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The Changing Position of Agricultural Labourers in Villages in Rural Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, between 1981/2 and 1996

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This paper looks at agricultural labourers in villages in Coimbatore district in 1981/2 and in 1996. It focuses on Chakkiliyans, the lowest status and most numerous Scheduled Caste group. It shows that while their position had barely changed over the decades prior to 1981/2, between 1981/2 and 1996 it changed dramatically, albeit less dramatically than one might have expected given all that was going on. 1981/2 to 1996 was a period in which (1)industrial and urban opportunities became available to virtually all labourers in the villages for the first time; (2)state policy became more favourable to labourers; and (3)village agriculture declined. The position of Chakkiliyans' agricultural employers weakened considerably between 1981/2 and 1996, but Chakkiliyans nevertheless found it difficult to stand up to them. This was partly because they were still getting a relatively attractive agricultural employment package in 1996, partly because they were in such a weak position in relation to alternative opportunities. Chakkiliyans found 'flexible' urban and industrial labour markets problematic because risky and available only on terms that were harsh. Moreover, housing and increased indebtedness in the villages resulted in Chakkiliyans being tied in some ways more strongly to agricultural employment in 1996 than in 1981/2. Other low caste labourers were getting urban and industrial opportunities that were likely to give them better prospects in the longer term. Chakkiliyans were not.

The paper also considers the position of the two other groups of agricultural labourers in the villages in 1981/2, and their descendants in 1996. These were (1) a higher status Scheduled Caste group, Pannadis, and (2) a group of Caste Hindus. The contrast between the three 1981/2 labourer groups is illuminating, illustrating the important role played by caste and the way it operates in this context.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on a group of Coimbatore villages in which the social and economic position of *Chakkiliyans*, the lowest status and most numerous Scheduled Caste group, barely changed over decades during which the irrigation system was mechanised, a green revolution type intensification of agriculture took place, and there was considerable urbanisation and industrial development. The similarities between the position of *Chakkiliyans* in villages which were relatively successful agriculturally in 1981/2 and Cederlof's (1997) account of the position of *Chakkiliyans* in a group of villages not far away over the decades of the first half of the 20th Century are remarkable.[1] Cederlof's account shows the position of *Chakkiliyans* in the villages on which she focused changing very little over the first half of the 20th Century, despite the activities of the Swedish Lutheran Mission which had many converts among *Chakkiliyans* in the villages concerned. Cederlof maintains that the system of exploitation in which *Chakkiliyans* were involved changed radically with the electrification of the irrigation system in the 1950s however. The study reported here suggests that while the system of exploitation had changed, it retained many of the features of the earlier period. Many of Cederlof's descriptions of the details of the system in the first half of the 20th Century could have been descriptions of the system in the villages that are the focus of this paper in 1981/2.

By 1996, however, the situation had changed more radically. There had been further increases in industrialisation and urbanisation in the proximity of the study villages, accompanied by a collapse of the water table which led to a decline in agriculture, as well as significant increases in state support for members of the Scheduled Castes. (This latter included subsidised food, noon meals, free school uniforms, and credit, all of which were reaching Scheduled Caste households in 1996.) The changes in evidence in 1996 were sufficient to begin to undermine the system of exploitation in which *Chakkiliyans* were involved. The process was slow. But the changes were significant and irreversible.

This paper focuses on villages in which irrigation was also mechanised following electrification in the 1950s. Mechanisation of the irrigation system was accompanied by a general intensification of agriculture which also made increased demands on agricultural labour. After an initial spurt in the 1950s, the process of intensification continued through the 1960s and the 1970s. Over this period there was an increased concentration of assets on small and medium-sized holdings, a decline in very large landholdings, and a move by large landholders into the urban and industrial economy. In 1981/2, there was a thriving intensive agriculture dominated by small and medium-sized holdings in the study villages. Eighty percent of the holdings were less than 7.5 acres, and 40% less than 2.5. There was a marked contrast with some of the surrounding areas in which agriculture was doing less well.

In 1981/2 *Chakkiliyans* in the study villages earned a living almost exclusively as agricultural labourers performing field operations. They had become the linchpin of the system as agricultural labourers rather than as people who worked with leather and livestock.

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[1] Cederlof's *Chakkiliyans* preferred to call themselves *Madharis*. The term *Chakkiliyan* is used throughout this paper though.

Between 1981/2 and 1996, there was a dramatic increase in industrial and urban development in the vicinity of the study villages (cf. Chari, 1997, and Chari, 2000, for a detailed account of some of this). Improvements in transport and communications made this accessible to people in these villages. The decline in agriculture associated with the collapse of the water table meant that this was very timely. The social and economic position of *Chakkiliyans* changed, but the changes were limited and slow.

The paper documents the tight control of the village elite over *Chakkiliyans* in 1981/2. It draws attention to the processes of control, the factors influencing these, and the efforts to challenge them from below.

The paper then looks at how the system of exploitation had changed in 1996, after a period of 15 years during which direct competition for labour from the urban and industrial economy became a reality, agriculture went into decline, and state support began to reach village Scheduled Caste groups. *Chakkiliyans* were "wrenching themselves from their moorings" for the first time. The "moorings" themselves were beginning to change too.

The paper asks why, when it came, change was so slow.

The paper begins with some background on Coimbatore, and the study villages. Next there is an account of the position of *Chakkiliyan*, *Pannadi* and *Caste Hindu* agricultural labourers in the villages in 1981/2. This is followed by an account of their position in 1996. The penultimate section contains a discussion of the changes. The final section summarises the conclusions.

The paper relies on data from two periods of fieldwork, one in 1981/2, the other in 1996. The first set of data was collected between September 1981 and March 1982 from a random sample of 20% of the households in 6 hamlets in 2 revenue villages. This paper focusses primarily on the data collected from households headed by labourers in 1981/2. Interviews covered different aspects of the long-term economic position of the households concerned. The interviews were conducted by the author and V. Mohanasundaram. The second set of data was collected between May and July 1996 from households descended from the households interviewed in 1981/2 still resident in the villages. The majority of the 1996 interviews were conducted by V. Srinivasan and S. Paul Pandian, a minority by the author and V. Mohanasundaram. The interviews were designed to obtain longitudinal data on the changing economic fortunes of households in broad outline. No attempt was made to obtain details of current economic activities. The data are weak on the details of women's activities, something that was only partly rectified in the 1996 data collection exercise. The data nevertheless provide evidence of many important aspects of long term economic change between 1981/2 and 1996 and some in the period running up to 1981/2.

1. COIMBATORE AND COIMBATORE DISTRICT

Coimbatore and the smaller towns surrounding it form a strong industrial centre.[2] There is a heavy concentration in cotton textiles, hosiery and knitwear, and in metal-based industries producing textile and other machinery and irrigation pumps. The district is a centre of medium and small-scale manufacturing rather than large, with levels of technology, and capital-intensity, that are above average rather than near the top of the range for India. A substantial proportion of the labour force consists of migrant farm labourers from all over Tamil Nadu and from neighbouring states. Significant growth in the 1950s and the 1960s was followed by slower growth in the 1970s and the 1980s. Tiruppur hosiery and knitwear production was the exception, growing phenomenally in the 1980s (Cawthorne, 1995; Chari, 1997). There was a direct link between what was happening in Tiruppur and the study villages here.

Coimbatore is a 'dry' district with a small amount of canal irrigation and a relatively high concentration of wells. It was in the forefront of the spread of electric pumpsets that revolutionised the agriculture of 'dry' areas following rural electrification in the 1950s. New seed varieties, fertilisers and pesticides accompanied the expansion of wells, and agriculture became increasingly input intensive, capital intensive, and commercialised.[3] The study villages are good examples of this. The main irrigated crops grown are cotton and sugarcane. There are also many minor commercial as well as food crops grown on well-irrigated land. The main dry land crops are sorghum, groundnuts, and to a lesser extent pulses.

Coimbatore's agricultural development slowed in the 1970s, and even more so in the 1980s and the 1990s, as the water table fell.[4] Although there were worries about the declining water table in the study villages in 1981/2 well-irrigated agriculture was still thriving there at that time. It was in the mid-1980s that wells began to dry up, previously cultivated land began to be left uncultivated, and land still in cultivation began to be cultivated less intensively. This was a process seen earlier in some other parts of the district, and later elsewhere.

The numbers and sizes of very large landholdings in Tamil Nadu fell with the intensification of agriculture, and asset distributions became more concentrated than land (Kurien, 1981). Coimbatore has for decades had a significantly higher proportion of labourers in the rural population than other districts in

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[2] Tamil Nadu has long been one of the more industrialised states in India. In 1980/81 Tamil Nadu had the second highest industrial value added of all Indian states, after Maharashtra, and the third highest numbers in factory employment, after Maharashtra and West Bengal (MIDS, 1988). Coimbatore is the second most industrialised district in Tamil Nadu. It is also one of the more urbanised. The proportion of the population living in what were classified as urban areas in 1981 was 33% in Tamil Nadu, 54% in Coimbatore district, compared with 24% in India as a whole

[3] In 1981/2 Coimbatore was the district with the most commercialised agriculture in Tamil Nadu (B. Harriss, 1981).

[4] Sivanappan and Aiyasamy(1978) note evidence of a continuously falling water table in Coimbatore going back to 1923.

Tamil Nadu.[5] A large proportion of rural labourers are Scheduled Caste, both in Tamil Nadu and in Coimbatore.[6] There are very few tribal people in rural Coimbatore.

Caste divisions are particularly rigid in rural Coimbatore. In the past there were strong divisions between Brahmin and non-Brahmin landowning castes, and there were strong divisions between these and Muslim landowners. By 1981/2, rural areas were dominated by *Gounders*, *Naidu*s, and *Chettiars*. Most of the Brahmins and Muslims had left. There were very strict divisions between Caste Hindu and Scheduled Caste communities.

The state in Tamil Nadu was highly interventionist from the 1970s to the 1990s. The Dravidian parties, the DMK (*Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam*) and the AIADMK (All-India Anna DMK), which ruled with few interruptions since the DMK first came to power in 1967, sought to undermine the rural elite by discouraging rural institutions (cooperatives, *Panchayat* unions, *Panchayat*s) which were the traditional power base of Congress. Both DMK parties pursued strategies alienating the rural elite in some ways, appeasing them in others (low taxes, subsidies on agricultural inputs, etc.), and both engaged in mass politics over the heads of the rural elite (MIDS, 1988).

The farmers' lobby led by the TNAA (Tamil Nadu Agriculturalists' Association) was powerful in the late 1970s. It lobbied very effectively for low taxes, low water charges in canal-irrigated areas, low electricity prices, low agricultural input prices, loan write-offs, and high paddy procurement prices. The Association was still evident in the study villages in 1981/2, although by then it was past its peak. The last overt confrontation with the state was over electricity dues, in 1982. That ended with a showdown in which the farmers lost.

In the 1980s state intervention was critical in providing support for the poor.[7] The AIADMK government introduced a wide range of social security measures, and developed what became a notably successful PDS (Public Distribution System).[8] Food subsidies and food distribution were emphasised rather than public works programmes. In 1982 the Chief Minister introduced a Noon Meals Scheme which entitled all 2-14 year-olds, and a few years later old-age pensioners too, to a free midday meal. Free school uniforms and books were part of a programme to encourage school enrolment. Expenditure on housing schemes for the Scheduled Castes increased in real terms in the 1980s. These were very visible in the study villages as will be seen below. At the end of the 1980s, the new DMK government introduced a social safety net which included pensions for the old, widows, deserted wives, and the

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[5] NSS estimates suggested that 45% of the rural population in Tamil Nadu were labourers in 1972, and 55% in 1983. This compares with just under 40% of the all India rural population in 1972 and just over 40% in 1983. (MIDS, 1988). According to estimates from the 1991 Population Census 58% of the population were (agricultural) labourers in rural Tamil Nadu and 71% in rural Coimbatore.

[6] In 1986/7 in Tamil Nadu 20% of the rural population was Dalit, but 40% of the labourers; 80% of the Dalit rural population were labourers; and furthermore there was a disproportionate proportion of male child labourers aged 5-14 (NSS 1987/8, quoted in Majumdar, 1996).

[7] The proportion of the population estimated to be below the poverty line in Tamil Nadu is high relative to other parts of India. 'Expert Group' figures 72/3, 77/8, 83/4, 87/8: 57-58-54-46% v. All India 56-53-46-39%; non-Expert Group figures for the same years were 63-56-44-40% v. 54-51-40-33% (Narayanan, 1996).

[8] There was an increasing element of state subsidy from 1984/5, which became very high indeed in the 1990s (Narayanan, 1996).

disabled; maternity benefits; and survivor benefits for households in which primary breadwinners died prematurely.[9] These benefits did not reach all who for whom they were intended, but they did reach a large number. Farmers were not completely neglected in the 1980s. One of the more important measures from which they benefitted was the deepening subsidy for electricity which was provided free to small farmers from 1984, and free to all farmers from 1990. There were also significant improvements in the transport infrastructure, which benefitted both farmers and non-farmers in the study villages and more generally.

The state financed the increased expenditures of the 1980s by relaxing prohibition, by shifting resources from capital to current expenditure, and by increasing levels of borrowing (MIDS, 1988). In the first half of the 1990s the Tamil Nadu state continued to protect much of its social expenditure in a similar way despite the reduction in contributions from the Centre (Narayanan, 1996; Prabhu, 1996).

The state had an important influence both in bolstering up small and middle farmers, and in protecting the poor, and this in turn had an important influence on agrarian relations between 1981/2 and 1996. The state had effectively been promoting the development of rural capitalism through expenditure which supported the development of productive capacity at the same time as helping to contain class conflict in the rural areas by measures to reduce poverty and decrease inequality.

2. THE STUDY VILLAGES

The villages on which the detailed discussion in this paper is based[10] are 40-60 km. north east of Coimbatore in western Tamil Nadu, and 20-30 km. west of Tiruppur. In 1981/2, 40% of the land in the study villages was well-fed, and agriculture was dominated by a group of relatively capital-intensive farmers investing in well-fed land, with a reputation for working in the fields alongside their labourers. All of the working irrigation wells were mechanised, but the mechanisation of field operations, transport, and other tasks was limited. A wide variety of well-fed crops were grown using substantial inputs of labour throughout the year. Dryland agriculture was more seasonal. Livestock-keeping had declined, and the livestock activities that remained were relatively labour-intensive.

Labourers in the study villages were relatively unaffected by the high degree of urbanisation and industrialisation despite the fact that much of it was going on relatively close by in 1981/2. The villages were still very successful agriculturally, transport was not yet well enough developed for commuting, and non-agricultural employment opportunities were not yet near enough. At that time, urban and industrial employment was anyway considered difficult for people from these villages to get.

By 1996, urban and industrial employment had become available to all, and problems had developed in agriculture. Farmers had invested heavily in compressor pumps and submersibles that could

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[9] The Government of India social safety net introduced in the 1995/6 budget was modelled on Tamil Nadu experience.

[10] Detailed figures are given in Tables at the end of the paper. Many of the statements made in the text are based on statistics drawn from the sample data.

draw water from much greater depths, but many of these were unsuccessful, and nearly all of those that were successful produced smaller quantities of water than before. As the irrigation crisis developed, labour costs rose too. Farmers responded by moving into crops that were both less labour-intensive and less irrigation-intensive, and planned for their sons to move out of agriculture when they could.

The villages were dominated by *thottam farmers*, defined as those operating well-fed land on a scale sufficient to justify the employment of permanent labour. They formed an oligarchic elite (12% of village households in 1981/2 (Table 1)). The majority of thottam farmers had holdings between 5 and 12.5 acres; the largest (not in the sample) had 40. Small farmers, most of whom had less than 5 acres, did not have enough well-fed land to justify the employment of permanent labour. They were more numerous than *thottam farmers* (making up 23% of village households in 1981/2 (Table 1)).

Households headed by agricultural labourers, with or without small areas of land, were more numerous still, making up a larger proportion (42%) of village households than those headed by *thottam* and small farmers. *Chakkiliyans* (18% of the households in the villages) were the attached labourers, or farm servants, in this area. *Pannadis* (11% of the households in the village) were the other large Scheduled Caste group, many of whom were migrant agricultural labourers crushing sugar cane outside as well as working within the study villages. *Caste Hindu* labourers (13% of the households in the villages) were higher status casual labourers with more room for manouvre than the two Scheduled Caste labourer groups.

By 1996 the number of *thottam farmers* had fallen, as had the number of small farmers. There were more non-agricultural enterprises in the villages, e.g. a small workshop, a groundnut oil extractor, a unit producing elastic for underwear. There were also more commuters, and more state employees. Many members of 1981/2 agricultural labourer households had entered non-agricultural occupations. Both those that had entered non-agricultural occupations and those continuing to work as agricultural labourers were considerably better off than they had been in 1981/2 as will be seen below.

3. AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN 1981/2

Before electrification in the 1950s, *Chakkiliyans* played a central role in the *kavalai* system of irrigation. They made leather 'buckets' for it, reared cattle for it, and worked it. In 1981/2, *Chakkiliyans* were employed primarily in field operations in agriculture, boys and younger men as *pannayals* (permanent agricultural labourers), *Chakkiliyan* women, girls, and older men as casual agricultural labourers. *Thottam farmers* employed 1-5 *pannayals* each; they also employed 20 or more casual labourers at any one time. Small farmers employed casual labour. *Pannadis*, including younger *Pannadi* men when they were not away crushing sugar cane, and *Caste Hindus*, many of whom supplemented their labour earnings with work on their own land and/or with their own livestock, also worked as casual agricultural labourers.

The degree to which agricultural labourers, particularly *Chakkiliyans*, were subordinated in these villages in 1981/2 was surprising for an area in which agriculture was highly commercialised, and the standards of living of labourers were relatively high. Labourers were not so poor that it was a real struggle to get enough to eat in 1981/2, though they had very poor clothing and very few consumer

durables. Nevertheless *thottam farmers* maintained very strong control over their labour, using social and political as well as economic means. The maintenance of strong divisions between *Chakkiliyans*, *Pannadis* and *Caste Hindus* made it difficult for labourers to organise. They also made it difficult for labourers to resist in less organised ways. The struggle for better conditions was muted in 1981/2.

We look at this in more detail below, first discussing the position of *Chakkiliyans*, and then that of *Pannadi* and *Caste Hindu* agricultural labourers. There follows a brief consideration of their common position, stressing the point that though they had in common the fact that they were all agricultural labourers, there was a great deal that divided them.

(a)*Chakkiliyans* (in 1981/2)

Chakkiliyans were the dominant agricultural labourers in the villages in 1981/2[11] and the permanent labourers. What was striking in 1981/2 was that virtually all *Chakkiliyans* in the villages were agricultural labourers, nearly all working exclusively within the villages. (The exceptions were a small number (4% of the sample) who also worked as migrant agricultural labourers; a small number of older men who herded livestock; and a small number of older men who repaired *chappals*. There were also one or two village policemen who held these positions by virtue of the fact that they were *Chakkiliyans*.) Not a single *Chakkiliyan* household in the villages had any agricultural land. The factors militating against *Chakkiliyans* being anything other than landless agricultural labourers within the villages were incredibly strong.

The permanent labourers, *pannayals*, worked much longer hours and much more continuously than other agricultural labourers. Just under 50% of *Chakkiliyan* households had one or more *pannayals* at the time of the survey, and 38% of *Chakkiliyan* men and boys were *pannayals*. *Pannayals* were 'beck and call' labourers with no fixed hours of work. They could be required to stay on the *thottam* at night to look after livestock, equipment, and stores, particularly if their employer did not live on the *thottam*. There was also a considerable amount of night irrigation for which they were responsible. There were no fixed holidays. *Pannayal* work was full-time, often much more than full-time, and continuous throughout the year.

Yet, although their position was considered particularly degrading, there was also a sense in which *pannayals* were the labour aristocracy in the villages in 1981/2. The annual rate of pay for *pannayals* was high relative to the pay that could be obtained for other types of agricultural labour, at Rs.2400/- in 1981/2 for an adult doing the full range of tasks, with or without one or more meals per day. This was equivalent to the highest daily casual labour wage of Rs.7/- for 343 days of the year without taking account of any of the additional perks available to *pannayals*. Less experienced adult *pannayals* were paid Rs.2000/- or Rs.1800/-. Young boys often started with meals only, and then got Rs.700/-, Rs.1000/-, etc. per year as they gained experience, strength and maturity. Mature *pannayals* carried considerable responsibility on *thottam farms.*

[11] Just under 47% of the male agricultural labourers working in the villages in 1981/2 were *Chakkiliyans*. This understates their importance in the village agricultural labour supply as a substantial proportion of these (38%) were *pannayals* generally working much longer hours and much more continuously than other agricultural labourers (Table 4).

One of the perks associated with *pannayal* employment was the lump sum, usually half of the annual wage, paid at the beginning of the year. This was distinct from credit: it was repaid by working out the year. There were also free or cheap *thottam farm* products, free fodder, and *pannayals* could take livestock to work. *Pannayals* could also get loans, medical care, and help in emergencies; help with building houses; and with the expenses of marriages and deaths. Many of these benefits were discretionary and important for employers keeping their *pannayals* under control. These discretionary benefits were powerful instruments because they were so valuable to *pannayals* and their households.

Boys and young men often worked as *pannayals* until they were well into their 20s. They contributed substantial proportions of their earnings to the household budget, and could expect help with marriage, housing, and setting up their own independent households in return. Many still found it difficult to escape *pannayal* employment until long after marriage even so. Others continued as *pannayals* throughout their working lives, or went back to *pannayal* employment in later life as adults. It was a matter of pride for a *Chakkiliyan* never to have worked as a *pannayal*. The majority, however, had done so in 1981/2.

Chakkiliyans made up over 40% of the male casual labourers in the villages in 1981/2 (Table 4), and a large proportion of the female casual labourers. There were vestiges of the system in which other household members were obliged to work for the employer of a *pannayal* as and when needed, but the obligation was no longer strong in 1981/2. This was one of the things that had changed significantly since the period documented by Cederlof.

The rates of pay for casual labour were lower than for *pannayals*. They were also lower for *Chakkiliyans* than for other casual agricultural labourers. (*Chakkiliyan* men were paid Rs. 6/- and Rs. 5/- per day, the higher rate paid in peak seasons and to those without loans. Other male casual labourers got Rs.7/-, Rs.6/- and Rs.5/-. *Chakkiliyan* women were paid Rs.2/- or Rs. 2/50 per day when daily wage rates for other female agricultural labourers were Rs.3/-, Rs.2/50 and Rs.2/-.) Women's wages in these villages were less than 50% of men's in 1981/2.

There was considerable variation in how full-time *Chakkiliyan* adults worked in 1981/2 and in how much each contributed directly to household income. Men who were *pannayals* worked very full-time, often more than full-time, as part of a regime that was very arduous. Casual labour was less onerous. The number of days worked per week could vary, and the hours per day were fixed. Women put in lower hours per day, and less days, than men. They also withdrew from the agricultural labour force younger.

Chakkiliyan children started working for wages when they were 10-12 years old, boys as *pannayals*, girls as casual labourers. They were the only labourer group in the villages for whom this was the norm, taking precedence over education. The few boys (and no girls) who went to school went for one or two years only, before they were considered old enough to go out to work. It was considered important by *Chakkiliyans* for their children to get used to agricultural labour from a young age.

Chakkiliyan women withdrew from employment when their children went out to work.[12] The health and strength of many were under pressure by the time their children reached the ages of 10-12. *Chakkiliyan* women married and started bearing children at young ages.[13] The health, and strength, of *Chakkiliyan* women was often very poor, and *Chakkiliyan* infant and child mortality was relatively high.[14] One of the reasons for sending children out to work was to ease the workload of their mothers. Many *Chakkiliyans* struggled to maintain households in which women were not able to work, or only able to do rather little work, at all stages.

Despite the fact that wages were relatively high in these villages compared with other parts of Tamil Nadu at the time, *Chakkiliyans* were still very poor in 1981/2. They had very few consumer durables: there were no bicycles at all in *Chakkiliyan* households (Table 6). Moreover, although they were no longer forbidden to wear particular items of clothing[15], standards of clothing were poor. However, *Chakkiliyans* did own their houses, and their house sites. Many of their houses were of good quality, devoid of possessions or furnishings but built of stone/concrete with tiled rooves. A large number of *Chakkiliyan* houses were built in the 1960s and the 1970s, many with 'help' from employers, much of it reflected in debt still outstanding in 1981/2.[16]

More than 80% of *Chakkiliyan* households had loans outstanding at the time of the interviews, over 50% from employers,[17] and one third from *kandu* moneylenders.[18] Servicing the loans took the form of weekly payments to moneylenders and/or reductions in wages in the case of employer loans. Very little formal sector credit reached *Chakkiliyan* households in 1981/2.[19] The only other loans they had were small loans from relatives, friends, and shopkeepers.

The social, ritual, and political roles of *Chakkiliyans* within the villages was an important part of their subordination.[20] *Chakkiliyans* played the drums at village festivals. They carried messages outside the villages. They also handled dead animals, human excrement, and waste. These roles carried small benefits in kind. *Chakkiliyans* also faced restrictions couched in terms of purity and cleanliness. These

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[12] They said they did this "when ther were enough other earning members in the household". Data on numbers of women working are not available for 1981/2.

[13] Many *Chakkiliyan* girls were being married at 14 or 15 in 1981/2.

[14] The evidence on this is only very casual. The numbers in the sample are too small to make strong inferences here.

[15] *Chakkiliyans* had been forbidden to wear clothing on their upper bodies, and forbidden to wear shoes, in the past.

[16] One or two *Chakkiliyans* in the villages had had government housing loans in the 1970s, none in the sample though.

[17] Employer loans were usually, but not always, associated with a deduction of Rs.1/- from the daily wage of Rs.6/- in 1981/2. There were also cases of loans from employers that were not associated with <u>any</u> decrease in the daily wage. The reduction in the daily wage associated with loans did not vary with the loan amount. Thus, anything between Rs.100/- and Rs.500/- could be borrowed at what amounted to up to Rs.25-30/- per month, depending on the number of days in the month worked. Employers were never in a hurry for loan repayments, as an outstanding loan gave an employer a lien on (cheap) labour which was useful at times of peak labour demand.

[18] The standard repayment was Rs.12/50 per Rs.100/- per week for 10 weeks, and this was strictly enforced, often with violence.

[19] The exception was one or two housing loans.

[20] Cederlof stresses this for the earlier period too.

included restrictions on such things as how they got water[21], where they lived, where they were served at the tea-shop, and where their children sat at school. These all served as daily reminders of their status, many of them distressing and humiliating.

Chakkiliyans played important political roles within the villages. They voted with *thottam farmers* at elections, and supported *thottam farmers* in village political disputes. They policed each other on behalf of *thottam farmers*, enforcing labour contracts, and debt. *Thottam farmers* acted as their intermediaries with the state. *Chakkiliyans* from two of the three *cheris* ("colonies", or separate housing areas) in the villages were in the process of acquiring new *cheris* in 1981/2, through the auspices of *thottam farmers*. This was an astute move on the part of *thottam farmers* who stood to gain a more permanent and more committed labour supply and to protect their labour supply for the future. (One or two of them also benefitted directly from the sale of the land, and, later, from contracts for the building of the new houses and infrastructure.) The benefits to *thottam farmers* were very apparent in 1996, as will be seen; likewise the disadvantages and the advantages for *Chakkiliyans*. More generally, the highly selective support that *Chakkiliyans* could get from the state in 1981/2 played into *thottam farmers'* hands. *Chakkiliyans* not getting government loans, not being able to get a hearing from the police, etc., increased their reliance on *thottam farmers* to whom they resorted instead.

Chakkiliyans put a high value on the security that went with their relationships with thottam farmers. This is not surprising given that their capacity to earn was their only resource, and that that was so vulnerable to illness, accident, disability, and other factors that affected their generally adverse dependency ratios. *Thottam farmers* exploited this.

While *Chakkiliyans* did not want to run the risk of jeopardising their underlying relationships with *thottam farmers*, there were ways in which they had been acting to reduce their dependency in 1981/2. One of the ways in which many tried to protect their positions was by not staying with one employer for too long. Another was by obtaining produce from markets rather than directly from employers. Yet another was by resorting to moneylender rather than employer loans. *Thottam farmers* complained about these developments - it was clear that they saw them as threatening.[22]

Chakkiliyans were the most subordinated of the three groups of agricultural labourers in the villages in 1981/2. The extent to which this was a matter of political and social as well as economic factors will become clearer when we discuss how their position had changed in 1996.

First we look at the positions of *Pannadi* and *Caste Hindu* agricultural labourers in 1981/2 by way of contrast.

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[21] They got water from the main village borehole where *Caste Hindus* filled their pots first, and then filled the pots of *Chakkiliyans* who were not allowed to fill their pots themselves. It looked as though this was designed to humiliate, or at least to keep *Chakkiliyans* in their place. It served as one of the more obvious daily reminders of their subordinate status.

[22] Employers complained vociferously, and hypocritically, about these developments, expressing concern that *pannayals* were losing out to middlemen, and deriding moneylenders as unscrupulous because they were willing to lend for consumption, on extortionate terms.

(b)*Pannadis* (in 1981/2)

Like *Chakkiliyans*, all *Pannadis* living in the villages were agricultural labourers in 1981/2. The major differences were that *Pannadis* worked as migrant agricultural labourers outside the villages; and that with one or two exceptions *Pannadis* did not work as *pannayals*. Unlike *Chakkiliyans*, many *Pannadis* also had (very small amounts of) agricultural land. The conditions of migrant agricultural labourers are never good (cf. Breman, 1996, e.g.), but in the *Pannadi* case they seemed in many ways better than those of *Chakkiliyans* who were so heavily and exclusively under the control of village employers in 1981/2.

A third of the male agricultural labourers in the villages were *Pannadis* (Table 4), but 26% of these worked as migrant agricultural labourers, absent for 6-10 months each year, and only one or two were *pannayals*. *Pannadis* made a disproportionate contribution to the village female agricultural labourer force. There were more pressures on *Pannadi* women to work as agricultural labourers than there were on *Chakkiliyan* women (see below).

Migrant sugar cane crushing labour was considered the best paid type of agricultural labour among alternatives open to labourers from these villages in 1981/2, but it was hard work, thought suitable at the time only for younger men. The rates of pay compared well with rates of pay for other types of agricultural employment, but much of what was earned was spent on the job.

Migrant sugar cane crushing involved working in gangs for different employers, many of them quite far from home. The work was arduous, and the conditions in which sugar cane crushers lived while on the job were very poor. There was a lot of violence and drinking associated with sugar cane crushing in 1981/2. *Pannadis* who went sugar cane crushing were exposed to a number of outside influences, including political and trade union influences, in the course of their sugar cane crushing work. This put them in a stronger position than *Chakkiliyans* to enter non-agricultural occupations in the late 1980s and 1990s as will become clear below.

Just over one third of *Pannadi* households had members who were migrant labourers in 1981/2. The rest, almost two thirds of *Pannadi* households, depended exclusively on work within the villages however.

Pannadi men were generally more independent of their households than *Chakkiliyan*. Once they started earning, usually as migrant labourers, they did not contribute much to household income. They did not get much help from their parents in establishing their own independent households either, many of them having considerable difficulty on this score, marrying late, living in crowded housing, et al. *Pannadi* men contributed less to household earnings than *Chakkiliyan*, even when no longer migrant labourers. Moreover, *Pannadi* boys were not sent out to work until they were 15 years old or more. (Most 10-14 year old *Pannadi* boys were 'staying at home', not going to school, in 1981/2.) This meant that *Pannadi* women bore a much heavier responsibility for maintaining their households than did *Chakkiliyan*. *Pannadi* women also tended to marry later than *Chakkiliyan*. They bore more surviving children, and their own health did not appear to be so poor. Unlike *Chakkiliyans*, *Pannadis* bear similarities to the agricultural labourer households described by Kapadia (1993a), and Da Corta and

Venkateswarulu (1999), among others, in which women carry much more of the burden of maintaining the household than men.

Pannadis had more consumer durables than *Chakkiliyans*: 12% of *Pannadi* households had bicycles in 1981/2; a few also had radios and watches (Table 6). They owned their own houses and house sites, but the quality of their housing was very poor. A large number of *Pannadi* houses were of mud, matting, and thatch; and many of them very crowded. More migrant labour income appeared to be spent on bicycles, radios and watches than on housing in which migrant labourers had less interest than family members who were at home throughout the year.

Pannadi households were not as heavily indebted as *Chakkiliyan* households in 1981/2. Smaller numbers borrowed, and what they borrowed was on better terms. Debt servicing was not as heavy a drain on *Pannadi* income as on *Chakkiliyan*. Nor did it make them as dependent on employment that was so continuous and arduous.

The social and political roles of *Pannadis* in the villages were very different from those of *Chakkiliyans*.[23] *Pannadis* were reputed to be thugs, doing the dirty work for higher caste households. They had freer contact with *Caste Hindus* than did *Chakkiliyans,* and they were more independent. The village elite could not draw on *Pannadi* political support as they could *Chakkiliyan*. Nor were *thottam farmers* ready to act as intermediaries with the government for *Pannadis*. The relationship was altogether much less close.

Thus, *Pannadi* men were more mobile, and more independent both of employers (and the village elite) and of other members of their households, than *Chakkiliyan*. The variance of *Pannadi* incomes was high. Some *Pannadi* incomes were higher than *Chakkiliyan*; others lower. *Pannadis* were in many ways more vulnerable than *Chakkiliyans* were. But those with good fortune were in a better position to take advantage of the more positive opportunities when they arose as will become clear below.

(c)*Caste Hindu* Agricultural Labourers (in 1981/2)

Caste Hindu agricultural labourer households belonged to *Naidu, Gounder*, *Mudaliar* and *Chettiar* castes. They included one or two headed by widows and deserted wives, and households that had had bad luck, but most were households from sub-castes that had long been associated with agricultural labouring. *Caste Hindu* agricultural labourers shared important features that set them apart from *Pannadis* and *Chakkiliyans*.

Caste Hindu households headed by agricultural labourers were less exclusively dependent on agricultural labour income than were *Chakkiliyans* or *Pannadis.* This was partly because many of their

[23] *Pannadis* were the descendants of labourers and tenant labourers in the 'Muslim' village which was the oldest and most central of the hamlets in the study and had been settled by a group of Muslims who came and constructed its tank. The tank in the 'Muslim' village was the only tank in the study area. *Pannadis* had performed tasks relating to the maintenance of the tank and the control of its irrigation water. The last of the Muslims left in the 1970s and by then anyway the tank was a less important source of irrigation than it had been earlier.

sons had non-agricultural occupations. It was also because many of these households had land and livestock, including milch animals. Only one or two members of *Caste Hindu* labourer households worked as *pannayals* or as migrant agricultural labourers.

Caste Hindus made up 20% of the male agricultural labour force in the villages in 1981/2 (Table 4). Virtually all were casual labourers,[24] many only part-time. Women in these households made a much smaller contribution to the female casual agricultural labour force than did *Pannadi* or *Chakkiliyan* women. More women than men were occupied exclusively in looking after their own land and livestock, as well as in domestic work.

One of the things that distinguishes *Caste Hindu* labourer households most clearly from *Pannadi* and *Chakkiliyan* in 1981/2 is that a significant number (28%) of the male members of these households, all sons, were employed in non-agricultural occupations (Table 3). Those in industrial employment were in positions that were temporary, with wages at the bottom of the scale in 1981/2, but these positions held out possibilities of advancement (Chari, 2000). Others were in a variety of forms of non-agricultural self-employment.

The other major factor that distinguishes *Caste Hindu* from other labourer households is that just under 50% had agricultural land in 1981/2 (Table 7), and many of their holdings were significant (more than 1 acre). Only one or two *Pannadis* had holdings as large as this. *Caste Hindu* labourer households also had significantly more livestock income, including income from milk (Table 8).[25] Agricultural labour income was still important in most *Caste Hindu* households headed by agricultural labourers nevertheless; some relied on it exclusively.

Three quarters of the boys aged 10-14 in *Caste Hindu* labourer households were in school (but none aged 15-19); the 10-14 year-olds not in school all worked as casual agricultural labourers. Most girls worked as casual agricultural labourers from the age of 10-12 too. Few went to school. Unlike *Pannadis*, there was no 'staying at home' for 10-14 year-olds in these households.

In general, *Caste Hindu* labourer households were better off than *Chakkiliyan* or *Pannadi* households. Just over a third had bicycles in 1981/2. A few also had radios and watches (Table 6). Moreover, they were able to rent, or live free of rent in, relatively good quality village houses, and/or to buy village houses at reasonable prices. They had spent considerably more on housing than *Chakkiliyans* or *Pannadis* in the 1960s and the 1970s. Not all were in as good a position though.

It was a matter of pride for a *Caste Hindu* labourer household not to have loans, and just under half had none in 1981/2. Most of those with loans had loans from friends, relatives, and shopkeepers.[26] A few had jewel loans, from banks. None had formal sector loans. Very few (less than 5%) *Caste*

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[24] One or two were migrant agricultural labourers and there was even one in the sample who was a *pannayal*.

[25] This option was not open to *Chakkiliyan* or *Pannadi* households whose position in the caste system prevented them from handling milk for sale in 1981/2.

[26] At rates of interest varying from 0 to 3-5% per month.

Hindu labourer households had loans from employers, and none had loans from moneylenders. They were much less burdened than *Chakkiliyans,* or *Pannadis,* by loan servicing.

Caste Hindu labourers were in a much stronger social position within the villages than *Pannadis* or *Chakkiliyans*. They were not subject to the same restrictions. They lived in the main villages in amongst non-labourers. They related to, and moved freely with, non-labourers. Many had links with households in better economic and social positions than themselves. A number were part of marriage and dowry systems involving higher status households. There were receivers as well as givers of dowry in this group.[27] One should not exaggerate though. Some among them were in extremely weak and vulnerable positions nevertheless.

A Shared Sense of being Agricultural Labourers?

All agricultural labourers in these villages suffered from low wages, poor conditions, and lives of drudgery and vulnerability in 1981/2. All suffered to a greater or lesser extent from dependence, subordination, and powerlessness in relation to their employers. None were able to get direct access to the state even to claim their legal rights. The position of *Chakkiliyans* was very different from that of *Pannadis*, and that of *Pannadis* very different from that of *Caste Hindus*, though. It is not surprising that they felt that they had so little in common with *Pannadis*, and *Caste Hindus*, and even that *Chakkiliyans* tried to keep it that way. In the case of *Chakkiliyans* it is also not surprising that there were no signs of wanting to organise in opposition to employers. They were still much too weak in relation to employers to have any incentive to do so in 1981/2. What they would lose exceeded what they might gain, by far.

By 1996 new possibilities had opened up for members of all three groups, *Chakkiliyans* included. There were new problems however, as will emerge below.

4. AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE VILLAGES IN 1996

One of the most striking changes for members of agricultural labourer and ex-agricultural labourer households in 1996 was that, unlike in 1981/2, non-agricultural employment was open to all who wanted it. A good deal of this was now available quite nearby. Improvements in transport and communications had made more distant opportunities more accessible too. Bus services were much more widespread: roads had improved enormously.

There were also dramatic changes in agriculture. There were more bananas and there was less cotton and sugarcane, as *thottam farmers* economised on irrigation water and on labour. Many *thottam farmers* had continued to invest capital in farms that were less productive than before. Others were no longer *thottam farmers*. Dry land was the subject of speculation in the expectation that it

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[27] Only trivial amounts of dowry were paid in *Chakkiliyan* and *Pannadi* households. In the majority of *Chakkiliyan* and *Pannadi* households there was no dowry payment at all.

would fetch high prices for industrial use, though a considerable amount was still under cultivation. Many small farmers still found farming worthwhile; others had moved into non-agricultural occupations instead.

Some 1981/2 *thottam farmers* had become non-agricultural employers in the villages: extracting groundnut oil, producing elastic for underwear, producing powerloom cloth. Some had become moneylenders on a significant scale. One or two had become traders. Many *thottam farmers* had invested what capital they had in trying to maintain their irrigated agriculture until much too late. None had migrated. They all confined themselves to activities in the villages, and planned for their sons to migrate.

The labour requirements of the more limited agricultural operations were less easy for *thottam farmers* to satisfy in 1996 than in 1981/2. The number of men and boys employed in agriculture in the villages had halved. Moreover many women had withdrawn from the agricultural labour force to concentrate on domestic work within their own households. To the extent that there was a feminisation of agricultural labour it consisted in a greater withdrawal from agricultural labour of men than of women.

A decline in the supply of agricultural labour on the scale observed would have been accompanied by severe labour shortages in agriculture had it not been for the decline in agricultural production caused by the fall in the water table, and *thottam farmers*' switch to less labour-intensive crops. There were few signs of mechanisation substituting for labour, except with respect to irrigation, already fully mechanised by 1981/2. *Thottam farmers* did not have much capital to spare: what they had they had invested in trying to maintain their irrigation, in many cases unsuccessfully.

Thottam farmers had less control over labourers in 1996. This was partly the result of the weakening of the position of *thottam farmers*, and partly the result of the opening up of opportunities outside agriculture. Another factor was the shift in state policy in favour of labourers, evident in social expenditure increasingly relevant to labourers, and in the attitudes of officials to lower status groups (see below). Labourers had formed their own organisations in the villages in 1996 and were beginning to use these in their relations with the state and also with the village elite. The social position of labourer groups had improved considerably too.

We look again first at the position of *Chakkiliyans*, then *Pannadis* and *Caste Hindus*, and then consider them together, briefly, after that.

(a) *Chakkiliyans* (in 1996)

In 1996, *Chakkiliyans* were no longer exclusively agricultural labourers working within the villages (Table 4). Some were now working in 'traditional' rural occupations such as *chappal*-making, coconut leaf plaiting for makeshift roofs and screens, and firewood cutting and charcoal-making. A few of the younger *Chakkiliyans* were also working in powerloom units owned by *thottam farmers* in the villages. One or two were working in textile units and construction elsewhere (Table 3). There were also a number over 10 years old in school. One or two *Chakkiliyan* women were doing domestic work at schools and one or two were working as construction workers. A small number of *Chakkiliyan* households had migrated (all to work as agricultural labourers in other rural areas).

Chakkiliyans maintained that they were "not used to operating in the urban areas". Moreover, urban employers preferred *non-Chakkiliyans*. *Chakkiliyans* were seen both by themselves and by employers as first and foremost agricultural labourers. They were still heavily involved in agriculture and the village environment; their position outside agriculture was weak.

Within the villages, *Chakkiliyans* were still very definitely labourers, not farmers. With one exception not in the sample,[28] no *Chakkiliyan* had bought or leased in agricultural land (Table 7). Nor were *Chakkiliyans* keeping any more livestock than in 1981/2 (Table 8).

Chakkiliyans were more dominant in the (reduced) village agricultural labour force in 1996 than they had been in 1981/2. Fifty five percent of the male agricultural labourers working in the villages in 1996 were *Chakkiliyans*. The figure rises to 72% if one excludes migrant agricultural labourers (Table 4). *Chakkiliyans* were also responsible for the largest number of female casual and contract labourers in the villages in 1996 (Table 4). It was also true that a smaller proportion of women and girls worked as agricultural labourers than in 1981/2, and those that did worked fewer days than before (see below).

Chakkiliyan conditions of agricultural employment had improved considerably. They were doing less *pannayal* labour, and the *pannayal* labour that they were doing was on better terms than before; they were relying more heavily on casual labour, much of it contract labour, and this was also on much better terms (see below).

Chakkiliyan boys and young men who would previously have been *pannayals* were now going to school, 'staying at home', or working outside agriculture. The number of older men who were *pannayals* in 1996 however was very similar to that in 1981/2.

'Full' *pannayal* wages more than doubled in real terms between 1981/2 and 1996 (reaching Rs.10,000–11,000/- per year in 1996).[29] Moreover, in 1996, *pannayals* had fixed hours of work, similar to those of casual labourers; and they had leave that was negotiated at the beginning of the year. It was no longer easy for employers to get *pannayals* to stay overnight on *thottams*. Employers also complained that *pannayals* taken on at the beginning of the year often left without completing their contracts, and that it was no longer possible to get other *Chakkiliyans* to bring them back, as would have been possible in 1981/2.

A little under half of the *Chakkiliyan* men and boys worked as casual or contract labourers in 1996 (Table 3). Larger numbers of *Chakkiliyan* women and girls worked as casual labourers than men. More men than women worked for wages however, and women working for wages worked less full-time and less continuously than men.

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[28] The one exception was a *Chakkiliyan* household a member of which had died in government service. His family had received sufficient compensation for his death to enable them to acquire 3 acres of thottam land. However "*Chakkiliyans* don't think of themselves as landowners" remained the response to questions about why more of the slightly better off did not buy land instead of livestock or better housing when they had any money to spare.

[29] The All-India Wholesale Price Index was used as a basis for deflating nominal wage increases. This undoubtedly understates the changes in real wages that occurred

Contract labour (not distinguished from casual labour in the Tables) had replaced casual labour for a large number of field operations in the villages in 1996. It is often assumed that contract labour enables employers to get more effort out of their labour force with less supervision. Many labourers in these villages in 1996 preferred contract labour to casual labour as it gave them the possibility of getting higher rates of pay for harder work and vice versa.[30] To the extent that labourers' bargaining power was improving, contract labour represented a way for labourers to negotiate better terms as much as the reverse.

In 1996 daily wages for casual agricultural labour were on a par with those in non-agricultural occupations in nearby urban areas. (The rates were Rs.50/-, Rs.45/- and Rs.40/- for men, and Rs.30/-, Rs.25/- and Rs.20/- for women.) This represented a more than doubling of men's casual labour wages in real terms between 1981/2 and 1996, and a considerably more than doubling of women's. Women's wages had risen to 50-60% of those of men. Contract labour remuneration was similar, and better for those willing and able to work unusually hard.

There was less pressure on *Chakkiliyan* household members to work continuously and arduously in 1996 than there was in 1981/2. A number were working in arduous full-time jobs, either as *pannayals* or in non-agricultural occupations (powerloom units, textile units, construction). Fewer worked in arduous full-time occupations than in 1981/2 however, when many were doing so as *pannayals* on much worse terms than *pannayals* in 1996. Other members of *Chakkiliyan* households worked as casual and contract labourers, many of them less than full-time. *Chakkiliyan* women stayed at home longer for the birth of each child, and to look after young children. They also stayed at home "to cook" and "do domestic work".[31] Some households still expected sons and daughters to start earning young. Others had 10-14 year old children staying at home or going to school, which was something that none had done in 1981/2. Interestingly, the reasons given for sending children to school were for being able to stand up to officials rather to get qualifications that might be useful for employment. This extended to girls as well as boys. Another reason was that *Chakkiliyans* could now afford to send children to school without putting impossible burdens on women. Also important were the new incentives in the form of free uniforms, free books, and free noon meals. The fact that *Chakkiliyan* children were no longer treated so badly in school was also a factor.[32] The proportion of 10-14 year-olds in school was still low (Table 5), but the proportion not working was higher than this when one includes those 'staying at home'.

One of the most significant ways in which *Chakkiliyans* had reacted to their generally improved possibilities was by decreasing the amount of wage work they did in 1996 compared with 1981/2.

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[30] Contract labour gave scope for varying rates of work and pay. A typical example was the weeding of sugarcane in 1996. An acre would take 10 men working 1.5 days, or 10 men 2 days working 4 hours/day 'in a relaxed way'. For this they would get Rs.500-Rs.1000/-. If casual labour was used it would take 10 men 3 days.

[31] One of the *Chakkiliyan* men commented that women had "no time for livestock because they were too busy with domestic work".

[32] Increasing numbers of higher caste children were going to English-medium schools outside the villages in 1996. This meant that *Chakkiliyans* were no longer at such a disadvantage in village schools.

Drudgery was an important aspect of their poverty in 1981/2 and in 1996. A decrease in drudgery was an important aspect of poverty alleviation as far as *Chakkiliyans* were concerned.

The decrease in work for wages was one of the reasons why *Chakkiliyans* were still very poor in material terms in 1996 despite the increase in wages, and the state distribution of food and clothing which *Chakkiliyans* now received free. I have earlier referred to this as a standard of living paradox[33]. A third of *Chakkiliyan* households had bicycles in 1996, but they had virtually no other significant consumer durables (Table 6). Standards of clothing were still poor. Housing had improved enormously however. The new *cheris* which *Chakkiliyans* had been in the process of acquiring in 1981/2 were 'up and running' in 1996. They included houses part-financed by state grants and loans, and state-provided water supplies, gravelled pathways, electricity, and TV. (The politics of all this is an interesting question.) The overall result was that *Chakkiliyans* in two of the three main *Chakkiliyan* hamlets were well housed in 1996. However, a considerable amount of *Chakkiliyan* labour, income and debt was tied up in these new housing developments. This meant that *Chakkiliyans* were more committed than ever to working hard and to living and working in the villages. The increased level of indebtedness associated with housing improvements undoubtedly made *Chakkiliyans* more dependent on village employers than they would otherwise have been in 1996. We return to this below.

More than 95% of *Chakkiliyan* households had loans outstanding at the time of the 1996 interviews, the totals reaching Rs.10,000 or more in some cases. This was a considerable increase over 1981/2. Moreover, despite the significant rises in wages and earnings, *Chakkiliyans* were more involved in the most exploitative forms of borrowing in 1996 than they had been in 1981/2. The incidence of employer loans had fallen (from over 50% in 1981/2 to just under a third in 1996),[34] but the incidence of moneylender loans had risen (from one third to two thirds). *Kandu* moneylending had become much more straightforward,[35] but the interest rates had not changed at all. Many *Chakkiliyans* also had formal sector loans in 1996 however, mainly housing loans. Moreover, a few had IRDP loans (for sheep, milch animals, and coconut leaf plaiting). The proportion of *Chakkiliyan* households with lower interest loans from friends, relatives, and shopkeepers fell (from 25% in 1981/2 to 10% in 1996).

Thus, *Chakkiliyans* had much better housing in 1996 but it had got them into considerably more debt. Borrowing from moneylenders rather than employers may have represented an attempt by *Chakkiliyans* to reduce their dependence on individual employers, but moneylender debt was very onerous. The fact that *Chakkiliyans* had so much debt reduced their standards of living and maintained the pressure on them to work hard. *Chakkiliyans* both had to put in more labour, and they had to do so on more onerous terms than they would otherwise have had to do.

The social status of *Chakkiliyans* had improved greatly by 1996. They could move about more freely and interact with others more easily in public spaces in the villages. Moreover, they had begun to

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[33] Seminar presentation at Queen Elizabeth House, Oxford, 1997, quoted in Da Corta and Venkateshwarulu (1999).

[34] In 1996 the standard deduction was Rs.10/-, from daily wages of Rs.40/-, Rs.45/- and Rs.50/-, for loans of thousands rather than hundreds of rupees. There were also cases of loans from employers that were not associated with any decrease in the daily wage.

[35] There was less coercion, and more reliance on formal agreements and promissory notes.

organise independently of *thottam farmers*, through the Ambedkar People's Movement (APM). The entry of the APM in 1994, and its activities from 1994 to 1996, illustrate how significantly relations with *thottam farmers* had changed by 1996.

An APM branch was set up in one of the main *Chakkiliyan cheris* in 1994 (on the initiative of *taluk* and district APM leaders). At first "it was hard to persuade older *Chakkiliyans* to join as they were afraid that *thottam farmers* would be offended if they did".[36] By 1996 it was gathering momentum.

When the establishment of the APM was announced, *thottam farmers* and others in the village objected, and planned "to stop *Chakkiliyans* from riding bicycles in the village", "not to give employment to initiators in the village", and "to file police cases against them". They also approached MLA's (Members of the Legislative Assembly) in a bid to prevent the APM branch from being set up.

The APM "just started dealing with their issues by themselves rather than going to leaders of the non-Scheduled Castes". The first issue they took up was the construction of the temple in one of the new *Chakkiliyan cheris*. When *thottam farmers* discovered that the APM was planning to start building a new temple they tried to persuade the person who had given the land for the temple not to give the APM the *patta* for the land. The *Chakkiliyans* started the construction work anyway. *Caste Hindu* villagers came with axes, knives and spades to destroy the work. The matter went to the police and the *tahsildar*, who came to the village, got a 'no objection' letter from village leaders, and told them not to trouble either the APM or the temple construction further.

The next move was to petition the Collector for power connections for houses in the old *cheri*, and for separate water taps. They got the separate water taps, and the right for *Chakkiliyans* to fill their pots themselves from the taps in the centre of the village if their taps ran dry.

During the 1996 fieldwork a dispute arose that illustrates the increasing confidence of *Chakkiliyans*. A woman from a *Naidu thottam farmer* family verbally abused a *Chakkiliyan* woman who retaliated "using the same words". The *Naidu* family's son then went to the *Chakkiliyan* woman's house with some other men and beat her up. A group of *Chakkiliyans* beat the *Naidu* son in return and then went to make a complaint to the police. It would have been unheard of for *Chakkiliyans* to go to the police on a matter such as this in 1981/2; it would have been assumed that the police would have sided with the *Naidu thottam farmer*. This time, in 1996, the police were said to be "making enquiries" favourable to the *Chakkiliyans*.

Thus by 1996 there had been a distinct improvement for *Chakkiliyans*, despite the fact that they were still primarily agricultural labourers, and they still suffered from social and religious stigma. The improvement was partly due to increased competition for labour, and partly due to the weakened position of *thottam farmers*. Increased backing from the state had also helped to strengthen the position of *Chakkiliyans* in many ways.

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[36] The following relies heavily on an account given by one of the officials of the APM.

However, their achievements were not as great as one might have expected given the fact that wages increased 2- to 3-fold in real terms, and given that there had also been a considerably expansion in state activities benefiting *Chakkiliyans*. (a)Much of the improvement had been converted into a decrease in drudgery which was very evident and significant. (b)Their material conditions still appeared to be very poor. (c)They were still very vulnerable, even more so with increased indebtedness associated particularly with housing and also with alcohol consumption. (d)Improved housing, supported by the state, tied them to these particular villages, and to working hard in these particular villages, even more than before (see below for further discussion of this point).

It could be argued that *Chakkiliyans* were better off remaining in the villages in 1996, that they were not in a strong enough position to move into higher quality non-agricultural employment, and that lower quality non-agricultural employment was worse than agricultural employment in the villages where they were. Their best strategy may have been to further improve their base in the villages before attempting to move out and up. We come back to this below. First we look at *Pannadis* and *Caste Hindus* in 1996.

(b) *Pannadi*s (in 1996)

*Pannadi*s had moved in much greater numbers out of agricultural labour in the villages than *Chakkiliyans* by 1996 (Table 3). Many of them had moved into urban industrial occupations. Also, the households that had migrated, had gone into urban and non-agricultural occupations, not rural. Unlike *Chakkiliyans*, *Pannadis* were breaking into urban space in 1996.

In 1996 *Pannadi*s were employed in industrial units, in petty shopkeeping and in trade (Table 3). Men working in textile mills, *banian* factories, and workshops were getting as little as Rs.40/- or Rs.45/- per day in 1996 when daily wages for male casual agricultural labourers were Rs.40/-, Rs.45/- and Rs.50/- without any of the additional commuting and other expenses associated with working away from home. The reason they were willing to work on these terms was partly that they much preferred the work and work environment to agricultural labour, partly that they could get year-round employment at these rates, and partly that this work might lead to better opportunities in the longer run. A few who had been working in textile mills, *banian* factories, and workshops for some time were earning Rs.60/-, Rs.70/- and even Rs.90/- a day. Some of these might aspire eventually to permanent positions. The first *Pannadi* in a sample household was about to be made permanent in 1996, after working for 4 years for the firm concerned. Some *Pannadis* were doing reasonably in shopkeeping and trade too.

Pannadis, unlike *Chakkiliyans*, had no problems operating in urban and industrial contexts per se. They were used to moving around, in urban as well as rural areas. Moreover, employers were better towards disposed *Pannadis* than towards *Chakkiliyans*. There was not as much difficulty for *Pannadis* as for *Chakkiliyans* on this score.

A number of *Pannadis* had bought land (Table 7) since 1981/2, which meant that many holdings were not as small as in 1981/2. A few *Pannadi*s were also leasing in land in 1996. *Pannadi*s had similar quantities of livestock in 1996 as in 1981/2 (Table 8).

Just over 50% of *Pannadi* men and boys were agricultural labourers in 1996 (Table 4). The percentages who were migrant agricultural labourers were very similar in 1996 to the percentages in 1981/2. The big drop was in men and boys who worked exclusively in the villages as agricultural labourers. Less than 20% did so in 1996, compared with 60% in 1981/2. *Pannadis* continued to provide substantial numbers of female casual and contract agricultural labourers in the villages, but in 1996 a number of women were also working as migrant sugar cane crushers, alongside men. Migrant labour was not an easy option for women but it was relatively well paid. (Women could only do it if children could be left with relatives when both parents were away.) There were still good opportunities for migrant sugar cane crushers in Coimbatore district with its growing labour shortage, though there was less sugar cane crushing work available in the vicinity of the study villages in 1996 than there had been in 1981/2.

More money was coming back from sugar cane crushing in 1996. Estimates of sugar cane crushing pay varied from Rs.50/- to Rs.100/- per day depending on how hard the group worked. The lowest rates of pay were not very different from the top casual agricultural labour rates for men in the study villages; the highest were nearly twice as high.

Thus *Pannadi*s formed a minor part of a much reduced village agricultural labour force in 1996 (38% of the male agricultural labourers in the villages, 18% if one excludes migrant agricultural labour). However, there were still considerably more *Pannadi* women working exclusively as agricultural labourers in the villages than *Pannadi* men (Table 4) despite the fact that *Pannadi* women were also working as migrant labourers.

More younger men were in non-agricultural occupations, many of them quite demanding; and more older men than before were migrant labourers spending months at a time away from home. All *Pannadi* boys were being sent to school by the mid-1980s, and all girls by the early 1990s. The proportion going beyond Standard V however was still low. Most 10-14 year-olds were still 'staying at home'. It was not the opportunity cost of child labour that was preventing *Pannadis* from sending more children to school, but problems with the perceived value of both primary and post-primary stages of school education.

The majority of *Pannadis* were still very poor in material terms in 1996 despite the increase in wages. Some of this was because like *Chakkiliyans* they were reducing their levels of drudgery. There was considerable variation however. Only 41% of *Pannadi* households[37] had bicycles, and none had mopeds. However one *Pannadi* household had a TV set (Table 6). A substantial number of *Pannadis* had bought and/or built houses between 1981/2 and 1996, all with their own or private finance, most with the proceeds of non-agricultural earnings. For *Pannadis* housing was a high priority by 1996. *Pannadis* had not had any help from the government with housing by 1996 (see below).

*Pannadi*s were not involved in the most exploitative forms of borrowing in 1996, but eighty percent had loans outstanding, the total reaching as much as Rs.22,000 in a household borrowing from

[37] The percentages were slightly higher among if non-agricultural labourer households were excluded as a higher percentage of non-agricultural labourer households were younger and less well established.

friends to finance the purchase of 2 houses and a small amount of agricultural land. Most had lower interest rate loans from friends, relatives, and shopkeepers; a small number had loans from agricultural employers; and one or two had *kandu* loans from moneylenders, though not at such high rates of interest as *Chakkiliyans*.[38] Several *Pannadi* households also had bank loans in 1996, some IRDP, others small jewel loans. In general, they had much less formal credit than *Chakkiliyans*. This was mainly because they had no government housing loans.

*Pannadi*s were the most formally organised of the labourer groups in 1996. They began to be active in the CPI (Communist Party of India) and TNALU (Tamil Nadu Agricultural Labourers' Union which is affiliated to the CPI) in the mid-1980s, and they built a CPI/TNALU office in the *Pannadi* section of the villages in 1992, with the proceeds of a TNALU Chit. In 1996, the TNALU had 300 members and the CPI 15.[39] The *Pannadi* village branches also had considerable support from *Pannadi*s originating in the villages who no longer lived there. The CPI and Union engaged in broader general political activity than the *Chakkiliyan* APM. Neither the CPI nor the Union got involved in issues concerning *Pannadi*s within the villages before 1996. Their main activities were the organisation of meetings, demonstrations and rallies elsewhere. However, members of the CPI were taking important initiatives in the villages in relation to the 1996 *Panchayat* elections at the time of the fieldwork. They were hoping to get *Chakkiliyan* support for a candidate not supported by *thottam farmers*. In the event, the outcome was that the wife of one of the *Pannadi* CPI organisers was elected to the *Panchayat* (the seat reserved for a Scheduled Caste woman in this case), and the sister of the same organiser was elected to the *Panchayat* union. The *Chakkiliyan* vote was very divided, allegiances to different sections of the village elite still playing an important role for them.

*Pannadi*s had had difficulties getting support for new housing. In 1996 there was a stalemate. They had been allocated a new housing area in the mid-1980s but the area was poorly located and had no facilities such as water or electricity. (They wanted these facilities before moving. The government wanted enough *Pannadis* to move before providing the facilities.) Their inability to get the new housing sorted out was symptomatic of the difficulties *Pannadi*s had getting state benefits in general. They were hoping that success in the *Panchayat* elections would put them in a stronger position[40].

*Pannadi*s had made considerable progress between 1981/2 and 1996. They had got into positions outside agriculture, though these were not yet very strong. They were doing as much migrant labour as before, the fitter and stronger adults, both male and female, preferring it to agricultural labour in the villages. They were benefiting from better terms and conditions of casual and contract agricultural labour within the villages too. All of this translated into less drudgery for some, and better material conditions for many. But many were still very poor.

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[38] *Pannadis* paid Rs.7/50 [per] Rs.100/- per month, not at Rs. 10/- per Rs. 100/- per month as in the case of *kandu* loans to *Chakkiliyans*.

[39] Membership fees were Rs.3/- p.a. for the TNALU and Rs. 25/- p.a. for the CPI.

[40] A *Pannadi* gave a graphic account of sitting in government offices not being listened to, claiming that this would change with *Panchayat* membership.

(c) *Caste Hindu* Agricultural Labourers (in 1996)

Approximately a quarter of the descendants of *Caste Hindu* households headed by agricultural labourers in 1981/2 were still headed by agricultural labourers in 1996. Few other *Caste Hindu* households had joined the ranks of agricultural labourer households. Most male members of 1981/2 *Caste Hindu* labourer households had moved into non-agricultural occupations, adding to the number already in non-agricultural occupations in 1981/2. A few had become small farmers.

Members of 1981/2 *Caste Hindu* labourer households and their descendants were involved in a variety of non-agricultural occupations in 1996 (Table 3). Many of those working in industrial enterprises were in positions that were temporary, and many were being paid wages at the bottom of the scale, as were members of *Caste Hindu* households headed by agricultural labourers in 1981/2, and *Pannadi*s in 1996. More *Caste Hindus* than *Pannadis* or *Chakkiliyans* were in non-agricultural occupations with some prospects though. One or two *Caste Hindus* had got permanent positions after nearly 10 years of working in temporary positions. Further, many were making a reasonable success of self-employment of various kinds. A number of women and girls from *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households were also working outside agriculture in 1996, in textile units, as school cooks, and as petty traders.

Just over 70% of the descendants of 1981/2 *Caste Hindu* labourer households had land in 1996, compared with just under 50% in 1981/2 (Table 7). Some were leasing in land in 1996 too. A number had bought land, most of them people with non-agricultural occupations. For those in non-agricultural occupations land provided much needed security. *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households had fewer livestock in 1996 than in 1981/2. In many cases, the returns to looking after livestock did not compete with other opportunities despite the fact that they could engage in milk production unlike Scheduled Caste groups for whom this was still difficult in 1996.

Caste Hindus were a relatively small component of the village agricultural labour force in 1996 (8-9% of the much reduced male agricultural labour force compared with 19-20% in 1981/2). Those who had not made it into other occupations were in a relatively small minority.

One of the important things about relationships within *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households as compared with *Chakkiliyan* or *Pannadi* households was that in the majority of households the younger generation was getting more support. All boys aged 10-14 in *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households were at school in 1996. None were going out to work. About half of the girls aged 10-14 in *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households were in school too in 1996. The others were working in industrial units.

Standards of living in many *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households were distinctly better than in *Chakkiliyan* or *Pannadi* households. In 1996, 51% of these households had bicycles, 11% had mopeds (one of these had been part of a dowry), and 8% had TVs. *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households continued to spend considerable sums on housing in the 1980s and the 1990s, as they had done in the 1960s and the 1970s. They had no government assistance for this.

The proportion of *Caste Hindu* labourer and ex-labourer households without loans had fallen from 50% to 40% in 1996, with the purchases of land, better housing, mopeds, TVs. The highest totals outstanding were Rs.30-35,000, financing marriages, and housing. Most of the loans were from friends,

relatives, and shopkeepers. A few of these households also had IRDP loans (for sheep, and for milch animals) in 1996. A few had jewel loans. None had loans from employers in 1996.

What shows up very clearly here is the relative success of members of 1981/2 *Caste Hindu* labourer households in moving out of agricultural labour. There were better positions, with better prospects, open to them, and they were in a position to take advantage of these. They were in a position to do so because their households could survive in the villages without continuous or ensured contributions from them at stages at which they were trying to establish themselves. Their positions in non-agricultural employment were often precarious. Once they had established themselves, many retained, or increased, their landholdings in the villages as well. Maintaining land and households in the villages gave them something to fall back on. It also enabled them to supplement the often meagre non-agricultural incomes they were able to earn. There are lessons here, for all groups, as will become clear below.

Agricultural labourers in 1996:

Agricultural labourers remaining in the villages were benefiting from considerably better wages and conditions in 1996. Both *Pannadis* and *Chakkiliyans* were developing avenues through which they could organise and stand up for themselves independently of employers in the villages, something they had been quite unable to do in 1981/2. The political and social status of *Chakkiliyans* and *Pannadis* had improved generally too. There was still very little basis for cooperation between the three groups though.

Outside the villages, in non-agricultural occupations and as migrant labourers, members of these households were benefiting from the general shortage of unskilled labour relative to the demand, but they were still on very weak ground there, *Chakkiliyans* particularly so. Members of agricultural labourer and ex-agricultural labourer households moved into non-agricultural employment at a disadvantage. Because of where they came from, ex-agricultural labourers were vulnerable, and exploitable, and their prospects were poor. The fact that their bases in the villages were getting stronger represented progress which might eventually put them in a better position elsewhere as well. For many, particularly *Chakkiliyans*, this would take some time though. We expand on this below.

5. DISCUSSION

Class, caste and gender all played key roles in the life chances of these labourers. The key determinants of the changes outlined above were the tightening of the labour market, the decline in agriculture, and the more helpful role of the state. All of these affected the position of these labourers as a class. But the ways in which labourers were affected were crucially affected by their caste positions and their genders. Caste positions structured relationships between the village elite, agricultural employers, and agricultural employees. Relationships within labourer households also influenced the outcomes, and these again differed between caste groups. Gender relationships and relationships between different generations and age groups were central here.

Chakkiliyans were located in a position of subordination within the villages that constrained what they could do, not just as agricultural labourers. There were village-wide processes making it difficult for *Chakkiliyans* to make a success of owning land; preventing them from getting access to as high wages as others were receiving; preventing them from getting access to certain types of credit; preventing them from getting independent access to state benefits; and so on. These disadvantages decreased between 1981/2 and 1996, but not as much as one might have expected given all the other changes that were taking place. There were some advantages associated with the close relations *Chakkiliyans* had with the village elite, though there was no sense in which these outweighed the disadvantages.

Chakkiliyans were located differently from others in the urban and industrial economy too: there were stronger processes working against them in the urban and industrial areas than against *Pannadis* or *Caste Hindus*.

Individual *Chakkiliyans* were also located differently from *Pannadis* and *Caste Hindus* within their households. *Chakkiliyan* boys usually started out with poor health and nutrition; to this was added early initiation into agricultural labour. They had very limited access to education, and to experience that might have enabled them to be anything other than agricultural labourers when they grew up. They were brought up expecting to be agricultural labourers. They were also brought up expecting to contribute earnings to their parents' households well into adulthood, starting from a young age. They had to take on the burdens of adverse dependency ratios in their parents' households, not just in households of their own. All of this made it difficult to get the break in the crucial years as a young adult that was necessary to have a chance of making it into a reasonable non-agricultural occupation. *Pannadis* had some of the same disadvantages but not all. They were likely to start with poor health and nutrition, but not early initiation into agricultural labour; they had limited access to education but not such limited access to experience that might have enabled them to get into non-agricultural occupations when they grew up; and they were not brought up expecting to contribute much to their parents' household earnings or to take on the burdens of adverse dependency ratios in their parents' households at a stage when they might be trying to establish themselves elsewhere. However, there were also vicious circles here: the downside for *Pannadis* was that their parents' households were weaker because of the lack of contributions from sons which could mean that sons had a poorer start themselves when young. But they did not have as poor a start as *Chakkiliyans* even so.

What is being suggested here is that the positions in which *Chakkiliyans* were located within the villages militated against their movement out and possibly up, and that the positions in which they were located within their households contributed to their difficulties as well. It was more difficult for them to make an uncertain and risky move that might or might not turn out well than it was for a similarly situated member of a *Pannadi* or *Caste Hindu* labourer or ex-labourer household.

The example of one of the *Chakkiliyans* who got as far as the SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate) in 1996 illustrates this. The two first *Chakkiliyans* in these villages to get SSLCs did so in 1996. One of these came from the only *Chakkiliyan* household head who showed a real interest in education in 1981/2. He, his wife, his mother, and his other two children had struggled to enable his first son to get as far as the SSLC. It became increasingly difficult for the household to manage without the son's earnings as the son grew older. The wife could not work much because she had been disabled by

the birth of her second child, and even more so her third, and the mother was getting old. The household head worked very hard to keep the family going. By the time the son passed the SSLC, with good marks, and was eligible for a bursary that would have enabled him to go on to higher education virtually free, his father felt that he could no longer continue to support the household virtually singlehanded, as he had then been doing for some years. He needed his son to work. We discussed this at length, and finally agreed that I would provide what the son would have earned, and that that would enable the son to take his education further. The son started on the two-year PUC (Pre-University Certificate) course. All went well for a few months. Then the grandmother died and money had to be found for her funeral expenses. The household head took out a loan. Following this, his young daughter was found to be in need of hospital treatment. This was the last straw. The son dropped out of the PUC course and started working as a labourer to support the household. He intended this to be temporary. But it seems clear at the time of writing that he is not going to get much further against these odds.

It needed more than one or two to pass SSLC for there to be a chance that a *Chakkiliyan* from these villages might get enough education to be able to get a reasonable job. More than this was needed for *Chakkiliyans* to begin to get some role models that would encourage other *Chakkiliyans* too. This was clearly also an issue for *Pannadis*. There were two *Pannadis* who had passed SSLC, one in 1995, and one in 1996. We listened to an older *Pannadi* man urging them to try to get a good job because it was so important to have role models - it was so necessary to demonstrate the value of *Pannadis* persevering that far. Dependency burdens were a really serious problem where *Chakkiliyans* were concerned. The obstacles seemed less serious for *Pannadis* than for *Chakkiliyans*, but they were serious nevertheless.

Decreased dependency burdens, and reduced pressure on young people to help to alleviate the dependency burdens of their parents' households, take time to come through. Many of the benefits are felt after more than one generation. It is not easy to build up a stronger position in this respect.

The above helps to explain why agricultural labourers did not gain more from the developments between 1981/2 and 1996. They needed more support if they were to be able to make much of the new opportunities. They needed better health services, better safety nets, and possibly better education, if they were to make real progress. Measures such as these were required before they could become part of a more productive labour force, a labour force able to make higher productivity contributions in future.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has shown what happened to agricultural labourers in one specific location in South India as the labour market tightened and a labour surplus developed into a labour shortage, through the development of industry, and transport and communications, at a time when there was a decline in agriculture. There were significant benefits even for lower caste labourers where previously there had been virtual stagnation in their social and economic position. But there were limits to the benefits. And there were processes in train that might or might not lead to real improvements in the longer-term.

Labourers did improve their position as agricultural labourers very substantially over a period of 15 years or so, and they were continuing to do so. Improvements included higher wages, better

conditions of work, decreased drudgery, better housing, and better social and political status. There were also improvements in health and education. But standards of living were still incredibly low; indebtedness was more of a problem than before; and alcoholism had increased.

It was surprising that *Chakkiliyans* could not improve their position more vis a vis their employers, given the weakness of their employers; it was also surprising that it was only in 1994 that something like the APM was started and that *Chakkiliyans* were so worried about it jeopardising their relationships with their employers when it did.

It was surprising to find so many *Pannadis* still working as migrant agricultural labourers, in conditions that were harsh; it was surprising that *Pannadi* housing was still so poor; it was surprising that many *Pannadis* who had non-agricultural employment were not doing better.

Pannadis and *Chakkiliyans* were still very much less well positioned than *Caste Hindus* to make any real breakthrough.

Table 1:

Occupational Groups of Households and Shares of Land in 1981/2 Sample:

	No. of Households	% of Households	Thottam Land	% of Dry Land	% of Total Land
Thottam Farmers	28	12	57	29	41
Small Farmers	53	23	37	45	42
Agricultural Labourers	96	42	0	7	4
Traditional Services	21	9	3	7	5
Modern Services	23	10	1	11	7
Non-Agric.Employment	9	4	2	1	2
All	230	100	100	100	100

Table 2:

Caste Groups of Labourer Households in 1981/2 Sample:

	No. of Households	% of Households
Chakkiliyan	41	18
Pannadi	26	11
Caste Hindu	29	13
All	96	42

Table 3:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1981/2 and 1996 Occupations of Individual Members 10 years & Over

(numbers)	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Non-Agric.	2	0	16	18	18	23	24	65	2	2	13	17
Own A/c Agric.	4	2	2	8	3	1	7	11	0	2	7	9
Agric. Labour	80	57	35	172	57	39	8	104	49	46	8	103
No Work	2	1	2	5	2	2	0	4	12	11	17	40
In School	0	1	3	4	9	8	7	24	3	2	5	10
At Home	0	9	0	9	6	3	0	9	1	4	1	6
Total	88	70	58	216	95	76	46	217	67	67	51	185

(percentages)	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Non-Agric.	2	0	28	8	19	30	52	30	3	3	25	9
Own A/c Agric.	5	3	3	4	3	1	15	5	0	3	14	5
Agric. Labour	91	81	60	80	60	51	17	48	73	69	16	56
No Work*	2	1	3	2	2	3	0	2	18	16	33	22
In School	0	1	5	2	9	11	15	11	4	3	10	5
At Home*	0	13	0	4	6	4	0	4	1	6	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 4:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1981/2 and 1996 Status of Individual Agricultural Labourers

Numbers

	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Pannayal	30	3	1	34	18	2	0	20	0	0	0	0
Casual*	47	39	27	113	37	12	7	56	49	32	8	89
Village total	77	42	28	147	55	14	7	76	49	32	8	89
Sugar Cane Cr.	3	15	7	25	2	25	1	28	0	14	0	14
Overall total	80	57	35	172	57	39	8	104	49	46	8	103

Row Percentages

	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Pannayal	88	9	3	100	90	10	0	100	0	0	0	0
Casual*	42	35	24	101	66	21	13	100	55	36	9	100
Village total	52	29	19	100	72	18	9	99	55	36	9	100
Sugar Cane Cr.	12	60	28	100	7	89	4	100	0	100	0	100
Overall total	47	33	20	100	55	38	8	101	48	45	8	101

Column Percentages of Agricultural Labourers

	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Pannayal	38	5	3	20	32	5	0	19	0	0	0	0
Casual*	59	68	77	66	65	31	88	54	100	70	100	86
Village total	96	74	80	85	97	36	88	73	100	70	100	86
Sugar Cane Cr.	4	26	20	15	4	64	13	27	0	30	0	14
Overall total	103	99	100	101	101	100	101	100	100	100	100	100

*Casual + Contract other than sugar cane crushing, in the villages, in 1996.

Table 4(contd.)

Column Percentages of Individuals 10 and over

	1981/2 - Males				1996 - Males				1996 - Females			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Pannayal	34	4	2	15	19	3	0	9	0	0	0	0
Casual*	53	56	47	51	39	16	15	26	73	48	16	48
Village total	88	60	48	66	59	19	15	36	73	48	16	48
Sugar Cane Cr.	3	21	12	11	2	34	2	13	0	21	0	8
Total Agric.Lab.	91	81	60	77	61	53	17	49	73	69	16	56

*Casual + Contract other than sugar cane crushing, in the villages, in 1996.

Table 5a:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1996 Male Educational Attainment by Age Group

(numbers)	Chakkiliyans				Pannadis				Caste Hindus				
	0	I - V	VI - X	All	0	I - V	VI - X	All	0	I - V	VI - X	X+	All
5 < 10	1	5*	0	6*	0	4*	0	4*	0	3*	0	0	3*
10 < 15	3	9*	5*	17*	0	6*	3*	9*	0	4*	1*	0	5*
15 < 20	7	2	2	11	4	1	5	10	0	0	5	0	5
20 < 30	17	2	2	21	17	3	2	22	0	3	4	0	7
30+	38	4	3	45	24	4	4	32	16	12	4	1	33
Total	66	22	12	100	45	18	14	77	16	22	14	1	53

(percentages)	Chakkiliyans				Pannadis				Caste Hindus				
	0	I - V	VI - X	All	0	I - V	VI - X	All	0	I - V	VI - X	X+	All
5 < 10	17	83	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	100	0	0	100
10 < 15	18	53	29	100	0	67	33	100	0	80	20	0	100
15 < 20	64	18	18	100	40	10	50	100	0	0	100	0	100
20 < 30	81	10	10	100	77	14	9	100	0	43	57	0	100
30+	84	9	7	100	75	13	13	100	48	36	12	3	100
Total	66	22	12	100	58	23	18	100	30	42	26	2	100

* some still in school

Table 6:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1981/2 and 1996 Consumer Durables
(percentages of households with)

	1981/2				1996				1996 ALAL Households only			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Bicycles	0	12	34	14	33	41	51	41	36	50	68	47
Mopeds	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	3	0	0	0	0
Radios	0	19	17	10	28	14	38	26	31	13	37	25
TVs	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	3	0	0	11	2
Watches	0	12	3	4	7	18	19	14	10	24	21	17

Table 7:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1981/2 and 1996 Landholdings
(percentages of households)

	1981/2				1996			
Acres	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
None	98	62	52	74	97	45	29	62
> 0 < 0.51	0	31	7	10	0	23	4	8
0.51 < 1.01	0	4	14	5	0	23	17	11
1.01 and over	2	4	26	10	3	9	49	19
All	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Table 8:

1981/2 ALAL Households: 1981/2 and 1996 Livestock
(total numbers of animals)

	1981/2				1996			
	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All	Chakkiliyan	Pannadi	Caste Hindu	All
Bullocks	0	0	2	2	0	0	6	6
Cows/Buffaloes	6	6	44	56	12	7	16	35
Sheep/Goats	35	39	75	149	36	53	56	145
All	41	45	121	207	48	60	78	186

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