

ECONOMIC ENQUIRY PAMPHLETS

No. 1.

THE ELAMKULAM VILLAGE

by

P.S. Ramakrishna Ayyar.

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No. I.

THE ELAMKULAM VILLAGE—I.

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REPORT ON THE ECONOMIC SURVEY CONDUCTED AT THE ELAMKULAM VILLAGE.*

Part I—The Agricultural labourers (The Pulayas)

By PROF. P. S. RAMAKRISHNA AYYAR, M. A., L. T.

I.

Under the auspices of the Economic Development Committee, Cochin, an economic survey of certain selected sites at or near Ernakulam is being conducted by the History and Economics Departments of the Maharaja's College. The special object of the survey is to make an intensive study of the conditions of slums and of the depressed classes—urban and rural—and make practical suggestions for their amelioration. Dr. P. Kallukaran, Professor of Economics in our College, has been at work for some time, in collaboration with Mr. V. Ramanathan of the History Department, on a slum area within the precincts of Ernakulam, the investigation of which has now been completed.

From Chingam last, I have myself been engaged on the investigation of a rural area near Ernakulam—the Elamkulam village. There is a pretty large settlement of Pulayas—one of the depressed classes of the West coast—in this locality, with the investigation of whose conditions, I have been mainly engaged so far. I have made constant trips to this place, during these months, visited a large number of Pulaya huts and gathered a great deal of information, first-hand. What with the illiteracy and backwardness of the Pulayas, and what with their proneness to over-statement in some cases and understatement in others, it has by no means been an easy task for me to elicit or gather from them information, either sufficient in quantity or satisfactory in quality, about their conditions. On every occasion of my visit, I have had to spend hours, visiting huts, making myself at home with their inmates, and trying each art to draw them out, so to speak. In this connection, it is so gratifying to me to record that, wherever I went, I was hailed with joy by the simple folk as a friendly visitor, nay, as a possible benefactor, and never taken to be an unwelcome intruder or a suspicious spy who was engaged on a sinister mission.

I was occasionally accompanied in my excursions by a few select students so that they might have opportunities of gaining some practical experience in this kind of work. I also acknowledge with pleasure the services rendered to me, in more ways than one, by Mr. W. Krishnaankutti Menon, B. A. (Hons.),

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a member of my department and native of Elamkulam. In the course of my inquiry, I had also occasion to interview some of the members of the local Panchayat and discuss several matters with them.

II.

There are no figures available concerning the exact number of Pulaya huts or the exact Pulaya population in the village of Elamkulam, at present. But there is a pretty large number of such huts—probably over 300—lying scattered about, in this village and in the adjoining places. Let us now try to know something about the situation and features of the localities actually inhabited by the members of this community.

There is a long, narrow road, or rather, a broad lane, running through the centre of this village from north to south, meeting the Kalur road at the north end and ending very near the Trippunittura road, on the south. On either side of this road, there are rows of houses or cottages inhabited by members of such communities, as the Nayars, Christians, Ezhuvans, Valans, etc. This region is of sufficiently high level, always free from inundation and conveniently situated for access, owing to its vicinity to the road. There is not however a single Pulaya hut situated in this region. How could it be otherwise? Are not the Pulayas a class of untouchables, a degraded community? How could they then have the privilege of living by the roadside, and in proximity to members of other and better-placed communities? Will that not be a nuisance, nay a contamination, to other castes—a thing by all means to be avoided? They only deserve therefore to be relegated to the slums, the nooks and corners, the outskirts, of a village or town, to lead there a sort of bestial, grovelling existence. Such are the ideas that unfortunately are current among certain sections of people, even in these enlightened days.

In the village under reference, the Pulayas are mostly confined to a long, narrow strip of low-land on its western outskirts, fringing a long stretch of fields, from end to end. The huts are specially in evidence—more than 60 in number—in the region lying between the Elamkulam road and the Trippunittura road. To the north of the Elamkulam road also, there is a row of huts lying scattered along the eastern margin of the fields. On the eastern side of the village, the huts are situated, not in a long row, as on the other side, but more or less in small scattered groups, in the midst of fields, to the east of the Elamkulam Mana. There may be about 20 to 30 huts in this region. I am told that, a little further to the east, at Palathuruthi, Karanakudam, etc., there is a large population of Pulayas. There is a scattered row of Pulaya huts along the eastern fringe of the Ernakulam town as well.

As regards these localities inhabited by the Pulayas, it has to be observed that they are certainly not as bad as one might be inclined to expect at first. Nay, they have even certain desirable features. Being in proximity to, or in the midst of fields, they are open, breezy localities, suffi-

ciently favourable to health. The huts lying scattered, there is little congestion in these localities. There is a sufficiency of open space for each cottage. The Pulayas being mostly field labourers, the situation of their huts in proximity to the fields is certainly an advantage to them.

There are, however, certain defects and disadvantages pertaining to these localities which cannot be ignored. It is, however, comforting to think that they are mostly such, as can be remedied, or greatly mitigated, by proper measures. In the first place, the regions are low-lands subject to inundation, in several places, if rainfall is a bit excessive. Secondly, the localities are somewhat isolated and difficult of access, owing to inadequate or unsatisfactory means of communication. There are no passages connecting them with the Elamkulam road running north to south, nor any satisfactory foot-paths leading in any direction. One has to pass through low, narrow bunds or balks of earth and often wade through dirty pools of water, to reach the huts. I have experienced these difficulties in full, in the course of my peregrinations. Thirdly, there is no supply of good water available for drinking and bathing purposes, in these localities. Here and there, one comes across some ditches or pools (rather, cesspools). It is on these that the inhabitants of the localities have mainly to depend for their supply of water in the rainy season. In the hot season, however, (Makaram to Mithunam) they mostly get dried up, so much so that during this period the Pulayas are reduced to serious difficulties and hardships in the matter of water-supply. Bathing becomes a luxury to them, to indulge in which they have to go to some tank or chira a long way off. There is a perennial canal in the fields close by, but the water being brackish, it is unsuitable for bathing purposes. For drinking and cooking purposes, they must either manage with the impure water available in pools in their localities or have to procure better water from the tanks of neighbouring compounds, with the permission of their owners. In the case of the Pulaya inhabitants on the eastern side as well, the difficulties are no less great. I was given to understand that, in the region of the fields, the water is brackish throughout the year, so that they have all to proceed a pretty long distance to the west to procure water. The small tank on which they depend for water-supply was shown to me but I must observe that even the water of that tank did not appear sufficiently wholesome.

With a view to remedy these defects, the following are some of the measures recommended.

In the first place, the means of communication have very much to be improved in these localities. (a) The foot-path now running north to south along the margin of the huts on the western side has to be broadened and levelled up and converted into a decent pathway extending from the Tripunittura road to Elamkulam road and even beyond. This will afford the Pulayas and others means of free and convenient passage to the north and south. (b) The footpath now running from the centre of the Pulaya locality to Ernakulam is very narrow and inconvenient. It is liable to get

submerged in the rainy season. It is broken by ditches in several places. Since it is important to establish easy communication between Elamkulam and Ernakulam so as to afford the inhabitants of the former place, including the Pulayas and other working classes, easy access to Ernakulam, it is highly desirable that the foot-path, referred to above, be converted into a satisfactory pathway. It has accordingly to be widened throughout, as well as raised in level, so as to be rendered free from inundation. In view of its position midway between the Elamkulam road and the Trippunittura road, it must serve as a very useful and convenient route for pedestrians from one place to the other. An alternative to this plan would be the extension of the present Karikkamuri road of Ernakulam right up to Elamkulam or at least the construction of a respectable pathway in continuation of the road. (c) It is necessary to open up a few passages or lanes connecting the Pulaya locality on the west with the Elamkulam road so as to afford its inhabitants easy access to the interior of the village. (d) In connection with the Pulaya inhabitants on the eastern side as well, it is necessary to improve their means of communication by the construction of convenient pathways in all directions. (e) The Elamkulam road running north to south, now no better than a magnified lane, has itself to be repaired and improved and converted into a proper metalled road and extended in the south, right up to the Trippunittura road. A conspicuous artery of the village, this road deserves and needs better attention than it receives at present. I do not believe that the improvements suggested are likely to involve such heavy expenditure as to render them incapable of accomplishment.

In the second place, there is a pressing need to improve the water-supply of the locality, in the interests of the health and physical well-being of the inhabitants. An adequate supply of good drinking water is an essential requisite of health. In the course of my enquiry, I have come across a good number of Pulayas subject to such water-borne diseases as tape-worm, elephantiasis, etc. Further, if they are found unclean in their habits and appearance, it is largely due to their lamentable lack of bathing facilities. What I have to recommend in this connection is the construction of three large public wells, at convenient intervals, on the western side, and of at least one well on the eastern side. The wells should be protected by dwarf walls at the top and fitted up with pulleys and other contrivances for drawing water. I am told that the water is rather brackish on the eastern side but a well may be sunk as an experimental measure and the fact be definitely ascertained. For bathing purposes, a good public tank or reservoir will have to be provided, specially for the Pulayas and other working classes.

All these measures may have to be financed by Government, in the absence of private philanthropy forthcoming. The sinking of a well may not cost more than Rs. 150 or so and it must therefore be easy enough for the Jenmies in whose lands the Pulaya huts are situated to provide the necessary wells and even a large tank, if they are philanthropically inclined or even.

if they are actuated by enlightened self-interest. In any circumstances, the Government will have to take the initiative in the matter and concert the necessary measures. The Jenmies may be interviewed by the Protector of the Depressed Classes and by other officials or non-officials and all matters in which their sympathy and co-operation are needed may be discussed with them and their social and civic conscience awakened. If, however, these measures of improvement will have to be directly undertaken by Government—as appears most likely—then it seems to me that the best agency to carry them out is the local Panchayat, subject, of course, to the direction and supervision of the Protector of the Depressed Classes and the Public Works Department. It should be the settled policy of the Government to infuse more life into the Panchayats, to invest them with additional functions and to maintain them in full activity and vigour, since there could be no more potent or efficient instruments of practical education and training in self-government than these bodies.

III.

Let us now consider the character of the Pulaya habitations and the conditions of their tenure. The plots on which the Pulaya huts are situated are owned by certain landlords of the locality, in many cases, by the owners of the adjoining fields. The occupiers of the plots have therefore, absolutely no rights in them and are bound to quit them at the will of the landlords. As regards the huts, I have been made to understand that, in almost all cases, they have been put up by the Pulaya tenants themselves at their expense, the average expense for a hut being reported to be about 20 rupees. I have also come across a few instances where the huts were said to have been put up by the landlords themselves or where at least the building materials were supplied by them, wholly or in part.

As things now are, the Pulaya occupiers of the huts can hardly be said to enjoy any security of tenure. They are liable to eviction by their landlords at a moment's notice and for trivial reasons. They may be paid a small compensation as value for their huts or—as more often happens—may be called upon to quit the plots, bag and baggage, taking with them the materials of their huts and all. If the tenants give their landlords the slightest room for complaint, in one way or another, say, by the demand of a slightly increased wage, or by the exhibition of a little spirit of liberty or by failure to perform a piece of work, exactly at the stated time, or by seeking more remunerative work elsewhere, in preference to work at *mamool* rates, on the estates of their Jenmies—then the penalty with which they might be threatened or even actually visited, is eviction. Needy, impecunious, ignorant, struggling from day to day to keep body and soul together, eviction must entail on the Pulayas untold hardships, till they get themselves fixed up elsewhere. Thus the poor fellows are reduced to a state of entire subjection to their landlords and are left at their tender mercies, for good or ill. In practice, however, I must say that evictions are not very common. Since the Pulayas are the agricultural labourers *par excellence*

and constitute a vital factor of rural economy and their services are essential to the landlords, it must certainly be to the interest of the latter, to keep them on their estates, as far as possible. In the course of my enquiry, I have heard many Pulayas say that they have been where they were, for a great many years. All the same, they are subject to the will of the landlords and enjoy little freedom in the choice of work or the fixing of wages. Liberty is indeed, a hard price to pay for a little security of tenure.

Is there any means of remedying this evil and securing for the tenants some security or permanency of tenure? The only effective remedy that I can think of is that the Government should acquire the plots now occupied by the Pulayas—and for the matter of that, by the members of other depressed classes as well—and make a present of the same to them under certain conditions or, should establish the members of these classes as colonies elsewhere, on lands owned or acquired by the Government. In our State, we have at present a few Pulaya colonies established by the Government. If this scheme were found feasible, financially and otherwise, well and good; it will be an unmixed blessing to the communities concerned. But I am afraid there will be serious financial difficulties in the way, the cost entailed being found prohibitive. Further, this is a problem that concerns not the Pulayas alone, but a great many other communities as well in the State. It will not be possible for the Government to provide everywhere plots, gratis, for all depressed classes alike. The only practicable means is to make an appeal to the landlords themselves, their sympathy and sense of justice, to touch their conscience, to create a new angle of vision in them and to get them to deal fairly with their tenants and exempt them from irksome restrictions. It is also equally important, by improving their material and moral conditions, to make the tenants themselves more self-reliant and self-confident, more able to assert and vindicate their rights and to stand the frowns of landlords and shift for themselves.

Even more important and urgent than security of tenure, it is to provide the Pulayas and I may add, other working classes as well, with better habitations. The huts in which they dwell at present are most miserable. They are dark, dingy, narrow, cells, ill-lighted and ill-ventilated, with hardly any provision for the barest comfort or decency. A Pulaya cottage is a small thatched shed, with a thatched enclosure all round, with a low, damp, mud basement, and with a single room inside serving all purposes, the room being divided in some cases by low thatched screens, into two or three sections. Light and air are scrupulously shut out, as if they were pestilential things. The hut is ordinarily too flimsy to weather a rough gale or storm. There is no fencing for the compound nor any privy arrangement. Nothing but a filthy, squalid, sickly kind of life is possible for dwellers in such huts.

The improvement of the housing conditions of the Pulayas and other working classes is certainly a matter of special urgency and importance,

If we want these classes to lead a life of health and comfort and decency, if we want to improve their conditions and standard of living, if we want to implant in their minds healthy ideas of family and social life—then it is essential that we should provide them with better habitations. A neat little cottage, besides contributing to the health and comfort of its inmates, will also have a moral effect on them. If the cottage has also a fenced compound as its adjunct, that will not only promote privacy but render possible the cultivation of vegetables, the rearing of poultry, etc., by the inmates. The provision of better cottages to these classes is therefore a problem that calls for the earnest attention of Government and their well-wishers. The cottages should be strongly built and made to look tidy. The flooring should be at least 2½ ft. high and be cemented or paved with bricks. The walls should be made of brick and fitted up with windows. For each cottage, there should be a broad verandah in front and two rooms and a kitchen inside. A thatched roof would suffice, but it must be sufficiently high. According to expert opinion, the minimum expense for a cottage of this description would be about Rs. 125.

The problem, however, is one of gigantic magnitude and great complexity. It is not easy to suggest ways and means to give effect to the housing scheme proposed. The work may be undertaken by the owners of the plots—the land-lords—who, in fact, are the proper persons to carry out the scheme. There will be no legal or technical difficulties in the way, if they were to move in the matter. Or, with their permission, as owners of the sites, the work may be undertaken by the Government, and carried out with the help of a local agency, such as the Panchayat or a house-building society. In any case, I believe, the scheme may have to be financed by the Government and carried out under Government direction and supervision. It may be spread over a number of years—say 10 or 15—so as not to involve any undue strain on the financial resources of Government. If the land-lords were to undertake the business, they may, if necessary, be helped by Government with loans, returnable in small monthly or yearly instalments. In return for the boon conferred upon them, the tenants may justly be required to pay a small monthly rent for their tenements. It is for the authorities to tackle this problem and work out the necessary details.

IV

We will now proceed to consider certain facts and factors in relation to the economic conditions of the Pulayas. They are a class of farm labourers on the West coast. As such, they occupy an important place in agricultural economy. Their services are essential for carrying on the various processes of cultivation—ploughing, sowing, harrowing, weeding, and harvesting. They are employed as watchmen in the fields while the corn ripens. In addition, they are also employed for various kinds of spade-work in compounds and gardens, for digging and repairing ditches, wells and tanks, for baling out water from tanks and repairing them, etc. The

above are their main occupations. Their women, as well as their boys and girls, say above the age of 12 or 13, generally take part in some of these occupations and are thus able to bring a little income to their families on their own account.

But are the Pulayas sufficiently occupied with agricultural or other labour, month after month, throughout the year? If this were the case, then they would have a means of getting on somehow throughout the year, without serious distress or difficulty. But unfortunately, this is not the case. In connection with the operations of agriculture, there are seasons of activity, of slackness and of stagnation. Accordingly, we find that during certain months, the labourers are busily employed, while during other months they find employment slack, if not altogether nil. According to the degree of employment available, the months of the year may be thus arranged:—

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| A. Kanni and
Makaram | } | <i>Harvest seasons</i> —Busily employed for most days—paid wages in kind at contract rates, according to work done—periods of possible surplus income. |
| B. Kumbham,
Meenam and
Medam | } | Season of <i>busy employment</i> in the fields or in gardens and compounds. There will be work for most days every month. |
| C. Edavam,
Thulam,
Vrischigam
and Dhanu | } | Months of <i>slack employment</i> —generally there will not be work for more than 5 to 10 days, a month. |
| D. Mithunam,
Karkadagam
and Chingam | } | Season of <i>unemployment</i> . At the most, only three or four days of work, a month. |

Period A:—This is the best part of the year for them. During the harvest, they are not paid fixed wages per day but the wages vary according to work. The tenants are not only able to make both ends meet but also to effect a decent saving in some cases. The saving is generally utilised by them to pay off, in whole, or in part, the debts previously incurred. This saving is the only means at their disposal to redeem their debts.

Period B:—During this period, the labourers are employed for most days and are thus able to get on in a way. The customary wage they are paid by their landlords is however very low, which reduces their income considerably. They are just able to meet their bare wants and keep body and soul together. In the present condition of their wages and income, it is impossible for them to effect a saving in any month. There is a consensus of opinion on this point among the Pulayas that I have interviewed.

Period C:—With slack employment, this is a period of struggle for the labourers. With their very slender and uncertain income, they are constrained to reduce themselves to half, and even quarter, rations. This is a period of hardship and privation for them. Brought up in agricultural labour

they are generally fitted for it alone and are consequently left helpless and destitute in its absence.

Period D.—This is the worst season for the Pulayas. Left with hardly any employment they are actually threatened with starvation. Even to provide themselves half or quarter rations, they have not the means at their disposal. Hence they are driven to the necessity of borrowing at intervals during this period. Even during period C, they are sometimes obliged to take small loans.

Indebtedness is indeed a serious evil among the Pulayas and other working classes. In the whole course of my investigation, I have not come across a single Pulaya family which was debt-free. The degree of the indebtedness largely depends on the size of the family and on the income of its earning members. The simple, ignorant, unsophisticated folk are made to pay exorbitant, nay, ruinous, rates of interest by their clever creditors, who are only too ready to make capital of their distress. For every Rupee borrowed, say in Mithunam and Karkadagam, they have to pay in all $1\frac{1}{2}$ to 2 paras of paddy in harvest time—that is, in Kanni—as far as possible. This burden of debt is indeed a mill stone tied round the neck of every Pulaya, dragging him down more and more. In my opinion, the main causes of this indebtedness are to be found in the Pulaya's want of freedom of work and the scandalously low rate of wages paid to him by his employers. Perhaps, to a small extent, it may also be due to his inveterate habit of drink. The demon of drink seems to devour every last pie that he is able to save.

I shall now give a few figures culled at random from my jottings, to illustrate the indebtedness of the Pulayas:—

Size of family.	Amount of debt.			Amount of paddy to be given for each rupee of debt.
	Rs.	A.	P.	
1. Five members (including four children)	19	8	0	32 nazhies (1 para and 6 edan-gazhies)
2. Nine members (including five children)	50	0	0	35 do $1\frac{1}{2}$ paras)
3. Seven members (including one child)	30	0	0	32 do
4. Three members	9	0	0	45 do (2 $\frac{1}{2}$ paras)
5. Six members (including four children)	10	0	0	30 do ($1\frac{1}{2}$ paras)
6. Five members (including three children)	30	0	0	30 do
7. Four members	25	0	0	30 do
8. Seven members (including four children)	30	0	0	35 do
9. Three members	15	0	0	32 do
10. Five members	20	0	0	35 do

It must be the earnest aim and endeavour of all, who are interested in bettering the economic condition of the Pulayas, to devise effective measures to remedy, or at least, to mitigate, the evils described above—*scarcity or want of employment in certain seasons* and *indebtedness*. The suggestions that I have to offer in this connection are the following:—

In the first place, a few cottage industries may, with advantage, be introduced among them, as subsidiary occupations and extra sources of income. They may be practised by all the members of the family throughout the year but specially, during the seasons of slack employment. Coir-making, basket-making, spinning, making of mats, poultry-farming, are some of the cottage industries that may be recommended. Some of these industries may require a certain degree of skill which can, however, be easily acquired. There is then the problem of financing these industries. Since the Pulayas and other working classes are ignorant, needy and unenterprising, it would be essential, at least in the early stage, to have an agency like a *Co-operative Buying and Selling Society*, to supply them with raw materials, pay them wages, take charge of the products made by them and attend to their marketing. The manifold advantages of such an organisation are only too apparent. With their steady progress in material and moral condition, and in the power of and initiative enterprise, I believe that the Pulayas and other classes would be better able to take care of their interests and to shift for themselves.

Secondly, it is necessary to make provision for *cheap credit* for the Pulayas and other working classes. Hence, the need for the establishment of a *Labourers' Co-operative Credit Society* at Elamkulam. The establishment of such a society would be a real boon to the depressed classes and go a long way to foster habits of thrift and providence among them and lift them up from the morass of indebtedness. I have talked to many a Pulaya on this matter and they are all enthusiastic about the scheme. It is admitted by all that co-operation is one of the effective instruments at our disposal to bring about rural regeneration. This is what the Royal Commission on Agriculture has to say on the matter:—“ We have no hesitation in recording our belief that the greatest hope for the salvation of the rural masses from their crushing burden of debt rests in the growth and spread of a healthy and well-organised co-operative movement based upon the careful education and systematic training of the villagers themselves. Thrift must be encouraged by every legitimate means, for the savings resulting from the thrift of the cultivating classes form the best basis of the capital they require. If the rural community is to be contented, happy and prosperous, local Governments must regard the co-operative movement as deserving all the encouragement which it lies within their powers to give ”.

In connection with the proposed ‘ Society ’, I may be allowed to stress a few salient features or principles. (a) It should be a registered concern specially organised for the benefit of the Depressed Classes and subject to the supervision of the Co-operative Registrar. (b). The services of the

local Panchayat may be enlisted to organise the society and supervise its working. (c) If practicable, one or two Pulaya representatives may be placed on the managing committee of the society and thus given opportunities for practical training in such work. (d) The society should have a *deposit* side, to take small deposits from the members and a *credit* side, to make small loans to the members. (e) The loans advanced should be small sums not exceeding say, Rs. 15, at a time and repayable in 12 monthly instalments. (f) In addition to the *credit* department, the society may also have a *stores* department, as well as a *purchase* and *sale* department, in connection with the cottage industries, already referred to. A 'Society' of this description, well-organised and efficiently managed, must be an unmixed blessing to the labouring classes and contribute not a little to their material and moral progress.

V.

The economic condition of the Pulayas—as measured by their wages and income—is deplorable. The wages they are paid by their employers, despite their hard manual labour, are as low as possible, so that a family with even 3 or 4 earning members would be found to have just sufficient resources to make both ends meet or even less.

It has already been observed that most of the Pulayas enjoy no freedom of work. Attached to the estates of certain landlords, they are in a state of subjection to them and bound to render services to them alone. On certain days they may be provided with work in the fields, and on other days, in the compounds or gardens. All the members, male or female, that are fit for work, are subject to this obligation. If they disregard it, except it be with the permission of their landlords, there is the grave danger of the latter coming down upon them and threatening them with eviction. Thus left at the tender mercies of the landlords, they are not in a position to bargain freely with them and have perforce to accept whatever wages they are paid. This is a decisive factor affecting their wages, which cannot lightly be ignored.

Fully recognising the small benefits and privileges—such as presents on certain festive occasions and favourable contract rates during harvest—that accrue to them from their connection with the landlords, it must still be observed that the remuneration paid to them by the latter is lamentably low and inadequate. It is in fact but a half of what they might reasonably expect elsewhere. They are paid at the old customary rates which are as hereunder:—

Males	..	4 to 5 annas. each <i>plus</i> a meal
	..	at noon (or 2 as. for it)
Females	...	2 to 2½ as. each <i>plus</i> do
Boys & Girls	..	1 to 1½ as. <i>plus</i> do

The usual wage in the case of a free labourer is 8 to 10 as. besides 2 as. for food. It will thus be seen that, thanks to their condition of servitude, the income of the Pulayas is considerably reduced and their means of sub-

sistence rendered precarious and scanty. For about 8 hours of hard manual labour in the field or in the garden, a Pulaya is paid a wage of 4 as. besides a little Kanji at noon. One cannot therefore resist the conclusion that the Pulayas are being sadly over-worked and under-paid and that they are being unjustly exploited by their masters. In these circumstances, the daily income of a Pulaya family would be found hardly sufficient unto the day, even with the minimum degree of comfort and the poorest and coarsest fare. I shall try to elucidate this point by citing a few facts and figures from my notes.

(1) Family of 9 members.

(5 wage-earners)

Daily income		Daily expenditure.	
	as.		as.
Father	4	Rice (7 nazhies)	10½
Boy (25 years)	3	Salt, tamarind, fish, etc.	3
Boy (18 years)	2	Oil	½
Mother	2		
Daughter-in-law	1½	Total	14
4 children	nil		
	<hr/>	Extra expenses.	
Total	12½	Clothing-Rs. 6 (a year)	
	<hr/>	Sundries-Rs. 12 do	

(2) Family of 5 members.

(3 wage-earners)

Old mother	2	Rice (3 nazhies)	4½
Daughter	1½	Salt, fish, etc.	1½
Son-in-law	3	Oil	½
2 children	nil		
	<hr/>	Total	6½
Total	6½		
	<hr/>	Extra expenses-Rs. 14 (yearly)	

(3) Family of 3 members.

(All wage-earners—free to work anywhere).

Father	8	Rice (4 nazhies)	6
Mother	3	Salt, fish, etc.	2
Boy	3	Drink (occasionally)	2
	<hr/>	Total	10
Total	14		
	<hr/>	Extra expenses-Rs. 12 (yearly)	

(4) Family of 4 members.

(2 wage-earners, free to work anywhere)

Father	8	Rice (4 nazhi-s)	9
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Mother	4	Salt, fish, etc.	3
2 children	nil		
	<hr/>		<hr/>
Total	12	Total	9
	<hr/>		<hr/>
		Extra expenses-Rs. 12 (yearly)	

(5) Family of 8 members.

(4 wage-earners working temporarily at the dockyard, Cochin)

	as.		as.
Father	11	Rice (10 nazhies)	15
3 boys (11 as. each)	33	Salt, fish, oil, etc.	6
Mother	nil	Drink	4
2 boys & 1 girl	nil		
	<hr/>		<hr/>
Total	44	Total	25
	(Rs. 2-12-0)	Extra expenses-Rs. 22 (yearly)	(Re. 1-9-0)

(6) Family of 6 members.

(2 wage-earners, free to work anywhere.)

	as.		as.
Father	8	Rice (5 nazhies)	7½
Boy (Dockyard)	8	Salt, fish, etc.	3
Mother	nil		
1 boy & 2 girls	nil		
	<hr/>		<hr/>
Total	16	Total	10½
	<hr/>	Extra expenses-Rs. 15 (yearly)	

In the above instances, families 1 & 2 enjoy no freedom of work and have to render compulsory service to their landlords. Their income in the shape of wages is consequently extremely scanty so that a day's income is hardly sufficient for a day's expenses. The members of families (3) and (4) enjoy freedom of work and earn higher wages. Hence these families are economically a little better off than (1) and (2) and their budgets would be found to reveal a small saving everyday. These savings, however, do not count for much, since they are easily consumed during the days of unemployment or for a little extra drink. The last two families, (5) and (6), would be found to be better off than all the others, since their members are working in the dockyard, Cochin, where they are paid fairly decent wages.

The conclusion that one is driven to, in the light of these facts, is that, for the betterment of their economic condition, the Pulayas should be emancipated from all bonds of compulsory service to their landlords and allowed full freedom of work. As tenants, they may justly and properly be required by their Jenmies to pay a small rent, monthly or annual, for the strips they hold but should be subject to no further restrictions. So far as work and wages are concerned, they must stand in a free relation with their landlords and enjoy complete freedom of contract with them. Other conditions

remaining the same, they may certainly be expected to show preference to their landlords in the choice of employers and the latter may also be equally expected to show preference to them in the choice of labourers. All that I have to urge is that free-will should be substituted for compulsion in the relations between the two classes. The emancipation of the Pulayas is essential for more reasons than one ; without it, they must be grovelling in the dust and cannot hold up their heads as men.

Another observation that I have to make is that, in the case of the Pulayas and all other classes of labourers, there is great and urgent need for an increase, in the general rate of wages, which is 8 to 10 as. at present. Most labourers are unemployed for many days of the year. In the case of the Pulayas, the period of unemployment or of slack employment is something like 5 months in the year. Therefore, during the seasons of employment, they have to earn sufficiently, not only to meet current expenses but also to make provision against the lean months. It may further be seen that the standard of life of the Pulayas and other working classes is deplorable at present and has to be substantially raised. This is indeed a consummation devoutly to be wished. But how can it be realised, so long as their wage income is what it is ? If we want to raise the standard of life of our working classes, to bring about their elevation all-round, and to qualify them for a proper exercise of the rights and duties of citizenship, then, the first and the most essential thing is to improve their economic condition and make possible for them at least a minimum standard of civilized life. In this connection, the following observations of Prof. Laski (*The Grammar of Politics*) may be quoted:—"A man has not only the right to work. He has the right also to be paid an adequate wage for his labour. By the work that he performs he must be able to secure a return capable of purchasing the standard of living without which creative citizenship is impossible. In such a notion, there can be no fixity of amount. He needs the food which keeps him physically fit, the clothing and shelter which make him begin life at least at that level where his energies are not wholly engaged in attention to purely physical wants. He needs the little comforts that make of life something more than a mere satisfaction of ugly wants. The right to an adequate wage does not imply equality of income : but it does, it may be urged, imply that there must be a sufficiency for all before there is a superfluity for some". In my opinion, the minimum wage of an adult labourer should be about 12 as, daily.

All this is easily said. But how are the suggested reforms to be achieved ? In the present circumstances, is it possible for the Pulayas to achieve emancipation, except through the good-will and acquiescence of the land-lords themselves ? The depressed classes are at present in such a position that they can hardly be expected to start or conduct any agitation themselves. Again, wages, where not customary, are competitive and

regulated by the law of supply and demand. How can wages then be raised artificially? Further, it may be urged by the cultivators that, in the present conditions of agriculture and agricultural production in our country, it may not be economically possible to enhance the wages of agricultural labour. The following are the few observations that I have to make in this connection.

(1) There is much need for propaganda in this connection which, in the present circumstances, must be carried on by the friends and well-wishers of the depressed classes. It devolves on them to take the initiative in the matter, to mould public opinion, to enlighten the minds of the landlords and prepare them for the necessary concessions. It also devolves on them to educate the depressed classes themselves and render them more self-confident and self-reliant and more fitted to fight out their cause.

(2) There is an equally great need to improve our present conditions of agriculture and methods of cultivation, which are antiquated and unsatisfactory. With a tangible increase in agricultural production, all classes will be benefited and not least, the agricultural labourers. It will become possible to enhance their wages, without any loss to the cultivators or the land-lords. Even as it is, however, there are those that believe that the distribution of agricultural income is not quite equitable, so far, at any rate, as the labourers are concerned.

VI.

The conditions of life of the Pulayas and other working classes are squalid and wretched in the extreme. Theirs is a kind of dull, dreary, humdrum life, without a ray of comfort or joy. They cannot boast of even the irreducible minimum of the amenities or the felicities of civilised life. They dwell in miserable huts. They are engaged in an eternal struggle to keep the wolf from the door. For a large part of the year their life is one of starvation or semi-starvation. They subsist on the poorest and scantiest diet. The use of vegetables, doll, beans, coffee or tea, milk, ghee or butter-milk is unknown and impossible to them. In quantity and much more, in quality, their diet needs substantial improvement. Their clothing is of the scantiest and absolutely inadequate for decency. A few earthen pots are the only things that might be seen in their huts. They have not even rough mats or pillows for rest and relaxation. They have no supply of pure water for drinking or bathing purposes. Many of them are stunted in growth, sickly and unfit for sustained labour. Involved in debt, they are in the grip of their creditors; attached to lands, they are in the grip of their land-lords. Without literacy and mental culture, their outlook is narrow and their vision is bounded by the fields. They are a class of "untouchables" or "unapproachables" in the eyes of the caste-Hindus and are subject to sundry social disabilities. The curse of 'untouchability' must go if they are to rise in the social scale. They have no facilities for recreations and no communal activities, worth speaking of. They have no temples or prayer halls and no places of assembly for joint meeting or conference.

The above is a rough picture of the conditions of the Pulayas and other depressed classes. It is impossible to contemplate the picture with a sense of complacency. It will be no easy task to rescue them from the Slough of Despond in which they are now wallowing. Their reclamation is, however, a matter of urgent necessity and supreme importance, in the best interests of themselves and of the country. It is a matter of justice, humanity and national well-being and advance. An essential condition of democracy is the existence of a united, enlightened, prosperous and public-spirited nation. "The theory of democracy" observes Lord Bryce, "assumes a far higher level of good sense, judgment, honest purpose, devotion to the public welfare in the citizen of a free country, than is either looked for or needed in the subject of a despotic monarchy or oligarchy." If India is to attain democracy, such are the qualities to be developed in her citizens. The foundations of democracy have yet to be well and truly laid in our country. So long as we have 'the Depressed Classes' in their present condition, so long as a large part of the population is struggling and absolutely 'benighted,' so long, the ideal of adult suffrage—the corner-stone of democracy—cannot be more than a dream in our land.

In this concluding section, I shall make a few general observations in connection with the improvement of the conditions, especially social and moral—of the Pulayas and other labouring classes at Elamkulam, and call attention to some more of their vital requirements at present.

1. The vice of drink is general, almost universal, among the Pulayas. Most of them are hopelessly addicted to it. Every pie that a Pulaya is able to save is diverted to drink. It is true, I have heard some Pulayas say that they hardly indulge in it or indulge only sparingly and at times but I believe that, if it is so, it is mainly due to their want of means. I have questioned many Pulayas on the matter but most of them hold that a little drink is essential to them to regain their tone and vitality, especially after their tedious and taxing work in the fields. Perhaps, most of them have recourse to it, as the only means of relief and enjoyment available to them, in the unmitigated dullness and gloom of their lives. Perhaps, it is their object to drown their cares in a cup of toddy. The habit of drink is, however, not confined to the Pulayas but is widely prevalent among all the working classes, irrespective of caste or creed. For more reasons than one, it is highly necessary that these classes should be weaned from this vice. Only then, it will become possible for them to effect a little saving, week after week and provide a small competence to fall back upon in dark days. But the eradication of the drink evil will by no means be an easy task. Mere propaganda will not suffice. It must be our earnest endeavour to strike at the root cause of the evil by salutary measures to improve their economic and social condition, to raise their standard of life all round and to import a little sunshine of joy and happiness into their lives. In this case, the vice, left without any peremptory need for it, is likely to weaken more and more and gradually die out,

2. It is said that the Pulayas are thriftless and improvident and that a habit of thrift must be inculcated in them. But I think that I have made it sufficiently clear that in their present condition it will be an achievement even if they are able to make both ends meet. As matters stand, anything like saving is out of the question for most Pulaya families. I understand that the safe-box system is now being tried among the Pulayas in certain localities to encourage saving. I do not, however, know what the boxes can do unless there is money to be deposited in them. The paramount need of the hour is to improve their sources of income and render it possible for them to effect saving to some extent.

3. There is no dispensary at present in the Elamkulam village, in spite of its vast area and distance from Ernakulam. It is suggested that a dispensary—allopathic or ayurvedic—on a small scale, may be started there, specially for the benefit of the poorer classes, including the Pulayas. Such a dispensary, with a sympathetic doctor presiding over it, cannot but be a boon to these classes, that are at present without facilities for medical aid.

4. The organisation of a *Labourers' Co-operative Society*, with three departments, if possible—*credit, stores, purchase and sale*—is highly desirable in this village, in the interests of the depressed classes. The necessity for, and the importance of, such a society have already been dwelt upon. It is not the interests of the Pulayas alone, but of other working classes as well, that will be served by such a society.

5. At present, there is no elementary school conveniently situated at Elamkulam for the Pulaya children to attend. There is an elementary school conducted by the missionaries but it is a little far-off and I have heard many Pulayas say that they find it difficult to send their children to it. The interest that the Pulayas take in education at present is extremely slack, and it would be an achievement to keep a Pulaya boy or girl at school through the whole course. The supreme importance, however, of education for the depressed classes as an eye-opener and as an instrument of their material and moral progress, cannot be gainsaid. In my opinion, a special *day and night elementary school* may be started somewhere in the centre of this village for the benefit of its inhabitants, especially the Pulayas and other working classes. Besides instruction in the three R's and in such general subjects, as local geography and history, the elements of science, hygiene, etc., there should also be provision in the school for moral and religious instruction in a general way and, what is more important, for a course of practical training in handicrafts and cottage industries, as has already been observed in a previous section. In this way, the school may be expected to fulfil a triple function—the imparting of essential general knowledge to the pupils their character-building, their training for useful occupations. The school may be conducted as a night school as well, for the benefit of the boys and girls of the working classes, of an age ranging from 12 to 18, who are generally employed during day time and may find it

possible to attend only a night school. There might be a fair number of such boys and girls who might not have received any rudiments of education.

6. At present, the Pulayas and other depressed classes have no place of worship in this village—a serious disadvantage. These classes are not without religious instincts and emotions of their own—however rudimentary and imperfectly developed they might be. The Siva temple situated in proximity to the Mana is open only to the caste Hindus and is barred to these classes. All the Pulayas that I have interviewed have felt seriously aggrieved in this matter—and expressed an ardent desire to be provided with a *Bhajana Madhom* (prayer-hall) where they may meet from time to time for prayer and worship, for bhajana and religious discourse, and conduct religious festivals and diversions of various kinds. This Bhajana Madom may be used in common by all the depressed classes without distinction. Their religious leaders and gurus can meet them here, whenever necessary, and impart healthy instruction to them and mould their character on right lines. Nothing can be so effective, as a bhajana, well-conducted, to inspire and elevate the mind and to kindle religious emotions therein. I have absolutely no doubt that the provision of a *Bhajana Madhom* will be hailed with joy by all the communities concerned and that it will contribute, in no small measure, to their social and moral uplift.

7. Ample facilities must be provided for the Pulayas and other working classes for healthy communal activities and recreations. At present, they have hardly such facilities. The members of these classes are now cut off from one another and seldom gather together for business or for pleasure. The establishment of a *special school* and a *Bhajana Madhom*, as suggested above, is certain to provide them sufficient facilities for common gatherings and corporate activities. Cinemas, lantern lectures and dramatic performances may be occasionally conducted for these classes in the school. The organisation of a Co-operative Society, as already suggested, may be expected to impart to them some healthy training in business management as well as to foster habits of thrift, co-operation, etc., in them. In course of time, the members of these classes may also be registered as voters in local elections and thus given some voice and training in the management of local affairs.

The village seems to be the proper sphere where a system of adult suffrage may be tried in the beginning. It is rightly observed in the Montford report that "it is by taking part in the management of local affairs that aptitude for handling the problems of Government will most readily be acquired, and responsible institutions will not be stably-rooted until they become broad-based." Every villager may be expected to have some—even an intimate—knowledge of the politics and problems of his village and it is but fitting that he should be given a voice in the management of its affairs and the election of its officials. Every village should in fact have a *Folkmate*

of its own, composed of all the adults of the village, irrespective of sex, age, caste or creed, with power to administer the affairs of the village, subject of course to the general authority and control of the central Government. It is in this way that the members of the backward and depressed classes are to have opportunities for political training at the outset.

VII.

Most of the observations and suggestions that I have made in this Report in connection with the Pulayas will be found equally applicable to other depressed classes as well, in fact, to working classes in general. The problem of the uplift of these classes is, in fact, hydra-headed. It has manifold aspects and it seems to me that it is only by attacking the problem on different sides, at the same time, that the elevation of the Pulayas and other depressed classes can be really achieved. As has more than once been observed in this Report, various agencies—the Government, the landlords, the employers, the public, the depressed classes themselves—will have an important part to play in this great and noble work—the work, in fact, of nation-building in our country.