of women's manual labour had reduced their work. In midland TTM farms, women noted that the use of the combine harvester had displaced their harvesting work. Similarly, in the lowland *KMK* women reported mechanization of harvesting had decreased the number of days of employment on an average from six months to four months in a year. However, farm owners used mechanical harvester for timely harvesting of paddy to avoid the risk of flooding was noted earlier in section 6.2 (see Figure 6.6). In addition, fears were also voiced by women about further work displacement due to the likelihood of transplanting being mechanized, as noted by a *Kanakan* woman:

“After the harvester has come, we don't get work like before. We are hearing that they are going to bring the transplanting machine soon. I don't know how we will live. We are going to starve”.

Momsen (2003) also observes that mechanization of agriculture may result in particular jobs being reassigned to men. This dilemma of adapting to new technologies is summarised by Anderson (2001:p407):

“In every case where machinery was introduced in activities traditionally done by women, men either completely took over women or the activity became subdivided and men took over the tasks that used the technology and required greater skill while women were relegated to less skilled, mechanical tasks. These shifts were accompanied by loss of income-earning opportunities or marginalization and lower income for women”.

Nevertheless, some women in the lowland *KMK* region felt mechanization was inevitable due to labour shortages and their children not wanting to work on farms:

“There is no work now because the machine is doing harvesting. But, I don't blame my farm owner. Last year we did not finish harvesting in time. My owner lost a lot of paddy due to flooding. Anyway, it doesn't bother me, I will work only for two or three more years. After that my children are not going to do farm work like me” (*Pullaya* woman, lowland *KMK*).

On the whole, agricultural transformation had resulted in a decline in women's work in rice production and in their off-farm work in all locations. This is borne out by a survey of the socio-economic conditions of rural labourers (Department of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala, 1985), which noted that agricultural labourers were unemployed on an average three days a week in Kerala. Mahesh (2002) affirms that this situation has continued in more recent years. Indeed, these changes in female agricultural employment in Kerala suggest that economic liberalisation measures were neither gender neutral nor did they ensure a minimum fair status for women (Devi, 2002). However, although all women had been affected by the changing cropping patterns and decline in rice production, it was women from the SC and ST that were feeling these effects most strongly. Thus economic liberalisation appears to have rendered poor women poorer, an observation also noted by Panda (2004).

6.3.3 Out-migration from Farm Work

The dilemma of declining farm and off-farm work noted above has now set the trend among women to increasingly out-migrate from farm work in all locations. This decreasing trend of women labourers in general from 29 percent to -16 percent in highland Wayanad district, 52 percent to -19 percent in midland Palakkad district and 16 to -21 percent in lowland Thrissur district between 1991 and 2001 was noted earlier in Chapter 5 as indicated by the Census of India report (2001). This out-migration has been due to women increasingly taking up non-farm work to supplement their income, which includes stone quarrying work in highland AML, construction and brick-making in midland TTM (see Figure 6.7) and sand loading in the KMK lowland village. These jobs were preferred due to higher wages, besides providing regular employment, in the situation of decreasing work in rice farming. Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006:p10) also note, "construction sector typically absorbs unskilled labour force displaced from agriculture in Kerala and the last decade witnessed tremendous proliferation in construction sector activities fuelled by remittance from the Gulf". However, in construction work, women performed unskilled, tiring and backbreaking tasks such as stone breaking, lifting and carrying concrete, mortar, bricks and sand (Wadhera, 1991). In addition, Arun (1999) points out that jobs like brick making are highly seasonal and dependent on the weather

conditions. Women respondents interviewed also noted the problem of being exploited in their construction work, as the following example illustrates:

“The only work available is construction work. I worked a few days, but my family don’t like it, they have heard about the contractor men sometime exploiting women. They think it is not decent work for women. So I decided to leave it” (*Charmar Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

However, a key contributory factor in the move away from agriculture altogether in all the locations was due to the increasing educational status of women and low status accorded to farm work. So after noting the increasing out-migration of women from farm work, it was relevant to explore if women would encourage their children to take up farm work. Generally, the survey revealed that most women (94 percent in lowland KMK, 89 percent in midland and 83 percent in highland) would not encourage their children to take up farm work. The most important explanation was the growing aspiration to educate their children for a better future: as indicated:

“I am illiterate that’s why I am doing this work, but my children are educated. I don’t want them to suffer like me” (*Kuruma, Hindu woman, highland AML*).

Indeed, in a state of high literacy, there was preference for white-collar jobs of high status and farm work was clearly a departure from the usual norm and not a welcome one, even in the situation of unemployment as indicated by a woman:

“Our children are not interested in farm work. I think the problem is that there is no respect for people working on farm. The new generation wants something better and decent” (*Kanakan, Hindu woman, lowland KMK*).

Other factors influencing women not to encourage their children to take up farm work was that of the limited employment opportunities:

“Why should I encourage my children to work on a farm when there is no work for me and my wages are so low? They will get something better. After all, they are educated” (*Vettuva Hindu woman, lowland KMK*).

“No, I don’t want them to do farming. They are selling fields for house construction. People working in the Gulf are ready to pay any price for land. By the time my children grow up, no paddy field will be left” (*Kavara Hindu woman, midland TTM*).

Withdrawal from farm work had also resulted from the improvement to the economic situation of some households:

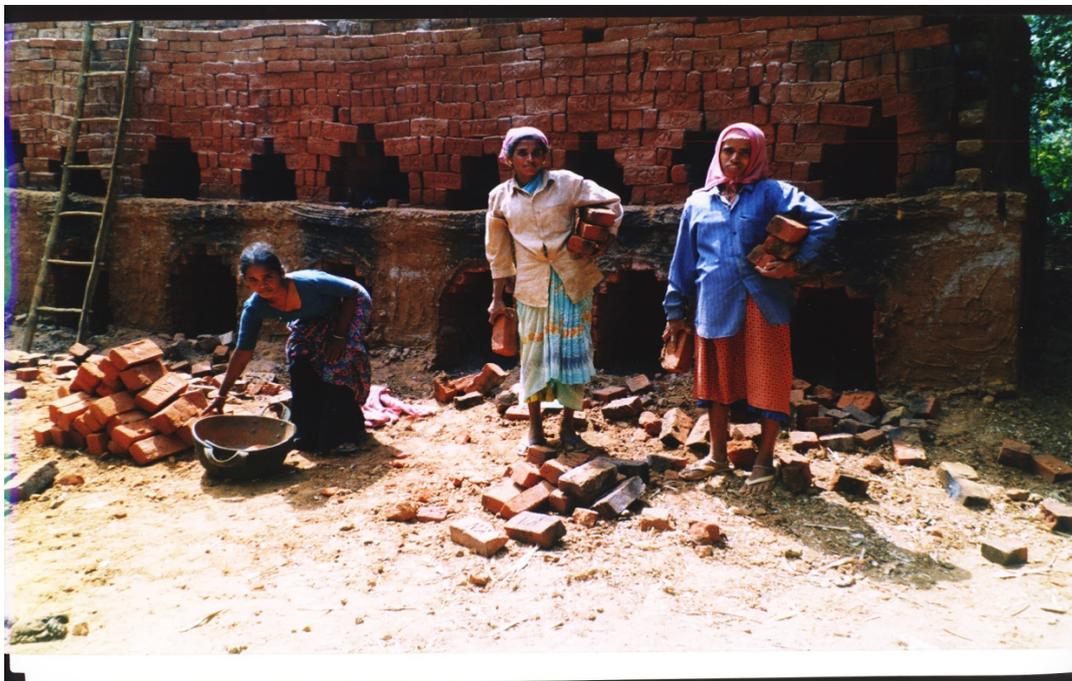
“My daughter doesn’t like doing farm work which for her is a messy work, so she is not working and is idle at home” (*Ezhava Hindu woman, lowland KMK*).

Fig 6.6 Mechanical harvester used in koleland KMK



(Source: Fieldwork Kerala, India)

Fig 6.7 Women working for brick making in midland TTM



(Source: Fieldwork, Kerala, India)

Eapen (2004) has also recorded women withdrawing from poorly paid manual and/or informal sector work in affluent households in Kerala due to the problem of declining work coupled with low wages, but they are not averse to employment considered to have 'status', particularly regular government jobs. Undoubtedly, for some households, this withdrawal from agricultural work is an outcome of Sanskritization, with the lower castes emulating women's domesticity of the higher castes (see Chapter 7 for more on this). However, as Eapen and Kodoth (2002: p30) also argue, "withdrawal from the work force on the part of the educated women indicates a worsening of their access to 'self-acquired' income". Thus a move out of agricultural work may not necessarily signal an improvement in women's economic position in Kerala. Additionally, some women also believed that the younger generation were not capable of doing hard work. This was noted by elderly *Kanakan* Hindu woman of lowland KMK:

"Farm work is very hard. We were trained from our childhood days to work on the farm. But, I don't think our children are strong like me to work in field, so why force them to do it? "

Nonetheless, there were a few women respondents who did desire their children to do farm work. This was either due to limited availability of other work or for the need for labourers on their own farm in order to sustain the rice fields:

"Our area is tribal area and there is no job for educated people. So what is the use of studying? Farm work is always there and someone has to do it. I want my children to do farm work like me" (*Kuruma woman, highland AML*).

"Why not, I want them to work on the farm. If every one stops working, who will do the farm work. What will we eat, if there are no rice farms"? (*Kavara woman, midland TTM*).

"Yes, I want them to work on my farm. I have a small piece of land in *kole* land. We cannot hire labour like my owner does, so my children mostly help me to do the work" (*Ezhava woman, lowland KMK*).

However, general over-riding preference not to take up farm work remained the same for women of all the caste groups. By contrast, clear differences were noted between women of different age groups with respect to their participation in agricultural work, with younger women being much less likely to engage in agricultural production than middle or older aged women. This changing job preference of the younger generation has resulted in a mismatch between labour supply and labour demand (Kannan, 1998).

The consequent out-migration of labourers has resulted in farm owners increasingly facing labour shortages on farms during peak seasons of harvesting and sowing operations in the rice fields in all the locations of the state. As Mahesh (2002:p7) observes:

“The proportion of agriculture labourers has been decreasing and that there is considerable underemployment among those continuing as agricultural labourers. At the same time, farmers feel that there is non-availability of farm hands to attend to agricultural operations in time”.

This situation of unemployment and labour shortages occurring in all the different locations of Kerala is indeed paradoxical!

6.4 Summary

This chapter explored the spatial variations in agricultural transformation in different geographical locations in Kerala state: highland, midland and lowland. It has revealed how economic liberalisation policies have impacted in different ways in different geographical localities within the state of Kerala. In highland AML, cash crops of pepper, tea and coffee suffered set back, while in the midland rice bowl region of TTM, the rice crop was severely affected. In the lowland KMK, losses resulted to coconut, pepper and rice cultivation on the *kole* fields. Indeed, this chapter lends support to Parayil and Sreekumar (2003) view of the vulnerability of economic liberalisation for promoting globalisation has affected Kerala more seriously than other states in India. However, this research forcefully illustrates that the impacts of economic liberalisation are not straightforward: the policies of the Indian government and the local state have impacted in different ways in different geographical locations of the state.

In particular, the chapter has revealed that the impact of agricultural transformation has been different for women in the different geographical locations, in terms of gender differential roles, labour recruitment strategies and wages. Women’s responses to these transformations also varied in the different locations of the state. However, this marginalisation was particularly observed amongst marginalized Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) communities. In Ambalayval and Thomatchal highland region, the crisis of cash crops of tea, coffee and pepper has greatly

impoverished women belonging to *Kuruama* and *Naiykaya* ST communities. While in the midland rice bowl of Thathamangalam declining rice area has particularly affected *Kavara* and *Nayadi* women of the SC communities. In the lowland village of Karamuck, women of *Vettuva* SC communities were affected by the losses to rice, coconut and pepper cultivation. It is thus probably true to assert that women belonging to marginalized and impoverished groups were mainly affected as also noted by Srinivasan and Sukumar (2003).

Despite these differences between locations and between women of different ethnic and caste groups, it is equally clear that the burden of changes due to agricultural transformation in all the locations has predominantly fallen on women. This, in many ways, is a process similar to other states of India and other Third World countries. Time and again the responses from women in all locations indicated increased casualization, decreasing farm and off-farm work and poor wages. Women's voices remained unheard and their problems unresolved. Patriarchal culture clearly played a significant role in women's work and wage status in Kerala, which seems to have generally affected women irrespective of their community, caste and ethnicity in different locations. Indeed, as Usha, a feminist researcher of UK University (*Personal Interview, May 2006*) argues, "a series of measures pursued by national and local state government are in blind pursuit of market forces, and being gender-neutral, may leave women in Kerala behind in the development process". This situation of declining farm and off-farm work, together with other factors of high literacy and low status for farm work, has resulted in many women out-migrating from farm work. This has resulted in the paradoxical situation of unemployment and labour shortages co-existing in different geographical locations of Kerala.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Gender Power Relations within the Households of the Midland village of Thathamangalam (TTM)

The previous chapter has delineated the spatial variations of agricultural transformation on women's farm roles in different geographical locations in Kerala. This chapter descends further to the household level in the midland village of Thathamangalam (TTM) and examines gender power relations as a consequence of changing roles on farms for women of different age groups. The overall aim of the chapter is to show how national policies of economic liberalisation, together with local state policies, filtered down to the household level and produced shifts in gender power relations. The paradoxical situation of women's empowerment in Kerala, in terms of reduced bargaining power within the household despite their exceptional social development indicators is clearly highlighted.

This case study of TTM is significant since women's empowerment in Kerala is frequently cited in the literature and by policy makers based mostly on state level social development indicators. Kabeer (1994) argues that households are the logical starting point for examining gender power relations due to their influence in allowing, restricting and differentiating members to participate in the economy and society as a whole. Paying attention to gendered power relation by addressing the issues of agency of decision-making and control over resources is also vital for examining women's empowerment. Feminist geographers have also attempted to reveal the relationship between home and paid work, through which gender identities are made and remade (Pratt and Hanson, 1988 and Laurie et al 1999). The research has shown many of the contradictory processes of economic globalisation have increased the vulnerability of some households and mainly absorbed by women (Aslanbeigui and Summerfield, 2001; Beneria, 2001; UNDP, 1999). Yet, Devi (2002) notes the rarity of research on the relationship between changes in employment structures and patterns and gender relations within households in India, even though such data is vital due to the

limitations of assessing the gender implications of economic liberalisation using macro-level data. Indeed, by focussing on the household scale and examining gender power relations consequent upon changing gender roles on farms, this chapter seeks to fill a crucial gap in the literature at this scale of enquiry in Kerala.

The first section of the chapter (7.1) summarises the agricultural transformation, which has taken place in Thathamangalam village and its implications for female and male agricultural labourers selected for the group discussions. Section (7.2) conceptualises first what it meant to be an ideal man or woman for the members of the focus groups. This is followed by an examination of gendered power relations in the household consequent to women's changing roles on the farms (7.3). These are particularly examined in the context of old and middle-aged women employed on farms, and young women who have withdrawn from farm work into domesticity. Section (7.4) further examines women's decision-making role in households, to determine women's bargaining power at the intra-household scale. Finally Section (7.5) concludes the case study by summarising the shifting power relations and paradoxes of women's empowerment within the households.

The fieldwork material for this chapter is drawn from focus group discussions conducted with four groups of men and women households separately (twelve members in total), with group members broadly representing different ages during a field trip to Kerala during April 2004. In addition, interviews were carried out with researchers and policy planners in Kerala and in the UK after returning from the field visit (see Table 3.5, Chapter 3 for details of specialist interviewees). The four selected households for in-depth group discussions had different economic backgrounds, but all belonged to the low caste *Ezhava* Hindu community. The first and second household group primarily survived by doing farm work, while in the other two groups, both women and men had withdrawn from farm work. Of the three women's groups, two were male-headed households, while one was exclusively headed by a woman, and in the absence of male members, economically they depended on their own labour for their survival. This criterion of selecting four households was to examine gender power relations in the context of different households - with some women and men still continuing with farm work while in other households men had out-migrated from farm work and women had withdrawn into domesticity. It was

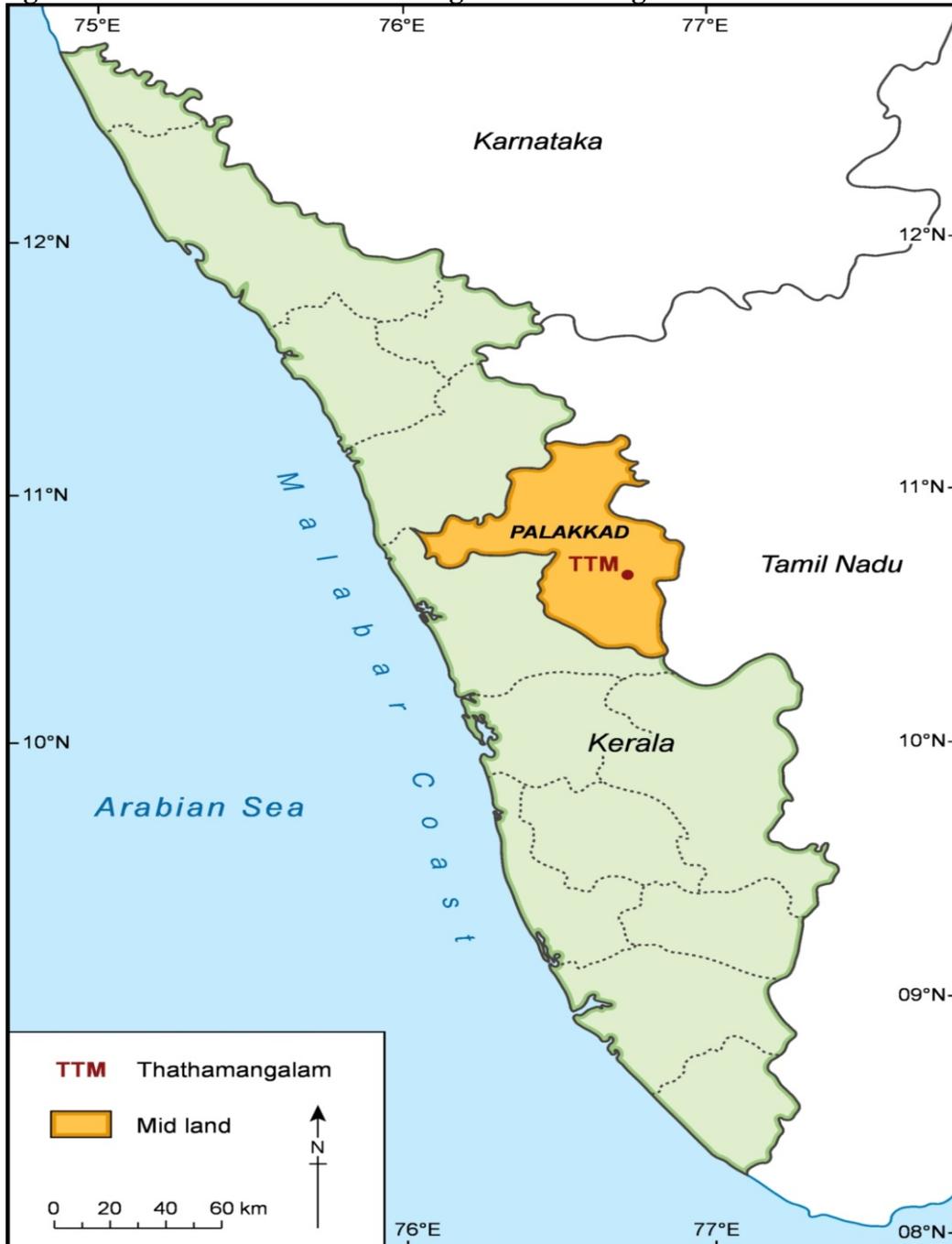
hoped by speaking to people with different economic and household structures that a more nuanced picture of the changes arising from agricultural transformation would emerge. At the same time, different age groups were selected to examine the divergent views and differences among different generations of men and women (see Table - 3.8, Chapter 3 for details of sampling techniques).

The detailed case study adopted in this chapter allowed for the development of less exploitative and more egalitarian relationships between the researcher and the participants than would have been possible using other research methods (see for instance McDowell, 2004). The focus group discussions were supplemented with secondary data from the literature.

7.1 Agricultural Transformation in Thathamangalam Village

The study village, Thathamangalam (TTM), a midland village located in the Palakkad district, is in the rice bowl of Kerala. The village is dominated mostly by farming communities and agricultural labourers and agriculture used to be the economic mainstay of the village. However, agriculture has been deeply affected since the economic reform period of the 1990s. The national policies together with the local state government policies have resulted in set backs to rice farming due to the high costs of inputs and the reduction of subsidies and credit cuts, as noted earlier in Chapter 6. This coupled with the problems of high wages caused non-profitability of rice cultivation, which is a concern since the region is a major rice producer within Kerala. During the field visit to Thathamangalam in 2004, the village was also facing a severe drought due to the failure of the monsoon, which resulted in serious crop failure since farm owners mainly depend on rainwater to irrigate their rice fields. The village had not experienced such a water shortage for the past 35 years, since the eight dams of the Palakkad district had always provided sufficient water for irrigating the rice fields. These were the consequences of increasing conversion of forests and rice fields for house construction and de-silting of river and streambeds (see Fig 7.1 for the location map of midland TTM village).

Figure 7.1 Location of midland village Thathamangalam



These activities had greatly affected the ground water level and regeneration capacities of the water bodies. Further, farm owners blamed the local Kerala state government for not taking appropriate steps for storing water and also for diverting water to the neighbouring states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. They believed that the state government did not keep their promise of timely release of water for irrigation, which had resulted in such a catastrophe.

On the whole, agriculture in TTM village had been facing serious challenges and the most profound impact of this had been the discarding of farming as a livelihood. This was clearly evident in the increasing exodus of farm owners from farming owing to land disposals, and the dismal conditions of those continuing with farming. Most farm owners were now incapable of employing and sustaining agricultural labourers due to the current crisis of agriculture due to national and local policies. This crisis of agricultural transformation had serious implications for those employed on farms, and this had particularly affected women labourers due to their predominance in agriculture. These impacts are further examined below in detail.

7.1.1 Implications for Labour

In this section, the challenges faced by men and women labourers selected for the focus group discussions are examined as a result of the crisis of agricultural transformation in the TTM village. Observing the implications of agricultural transformation for women labourers and their changing role on farms is vital for further investigating the implications for their gender power relations in the households in the following section.

The women working as labourers on farms in the selected households were mostly middle and old-aged. While the younger and better educated women moved out from farm work due to its perceived low status, despite the problem of not finding alternative jobs outside of the agricultural sector. As noted in Chapter 6, there has been a drastic decline in women's employment opportunities on rice farms, which is further complicated by economic liberalisation and the consequent agricultural transformation. In general, women continuing with farm work were increasingly vulnerable and life was tough and uncertain for most of them:

“It is a very bad situation. Day by day the work is getting less and less on the farms. I don’t know how we are going to survive and what will happen to our family. I got just few months, about three to four months of work, that too with great difficulty this year. The situation is very bad and it is a great worry for all of us working on farms” (*Dhanam, middle aged women, group 1*).

Women thus worked with apprehension and disappointment, as indicated by a woman respondent:

“If it continues like this I don’t know what will happen next year or after five or ten years. I am telling you soon that day will come when there will be no rice farms or farm owners or labourers in the village. God only knows what will happen to all of us then. I am always praying that I shouldn’t be alive to see that day. But you see, that is going to happen some day”.

(*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

Some women reported taking-up men’s work in the wake of male labour shortages on farms.

“Our farm owner has problem in getting men for work. Not just our farms but also all others have same problem. There are no men to do work. So we women do their jobs, which we never did earlier. Like in our farms there are no male labourers. Five of us women together do all kinds of jobs like applying fertilizer, levelling, digging etc” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 3*).

“Yes, I think we are doing these jobs well and with confidence though not used to doing it and we get only Rs. 60, for which men are paid Rs. 120. It is the question of just getting used to doing things. But most women think they can’t do men’s work and will never try it” (*Lata, young woman, group 1*).

The additional income earned particularly helped households in the event of their work declining on the rice farms.

“One reason is also because there is no work for us. Day by day our work is getting less and less. So we are ready to do anything to earn some money. Doing men’s work helps in getting some money for our family to survive” (*Dhanam, middle aged woman, group 1*).

Thus, women engaging in men’s work clearly made them visible in new spaces that they did not previously occupy, with apparently fixed gender-role identities on farms becoming contested and distorted. Feminists have long debated how gendered identities are created and recreated at work, contesting the view that individuals enter the labour market with their identities firmly fixed in place (McDowell, 2004). While this fluidity was clearly evident in this case study, it is ironic that women taking up men’s work also resulted in their being paid lower wages than men for equivalent work, suggesting the reassertion of patriarchal uneven power relations in which

women's work continued to be devalued compared to men's. Indeed, Mencher (1993: p117) has aptly noted that, "regardless of energy output, when a task is performed by men alone, it is always described as hard work, requiring extra strength, and when it is done by women it is simply taken for granted". So while there may have been some shift in gender roles, which impacted on gender identities, this did little to challenge entrenched patriarchal gender power relations. Women's contribution to agricultural work was thus again going undervalued and unrecognised.

The men also acknowledged that women were taking up their work in the event of male out-migration from farm work, though they noted women's work was not perfect and that farm owners still preferred to hire men, despite it being less economical:

"I know women are working hard and trying to do men's work. But still it is not done whole-heartily I would say. It is not perfect like when we do it. This is because of old culture and traditions. But most farm owners would not want women to do men's work and will hire them only when they are very desperate" (*Kannan, old aged man, male group 4*).

However, men thought women sometimes intentionally did not perform well because they were worried that male household members might lose their jobs. Men were paid more for their work and this would ultimately benefit everyone in the household, as the following remark observes:

"No, I don't think it is physical strength alone. It is our tradition. They (women) are not doing it enthusiastically; most of them will refuse to do because they think it is men's job for which they get more money. And when men lose their work it will only affect the family. Women don't want that to happen. May be that is why their work is not perfect" (*Kandan, old age man, male group 4*).

In my opinion, the quote above illustrates the complexity of the situation in Kerala. On the one hand, this might represent how patriarchal culture undermines and devalues women's work. On the other hand, it may also be that women doing men's work inefficiently is a sensible survival strategy that women actually employ to ensure that they do not displace (higher paid) men from their jobs. Capturing changing nature of household survival strategies is vital according to Okongwu and Mencher (2000).

Concerns over worsening employment opportunities also emerged from male members of the focus groups and neither farm owners nor the agricultural labourers were interested in farming:

“Things are not very good with agriculture or our farm work. It is really a bad condition for those of us still working on farms. Earlier we men used to get 15 days of work in a season, but now there is hardly 5 days of work, like applying fertilizer and pesticides, that’s all”(Vellan, middle aged man, male group 4).

However, male members of the group acknowledged the ‘marvellous efforts’ of the Communist government to safeguard their interests, though they accepted that the labour empowerment and union problems were also partly responsible for the current situation of declining work opportunities:

“I think our leader EMS Namboodiripad and the Communist government did great things for us. Other governments that came and went also did some thing or other for the labour class. After all, they want us to vote for them. They know if they don’t do anything for us we won’t vote for them. But, I know it is all going against us now because of all that strikes and labour problems all factories are closing”(Ravi, youth, male group 4).

There is little doubt that agricultural transformation has had serious implications for both men and women agricultural labourers. It was thus difficult to attain a subsistence level of living from agriculture, for the households continuing only with farm work, as the following response from an old male group member indicate:

“They are using machines for levelling of land, when they use tractors the job is quickly done. So they don’t really need us. But, earlier when we were using bullocks for ploughing and levelling there was more work for men” (Kandan, old aged man, male group 4).

Taken as a whole, testimonials of men and women on the implications of agricultural transformation indicated their fears that farming could cease to be viable in the village. Others believed farm work was of low social and economic value compared to other work. Generally, both men and women had moved away from farming, but the change was greater for young women and men. Men had out-migrated to other sectors like construction work, which was regular, highly paid and a growing employer, as illustrated by a male respondent:

“We started going out and looking for outside work, like construction or carpentry work. It is highly paid. I get 150 rupees a day compared to 100 rupees on farms. Even for that there is no guarantee” (Ravi, youth, male group 4).

Economic conditions of households had greatly improved due to men out-migrating to construction work, though improvements had also arisen due to low fertility rates,

with most families in Kerala opting for family planning and preferring one or two children:

“These days most of us have one or two children, that is all. The government says one or two children are enough. Earlier, even after the age of 45 women were delivering children. But, now women stop and only want one or two. You don’t see many women having children after the age of 24 or 25” (*Vellan, middle aged man, male group 4*).

The fertility rate of Kerala was 2 children per woman in 1988, which has since dropped further to 1.52 in 1999 (Chacko, 2003). (The replacement level TFR (Total Fertility Rate) is 2.1, the number required to maintain adequate population size). The emergence of nuclear families with fewer children clearly had implications for the economic improvement of households:

“When you have one or two children you can look after them better, by giving good education, food or other things. But, earlier it was difficult; there were seven to eight of us. Feeding and looking after such a big family was not easy. Now when I sit and think about those days, I don’t know how we managed. Maybe that is why we had to work so hard those days” (*Kandan, old aged man, male group 4*).

Economic improvement of labourers resulted in their emulating customs and traditions and ways of life of the higher caste, in their effort to join the ‘mainstream’ described earlier in Chapter 2 as Sanskritization. The improvement to the labour households in the village TTM is evident to the extent that many households preferred to send their children to fee-paying private schools rather than to government schools offering free education. The village was thus facing the threat of the closure of the government schools due to low enrolment of students from the labourer castes. Nevertheless, despite the increasing preference to educate children, education does not guarantee earning a livelihood in the village or in adjacent localities. The few factories and small-scale industries could provide employment for a relatively small proportion of educated people only. In addition, many small-scale industries of the district also faced the threat of closure since the economic reform period of 1990. Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006:p16) also note traditional industries facing serious threats and the small-scale, cottage and household industry been affected due to competition from bigger players, lack of product demand etc and were either sick or closing down.

Thus it is clear that changes have been wrought to agriculture within the village, which has impacted on social and economic sphere within the households. The following section will explore further the implications of these challenges faced on the farms for gendered power relations, which has implications for women's empowerment in the household.

7.2 Idealised Gender Identities

It was first considered important to uncover beliefs surrounding gender identities by gaining insight into the various perceptions men and women in the selected groups had on what it meant to be an 'ideal' woman or man. This would give an insight and provide a 'base line' from which to consider shifting gender power relations within the households. In general, views that emerged from both male and female group members about the qualities associated with an "ideal" woman or man were consistent. The ideal woman was related mostly to their reproductive role of the domestic caretaker, while the qualities of an ideal man were bound up with their productive role. Comments like the following illustrate these responses of what it means to be an 'ideal woman' or 'ideal man':

"To be a good woman it needs lot of efforts. She has to look after her children and husband, worry about marrying her daughters. She has to resolve any disputes or problems in the family. Not abuse her daughter-in law and so on she is a good woman" (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

"For me an ideal woman has to be spiritual and God fearing. Restrained and calm in her dealings with day-to-day matters in the house. While the ideal man should not have bad habits like drinking or gambling or flirting with women" (*Devaki, middle age woman, group 3*).

"A good woman is one who looks after children and husband well, while a good man has to be hard working to support his family" (*Ponamma, old age woman, group 3*).

However, this association of an ideal man with the income earning role indicates how economic considerations cut across gender ideologies and cultural perceptions:

"Very true, I also think income is more important. Being good or bad comes only after that. My son will be an ideal man only if he has good earnings. No one bothers whether you are good or bad. But, how much money you get is important these days" (*Lata, young woman, group 1*).

The men's responses also followed a similar pattern to the women's, who defined 'ideal' woman by her biological role, while an ideal man was defined by his productive role.

"A good woman is one who can do housework like cooking and look after children and the elderly in the household. Oh yeah, women have a great responsibility in the family. An ideal woman for me is one who is good daughter, wife or mother. While a good man, whether a son or father has to be responsible. But if he is not responsible and does what he wishes he will create problems for himself and for family" (*Velan, middle aged man, male group 4*).

A good woman will try always to maintain harmony in the family. She has to respect traditions of obeying elders and men in the family. While a good man has to be obedient and respect elders. I know it is difficult for boys and girls to obey parents. There is lot of generation gaps, days have changed and it is not easy for young generation to adjust to all this. Still they should try to understand us and somehow try to adjust" (*Kandan, old aged man, group 4*).

From these testimonials, it is clear that masculine identities continue to be associated with the economic sphere, while home is an expression or 'marker' of women's identity. However, in the past, participation in hard manual agricultural work was a key identity for both men and women of low caste labourers in Kerala. Gender identity, Lindberg (2004:p17) argues, was not based exclusively around the home for women, but to be an ideal woman was to combine fieldwork and house work successfully:

"Ironically, a "good wife" for a low-caste man in the 1930s was a strong woman who was able to do a lot of work and provide for herself and her children. Similarly, a "good husband" for women of lower caste at the time was a man with a good landlord who would offer job opportunities for the women".

7.3 Gender Power Relations within the Household

After establishing idealised gender identities, it is important to uncover gender power relations in the households for examining women's empowerment in the context of changing farm roles of agricultural transformation of national and local policies. These are considered in this section in the context of old and middle-aged women continuing to work as agricultural labourers while other women, particularly the young, withdrawing from farm work into domesticity. A consideration of these two age group will help reveal the complexities and differences of empowerment for different age groups of women at the household level.

7.3.1 Women Continuing with Farm Work

Discussions were held first with the old and middle aged women who were continuing with farm work to explore how they felt about being employed and earning a livelihood, before examining the gendered power relations within the households. In general, these women indicated their working for wages and contributing to the family income provided them with a sense of economic security despite declining opportunities for work:

“When you have your own money, it makes lot of difference. I feel great relief, I don’t have to depend on my husband every time for money. Earlier when I was not working I had to beg for everything. I was not able to fulfil my children’s wishes or other needs of the house. When you have money, family members also give you respect. Then nobody will care these days when you have no money” (*Dhanam, middle aged woman, group 1*).

Women repeatedly referred to their waged work and earning as advantageous for the household despite unequal wages and persistent declining work on farms:

“Yes, when you have your own money you can spend it the way you want to, you don’t have to get scared of accounting. Earlier, when we were bonded, it was still worse. We were at the mercy of our landlords for everything. After all in those days we were slaves and so how can you expect them to treat us well?” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 1*).

However, women’s testimonials also indicated that, generally, they spent wage earnings on the family/household needs rather than for their own needs.

“Yeah, even I feel it is good to have our own money. I spend it mostly for buying household items or for buying children schoolbooks, clothes or other things like grocery etc for the household. Of course I spend it for my family and don’t waste it on anything else” (*Chella, old aged woman, group 2*).

Further, almost all women noted a substantial amount of their earnings were used for buying gold for their daughter’s marriage. Most of them expressed the view that the dowry was a major concern, which most families find difficult to meet. Devaki, for instance was forced to borrow money from a private moneylender and had to work for the rest of her life to clear her debts arising from her daughter’s dowry. When asked why they continued giving dowry, the women of the group expressed their helplessness in the event of their daughters remaining unmarried.

This was indicated by Devaki during group discussion:

“Most of the money I earn I use for paying the loan I took for my elder daughter’s marriage. After that nothing is left for my family or me. I don’t know how many more years I will have to work to pay my debts. When I think about it, it really scares me. I think giving gold, for a girl’s marriage is a big worry and tension for most of the families these days” (*Devaki, middle aged woman, group 3*).

Lindberg (2004) also notes this transferring of resources from women to men and how years of women’s labour is often changed into dowries for a marriage. The dowry was paid in gold and was demanded mostly by the groom’s family either before marriage or at a later date. After the marriage this gold is, in most cases, passed on to the in-laws. However, Thresia (2004) indicates dowry demands include not only gold, but also other gifts like dresses, utensils and household furniture and often propel many families into debt.

Even men with uncertain incomes and limited prospects demanded dowries of several thousand rupees and in many cases, the dowry was appropriated by the husband or his family and was used for paying loans or to start a new business or even help to pay dowries for unmarried women of the groom’s family (Chacko, 2003). So many women in the old and middle age categories readily sacrificed whatever they earned to provide their labour as dowry in an attempt to find a good partner for their daughter.

“Yeah, they are asking now minimum 20 sovereigns of gold. Only if I have that much to give my daughter can marry a boy who has a good decent job. That is the culture now. And every time price of gold is going up when you go to the market for buying it. It is really a big problem for those who have a daughter at home” (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

Instead of empowering women by giving them assets, giving dowry can further disenfranchise them. Lindberg (2004:p17) has argued that the modern dowry may represent a loss of women’s inheritance or earnings:

“The relinquishment of self-earned dowries not only leads to family resources being unequally distributed among males and females, but also causes women’s labour to be transferred into men’s possessions by having their life savings or pensions turned into modern dowries”.

Young women also expressed their dissatisfaction over dowry practices and yet agreed to get married since they had no other choice.

This was noted by Sarla, young woman of group 3:

I didn't want to marry because my in-laws were asking for too much gold. I don't think it is good thing to ask for so much gold. But, I agreed because of my parents, they don't want me to remain at home and then people talking all things about it. Finally I agreed to getting married and had no other choice".

However, Lindberg (2001), in her study of cashew workers, views that concern among women for their daughter's marriage and the preference for a good husband for their daughters is not due to a lack of consciousness about patriarchy, but is rather a survival strategy for planning a better future in a rational way for their children.

Male group members interviewed also expressed discontent and dislike for the dowry system. Nevertheless, they argued that marriage was "a must", and that not marrying was not an option available for their daughters. In this context, Thresia (2004) observes how marriage is supposed to provide women with a sense of security and status, which unmarried women do not have even in the situation of it not providing women with emotional or economic security. This is the case in Kerala today. Most households struggle to have enough money to cover the dowry if they were to marry their daughter.

"Yes we give lot of gold now, most of us have to think about it from the beginning. Both women and men work hard and save money for it. I don't think there is any marriage taking place without giving gold. But during my time there was no such practise. When I got married my wife did not bring any gold" (*Kannan, old age man, male group 4*).

Both older men and women in the households are thus increasingly bearing the brunt of the dowry system. Giving this dowry for the labourer households is imperative to enhance status in the groom's family and in contemporary society in general, as the following example illustrates:

"Even if the groom's family don't ask for it, we have to give it. Whatever is possible according to our status. Otherwise what impression will people carry about us. We won't have any respect in the society or in the boy's family, if daughter goes without gold. We have to keep-up our prestige" (*Velan, middle age man, male group 4*).

However, Thresia (2004) notes that the dowry system was not previously practised among labourers such as the Scheduled Castes (SC), and it was the willingness of the bride and the bridegroom's families that decided marriage, rather than economic

status. According to Chaco (2005), such dowry practice were rare in Kerala until the early twentieth century, with only patrilineal Brahmin communities and Syrian Christians, who had converted from the upper castes, following this custom. For instance, among the *Irular* tribal community of Palakkad, there was no dowry system and men and women had full freedom to find and choose their partners (Kalathil, 2004). An old woman respondent of the group vividly illustrates this:

“During the old days there was no such practice of giving gold or anything. We never heard about it. But now it is a must. If we don’t give gold no one will marry the girl that’s all. She has to remain unmarried whole life. So what can we do? Well, things have changed now, we also somehow try to adjust to changing time” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 3*).

The practice of giving dowry has thus been recently augmented among the labourer castes. As Srinivasan (1956:p484) notes, the institutions of marriage among low castes were more liberal than for the high caste Brahmins:

“Post-puberty marriages do not occur among them, widows do not have to shave their heads, and divorce and widow marriage are both permitted and practised”.

This wearing of jewellery and covering of bodies among the low castes indicates the new expression of femininity as the female body becomes more sexualised, replicating the values of higher caste women (Lindberg, 2004). Adherence to the patriarchal traditions like dowry for a girl’s marriage clearly indicates that labouring households are attempting to emulate upward social mobility. So we are clearly witnessing shift from caste to class alliances of Sanskritization among the agricultural labour castes.

This general shifting trend towards dowry practices in Kerala is clearly alarming and is starting to mirror the Northern states of India. Kabeer (1999) has noted how dowry practises concurrently express and strengthen the preference for sons, with daughters becoming financial liabilities to their parents, thereby relegating women as a subordinate class in India. As a result, women have continued to endure various forms of discrimination and abuse:

“Female children are abandoned soon after birth as parents cannot pay dowry. Orthodox parents pray for a male child. Dowry deaths and wife burning still exists in some parts of India. Every day newspapers report harassment of women by their husbands and his family” (*Swaminathan, Personal Interview, December 2006*).

If we now turn to examine the gendered power relations within the household for those women continuing with farm work, it was clear that, despite contributing to the survival of the household, many women felt helpless to challenge male superiority based on their 'bread winner' role. This situation had continued even when men were unemployed and they still tried to retain the fallacious position of the 'head of household'. Further, women also noted that in many cases their work burden had increased due to male unemployment, with the household responsibilities disproportionately falling on their shoulders:

"For men there is no work on farms now. If we don't work and remain dependent on men, then our family will be starving to death. But, we have to look after men, cook food and do everything for them when they come home. Whether they are working or not it doesn't matter. I don't think it is really a good thing" (*Lata, young woman, group 1*).

The women articulated that it was they who had to worry about everything and their men were not in the least bothered. Dominant voices thus emerged about men being lazy and irresponsible in discharging family responsibilities:

"Men are lazy these days, particularly the young ones, they can't work hard like us. When we don't have work on our farms, we go out and look for work on other farms. But men don't care. Whatever they are earning they are enjoying with it. It is we women who are earning and looking after the family. But, the earlier generation was different. My husband passed away twenty years ago, but when he was alive he was very responsible in giving money and looked after us very well" (*Chella, old aged woman, group 2*).

The other problem reported by women group members was of the increasing violence of the male members towards women within the household:

"Earlier men were scared of parents and elders and behaved well. But, now who is there to question them. And they do what they want to, there is no peace of mind at home. Every day there is one problem or the other. Certainly young women are facing more problems now" (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

Young women complained of the men being pampered by their parents attributed this mainly to the prejudice towards females in the households and, particularly mothers:

"They have been brought up like that. Like from my childhood days I have always seen my brother being pampered. My grandmother never used to scold him no matter what he did. When she cooked anything special, she will keep it separately for him, so they always had special treatment. But we never got any treatment like them, which I think is really very unfair" (*Sarla, young woman, group 3*).

Nevertheless, older women, and to some extent the younger ones too, empathised with men remaining idle and unemployed, which they think had caused such frustration and conflict within the households:

“I think the main problem is that these men have no work. The government should give them a job, but they don’t help or bother about it. Some factories give them work for a month or two, that’s all. So it is this idleness, which is making them frustrated and aggressive. It is not entirely their fault, but the circumstances are forcing them to behave in that manner” (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

“Yes it is true to some extent. These men have nothing to do. When you are idle and have nothing, your mind is like a devil’s workshop” (*Lata, young woman, group 1*).

There was thus a sense of helplessness among the older and middle-aged women for being considerate towards the men:

“If I tell them anything or argue with them, they will threaten to commit suicide, the rail track is very close to our house. So I just keep quiet. So as long as I am healthy I will carry on working and looking after my family. After my life, let them do what they want to. That’s all I want to say” (*Lakshmi, middle aged woman, group 1*).

The much talked about ‘crisis of masculinity’ thus surfaced when men faced a loss of employment or limited employment, with their masculine identity of the ‘bread winner’ being challenged. The crisis of masculinity, which has arisen due to men remaining unemployed, has also been observed by Panda and Agarwal (2005:p24):

“Unemployment-related stress and frustration is likely to be associated with a higher probability of violence and regular employment with a lower probability. The gender gap in employment could also matter, although this could go either way. A husband might be deterred from violence if the wife had a higher employment status and hence a stronger fall-back position or he might be more prone to violence because her better position shows him in a poor light, especially if he is unemployed”.

In addition, women lamented and complained about men demanding and wasting money on liquor:

“Every time he wants money. When I don’t give him all the problems start. It’s not that I don’t want to give him or I am hiding money. But, I am myself struggling because there is no work on the farms now. From where will I get money to fulfil all his demands?” (*Lata, young woman, group 1*).

At the same time, they also felt they were not getting the respect they deserved despite their supporting and sustaining the family, as evident from the following testimonial:

“If I tell you the truth they are not giving us the respect though we are earning. I am only supporting my family by doing hard work. My husband doesn’t work. And also he is wasting money on liquor. He drinks every day, then you know the problems he creates after he is drunk. He goes wild like an animal” (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

In general, responses from women indicated male domination in the household had intensified, even though often the women had greater economic resources than men.

Researcher Archana of the State Planning Board of Kerala also noted this:

“If you look at the labour households, women have all kinds of problem, like husbands abusing them, beating them etc, despite their being educated now. I don’t think there is any real improvement in the status of women. But, I agree that there has been increasing awareness through training programmes at the *panchayat* level and women are able to address practical strategic needs, though wage discrimination still exists (*Personal Interview, April 2006*).

Increasing violence in the households clearly indicates women’s inability to bargain for major changes despite their earning a livelihood for the household. Mitra and Singh (2008) also note domestic violence against women is increasing in Kerala and much of it arising due to women’s resistance to traditional social norms dictated by males. However, it must be noted that male members of the group disapproved of the increasing male violence and considered that both males and females of the new generation were aggressive:

“No, I think it is wrong to say all men, whether young or old are aggressive or bad. The new generation, both boys and girls are not scared of any one these days. That is how they are, no one can question them or say anything to them. They think they have all freedom and they will do what they want. So it is not right to blame only men” (*Kandan, old aged man, male group 4*).

Further men household members claimed women were bolder than before. They were revolting against men’s offensive behaviour and not just keeping quiet and tolerating.

The following responses of men indicate this changing situation:

“Oh, yes, yes women are very bold now. They would not keep quiet like before if men abuse them or do any wrong to them. If there is quarrel in the house earlier women will simply keep quiet, but now we don’t see that happen. And when women shout everyone will come to know about it” (*Ravi, youth, male group 4*).

“We are afraid of what neighbours and others will think about it. It becomes a prestige point for us, you see, so definitely we are careful about all this” (*Velan, middle aged man, male group 4*)”.

Responses from men thus suggest that male violence within the households has not increased but rather has become increasingly visible now. Researcher Bhaskaran of the State Planning Board also supports this:

“Atrocities we hear these days were there before, but now they started getting revealed through media and press in the society. The increased literacy rate has definitely improved the overall status of women. Women are able to speak or complain now. They have the *Kudumbashree* and neighbourhood programme where about 20 women meet in groups and share their problems like husbands beating them or alcoholism and other problems”(*Personal Interview, April 2004*).

Despite the atrocities in the households being revealed, overall the testimonials highlight that women were not able to alter much the patriarchal tradition of male dominion in the households. As Batliwala and Dhanraj (2004) observe empowerment as the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining greater control over the power sources. It appears that for women growing inequalities and vulnerability within the household has increased under the economic liberalisation policies in India and they have not been able to challenge existing power relations (see for instance, Arora, 1999; Kalpagam, 1994; Upadhyay, 2000). Indeed, it is probable this is particularly the case for older and middle aged women in Kerala.

However, increasing inequalities and women’s inability to bargain has also resulted from the process of ‘Sanskritisation’, or the emulation of higher castes. Lindberg (2004) ascribes this to diverse beliefs and discourses of modernization and the strengthening of capitalism whether adopted from the West, or locally, which has widened the cultural gap between men and women. However, the discourse of femininity among low caste women and men were not as dichotomised in earlier periods according to Lindberg (2004:p7):

“Up to about the mid-1940s, low-caste members of both sexes were considered capable of doing hard labour, going out at night, having alcoholic drinks in a public place, providing for themselves, and dressing only in a linen cloth”.

Such a view of women enjoying greater equalities with men in the household previous times was also echoed during focus discussions:

“Earlier, both men and women worked from early morning till late nights on fields. Our living conditions were bad and so our family life was entirely different. I think there was greater cooperation and sharing between men and women after all the hard manual labour work we did in the fields” (*Kunchi, old aged women, group 1*).

“Yes, but I think that was mainly due to the joint family system. Every one looked after each other well, whether it was men or women it didn’t really matter” (*Dhanam, old aged women, group 1*).

This shifting from caste to class based alliances and recasting of the patriarchal culture and practices of Sanskritisation has clearly meant the reversal and erosion of earlier gender equalities which older and middle-aged women enjoyed in their households. This widening of the gender gap between older low caste men and women has been further augmented during the post-reform period of the 1990s. Bhan (2001) also notes widening gender, religious and caste based inequalities of the economic liberalisation policies of the Indian national government. Despite variations between regions, trajectories of change appear to have considerable reach in India according to Jackson and Rao (2004: p3):

“Sanskritisation amongst lower castes and ‘tribes’, the spread of dowry into new social spaces, the deepening of son preference and consequent masculinisation of landed rural household, as well as positive changes such as rising age at marriage, closing gender gaps in education, and rising life expectancy”.

7.3.2 Women Withdrawing into Domesticity

After considering the gendered power relations of the old and middle-aged women, most of them working on the farms, the focus is now on women who have withdrawn from farm work into the domestic sphere. This trend of withdrawal into domesticity is mostly seen among women of the younger generation.

An important issue that featured in this research was of the young women not considering low status farm work as an adequate substitute for paid white-collar work. Young women therefore were withdrawing into the domestic realm and their role, as

domestic caretaker had assumed increased importance in the event of their remaining unemployed:

“No, I don’t think I can do farm work. I can’t even imagine doing a labourer’s job. Our parents did it because they were not educated like us. I think it is really a messy job, which none of us would like to do. How can someone take up a job like that after being educated?” (*Gita, young woman, group 2*).

It is likely, according to Eapen (2004) that women are choosing to remain unemployed in the event of not procuring jobs commensurate with their education and preferences given the high unemployment rate for educated people in Kerala. In such an event, in this research households survived mostly on men’s higher earnings from non-agricultural work like construction. This had certainly rendered women’s limited and seasonal work on the farms as menial and secondary, as the following remark of a male group member illustrates:

“Whatever women earn from the farm is very small amount, it is pitiable, and it doesn’t help in anyway for our living. You can’t have a decent life by working on farm. So I think there is no need for the women to do farm work. If you see our family, only after we men started going for construction work our situation improved. When we get enough money from work we are able to look after the family well” (*Velan, middle aged man, male group 4*).

My research findings also reflect Kodoth’s conclusion that increased education in Kerala is directly linked to increasing female domesticity:

“The higher number of years women spend in the educational stream, largely in ‘general education’, is perceived as being in the interests of the family as it could foster more effective child care, health and education even though it may not result in gainful employment. Unlike men, for whom the need to find employment is clearly central, for women full time domesticity is not regarded “unnatural” (Kodoth, 2004:p8)

The traditional customs and norms restricting women taking up farm work, which is typical of a patriarchal society, is becoming increasingly dominant in Kerala (Devi, 2002). However, this restriction of women not doing farm work was mostly practised by higher castes earlier. For instance, Unni (1975) notes how the impoverished women of the higher caste Nair group would take on clandestine prostitution rather than working as agricultural labourers. Following this trend, in my research, the lower caste groups were increasingly adhering to the ‘upper castes’ social mores. Eapen and Kodoth (2002) argue that the withdrawal of educated women from employment is

detrimental to women's self-acquired income and position within the family in Kerala. Even at the government policy level, the model of a male breadwinner and the female domestic housewife is presumed, with lower wages and occupational segregation continuing to be legitimised (Lindberg, 2001). Mies (1982) links the stereotyping of women as housewives to the process of effeminisation, even when women are not housewives, irrespective of whether they are dependant on their husband. Moreover, as Kabeer argues (1999), the economic activity can influence both the welfare and empowerment of women. Thus women's empowerment in Kerala needs to be questioned in the context of women's economic dependence and their withdrawal into domesticity.

During discussions, young women emphasised the contradictions and tensions they faced during this process of change due to their withdrawal into domesticity. For instance, Gita pointed out how she always wanted to work and to be on the same terms as her husband:

“Yeah, I really want to work. Sitting at home all the time idle is very difficult. I feel like I am imprisoned within four walls. Then I think it is good to earn and have your own money. Definitely my husband thinks he is superior because he is earning and the family is surviving on his money. But finding a job is not very easy. There is no work for educated people” (*Gita, young woman group 2*).

Gita thus went through a very bad time and although she was registered in the employment exchange, she was not sure if she would ever hear from them due to the long waiting list. But, Gita was not the only example of a young woman in the selected groups forced to remain a housewife because she could not find a position commensurate with her education. Sarla, who worked earlier for a small-scale industry in Palakkad district also reported losing her job after the closure of the industry. This is similar to other parts of the state, where most of the cottage and small-scale household industries have been affected since the economic reform period of 1991 (Mazumdar and Guruswamy, 2006). This will mainly affect women as Thresia (2004) points out women have historically formed a major proportion of labourers in the traditional industries of coir, cashew and handloom in Kerala.

Sarla went on to explain how her attitude changed after marriage, though remaining unemployed meant initial isolation for her, but slowly she has accepted her prime

responsibility for childcare and the household. To a certain extent then, she had denied herself alternative opportunities by remaining unemployed and for most young women interviewed this also meant denying their economic independence.

However, the withdrawal into domesticity certainly has helped some young women fulfil their self-defined nurturer role, though the response to this withdrawal into domesticity was complex – some women consented to it, while others like Sarla, occasionally took up home-based tailoring work:

“No, I am not doing any work, only looking after children and household work. But, sometime I do some sewing work. Government has given me sewing machine on loan. But, it is not a regular work, as and when somebody wants something to be stitched, I do it” (*Sarla, young woman, group 3*).

That little bit of money earned by tailoring work was of great help to Sarla to fulfil her children’s and family needs. Overall, staying at home and fulfilling childcare and household responsibilities was the logical option after marriage for most young women interviewed in the group. Nevertheless, for most elderly women in the group this withdrawal from work by young women helped in avoiding conflict between outside work and their reproductive role. The responsibility for children was seen solely as women’s duty in the shifting trend from joint to nuclear families:

“The main problem is that there is no one to look after the little ones. These days my health is not very good. Age is catching up. It is difficult for me and I can’t take care of children like before. During our times it was different, we had a very big joint family. There was always one person or the other at home. But, now it is small family” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 3*).

This view among older women labourers, preferring young women to remain housewives, clearly reflects shifting perceptions among the labouring castes. However, young women did not recognize themselves as being victims of Sanskritization, as the following responses indicates.

“I think we really have a better life than earlier generation, my mother or grandmother had. We got a chance for better education and we are able to socialise equally with other communities” (*Sarla, young women, group 3*).

“Yes, if you ask my grandmother she will tell you about her life and all the difficulties they have seen during her life time. Definitely there are improvements to our life” (*Lata, young women, group 1*).

These views were mainly expressed by women for whom the socio-economic changes and upward mobility had allowed them to overcome the disadvantages, which low caste agricultural labourers had previously faced in Kerala. The radical political and mass mobilization of the lower castes in Kerala resulted in a greater emphasis on women's education and in some instances caste served as an alternative for class for access to resources through reservations and special programmes in many areas of development activity (Sen, 2001; Panda, 2004; Jackson and Rao, 2004). However, an inverse relationship exists between education and female employment in Kerala (Devi, 2002). Thus improvement in social development and higher education alone is inadequate to challenge the subordination of women (Mohindra, 2003). As Devi (2004:p47) argues, women's economic power (defined as control of key economic resources such as income, property, and other means of production) relative to that of men is posited as the most important dependant variable affecting gender relations at the household level". Nevertheless, the paradoxical situation in which women in Kerala find themselves is clearly indicated by the failure of increased education to enhance women's employment opportunities, and the failure of social empowerment to lead to economic empowerment in the contemporary period.

7.4 Decision Making within the Household

After examining the gendered power relations in the context of both women working as agricultural workers, and those withdrawing into domesticity, this section further addresses the issue of who makes major decisions in the household: men, women or both? Has this changed with agricultural transformation? Addressing decision-making is vital since empowerment is the process of the decentring of decision-making power (Rowlands, 1997). A focus on the decision-making potential of women will clearly help in measuring women's empowerment, in terms of their bargaining power in the household.

Most women interviewed reported that their involvement in the decision-making of the household was limited:

"I know in some families men do consult their wives. But, for my husband it depends upon his mood. Sometimes he will consult me, otherwise he won't bother"(Lata, young woman, group 1).

Further, women's involvement predominantly revolved around family or household decisions while men still exclusively handled financial matters. Women also indicated handing over their wages to men and mostly asking their permission for spending.

“Of course I give him whatever I earn. He only decides what to spend. I think it is like that only in most households” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 3*).

“If I don't give him then there is going to be more problems in the house. My mother-in-law and other elders in the family won't like it” (*Lakshmi, middle aged woman, group 2*).

These findings are consistent with Thresia's research (2004), which showed that nearly half of women in her sample village of Palakkad reported that men had considerable control over women's wages, since they handed over their earnings to their husbands.

On the whole most women, like Dhanam (*middle aged woman, group 1*) indicated that men do not like women to interfere in decision-making and men decided on their own whatever they thought was right. Another women group respondent also noted this:

“They will ask us if it is something to do with children's education or buying something for the house. It is not a new thing, it has been like that even before” (*Kunchi, old aged woman, group 1*).

While, women, mostly the young who remained unemployed, rarely reported taking decisions and they did not see it as an option open to them. Clearly women's withdrawal into domesticity and their lack of access to earn an income had made it harder still to negotiate in household decision-making. Devi (2002) notes, women's economic power and gender relations in households are closely related and increased participation in paid labour is believed to increase control over household decisions and improve women's status. Access to employment has important implications for individual freedom, capabilities and dignity (Heintz, 2008:p3). This reversal appears to be occurring in Kerala.

Yet, generally the opinion that emerged particularly from older and middle-aged was that decision-making was a male prerogative.

This domain of men in decision making was noted by Ponamma:

“No, the thing is that when men are at home, women should not make decisions. Most elders think women should not be speaking or coming out when men are there. After all, they are head of households. So all the decisions are made by men only” (*Ponamma, old aged woman, group 3*).

Decision-making in the household was clearly governed by patriarchal culture. In this context Mohindra (2003) argues that economic autonomy means not only the earning of income but also the ability to have command over resources and how they are spent. But older women generally did not feel that they were experiencing much discrimination and they accepted it as being part of their tradition:

“It doesn’t matter whether we are working or not. I have three sons, if they need money I give them, but when it comes to decision-making they only decide. Some how I don’t feel confident making decisions, think it is wrong and I will be blamed for it. So I let the boys do it” (*Devaki, middle aged woman, group 3*).

These debates indicate, as Sharp et al (2003) observe, how less tangible elements of cultural and social fundamentals could also directly obstruct women’s decision-making capabilities, but guarantee that women do not even consider or even think alternatives are possible to alter their situation.

In contrast, young women felt helpless and thought about revolting against male patriarchy, but since this would mean depriving them of the cultural norm of being a “good woman”, so few directly challenged male power:

“I think men should consult us. But, they always want to be above women and dominate, that is the culture. Whether men are earning or not it doesn’t matter. It is continuing like that and if I complain elder people think I am not a good woman. So I just keep quiet” (*Sarla, young woman, group 3*).

But, in the case of the women-only household, obviously women made all decisions:

“In our family there are no men, so we women have to make all decisions of the family. In the beginning it was difficult. I was not really used to it since till my husband was alive he was deciding everything and there was less headache for me. But after he passed away, it is all our responsibility” (*Lakshmi, middle aged woman, group 2*).

At the same time, there was often a feeling that when women made decisions it would not be right and most women noted that they had grown up with situation. As Eapen

and Kodoth (2002) argue, women's ability to influence decision-making in the households remains limited in Kerala. Thresia (2004) also notes how the role of women in economic and other important decisions in the household is insignificant, with nearly three-quarters of women respondents in her study of the cashew industry in Kerala reporting that they had no role in decision-making and that their father, husband or other male members made decisions.

Interestingly, male respondents in this research disagreed with the women and ascertained that they consulted their wives in important decision-making matters:

“That is only women's perception because that was our age old tradition. But now we both, wife and husband, make decision together in the households. May be there are few families where only men make decision. Then there are always fights and problems in the house. There is no peace of mind” (*Velan, middle age man, male group 4*).

Further, according to men there had been conspicuous changes and women were not totally excluded from decision-making as they had been in the past:

“But, you see during our days it was not like that. Women were illiterate, they could never speak or say anything. If she wanted to say something, she had to tell her man without anybody knowing about it. But, now women are very bold, they go out and meet people and have guts to say what they want. They are educated and are different now. They won't allow men to do what they want to. That is sure” (*Kandan, old age man, male group 4*).

According to men, women's involvement in decision-making also appeared to be influenced by their economic status, with waged women having more chance to contribute to decision-making compared to others, as illustrated:

“Yes the thing is now women are doing work and bringing money home. If I don't consult my wife there will be a problem. Let me give you example. I wanted my daughter to go to another better school, which is far away, and I asked my wife and then only I sent her there. If I don't ask her she will not cooperate and help in bringing her from school etc” (*Ravi, youth, male group 4*).

Indeed, domesticity and economic dependence can only further weaken women's bargaining power and status within households in Kerala in the future. On the whole, my research supports the view that it is predominantly the male members of the household who make decisions and that women generally accept this as part of their culture.

As Rowlands (1997: p74) argues:

“Empowerment is more than participation in decision-making; it must also include that processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions”.

From this, it seems appropriate to argue that women’s opportunities for true empowerment in Kerala are becoming increasingly circumscribed. Moreover, the adherence to the patriarchal culture of Sanskritization again indicates a reversal of the earlier trend of gender equality, which women in the low caste agricultural households enjoyed. Thus the transformation of agriculture has influenced women’s farm roles, with younger women moving into the domestic sphere. This has reduced their economic bargaining and hence decreased their levels of decision- making control and empowerment at the household level. A situation thereby exists of high levels of social development existing alongside low levels of economic empowerment in Kerala. A paradox indeed!

7.5 Summary

This chapter contributes to debates of how the changing farm roles due to national and local policies of agriculture has filtered down to affect gender power relations within the households in the midland Thathamangalam village of Kerala. The main thrust was to examine agency of decision-making, control of resources and the processes of making choices for challenging the discrimination. It reveals shifting power relations varied for women of different age groups. Women working on the farms, mostly the old and middle-aged faced increasing inequality and reversal of earlier gender equality. Further, women’s income was being used to pay dowries, thus disadvantaging older and middle-aged women’s positions. While women experienced declining work opportunities, at the same time, declining farm work had also threatened male masculinity due to the constraints, which men faced in fulfilling their bread-winner role.

By contrast, young educated women were increasingly withdrawing into domesticity, in the event of men out-migrating to highly paid construction work. This had meant these women were losing independent economic status to men. So while these women

were socially empowered, in reality they were becoming increasingly economically disempowered in the process of redefining their role as housewives. It thus highlights the paradoxical situation of women's empowerment in terms of reduced bargaining power within the household despite their impressive social empowerment of health and education. As Jackson and Rao (2004) argue, socio-economic transformation can benefit women while at the same time result in increasing inequalities. However, this research shows the situation is complex and there are many important factors at play, the most important being Sanskritization, the processes of shifting from caste to class based alliances and recasting of the patriarchal culture. As Mitra and Singh (2006:p1228) argue "Kerala is experiencing some unique social and cultural problems that are proving to be impediments in promoting gender empowerment. This clearly raises questions about women's empowerment in Kerala, which Johnson (1994: p148) argues entails, "the need to gain some control over power structures, or to change them".

CHAPTER EIGHT

Discussion and Findings

This chapter brings together research findings about the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations during the post-reform period of economic liberalisation in Kerala, South India. The first section (8.1) reviews and discusses key findings of the research thereby highlighting its innovative contribution to gender and development debates relating to the three aims of the thesis. Section (8.2), finally summarises and concludes by a broad review of the debates of the crisis of development and paradoxes of women's empowerment of Kerala.

8.1 Reviewing Research

Kerala has provided an interesting location for this research on gender and development due to its many extraordinary features. These include the geographical and agricultural diversity of cropping patterns, regardless of it traditionally being a wetland rice-growing region. The successful re-distributive measures and welfarist policies of the Communist government (also sustained by other governments) with empowerment of women and ordinary people resulted in impressive Human Development Index and Gender Development Index despite low per-capita income. Indeed, according to Veron (2001:p601) Kerala's development has been remarkable during the past four decades. As such Kerala holds an important place in development studies. However, this research has also drawn attention to concerns about the crisis of agriculture transformation and paradoxes of women's empowerment in Kerala, which could threaten the sustainability of the 'Kerala Model' of development.

On the whole, choice of appropriate method of triangulation, combining both quantitative and qualitative for data collection helped in generating relevant and pertinent data for the thesis. The ethical issues of gaining informed consent and confidentiality were relevant for this social science research. Positionality and reflexivity of analysing self as a researcher were important as Jackson (2003:p454)

argued for a renewed emphasis on reflexive ethnographic research and goes on to quote “Reflexivity in research demands a continuous engagement with our own positionality as researchers and how this affects the research process and outcomes”. Overall my positionality, past experience and personal contacts helped in smooth collection of data and in gaining easy access to information. The consequent power relations thus shaped and re-shaped the outcome of research on the paradoxes of agriculture transformation on gender role and power relations in Kerala, India.

The research makes an original and significant contribution to debates about gender and development in South Asia. The focus of the research is on women’s informal agriculture work in Kerala, India, which mostly remains unrecorded and unrecognised in official statistics and development research. This under-valuation of women’s informal work is particularly serious in South Asia. Documenting women’s informal work is vital to address gender inequalities, and for the greater recognition of women’s valuable contribution to agriculture. This thesis therefore contributes to strengthening the existing database of women’s informal work in different cropping patterns of food and plantation crops within the different geographical locations of Kerala, India.

In the process of documenting women’s informal work, the research had captured women’s voices, which are essential since the voices of women and poor people are largely missing from trade policy negotiations and they need to be heard and respected (Cagatay, 2001). The literature review (Chapter 2) revealed that informal work has expanded and appeared in new guises in the context of globalisation and women in the informal economy find themselves as the “weakest link” in global value chain (Chant and Pedwell, 2008:p1). As Elson (2002) notes, macro-economic policies tend to be gender-blind and fail to recognise that women’s contribution to the economy is systematically underestimated. There are still institutional constraints on women’s economic participation in South Asia and women’s voices remain largely absent in many global policy-making institutions, despite the numerous UN resolutions and agreements requiring gender mainstreaming in policies, programmes and institutions (see, for example Cagatay, 2001; Momsen, 2004; Chant and Pedwell, 2008). Arun (1999) also stresses that it is necessary to develop an approach to situate women’s

voices and experiences in the historical, spatial and social contexts within which women live and work to empower them to articulate their own needs and interests. This research has thus attempted such a situated approach of capturing women's voices.

Most importantly, this research contributes to a body of work examining the gendered impacts of economic liberalisation in Third World country (see, for instance, Kabeer, 2004; Fontana et al, 1998; Marchland and Runyan, 2001; Agarwal, 2003; and Beneria, 2001). Such a research project is timely for Radcliffe (2006) notes that although gender is gaining new policy and public visibility, this is simultaneously at a time when neo-liberal and global restructuring processes have entrenched gendered differences and impoverishment in many parts of the world. Moreover, Stewart (1995) and Hamner et al (1996) agree that the extensive literature on poverty and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) has tended to ignore gender and has treated the poor as a homogenous and passive group. Despite a growing body of work on the varied impacts of economic liberalisation processes, most research to date still focuses on the economic dimensions of restructuring rather than on the differential impact of economic liberalisation on men and women in the agricultural sector or in the household (Runyan, 2001). Nevertheless, gender is not only a human rights issue, but also that gender inequalities on one hand, and the dynamics of growth, inequalities and poverty on the other hand, are inter-related (Cagatay, 2001).

The recent wave of feminist research, in exposing the gender inequalities associated with economic restructuring has drawn attention to the ways in which gender is being reconfigured by globalisation and the ways in which the globalisation process is itself gendered (Eschle, 2004). Further, Thorin (2003) indicates most of this research on gender and economic globalisation is to date more conceptual than empirical and more qualitative than quantitative. The growing gender inequalities arising from the global integration of the Indian economy has particularly been of concern to many authors (Singh, 1993; Panini, 1995; Vanaik, 1993; Acharya, 1995; Sen, 1996; Swaminathan, 1998; Scrase, 2001; Shiva et al 2004). These debates have been influential in focussing attention on gender roles and power relations during the post-reform period in Kerala, India. The key findings this research has produced in the context of the three aims of the thesis are outlined below.

8.1.1 Gender and Interacting Spatial Scales

The first aim of the thesis has been to document and explain the crisis of agricultural transformation occurring in Kerala and to examine its implications for labourers and women in particular. Agricultural transformation has been analysed as the outcome of the interplay between national and local policies. The national (Indian) policies of economic liberalisation, associated with the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) imposed by the IMF and World Bank were examined, which served to integrate India further into the global economy. While the local (Kerala) state government policies were considered in the context of redistribution and welfare policies of land reform, labour empowerment and agricultural policies (Chapter 5). Lobao (1996) and Lobao, Jamie and Browne (1999) contend that this articulation of units of different scales of global and local analysis has become one of the vital challenges of contemporary social science. Yet, little previous research has been done on these interacting spatial scales to examine agricultural transformation in Kerala, or in India more generally. This research addressed this gap identified here.

The key theme emerging from this research is of the importance of the inter-relatedness of national and local scales and how economic liberalisation processes permeated from the global arena to the national and local state level and together they have transformed the agricultural sector in Kerala. It reveals that the central (Indian national) government's Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) and WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) resulted in increased commercialisation, import export relaxation, dismantling of the Public Distribution System and a reduction in subsidies and credit cuts. Economic liberalisation has therefore seriously undermined agriculture in Kerala, India while the rich, Advanced Countries are reaping potential gains. The dismantling of domestic food production has created monopolies of global agricultural corporations and, according to Shiva (2004), it can increasingly eliminate small peasants. Khor (2000:p12) summarises the impact of economic liberalisation as:

“Some countries have gained more than others; and many (especially the poorest countries) have not gained at all but may well have suffered severe loss to their economic standing. Only a few countries have enjoyed moderate or high growth in the last two decades while an astonishing number have actually suffered decline in living standards (measured as per capita income)”.

However, this research shows that agricultural transformation in Kerala was not only due to the national policies of the Indian government attempting to integrate India into the global economy, but it was also activated due to the local Kerala state government communist policies associated with agrarian transition and labour empowerment. Further, the Kerala state government's choices to sustain policies, such as decentralisation, were often hampered due to short-lived governments. Additionally the choices of the state government were also restricted by the national policies of the Indian government. This crisis of the agricultural sector was visible in the increasing number of farm owners committing suicide in Kerala in recent years.

In examining the inter-relatedness of different scales of analysis including national and local policies for agricultural labourers, this research shows that the agricultural transformation has particularly affected women. But in doing so, the research has also recognized that the consequences for women have been paradoxical with labour shortages and unemployment both co-existing on farms. For example, whilst the Indian government's national policies increased women's participation in the cash crop and plantation sector, it has also resulted in job uncertainty and impoverishment due to economic fluctuations in the global economy. Wages are also low and working conditions in the plantation factories are poor and below standard. Indeed, the fact that women suffer disproportionately from adjustment and economic globalisation has additionally limited women's previously poor prospects of empowerment in India (Arora, 1999). This research therefore supports Murray's (2005) observation that economic liberalisation processes have produced complex and contradictory impacts on women in Asia in terms of their advancement and marginalization. Nevertheless, this research has shown that local Kerala state government policies have also decreased work and regardless of the rhetoric of labour empowerment, gender discrimination in wages also remains unaddressed. These problems associated with farm work of increased casualization of work, and decreased work in rice cultivation, together with the improved female literacy and the low status accorded to agricultural work, have resulted in increasing out-migration of women from agriculture, especially younger women. This research concurs with Tickamyer's (2000) hypothesis that structures of inequalities and domination and subordination practices are entrenched in relations between the global and the local!

8.1.2 Gender and Geographical Differences

The second aim unravelled the spatial variations of agricultural transformation in three different geographical locations of Kerala state - Ambalayval and Thomatchal of the highland region, Thathamangalam of the midland region and Karamuck of the lowland region (Chapter 6). In doing so, this research has drawn attention to the impotence of spatial variations in the impacts of agricultural transformation within a state (Kerala) during the post-reform period of economic liberalisation in India. It has highlighted how agricultural transformations resulting from national policies of economic liberalisation, together with state government policies, have played out differently in different geographical locations. In the highland, Ambalayval and Thomatchal location farms of Wayanad district, the cash and plantation crops of tea, coffee, cardamom and pepper were badly affected by economic liberalisation. Whereas in Thathamangalam village of the midland Palakkad district, the impact was visible mostly in a huge reduction in rice fields. In the lowland Karamuck village of Thrissur district, coconut and pepper crops were affected, in addition to the non-profitability and labour shortage problems of rice cultivation. Despite this spatial variation between the geographical locations, the overall agricultural scenario in the different geographical locations was a picture of general losses due to a range of inter-related factors: low productivity, low profit margins, high cost of inputs and wage labour, a reduction in subsidies, credit cuts in rice cultivation and declining prices of exportable crops due to import relaxations.

These spatial variations of agricultural transformation resulted in differential gender roles, labour recruitment strategies and wages being observed in the different geographical locations of the state. Examining this was vital since there is limited data on how gender inequalities vary spatially and so to-date research on gender and agriculture in Kerala has remained geographically undifferentiated. In particular, it reveals the impact of agricultural transformation on women has been different for women in different geographical locations of highland, midland and lowland. In Ambalayval and Thomatchal on the highland farms, the crisis of cash and plantation crops of tea, coffee and pepper impoverished women and there was also a declining area under rice cultivation. Whereas in Thathamangalam the midland region, women's work in rice cultivation was greatly affected being the rice bowl of Kerala. In

addition, off-farm work of basket weaving and livestock grazing was being displaced here. In Karamuck of the lowland region, women experienced declining work on the *kole* land of rice cultivation, further to the crisis of coconut prices and the virus disease affecting women's coir making work, a major source of their livelihood. The research identified that these spatial variations have resulted from various factors including geography, economy, ecology, cropping patterns, farming practices and the overall differences in agricultural development histories in the different geographical locations of the state. It contributes to feminist geographers' broad body of work showing how in different ways gender and geography are mutually constituted by examining the ways in which space is gendered (Pratt and Hanson, 1994). The findings of this research are undoubtedly consistent with Laurie et al's (1999) work in claiming that gender roles are constituted in diverse ways across space and that women have a variety of different experiences in different spaces. This spatial pattern of gender relations in different places and at different times is also observed by Momsen (2004). Indeed, space mattered in understanding the gendered impacts of economic liberalisation in different geographical locations of Kerala!

Focussing on the spatial variations and complexities of geographical locations has also helped in examining how agricultural transformation has affected women differently in different locations. Capturing the diverse voices of women was fundamental to this research project to take a poststructuralist feminist stance and to challenge essentialist ideas about gender asserting the category of 'women' without tracing its complex differentiations of class, race and sexuality (Blunt and Wills, 2000). However, the few studies in India that have attempted to examine the effects of globalisation processes on women have tended to focus on consumerism in a globalised economy and on differences of the upper and middle castes (Scrase, 2003). This research goes in meeting this need to strengthen data considering women's differences of agricultural labour class and the lower castes in India. It has shown that the impact of agricultural transformation varied among different women in different places. In the highland region, the Scheduled Tribe Hindu communities, such as the *Kuruma* and *Naikaya*, were much more impoverished than the *Ezhava* Hindu caste and the Muslim and Christian groups. However, the situation of Christian women was better than that of the Muslims, who possessed limited land holdings. Further, Christian households

being outside settlers had other small business and also grew coffee and pepper in their households which provided them with income additional to farm work. In the midland region, the Scheduled Caste communities were more affected, such as the *Kavara* who had survived earlier on basket weaving, and the *Nayadi* who survived on alms. However, even among the Scheduled Caste, the *Cherumar* Hindu communities were better off since they enjoyed more privileges and benefits from the government. Similarly, in the lowland region also Scheduled Castes communities were affected though the *Vettuva* communities, belonging to the Scheduled Castes surviving on coir making were more affected compared to the Scheduled Castes Hindu like the *Kanakan* who also worked as construction workers, though the situation of *Pullaya* Scheduled Caste was better than the *Kanakan* who survived on fishing, in addition to agriculture work. It is clear, therefore, that in all three regions the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes were most badly affected by changes to agriculture. This research therefore supports Srinivasan and Sukumar's (2004) view that marginalized populations are usually most adversely affected by Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) of economic liberalisation.

Nevertheless, despite these spatial variations in women's roles, this research has contributed to contemporary feminist theorising about differences between women but at the same time it has also stressed the similarities between women surrounding gender inequalities (see Braidotti, 1994; Squires, 1999; Young, 1990; Momsen, 2004; Chant and Pedwell, 2008). It shows that patriarchal traditions have a stronghold in explaining women's work position, their lower wages and lack of union representation in all locations of the state. The gender inequalities continue to affect women irrespective of their caste and ethnicity in all the geographical locations of Kerala. Women's agricultural work in rice, export cash crops is informal with low wages, lack of benefits and exploitative conditions, similar to other Third World countries. As Beteille (2001:p3) argues:

“The work done by men and women is not only different, it is unequally rated. Women's economic contributions are indispensable and their earnings may be substantial, but they are subordinate to their men folk, economically and socially”.

This is certainly the picture that emerged from this research in Kerala, despite the rhetoric surrounding women's favourable social development compared to other states

of India. Additionally, Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) have cut down on state government services like welfare, education and health and this has also particularly adversely affected women in Kerala. This declining social welfare expenditure due to adjustment programmes has also been noted in other countries in Latin America and Africa (see World Bank, 1996). Indeed, many authors note that the economic liberalisation policies encouraging global integration of the Indian economy apparently have done little to redress gender inequalities (Upadhyay, 2000; Arora, 1999; Dewan, 1999). However, these common concerns that most women in Kerala share in agriculture are also a consequence of local state government policies. These gender discrimination women faces in Kerala in the informal agricultural sector are characterised by low and unequal wages, high job insecurity and poor working conditions are common in India in general. This requires immediate action by both the local state Kerala government and the central (Indian national government). ILO research also emphasizes this role of national and local governments and the framework of law and governance in protecting and enforcing the rights to organization and voice for informal workers (ILO, 2002b:p8).

The above debates arguably indicate that women's economic marginalization within the development process has particularly exacerbated since economic liberalisation in Kerala. So despite a focus on these differences between women, this research has also identified commonalities of continuing gender subordination, which must not be ignored. Yet, it is clear that this situation of gender inequalities in agriculture is not unique to India. This situation is comparable to other regions in the Third World including Africa and Latin America. As Beneria (2001:p42) suggests, the dynamics of women's employment is certainly complex and contradictory across the globe:

“Female employment has for the most part been identified as linked to exploitative conditions, low productivity and low pay. Yet, these generalizations need to be quantified. As women's educational levels and labour force participation has been gradually increasing – in some cases dramatically”.

However, in this research the drastic out-migration of women from agriculture in all three geographical locations of Kerala was noted. This is in contrast to many other regions of the globe and South Asia. There are strong indications that women's employment in the informal sector has expanded globally and in South Asia (ILO, 2007a; ILO, 1996). This out-migration from agriculture in Kerala has resulted from

several interacting factors including declining work on farms as rice production has declined, higher literacy levels of women and the low status for farm work, which means many women, especially of the younger generation no longer wish to undertake farm work.

8.1.3 Gender and Shifting Power Relations

The third important aim of the research was to examine the shifting power relations that had occurred within the households due to changing farm roles for measuring empowerment for women of different age groups. Eapen and Kodoth (2000) and Panda and Agarwal (2005) have demonstrated that, to date, research on women's empowerment in Kerala has mainly been confined to conventional state level measures of women's education levels, health indicators and income levels rather than on the household dimension. Jackson and Rao (2005) also indicate further methodological challenges relating to the specific requirements of gender relations analysis and in particular note that intra-household perspectives on this topic remains rare in India. The literature search also revealed a dearth of information and this research contributes to debate about shifting power relations with respect to economic liberalisation in the households. It does so by examining agency of decision-making and control of resources and the process of challenging discrimination at the household scale for women of different age groups.

ILO research also stresses the need for examining the relationship between gender and age and to ask consistently, which women and where while discussing women's empowerment in the informal economy (Chant and Pedwell, 2008). This research thus reveals differences between old and middle-aged groups and the younger women in the process of examining shifting power relations within the household. Women of older age groups and middle-aged working on the farms had witnessed great transitions in the agricultural sector due to the empowerment of the lower castes. It had helped them to overcome earlier barriers they faced under the feudalistic system. However, although these women contributed to the household income, they had not seen any dramatic changes to their bargaining power in terms of increased decision-making or control over household resources. In addition to this, their income was increasingly being transferred as dowry, which was starting to weaken their economic

status. Thus a growing reversal of gender equality was starting to emerge in response to older and middle-aged women emulating the upper social castes. This process was being paralleled in other parts of India, as researchers have documented how economic liberalisation policies resulted in an increase in the feminisation of poverty, and growing gender inequalities within the household (Centre for Women's Development Studies 2000; Arora, 1999; Dewan 1999; Scrase, 2003). This research therefore supports Jackson and Rao's (2005) view that gender-based inequalities have proven to be more obstinate in several ways than class inequalities in India.

In addition to shedding light on the shifting power relations for older and middle-aged women, the research has also examined its implications for younger women of the households. For some men, out-migration from farm work into highly paid construction work has resulted in the improvement to the economic conditions of their household. In these cases, the result has been that younger women have withdrawn into the domestic sphere. This has resulted in their losing independent economic status to men as these young women no longer have an independent source of income. At the same time, as farm work has generally declined for men, this has threatened male masculinity due to their facing constraints in fulfilling their provider role and in some instances this has caused problems within the household. Thus as men have not been able to achieve economic security and fulfil their provider role due to unemployment, it has forced some of them to renegotiate authority within the household and this has been the cause of domestic violence in some cases. This process of the 'crisis of masculinity' has been noted elsewhere (Mills, 2003; Giffin, 2004; Goldring, 2001; George, 2000).

On the whole, in setting out to contribute to the sparse debate about shifting gender power relations of economic liberalisation, this research has revealed the reinforcement of female domesticity, especially for younger women. These factors have been exacerbated by shifts in caste to class based alliances as lower caste groups are beginning to emulate the patriarchal customs and values of high caste Brahmins in which women are discouraged from working outside the home. Lindberg (2004) has also identified, this relegation of women solely to the role of housewives is one aspect of Sanskritisation. This gradation of work among the various castes has a long

tradition in India and Beteille (2002) notes that historically manual fieldwork was rated low status and thus mostly avoided by the higher castes. This process is being emulated in the contemporary period through Sanskritisation, as women, especially younger ones, are aspiring to the social mores of the upper castes and are moving away from the farm work towards the domestic sphere. It is clear then that this research has uncovered shifting gender power relations not just due to agricultural transformation of economic liberalisation but from a complex interplay of factors including Sanskritisation, and the reassertion of patriarchal traditions, all of which interact to produce changes at the household level of analysis. A paradoxical situation of women's empowerment in Kerala, in terms of reduced bargaining power within the household despite their exceptional social development indicators is clearly highlighted. This was an important finding of this research and one that linked changes both in the global economy and gender power relations at the household level. The following section summarises and reviews debates regarding crisis of development and paradoxes of women's empowerment of Kerala.

8.2 Summarising Crisis of Development and Paradoxes of Women's Empowerment of Kerala

This research has contributed to gender and development debates by addressing gaps in literature on the key issues of space, differences and power relations, as reviewed in earlier Section 8.1. In doing so, it has generated some innovative and original findings to be revealed about the crisis of development and paradoxes of women's empowerment in Kerala, India due to the interaction between national and local state policies during the post reform period of economic liberalisation of 1990. It has helped highlight issues of the crisis of the Kerala agriculture, in particular neo-liberal policies though the economic liberalization of the Indian economy has generally evoked a mixed response of success and failure. As Mazumdar and Guruswamy (2006: p4) note "Structural changes in the Indian economy, initiated under the New Economic Reforms in 1991, has set in motion a transitory forces within the economic system of the country, and Kerala had not been immune to such forces". But the global integration of Indian economy has affected Kerala more seriously than other states of India. The agrarian crisis and farmers' distress are closely linked to the neo-liberal policy regime according to a study on analysis of farmer's suicides in Kerala

conducted by Mohankumar and Sharma (2006). The Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) of World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the WTO Agreement on agriculture (AOA) pose challenges due to import-export relaxation, declining subsidies and credits and dismantling of Public Distribution Systems. These challenges in the new era of economic liberalisation indicate that closer integration into the global economy have been disappointing for Kerala. This research lends support to Parayil and Sreekumar's (2003) serious concerns about Kerala's vulnerability to the recent phase of economic liberalisation and the rapid integration of the Indian economy into the global system. It contributes to debates of how some countries find it exceedingly difficult to develop export markets and participate in global financial and trade flows (Barrientos, 2000:p- 563).

However, this research also reveals that there are clearly other factors influencing these changes in the contemporary situation. These include local politics, Communist policies of redistribution and labour empowerment, a long history of the export economy and the overall transformation of the state and society. Sustaining policies have been difficult also due to changing and short-lived state governments, while adhering to the conditionality of the SAPs and Agreement of Agriculture (AOA) of WTO was vital for the Indian national government. On the whole, Kerala being a food-import-dependent state is extremely vulnerable to such developments (GOK, 2007:p2). Thus the interconnected national and local state policies have combined together to produce devastating results of decreasing area and productivity of food crops and declining prices of exportable cash crops during the post-reform period. Indeed, as Davids and Driel (2001) argue, global and local are no longer two dichotomous positions, but are inextricably connected. However, there has been slight improvement in commodity prices and agriculture subsidies in recent years and series of measures were initiated by the central and state government to solve the agricultural crisis. But a large number of problems of agriculture still remain unresolved and the current looming world recession will further worsen the situation and the long term prospects of Kerala are not very bright (GOK, 2007). In general, the agriculture sector has been facing serious challenges, which clearly pose a serious problem for Kerala's development due to its high level of dependency on agriculture. Addressing these concerns of agriculture for Kerala therefore remains very critical to

sustain its development model of high Human Development and Gender Development Index.

In addition to revealing the crisis of development of agriculture, this research also highlights the paradoxes of agricultural transformation on gender roles and power relations. It focuses both on women's productive and reproductive sphere of Kerala and makes an important empirical intervention based on a mixed methodology of quantitative and qualitative approach. As Chant and Pedwell (2008: p30) puts it "analysis which interrogates the gendered reproductive/productive dichotomy and empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative) of women's reproductive work is of significant importance and has been receiving increased attention by the ILO". This research makes a contribution to the debates of how development continues to cause gender inequality and subordination of women in Kerala (broadly speaking), even in the situation of women's favourable social development indicators. Many women are in a helpless economic situation and are unable to bargain and overcome the inequalities they are increasingly facing on the farms and within their households in Kerala. Arun (1999) also notes that women's involvement to organise themselves to bargain for equal wages, rights to land and power, against domestic violence and dowry practices is limited in Kerala, despite the organised labour unions there. Women are placed at the lower end of job markets, their unemployment rate is highest in India and male domination in all social and domestic spheres has contributed to high rates of family violence and female suicide rates in Kerala (Mitra and Singh, 2006; 2007). This clearly implies that the Communist empowerment policies for labourers in Kerala have focused on caste issues but have failed to significantly address gender inequalities. The result according to Erwer (1999) "Communist parties have in some ways quietened the issue of gender as a power relation". Indeed, according to Wills (2005), many gender inequalities have not been eradicated in Communist countries, despite their attempts to promote gender equality in their policy approaches. This is clearly the case in Kerala. However, the development of state and transformation of society from caste to class-based alliances and the dissolving of matriliney has also altered women's position. It has reinforced patriarchy within different caste and community groups of the state. Exclusion from the labour force outside the family domain is clearly one aspect of this upward mobility, often referred to as the 'Sanskritisation' process (Raju and Bagchi, 1993).

At the same time, the case study argue that issues of empowerment depend upon which women one is considering by revealing differences between women of different castes, ethnicity groups and ages. Examining differences between women is significant and is gaining ground in ILO literature according to Chant and Pedwell (2008:p9) since majority of studies continue to treat women (or in some cases “poor” or Third World” women) as a self evident and homogenous group. Further, this research reveals out-migration of women from agriculture in all geographical locations of Kerala. This is in contrast to many other regions of the globe as Walgrave and Reddy (2005:pvii) note,” informal economy has expanded with unexpected rapidity throughout the world”. There are strong indications that women’s employment in the informal sector has expanded globally and in South Asia (ILO, 2007a; ILO, 1996).

The suggestion following from these debates is that it is time to temper opinions about Kerala’s ‘model for development’ by considering carefully the assertions about women’s empowerment, which is solely based on social development indicators of health and education. Nevertheless, it does not imply social empowerment is ineffective and not vital for empowering women. But in the case of Kerala little significant results were achieved without women’s economic empowerment and increased agency to exercise control over resources and decision-making processes within the household. “Gender and Development” perspectives argue that while conventional socio-economic development may improve the overall socio-economic profile of a nation, substantial inequalities will emerge unless specific efforts are made to anticipate and prevent them (Sudha et al 2005:p2).

Getting women integrated into the development process clearly requires transformation in conventional development structures and thinking It requires addressing both material and cultural sides of power relations to change subordination based on gender, though other subordination such as caste and class are important too. As Mitra and Singh (2007:p1227) rightly argue, “High educational attainment alone will not promote gender empowerment unless the social and cultural norms of a country or state ensure equality of women in all areas of life”. To really empower women requires, as Rowlands (1995) indicates, reaching a point where women can take charge of creating option for them to choose. Failing to address these issues, the

gendered inequalities will continue to widen, even in the situation of women's favourable social empowerment as revealed in this research in the Kerala context. Indeed, these debates contribute to the emerging body of research about gender paradoxes and women's empowerment in Kerala, which has much to contribute to general debates about gender and development elsewhere.

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Appendix - 1 Example of Interview Transcripts with Specialists

The following are two examples taken from interview transcripts with specialists. The interviews explored the Indian government's policies in the context of economic liberalisation, and Kerala state government policies including welfare and redistribution policies in the post-reform period of 1990 in Kerala, India.

Example -1 Extract from Interview with Gender Specialist, Usha, UK University.

▪ How has the neo-liberal economic policies of the Indian national government affected women's role in agriculture in Kerala?

Structural Adjustment Packages and other neo-liberal policies have affected the agricultural sector in general through reduction in farm subsidies, increase in price of farm inputs such as fertilisers, fluctuation in prices of farm outputs such as tea, pepper, coconut and rubber, all of which have affected incomes and employment.

▪ In what way did the Kerala state government's policies and programmes in the post-reform period affect women labourers?

The continuous decline in food crops and traditional industries such as cashew and coir, where women have had higher work opportunities has affected income and employment for women. On the other hand, the increase in cash crops such as rubber, coconut etc has less demand for female labour as this employs male skilled labour. State policies and programmes have not taken measures to protect female labour in specific.

▪ How did the Kerala state government's labour policies change in the liberalized agricultural economy?

The agricultural economy, through its continuous decline of food crop production and increase in cash crops, has led to reduction in employment for women as male skilled labour is employed in cash crops such as rubber and coconut.

▪ Do women fare better under a Neo-Marxist, rather than a Marxist, development framework?

Well, a support-led approach and historical factors have enabled women in Kerala to achieve higher levels of social indicators such as education and health, rendering the successful 'Kerala Model of Development'. However this has not been effectively translated into economic or political participation of women, nor has it been able to tackle wider issues of increased violence against women and to create effective institutional interventions to address women's concerns, thus making a Kerala model more of a rhetoric rather than a reality.

- Have the changes at the national and state levels resulted in changes to gender status and identities of women labourers in Kerala?

I think policy changes at the state and national levels may not directly affect the identity of women labour, but through a series of measures that are in blind pursuit of market forces and gender-neutral or gender name-sake initiatives for example social security, employment, health etc, may leave women behind in the development process.

Example - 2 Extract from Interview with Policy Planner, Ravi, Government of Kerala.

- How did the neo-liberal economic policies of the national government affect the agriculture sector in Kerala?

The structure of Kerala agriculture had changed fundamentally even before liberalization. Historically, Kerala had modified its agriculture to suit exports rendering international or national markets. This accounts for the predominance of the cash crop economy especially, Rubber, Pepper, Cardamom, production of Tea, Coffee, and other spices. Traditional food crops have been shrinking mainly in response to comparatively low profit, shortage of labour and demand for house and other construction sites. Therefore, I feel that it will be difficult to trace the impact of post liberalization economic policies on Kerala agriculture. Even the WTO agreements have not had significant impacts per se. However, Regional Trade Agreements especially relating to coconut, pepper, tea, edible oil etc., have had serious repercussions on agriculture in Kerala.

- In what way did the Kerala state government's policies and programmes affect the agricultural sector of Kerala?

The State's Policies have tried to focus on protection of paddy cultivation, diversification and inter-cropping, value addition and subsidiary activities in animal husbandry and fisheries; but these have not yielded the intended results. Still two successes can be mentioned. The first is the participatory, farmer-centered Horticulture Development Project implemented in the 90's with European Commission support, which really helped farmers. The second is the recent initiative of the State Poverty Eradication Mission (Kudumbashree) to harness the potential of lease land farming using women self-help groups, which has yielded promising results. Already 50,000 acres are under cultivation by the women groups through informal leases.

With decentralization Government transferred agriculture staff to the Panchayat Raj institutions and mandated setting apart 30% of the resources for the productive sector (predominantly agriculture and allied activities). This has not been universally effective; but it has thrown up successful local models in paddy cultivation, vegetable cultivation, and land up-gradation. May be this is confined to less than 10% of the area. The State's attempt to improve land quality through integrated watershed management has not taken off due to issues of inter-departmental coordination and lack of farmer demand.

- How did the Kerala state government labour policies change in the liberalised agricultural economy?

State Labour policies have not changed in respect of the agriculture sector. There have been changes only in respect of headload workers and to some extent public sector employees. But it is a fact that the welfare provisions of the Plantation Labour Act have started collapsing in the wake of price crashes of coffee and tea.

- Do women fare better under a Neo-Marxist, rather than a Marxist development framework?

This is a theoretical question and as there has not been any Neo liberal or Marxist development (in the orthodox sense) in Kerala. So the answer depends on the individual belief of the respondent. I personally feel that where there is greater real freedom and where there is greater economic quality and where the State is welfarist and where a humanist credo prevails in the society and polity, women could fair better. Regimented systems as well as ruthless profiteering systems, both do not help women as they affect freedoms, individual and collective.

Appendix - 2 Example of Questionnaire Survey with Farm Owners

Address:

Village

District

1 - Farm size, holdings and area

Location	Average farm size (2ha, 2-5ha, >10ha)		No. of holdings	Total area (hectares)
	Rice	Cash Crop		
1. Highland				
2. Midland				
3. Lowland				

2 - Shifting cropping pattern on farms (1990-2000)

Cropping pattern	Tick	Area change +, -, same
Rice		
Coconut		
Rubber		
Pepper		
Tea		
Coffee		
Cardamom		
Arecanut		
Tapioca		
Others		

(Location (tick) ...Highland/Midland/Lowland)

3 - Farming practices for rice cultivation

Activity	Farming practices t-traditional, m-mechanized
Land preparation	
Seed sowing	
Manuring	
Transplanting	
Weeding	
Irrigation	
Harvesting	
Post harvesting	

4 - Labour category and number of labours

Labour category	Gender		Total labours
	Male	Female	
Permanent			
Casual			
Contractual			

(Location (tick) ...highland/midland/lowland)

5 - Farm work by gender

Activity	Responsibility w-women, m-men, j-jointly	Change	
		$\overline{m} \rightarrow w$	$\overline{w} \rightarrow m$
Land preparation			
Seed sowing			
Manuring			
Transplanting			
Applying pesticide			
Irrigating			
Weeding			
Harvesting			
Post harvesting			
Transporting			

6 - Daily wages of men and women on farms

Location	Wages in cash (Rs)		Wages in kind
	Men	Women	
AML, highland			
TTM, midland			
KMK, lowland			

Appendix - 3 Estimated Cost of Rice Production

The following table shows the estimated cost of rice production, which is based on the discussion with a farm owner in the lowland KMK during fieldwork to Kerala in 2001.

A - Total production cost

1 - Farming Operation	Input Cost (in rupees) 40 rupees = \$1
2 - Nursery preparation hiring tiller/tractor hourly rate	390
3 - Levelling & manuring - Labour wages, 3F+1M - Manure 10 kg @ Rs.6/-per kg	416 60
4 -Transplanting - Levelling by tiller, 3 hrs@ 330/-per hour - Strengthening bunds, labour wages, 2M@Rs 175/-per - Organic manure, 150 kg @ Rs 10/-per kg Lime, 100 kg @ Rs 20/ - per kg - Fertilizer, 50 kg @ Rs 60/-per kg - Pesticide, 10 tanks @ 150/-per tank	990 350 1500 2000 3000 1500
Weeding & manuring - Labour charges, weeding, 15 F @ Rs 80/-per labour/per hour - Manure, 50 kg @ Rs 60 /-per kg	1200 3000
Harvesting - Labour charges, 40 F @ Rs. 80/- per labour/per hour	3200
Transportation & loading charges	1000
- Total production cost	19085

B - Total selling price of products

Product	Value in Rupees
Paddy 30 quintal @ Rs 720/- per quintal	21, 600
Straw	1, 000
- Total income	22, 6000

Appendix - 4 Semi-structured Interview with Women Labour

The following is an excerpt of the semi-structured interviews with a women labour.

QUES: Over the last ten years, how has agricultural transformation on farms in the village changed your opportunities to work on the farm?

RESPONSE: These days the rice area on farms is declining and there is no work for us. But, it is better after my owner started growing tea and coffee. There is more regular work now in tea and coffee harvesting, though it was difficult first to do the work. I didn't know how to pluck tea leaves. My work was very slow. But, now slowly I am learning and I am able to work fast.

QUES: Has the shift from rice to cash crops increased or decreased your work?

RESPONSE: We had more work after my owner started growing tea and coffee. But, my owner says he gets fewer prices in market for tea. So it is all changed now, but earlier also we had problem, when the rubber prices was not good. So, I don't know what will happen in future and if I will get work or not".

QUES: And mechanisation of rice farming?

RES: My farm owner is not using any machines. Our farm is on a hilly place. So very difficult to use machines. Then in tea and coffee farming there is no need for any machines.

QUES: *Has your work load on farm increased or decreased due to agricultural transformation?*

RES: I think our work load is less now a days. I work only limited eight hours a day. I have more time for my family. But, earlier, I didn't have time for anything and had to go anytime my owner wanted me. We never had rest at all in a bonded labour system you see.

QUES: What other benefits do you get in addition to wages paid for your work?

RES: I also get a cup of tea early morning. Then after that we get one time meal in the afternoon. Of course not all farms give food, but the one I work for pepper harvesting give labours one time meal.

QUES: If you were provided with relevant training, to what extent would you be able to do the farm jobs assigned now only to men?

RES: Yes, I will do men's job if I am trained to use a machine and if I am paid more like them. But, even now I am doing their job, cutting branches and sometimes levelling the field, though I don't get the higher wages of men. Transplanting is very

hard, but still I get fewer wages. So men always get more than we get, which I think is not correct, very unfair.

QUES: Do you attend labour union meetings? If yes, how do the labour union meetings address your problems, If you don't attend, why not?

RES: We have no time for union activities. I am a women and my family does not want me to attend any union meetings. I have do household work and also look after my children. Where is the time for me to attend meeting. Only my husband goes for meetings of the Communist party, there is no union on our farms.

QUES: Are you happy with the working conditions on the farms? If no, what are your suggestions for improving the facilities?

RES: No, I am not happy very happy. Not only I but other women also face this problem of walking long distance through very difficult terrain because there is no road to reach the plantation farms. Some times when it is raining, it becomes very difficult to walk. I would prefer to have a good road rather than the muddy one we have now.

QUES: Do you take up any non-agriculture work? If yes, what kind of work and why? If, no, why not?

RES: No I don't do any other work, than doing agriculture work. Because, there are different types of crops on different farms. Than I mostly work on farms growing tea and get regular wok of plucking tea leaves. Than there is also this work on rice farms, though occasionally.

QUES: Will you encourage your children to take up agriculture work? If yes, why? If no, why not?

RES: No, I won't encourage my children to do farm work. I am illiterate that is why I doing agriculture work. But, my children are educated. We don't want them to suffer like us. When they are educated they should be doing something better.

Appendix - 5 Key Themes for Focus Group Discussion

1. How about declining area under rice cultivation? What have been the implications of this?
2. How did agriculture transformation affect men and women's farm role?
3. Why do men and women have different roles?
4. How have these changed in the last 5/10/20 years and why?
5. What does it mean to be an ideal man, or 'ideal women'?
6. Did these have impact on role in the households?
7. And status? Do men and women make major decisions in the households?
8. Has this changed with changes to role in agriculture?
9. With all changes on farms and changing role of women, has gender relations of men and women within households changed?
10. How old and aged women feel being a wage earner?

Appendix - 6 Policy Recommendations

This research reveals several important policy recommendations. First, improvement of the economic situation of all women labourers in Kerala is required. At present women have limited off-season work to supplement their income during the lean period. Training programmes for small scale entrepreneurship like floriculture, medicinal plants and animal husbandry and labour banks for women need be promoted. Forming of labour banks could help in giving credit for women to encourage these programmes. National Employment Guarantee Act (EGA) introduced recently could possibly focus more on women agricultural labourers. These would increase income generation and employment opportunities during the off-season and go some way towards improving women's bargaining power at the household level.

Secondly, women are paid lower wages than men for the work they perform in rice fields which is skilled and hazardous. There is a need to therefore address the issue of unequal wages of male and female labourers. Thirdly, measures need to be taken to improve women's control over decision-making and to increase their autonomy within the household. As Malhotra et al (2002) note, only limited studies of women's empowerment have addressed this issue of agency directly and so this remains an important gap in both the literature and policy arena. The empowerment needs to be looked at more holistically, not merely just in terms of social development indicators of education and health.

Fourthly, the situation of the older women groups requires attention. For older women, for example, there are only limited grants and the old age pension for an agricultural labourer is limited to 100 rupees a month. It is therefore essential to have some kind of national provident fund or other schemes extended to improve the security of the more elderly women labourers in the informal agriculture sector.

Specific policies need to be developed for the most marginalized women groups. The women oriented programmes such as *Kudumbashree*, which leases loan facilities and programmes like leasing land for farming, has been successful in empowering women in terms of economic empowerment and political mobilisation. However, it was also noted that women face a number of constraints of going to the bank to the final stages of marketing their produce in the absence of male members in the group. There is a need to form a 'separate cell' and council for motivating and encouraging women from time-to-time for helping them overcome these constraints to become more economically independent. It could also help in sustaining and following the programmes even after their completion. There is a need to make changes to land legislation to facilitate easy leasing of land and to make this programme more universal by extending it to other areas rather than focussing on micro-enterprises alone and it could also target agricultural women within a local context.

In summary, it is clear that the problems in the agricultural sector of Kerala identified in this thesis have been further exacerbated in recent years. According to a recent Draft Approach Paper for Kerala's Plan (2006) of Kerala State Planning Board, "the state is afflicted by a serious agrarian crisis since the late nineties, which has reportedly taken close to 2000 lives through farmer's suicide". Recent personal communication (March

2007) with Shekhar, Agriculturalist of Kerala Agriculture University also indicates this sad state of affairs of Kerala's agricultural sector. This requires immediate policy action and future local and national state government economic policy must attempt to revive the agricultural sector as a matter of urgency. Shekhar has made the following agricultural development policies for reviving the agriculture in the context of economic liberalisation:

“The government from time-to-time has developed several policies for agriculture. The decline in agriculture growth has now led to a state of despair among farm families. The time has therefore come when we should focus more on economic well-being of the women and men feeding the nation than just on production. It is clear that the human dimension must be the principal determinant of agricultural policies and not just in physical forms; i.e. place faces before figures. The crisis of Kerala's agriculture is not of its own making. It is caused by a number of factors, including economic liberalisation, which has resulted in price crashes in a number of cash crops important to the state. A two pronged strategy is inevitable to revive Kerala's agricultural economy- while continuing the campaign to organise the people against the evils of liberalisation forces and to pressurise the government to initiate farmer protective measures, efforts should be made to increase the productivity of major crops of the state by applying science and technology so as to enhance the profitability of agriculture. A number of measures are warranted to make agricultural production more effective. Increased importance must be given to food crops, so as to address the issue of food scarcity and employment generation, particularly for women-headed families. The government should increase the outlay in the form of budget support to the promotion of cultivation of cereals and pulses. To overcome the limitation of scale, farmer organisational measures such as group farming, group marketing etc have to be fostered. Diversification of crop enterprises and value addition to agriculture produce must be promoted. All the measures, besides boosting up the income stability of the farm families, will also help in generating gainful employment to agricultural workers particularly the women. The basic thrust must be that the state protects and supports the peasant production and traditional industries”. (*Shekhar, personal communication, March 2007*)

These are sensible suggestions necessary to off-set some of the problems and issues of agriculture noted in this thesis. My hope is that they will be implemented to improve the situation for women (and men) in Kerala