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CASTE AND THE RURAL ECONOMY:
Report of a Field Study in Chingleput District

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Caste system in India is among the most researched social systems in the world, and rightly so. It has survived unabated through centuries, and imposed its form on the whole of social life. The omnipresence of caste in all spheres of life can be felt upto the present day. Caste system has links with, and pervades every other social institution and any study of caste has to contend with its many dimensions. For the purpose of the present study, however, we are confining ourselves to one aspect of it alone, namely the economic.^{1/}

Sociological studies on the caste system have frequently focussed their attention on its important economic function - that of the division of the village community into different occupational groups. Every caste performed specific tasks, and in principle enjoyed the monopoly in the region of carrying out the economic function allotted to it. The resulting interdependence among castes was considered as the basis for the stability of the system as a functionally integrated whole.^{2/}

1/ We are not making a review of literature in the following pages, but attempting to trace the main trends in order to place the study in its context.

2/ Sociologists like Wiser, E.H. Leach, L. Dumont, M.N. Srinivas and K.I. Ishwaran are proponents of this view.

The economic significance of the system has been described as that of eliminating competition among workers and constituting a harmonious system of exchange relationships between the different castes in the hierarchy as more or less equal partners.

The limitations of such studies are several. First of all, their conception of traditional Indian village is as a community of peasants working on land, along with non-agrarian groups of artisans and other specialists; exchanges could therefore only take place between cultivators and service communities, and therefore there was reciprocity in the relationships. They fail to take into account the differentiation within the agrarian castes and the gross inequality in rights to land and produce between the different castes.^{3/}

Secondly, the context in which caste system operates, is overlooked. The unequal access to means of production (and hence of products) of the different groups, created and sustained by the caste system, and its influence on the agrarian structure and production process, has received little attention. Moreover, there is little attempt made in these studies to relate the social processes observed to the existing material conditions of production.^{4/}

^{3/} T.O. Beidleman (1958) is an exception. He calls the jajmari system exploitative, and based on unequal ownership of land whereby the landed uppercastes could command the services and products of the landless lower castes.

^{4/} By material conditions of production we mean factors like soil quality, rainfall, cropping pattern, irrigation, extent of consolidation of land, proportion of agricultural labourers, etc.

Economists, on the other hand, have in general tended to ignore the influence of caste structure in their studies of the rural economy; and this includes some of the most comprehensive studies in recent times providing new insights into the structure of the rural markets. The study of interlinkages of land, labour and credit markets by Rudra and Bardhan (1978), for example, has pointed out the changing relationship between tenants, labourers and landowners; but they have nowhere made even a mention of how caste divisions which in the past determined an individual's relation to the production process, have aided or deterred this process. Again, in their study of the various types of labour attachments in West Bengal Rudra and Bardhan aimed at "understanding production relations in agriculture and the nature of segmentation of labour market," the caste factor which has been found to be one of the main determinants^{5/} deciding which section of labourers is attached, has been overlooked. A recent article^{6/} however, mentions caste as one of the factors influencing the bargaining power of labourers.

The above studies by Rudra and Bardhan have quite rightly tried to relate the work contracts to the material conditions of production in a village such as 'level of advancement', but the factors considered seemed to be insufficient. The sample villages chosen are from various districts, in which cropping pattern and intensity, proportion of agricultural labourers relative to cultivated area, and availability of

^{5/} Bardhan and Rudra (1980).

^{6/} A. Rudra, (1981).

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alternative sources of employment could vary significantly even within one of regions of the same level of advancement. We therefore find the limitations in these studies to a failure to consider the social dimensions of the rural economy, and some crucial economic variables as well.

Dharma Kumar (1965) is perhaps the very first among economists who have drawn attention to the social structure and its influence on the rural markets. Her study covering the whole of South India points out the way in which the rural economy is impregnated with caste, governing the extent of wage labour and tenancy prevalent at a particular time point. She further drew attention to the fact that members of the lowest group in the caste hierarchy, the untouchables, had neither the right to own nor lease-in land. They depended completely on the higher land-owning castes and were agrestic slaves even upto the mid-nineteenth century, later swelling the rank of agricultural labourers.

Mencher (1978), Brennan (1974) and John Harris (1979) drawing on field surveys of villages, have perceived the interrelationship between caste and class in the production process. They take note of the fact that higher castes are generally landowners, the lowest castes are for the most part landless or marginal farmers dependent mainly on agricultural labour. They also find tenancy to be more prevalent among the relatively higher castes and some work contracts to be caste specific.

The significance of social composition of the agricultural labourers in determining their bargaining strength, and hence the possibility of organizing themselves has been pointed out by these authors, as well as Gough (1973), Eteillo (1964) and Adhyay (1960). Caste homogeneity among agricultural labourers is likely to act in their favour, as a unifying force, while caste division among labourers strengthens

the hold of landowners over them. According to Harris, however, "a strong sense of caste identity may cut across, or it may tend to strengthen tendencies to political mobilisation on class lines dependent upon the particular local situation and upon the structural positions of castes within the local hierarchies. But in any event, strength of the caste identity is liable to be inimical to the development of a radical meaning system." (Harris, 1979, p.420).

Although these studies have undoubtedly advanced our understanding of the problem, they do not provide answers to several vital questions.

- (a) What accounts for the resilience of the caste system - is it determined irrespective of the material conditions of production and development of productive forces?
- (b) What are the specific ways in which caste plays a divisive or uniting role among the rural labourers? Is it only at the level of consciousness (as the above studies tend to show), or are there concrete ways in which caste is enmeshed in work arrangements between labourers and landowners?
- (c) How does the effectiveness of the exploitation of caste vary with "particular local situations and structural positions within local hierarchies"?

Our study is a modest attempt to seek answers for some of those questions. Our premises are that i) caste divisions already existing in society, could prove a useful divisive force in the hands of employers in keeping the labour force divided, ii) the way in which caste is thus

exploited, and its effectiveness, are crucially dependent both, on the prevailing material conditions of production and the caste composition of landowners and labourers.

The division of society into castes has afforded unequal rights to land and share of produce to the different groups, with institutional backing. Among the lowest castes which have traditionally been deprived of right to own or lease-in land, there existed cultural acceptance of a disadvantaged position in the labour market. This can work to the advantage of employers who would be in a position to keep this labour segregated from the rest and set their wages irrespective of that of the others. Given the structure of labour demand whereby there is need for a small fixed nucleus of labour throughout the year and a much higher number of hands during the peak seasons, the landowners would find it useful to have a cheap labour force of permanent farm servants and some means of ensuring labour supply at low costs during peak seasons. Besides constituting a cheap source of labour, the existence of a segregated labour force would also keep in check a rise in wage levels for other labourers.

Apart from serving to depress wage levels in the short run, the segmentation of workers by caste would also serve a long-run purpose, of keeping workers from organising ^{themselves} as a class. This would keep the balance of forces between employers and labourers tilted in favour of the former, and deter workers from pushing for better terms of work.

It was therefore proposed to examine in detail through^a field study, the nature of the role played by caste in the functioning of the rural economy, especially in the way it influenced work arrangements entered into by labourers and landowners. We aimed at some level of generalisation, (however limited), and therefore opted against single village studies. A sufficiently large number of villages that would give a comprehensive picture of a region were proposed to be covered. This would also afford analysis of inter-village variations in the role of caste in relation to the caste homogeneity or heterogeneity of agricultural labourers.

Factors such as cropping pattern and intensity, extent of irrigation and productivity are important determinants of the demand for labour; availability of alternative employment, and the proportion of agricultural labourers relative to cultivated area influence labour supply, and these material conditions of production could play a crucial role in determining the bargaining strength of labourers. The influence of caste configuration of a village is subject to the boundaries set by these factors. Villages where material conditions vary drastically may find differences in ^{the} way/caste factor is operating, both in nature and extent. For example, a single crop village with low demand for labour would have no need to exploit caste divisions to attract labour, whereas an intensively cropped village may do so. both these have similar caste configurations. The variations in the role played by caste in the different villages would have to be understood in relation to these factors.

The specific objectives of the study were outlined as follows, with the above considerations in view:

i) to examine the way caste is intertwined in the work contracts entered into between labourers and landowners and the resultant effects in the balance of forces between them in different villages;

ii) to relate variations in the above, across villages, to

(a) differences in the caste composition of the landholding groups and of agricultural labourers;

(b) differences in material conditions of production.

In the following sections, we would be discussing the methodology adopted, and the findings of the two stages of the field study.

II

The study consisted of two main stages. The first was an intensive study of five villages to get an inventory of the ways in which caste pervades the rural economy. In the second stage, a random sample of thirty villages was chosen, (out of a total of 160 in a given taluk) to look for generality of the pattern observed in the five villages and to analyse causes of inter-village variations.

For the purpose of the study, the social and material characteristics of villages that were taken into consideration were as follows.

Various possible combinations of two caste groups--'dominant castes' and other castes'--in the groups of agricultural labourers, small landowners and big landowners were enumerated. (See Appendix)

combinations, which we call caste-class configurations (k_1, \dots, k_g) were obtained. ^{7/}

The choice of villages being restricted to a taluk of fairly homogeneous agro-climatic conditions and not very significant variations in the extent of use of high yielding varieties, chemical fertilisers and tubewell irrigation, we took into account the following economic variables alone - the proportion of agricultural labourers/cultivated acre (S_i), the type and number of crops (C_j), ^{8/} yield per acre/harvest of paddy (Y_i), the number of tank irrigated harvests (T_1), and location with respect to alternative sources of employment. (L_p)

The choice of the initial set of five villages was done in the following way. Data on all the above characteristics was available for a group of thirty villages (not randomly chosen), and these villages were organised into a matrix M

$$M = S_i Y_j C_k T_l L_p$$

$$S_i Y_j C_k T_l L_p$$

$$\begin{array}{|c|} \hline k_1 \dots k_g \\ \hline \end{array}$$

where $S_i Y_j C_k T_l L_p$ would represent a set of villages have a given

^{7/} Only two groups of castes were made, scheduled castes on one hand, and clubbing all other castes together on the second, because a) there are hardly any 'high' caste members - Brahmins & Kshatriyas, b) scheduled castes are nearly 50% of all households - and all 'other' castes are nearly the same in the hierarchy of caste.

^{8/} The extent of area cultivated with each of these crops for all the villages could not be obtained, and hence this crude measure.

proportion of agricultural labourers, cropping pattern, productivity, of number/tank irrigated harvests and location with respect to alternative sources of employment. k_1 column would contain villages of the same caste.-class configuration but varying in material conditions of production. The five villages chosen belonged to five different caste-class configurations, and they were two pairs from two different rows, and the fifth from a third row.

After the choice of the five villages (for which information on castewise landownership was already available) a sample of households representative of the different caste groups and landholding/labouring groups in the villages, was chosen from each village,^{9/} and a survey conducted.^{10/}

Data was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire and information on landownership stated by respondents was cross checked with land records.^{11/}

^{9/} The actual process was as follows. The hometax register had the complete list of households, out of which we chose households by calling out numbers from the table of random number. We took a much longer sample than we were going to survey. With the help of the census information we had on the number of households according to caste and landownership groups, we had decided on the requisite representation from each of these groups, and we checked with land records on the landholding status of the households to get the required number from the sample chosen out of house tax register.

^{10/} The surveys in both stages of the study were jointly conducted by Hilar Shah of Centro for Development Studies, and myself. We were guided and helped in the field survey by five educated young men from the villages, whose understanding of the problem being studied and conditions in the village made the outcome of surveys better than what we ourselves would have been able to do.

^{11/} This did not work out in the case of larger landowners whose holdings were always understated. The 'thaliyari' (Asst. accountant) of the village helped us out by pointing out that their holdings had been registered in the names of several members of the family. We included the land held by all the members of the household (living under the

The random sample of ~~thirty~~ villages in the second stage was studied with the help of a village-level questionnaire filled in from official records and through interviews with a sample of landowners, tenants, and labourers engaged in different types of work contracts.

These thirty villages were again, organised into the matrix M. Variations across villages in the nature and extent of role of caste and the resulting differences in bargaining strength of labourers were analysed in terms of their caste-class configurations through a comparison of sets/villages in the same row, and in terms of differences in conditions of production through a comparison of sets villages in the same column. Comparison of the bargaining strength of labourers was ~~concerned~~ mainly with respect to its manifestations on the terms and conditions of work, wage levels and discrimination based on caste in the rural markets. This was sought to be substantiated through accounts of past struggles of labourers.

Since the matrix M had 88 elements (being 11 x 8) and the sample villages were only thirty, a number of cells in the matrix are empty. This means comparisons across caste-class configurations or material conditions of production are restricted to the types found within the same row or column respectively. A complete ordering of variations according to types is therefore rendered impossible.

11/ cont...

same roof in the landowner's holding. Labourers and permanent farm servants also helped in confirming the extent of holding of a given landowner. At times, the landowners' accounts of the number of allotment holders and expenditures incurred therein, itself gave them away.

We conducted surveys separately in the pr and chieri of a village, local youth helping us with the latter.

III

The area chosen for field study is Chingleput Taluk in the Chingleput district of Tamil Nadu.

Chingleput district is a flat strip of country, bounded on the east by the Bay of Bengal with a coast line of 115 miles. On the south it adjoins South Arcot, on the west North Arcot and Chittoor, and on the North Nellore. Situated about the middle of its eastern boundary is Madras City.

The climate is, compared that of inland districts, temperate. The mean temperature is about 83°F varying from 60°F-112°F during the year. Average rainfall in the district is 45.03 inches per year, the N.E. Monsoon (October-December) accounting for more than half the total.

71.1% of the net sown area is irrigated, and tanks form the most important source of irrigation (63.5%) upto the present day. There are three main agricultural seasons: the Samba harvested in mid-January, followed by the Navarai ending in Mid-April and Somavari immediately thereafter in May. 80.2% of the total area sown is under food crops -- paddy and ragi, the area under paddy alone being 67%. Groundnut and sugarcane are the other crops, the latter being concentrated in the southern taluks.

85.5% of the area under paddy is under highyielding varieties. Tube-well irrigation has risen dramatically since the sixties, from irrigating a mere 19 hectares in 1960-61 to 14,231 hectares in 1975-76.

Use of tractors is also widely prevalent, there being 1074 tractors in all, used in the district in 1974; the district has the second largest number of tractors in the State, after S. Arcot.

Though agriculture is still the main source of employment, industries in the northern taluks and in Madras are increasingly becoming an alternative source. The atomic research centre at Kalpakam on the south-east is again, a source of employment of casual labourers especially in its construction activities.

Chingleput district has a very large population of scheduled castes, which is nearly wholly comprised of Paraiyans. They form 28.7% of the population, Vanniyars 16% and Mudaliars, Naidus, Yadavas and Reddys together, another 20%. Brahmins form less than 5% of the population. Other castes include various service communities, granamis, chettiars and Rajas.

Description of villages chosen for intensive study

The five villages chosen for the first stage of the study can be grouped into three:

- (A) Aminjikkaram and Mahamai
- (B) Arungunram and Voyalur
- (C) Kilur.

Villages in each group having the same material conditions but differing caste-class configurations. They belong to different parts of Chingleput taluk, and are dispersed over a wide area.

Factors influencing agriculture: Group A villages have two main crops, (Table 1), paddy and groundnut, and grow two crops of the first and one of the second. Ragi is also grown on small tracts of 'punja' (dry) land. Only Samba harvest of paddy is irrigated by the local tanks and only 60% of the Samba area is sown for Navarai paddy, irrigated by tube wells. The net yield per acre of paddy is 1700 kgs. on an average. These villages have a low proportion of agricultural labourers per unit cultivated area - .76 and 1.00 respectively.

Arunguram and Voyalur (Group B) strike the observer as villages of abundance. They have three crops of paddy, and groundnut and ragi are also grown simultaneously on dry land. Arunguram has two harvests irrigated by the local tanks but the case of Voyalur is unique. The tank is almost completely dry, but tube wells sunk on the river bed of Palar irrigate three paddy crops. The yield per acre of paddy varies from 1700 kgs - 1920 kgs. The population pressure on land in this set of villages, is however, high (1.80 and 2.02).

Vilur is different from A and B both in cropping pattern and irrigation. Paddy is the only main crop grown here, Ragi being confined to small dry tracts for local consumption in Sornavari. It has at least two tank irrigated harvests and sometimes more. Yield per acre of paddy is almost the same as that of the other villages. The main distinguishing factor is the very high population pressure on land, $S = 2.80$ in this case.

Table 1Pattern of Agriculture

Villages	Crops	No. of paddy crops	No. of Tank Irrigated harvests	Prod. paddy/acre	Land-Man ratio	Proportion of wet land (Punja)
Aminjikkarai	Paddy, Ragi, Groundnut	2	1	1700-	1.76	.29
Manamai				1920		
Arungunram	Paddy, Ragi, Groundnut	3	2	1700-	1.80	.50
Voyalur				1920		
Kilur	Paddy and Ragi	2	2	1700- 1920	2.80	.58

Population and Caste Composition

Of the five villages, Voyalur has the largest population (2519) and Aminjikkarai the least (678). The population and number of households in each village is given in Table 2 below:

Table 2Population

Villages	No. of Hhs.	Population
Aminjikkarai	113	678
Manamai	253	1650
Arungunram	174	759
Voyalur	445	2519
Kilur	230	1084

The larger villages, namely Voyalur, Manamai and Kilur consist of a number of small settlements. Voyalur is divided into an upper caste settlement, called ur and three Paraiyan settlements called cheris or colonies - Periya colony, Chinra colony and Attangarai colony. Two of the colonies lie north of the ur, and one, to its south, each of them separated from the ur by atleast a kilometre.

Manamai has four settlements, the ur consisting of Mudaliars, Yadavas and different service communities, Kazhanippakkam exclusively of Naickers, and 'Manamai' and 'Dargas' colonies of Paraiyans. The colonies are themselves nearly two kilometres apart, and the ur a further one kilometre away.

Kilur has an ur, two colonies and a Naicker settlement called Dharmapuri. The smaller villages are divided simply into the ur and the colony.

The distribution of households in the villages into castes in the five villages is given below:

Table 3

Caste Composition

Villages	Total No. of	Brah- min	Muda- liar	Nai- cker	Nai- du	Che- ttiar	Yad- avas	Ser- vices	Hari- jan	Red- dy	Gra- mani	Others
Aminjikkarai	113	-	-	12	8	10	9	6	27	8	31	2
Manamai	253	-	7	20	2	-	5	4	215	-	-	-
Arungunram	174	-	-	-	26	-	10	-	138	-	-	-
Voyalur	445	1	14	1	-	4	25	6	383	2	-	9
Kilur	230	-	-	16	11	2	6	3	192	-	-	-

In all villages except Aminjikkarai, Paraiyans form more than sixty percent of the number of households.^{11/} The composition of upper caste members varies from village to village. Mudaliars in Voyalur, Mudaliars and Naickers in Manamai, Naidus in Arungunram and Kilur and Gramanis and Naickers in Aminjikkarai are the principal castes, while Yadavas and various artisan and service castes are also present. The number of castes in a village varies from ^amere three in Arungunram to nine in Voyalur and Aminjikkarai.

In the Hierarchy of castes in these villages, Mudaliars and Reddys would rank on top, and Naidus nearly on par. Yadavas and Gramanis rank next, and Chettiars with them. Naickers and artisans constitute the second last rung from the bottom, and Paraiyans rank bottom most.

Land ownership:

All the five villages exhibit an extremely high degree of concentration of land holdings, and have a large number of agricultural labourers.

Table 4 (a)

Distribution of Land

Villages	No. of households owning				
	No Land	1 Acre	1-5 Acres	5-10 Acres	10 Acres
Aminjikkarai	62 (54.87)	5 (4.42)	41 (36.28)	5 (4.42)	-
Manamai	76 (30.03)	111 (43.87)	56 (22.13)	3 (1.19)	7 (2.77)
Arungunram	92 (52.87)	50 (28.74)	9 (5.17)	21 (12.07)	2 (1.15)
Voyalur	283 (63.6)	26 (5.84)	112 (24.67)	17 (3.82)	7 (1.57)
Kilur	173 (75.22)	23 (10.00)	28 (12.17)	4 (1.74)	2 (0.08)

^{11/} The original group of villages from which these five were chosen were not representative of the taluk, and had a higher than usual proportion of harijan households. This accounts for the situation in these five

There is considerable variation between the five villages in the percentage of households which are landless (30-75) but if the first two categories are combined to give the number of households that have to necessarily depend on agricultural labour, the variation is far less (58%-85%). The size of the middle groups is smallest in Kilur and largest in Aminjikkarai, the latter having no households owning above 10 acres of land.

Table 4 (b)

Distribution of cultivated area into ownership holdings*

(In case of land held by non-residents, only total area could be obtained, and are given below the cultivated area in brackets).

Village	Total cultivated area	AREA IN ACRES OF HOLDINGS			
		Less than 1 acre	Between 1 and 5 acres	Between 5 and 10 acres	More than 10 acres
Aminjikkarai	307.01 (131.39)	3.50	137.12	36.50	-
Manamai	797.82 (150.00)	77.50	168.00	24.00	378.52
Arungunram	322.87 (40.00)	35.60	36.00	163.17	41.10
Voyalur	781.46 (50.00)	18.26	336.10	136.00	241.10
Kilur	290.10 (28.00)	16.10	112.00		98.00

*Except in the case of Voyalur (where all land held by non-residents is leased out) total operational holdings is not equal to total cultivated area. This is because the land is held by owners in neighbouring villages who cultivate it directly.

Fn.11 (contd.)

villages. The random sample of villages used in the next stage has only 50% Harijan households.

Table 4 (c)Distribution of Cultivated area into Operational Holdings

Village	Total cultivated area*	AREA IN ACRES OF HOLDINGS			
		Less than 1 acre	Between 1 and 5 acres	Between 5 and 10 acres	More than 10 acres
Aminjilkarai	307.01	3.5	137.12	30.50	15.50
Manamai	797.82	80.3	160.00	29.00	366.02
Arungunram	322.87	45.94	34.17	25.00	31.16
Voyalur	781.46	20.06	372.10	140.00	246.10
Kilur	290.10	34.10	114.10	38.50	80.00

*Except in the case of Voyalur (where all land held by non-residents is leased out), total of operational holdings is not equal to total cultivated area. This is because the land is held by owners in neighbouring villages who cultivate it directly.

We find that relatively few households own more than 10 acres of land in the other villages as well. Kilur and Arungunram have each two households owning above 10 acres, but while in Arungunram this consists of holdings of 11 acres and 30 acres respectively, in Kilur the status of the two major landowners is markedly different, one owning ^amere 13 acres while the other, 85 acres in all.

In Manamai five of the seven large landowners are part of the same extended family and control between them 325 acres of land in the village. A similar situation exists in Voyalur, where all landowners owning above 10 acres belonging to two family groups.

The concentration in the distribution of cultivated land is most acute in Kilur - a single owner accounting for one third of it. Manamai follows suit, with 2.77% of the number of households owning 47% of the land between them. Voyalur and Arungunram rank next but the concentration could be said to be the least in Aminjikkarai since almost four times as much land as owned by the 5-10 acres landholding size group is held by about thirty households belonging to the neighbouring villages (and cultivating it with labour drawn from their respective villages).

Caste and Landownership

The positions of different castes in the caste and economic hierarchy are nearly congruent in all the five villages. Nevertheless, class differentiation can be observed among the Paraiyans, and the middle castes (in the local hierarchy) also constitute a significant proportion of agricultural labourers, so that there is no longer a strict congruence.

Tables 5a, 5b and 5c below give a detailed account of the distribution of landholdings between castes, the caste composition of the different landholding groups and distribution of land within each caste in the five villages.

From the tables we can see that Mudaliars as a rule are concentrated in the top two landholding groups. As far as Maidus who are the largest landowners in Arungunram and Kilur are concerned, this cannot be said as they are dispersed over all landholding size groups.

The middle group owning between 1 and 5 acres of land consists of Yadavas and Gramanis mainly. Naickers come next only to the Paraiyans in the rank of landless or marginally landed, and in only one of the five villages do we find about 13% of them owning between 5 and 10 acres.



Table 5 (a): Caste Composition of Each Landholding Size Group (Percentages)

Village	LH Size Group (acres)	% of Households Castes											Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Aminjikkarai	0	-	-	7.7	5.8	11.54	3.85	11.54	51.92	3.85	3.85	-	100
	< 1	-	-	80.00	-	-	20.00	-	-	-	-	-	100
	1-5	-	-	7.84	5.88	7.84	11.76	-	-	5.88	60.78	-	100
	5-10	-	-	-	40.00	-	-	-	-	60.00	-	-	100
	> 10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
Manamai	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.02	99.98	-	-	-	100
	< 1	-	-	13.5	-	-	-	1.0	85.50	-	-	-	100
	1-5	-	-	7.14	3.57	-	8.93	3.57	76.79	-	-	-	100
	5-10	-	66.6	33.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
	> 10	-	85.71	-	-	-	-	-	14.29	-	-	-	100
Arungunram	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	100
	< 1	-	-	-	8.0	-	-	-	92.0	-	-	-	100
	1-5	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	100
	5-10	-	-	-	95.24	-	4.76	-	-	-	-	-	100
	> 10	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100
Voyalur	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	100	-	-	-	100
	< 1	-	-	-	-	-	7.69	15.38	57.7	-	-	19.83	100
	1-5	3.4	-	0.89	-	-	18.75	1.79	74.11	-	-	3.5	100
	5-10	-	52.94	-	-	11.76	11.76	-	11.76	11.76	-	-	100
	> 10	-	71.43	-	-	28.57	-	-	-	-	-	-	100

Table 5 (a) contd.

Village	LH Size Group	% of Households Castes										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Kilur	0	-	-	2.32	-	0.58	2.32	1.16	93.64	-	-	-
	< 1	-	-	13.04	13.04	4.35	-	-	65.22	-	-	-
	1-5	-	-	18.42	10.52	-	-	-	39.47	-	-	-
	5-10	-	-	40.0	40.0	-	5.26	20.0	-	-	-	-
	> 10	-	-	-	100.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Table 5 (b)

Landholding Status of Each Caste Group (Percentages)

Village	LH Size Group (acres)	% of Households (Castes)										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Aminji- kharai	0	-	-	33.3	37.5	60.0	22.2	100	100	25.0	6.1	-
	< 1	-	-	33.3	-	-	11.1	-	-	-	-	-
	1-5	-	-	33.3	37.5	40.0	66.6	-	-	37.5	93.9	-
	5-10	-	-	-	25.0	-	-	-	-	37.5	-	-
	> 10	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	-
Manamai	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	25.0	34.88	-	-	-
	< 1	-	-	75.0	-	-	-	25.0	44.19	-	-	-
	1-5	-	-	20.0	-	-	100	50.0	20.00	-	-	-
	5-10	-	28.6	5.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	> 10	-	71.4	-	-	-	-	-	0.93	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	100	100	-	100	100	100	-	-	-

Table 5 (b) contd...

Village	In. size group	Status of each caste group (percentages)										
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Arūṅṅuram	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	66.67	-	-	-
	< 1	-	-	-	15.38	-	-	-	33.3	-	-	-
	1-5	-	-	-	-	-	90.0	-	-	-	-	-
	5-10	-	-	-	76.92	-	10.0	-	-	-	-	-
	> 10	-	-	-	7.69	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Total	-	-	-	100.00	-	100.00	-	100.00	-	-	-
Voyalur	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	73.59	-	-	-	
	< 1	-	-	-	-	-	8.0	66.7	3.52	-	55.6	
	1-5	100	-	100	-	-	84.0	33.3	21.67	-	44.4	
	5-10	-	64.29	-	-	50.0	8.0	-	0.2	100.0	-	
	> 10	-	35.71	-	-	50.0	-	-	-	-	-	
	Total	100	100	100	-	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Kilur	0	-	-	25.0	-	50.0	66.67	66.67	84.38	-	-	
	< 1	-	-	18.75	27.27	50.0	-	-	7.81	-	-	
	1-5	-	-	43.75	36.36	-	33.3	-	7.81	-	-	
	5-10	-	-	12.5	18.18	-	-	33.3	-	-	-	
	> 10	-	-	-	18.18	-	-	-	-	-	-	
	Total	-	-	100	100	100	100	100	100	-	-	

.....2/-



Table 5 (c) : Land Area (in acres) Controlled by Each Caste Group

Vill- ages	Caste											Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Aminji- kkaarai	-	-	9.02 (5.12)	19.0 (10.82)	7.5 (4.27)	19.2 (10.82)	-	-	38.6 (21.98)	82.8 (47.15)	-	175.62 (100.00)
Manamai		339.32 (18.47)	34.5 (5.02)	8.0 (1.23)	-	24.0 (4.01)	0.8 (0.1)	237.43 (36.65)	-	-	-	641.82 (100.00)
Arungun- ram	-	-	-	203.7 (72.01)	-	43.2 (15.7)	-	34.8 (12.3)	-	-	-	282.81 (100.00)
Voyalur	3.0 (0.44)	296.1 (40.48)	3.2 (0.44)	-	44.4 (6.07)	97.1 (13.26)	8.0 (1.09)	260.8 (35.65)	8.2 (1.09)	-	12.0 (1.33)	731.48 (100.00)
Kilur	-	-	42.8 (16.33)	129.4 (49.37)	0.9 (0.34)	9.3 (3.55)	7.0 (2.67)	73.3 (27.91)	-	-	-	262.1 (100.00)

<u>Caste Codes:</u>	1:	Brahmin	2:	Mudaliar
	3:	Naicker	4:	Naidu
	5:	Chettiar	6:	Yadava
	7:	Service Communities		
	8:	Paraiyans	9:	Reddy
	10:	Gramanis	11:	Others

The overall status of Paraiyans is the lowest in the hierarchy, but while in two of the villages not a single Paraiyan household owns more than an acre of land, two households in Voyalur own 8 acres each, while in Manamai, two Paraiyan families own more than 10 acres of land, the extent of one of these holdings being 40 acres of dry land.

Coming now to each landholding size groups in the villages, we find that in Arangunram and Voyalur, those below 1 acre holding consist exclusively of Paraiyans, while in the other villages both Paraiyans and other castes constitute their ranks. But as mentioned earlier, in Kilur, Manamai and Voyalur, the Paraiyans were themselves differentiated especially in the last two cases.^{12/}

Concentration of land in the hands of one caste group is greatest in Arangunram, 72% of the cultivated area owned by Naidus. In Aminjikkarai the largest single landowning group is the gramanis. In Manamai and Voyalur 52% and 40% of the land respectively is controlled by Madaliars, and in Kilur 49% by Naidus. In these three villages, the land held by Paraiyans is also significant - 36%, 35% and 27% of cultivated area, as a result of their numerosness, though the average size of their holdings is almost insignificant when compared with that of the other castes.

^{12/} The caste-class configuration of these villages are as follows:
 Arangunram: K₁ Kilur: K₃ Manamai: K₆ Aminjikkarai: V₃
 Voyalur: K₅

Findings of the field study in the five villages

I. LABOUR ARRANGEMENTS: - A plethora of arrangements for labour between labourers and landowners were found in the five villages, known by different names and varying from each other in one or more aspects.

The labour arrangements could be broadly classified into three types,

- (a) attached
- (b) partially attached, and
- (c) casual.

a) Attached-labour contracts: Four of the five villages had attached labourers of one type or more - known by the names "padial", "Suvasi," "Siruvedukkarar", and Koottuppayirkar" respectively.

Padials were found in Voyalur and Manamai, and the latter had suvasis as well. Kilur had only suvasis, Arungunram, siruvondukarars and Aminjikkurai, koottuppayirkarars.

Padials seem to be the most common type of attached labourers in Chingleput villages. They are farm servants engaged on a long-term basis usually as part of an arrangement whereby they take a loan from their employers and agree to work full-time for them in return.

The payments for padials are usually in kind, (called 'padi') and vary even within the same village, according to the age-group to which they belong (which represents their capacity to work) but married adults are all paid the same. In recent years, some villages have taken to cash payment, but in the villages of our study kind wages were still prevalent. The periodicity of payment also varies, from monthly to every crop season or annually. The padials are, in addition

to these payments, given gruel twice a day throughout the year, besides new clothes for Pongal.

The padials in Manamai received 8 marakkals (51.2 kgs.) of paddy a month if they were married adults, while those between 15-20 and not married received between 5 and 7 marakkals. In Voyalur the corresponding rates are 12 marakkals (76.8 kgs.), and 5-8 marakkals. Children between 10 and 15 years were paid between 2 and 5 marakkals in both villages, according to their work load. The differences in terms for a "married" padial are because his wife is expected to contribute labour services as well.

The work of padials consists of all agricultural work required in the landowners' fields and in addition, grazing his cattle, cutting grass, collecting firewood, cleaning the cowsheds, milking the cows, making dung cakes for fuel and running errands for the landowner. This necessarily means that in practice, the padials wife does all the non-agricultural work required of him for no additional payment. Besides these, in Voyalur the padial's wife is also expected to do weeding, transplanting and harvesting in the landowner's fields as part of the padial's contractual arrangement.

All padials described above are Paraiyans. In Voyalur we came across a Naicker padial, the only one in the village, but he described his work as "supervisory", not involving actual manual labour, but consisting of recruitment of labour and taking the responsibility for getting jobs done and was paid Rs.15 per month in addition to the 12 marakkals of paddy received by the other padials. In fact, he enjoyed a totally different status from the rest, with free entry into the landowner's house and as his confidante.

Padials are only employed by the largest landowners in the village - in both Voyalur and Manamai, these happen to be mainly the Mudaliar families.

The padial system seems to have undergone important changes in the past few decades. While in the past a padial was attached to a landowner's family almost indefinitely, serving him while he can and enjoying the latter's patronage in his old age, today a padial is employed for at least four or five years till he clears his debts, and is replaced by another. The labourers say that through the insecurity introduced, the landowners make sure that labourers "don't take advantage". There is also the feeling among labourers that the more beneficial (for labourers) aspects of the padial system have ceased to exist.

The 'suvasi' system : This is a system of attachment wherein the labourer is given a land allotment of about thirty cents or less, in return for which he works as a full-time farm servant to the landowner. The payment arrangements are usually either of these two: a) the labourer takes the entire produce of the allotment and is maintained throughout the year b) the labourer gets 50% of the produce from the allotment and in addition, a monthly payment in kind.

Suvasis are allowed to use the landowners' plough bullocks and are given seed loans to be returned after harvest. Straw from the allotment is given to the landowner in return for use of the bullocks.

The work obligations of suvasis are same as those of padials and in addition, they also function as recruiters of labour. The landowner is thus ensured of labour supply during peak seasons, and as for the suvasis, it places them in a better status than padials among the agricultural labourers. A suvasi's family can be assured of employment for the greater part of the year.

The suvasi's wife is required to do domestic chores for the landowner's household, but when she does agricultural labour, is always made some payment (usually less than prevailing casual wages).

Suvasis exceed the number of padials in Manamai; Kilur has only suvasis, a very large number of them (forty in all, paraiyans, employed by a single Naidu landowner who owns 85 acres of land. In both the villages, the number of suvasis has increased over the years, with fewer paraiyans willing to become padials, according to landowners. All the same, while earlier the allotment made to the suvasi assured permanence of the contract, (some suvasis even being given it as a grant in their old age) this is no longer the case. The allotment holding of a suvasi is regularly reshuffled so that he does not lay claim to a particular piece of land, and the contract itself can be terminated at will by the landowner after a couple of years.

The 'sirivedu' system: This is very similar to the 'suvasi' system, with better terms of payment. The labourer takes all the produce from his allotment, and in addition is paid 5-7 marakkals of paddy per month in addition to being given gruel twice a day. The 'sirivedukkarar's work obligations are exactly those of the suvasi's.

This type of attachment was found only in Arungunram. It is possible that 'sirivedu' & 'suvasi' stand for the same systems, and that in this particular village the terms of payment have improved. The proportion of labourers doing sirivedu is however low, compared to those doing semi-attached or casual labour.

Here again, paraiyans are working for Naidu landowners who own more than ten acres of land.

The 'koottuppayir' system: 'Koottuppayir' actually means joint cultivation, and perhaps stood for some kind of tenurial arrangement in earlier times. Today it is a form of attached labour with the least security various types of wage payment are observed in this context.

The labourer enjoys produce of the allotment, but neither receives gruel twice a day or monthly kind payment in paddy. He does all the work expected of a suvasi, including recruitment of labour, for Samba and Navarai seasons. In the sonavari season, he is free to work for any other employer.

This system was found only in Aminjikkarai. Only two paraiyans worked as Koottuppayirkarans, for Chottians. According to the landowners, this was the most suitable arrangement for villages like theirs where there are only two paddy crops. There is not sufficient work the year round to keep a full time servant engaged in, and hence padials or suvasis would be uneconomical.

Partially-attached labour: A new phenomenon that is becoming increasingly important is a kind of "partial-attachement" of labourers. This system varies from attached labour in the following ways. Though in this case also the labourers are given a land allotment by the landowner, the labourers are not full-time servants but are only required to labour in the landowner's fields whenever additional hands (other than attached labourers) are required. They do only agricultural work, unlike the attached labourers who have to do any task given to them.

Their terms of payment are also different. Whenever they do agricultural labour for the landowner, they are paid some nominal wages, always less than the prevailing wage-rates for casual labour. The labourer's family is also expected to give first priority to the landowner's labour demands. The labourer has to pay either a fixed quantity of grain or a share of the produce on the allotment to the landowner. These terms vary across villages. The shares are usually 50% of the produce on tank irrigated land, and 67% on tube-well irrigated land, for every harvest. The fixed grain payments are much more varied, but amount to at least half the produce on the allotment every harvest.

The use of plough bullocks of the landowner, which the allotment holders of "attached" category enjoy, is however, not open to these 'partially attached' labourers; and interest of about 10% per month is charged by the landowner on any advances given to them. The duration of their revenue was generally one year, but could even be just one crop season.

All villages except Aminjikkarai have 'partially-attached' labourers, but the terms are different. In Voyalur and Manamai, the labourers give a share of the produce, 50% or 67% to the landowner, according to the nature of irrigation on the allotment. In Kilur, the labourers had to pay a share of produce in the Samba season when productivity is highest of the three seasons, and in the Navarai when the crop was subject to greater risks (due to uncertainty of irrigation), a flat 1 marakkal (6.4 kgs.) per cent of allotment had to be paid. In Aurungunram it was the other way around - fixed grain payment in Samba and share of produce in Navarai, an arrangement of greater advantage to labourers.

This system of partial attachment seems to suit both labourers and landowners. The labourers entering this kind of arrangement are again, paraiyans and to them the relative independence assured by such a contract (compared to attached labour) make it more attractive. In fact, they consider it even better than casual labour, and their status to be that of 'tenants'. They call the contract 'varam' or 'kuttagai' i.e., share and fixed rent tenancies, and only when some probing was done on the conditions of work did the actual nature of the contract become clear. Paraiyans one generation ^{ago} were not permitted to lease-in land and therefore they do not seem to mind the additional strings attached when some land is "rented-out" to them in the present-day.

The landowners who "rented" out land to paraiyans in this arrangement were all the biggest landowners in the village owning more than 10 acres at least and the size of each plot never exceeded 50 cents. The proportion of land rented out by each landowner was less than a tenth of his total holdings. To the landowners therefore, this was a method of ensuring labour supply in peak seasons at lower wage rates, without incurring the costs of providing food throughout the year or interest free loans, as in the case of attached labourers. The labourers are constantly reshuffled and "unless you are obedient and willing to slave for the landowner", the contract can end after a single crop season.

In spite of complaints like "only straw for bullocks remains, after all is paid", there is stiff competition among paraiyan labourers to enter into such 'partially attached' labour contracts. This may be because in addition to their coveted status as 'tenants', it also assures them wage-employment albeit at lower wages.

Table 6

COMPARISON OF THE DIFFERENT ATTACHED AND PARTIALLY
ATTACHED LABOUR CONTRACTS

Contract	Work obligation	Terms of Payment	Additional Benefits	Duration of Contact
1. Padial	All agricultural work in the landowner's fields throughout the year, and a range of domestic chores - cleaning cowshed, grazing cattle, collecting firewood, running errands. In some cases wife has to do agricultural work free, otherwise family usually does domestic work free, agricultural work for payment.	A monthly payment in kind ranging from 8-12 marakkals of paddy (51.2-76.8 kgs.) and two times gruel every day	Advances given interest free. Gifts of clothing every year.	About four or five years
2. Suvasi	Same as above except that family paid if the work is done, and that suvasi recruits labourers as well.	Produce from allotment of about 30 cents and two times gruel every day.	Permitted to use landowner's plough, bullocks. Interest free advances, and gifts of clothing yearly	Same as above
3. Siruvedu	Same as suvasi	Produce from 30 cents of land allotment and a monthly payment in kind of 5-7 marakkals (31-44.8 kgs.) of paddy, and gruel twice a day	Same as suvasi	Maximum of four or five years
4. Koottupayir	Same as above, except that work is required to be done only for Samba and Navarai seasons.	Produce from 30 cents of land allotment. No food, or payment in kind.	Same as above	Same as above

Table 6 (contd..)

Contract	Work obligations	Terms of payment	Additional benefits	Duration of contract
5. Partially attached labour	Required to do agricultural work for the landowner whenever the latter requires. Cannot work for anyone else. Family also expected to give just priority to the landowner's labour demands.	Wages when agricultural work is done is Re.0.50-1.00 or 1.6 kgs. below prevailing wage rates. Given allotment of bet.30-50 cents. Labourer pays a) 50% or 57% of produce on land to landowner every harvest according to whether land is tank or tube-well irrigated or n) 6.4 kgs. of paddy per cent of allotment every harvest. Either (a) or (b), or (n) in one crop season in (b) in the second, prevails	Advances given on or interest of about 10% per month, deducted from labourers share in the harvest	As per usual, but can be even one crop season.

Table 7

DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS ACCORDING TO THE DIFFERENT LABOUR ARRANGEMENTS

Village	A.lab. Hrs.	Agrl. Lab.		Attached*				Parti- ally atta- ched	Indi- rectly atta- ched**	Cas- ual	
		Total	M	F	Pañi- yal	suva- si	Siru- vedu				Koottu- prayir
Aminji- kkarai	67	185	109	76	-	-	-	3	-	3	179
Arungunram	142	456	254	202	-	-	36	-	10	43	307
Maramci	187	795	413	382	12	20	-	-	23	84	556
Voyalur	309	1060	572	488	60	-	-	-	12	23	965
Kilur	196	504	272	232	-	120	-	-	12	163	309

*We have included family members also required to do free labour, and not free to work for other landowners.

**'Indirectly attached' are those obliged to give first preference to a given landowner's labour demands because of being the family member of an attached or partially attached labourer.

Casual labour: Despite the existence of various types of attachment of labour, casual labour is by far the most common form of agricultural labour (Table 7 above).

There exists even in the case of casual labour, differences in systems and types of payment for the different operations and in rates for the different sexes. In each of these, there are inter-village variations as well.

Ploughing, weeding and transplanting have time-rate of payment, whereas plucking seedlings from the nursery for transplanting has either piece or time rates of payment. In the case of harvesting, a system of 'collective-piece' rate is practised. The wages per head for male and female labourers are fixed, and so is the number of men and women to be employed per acre. The total wage bill thus gets determined, and if more than the stipulated number of labourers seek employment, this total wage bill is divided between them.

Piece-rate is favoured by landowners for plucking seedlings but in cases where increased work intensity has led to poor quality of work, they have settled for paying very low time rates. Workers' preference seems to be for time rates in most cases, though a few of them thought piece-rate enabled them to finish work earlier if they were fast enough. Piece-rates in fact turned out to be a way of fixing a minimum productivity, because workers complained that they were not given additional wages even if they completed more work, though they could stop work earlier if the minimum work was done before the day ended.

Both cash and kind wages exist, the latter being paid for harvest. This seems to be a suitable arrangement for both parties.

Ploughing and plucking seedlings are exclusively male operations, transplanting and weeding exclusively female, and harvesting is done by both. As is to be expected, transplanting and weeding are also the lowest paid, and harvest wages for women are lower.

Table 8 gives below the wages and systems of payment in the different villages.

Table 8
Wages* for Casual Labour.

Villages	Ploughing (time-rate)	Plucking seedlings	Weeding and Transport Time rate	Harvesting	
				Men Time rate	Women paddy
Aminjikkarai	Rs.2	Rs.3 time rate	Rs.1.50	2m**	2m
Narayani	Rs.5	Rs.5 time rate	Rs.3.00	4m	4m
Arunginrai	Rs.4	Rs.4/100 bundles	Rs.2.00	4m	3m
Vogalur	Rs.4	-do-	Rs.2.00	4m	2½m
Filur	Rs.4	-do-	Rs.2.00	3m	2m

(*wages mentioned are always supplemented by gruel once a day).

** 1 measure = 1.6 kgs. of paddy

Caste influences are everywhere to be found even in the recruitment of casual labour. First of all, the supply of labour is demarcated along caste lines. The landowner of each caste can employ labourers either of the same or of the lower ranking castes. Thus the Mudaliar or Naidu landowner has access to a larger group of labourers than a paraiyan landowner.

The Naicker communities in both Manamai and Kilur worked only within the community - they would not work for either the Mudaliars or Naidus who were above them in the caste hierarchy, or for Paraiyans who were below. In addition, Naicker landowners seldom employed labourers from among paraiyans.

It is only paraiyan women who engage in wage labour; while Naicker women work on land, they seldom work on another household's fields for wages. Thus paraiyan women have virtual monopoly over work in the weeding and transplanting seasons.

Both caste and economic factors place the harijan landowners in a vulnerable situation. Though they account for between 12% to as high as 36% of the cultivated area, they usually own less than ten acres of land and the average size of their holding is less than 2 acres in all cases. While the Naicker landowners (who constitute along with Paraiyans a good proportion of small landowners) in Kilur and Manamai are ensured of labour from their own caste members, the Paraiyans land owners are pitted against the powerful Mudaliar and Naidus whose labour demands are far greater. They have therefore to pay higher wages especially during harvest, and instead of the usual noon time meal, give a decent meal. In all four villages where there were Paraiyan landowners, the harvest wages paid by them was between 1-2 measures higher than prevailing rates. The landowners in turn try to exploit caste sentiments, in Voyalur and Manamai, fewer persons per acre were employed by them than is usual.

There exists another practice - if there exists a single large and powerful landowner or a family of landowners who cultivate a major part of the village's land, the wages paid by him/it is lower than the wage rates in the village. Extent of landholding alone does not ensure

this privilege, since the 40 acre owner in Manamai who is a Paraiyan does not enjoy it. It seems to be connected with the status (which is a resultant of both caste and economic positions) of the landowners in the village.

LEASING ARRANGEMENTS:

The incidence of leasing out land for a fixed rent "kuttagai", or share of produce - "yaram" is very low. Land is usually leased out by an absentee landowner or one who can no longer manage it himself to one of his relatives or to a landowner of sufficient standing to be able to pay the rent without any need for supervision. The input and crop decisions are made by the tenant himself, and cost-sharing is done in the case of share-rent tenancy.

The 'kuttagai' system was found in Aminjikkarai, Arungunram, Voyalur and Kilur. On Aminjikkarai, land has been leased out by an absentee Chettiar to a Maida who himself owned 7 acres of land. The rent was Rs. 2500 per kani (1.3 acres) per annum.

In Arungunram, two cases of kuttagai were found, both between relatives, and the rents were different in each case. (Table 10 below)

Kuttagai contracts were more in Voyalur - 21 in all, including 13 Paraiyans. This is perhaps among the very few villages where paraiyans leased-in land, and it has been possible because nearly 50 acres of land in the village is owned by an absentee Reddy landowner who would find it to his advantage that Paraiyans were willing to pay much higher rents than the others.

The rents vary widely even between these twenty-one tenants according to the power and status of both the leaser and the lessee.

Table 9
Leasing Arrangements

Village	Type	No.	Rent	Caste of Tenant	Owner
Kilur	Kuttagai	1	633 kgs./acre/ harvest	Naidu	Naidu
Aminjikkarai	-do-	1	Rs.2500/ann.for 1.3 acres	Naidu	Chettiar
Arungunram	-do-	1	1036 kgs./acre/ann. tubewell irrigated	Naidu	Naidu
		1	576 kgs./acre (tank irrigated)	Yadava	Yadava
Voyalur	-do-	13	2304 kgs./acre/ann.	Paraiyan	Reddy
		2	1152 kgs/acre/p.a.	(Chettiar Reddy)	"
		1	1382 kgs./acre pa.	Naicker	"
		1	1036 kgs /acre p.a.	Paraiyan	Brahmin
Mananai	Varam	2	50% of produce to LO tank irriga- ted land	Naicker Naicker	Mudaliar Naicker
Voyalur	Varam	1	61% of produce to L.O. tube well irrigated	Paraiyan	Yadava
Kilur	Varam	1	50% of produce to LO, tank irrigated land	Naidu	Yadava

In Kilur, there was one case of Kuttagai between Naidu landowners

There is no cost-sharing in Kuttagai arrangements. Kuttagai is considered feasible only in those villages where three paddy crops are possible so that the tenants can, after paying rents hope to make up for costs and gain.

In the case of varam, the standard share is 50% of the produce to landowner if the land is tank irrigated, and 67% if it is tube-well irrigated land. There were on the whole only four cases of varam, as detailed in table 9 above.

Tenancy contracts are reported to have declined very greatly after the tenancy reforms, though there is no data available to make a comparison possible. Landowners showed a definite preference to "own cultivation" with attached or partially attached labour, and reserved leasing-out for those who were absentees, were too old to manage or worked elsewhere. Classical tenancy as a regular contract does not seem to be in any way significant in the present day.

That caste permeates the labour and lease markets cannot be disputed. Attached and partially attached labourers necessarily are paraiyans, and since wages for these arrangements are lower, the average wage level is depressed. Furthermore, in the casual labourer's case, caste determines the extent of his market and possibility of finding employment.

If the situation of a landowner is considered, here again, attached or partially attached labour cannot be employed by a Paraiyan. Supply of casual labour is wider for an upper caste landowner than a Paraiyan. Wage levels are influenced by caste and economic power of the landowner, giving rise to the strange situation where several different casual wage rates prevail in a village for the same type of work. In the land-lease markets, tenancy contracts seem to be affected nearly always between members of the same caste status, and even in the few cases where land was leased out to paraiyans, the rents are much higher than for the rest.

The generality of these findings and factors influencing variations between them could only be determined with information about a much larger set of villages, which was the next stage of the study.

III

Equipped by the first stage of the study with details of the way caste influences the village economy, we proceeded to

- a) test the generality of observations made in the five villages;
- b) relate the variations in the nature and extent of the effective role of caste across villages, to their caste-class configurations and material conditions of production, with a random sample of thirty villages from Chingleput taluk.

A brief account of the sample villages:-

The sample villages served to give a picture of the taluk as a whole. Highyielding varieties and tube-well irrigation was prevalent in all the villages, and 15 of the 30 villages had either tractors or power-tillers. The main crop is paddy; ragi and groundnut are also

grown either as a third crop or in the dry lands. The average net yield of paddy per acre varied from 1728 kgs. to 2880 kgs/very greatly. (0.5 to 4.8) across the thirty villages and so did the proportion of land area controlled by the top 1% of the population (0.1 to 0.8).

Paraiyans account for 53.8% of the households in these villages and Naickers 31.59%. Mudaliars, Naidus, Yadavas, Reddys, Rajas, Gramanis, and service communities constitute the remaining households.

41.34% of the households are landless, and a further 18.88% own less than an acre of land. Only 4% of the households own more than 10 acres of land.

Harijans and Naickers together constitute 94% of the landless households and 86% of the owning less than an acre of land. Naickers are a highly differentiated group - they form a significant proportion (33%) of those owning above 10 acres, as well. Mudaliars, Naidus and Reddys together constitute 36% of the owning above 10 acres of land. Harijans are also found to be quite significant in this group of landowners, they account for 10.88% of it.

If differentiation within a caste is considered, Naickers - as mentioned above, are most differentiated. 50% of their households are dependent on agricultural labour, and the remaining are spread over all the landholding groups. (Table 10 below). Harijans are nearly all concentrated in the group of agricultural labourers, while Reddy, Mudaliar and Naidu households are concentrated in the topmost landholding groups.

Table 10

Distribution of Land

Landholding size groups	Landless	Less than 1 acre	1-5 acres	5-10 acres	More than 10 acres
Percentage of Households	41.34	18.83	27.71	8.13	3.92

While the overall picture may give an impression that there is neat correlation between the caste and class hierarchies, the reality is far more complex.

Villages and Caste-Class Configuration

Table 11 below gives the distribution of villages according to caste-class configuration:

Table 11

Caste- Class Configuration	K ₁	K ₂	K ₃	K ₄	K ₅	K ₆	K ₇	K ₈	Total
No. of villages	2	8	4	2	4	2	6	2	30

K₁ is the case of complete congruence of caste and class divisions, with all labourers belonging to scheduled caste and all landowners belonging to upper castes. K₇ and K₈ are cases where there is a single, differentiated caste in the villages, the first of these K₇ consisting of Naickers and K₈ of scheduled castes. K₂ is the case where harijans are one class viz., agricultural labourers, but the other caste group is highly differentiated, so that agricultural labourers are cut across by caste lines. K₃ and K₅ are situations where though all labourers are one caste - harijans, harijans are differentiated by class. K₄ and K₆ also have differentiated harijans but in addition, labourers cut across caste lines as well.

We can see that K₂, and K₇ and K₈ together are the most common types, and K₁ relatively rare. K₃ and K₅ are more prevalent than K₄ and K₆. This is because harijans are nearly all labourers and Naickers who form a significant proportion of labourers, are very highly differentiated. The absence of Naickers in some villages (K₃, K₅, K₈) is compensated by the occurrences of a relatively large number of exclusively Naicker villages.

Table 11

CASTE AND LANDOWNERSHIP

(a) Caste Composition of Landholding Size Groups (Percentages)

Caste*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Total
Land- holding (Acres)												
0	-	0.19	24.6	0.62	0.10	0.32	1.1	70.54	-	0.13	2.3	100
Less than 1 acre	0.21	2.34	35.5	2.06	0.85	1.84	1.35	50.46	-	2.83	2.55	100
1 acre-5 acres	0.24	7.82	35.3	1.35	0.48	4.73	0.58	46.16	-	2.12	1.2	100
5 acres-10 acres	-	11.51	44.57	8.38	0.82	2.96	0.49	23.51	2.8	1.31	3.61	100
Above 10 acres		18.03	33.3	7.14	2.04	6.8	-	10.88	11.9	4.4	4.4	100

(b) Landholding status of each caste group (Percentages)

Caste	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Land- holding (Acres)											
0	-	1.85	32.19	12.84	8.33	5.81	52.11	54.18	-	3.7	15.2
Less than 1 acre	37.5	10.19	21.22	19.59	33.33	15.12	26.76	17.70	-	36.7	16.9
1 acre to 5 acres	62.5	50.00	30.96	19.59	27.77	56.98	16.90	24.27	-	40.37	8.0
5 acres to 10 acres	-	21.60	11.48	34.46	12.88	10.47	4.23	3.56	32.7	7.34	24.0
Above 10 acres	-	16.25	4.15	14.19	16.67	11.63	-	0.80	67.3	11.93	35.9
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

*Caste Codes: 1 - Brahmin 5 - Chottiyar 8 - Paraiyans
 2 - Mudaliar 6 - Yadava 9 - Veddy
 3 - Naicker 7 - Service 10 - Gramani
 4 - Maidu communities 11 - Others

Labour and lease contracts: Of the 30 villages, the attached labour system exists in 23. It is absent in all the six all-Naicker villages, and in one of the two villages where there is congruence between caste and class. Nearly all attached labourers are paraiyans, while there were also three "supervisory" padials.

Of the 23, 14 had only padial system, 8 padial and suvasi systems, and 1, padial, suvasi and koottuppayir systems.

Given below are the different systems of payment and terms of work in attached labour, and their distribution across villages.

Table 1.2

Variations in Attached Labour Contracts

Periodicity and Type of Payment	Wages	Terms of work	No. of villages
<u>PADIAL</u> Monthly payment in kind (paddy)	a) 12 marakkals - married adults 6-8 marakkals - others 2 times gruel	Agricultural and non-agricultural work by padial, family to do domestic labour unpaid, but paid for agricultural labour	3
	b) 10 marakkals - married adults 6 marakkals for others 2 times gruel	-do-	1
	c) 8 marakkals and 2 times gruel	-do-	2
		Agricultural and other work only by padial. Family paid for any work done.	1
	d) 7 marakkals paddy for married adults Others 5-7 marakkals according to age and work done 2 times gruel	same as a, b	1

Table 12 contd.

Periodicity and Type of payment	Wages	Work obligations	No. of villages
2. Monthly payment in cash	a) Rs.50/ month + 2 times gruel daily	Agricultural & non-agricultural work by padial, padial's family to do domestic and agricultural work unpaid	1
	b) Rs.5 for boys below 10 yrs.	Mainly cattle grazing by padial	3
	Rs.10 for 10-15 year old boys + 2 times gruel daily.	agricultural work and odd-jobs by padial, family paid for any work done	
			----- 4 -----
3. After harvest payment in kind	a) 18 marakkals 2 times gruel daily	same as 2a	1
	b) 72 marakkals 2 times gruel daily	same as 2a	2
	c) 48 marakkals 2 times gruel daily	-do-	3
			----- 6 -----
4. Annual payment in kind	a) 500 marakkals of paddy and 10 marakkals of ragi 2 times gruel daily	Agricultural and non-agricultural work by padial; family not paid for domestic work, paid for agricultural labour	1
	b) 120 marakkals of paddy, 2 times gruel daily	-do-	1
			----- 2 -----
5. Monthly cash + Annual kind	a) Rs.10 a month plus 144 marakkals annually 2 times gruel	as in 2 a	1
	b) Rs.30 a month plus 20 marakkals annually, 2 times gruel.	-do-	1
			----- 2 -----

Table 12 contd.

Periodicity and Type of payment	Wages	Terms of work	No. of villages
<u>II. SUVASI</u>			
Every harvest in kind	Produce from allotment of about 30 cents	Agricultural and non-agricultural chores for land owner. Recruit labour. If family works, payment is made	4
Harvest and monthly	a) 50% of produce from allotment of about 30 cents and monthly payment of about 5-7 marakkals	-do-	4
	b) Produce from allotment of 30 cents after paying 36 marakkals to landowner	-do-	1
	In all cases, 2 times gruel a day.		
<u>III. MOOTTEPANNIR</u>			
	25% of produce from 30 cents allotment, tube well irrigated	same as above only for Samba and Navarai seasons	1

Partially attached labour arrangements exist in 12 of the 30 villages. Of these, the produce-share type exists in 6 and the fixed payment type in 2, and both together in 4. In all the cases these contracts were between harijan labourers and upper-caste landowners.

In the produce-share type again, the labourer had to pay 50% or 67% of the produce per harvest to the landowner when the allotment was tank and tube-well irrigated respectively. In the ^{case of} well-irrigation it was 33% - 40% of produce to landowner. In the fixed payment type, the grain payment varied from 30 marakkals to 54 marakkals of paddy for an allotment of 30 cents depending on the quality of land and type of irrigation.

Table 13

Extent of attachment (total/partial)
among Harijan labourers

<u>% of Harijan Labourers attached</u>	<u>0-10</u>	<u>11-20</u>	<u>21-40</u>	<u>41-60</u>	<u>61-99</u>	<u>100</u>
No. of villages	10	7	4	3	5	1

As far as tenancy is concerned, 18 of the 30 villages had some form of tenancy. The 'varam' or share-rent tenancy was found in 14 of these, and "kuttagai" or fixed-rent tenancy exists in 4. 'Varam' shares are again, 50% or 67% of the produce to the landowner, depending on type of irrigation. Kuttagai varied from 90 marakkals on dry land to 180 marakkals of paddy on the tube well irrigated land per year. Cost-sharing is done in the case of 'varam' in the same proportion as product-sharing, but there is no cost-sharing in the case of kuttagai. Crop and input decisions are left to the tenant, but the rent in kind is always to be paid in paddy.

Tenancy contracts in 11 of the 18 villages were between members of the upper castes. In 2 villages, both parties were harijans and in 2 others, harijan tenants leased-in land from upper caste landowners. Only in 3 villages did we find 'kuttagai' being given to both harijans and upper caste tenants and in these cases, the harijan tenants paid almost double the rent as their upper caste counterparts, between 324 and 360 marakkals of paddy per year.

Wages for casual labour varied widely between villages. (Table 14 below):

Table 14

Variation in Casual Wages*

(*Wages are supplemented by gruel given once a day)

Ploughing		Plucking Seedlings		Weeding & Transplanting		Harvesting	
Wage rates (Rupees)	No. of villages	Wage rates (Rupees)	No. of villages	Wage rates (Rupees)	No. of villages	Wage rates (kgs.)	No. of villages
3	3	3.50	2	1.50	2	4.0	2
4	9	4.00	8	2.00	16	4.8	5
5	13	5.00	3	2.50	6	5.6	3
6	4	<u>Time</u>		3.00	6	6.4	18
.8	1	3.00	2			9.6	1
		4.00	4			12.8	1
		5.00	6				
		6.00	5			Women	
						2.4	1
						3.2	8
						4.0	2
						4.8	9
						5.6	3
						6.4	7

In 14 of the 30 villages, large landowners of the local dominant caste paid lower wages (ranging from 50 p. - 1 Re. in cash and 1.6 kgs. in kind to the labourers, or in the payment of kind wages, used a smaller measure according to which 1 marakkal = 4.8 kgs. instead of 6.4 kgs.) wherever harijan landowners existed, they paid higher wages to harijan labourers, the difference from prevalent wages ranging from 0.8 kgs. -

3.2 kgs. of paddy in kind and 1 Pe. in cash. Thus our earlier findings were found to have wider applicability.

Again, in villages where there were both Naicker and other upper-caste landowners (8 villages) Naickers worked only among themselves. In the ten villages where big landowners were all Naickers, whereas labourers were both Naickers and harijans, clear priority was given to the Naickers in employment.

Thus the forms of exploitation of the caste factor seem to be present over the entire area, with some variations in extent.

Caste-Class configurations and inter-village variations in labour contracts

The caste-class configuration of a village seems to have influenced in several ways the extent and effectiveness of the way caste is used in the balance of power between landowners and labourers.

As is to be expected, villages which had only one caste group did not have any attached labour. In villages where harijans were all agricultural labourers but there were also agricultural labourers of upper-castes, the largest proportion of attached/^{and} partially attached labourers are found. Here also there was one variation: villages where big landowners were all Naickers had relatively smaller proportion of attached labourers than those where there were Mudaliar, Naidu and Reddy landowners.

To get a better idea of the way conditions varied under the different caste-class configurations, groups of villages controlled for various material conditions were compared. (It would be a comparison of villages across a row in our matrices). The main row-wise ^{partial} characteristics compared were a) proportion of attached labourers/partially attached labourers, b) terms of the attached labour contracts - wages, benefits and work obligations, c) wages for casual labour including type of payment,

d) extent of segmentation of casual labour market by caste e) differential wage payment for casual labour, f) tenancy arrangements and caste based differences in the terms of contract.

The following broad trends could be discerned:

- 1) Villages (type K_1) where all agricultural labourers are harijans and all landowners are upper castes had smaller extent of attachment or none at all, and the terms of this contract were also better both in wages and benefits and in work obligations. The wages for casual labour were higher and obviously, no caste based discrimination could be made in employment since all agricultural labourers belonged to one caste. In villages of this type the balance of forces can be said to be relatively more favourable to the labourers, but such villages seems to be rare in the Taluk.
- 2) Among villages where harijans were landowners, (K_3 to K_6) those villages where the labourers were all harijans (K_3 and K_5) were better off generally than those where labourers were cut across caste lines (K_4 and K_6) in terms of the characteristics listed above. All the same, much depended on whether the landownership of harijans was a recent phenomenon or whether they held land grants made some time in the earlier generation. For example, Karunilam (K_4) where a large number of harijans who held land had received it as "manyams" sometime in the distant past, had very high fixed grain payment required by partially attached labourers and wages were uniformly lower than Puduppakkam, Ottivakkam and Sirudavur (K_5) where land has been acquired within the last 25-50 years through a process of struggle. On the other hand Manamai (K_6) has attachment in more remunerative terms, uniformly higher wages for casual labour, and higher differentials wage paid by harijan.

landowners than Sembakkam (K_3). As before, Sembakkam has a long starking history of harijan landownership in significant numbers, but in Maramai except for two households, all the others have acquired land either through purchase or occupation of government waste land in the face of stiff opposition by upper caste members.

This difference in influence based on the nature of land acquirement of harijans could perhaps be explained in the following way. Where they have come to own land with the full sanction of the status quo and indeed as a result of their benevolence, there is a tendency among harijan landowners to identify themselves with the traditional social structure and pose no challenge to the status quo whereas in the case where they have come to own land despite pressures against it by the status quo, the harijan landowners have initiative, for struggle to change the conditions of their caste members. The existence of harijan landowners in villages when compared to those where all harijans are labourers is advantages for harijan labourers since the former are totally dependent on them for wage labour.

3) Villages with a single caste have no attached or partially attached labourers; wages for casual labour are higher compared to other caste-class configurations with similar conditions of production though these single caste villages (K_7, K_8) are small settlements with limited land and have a greater number of labourers per unit of land.

Between the all-Naiokor and all-harijan villages, the latter have slightly lower wages than the former.



4) Villages of type K_2 , where the harijans are all agricultural labourers but the upper castes have agricultural labourers and landowners, the terms of contracts are most unfavourable to labourers; they have the largest proportion of attachment usually under most servile conditions (the whole family being obliged to do free labour) and poor payment, lower wages for casual labour, (average wages of these villages being 3.25 as against 4.10 of all other villages put together) and more exacting terms of payment for partially attached labour. The reason for the unfavourable terms of contract could be that this configuration lends itself to division of the labour market by caste and discrimination against the vulnerable group of landless harijans.

Thus, the caste-class configuration of a village in many ways determines the bargaining strength of the labourers vis-a-vis landowners, and the caste factor is crucial in determining the possibility of organisation of agricultural labourers.

Variations in physical conditions and its influence on the role of caste

Variations in physical conditions like rainfall, soil quality (and therefore productivity), cropping pattern etc. between villages ^{is} limited since all of them belong to the same taluk which is in this case a fairly homogeneous agro-climatic region.

However, the extent of irrigation by tank varies. Some villages have none or only one harvest irrigated by tanks, most villages have two tank irrigated harvests, and some have even three. In villages of the same caste-class configuration, the type of attachment was at times influenced by this. In Fayamangalam, where tank irrigation is not sufficient for even one harvest, no allotment type of attachment was found, and all were padials, whereas in other villages but padials

and allotment holding surasis were found. This is because allotments for attached labourers are always tank irrigated and therefore, where tank irrigation is uncertain, they become unviable. Again, even where both types of attachment exists, the proportion of padials is more in villages where only one harvest is tank irrigated, than in those where two harvests are. Moreover, partial attachment is most prevalent in villages with two tank irrigated harvests.

An important influence especially on the wage levels and on the extent and terms of attachment of labour is the proportion of agricultural labourers and the concentration of land in the hands of large landowners of a single caste.

Between Appur, Peria Irumbedu and Rayamangalam (all K_2) for example, the proportion of agricultural labourers are .36, .56 and .70 and proportion of cultivated area held by large landowners, .50, .20 and .75 respectively. Wages are highest in Peria Irumbedu and lowest in Rayamangalam. (All other physical factors except irrigation are same). Another example - of (K_3 villages) Poondi, Sembakkam and Kilur and Perambakkam, lowest wages are found in Poondi where concentration of land is highest, and highest wages in Sembakkam where concentration is lowest. Perambakkam, which has the highest proportion of attached labourers of these four, is second highest in both concentration of land and proportion of agricultural labourers; (it is the only one where both these are high simultaneously). Between Voyalur, and Puduppakkam, Ottivakkam and Sirudavur (all K_5) the first of these has a larger proportion of agricultural labourers and lower wages, than the other three.

Variations between villages of the same caste-class configurations can thus, be explained to some extent by variations in irrigation, proportion of agricultural labourers and concentration of land. However, the impact of material conditions of production in modifying the role of caste could not be sharply brought out, perhaps because the inter-village variations in material conditions of production were very limited. It would be reasonable to expect that the nature and extent of the importance of caste would vary greatly from conditions in Chingleput a region with very different conditions of rainfall, quality of soil, irrigated area, type of crops and degree of concentration of land and proportion of agricultural labourers.

IV

The inter-village comparisons of bargaining strength of labourers in terms of their reflection on terms and conditions of work, wage levels etc. are not sufficient by themselves, since these indicators may be influenced by random factors other than bargaining strength (which we may not have captured in the economic variables chosen by us). We therefore sought to substantiate our findings with an account of the way in which bargaining strength of labourers aided or deterred a process of struggle in villages of different caste-class configurations. The struggle in the five villages chosen for intensive study are described in this section.

Though caste-consciousness demonstrates a resilient and continued influence on the rural economy, this does not mean that castes co-exist harmoniously, acknowledging their inter-dependence and the reciprocal nature of their relationship. There are a large number of instances of conflicts among castes. Moreover, class antagonisms often get expressed in the form of caste conflicts. This is the case when there

is congruence between caste and class divisions. The case where there are caste divisions among labourers with one of the castes being untouchables works to the great disadvantage of the labouring class. Thus caste divisions influence the form of class conflicts.

All the paraiyans interviewed felt that it was not fair that attached labour was associated with their caste. They were very emphatic in stating that they do not favour attached labour, and would never enter into it unless compelled by very adverse economic conditions. To be an attached labourer meant doing "admai-volai" - slave-labour. Remarking on the fact that even if a Naicker or Yadava was pauper, he would be made a "supervisory" padial, ranking above the paraiyans: one of them said, "We are both alike - paupers, but he is a Naicker and I, a paraiyan and so, he stands on the burid and I, in the marsh!"

The reactions of labourers from the upper castes were very different. "Who else can be attached labourers, except Paraiyans? That's the way it has always been!" They resented their paraiyan counterparts, and some standard remarks made by them were - "Everybody thinks only of their conditions, all government schemes are for them. They have become too bloated in their heads - you cannot even call a paraiyan a paraiyan these days!"

Labourers felt that getting organised as one class group across castes was impossible. The paraiyans felt, "that will never be. Even if they (the other castes) don't have gruel for the next meal, they will never join with us." As far as labourers of other castes were concerned, organising against their own "pangalis" (kinsmen) was shameful, it did one no good to be jealous of one's brother's good fortune.

All the same, the labourers felt that their wages were not fair; their notion of fair wages varied depending on what they knew about other places; terms for attached labour were considered scandalous, though where semi-attached labour was concerned, the opinions differed - some felt that the terms were alright, others that 67% of produce to labourers was fairer share.

Every village had a history of struggles between the paraiyans of the cheri and the ur people, the origins and consequences of which seem to be related to the caste-class configuration of the village.

Aminjikkarai (K_2) is an example of a village where all harijans are labourers but labourers are cut across caste lines, there being upper castes labourers as well. Thirty years ago it was a zamindari village, the zamindar belonging to Nerumbur, 15 kms. away. All the land belonged to the zamindar, and families of the present residents of the ur were his tenants. All the 'colony' families were either attached or casual labourers: when zamindari was abolished, land was settled in the names of the tenants according to their operational holdings at that time, with the result that all the paraiyan families went landless.

The dissatisfied paraiyans of Aminjikkarai soon gained notoriety as trouble makers but things came to a head four years ago. Some paraiyans who had been doing koottupayir for twenty-five years or so wrote a petition to the Collector of Chingleput demanding that the land in their possession be settled in their names according to the tenancy reforms. This decision had been made in their caste panchayat, and action taken by their leaders. The landowners retaliated by terminating all attached and semi-attached labour contracts, and minimised their casual labour employment by relying as far as possible on labourers from the ur and even calling in upper caste labourers from the next village.

A permanent state of tension exists between the ur and the colony now; the paraiyans made a second move to ensure a means of livelihood. It was discovered that 18 acres of land held as part of garden land by some landowners was infact 'unclaimed' (anamadeyam) land according to records. They sent several petitions to the Collectorate asking that the land be distributed to them, and also pulled strings in several directions. In 1979, a year after the move began, 13.5 acres of the land ($\frac{1}{2}$ acre per household) was sanctioned to the colony households. But before the formalities were completed, the affected landowners of the ur made claims through the village munsif (one of them) that according to earlier village records, the land was indeed theirs but had been entered as unclaimed during a resurvey due to the oversight of the surveyor. In 1980 again, the issue was taken up by officials, and the revenue inspectors cajoled landowners to make at least 7 acres of land available to paraiyans. The paraiyans refused to accept it.

The issue was far from settled during our survey. Tempers ran high in both sections and the landowners were determined to "teach the colony people a lesson." Labourers of the upper caste resented the idea that paraiyans could get land when they themselves stood no such chance. Though wages are ridiculously low in the village, and they feel it is very unfair, they have never considered the possibility of joining hands with paraiyans to demand higher wages. On the other hand, landowners who were Naickers, Gramanis, Naidus and Reddys formed one cohesive unit and kept wages under control. A Naicker labourer described how a landowner who had paid higher wages to ensure sufficient labour was fined by the caste panchayat.

Paraiyan labourers could in no sense identify themselves with labourers of the upper caste inspite of the difficulties in persevering with their struggle because of their small numbers. They felt they were better off this way, though struggling to make ends meet, since they were no one's slaves, and can stand up for their rights.

The labourers are at a disadvantage in Aminjikkarai, divided into two caste cliques, one willing to fight but thwarted at every step and the other too bound by caste and kinship ties to protest.

Manamai has one major advantage over Aminjikkarai. Though here also the labourers are divided across caste lines harijans landowners also exist (K_6). Further, one of the divisions of labourers, the Neickers, works within the same caste group leaving the paraiyans a virtual monopoly over employment by Mudaliars who own more than 50% of the land. There does exist attached and semi-attached labour, but the labourers have constantly sought to improve their terms of work. They have increasingly moved away from padial to suvasi system, and at present, demand to be made 'semi-attached' instead of either of the first two.

Women's wages have increased from Rs.1.50 and 2 measures to Rs.3 and 4 measures in the past three years, and wages for ploughing from Rs.4 to Rs.5 as a result of demands of workers threatening to stop work during peak seasons.

Labourers had vehemently opposed introduction of piece rates for plucking seedlings, and demanded (and won) that wages be raised from Rs.4 to Rs.5 and time rates be retained. "We cannot work at that maddenning pace" they said when we asked why they had opposed piece rates, and when we pointed out that labourers in other villages could, gave

an angry retort, "They may put up with it. We won't."

The suvasis who recruit labourers, they said, try to settle all the problems of labourers themselves, and mediate between them and the landowners. Though sometimes this has made wage arbitration smoother, "they serve to keep us divided, and are actually on the Mudaliar's side."

The village has evidenced dramatic political changes in the last ten years. The 'colonies' were able to put up their candidate for panchayat elections, who defeated a Mudaliar who had held power for very long. The Manamai colony now has pucca houses built by the Harijan Welfare Department, a school, road and electricity connections. But the paraiyan labourers are dissatisfied - "We labourers have remained as we were; those who had something earlier have gained a lot more now, we poor have gained nothing." Cleavages are beginning to develop between paraiyan labourers and landowners. The labourers resent the lack of concern of their landed kinsmen in putting forth demands for land to the government, or taking decisions in the case panchayat about conditions of wages and terms of work under the Mudaliars. They agree that paraiyan landowners paid them and treated them better, "but only because they extract more work from us. We are usually employed, 12 of us work because it is our own caste person's land." The Paraiyan landowners have their complaints as well - "Unless we pay them more, they will not come. But we do not calculate when it comes ^{to} own caste labourers - when they go without food, we share with them. When they are in trouble, we help them out. Should they also not oblige us in return instead of counting paisa for paisa?"

The situation in Manamai is far more hopeful than in Aminjikkarai. But it is quite possible that if it was not for differentiation among paraiyans, the class struggle would have been far more acute. 73 of

paraiyans are mainly agricultural labourers but the leadership is in the hands of the better-off paraiyans who are more interested in securing the concessions and benefits offered to the middle class harijans by the Government. It must be mentioned that no attempts have ever been made by the leadership for land distribution or implementation of minimum wages, while it has fought tooth and nail over issues like shifting the post office from the ur to the colony, and diverting a bus route to Madras via their village!

In Arungunram the atmosphere is different. This is a village where there is congruence of caste and class divisions (K₁). It was weeding and transplanting season when we were doing our survey, and on one of the plots the women had refused to work unless the number employed per quarter kani (33 cents) was increased from five to six; all others followed suit and since there was no time to lose, the landowner had no option but to agree.

The labourers of Arungunram are all Paraiyans and the caste is itself undivided along class lines. This complete congruence of caste and class has enabled the workers to become powerful bargainers. Decisions on a strike to increase wages are made in the caste panchayat and intimated through the labour recruiters. The labourers had gone on a strike two years back and raised wages from Rs.3 and 3 measures for men and Rs.1.50 and 2 measures for women to Rs.4 and 4 measures for men and Rs.2 and 3 measures for women. They intended to have a further rise this year, 5 and 4 measures for men and women respectively, and Rs.2.50 cash wages for women.

Piece wages prevailed for plucking seedlings, but the labourers had their own way at showing their disapproval of it- the bundles of seedlings made by them had a good proportion of grass in it, and so they finished work much faster and left the fields earlier. In course of time this could compel the landowners to switch to time rates. During the previous year's Samba harvest the biggest Naidu landowner decided to make a show of strength and brought labourers from Sriperumbudur nearly 60 kms. away, for five days. He had to pay high wages and foot their transport costs. He learnt his lesson when during the Navarai season labourers boycotted his fields, and he could not bring labourers from outside since the work load was not high enough to make the proposition economical.

According to a Naidu landowner, the paraiyans had constantly strived to improve terms of work. Earlier, the semi-attached labourers had to pay a fixed quantity of grain from their allotment, amounting often to the entire produce net of cultivating costs in the Navarai season. The labourers refused to pay up, and termination of the contract proved useless because the new allottee did the same. Now the system has been altered to fixed grain payment in Samba and 50% share in the produce in the Navarai seasons.

It seems to be an acknowledged fact by the landowners that the labourers were strong and united. They put this down to their monopoly for wage employment since Naidus themselves never did ^{wage labour.} "Only where there are Naickers who do not mind dirtying their hands in the soil do the Paraiyans behave themselves." An attempt to organise the landowners under a 'Vyvasayigal Sangam' had failed, since "each person was only interested in getting his own work done, and did not

want to enter into controversies with the labourers."

The scenario in Voyalur (K₅) where all the labourers are harijans, is rather complex. but harijans themselves are differentiated. The Mudaliars of Voyalur who control only is rather complex 40% of the land (when compared to 72% by Arungunram Naidus) wield enormous power. They employ all but one of the padials and all the semi-attached labourers, and terms for padials are the worst of all villages. The padial's wife is required to do free agricultural work besides attending to all domestic chores. When compared to Arungunram which has similar production conditions, conditions are surely worse. Wages are the same in both villages, but the big Mudaliar landowners paid at least a rupee or measure less.

This is inspite of the fact that all agricultural labourers are paraiyans and some of ^{paraiyans} own about seven or eight acres, and thirteen are tenants of an absentee landlord and therefore relatively independent. One reason for the existing state of affairs is the total identification of the paraiyan landowners of Voyalur with the Mudaliar landowning interests. A paraiyan landowner owning about 8 acres of land was made the panchayat president, only to find him joining hands with the Mudaliar landowner whose place he had won. No wage struggles are encouraged by him and his clique, and Voyalur has rarely witnessed any strike in recent years.

Because of availability of work in the western parts of the taluk near Madras, migration ^{by casual labourers} during harvest season has become a practice in recent years. Wages within the village have subsequently been raised by the smaller landowners, but with the Mudaliars there has been no question of a rise; they have even stopped giving the

mid-day gruel. Their hegemony is perhaps strengthened by the fact that when compared to their counterparts in Manamai, they have greater connections with the outside world. Some of them are share-holders and part of the Board of the Sugar Co-operative in Maduranthakam, and are also part of Naidus Vyavasaigal Sangham. Strong political connections also seem to exist - one of them is the District President of the Lion's Club. The rest of the village has to depend on them for information and recommendation to officials for any transaction and those who do not, are usually "taken care of" - their work never gets done.

Kilur is unique in several respects - it has an incredible percentage of landless agricultural labourers (75), population pressure on land is highest of the five villages and it has a single landowner owning 33% of the village's land.

Though nearly all agricultural labourers are paraiyans and some of them owned land (type K_3) (controlling 27% of the village's land) the above characteristics have made conditions in Kilur very difficult. Nearly 23% of paraiyan labourers are suvasis, and a further 6% semi-attached, all employed by the single large Naidu landowner. The wages paid by others are comparable to the other villages, but the Naidu paid only kind wages for all operations, a uniform 3 measures for men and $1\frac{1}{2}$ measures for women.

The present suvasis had been padials in the past and had fought and won their allotments five years back. Wages for ploughing and plucking seedlings had been raised to Rs.4 after a strike two years ago, and the "thalaivar" - Naidu landowner had to raise kind wages from 2 measures to 3 measures. He immediately brought in piece rates for plucking seedlings. This year Rs.5 in time rate is being demanded, and the smaller landowners are afraid they would have to give in.

A recent strike in Kilur was over work intensity for harvesting - 10 women and 5 men per acre are usually employed and the wage bill is fixed accordingly. It was being demanded that 12 women and 6 men per acre be made the norm, and some landowners had already complied with it.

The Landowning harijans all hold less than 5 acres and have little to identify themselves with the Naidu landowner. They most often exchange labour for each other and in peak seasons employ own caste men for higher wages. They are nearly all landowners of first generation having acquired pattas of poramboke land inspite of attempts by ur members to thwart the move. They do not have the experience of identification with the status quo like the landowners of Voyalur.

Concerted struggles have therefore been a possibility in Kilur, and though a conglomeration of factors have made the labourers ^{relatively} vulnerable, the struggle continues.

Conclusion: The study shows beyond doubt that caste enters almost all arrangements of work made between landowners and labourers, and that the effectiveness of caste in tilting the balance of forces between them one way or the other, is influenced by the underlying caste-class configuration.

It should be noted that use of caste factor is made by farmers who are highly entrepreneurial and profit-oriented. What they seem to be doing is to simultaneously use modern techniques of production and primitive forms of exploitation of labour like attachment of harijans. The least we can say is that these forms have not proved fetters to the adoption of modern techniques of production. One may

even venture to suggest that by facilitating the extraction of a large surplus, they have aided the process.

Although the forms being employed are similar to those that existed in an earlier and different historical context, the fact that those employing these forms are not landlords or rentiers purely producing for consumption by itself suggests that these forms have a totally new and different significance now; that is, the reasons for and implications of their existence are different.

Finally, a crucial element in the dynamics of the present situation seems to be the struggles waged by the agricultural labourers. The overthrow of the prevailing barbaric forms seems to hinge on the outcome of these struggles.

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APPENDIX

The caste/class configurations K_1, \dots, K_8 , enumerated were the following:

- K_1 : All agricultural labourers are scheduled caste (All landowners are 'other castes') and All Scheduled Castes are agricultural labourers.
- K_2 : Agricultural labourers are both scheduled caste and other castes.
Scheduled castes are all agricultural labourers.
- K_3 : Agricultural labourers are all scheduled castes (other castes are only landowners)
Scheduled caste are agricultural labourers and small landowners (owning less than 7.5 acres of land).
- K_4 : Agricultural labourers are scheduled castes and other castes.
Scheduled caste are agricultural labourers and small landowners.
- K_5 : Agricultural labourers are all scheduled caste.
Scheduled caste are agricultural labourers, small landowners and big landowners (owning greater than 7.5 acres of land).
- K_6 : Agricultural labourers are scheduled caste and other castes.
Scheduled caste are agricultural labourers, small landowners and big landowners.
- K_7 : Other castes are agricultural labourers, small landowners and big landowners. There exist no scheduled caste.
- K_8 : Scheduled caste are agricultural labourers, small landowners and big landowners.
There exist no other caste.

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