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FISHING, TECHNOLOGY AND WOMEN

PART II

CASE STUDIES

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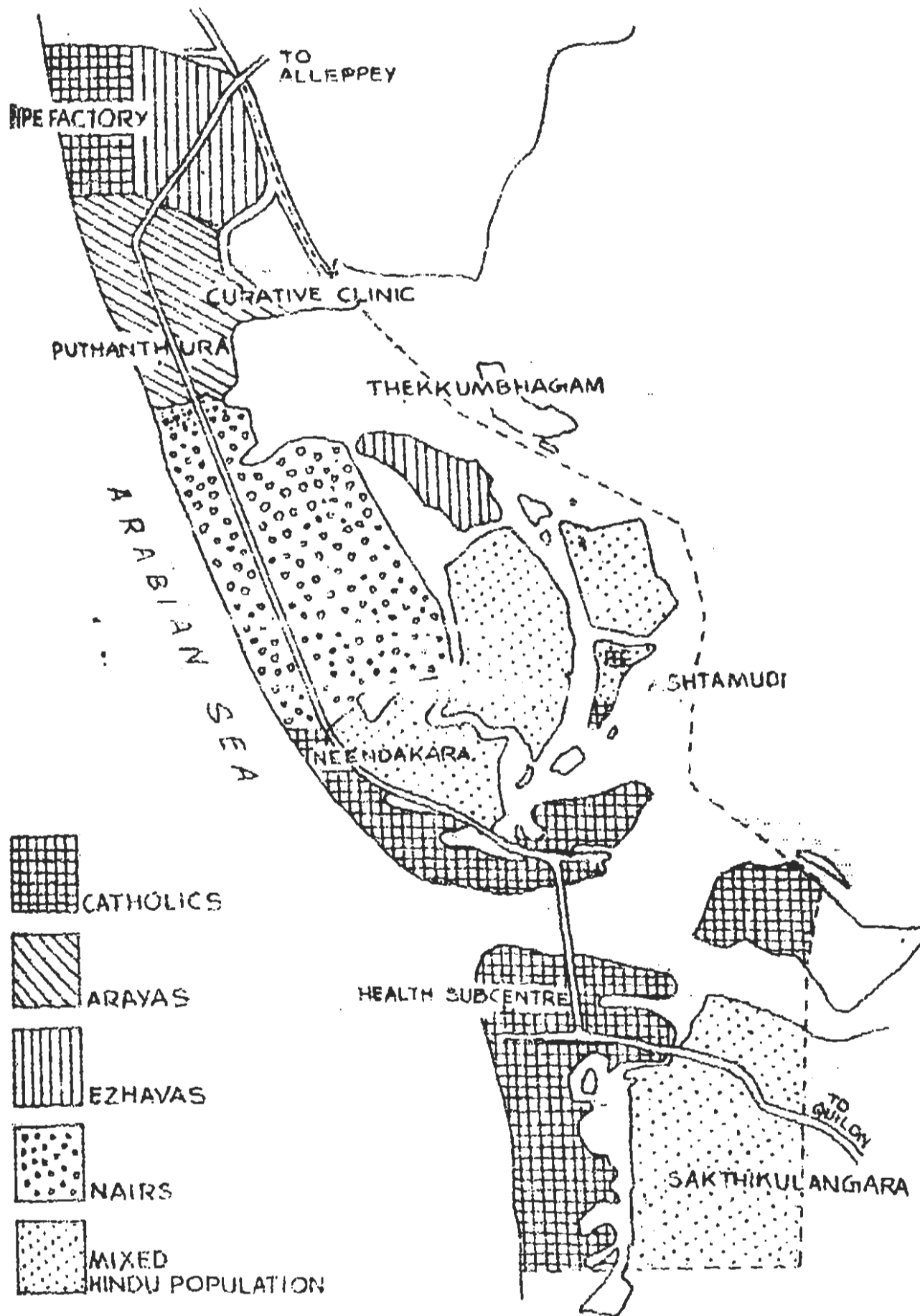
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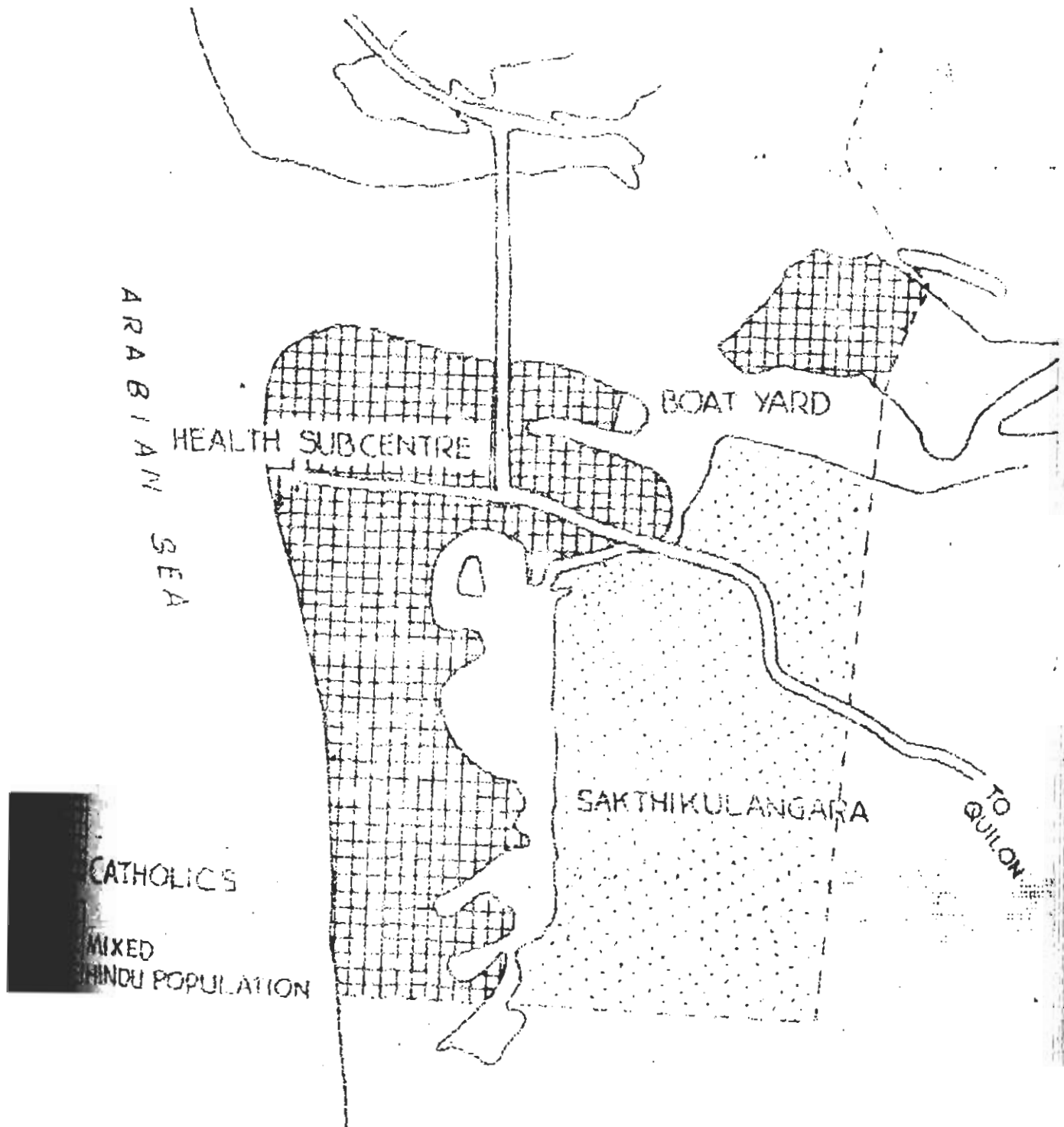
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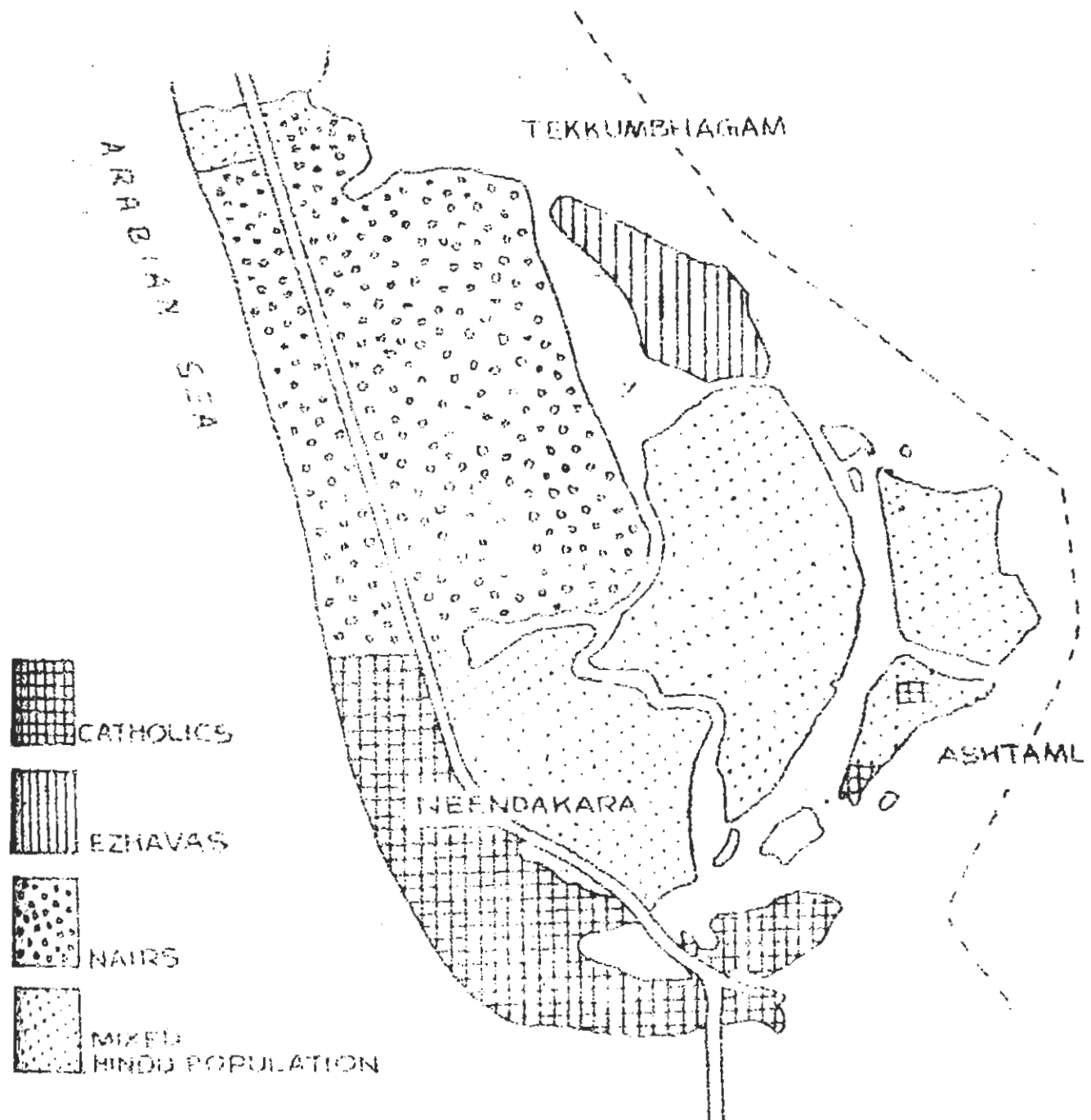
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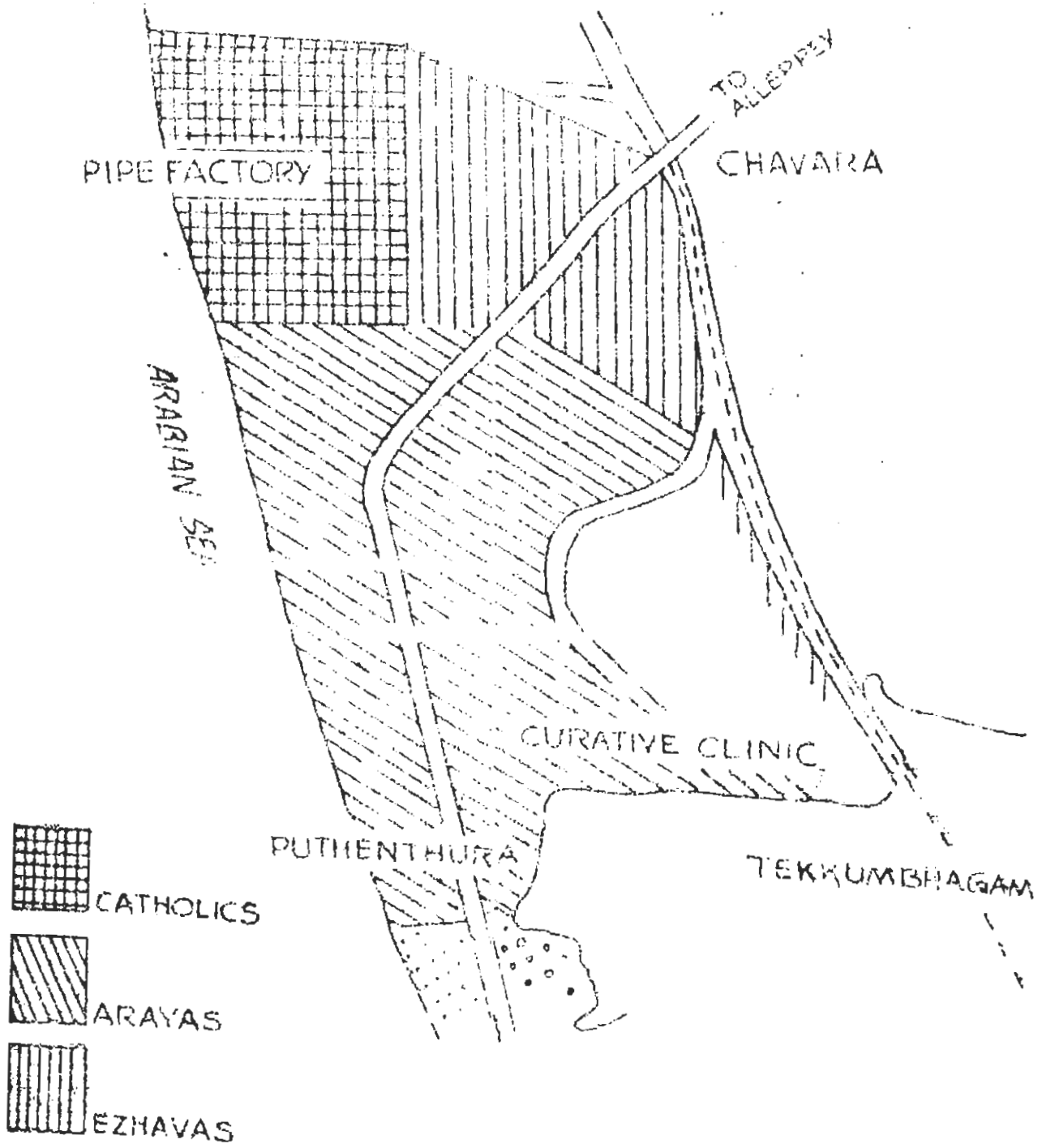


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APPENDIX

CASE STUDIES

Shakthikulangara

Case Study - A

MAGGIE

The Headload Fish Vendor

I was born and brought up in Shakthikulangara very near the present boat jetty. In those days, when I was a child, we could just walk over to the bay. Now, the place has changed beyond recognition with sheds and factories lined up all along.

Our hut was so close to the sea shore that we were always scared of its being washed away. The area was exposed to intense erosion and very often palms and huts would get washed away in the monsoon season. However for us, its location was very convenient, as my grandmother worked for a big house close by as a maid servant. The family she worked for was a leading family of this village, in terms of not only wealth, but also education.

Family background

My grandmother was raised in this family as a child. She must have started helping in the kitchen from the age of 5 or 6. Though she never got married, she had three children, one boy and two girls, who grew up in that very house. My father Janice was one of these three children. Even to this day we never have asked our mother about the family background of my father, we knew it was something we could not be very proud of.

My mother really grew up in Quilon city, some 10 kilometres south of Shakthikulangara. Her parents lived by street singing. At one time a whole community of street singers lived behind the Quilon Railway Station. My mother's parents would come occasionally to the two Christian fishing villages to sing on special occasions. That is how they came to know my father's mother. My parents were married in a simple ceremony in the Church with no dowry. After his marriage my father put up a thatched hut at a little distance from the big house where my grandmother worked.

My brothers and sisters

My parents had seven children. Of these two died as infants. All her children were delivered by mother in the hut. My mother was married only for 14 years, when first my thirteen years old brother and then my father died in a cholera epidemic in quick succession. My mother became a widow at thirty-six with four children to raise. She was illiterate and had acquired no special skills. Before her marriage she had known street singing and after marriage she was raising her family with a child born to her practically every two years. She did manage to do some part-time work as a water carrier. This meant carting water to the houses that needed drinking water from the wells and she would be paid for this service. Water was a very scarce resource in those days and we had to commute long distances to cart water. It was virtually rationed in the households and most of our quarrels centered around it in the family. This was an important source of employment to many women.

Trip to Singapore

When I was around ten years old the people with whom my father's mother worked were looking for a young girl to go with their son and his family to Singapore for four years on a teaching assignment. I was chosen as a domestic help on my grandmother's recommendation. I remember the long sea journey and how I got sick. I did not eat for days on end until we reached Kuala Lumpur. Looking back, I enjoyed my stay in Singapore. They looked after me very well. I had to help them with their three little children. During my four year stay in Singapore, my food and clothing were entirely taken care of. Also, I was given some pocket money.

Our contact with other nationalities was minimal, we were more or less confined to socializing with people from Kerala. I did meet some Malayalee young men but the question of my marrying one of them did not arise. I was to have come back with the family after four years.

The first marriage

Within a year of my return from Singapore my marriage was arranged. There was a woman water carrier, a Syrian Christian, who had migrated from Ernakulam to Quilon, by the name of Eliyamma, a local derivative for Elizabeth. How a Syrian Christian woman came to live among Latin Christian fishermen has remained a mystery. She worked first for the Austin family, which has always been prominent in politics. Later on, she got a job in the local church school on their recommendation. Though I had met her son, Yohannan,

even before I went to Singapore, I had no idea that I had made any impact on him. Apparently he had made up his mind and let it be known that he would wait for my return. At the age of fifteen, I was married to Yohannan who was twenty-four. It was a Church wedding and we were married at the St. Britto's Church. A sum of Rs.300 was handed over to Eliyamma as dowry by my former employers.

Once married, I had moved to Eliyamma's house to live with Yohannan. I must have given birth to our first child within one year. It was delivered at home. It lived only for sixteen days. When I was expecting my second child, Eliyamma took me to the government hospital in Quilon. I delivered a boy. He was baptized as Antony.

I become a widow

When our son was hardly six months old, Yohannan died in an accident at sea. While the other crew members swam to the shore, Yohannan could not, as he was not a good swimmer. Eliyamma and I lost our sole male support with an added responsibility of an infant to look after. Eliyamma was kind enough to ask me to continue to stay with her. She saw in her six-month old grand son her sole consolation and drive to live. I stayed home for about a year. Then I took to fish vending, the only job I could possibly do. Eliyamma would take care of the child when I was out vending fish.

My second marriage

While Eliyamma supported me and my son with an open heart, she was keen that I must think in terms of remarriage. It was she

who found a second match for me. Xavier was an orphan boy who had been adopted by a family in the village on the other side of the creek. He was twenty-five years old then and had been working as a coolie fisherman for some years. But he had never been to school.

Eliyamma offered to give the 300 rupees dowry which I had brought in at the time of my marriage to Yohannan. If a girl becomes a widow at a young age, the dowry money must be returned so that she can remarry.

To start with, I moved to Xavier's foster-home. Eliyamma offered to keep my toddler son with her. But we did not stay in Neendakara for more than a few months. I missed my son and also Eliyamma. Moreover, I felt that I was an added burden on Xavier's foster family. Once I could persuade Xavier on moving with me back to Shakthikulangara, we lost no time. Eliyamma welcomed us with open arms and allowed us to stay in her hut. I delivered my first child from Xavier, Socha, a girl, in Eliyamma's hut.

Undergoing sterilization

The reason I did not go to hospital for my delivery was that I was taken by surprise by pains and there was little time for me to be removed to the hospital. After that, I had five more children, three sons and two daughters. They were all delivered at the Project Hospital. I had no problem with any delivery, but during my fifth and sixth pregnancies I was asked several times if I would have them terminated. "Haven't you had enough? Why don't you people concentrate on the ones you have already?" These were the questions I

heard often when I went to hospital. Somehow the idea was frightening. I did not even discuss it with Xavier or any one else. After my sixth child the doctors told me that it was time for me to go in for sterilization but both Xavier and Eliyamma, on whom I depended for all advice and help, were reluctant. Still, I could somehow bring them around. Neither of them wanted me to have more children, but they were worried that there might be post-operation complications. I had had my first child when I was only 16 and since then I had been doing little other than delivering and feeding babies and also working. I am really happy that I do not have to bear any more children thanks to the operation. But it has left me weak and I get, as a result, severe headaches and backaches once in a while but there are no other complication. The doctors feel I am imagining and it is due to my age and general weakness. I am not sure whether they are telling me the truth or just consoling me.

Our separate hut

Soon after the birth of Sosha, my first child from my second marriage we put up a separate hut on a piece of land Eliyamma had bought recently near to the plot on which her own house was built. That is when Xavier and I moved along with little Sosha to our house, and Antony stayed behind with Eliyamma. Since we continued to stay in the same compound, I never really felt separated from my son. It is in this hut that I brought up Sosha and the other five children, altogether four boys and two girls, from my second marriage.

Our hut

Our hut is of very modest proportions. Within a total built area of 16'x 13', we have three small rooms and a long verandah. The long narrow wooden table is in the verandah along with a bench. Menfolk have their lunch and dinner on this table. But the verandah serves also as our living room. I have kept three wrought-iron chairs, with back and seat woven with plastic cane, for the use by our visitors. The photographs you see above the two doors on the whitewashed and brick wall are mostly of my children and grand children. Eliyamma's pictures taken of her send-off from the school she was working for, are in the most prominent place. The clothes-lines running across the whole verandah is to keep one's work clothes for the night. We don't have any cupboards to fold and keep our clothes, men's or women's. These clothes-lines, strings tied from one wall to the other, are our cupboards.

My child from the first marriage

Antony is my first son, as you know, by my first marriage to Yohannan. He was with me only for three years, even less. After I got re-married, he stayed with his grandmother, Eliyamma, even though I saw him practically every day. He has virtually been raised by her. He went to the same school where Eliyamma was the water carrier, and studied till the tenth standard, but never got through the final school leaving examination. Now, Antony is twenty-seven years old, married to the daughter of an owner of a mechanised boat. He runs a mutual saving scheme (known all over South India as a Chit Fund) on a modest

scale. It has been formally registered, as the operations are subject to certain public restrictions through special legislation. It is really a Saving Club and in Shakthikulangara, these days it exists in all sizes. From the very beginning, Eliyamma did not want him to have anything to do with fishing. All the lump sum amount she got on her retirement from school service and what Antony got in cash by way of dowry at the time of his marriage, have been invested in this chit fund business. With experience he has started doing reasonably well in his business. More and more people come to him to keep their extra cash. But he still has to go around to collect the contributions as they fall due, to keep the defaults as small as possible. On that, in fact, depends the success of this business.

Eliyamma, Antony, his wife and their one year old son live in a large house made of baked bricks and cement concrete roofing. In their 15 cents of land they have put up two identical houses. They live in one house and have rented the second house which is in front and close to the road to a doctor who runs a clinic. He gets a rent of Rs. 100. The houses have electric connection and proper bath and toilets. But they still have to rely on the wells as there is no proper water connection. They have dug a well in their own compound.

Antony is of immense help to me and my family. I and Xavier and my grown up sons are all members of one or the other of his chit funds. When we are in need of funds, he is always willing to help us.

My daughter Socha

Sosha, the elder of my two daughters, is now 25 years old, married, with two children, a daughter and a son. I kept Sosha at School only for four years. When she was fourteen years old she started helping me with not only housekeeping chores and child care but also with my work. She would peel the prawns, I brought home in the evenings. This was a help as the export companies accept prawns only in peeled form during certain specified hours. I got Sosha married when she was only fifteen because we got such a good match for her. The boy was ten years older to her, no doubt, but he was a well educated young man, a trained welder and already making a decent living. He has been in school for some ten years and is a handsome looking young man. His father, though from a far off fishing village, has been virtually living in Shakthikulangara with his daughter. We agreed to give Rs.2,500 in cash as dowry and jewellery worth 60 grams of gold worth Rs.1,200. All told, it meant an expenditure of Rs. 5,000. The decision to get Sosha married was a collective one of Xavier, Eliyamma and myself, though I was the one who pursued the matter most actively. We pooled money for the dowry from various sources. Eliyamma lent us some, and some we had to borrow from neighbours and friends. Also, Xavier and I had some savings in our chit funds. Sosha's husband used the dowry money including the cash he could raise by pawning the jewellery to go to the Gulf. He has been working there for the last four years.

My children from the second marriage

Titus, my second child from my marriage with Xavier is some 2½ years younger to Sosha. He studied till the seventh standard and started working thereafter with his father on the traditional craft. He tried to work for mechanised crafts, but that makes him sick. He cannot stand the diesel smell and the vibrations. Sosha's husband has arranged for a no objection certificate, what is popularly known as N.O.C. He will go and work for a local contractor in Kuwait as an unskilled labourer. We have spent almost Rs.15,000 in all on the N.O.C., his air ticket and his clothes. Antony has been a great help in raising the local funds. Sosha's husband will be paid straight back directly by Titus once he starts earning in Kuwait. Titus is my good son. He does not smoke or drink. He brought back home all the money he earned as a fisherman. So I have no doubt that he will not only repay all the money we borrowed for him but also help us with whatever additional funds we need for settling our other children and constructing a better house for ourselves.

Eighteen years old Joseph has stays in school to complete the ninth standard. He is now a full time fisherman, going with Titus on our Kochuvallom, the small traditional craft. With Titus gone to the Gulf, he will be needed more by his father. But I would like him to start working for a mechanised craft where the earnings is much higher although seasonal. Even if he too wants to go with his brither to the Gulf, I would be happy, we will be able to save in a short while the money needed for his N.O.C. and air ticket.

The second daughter's affairs

Mariamamma, our second daughter, was studying in the eighth standard, when she had an affair with a neighbour's son. Since she was expecting, we had to save the situation by somehow getting the two married before people came to know about the affair. She was three years under age however. With the new legislation, the Church would not allow any girl to marry before eighteen. We had to put great pressure on the parish priest for getting her married. The boy has been at school only for four years. He has not settled down to proper work, not even as a fisherman. None of us are happy about the choice. We would have mobilised enough funds to get her married well. Now it is no use, Mariamma is already expecting her first child.

The last two

My last two sons, Jose 13, and Joy 11, are still in school. Jose is in seventh standard and Joy in the fourth standard. If they show sufficient interest in studies, I shall have no objection to their completing school. In fact we all would very much like them to go in for some technical training thereafter so that they too can go to the Gulf, if it is still possible to do so. Even for a good living here, they would probably need such training even more. Moreover, we can afford to have them in school longer. I would have liked even Mariamma to complete her school but her stars evidently were not in the right position.

My daily routine

I get up quite early at about six O'clock in the morning. I then go to the bushes and then to watch out for the incoming country crafts. I carry my basket with me. Other female fish vendors of this village, most of them in their late forties, also come to the sea shore. The landing centre for country crafts is close to the old lighthouse, which stands a silent monument to the old days. All the crafts including Xavier's are berthed on sand. During rough weather, they are pulled inland. I buy fish for vending from any craft. Apart from the fact that the time when Xavier comes back with his catch may not always suit me most, it makes little difference from whom I buy my fish. Even Xavier's fish catch must go through auction, for often he had to share the proceeds with one or two persons from outside of our own family who work as crew members. Actually, if both the boys went out with Xavier, then they would not need any outsider. But I am always scared to send all the three out to sea in one boat. If there is an accident we would lose all of them.

After buying fish I walk back home. Sosha would by then have, cleaned the house and cooked breakfast. Very rarely do we depend on the left over rice and rice gruel of the previous night any more. Those days are luckily left behind us. We cook fresh breakfast every day. After breakfast I go fish vending with the basket on my head. I go to the houses of my regular customers in Marathadi, a locality within Shakthikulangara where the Hindu population is residing. There are also a few tea shops who buy from me fish for their daily requirement.

I sell mostly on cash basis but there will always be some who cannot immediately pay me either in part or in full. Usually they pay up the next day or the day after that. Often they ask me if I will go back later in the day to collect money. So I go back to them after disposing of the left over fish in a way side market. If the quantity I have to dispose of is large, I go to the main market where there is a section for women fish vendors. We all squat on the floor with our baskets placed in front. On my way back home, I stop at a tea shop for a cup of tea. But I take my midday meal at home with Sosha, who does the major part of the housekeeping including cooking, in our house. After our midday meal, I help Sosha with the cleaning of vessels before lying down for about half an hour. Lunch consists of rice and fish curry and rarely tapioca. Men do eat at home, i.e., lunch and dinner. I and Sosha have lunch only after the men have eaten. They eat on the long bench in the verandah and we eat in the kitchen itself. There is enough food for all so we do not make any difference in the distribution of food between girls and boys. Children take fried fish, chutney and rice to school which is considered clean food as it does not drip and is easy to handle.

I get ready to reach the jetty by about three in the afternoon. I have been going there for the last four years. At the jetty I participate in the auctions of shrimp catch. As a mechanised craft lands its catch, the auction is organized immediately for each basket. The auction agents are all men and the bidders cluster around the basket. If the basket contains expensive prawns, mostly men bidders bid for it. If it contains a mixed assortment then women

compete with each other for it. I sell to the representatives and agents of exporting firms who do not have the time and energy to watch out for every boat and participate in the auction. I often stay on at the jetty till about 6.30 or 7 in the evening. Late in the evening the bidding does not go very high since much fewer people are there to participate. If and when I buy at the evening auctions, the prawns have to be taken home to be sorted, peeled, and cleaned. Then they have to be taken to one of the factories with which I have an arrangement to sell. Though there is much more money in bringing the prawns home, peeling them and then selling them, I cannot do it on a large scale. For that I must put up a peeling shed of my own and have a number of women working for me. Also, it is becoming very difficult to get someone to cart the prawns home at a reasonable price. I do plan to give up fish vending because it is both time consuming and low paying and concentrate on just buying of prawns and selling them away at profit without processing it. If I give up fish vending, I shall be able to go to the jetty in the forenoon as well.

For participation in the auction I need ready cash with me, though on resale the reimbursement is immediate. Only when I sell directly to the factories as I do for the evening catch, I have to wait for three to four days on average to be reimbursed. The cash I generally carry with me runs between Rs.300 and Rs.500. During the monsoon months when the prawns catch is at its peak I can do with even more cash. In these months, there are times when I make a profit of Rs.50 in a single day. But then there are lean months and also months when there is no business at all to do. All the same, I am now a full-

fledged worker in my own right. In fact, I sometimes wonder if I should not cut down on my work so as to devote a little more time to my family, particularly to my two sons still in school.

Husband's work

For the last four years, our household has had four earning members including myself. Xavier has his own craft, Kochuvallom and three different kinds of nets, including a few nets to catch lobsters which has a good market. The two gill nets he has are for sardines and mackerels. They are all made of nylon and cost somewhere between Rs.2,000 and Rs.2,500. Lobsters are something which have recently caught on as they have an export market. The lobster net is not a very expensive net except that it has to be replaced frequently. It lasts just six months. Moreover, you need a few of them so that they can be immersed in the sea at about one mile off from the shore where the sea-bottom is rocky and lobsters are found. The lobster net is actually a bottom set net whose meshes are of a rather big size. Xavier has three of them. The older boys, Titus and Joseph, go out fishing with not only Xavier, their father, but also on other crafts.

Xavier started working for the family that brought him up from a very early age. From what he has told me over the years, it appears that he used to carry water from the wells with water considered safe for drinking. It was only after pipes were laid under the Project to connect our three villages with Sasthancottah lake, that we stopped depending on these wells. I am sure he had to do a lot of other chores for the family. However, as he grew up, he was

initiated into fishing. When I got married to Xavier, he was working as a coolie fisherman for other people's crafts, big or small. He was already considered a good fisherman. He was, therefore, not short of work, provided the weather was alright for fishing. Soon after Titus was born, Xavier negotiated for financing a second hand Kochuvallom, a small craft, from a neighbour in the village. He could raise the money from friends and relations because ^{of} his reputation as a good fisherman. Over the years, he has changed the boat several times, but stuck to the same small type. It is a more versatile craft and can be used for a larger number of days in a year. The craft he owns now was bought a couple of years back for a sum of Rs.3,000. He borrowed some Rs.2,000 by pledging our house and land and the balance was raised from friends and relatives to be repaid in small amounts from the earnings from fishing. He has not defaulted in the past, so his credit rating is good. Though he is completely illiterate, he is very methodical in his work. He takes great pains to maintain his crafts in good condition.

Managing the household

For the last few years, four of us from the household have been earning a living. The men, my husband and two sons, give me a major portion of whatever they earn. They do keep a portion to meet not only their daily personal expenses on the tea and snacks, but also their contributions to chit funds. Each one of us subscribes to a separate chit fund. I subscribe to one separately. The management of the household budget is left entirely to me. Contributing to the family

budget, with four earners, meeting our day to day requirements poses no problem. But new and major expenses have cropped up from time to time. The craft and nets have to be replaced often. The thatch of the house has to be redone once every two or three years. But the largest amount we needed to raise was for sending Titus to the Gulf. Thanks to my son, Antony, from my first marriage, we have not had such problem even then. Also, we all, individually and collectively could contribute a little with our savings.

Looking ahead

The hard work that Xavier and I have put in all these 21 years has been reasonably well rewarded. We both are illiterate but all our children have been at school for seven to eight years. Given our backgrounds, both of us suffered from various difficulties but we have been able to give our children a better start. One thing I am sure of that without Eliyamma's open hearted support we could not be where we are today. Our debt to her cannot easily be repaid. With both the girls now married and the boys on the threshold of better careers, I look forward to a brighter future. I would like to send my last two children, both sons, to College, if they do well in school, and build a brick house. I would like it to be provided with proper facilities like water, electricity and drainage. Several people here in our own village have been able to build good, comfortable houses. We too, I feel, ought to start building one, as soon as our debts are repaid. Xavier is not interested in having a mechanised boat, but when Titus is through with his job in the Gulf, he and Joseph would probably want to have one. However, that is a bridge we shall cross when we get to it.

Shakthikulangara
Case Study - B

PHILC MENA

The non-working wife

Introduction

I was born in a village called Puthenthuruthu, a small island village, a short distance away from Shakthikulangara where I live now. Even now, my village is not approachable by road. We have to use a boat or some kind of ferry to go back and forth from Shakthikulangara.

I come from a large family. Of the ten children, five girls and five boys, born to my parents, I was the third child. All of us were born in our house in Puthenthuruthu. My father was a fisherman owning a small craft, Kochuvallom, and a cast net. This is a small scoop net made of cotton used by the traditional fishermen of the area when the sea is rough and they cannot put their canoe at sea. This is a net that one can handle from the beach itself. My mother used to collect shells, clean and dry them and then sell them to be converted into lime. Even my mother's mother, i.e., my grandmother, was a shell collector, though she also worked as a midwife attending to child births in our village.

Early childhood

I was never sent to school. There were no schools in our village and if one wanted to go, one would have to depend on the ferry. My parents were very hard up and did not possibly see any need for educating children. So, none of us was sent to school.

Some children from our village did go to school in Sakthikulangara by boat but they came from better off families. I stayed home and helped my mother with the housework and in taking care of the younger children, who were there plenty. Also, I helped my mother in cleaning and drying shells. Sometimes, I went out with her to collect them also. I attained puberty at the age of sixteen and at the age of nineteen, I was married off to Valerian, a cousin of mine living in Shakthikulangara. He was 23 years old then. We were married in the Church at Shakthikulangara, the only dowry I got was a thin pair of golden ear-rings weighing 20 grams of gold worth Rs.300.

Husband's household

In Valerian's house in Shakthikulangara, I was not with strangers. They were my relatives and used to visit my family before our marriage. That is how our marriage was arranged.

Even, one knew my father-in-law, as he took a very active part in the Church. He was a strong and articulate man, proud of his awareness of politics and things in general. They were certainly being generous in letting me enter their family. They probably could have got a girl from a family doing better than us. May be, since I was better looking, it helped.

My father-in-law is now 65 years of age. He had 12 children, but only 10 are living, as two of them (both boys) died, one in infancy and the other when he was 2-3 years old. The first one died when he was just two months, because of congestion in the lung. Of the surviving ones, eight are boys and two girls. My mother-in-law

kept having children even after her sons were married and were raising their own families. My husband, Valerian, is their first living son.

Eight pregnancies

During the 15 years of my married life, I have had eight pregnancies, all live. But I have only six children living. Both my first two children, girls, died as infants. I was expecting my first child two years after our marriage. I went to the Government Hospital, in Quilon City, for delivery. On the fortieth day, the child is usually taken to the Church for baptism. But I lost my first child, a girl, on the thirtieth day itself. The Latin Catholic custom is that the couple should stay apart for a month. This is the minimum period of rest considered necessary for the wife and it is supposed to give her time to recuperate. During this time, she is given special herbal tonics, oil massage with hot baths and special food. I was also given all that. Within two months I was expecting again. This time also I went to the same hospital in Quilon, but had a premature delivery. The doctors felt the child was too weak. I went with my infant girl to my parents' home just to recover from both the mental and physical strain of all this. But the child caught Whooping cough from one of my brothers. So I had to come back to my husband's place and take the child for treatment to the Benzigar Hospital, a mission hospital, but in spite of all our efforts, the child did not survive. Around this time, Valerian and I decided to go and live in my village. Actually,

my father had mentioned that he could give us some land as he had not given me any dowry. So we put up our hut on my father's land. But soon Valerian and my father had a big quarrel and just around this time when I was about to deliver my third child, he decided that we were not staying there any longer and that I should go with him to his parents' house at once. But it was late in the evening, we had to take a ferry. Half-way through, I started having severe pains. Nearby was living my grand-mother who also was a midwife. She helped me deliver the baby that was a boy. After fifteen days of stay at my grand-mother's house, I was moved to Valerian's house, because the child was running temperature and had to be taken to the hospital for immediate treatment. It was found that the umbilical cord had become septic. The child took six months to recover completely, so he was baptised late. We call him Babu. He is now twelve years old.

When my fourth child was due, after a two-year gap, I went to a private nursing home in Shakthikulangara. Earlier, for my first deliveries, I had gone to the Government Hospital. Both of the children born to me there did not survive. Then I had problems with the third one, delivered at home with the help of my grand-mother. As my due date came closer I started worrying about where to have my delivery. I was irritable and would quarrel with Valerian and his people. Then one day he was so angry that he beat me up badly and I became really sick. I think he felt bad about it. So, it was decided that I should go to a private nursing home, though this would cost him a lot more money. My fourth child was a girl.

She was baptized as Shirley. So when I had breastfed my children. But soon after Shirley's birth, I had problem with my breasts. So for a while I had to put her on diluted cow's milk. She was fed with a piece of cloth soaked in milk. But none in the family quite approved of it. So I switched Shirley back to breast milk as soon as the doctor felt that it was perfectly safe to do so.

I breast-fed Shirley for a little over one year before I conceived again. This was my fifth conception. That depressed me a great deal. I had heard about family planning already and though as Catholics we were not supposed to use contraceptives or get sterilized, I felt that I could not go through pregnancies any more. But I had no courage to talk to any one on this subject. When I went to hospital for my delivery, my kidneys were found to be infected. This time, for my confinement I had gone to a Church-run hospital. Keeping in mind my history of complications and my own state of health, the doctor there advised me to go in for sterilization after delivery. I would have gone in for sterilization if Valerian had been even half-willing. He was opposed to it stubbornly. After I delivered a boy, I returned home after three days. I was weak and had not quite overcome my problem with the kidneys, I got scabies and passed it on the boy.

Valerian and I started having frequent exchange of arguments. I felt he and his people did not worry enough about my health. Also, I felt very weak. So I was packed off to my parents' home along with my three children. I was virtually separated from Valerian for almost three years. During this time my parents had to look after

us. I was afraid that I and my children would become a permanent burden on my parents if I did not go back to Valerian.

Then Valerian came one day to take me home. Within less than a year of this I was expecting again. Not that I wanted any more children but I was now resigned to going through any number of pregnancies regardless of what happened to my health. I did not want to be packed off again. So within the next four years I had two more children. On the eve of my eighth delivery, I was very sick and felt really so low that I thought I would not survive it for very long.

The sterilization

From my sixth delivery onwards, I had been going to the Project Hospital in Puthenthura for treatment and confinement. There the doctors and other medical staff do not like women to have many children though they never send you away. Every time I went there in pregnant condition, they would ask me if I would like my pregnancy to be terminated in view of my poor health. But who was I to say 'yes'? Valerian too would be asked whenever he was with me. He always said 'no'. I felt that he was really not convinced about the need. However, considering my condition during the course of my seventh pregnancy, he told the doctor that I could be sterilized if it was absolutely necessary for health reasons.

I stayed in the hospital for six days after my delivery and sterilization. Soon thereafter, I was running high temperature because this stitches had got septic. I had to be readmitted in

hospital for treatment. I never felt so weak as at this time. Now I have a nine-month old baby with my health in utter ruin. I feel weak in the lungs and get tired very soon. But I must somehow keep home and cook for Valerian and our five surviving children.

Our hut

We live in this small thatched hut 15 feet x 12 feet, to the back of the house in which Valerian's parents live. The land belongs to Valerian's grand-mother. The hut was put up by us, some eight years back when Valerian brought me back from my home after a three year separation. The two feet elevation helps to keep the rain water from entering the hut. Of the two rooms, 8 feet X 6 feet each at the back of our fifteen feet verandah, one is used as a store-cum-bedroom and the other as our kitchen. A part of the little space that lies in between the two rooms, 3 feet X 10 feet, serves as our prayer room. All Latin Catholic homes have their best room as a prayer room. You can see here our collection of calendar and poster pictures of Jesus Christ and Virgin Mary. I keep a small candle lamp burning there all the time. In the evening, all of us get together to offer our prayer to the Sacred heart. In the store-cum-bedroom, Valerian hangs all his clothes on a string tied across the room, from one wall to the other. In fact, even my clothes and the children's clothes are hung there. This is the only way to air the clothes and keep them safe from rats. Hanging them on the lines helps keep the clothes out of everybody's way. Then the few extra fishing nets of Valerian are also kept in this room dumped in a corner.

My time disposition

I spend most of my waking hours moving in and out of the kitchen. It takes some ten minutes to reach the public water tap for me or for my daughter, Shirly to collect water. We depend on this tap for our drinking water. For washing clothes and cleaning vessels, I use the pond in front of our hut. Most of the area is only two yards above the sea level, so it is easy to reach the water level. But the water is contaminated and has a high level of salinity. So, I use this water for all other purposes except for drinking and cooking.

I am the first to wake up in the morning except on days when Valerian goes out fishing in the small hours of the morning. I clean the front yard, bring some water and then go to the bushes for toilet purposes. We have three school-going children, Shirley, Solomon and Raju. Babu, my first son, has given up school already. Before she gets ready for school, Shirley helps a little in the kitchen. She is able to do more odds and ends after she gets back from school. I always keep some left over rice and gruel from the previous night. Children have this for breakfast before going to school. Usually, Valerian goes to the street corner tea shop for his tea and breakfast. I make tea or black coffee just for myself and have it with the left over rice. The children get ready by themselves and Shirley helps Raju who is just six years old. The school is not far away and is run by the Church. The children can walk back and forth by themselves. Once the school-going children are out of my way, I attend to the two young ones. I am still

feeding the youngest one on breast milk. It is not enough and I have to supplement it with some rice gruel.

I attend to washing of the vessels and the clothes after the children are taken care of. Washing clothes is a time consuming affair as the clothes are so dirty and I cannot spend much on soap. So you have to scrub and beat them hard. Washing clothes takes me two hours every day in the forenoon. Then I get back to the kitchen. I use firewood to do my cooking and kerosene for lighting the wicker lamps. Though there are no coconut trees on our land, there are some 20 trees on Valerian's father's land. These trees yield quite a quantity of dry shrubs that one can use for lighting a fire. The children collect them for me when they get back from school. But shrubs are not enough. We have to buy proper firewood as well. It is available from a corner firewood stall.

Husband's work and temperament

Things would not be so difficult for me if Valerian was doing well in work and was more cooperative and kind. He not only gets angry but usually his anger is turned on to me. He feels bad that he is not doing as well as a fisherman, as many others in this village. Over the years he has become even more bitter. While several others in the village, some very close relatives, own mechanized boats, Valerian has only a small craft, Kochuvallom, of his own. We have not been able to lay by enough to improve our position. Last year his mood was even worse when the doctors diagnosed and declared him a diabetic. This upset him no end. How to avoid sugar

and eat enough to do the kind of hard work that is necessary on a traditional craft, this was his problem. Then of course was his addiction to liquor. He was strongly advised to cut it down. But he is finding it hard to do that. On top of it all, two additional misfortunes occurred. In the heavy monsoons last year, our hut collapsed and we had to move into the house of Valerian's parents. We were really not welcome there, but there was no other alternative open to us. Then I fell sick and the doctors wanted me to be hospitalized and have my uterus removed. When I got back from the hospital, I was completely drained of energy and was at the mercy of my in-laws.

Not much love is lost between me and my in-laws. My mother-in-law has new daughters-in-law who have brought in much larger dowry and are healthier and possibly more helpful. My father-in-law just talks too much. He also spends a lot of money on drinks, possibly because he has wasted all the good opportunities that came his way. After all he was one of the first to be allotted a mechanized boat when the Project started.

Own evaluation/prospects

With men like Valerian and my father-in-law, none of us women can have any voice. We must only reproduce children and take care of the home without protest. I would have liked to work and contribute to the family income in spite of my bad health, but they would not hear of it. I would have at least been less dependent. They feel that men at the boat yard are not only drunk and badly behaved, but also take advantage of women who go to work there. So I was

never permitted to go to the boat yard.

Now that I cannot have children any more, I feel I can gradually overcome my health problems. Then, if Valerian is unable to take care of us completely, I shall be happy to go out to work. I am only thirty-five years old. I am quite young. I see so many older women from our neighbourhood working and making money. I too would like to try my chance. Of course, Valerian thinks that the children will soon start contributing their mite. Babu, our eldest, has already stopped going to school. He can start going to the sea with his father. But I would like my other children to go to school longer in life. How else can I make certain that I am taken care of well in my old age?

Summing up

I have had seven children and more or less have been responsible for their care. Occasionally when I have been sick, either my parents or Valerian's parents have cared for them out of sheer necessity. The two main sources about which I have some information is the school and hospital. I do not read the papers and we do not own a radio. Sometimes, I hear men talking to each other and that is the only source of information. Our main source of income is from that of Valerians fishing. We have no other source whatsoever.

Shakthikulangara

Case Study - C

MARY

The Prawn Peeler

I came to Shakthikulangara after I got married to Napoleon in 1965. I was twenty years old then and Napoleon was 24, just a few years older. Usually, the age difference between the boy and girl is greater than what it is between Napoleon and myself.

I come from a fishing hamlet in Chavara village. Chavara is a predominantly Hindu village with coir, the coconut husk fibre, as the main base of economic activity. Even in fishing households, whether Hindu or Christian, while men were engaged largely in fishing, women as was the case with my grandmother and mother, earned some money retting and defibring coconut husks. Both I and my sister, older to me by one and a half years, learned to spin coir ropes. As young children, we would work for one or the other many small rope producers in the village, spinning ropes of different strengths, at the Ratt, the wooden spinning wheel specially designed for the use of coir fibre. Out of us eight children five boys and three girls, the two older girls were never sent to school. The remaining five went to school though for varying periods.

My parents

Both my parents, Jerome and Augustina, belonged to the same village, Chavara. They were actually neighbours, but their marriage was an arranged one. My father was a ferry man transporting goods

along the backwaters and my mother defibred coir and made coir ropes by herself. They had in all eight children, three girls and five boys. They are all alive. All the children were delivered in the hut itself with the help of a midwife and relatives.

I am the fourth child in the family. I have two older brothers and one sister older to me. My first brother, Michael, still lives in Chavara with his five children and wife who also belongs to same village. Michael who went to school for ten years, has gone in for vasectomy, something that normally men among the fishing households don't go in for. He owns two Chinese nets and his wife works as a coir rope maker. Augustina, my older sister, is just two years younger to Michael. Though Michael went to school, Augustina and I, as I told you already, were never sent to school. Augustina is married in Shakthikulangara. They have been allotted five cents of land by the Church under the rule that all families who were squatting for more than a certain number of years were to be given the right to settle. After her sixth child, Augustina went in for sterilization. Her husband is a fisherman and Augustina herself is engaged in buying and selling of prawns.

My brother Yesudas, two years younger to Augustina works as a boat crew and his wife is a fish merchant. They have only three children but his wife has already gone in for sterilization.

I am two years younger to Yesudas. Since I was never sent to school, I started defibring coir husks as quite a young kid. Whatever little I earned I gave to my mother. I also helped her in

the house in the case of my younger brothers and sisters while Augustina helped her with the household chores.

My other brothers and sisters

I have three brothers and one sister younger to me. The brother immediately after me, George, has studied only for four years. He started going for fishing in the backwaters, but later on switched over to a mechanized boat as a crew member. That is how he migrated to Shakthikulangara and stayed with us for a while. After he got married to a girl from Kadavoor, a fishing village near Quilon they decided to live permanently in Shakthikulangara. His wife is very enterprising. She runs a shop selling not only tea but also grocery and fuel wood. Her parents are in this business in their village. They have three children. Now she has gone in for sterilization. The two brothers younger to George also came away to Shakthikulangara first and then tried for jobs. Antony worked for a while in Bangalore and then tried for jobs. Antony worked for a while in Bangalore and then went to the Gulf. Later, he found a job for his younger brother, Lubis, also now in the Gulf. My younger sister Rita and her children stay with me while her husband is away on a job in the Gulf. My parents have also come away from Chavara. They stay with George, but eat their meals with me.

My marriage

My parents never were really doing well, though both of them worked. My father, though basically a ferry man, spent more of his time running an illicit liquor joint. One of his customers at this joint was an uncle of Napoleon. It was through him that my marriage

was fixed. It turned out that Napoleon's parents had reservations about our family, on the score mainly of my father's liquor business, but they would not go back on the word given by Napoleon's uncle to my father. Napoleon's parents have been very generous ever since, considering the kind of reservations they had about my family and the smallness of dowry given to me. I brought with me just 300 rupees in cash. After my marriage, I moved to Shakthikulangara to the house of Napoleon's parents. I was not a stranger to Shakthikulangara. Already, my sister had been living there with her husband and children. In three or four years, we put up a small hut of our own on a plot of land belonging to Napoleon's father.

Our hut

It is, as you can see for yourself, a very modest hut, all made out of thatch, walls as well as roof, covering an area of less than 300 square feet. The only room other than the kitchen serves as the household store.

I have lived here now for over ten years. I moved here some time in 1970. Now, my father-in-law is obliged to sell this land to raise money for dowry to be given at the time of the marriage of his youngest daughter. However, this will not create any problem for us since we have already bought a five cent piece of land close to our present plot and are busy putting up a new house there. My brothers, who are working in the Gulf, have been helping us financially to put up our new house. We would soon have a comfortable brick house, with four-five rooms and also facilities like piped water,

electricity and drainage. I am very much looking forward to our move to the new house.

Our children

Five children were born to us, two daughters and three sons. However, only four of our children are living now.

I was expecting my first child after two years of our marriage. Around the seventh month, I went back to my parent's house, and delivered my first child there. The very next day after delivery, I was bitten by a snake. I was given some Ayurvedic treatment immediately and I recovered. But it seemed to have affected the infant girl. My relatives felt that she also was poisoned as I was breast feeding her. She died thirteen days after her birth. We did not have time even to take her for baptism. My oldest surviving child, a son, is now fourteen years old and is studying in the 8th standard, we call him Prasau. We decided to follow the fashion and give our children Indian names rather than old fashion biblical names. He was born two years after my first delivery. This time I did not go back to my parents. Instead I stayed on in Shakthikulangara. A nurse working for the Project hospital looked after me when I was expecting. She also came to attend on me for delivery. We were really hard up for money at that time so I was not given any of the special attention in terms of tonics (ayurvedic) and baths, that a woman is supposed to receive in the days immediately following delivery.

There was a gap of six years between our first and second son, who is now eight years old. He is studying in the third standard. I cannot quite explain the reason for the gap between my

second and third delivery. I was not on any medicine; nor were we using any other spacing device. It just happened like that. This time I was under complete care of the Project hospital. I went there quite regularly for my pre-natal check up. I had my baby there and I went to the baby clinic thereafter for the immunisation programme. The baby clinic is also run by the Project hospital. We call this son Rajan.

My sterilization

Before my fourth and last delivery, it was found out by the doctors in the Project hospital that I was going to have twins. When the doctors asked if I would like to be sterilized after the delivery, Napolean and I gave our consent. That was in 1974. We both felt that four was quite a good number and that we did not want more children. Several women from the village had already undergone this operation. So there was nothing to be scared of. Even the Church had started accepting sterilization though publicly, it spoke and continues to speak against all forms of family planning. I must confess, however, that my health has not kept well after the sterilization operation. I get headaches and backaches quite frequently. Everyone here believes that these all are due to the operation. Still I am happy that I do not have to have more children. Instead, we can help those we have to grow up well.

Our household size

Our household size is somewhat unusual in the sense that it is much larger than our family. A number of my relatives have been

staying with us from time to time. My younger brothers and sisters were anxious to come away from Chavara to find work opportunities here. As soon as prawn catches became larger, the whole area around Neendakara Harbour became the centre of work opportunities. How could I close my door on my own kith and kin when they came. I am sure that at the time of our need they too will help us. My sister-in-law, George's wife is different. She is not sufficiently warm to them. So they all come to me. My younger sister, Rita, migrated here with her husband and their two children. She is still staying with us but her husband left recently for the Gulf. He has got a job there with the help of my brother, Antony, who has been working there for some years now. Antony had recently come home on leave and was staying with us for a few months. Then my youngest brother, Lubis, who worked in the Gulf for one year had to come away when his firm there wound up. He is now trying for another job in the Gulf. Staying with me is also a sixteen year old girl, Angela, from a neighbouring district; she helps me with my household chores. She has been with me from the age of ten.

It is true that we are quite crowded. Our present hut was never put up to accommodate fourteen persons. During the day time, however, there is not much of a problem. The menfolk usually leave home early in the morning and get back only later in the afternoon. Children go away to school. Rita, my younger sister, and I go away in the afternoon to the jetty to peel prawns. It is only in the night that you really feel the congestion but we have managed somehow. Next year, when we move to our new house, we shall feel the congestions very much less than now.

My first ten years after marriage

I must have started going out to work from the age of six or seven. As a young child, I knew how to defibre retted coir husks, rotate the spinning wheel and later when I grew up I could spin two and three ply ropes. Until the time I got married, I worked for one or the other ratt owner. Whatever I earned, I gave to my mother. After I got married and moved to Shakthikulangara, I did not go out to work for about ten years. I started having children straightway, and also there was not much activity related to coir in Shakthikulangara. Defibring of coir had already been mechanised here and coir spinning was something that only a very few ratt owners in the village were involved in. Moreover, the wages in coir had remained so pitifully low that there was not much I could have contributed to the family kitty by working in the coir industry. Whatever coir defibring and spinning remained in Shakthikulangara was completely in the hands of Hindu women from Ezhava caste. I don't recall any women from the Christian households in this village working for ratt owners. For the last five years, however, I have started going to work. It is easier now as even my two youngest children, the twins, are at school.

My domestic help

When I had twins, I really had a hard time. It was then that my brother-in-law brought a ten year old Christian girl from Alleppey, a town some seventy kilometres to the north. Her parents wanted to migrate to Goa in search of work and were short of funds.

So we gave them fifty rupees and they left the child to work for us. She has been living and working with me for the last five years. She takes care of practically all my household work now. Thus I have a full time housekeeper. We plan to get her married when we can find a proper match for her. That is our moral responsibility. Also, my sister Rita who, as you know, is living with us gives me a hand in all household chores. I do not really have to worry, therefore, about the running of the house, though the number to be taken care is unusually large.

My present work

My elder sister Augustina, who too is married in this very village, has been engaged in prawn business for the last ten years. So entry into the business was no problem for me. To be with Augustina was a great help to start with at least. At the boat yard there is not only much of physical jostling and pushing about, but also a lot of aggressive male talk that relatively younger women find it rather hard to take regardless of whom the talk may be aimed at. Most men at the jetty are, no doubt, from Shakthikulangara and known to us. Still it is different when you meet them at the jetty than when you see them socially. Probably when you participate in an auction, every one is on his own and has to stand his ground firmly. To gain acceptance as an equal bidder with men takes time probably for all women. It is particularly so if you are young and on your own. Further, one has to deal with agents, peeling shed owners, auctioneers, peelers and coolies, All of them except peelers are men. We, women, have therefore to develop a thick skin in order

to be successful in this type of work.

Initially, we women prefer to participate in small auctions. These consist of small lots. Strictly speaking, there is no rule against us, women, participating in bigger bids. In actual practice, however, for large, expensive lots of prawns, where the bidding itself opens with Rs.1,000 mostly men participate in auction. Women like me with modest cash on hand bid only in the smaller auctions, where prawns both smaller in quantity and of inferior variety are auctioned. But I cannot say that there operates any segregation in work based on sex. While participation of women in the bigger bids may be close to 10 per cent, the ratio of men to women participating in smaller auctions, women very much outnumber men.

It is usually around 1 O'clock in the afternoon that Rita and I go to the jetty. Each of us carries three to four hundred rupees in cash. This is the minimum working capital one needs to operate in a modest way. Many other women as well as men would be there already. It gets very crowded by 3 p.m. when the boats come in quick succession to land their catch. The land comprising the jetty on the western side of the highway belongs to twelve Latin Christian families. All of these have become rich both because of the regular income from the use of their land by incoming boats but also because of the enormous increase in the price of the land.

As and when necessary, Augustina, Rita and I pool our capital. Then it is Augustina who participates in the bidding on our behalf. Often, however, we operate separately to be able to bid in more than

one auction since several auctions are going on simultaneously. When a bid materialises in my favour, I transfer it to the nearby peeling shed of the firm with which we have been having our dealings. Three teenage Hindu girls from a neighbouring village who have been working for us for some years now peel the prawns. The girls get paid according to the number of basins peeled. On an average, they make five rupees a day each. While we don't pay for the use of the shed, we have to buy our own ice. However, we have to leave behind the shelled peels so that the shed owner can sell it as manure. We sell our peeled prawns to the firm. I have already mentioned, according to the size and weight but the prices keep fluctuating from day to day, indeed hour to hour, depending on the incoming catch. When the catch is good, the price is low. Each firm displays the price it is willing to pay for various sizes. On a good day, Rita and I can net in as much as seventy-five rupees together after deducting our expenses on sorting, transporting, ice and peeling. This happens during the peak months of June to August when the catch is maximum. On a lean day, our earnings may be as low as ten rupees. Even though on such days we try to do quite an amount of peeling ourselves. Then there are several days when there is little to buy, peel and sell. So one makes next to nothing.

The firm we deal with clears its bills only once every week and that is what creates headaches for us particularly during days of peak business. For, to be able to buy shrimps worth Rs.1,000, in the course of one day, the weekly working capital we both require works out Rs.5,000, a sum that is not always quite easy for us to

mobilize. Both Rita and I are subscribing to chit funds to keep by our savings in a form that we can tap readily.

Napolean raises bank loan

The year 1980 has proved to be a year of distinct improvement for us. Napolean, my husband, was able to raise two bank loans, totalling Rs.6,000, and buy a kochuvallom and a couple of nets. Now he owns, all told, ten different kinds of nets so that he can go out to sea more often than if he had only two or three nets. We have often thought of a mechanised boat, but it is still far too expensive for us. A new boat alone costs at least Rs.1,35,000 and the gear would cost another Rs.25,000. So it is clearly beyond our reach. Napolean could have enrolled as a crew for a mechanized boat, but he is his own master now and prefers this status. After all, what he can make on a good day on his craft is not at all so bad. It is when one has no craft at all or an old boat which cannot be put to sea as and when necessary that one's position becomes difficult. Then you are no better than a landless labourer.

My daily routine

My first task in the morning, is to see that the house is cleaned and the children get ready for school on time. We cook fresh rice for breakfast unless sufficient quantity is left over from the night's meal. The school is close by and the children come home to have their lunch. All the school going children, my four and Rita's one, have to be washed, bathed and dressed for school in clean clothes. Angela takes care of this, while I and Rita get

breakfast going. After the children leave for school, Rita and I have our breakfast. We do not wait for the menfolk. But if any of them is there, he is served breakfast before we women sit down to ours. Men prefer to eat at the tea shops rather than share left overs. After my breakfast I go out to do my daily shopping.

Lunch is the main meal we cook. The rice and tapioca we cook has to be sufficient to last the whole day including for the night meal. We make a fresh fish curry again in the evening. Napoleon, my husband, leaves the house on most days at 5 O'clock in the morning and is back only around lunch time. He has his tea and breakfast at the tea shop, but lunch at home. Angela is there to serve him lunch if I am not there. Very often both Rita and I would have gone away to the jetty by the time he is back. After lunch he likes to sleep and the house is usually quiet for that. If he is at home for some reason, we take lunch only after he has been fed, a convention that all households follow.

Looking ahead

Both Napoleon and I are virtually illiterate but we want to give a good education to the children.

With Napoleon now owning his own craft and nets and my work going on reasonably well, it should not be a difficult target for us.

I think we have improved our status from where we started. We shall soon move into a proper brick house. If and when I need any additional funds for my business, or Napoleon needs them for his work, we can be still reasonably certain of help from my brother still in the Gulf.

I see much better days ahead for my children and also ourselves.

Shakthikulangara
Case Study - D

LILLY FRANCIS

The boatowner's wife

Sakthikulangara is in my bones. Both my parents belong to this village. So did my grand parents and great grand parents. Virtually every other family in the village is related to me. Almost all the marriages among Cristians here take place within this village. This way not only can the family members keep in touch with each other but also the dowry money stays within the village. My husband Francis is from the same neighbourhood as our own. I had seen Francis before we got married but I had never spoken to him until after our marriage.

Marriage

I got married in 1967 when I was only eighteen years old. We were married at the St.Britto's church. Francis was twenty-four years old then. I had been sent to school for just two years. Since I was my mother's first daughter, it fell to my lot to take care of the housework and look after my brothers and sisters as soon as I was old enough to help. My parents gave away what was considered then a big dowry in my marriage. They gave Rs.6,000 in cash and 70 grams of gold worth Rs.1,400 in the form of jewellery. My marriage expenses in all amounted to over Rs.10,000.

My brothers and sisters

My parents had eight children in all. Of these, three of us

were girls and five boys. I have two older brothers but I am the first daughter. My mother never went to the hospital for her confinements and delivered all her children at home. All her eight children are living. Of these, now five of us are married; all the three girls and two boys. I have three younger brothers who are yet to be married. My two older brothers are living separately with their families. Both of them are married to girls from Sakthikulangara. Each of them received a dowry of Rs.5,000 in cash and gold worth Rs.2,500. My first brother has seven children and the second one, four. They have not thought of limiting their families yet. Agnes, the sister younger to me is married to a boat owner in this village. She has two children.

The cash (dowry) at my marriage was handed over to Francis's parents during the engagement ceremony that preceded the marriage by a few days. Gold was given to me in the form of jewellery. The unwritten rule is that the cash money is really for the groom to establish himself. However, gold brought by a girl is also at the disposal of her husband and his parents, as they can pledge or sell it during a crisis or use as part of an investment to improve the family position. The understanding, however, in the case of gold is that the girl is entitled to get back the gold lent by her sooner or later, but there is no hard and fast rule about it.

Mother's dry fish business

My parents could give me a substantial dowry because they were doing reasonably well. My father owned a traditional craft and couple of nets. However our prosperity rested on our mother.

When I was young, my mother was a headload fish vendor going from one wayside market to another. Soon, she also got into dry fish business. She would hire a coolie to cart the fish to the city market in Quilon where she had put up a permanent stall of her own. During the peak season, when fish is in a surplus quantity, she would buy it in bulk. All of us would help in drying the fish. This meant washing, cleaning and salting of fish before it was spread out in the sun for a day to dry. Small fishes like anchovies and silver bellies we could just sun dry without using salt. Mackerels and sardines we had to fillet and stack them in salt in alternate layers in heaps and wait for the water to drain out and then dry them in the sun. Bigger fish we would stack with alternate layers of salt in a trough and keep them for a day and then expose them to sunlight. Finally all these dried fish had to be packed in baskets with coconut palm leaf and made ready for transportation to the High Ranges and inland markets. This business venture turned out to be successful and very soon she was one of the wholesale dealers in dry fish, selling dry fish in bulk to merchants coming from the midlands and highlands where dry fish is a major item of consumption.

My mother had received some 15 cents of land in dowry at her marriage. It was on this piece of land that my parents built up their hut where all their children were born and bred. Land fetched little price in those days, those with landed property would give a part of it in dowry if they couldn't give cash or jewellery.

My children

Once I got married, we set up a separate house. I have six children in all of which all are sons, the youngest is just a year old. I have had all my children in a mission hospital, known as Benziger's. It is not a free hospital, but it is considered the best hospital around. We prefer to go there because the treatment you get there is better than what you get at the Government Hospital, though they don't fleece you, it is expensive. It costs you about Rs.150 these days to have a delivery and stay three days. In the seventies the hospital charges came to just about Rs.50. Ever since then it has been consistently going up. Also, if I had gone to a Government hospital, the doctors there would definitely have wanted me to get sterilised by now, having had six children already. However, Government hospitals are absolutely free.

The general state of my health has not been so good. I have been on tonics for a few years now. My two and a half year old son is also rather weak for his age. We both are under treatment. I don't think I can go through another pregnancy, but I am scared of the operation. There is no question of Francis undergoing an operation. This is unheard of in this village. Men in our community feel they would not be in a position to put in hard work once they go for this operation. Francis is not even keen that I should undergo sterilization. In fact, he is not as concerned as I myself am about the fact that any more pregnancies could kill me. So I shall have to get over my own fear of the operation and to make up my own mind one day.

I must confess that if I were feeling better I will not mind having a daughter also. You need at least one daughter in a family.

I had my first child in the very first year after our marriage. For a newly married couple to produce an offspring early is considered right and proper. If one does not get pregnant fast enough, one has to answer all sorts of questions. The family people start worrying. Childlessness is considered a great sin. Between the two situations where you do not have children and where you have too many, the latter is preferable. However, re-marriage among us, Latin Christians, is allowed only on the death of the spouse and not on the plea of childlessness.

My first son now is twelve years old. I have had more or less a child every one year and a half. All my children have been breast-fed. I have now four school-going children. The younger two are still at home under my own care. Recently we moved into my parents' house at the request of my father. Philomena, my youngest sister, was a great help to me once we moved in here, but now she is remarried and has gone to her husband's village. I am the only woman around in the house and I have my children as well as my father and brothers to take care of as I have three brothers who are still to be married. Though there are six men around in the house including my husband and father, I cannot ask them to clean, wash, cook or fetch water. It is never done. Nor would they be willing to partake of household chores even if they are absolutely idle. The most men do is to take children out once they are cleaned, bathed and fed and do some shopping and that too only certain kinds of shopping. The

strain of running the house is too much with my poor state of health. Anyway, we should be soon moving to our own house and then it might be easier to take care of just my family, though I do feel very concerned about my brothers and father.

Description of the house

We are living here on the 15 cents of land that was given to my mother as part of her dowry. It was on this piece of land that my parents built up their hut and where all of us are born. We are rather cramped for space here, since I have moved in with my six children. We are now six adults and six children living in the house. When the land was given to my parents, there was just a thatched hut. My mother had invested some money and put up a two-roomed brick house with a verandah and a kitchen. We have also a thatched enclosure to wash our utensils and to have bath. My parents still have about 15 cents of land but the house occupies only three cents of land. There are about 25 coconut trees but nine of them have got destroyed due to lack of care and neglect. Luckily we have an electric connection and all the rooms have doors and windows. We have a small pond from which we take water for washing and cleaning purposes. Since it is not protected water, we have to bring a couple of pots of drinking water.

Move to my parents' house

For the last two years or so we have been staying here in my parents' house with my family. I had to move in when two tragedies struck my family, one after the other within a span of just one year. First, my younger sister, Philomena became a widow within one month

of her marriage. My parents got her married to a young man from this very village who was already working as a shrank, which means as a crew leader, on a mechanised boat. Philomena was given a handsome dowry of Rs.10,000 in cash and 100 grams of gold in the form of jewellery. All told, it worked to more than Rs.20,000. Unfortunately, the marriage did not last for more than a month. During the months of June, July and August, prawns move in a big way into the coastal waters of Neendakara. But these are also the months most dangerous for fishing. The sea is most turbulent because of the south west monsoon. So we have a number of accidents every year during this period resulting in loss of very valuable lives of young and daring fishermen. It is usually the more daring who venture beyond the safe limits and get trapped. Of course, let us face it, however, accidents and loss of life are a part of fishermen's lives. It is just too bad that it should happen to Philomena who was so recently married. Quite often these boats and the lives of fishermen are not properly insured so that the families of the dead do not get the right compensation. Even if the crafts are insured, they are not supposed to go during the monsoons. Loss of boats results in major financial losses. Men of course are seldom insured against their lives. In spite of that boat owners are unscrupulous and encourage the crew to take great risks in order to make huge profits.

The shock of Philomena's widowhood was particularly felt by my mother who was already ailing. She had been a heart patient for some years. Within less than a year of this tragedy she passed away.

A great deal of money was spent on her treatment, including hospitalization. After my mother's death I had to move into my parents' house to stay with my father. No doubt I had two sister-in-law but it would not be the same. Two of my younger brothers were there and also my youngest invalid brother who is still a heart patient, had to be cared for. Though I was not really well, they felt I too was needed. Daughters are the ones people turn to during periods of emotional crises. With the addition of us eight, my parents' house has become rather congested and everyone is rather cramped for space. It is no doubt a brick house, but it has limited space with total covered area not more than 150 sq.ft. Francis was not totally against moving here for several reasons, for one we would be closer to his parents' house as two of his brothers are working on his boat. Even my brother is working on his boat. Moreover, our hut was falling apart and we were short of funds as all that we had was invested in buying the craft. By moving in here, he felt he could keep a closer contact with the crew and commute to the boat jetty easily.

Philo's remarriage

Once we moved in, our first task was to see that Philomena was remarried as fast as possible. Among us Latin Catholics, not only is re-marriage in such cases allowed, but also the girl is entitled to the return of the whole dowry. Where there is dispute, the Church steps in and arbitrates. In fact the Church records the amount of dowry given in each case. In Philomena's case, we got back all that had been given in dowry. The problem usually arises because

to get a girl re-married, the dowry demanded is much bigger than in the first marriage. Philomena stayed at home for a full one year and a half. Finally we found a suitable boy for her. He also works as a crew hand on a mechanized boat in a small neighbouring village. The dowry we gave has added up to Rs.30,000. She comes to visit us often. Now we, Francis and I, are thinking of building a brick house for ourselves. We own a seven-cent piece of land on which we had a thatched hut. Because of disuse and lack of repairs, the hut now has fallen apart. We don't want to move as yet. With Philomena married and not close by there are no female members in the house. Two of my brothers who are married live separately with their families and are not anxious to move in. My second sister Agnes, who is married in this village is almost not in a position to help. So that leaves just me. Since Francis is not objecting to it seriously even though we are cramped for space, I don't mind staying on here for some more time till we have built a brick house of our own.

Francis' work

Francis first started going out fishing from the age of fifteen. He studied up to the eight standard. His father was a vallon owner and Francis went out to sea as one of his father's crew. Being the eldest son in a family of ten, probably he had to start work rather early. His other six brothers are better educated than him. When I got married to Francis in 1967, Francis had started going as a deck hand on a mechanized boat. However, he was never very comfortable on a mechanized boat as it invariably made him sea-sick. All

the same he wanted to own one rather badly.

Francis, along with four of his brothers became members of a co-operative society ('Malsya Utpadaka Co-operative Society) and then applied to the Government as a group of five for the allotment of a mechanized boat (32' trawler). The membership fee came to Rs.155 for the five to them. Also, they had to deposit Rs.14,000 as an advance along with the application. Francis was able to raise this amount with the help of his two brothers and one brother-in-law who are in the Gulf.

After a lot of running about and greasing various palms over a period of some 24 months, Francis and his brothers were allotted a boat. It cost Rs.1,25,000 which has to be paid up in regular monthly instalments of at least Rs.2,000. He has to pay a seven per cent interest on the total cost of the boat. Thus he owns a mechanized boat now. Francis himself does not go out fishing. His brothers, along with my younger brother, Pius, work to constitute the boat crew. No one from outside the family has to be hired for the purpose. Francis takes care of all the transactions involved including the maintenance and running expenses of the boat. He is trying to repay the loan as fast as possible so that the boat can then be transferred to our name at the earliest. That is the first priority for him. But at the time he is laying aside some amount for the construction of our brick house. Luckily for us, Francis is not addicted to drinking and is not particularly keen on extravagant living in the manner of several of his comperes in this village. So he can save considerably

more than others. In fact, if anything, it is my health and constitution which is a major drain on his finances.

Last month I had a major set back and had to be rushed to the hospital. The doctors were firm and felt I would have to undergo a hysterectomy operation. We had no alternative left and had to give our consent. I stayed on the Benziger hospital for fifteen days in all. The expenses came to Rs.3,000. So now the question of having more children does not arise. In a way I am glad it is all over. I fell weak but once I recuperate, I am looking forward to moving into our new brick home and taking better care of my family. With my health I cannot aspire to do anything more.

Shakthikulangara

Case Study - E

GORATTI

a deck hand's wife

I lost my father when I was just two years old. He had gone out to sea fishing and was caught in a severe storm in which his craft capsized. He was with nine other fishermen on a large traditional craft known by the name of Thanguvallom. The plank built canoe belonged to all the nine and was jointly owned. My father who was thirty-five years old and another younger relative of his, 22 years of age, both lost their lives. They found my father's body but they could not trace the young man at all. This is a hazard which all households of fishermen face. We have to accept it as a fact of life. In those days if a fisherman was lost at sea, that was the end of the story. In recent years, the State Government has started paying compensation to the family. Also, there exist insurance policies which, however, only the better off amongst fishermen can take out. When my father died in 1954, my mother had already four children and was expecting her fifth one.

Early background of my mother

Both my parents belonged to Sakthikulangara. My mother's father owned a Thanguvallom. That was a mark of well being among fishermen. My grand mother was not doing anything in particular besides house work. My mother, however, was sent to school for just

three years. The Church co-educational school was very close to their house but the parents never saw the need to send her for a longer period. It was not the normal pattern in the village for girls to be at school for a length of time. But even my father had been to school for five years only, enough for him to read and write reasonably well. When my parents got married in 1944, my mother was twenty years old and my father was twenty-five. She was given a dowry of Rs.300 and jewellery worth two rupee silver weight. They had been married for nine years only when the accident, I have told you about, took place. Thus my mother became a widow at the young age of thirty. On her rather young shoulders was thrown a rather big responsibility of bringing up thereafter four young children, including one on its way.

Re-marriage was ruled out

All of my mother's children were delivered at home. The first four of her children were all girls. One of these, her second daughter, died before my father's accident. The child, who was four years old, drowned herself when she was playing in the shallow backwaters. When her fifth child turned out to be a boy, and it happens so soon after my father's death, everyone including my mother herself felt that God had shown great mercy on her. They felt that now there would be someone to take care of her in her old age and give her both economic and social support. My grand parents, i.e., my mother's parents, and the parish priest suggested considering re-marriage to my mother since she was still rather young. She felt, however, that she could not take such a step with four young children to take care

of. The eldest child, Angelo, was still only nine year old. Lilly was three and I was not even two years of age. Then she had an infant to take care of as well.

Meeting the crisis

Even after my father died, we continued to stay in the same hut, as the land belonged to us. My mother did not go out for work and her parents, particularly her father and brother lent her great moral support. About three years after her widowhood they learnt that the locally based Government firm, Kerala Fisheries Coperation was looking for women to work in its ice-cum-freezing plant. My mother was encouraged to put in her application. This was around 1957, i.e., four years after the Project had come into existence. There were not many applicants. Also, most women who applied were fishermen's widows, though my mother, I was told, was possibly the youngest.

My mother's regular factory job.

For the last 25 years, my mother has been working in the Government factory. In another few months, when she completes 58 years of age, she is due to retire. She now makes Rs.400 every month and when she retires she will be entitled to a lump sum payment of Rs.2,000. My mother is very sad that she has to retire in two months' time. She feels she is quite healthy and could go on working for some years. She had taken the birth certificate from the Church where she was baptized. The Hindu co-workers were able to understate their age for want of proper evidence. She feels, she has to pay a price for being born as Latin Catholic. All the same, you cannot overlook the fact

that it was because of the steady income she earned all these years that she could bring up her children without much difficulty. This regular job was a great boon for our family.

Our bringing up

Angelo, the oldest of us three surviving girls, gave up school when my father died. She had been to school for only three years. But even Lilly and I went to school for only three years when our turns came. The need to keep us in school longer was evidently not felt. We just stayed at home doing the house chores and taking care of our younger brother Gilbert while our mother was out at work in the factory. One thing my mother saw to was to keep the boy in school for the maximum period necessary. He, however, failed to complete his school leaving certificate even after two attempts.

Our marriages and dowries

All the three of us girls are married into the families belonging to this village. When Angelo was married off at the early age of 17, my mother was unable to give any cash in dowry. Instead, she promised to give her a part of the 12-cent piece of land which belonged to my father. The dowry transaction in these villages can take place in cash, land, gold or a combination of these. When Lilly got married, the normal cash dowry stood around Rs.3,000. The land my mother gave away was worth Rs.5,000. Angelo works as a commission agent and her husband works as a shrank (it is the name given to the overseer who ranks next to the driver in terms of the share of the catch) on a mechanized boat. They have three children,

one son and two daughters. She had all her children in the hospital, but so far has not gone in for any family planning measure. However, she has not conceived for some years now. So probably she does not see the need for taking to family planning. But you cannot tell whether or not she will have any more children. After all, she has not yet crossed that point.

In the case of my second sister, Lilly, who also was married at the age of 17 years, my mother promised to give part of her land in dowry, the idea being that either the land should be given or part of the sale proceeds. Lilly's husband had a job in Bhilai, one of the steel towns in North East India. He had to come away after an accident in which he lost a part of his hand. On his return to the village, he raised funds by borrowing from the Banks and private parties and bought a new mechanized boat. He now manages the boat and Lilly runs a successful grocery store. They have five daughters. They have given up hope of a son and Angelo has gone in for tubectomy after her last child. They are in the process of replacing their hut by a brick house.

I was the third girls and I too was married off early. It is my uncles, my mother's brothers, who found the match for me. Sebastian and I got married in 1969. It was at the time of my marriage that it was decided to sell off the 12 cent piece of land and recover the cash to be divided among the three sisters. I suppose you know already that dowry is very important for marriage in our society. Before the anti-dowry legislation, even the Church was not against this practice. We even had the system whereby the whole amount was

recorded with the Church where a register was kept for this purpose. Earlier, a percentage of the dowry was payable to the Church but that practice has been discontinued as many people would under-report the dowry transaction. This register was still maintained in the Church that in the event of any dispute one would always refer to it. In theory this dowry money is supposed to be for the bride, the practice here, however, is for the bridegroom to have the full use of it. Generally, he uses it for starting a venture of his own.

Sebastian, my husband

Sebastian was twenty-one years old when we got married. He had attended school only for two years. Sebastian had to start working at the age of 10 or 12 because his parents needed him to supplement their earnings. They had six children, four boys and two girls. Sebastian was the first son. Both his parents worked. Sebastian's father owned a kochuvallom, the small craft, and his mother worked as a headload fish vendor. The brother next to Sebastian turned out to be a very sickly kid. This was a great source of anxiety and expense. Ultimately it was diagnosed that he had cancer and he died of it at the age of 24. All the other brothers and sisters of Sebastian could stay in school for a much longer period than Sebastian. One brother and one sister younger to Sebastian are also married now. At the time of his sister's marriage, a large dowry of Rs.9,000 was given in cash and gold. Later, when Sebastian's brother's marriage was fixed, he brought a much larger dowry of Rs.13,000 in cash and gold.

My husband's work

As I have told you, Sebastian started working at a very early age. When we got married, he was going out to sea with his father as well as with other fishermen. He was working hard to contribute as much as possible for the maintenance of his family. But his heart was in the mechanized boat. People who worked for mechanized boats made more money even though the period of peak activity was very short and concentrated. Luckily for him, quite a few of his relations had already got mechanized boats of their own. So Sebastian switched over as a deck hand for mechanized boats.

Constructing our own brick house

After I got married, I lived with him at his parents' residence for a period of six years. His parents stayed close to the old lighthouse where country crafts used to land their catch. This is also where the valloms are still berthed when not in use and men got together to dry out nets or repair them in the evenings. Though all valloms look alike, people have their ways of identifying them. With more and more people switching over to mechanized crafts which land their catch at the jetty, this old centre is looking more and more deserted.

The dowry money I brought with me was used by Sebastian to buy 13 cents of land not far from where his parents were living. We started saving money so that one day we could put up a house on this land. Investment in a mechanized boat of our own appeared to be beyond our reach. So we thought in terms of a house of our own.

Working as a deck hand, he made forty to fifty rupees a day during the three months of peak activity. All deck hands do that but the general tendency is to spend it very largely in drinking and other wasteful ways so that in periods of lean activity they are generally reduced to a hand to mouth existence. Only the few more thoughtful ones who can think of the future for themselves try to plan some proper use of the income. Already many households had changed their huts into brick houses.

In our village, the type of house you live in determines your status now. No longer does everybody stay in thatched huts. Many people had already built nice large brick houses. Once we had enough funds to start construction work we went to a local building contractor and got a plan drawn. The estimate was that the house alone would cost us Rs.16,500. Sebastian mortgaged our land for Rs.9,000. We calculated that we had access to Rs.2,500 to start with and that the balance would be possible to raise from the chitties we were subscribing for. Actually, the total cost came to Rs.17,500. Sebastian kept a detailed account of all the expenses. Over and above that we spent Rs.8,000 on electrical wiring, painting and furniture. Also, the house-warming ceremony would involve a sizeable amount, the only thing we could not go in for was piped water and built-in-toilets.

House warming and Pollu

On the completion of our house, it is the practice in our village to invite all friends and relatives for a house warming party. At this party, each guest brings in a cash contribution towards the house according to his economic capacity. It is recorded in a proper

way by the recipient family. These contributions, together add up to a substantial sum so that the recipient family is able to repay the debts incurred by it during construction. Repayment of contributions received in Pollu has got to be made in due course along with interest. In addition, one makes a small gift. There are no legal bindings. The social sanction against default is so strong that default is simply unheard of. You keep repaying as the occasion arises. In case the giver has already built a house, then one can repay during a wedding in his or her family. There are enough occasions to settle these transactions. When we gave the house warming party, we received some Rs.30,000 in pollu contributions. Sebastian's brother set down and noted down all the contributions in two notebooks that we have kept very safely. I shall be very glad to show you the register. We could not only clear all the debts straightaway but also have some surplus. We bought a cow with the amount left with us.

Our new house

We moved into our new house sometime in 1978. It is, as you can see, made of kiln fired bricks. We get these bricks from a kiln located about 3-4 kilometres from here, where bricks are baked in the traditional manner. I doubt if, barring a couple of very rich families in our village, anyone has built his house with wire-cut bricks. They are no doubt sturdier and better shaped by at the same time much more expensive. We used cement mortar. Cement was not in such short supply as at present. Now, the same house

would have cost us a lot more because we could have had to buy cement in the black market. You can never get the allotment on time, however much you run around for it. We tried to economise on other costs as well. By going in for jalli walls, i.e., walls with holes spread out as in lattice work, we could dispense with windows. We opted for a red oxide cement flooring instead of mosaic flooring because the former is far less expensive. The item we did not economise on is the door at the entrance. We had to have a solid wooden door with a proper built-in-lock. Also we got a neon light fixed in our living room, but the other rooms, including the kitchen, have only ordinary electric bulbs. I am quite fond of my kitchen. It has a platform for cooking and proper cupboards to store things. As you can see, I have almost all the local gadgets that one needs in a traditional Kerala kitchen for steaming, pounding and grinding activities. There are two things we still do not have in our house. One is a water connection and the other toilet facilities. Sebastian and I discussed a lot how we should build the house. In the course of its construction, I was probably around more often than Sebastian because he had to go away whenever the boat he worked for was out at sea. Of course, as is the case with everyone in the village, new constructions or major repairs are not taken up in the peak fishing season both because one has to be away at work and also because that is when it rains most.

The family

We live in the house just by ourselves, i.e., my husband and myself with our three children, two girls and one boy. My first child

was a boy, Alphonso, who is ten years old now. He is studying in the fourth class. My second child was a girl, Anne. She is eight years old now. She is now studying in the third standard. The youngest one, also a girl, is four years old now and goes to a small nursery in the village where the children play and learn.

I was expecting my first child within one year of our marriage. I was just about 18 years old and staying with my in-laws. I came down with a severe attack of jaundice. This is a common problem here now. The general sanitation in our village has become worse over the years with the expansion in activities related to prawns. Prawn peeling sheds are spread all over the village with the result that you see hills of peels rotting everywhere. Prawn peels decompose into manure for which there is a good demand from farmers. As a result, however, there is a great deal of flies all through the year. Even if you keep the house absolutely clean, the chances of your getting exposed to infections are very high. I went away to my mother's house when I was five months pregnant at her urging. Since jaundice had made me rather weak, my mother wanted me to go to a private nursing home for delivery even if it meant expense. Already, there were several private nursing homes in Sakthikulangara, in addition to the two Government-run hospitals. I stayed in the nursing home for a week and then returned to the care of my mother. Ordinarily, she would have put me on Ayurvedic tonics, but since I had had jaundice we decided to stick to just allopathic medicines. We took the child for baptism only after he was three months old. Earlier, the practice was that the child was taken for baptism within the first ten days, but now this rule has been relaxed. We can take the child

for baptism any time before it is six months old. I breast-fed the child until I was expecting again after about fifteen months. For my second delivery also I went to the same nursing home. Between my second and third children, the interval was four years. I delivered my third child also in the nursing home. Since I never felt well during the course of my pregnancies, I did not want to continue having children. With three children already, two daughters and one son, the time had come, I felt, to undergo sterilization. Everyone in the village knows now that there are ways of limiting the family size. The radio and the movie houses carry this message. Moreover, the auxiliary midwife comes often on her rounds and was encouraging me to talk to Sebastian and have the operation performed. Sebastian was initially reluctant on the ground that the operation might disable me permanently, but he agreed when I told him that his fears were unjustified. It was not a new thing in my family, since my sister had gone in for sterilization after her fifth child. After our third child was six months old and when my periods started I went to the Quilon Government Hospital for my operation. I have had no complications after that and am at peace with myself.

Having a small family with all the three children in school, I have plenty of time. Housekeeping has been made easy with a well constructed house. So I have started recently going with my sister to the boatyard to either operate as a commission agent or peel prawns for wages.

Brother's good fortune

Since my mother is going to retire soon, she may help me with taking care of the children. I do not think she will want to join us in business. She stays close to me, with my only brother Gilbert. He started his career as a commission agent and is now an auctioneer. He and a friend of his raised a loan with a local bank and have bought 36' trawler boat. He has also put up a modern brick house of his own. Now he owns his home and has a share in the mechanised boat. We are happy that Gilbert is doing well and is taking care of my mother well. Sebastian, my husband, is now working on Gilbert's boat.

Looking ahead

There is no doubt that we all had a good start because my mother had a steady job. Sebastian has been very hard working and as a deck hand makes more than what is enough for our basic necessities. I am sure he would now like to go in for his own boat. Maybe we can mortgage our land and raise the money. Once we get a mechanized boat and do better, we can think of sending our children to a better school. Not only are English medium schools much better, but also sending children there gives the family a higher status. Also, children not only learn to speak English better, but have a distinct advantage over other educated children in the village. These are our two major ambitions in life.

Puthenthura

Case Study - A

RAMANI

The net maker

We live, as you can see, very close to the sea shore in Puthenthura. The sea is just a few minutes' walk from our hut. The open air stage in front of our hut was built by a local group for the villagers to stage plays on festive occasions. We have been living here for the last twenty-five years and have grown to like the location of our hut. That is why we did not apply for the allotment of one of the new brick houses put up by the Government on the East Side. We are hoping that the Government will allot to us some ten cents of land right here where we are squatting. After a hundred families have moved out from this West Side, it has considerably eased the congestions and we have started liking it here even better.

Present occupants of the hut

In this small hut, my 61 year old husband Raman, and I live with our second unmarried son Dharm who is twenty years old. Our older son who is married lives separately with his wife in the adjacent hut. Though Raman is virtually illiterate, having been at school only for two years, he is still called 'Asan' by every one in this village. 'Asan' in Malayalam means teacher. He is referred to as such because he is not only a good fisherman but also one who is always ready to share his knowledge of the sea and the movements of the fish shoals with others. He is so very adept at fishing that

he seldom comes back without fish when he is at sea. So every one, young or old, asks him when and where to go fishing. Our hut has been the meeting place for young fishermen. This in a way is of great help as we can mobilise a crew at a short notice.

Being Raman's wife, they call me Asati. I have been at school longer than Raman and I have studied until the 5th Standard. So I can read and write well. I was particularly good at maths and even now I often help Asan with his calculations. After our craft comes back from the sea, the auction proceeds from the day's catch are shared by all the crew members in our verandah. I am always around to help them out with their arithmetic.

Raman's work

Though Raman is now sixty one years old, he is still quite active. He takes out his craft, a Thanguvallom, to sea on as many days as he can. In this village, two kinds of crafts are mostly used. Thanguvallom, a large plank built boat and Kochuvallom, a smaller boat. The Thanguvallom is a 40 feet long canoe. It is built of planks. The planks are tied together with coir ropes which pass through various holes made for the purpose in the planks and then nailed together with copper nails so that they don't rust. The holes and joints are filled in with substances that do not dissolve in water. Thanguvallom takes a crew of nine to eleven persons and operates a type of local purse seine net called thanguvala. Ordinarily, Thanguvallom is operated from the middle of July to the end of September. Since we do not own a Kochuvallom, Raman takes the Thanguvallom practically all through the year except during the months when it is

utterly dangerous to go out to sea. Kochuvallom is a smaller but more versatile crafts which needs a crew of ~~four~~ to five persons. So far we have never owned one.

Raman has a regular crew of nine young men. This includes our older son and a few relatives. Though we own only one net, it is quite a versatile type capable of hauling all kinds of fish. The cost of a new net is some 15,000 rupees. It is made of white nylon twine. Most of the men who work for us belong to this village and are related to us either through blood or marriage. Raman usually goes out in the morning and spends some six hours fishing. It takes them approximately between an hour to an hour-and-a-half to reach the fishing grounds. They have to reach a certain depth before they can spot the shoals. Coming back to the shore takes usually less time. The catch is auctioned off as soon as it is landed and is paid for in cash on the spot. Raman and his men sit down in our verandah to distribute the cash. We get two out of eleven shares, one for our craft and one for Raman as a crew member. The nine crew members, including Gyan, gets one share each.

Engine for a traditional craft

Recently a well known engineering company, which manufactures marine engines of the Japanese design offered to fit an out-board engine temporarily to our craft to demonstrate how a traditional craft itself can be mechanized. Raman is quite impressed with the engine because the craft can make a trip faster involving

less of physical strain though the size of the crew remains the same. The use of the engine will mean that the crew will have more time and energy to fish. The use of engine does reduce the life of the boat because of the vibration and increases the maintenance cost. If we can raise a bank loan, we intend to buy the engine. As you know, the banks give loans to fishermen on concessional terms. The local agent of the manufacturing company is confident that our local bank will give us the loan for buying the engine.

Sending a son to Gulf

We could have raised funds for this engine from other sources as well if we were not already in debt. Your younger son, Sharm, has been very keen on going to the Gulf. Twenty years old, he has finished ten years of his schooling. He appeared twice for the school leaving certificate examination, but could not make it. English language was his weak point. This is the case with most of the children here. We were hoping that we would send him to college. Since going to college was out of question, he went on to a technical training school for a diploma course in fibre moulding. This school run by the Government was located some twenty kilometres away from our village. That is how we could manage to change his profession. We are fed up with this uncertain and hand-to-mouth existence. I would like my children at least to have a steady income. I don't care if they have to give up fishing. After finishing

the course, Dharm could have gone for a more advanced course in Madras, but before we could decide on that we met an agent from Quilon who came looking for young men willing to go to the Gulf. In recent years, quite a few young men from our own village have gone to the Gulf. I know all of their names. They are the talk of the village because their families have become suddenly rich. I never thought that either of our sons will make it to the Gulf. When the agent from Quilon suggested that Dharm would make it if we raised the necessary money, I jumped at the idea. The agent felt that with his education and technical training he will get for Dharm a contract as part of a group of some fifty men required by an Italian furniture making firm in Abu Dhabi. According to this agent 20 out of 50 persons enrolled for this contract are from Kerala State.

His job will carry a pay of Rs.2,000 plus board and lodging. Usually people going to Gulf can send back more than two-thirds of the cash salary for which they are hired there. So the debt one incurs to send young men to the Gulf is possible to clear within 16 to 18 months. Then one can think in terms of improvements in one's working and living condition.

Raising the money

The first thing to do however was to raise the sum of Rs.13,000. This would cover not only the premium payable to the agency for arranging the job and immigration clearance (normally we refer to as the getting of NOC, i.e., no-objection-certificate),

and the one-way air ticket which alone costs Rs.3,442. Immediately, I offered to give away whatever gold I had accumulated over the years from my earnings from net making. Savings from fishing get always used up in replacing the craft and net, though, over the years, our craft and equipment both have become not only better, but more expensive. The nylon net, Raman uses is quite expensive. Also, his Thanguvallon is only two years old. But then there was no question of selling or mortgaging our craft and gear. By pooling together my gold and my daughter-in-law's I could raise Rs.4,500. For the rest of the money, I had to go around and ask all our friends and relatives to give cash or a gold bangle or two to be pledged for cash on the clear understanding that each of them would be paid back in as soon as the son starts sending money from the Gulf. The money was not difficult to raise. People in the village are now used to contributing their might for this purpose. I do not know of a single case in our village where money thus raised has not been paid back. We have deposited the full amount with the agent. Dharm has already received his passport and is now waiting to be called any day.

We are keeping our fingers crossed. We hope very much that once Dharm makes it, he will work out some way of getting his elder brother, Gyan, also to the Gulf.

My childless daughter-in-law

Gyan is now thirty-four years old. He has been to school

for nine years. Thereafter, he joined his father's crew. When he was twenty-five, we got him married. We got a dowry of Rs.1,000 and 70 grams of gold equal to Rs.1,400 in cash in all. We used the cash to make a payment of the new craft that we were negotiating for. In fact I asked my daughter-in-law to give also part of her gold jewellery. This was one of the causes of misunderstanding between us. We have not been able to return her cash and gold so far. Recently, when she saw that we needed money for Dharm, she went and left with her mother whatever gold jewellery she had. Of course, apart from this the main cause for misunderstanding between my daughter-in-law and myself also lies on another score. I have been urging my son to send his wife away because she has not borne him any child in ten years. We have taken her for treatment to all types of doctors and hospitals. Thrice she has undergone curetage. Even my son has been tested for his virility (sperm count). He has been found all right. Evidently something is terribly wrong with her. But my son does not agree that we should send his wife back to her parents. Instead, they are looking for a child to be adopted. I do not like that idea but I cannot force my ideas on him beyond a point.

Daughter-in-law sets up a separate house

For the first eight years, my son and his wife were staying with us in this hut. My daughter-in-law would do all the kitchen work and I could make the nets. Then once we had a big row and I gave her a couple of slaps. She was in her periods, according to us in a polluted state, and absent-mindedly touched certain things.

May be, I over did it but she was getting on my nerves too much. In spite of her being childless, she was lazy and complaining. Also I was never very happy with the way she was doing her domestic chores. One day this break had to happen. Moreover, she wanted Gyan to give her his share of the money. Then they decided to move away. Gyan with the help of his father erected a small hut close to ours. I see very little of my daughter-in-law these days; we are still not on talking terms.

My own work

I have all along been working after I got married and went to Raman's village to live with him. I would defibre coir husks and make cotton nets. In the forties the use of nylon threads had not appeared on the scene and nets were made only with cotton threads. But ever since we moved to Muthenthura I have been engaged in making nylon trawl nets and try to keep the money for special purposes. Sometimes I buy a little gold item now and then. There are two net dealers in our village. Both of them deal in trawl nets. They buy nylon twine in bulk and farm it out in small lots to the women working for them. I work for the dealer who has some sixty to seventy women, young and old, from our village, working for him. These are all women who, for one reason or other, have to stay at home. The dealer keeps getting orders all the time for trawl nets. Each mechanised boat has at least two trawl nets and they were out in a short while. So there is always demand for it.

I collect the twine from the net dealer's house. His wife will be there always. Indeed, she is the one who weighs the twine and keeps an account of it. When we return the knitted sections to her, she weighs them again. One gets paid for knitting on the basis of weight, little though such payment is compared to what one can earn in jobs outside one's house.

She also gives instructions regarding the sections of the net to be knitted. I do all my knitting in our verandah. I know for each portion of the net the mesh size and the number of knots that are necessary to start with and then taper off. There are sever distinct parts of the trawl net. To assemble each part, one has to do several sections. For instance, to do the main face, you need four panels, each starting with 400 meshes and ending up with 300.

Time disposition

I get up around 5 o'clock in the morning. It has become a habit over the years. Even if I want to sleep longer, I cannot. The first thing I do is to brush my teeth and have a wash. I have a nice enclosed area on the back of my house where I can have a wash and then I go to the sea-side tea shop. There are twelve shops but I go to the one very close to the sea shore run by a woman. Once I get back home I clean the front yard and say my prayers. By then it is clear day light. So I sit down for net making. Around 9 a.m. I make some breakfast. Usually, this is left over rice and

gruel from previous night. Then I must take a break and do my shopping. My morning shopping consists of firewood and spices. There are two fuel shops and six grocery shops in the village. There are, in addition to the two ration shops, some twelve women who sell just rice. We need to buy extra rice because the ration quota is never adequate. I, however, buy all the rice, sugar and kerosene I am entitled to in our ration card from the ration shop to which we are assigned. I cook rice only once for both the meals. I make a fish curry every day. Sometimes, I also make a coconut chutney. Grinding spices for the fish curry is the main chore. Raman and Dharm eat their meals at home but separately. It is only for the evening meal that we are always together. In the afternoon, first I feed both the men and then have my own meal. The vessels have to be washed and left over rice and gruel stored away for the evening. In the afternoon, I take a little break before getting back to net making. In between work, when I feel like taking tea, I go to the tea shop. A little before dusk by around 6.30 p.m. in the afternoon, I clean the prayer room and sweep the yard. The two brass lamps have to be scrubbed and cleaned every day before they are lighted for evening prayers. After this, I can put in some more work in the evenings because Raman spends an hour or two at the toddy shop. All told, I am able to devote six to eight hours a day to net making, but I seldom make more than four rupees a day. Of course, we do not get paid on a daily basis.

I am now used to Raman's drinking. I have learnt to take these things in my stride the hard way. When I was young, I would protest strongly and get beaten up in the process. His drinking was the only matter on which there used to be a problem between him and myself. Otherwise, he was always ready to leave quite a lot of matter for me to handle. I am therefore very deeply involved in matters connected with his work. As I have told you already, I help Raman with accounts and other matters connected with fishing. His crew members and others who have dealings with him, have however got used to my involvement.

Early background

I was born and bred in this very village. So were both my parents. My mother, who lived till the ripe age of eighty, died only recently. My father owned two crafts, the big and the small one, and the nets to go with it while my mother was a midwife. She made some money by attending on women's deliveries. For every delivery she attended she would get a new set of clothes and some cash depending on the household and the sex of the child.

My parents had eight children in all. Of these, two, both female, died in infancy. Of the six surviving children, four were boys and two girls. Except for my younger sister Radha who is married outside the village, the rest of us live in Puthenthura. All of us were sent to school for some years. My youngest brother studied up till the tenth standard. He is the only one working on a mechanized craft. He goes to the neighbouring village of Shakthikulangara

on most days. When it is off season then he travels to the northern parts of the State, going as far as Cannanore with the boat. Then he has to stay away from home for several days at a stretch. My other three brothers are engaged in traditional fishing, each owning his own craft and gear and living separately with his own family in this very village.

My marriage

I was married in 1947 at the age of 22 to Raman from the neighbouring village of Kureepuzha. Raman was 28 years old. Our families knew each other, being distantly related. They came to ask for me and once the arrangement was agreed upon, we got married. The Araya priest conducted the ceremony. Raman's people gave me a new set of clothes. I had to change into those clothes before departing for their house. There was no exchange of dowry. Kureepuzha was a village where coir defibring and spinning were one of the mainstays of the people. When I went there, I too started defibring husks. Raman's parents had five surviving children. Two had died, one male and one female. Raman was their second of the surviving sons. His father had a share in a Thanguvallon along with six others, but a Kochuvallon he owned all by himself. We stayed there with them for four years. Raman worked for his father at that time. In the fifth year, we moved to another village where Raman bought a piece of land.

Children

Of the five children I gave birth to, only two, both sons, have survived. The other three were girls. I was expecting my first

child within a year. I came away to Puthenthura to my parents when I was five months pregnant, according to the custom amongst us. My mother and other relatives helped me with my confinement. The baby, a boy, was delivered at home and I was taken care of in the traditional way. This meant having hot water bath after oil massage and taking herbal tonics. My parents, particularly my father, were strong believers in the Ayurvedic tradition. Most people in the village know the recipes and can often make them at home. There are other medicines that you have to buy from Ayurvedic medicine shops. I went back to Raman's village only when the child was three months. Most Araya parents try to keep the couple apart for some time before and after child birth. The practice is wearing out as these days when girls go to hospitals for delivery they don't spend much time with their own parents. Very often girls married to boys of Puthenthura don't even go back. It is not good for their health, to be together so soon after child birth. I did not get the boy vaccinated. Instead I just kept giving him a herbal mixture which was supposed to protect him from all virus infections. The child was breastfed for three years until I was expecting my second child. My second child was a girl. The girl was growing up nicely. When she was five years she was drowned in the backwaters. In between, I had another child, again female. She lived for two and a half years only and died after an intestinal infection. My fourth child again was a girl who lived for only one year. She had developed a breathing problem and she died before we could get her

to hospital. Losing three children withⁱⁿ a period of three years or so was a big shock to us. I was feeling very depressed. Rightly or wrongly, I did not feel like staying any more in Kureepuzha. I wanted to go back to Puthenthura. Raman agreed to the move for my sake, but only on an experimental basis. At that time, Puthenthura was more advanced than Kureepuzha thanks largely to the Project. The Project hospital was situated next door. Also, the villagers were given easy access to safe drinking water. Not that Raman was worried about making good as a fisherman, because he was already an expert in traditional fishing, but there is always uncertainty about moving to a new place of work, away from your own friends and relations. Anyway, the move to Puthenthura proved to be permanent.

In Puthenthura, I felt more secure. I was now close to my parents. But having been left just with one son, was a source of constant anxiety and my anxiety became greater and greater with the passage of time as I did not conceive again. So I was advised to undertake weekly fasts and I made rounds of various temples. I conceived Dharm, my second son, after a five year interval. This was in 1960. My mother was still living, but she had become too old to help me deliver at home. So, unlike for the first four deliveries, it was decided that I should go to the Project hospital, which was located just next door to where we had put up our hut. The hospital staff insisted on vaccinating the baby. So my second son has gone through the whole course. I breastfed all my children,

but I fed the last one for five years because I did not conceive thereafter. In 1965, my uterus had to be removed because of some complications.

Looking ahead

Looking back, I feel we have worked very hard and tried our best to bring up the two boys to the best of our abilities. I myself have not wasted a single day in my life. All the money that I got from making nets, little though it was always, went towards educating the boys. True, I have used up part of the dowry brought by my daughter-in-law, but I am not at all ashamed on that score. We used it for the good of the family, and that includes her as well.

The people in the village feel I am lucky since I have sons only, but I am not so sure of that. In old age, a daughter can be of great r help. A son, however nice and obedient, will never help you with the household chores. And unless you are very lucky, it is hard to get loyalty and affection from a daughter-in-law. She is always wanting to sow the seeds of separation between a mother and her son. I believe if a joint family has to survive, a daughter-in-law must be kept in firm control. We have become too lenient these days.

Ideally, if both of our sons can go on jobs to the Gulf, we should be able to build a good house. Also, we could build up enough savings to take care of our old age. My younger son has promised that he will not let us down. I am not so sure of the elder son. He is good, but his wife can prevail on him to do things differently. All the same, we have to be concerned about him as much as about our unmarried son.

Puthenthura
Case Study - B

SARLA

The Chit Fund Operator

I was born on the neighbouring fishing village of Chirayinkil in 1946. Though both my parents are living, they are separated. My mother lives with my younger brother very close to where I live now in Puthenthura, whereas my father continues to live, as always, with his second wife and their children in Chirayinkil. My mother who has been in indifferent health practically all her life, is still working. She works as a part-time sweeper in a sea food exporting firm in the neighbouring village of Neendakara on a monthly salary of Rs.35. It is a small amount no doubt, but she gets it regularly, month after month, and that means a lot to us, poor people.

Early separation of my parents

When my mother was around sixteen years of age, her father got her married into a family that was reasonably well off and well known to him. It was nearly an alliance between the two Araya families. One had land and money and the other, that is, my mother's family, was better educated and known for Sanskrit learning and knowledge of Ayurvedic medicine. Dowry was there even then, but not as large as it is now-a-days. She was given a sum of Rs.300 as dowry in cash. Her wedding was performed by the Araya Service Organization.

Although my mother had been to school for 4-5 years, she was neither healthy nor good looking. It appears that right from the very start she did not hit off with either my father's parents, especially his mother, or my father himself. On top of that, the first two children born to her were female. The first one was a still-born and the second, born within one year of the first, was myself. The story is that when after her second delivery at her parents' house, my mother returned to my father's house along with me as an infant, she found herself most unwelcome. My father's people spread the word that an astrologer had predicted that my mother would bear him only seven daughters and no son. They felt that this would amount to a total disaster for the household. They would not only have to find seven bridegrooms, but also mobilise seven dowries. So they wanted my mother to leave their house with her child so that my father could marry another woman. My mother refused to oblige however without a proper settlement which took time to work out. She had a tough time there, having to stay put in a completely hostile environment day after day, but she stuck to her guns.

The settlement between my parents

Since this marriage has been registered with the local caste service association, the Araya Samiti, the dispute between my parents had to go to the association. A settlement was reached whereby my father was made to repay the dowry money, raise and educate me till the age of 16 and then get me married and pay my mother a sum of Rs.7

every month towards her maintenance. By the time all this was sorted out, I had reached the age of five.

My bringing up

I grew up with my father and step mother thereafter. My mother, who had moved back to her parents' house, would come to see me occasionally and take me with her during summer breaks from schools. I stayed in school till I reached the ninth standard. The school was a good one hour's walk from where we lived. But my step mother always wanted me to complete all the house work she had assigned to be before leaving for school. This meant drawing water from the well, cleaning the yard and the house, washing up my step brothers and sisters. My step mother never quite liked the idea of my going to school. She was always asking my father to keep me back so that I could help her. However, better sense prevailed and since I was so keen on going to school, my father allowed me to continue. I enjoyed school though it meant walking long distances. I had my girl friends and also it was a respite from home. When I completed my ninth standard, I felt I had enough of my step mother. I decided to move with my mother who was by then living with her little son born to her outside of wedlock in Puthenthura.

My mother's affair and pregnancy

Though my mother was staying with her brothers in Chirayinkil, she used to travel to Puthenthura to visit her elder sister who was living there with her husband and their children. She earned her keep by defibring coir husks. She had kept the dowry money that was

returned by my father with her brother to be re-invested as a loan so that it could earn her son interest. With the passage of years, there arose some misunderstanding between brother and sister about the money he was keeping for her. In this matter, my mother's sister's husband played quite a role. I think this was his way of gaining my mother's confidence and getting closer to her. This resulted in a relationship between the two and ended up in my mother conceiving from him. That came as a great shock to every one including her own sister. I was around thirteen years of age then and could understand what had happened. The two sisters had a big quarrel and my mother was thrown out of their house. She decided to put up a thatched hut in Puthenthura itself with the help of some village men. She also started looking out for work there. This was some time in 1958. With the introduction of mechanized boats under the I.N.P., trawling for prawns had already started paying dividends. My mother found work as a peeler with a prawn exporting firm. But she had to commute to the next village. She had to go to the 3 KM distance walking. Also, under the Into-Norwegian Project, a medical unit had been set up in Puthenthura. My mother's hut was next door to this small hospital. Luckily having a child, without the help of relatives and at such a late age did not pose a big problem for my mother. The new hospital next door, though small, was well equipped. It was specially geared to look after the needs of women and children. She had her confinement there. I now had a brother who was thirteen years younger to me. Though I felt somewhat embarrassed about it in the beginning, I still felt drawn to my own mother's child than to my step-mother's children. My mother had to resume working soon after

her delivery and needed my help. I decided therefore to give up my studies and move with her to Puthenthura. Though my father was not quite happy about it, I think my step-mother persuaded him not to come in my way.

My marriage to Soman

After I moved to Puthenthura with my mother, my main pre-occupation was to look after my kid brother and attend to the household chores, while my mother was away at work. Thus, I stayed mostly at home, keeping fully occupied with domestic chores. Soman, a young coolie fisherman of the same village working on a traditional craft, would often pass by our hut on his way to the sea coast. He had lost his father when he was around twelve years old. His father had some serious throat infection and was sick for six months. They had to spend quite a lot of money on his treatment. Soman stayed in school only for three years and ever since then has been helping his family. Once his father died, his responsibilities increased. There were three older sisters who had to be married off. They sold off their seven cents of land and got the girls married in the neighbouring fishing villages and moved to squat on Government land. They also had to borrow money so his mother was steeped in debt. Her hope was that Soman's wife would bring a good dowry so that she could pay up part, if not all, of her debt. However, as time passed, I and Soman got to know each other and developed an attachment. We both started toying with the idea of getting married to each other. My mother had noticed the development of our relationship and was not opposed to the idea of our getting married. People were talking about our interest

in each other and the gossip reached my father. But when my father heard about it, he stoutly rejected it saying, 'I haven't brought up this girl to marry an illiterate coolie fisherman.' He came personally and threatened Soman that if he saw me any more he would face grave consequences. At this turn of events, I was so severely dejected that one day I decided to end my life and threw myself into the sea, but I was pulled out in time by some men around, who were suspicious of my movements. That is when my mother made up her mind to go ahead and get me married to Soman without loss of time. At a simple Kerala style wedding ceremony, Soman gave me a new set of clothes and we were married. My father must have felt great anger at the news of our marriage but the only way he showed his displeasure was not to look me up ever since then. Nor have I tried to make contact with him and his family.

Our children

We have been married for 16 years now. We have five children, three girls and two boys. I went to the project hospital nearly for all my confinements. Very good care is taken there, before and after delivery, of the mother as well as children. I wanted to go in for sterilization after my third child when I got a son, but both my mother and Soman would not hear of it. Several of my friends and neighbours had gone in for it already and there were not many who complained about the after effects of the operation. Somehow both Soman and my mother feared that I would become a permanent invalid as a result. Using alternative methods of family planning never even cropped up. No one in my knowledge in the village even considers them

seriously though doctors and nurses in the hospital do talk about them often.

Whenever, I complained about the size of the family, my mother would console me that she was always there to render her services. It is true that one person I could depend on was her, though an invalid all her life. Soman and Yogi also helped with the children in the sense they did take them out and play with them. Of course the major task of feeding, clothing, cleaning and doing the lessons really fell on me more than any one else. By the time I could persuade them I had two more. I felt I had more than I could really take care of. There were three other women who were also anxious to have their tubes tied and we decided we should go together and we gave each other moral support. Seeing that I was determined, Soman and my mother agreed. The doctors, were more than willing to do it as I had four children and was expecting the fifth. I am glad that I do not have to go through any more pregnancies. I keep so busy that I am waiting even for my young one to start regular school.

All my children are in school except the youngest who is just three years old. I send him to a nursery called Anganwadi, run by Government, where he gets even a mid-day meal. My fourteen year old daughter, the eldest, has reached the ninth standard. The other two children are in the sixth and fifth standard. I plan to keep them in school as long as they show interest. So far, they have been fairly serious, so it might be easier for them to stay on. Until recently the only nearest high school was located at a distance of four kilometres. Children from our village would walk to and from the school

in all seasons. Parents have been particularly reluctant to send grown up girls. Now that we are having a high school in our village, this has made education for our children more accessible. In this respect Shakthikulangara is more fortunately placed because the Church there has all along been taking a lead in establishing schools.

Soman's work

When I got married, Soman was just a coolie fisherman. Being so, Soman made a very modest living. We also had Soman's mother to care for as her health was fast deteriorating. She was in an anaemic condition and when this persisted, passed away in 1968 after only four years of our marriage.

There were days on which Soman made no money whatsoever. Only in season he made good money, say, something like Rs.10 to Rs.15. Since he was not addicted to drink, he would bring back practically all the money he made. But we could barely manage.

I start my chitty business

Soon after I got married, I felt I must work and earn and contribute to the family pool. Since Soman did not own any craft or gear, he had to look for work every day. With his mother heavily indebted, he was obliged to work for the persons who had lent them money. This also meant that he got work only on days when fishermen with crafts needed extra hands to work for them. During the peak seasons for fishing, of course there was no problem of getting work but whatever he got by way of his share was not adequate. During

the lean seasons when the sea was rough things could be difficult. In any case, it appeared that he would never be able to extricate himself from his mother's indebtedness.

I was quite educated, more than most other fisherwomen of my age. Also, I know a little about running a chit fund from my father which is really a mutual saving club. I also had some experience in running a chit fund even at school. Children would get together and pool their money and take turns in buying their basic requirements. I thought of starting a chit fund for women in the village. The idea was that number of women would contribute Rs.2.50 every week so that each member would have saved Rs.100 in ten months. Most women in our village were making a few rupees from weaving nets. In virtually all fishing households here in these villages women are engaged in making nets. The money they earn thus is kept strictly for their own personal use. Men seldom lay claim to it, though they may like to know how much they made. Most men are themselves members of one chitty or the other. That is how they raise funds needed for repairing the craft or replacing the roof or meeting some other major expense. So there was no question of opposition from men to the question of women joining the chitty out of their own earnings. To start with nine women agreed to join my first chitty. I was the tenth member. At the end of every month, I got together these members to decide by auction who would get the amount of Rs.100 they had put together in the chitty. The auction is about the amount a member is willing to surrender in lieu of the right to have the lump sum. The amount surrendered in the first auction was as high as thirty rupees. Each of these nine

women members had to pay only Rs.23 for the month. My commission as an organizer was five per cent of the amount collected every month. In addition, I was actually entitled to take the first month's collection as loan without surrendering any portion thereof on auction. But to start with I let the other members bid for the first month's collection and on occasions I did not require the money I could auction it and the surrender money would belong to me in full. I got five rupees out of this as my remuneration and the balance of twenty-five rupees was to be distributed among the nine members other than the member who took the principal by way of reduced contribution in the month that had just started. The problem was not of keeping accounts but of collecting the money from members. Often, I would have to visit them at home. In time, I found out when each of my member was most likely to have the money to pay up her contribution. I kept the accounts neatly and carefully and read them out to the members at the time of the auction. Within a few months I was approached by other women for membership. So I started a second chitty. After a year or so, some women who, like my mother, went out for peeling of prawns wanted me to have a chitty where they could put in Rs.50 per month for a 20-month period. Though I started this business in a very modest way, with the faith and confidence I was able to build up. I have now a steady income of Rs.80 to Rs. 100 per month. I manage four to five chitties at any one time.

Move the Government housing colony

It was around 1968 that the Kerala State Government decided to construct some 100 houses to the east of the highway passing

through Puthenthura. The houses were meant for fishermen living on the west side squatting on Government land. The houses were to be laid out properly around a back-water canal. They would be made with burnt bricks and cement mortar and have an asbestos roofing. Each house would be independent with an access of its own with drinking water tap within easy reach. Though each house was to cost the Government Rs.8,000, those who would be allotted the house had to pay only Rs.4,000 and that too in instalments of Rs.25 per month. One could get an electric connection by paying some extra money. To be eligible for allotment you would have to show that you did not own any land. Soman applied for one of these houses along with some 20 others from the west side. I had been all along hoping that we would get an allotment and was very happy in moving to the new home in 1978.

The house

The house has, as you can see, has a built in area of 480 sq. ft. with a little open area around it that you can call your own. We have two proper rooms, a kitchen and a verandah. Though the accommodation available to us is infinitely better than what any one had on the west side, people's expectations from the Government were very much higher. You can hear practically every one of us complain that the walls are not cement plastered, that the doors are not good, and the roofing could have been better. I know that the house would then have cost a lot more and I am not sure we would have paid more by way of monthly instalments. In fact, most of us have defaulted on our instalments and very few of us pay any attention to the notices

of outstanding dues that we receive regularly from the Government hoping that one day the Government will agree to write off our dues.

A tea shop for women and children

About one year back, after we moved to our new house, I got the idea of running a small tea shop. I always had some surplus of cash. So I decided to start a small tea shop for women and children and that too to serving morning tea, coffee and snacks. Since quite a few women from our village go to the neighbouring villages for peeling work, they tend to go out for their morning tea and snacks. In ordinary tea shops in this village, there is no separate place for women to sit, so they take their tea and snacks standing. I thought my tea shop will permit them to have their tea and snacks in a much more comfortable way. And I must say that my idea has worked well. Running a tea shop, I must admit, is not considered a very respectable occupation. Since an ordinary tea shop is on a roadside and caters to a wide variety of men, it would be difficult for young women to handle it. You not only have to serve tea but have to make conversation with all and sundry. Since I am running my tea shop for only women and children around here, these problems don't crop up. Since my mother works only part time because of her indifferent health and as she stays so close to our home, she helps me with my tea shop in spite of her indifferent health. For the tea shop I have put next to our kitchen another thatched room. Here I not only store firewood but also do all the pounding and grinding work, require for the snacks, that I cook to have with tea and coffee. I have collected grinding

and pounding stones and built a platform of 3 feet above the ground where all the cooking is done. In our small verandah we have kept a long table and a bench to go with it for use by my customers. My major investment was on the thatched room, furniture and additional cooking utensils. The amount I needed for the purpose added up to Rs.100. The idea was to stretch whatever we had and then slowly buy the other things. My daily profit in the tea shop comes to Rs.6 to Rs.8. You cannot call this profit because I have to put in a lot of hard work. Moreover Yogi and my mother also help me a great deal who only get breakfast as their pay. The main difference between me and women who go out to work for others is that I make the same amount of money working at home.

Time schedule

From the day I started the tea shop, I have to get up before 4 O'clock in the morning. When my mother feels up to it, she comes over to help me with the work that is not so heavy. From the day I started the tea shop, I have to get up before 4 O'clock. I get my breakfast ready. Once the snacks are ready half way, I then get the huge pan of water to boil. Around 5 to 5.30 a.m. both tea and snacks are ready. Then the children have to be woken up and made to have a wash so they can go to school. My mother is of great help to me. Apart from the help in the kitchen, she gets the children ready for school. Also, Soman and my brother are taken care of by her. Of course, they are not there on days when they have gone to sea in the early hours of the morning. My fourteen year old daughter also lends

me her hand but I am keen that she devotes as much as possible of her time to her studies. I want very much that she completes her school well. If she does well, I shall be happy to send her to college. There she may be able to go and then get a steady job or some Government service. But I don't wish to think big. It often ends up in disappointment. At the same I would like her to become something good before she thinks of marriage.

The customers start coming at about 7 O'clock in the morning. I can usually wind up things by 10 O'clock in the morning. Cleaning of the vessels and the place easily takes an hour thereafter. I need another one hour to do the daily washing. Then I keep rice to cook on slow fire and go out to the daily shopping.

Also I have to collect the chitty dues from women who have not yet paid up. I sit down to write up my tea shop accounts before or after lunch depending upon when I get back home from shopping. I take a little nap if there is time. Soman and Yogi take lunch at home. Then it is time for the children to get back from school and they have to be fed and washed. If necessary, I go out for an hour or so to look up my clients or do the shopping that could not be done before noon. Then the brass prayer lamp has to be washed and lit so that we all can say the evening prayer. My mother is there to get the children ready for this. In my house I see if we can have dinner early so that the vessels can be rinsed and we can retire not too late. This can help me get up early enough to start the morning. So, you can see how busy I keep for all my waking hours.

A few items of furniture, the one band radio, and the time piece you see in our house were bought one by one over the years. The amount I can draw from the chitties I run have been very handy whenever we had to incur a major expense. However, the most important item we have been able to buy with the help of the chitties is the vallom, the big traditional craft and its gear known by the name Kambavala, though second hand, it meant a tidy sum which we paid up over a period.

Soman now does not have to go fishing as a coolie. He can hire people now. Yogi, my 24 year old brother, works with Soman on the same craft. If there is one single achievement in our lives that I feel proud about, it is that Soman now owns a craft of his own and that too a Thanguvallom and a Kambavala.

Looking ahead

When I look back at my life you can certainly say that I have come a long way. Though as a child I got a little affection from my parents, still I had access to steady education. This proved to be a great asset. I married the man of my own choice to the great discomfiture of my father with the result that he gave me up altogether. I had very little contact with even my other relatives who virtually deserted my mother after my brother was born after her separation from my father. Times had changed and new opportunities had opened up so that my mother could find some work to eke out an existence.

With an understanding and cooperative husband, I have been able to try out daring ventures and have proved successful. Also,

with access to medical help locally, I could restrain my family size.

It took me time and a lot of persuading, but I succeeded.

Today we are doing reasonably well and I am proud to say that I have also contributed somewhat towards our success.

If I can educate the children and make them economically independent, I would have achieved my life's ambition. I am not particularly worried about our old age. The children are bound to look after us. The important thing is that they should have enough to share it with us.

Puthenthura
Case Study - C

PANKAJAKSHI

a retired home maker

I have been living in Puthenthura for the last thirty years. I moved here from a nearby fishing hamlet some twenty kilometres away with my husband, when I was around twenty two years of age. I am now fifty five and my husband, Velu, is sixty five. We both are from the Araya caste of Hindu fishermen and belonged to the same fishing hamlet known by the name of Chirayarikal.

We are squatting here in Puthenthura on some two cents of private land belonging to a landlord just behind the Government Upper Primary School, very close to the National Highway. We chose this location for putting our hut because of its location. Velu gives private tuitions to school going children. They come to him for help either before or after school. He charges every student two rupees a month. The village people were always very considerate to us in appreciation of his work. They helped us build and replace this thatched hut. The two benches you see outside our hut are given to us by the villagers for use by Velu's students. For about a year now, Velu has cut down the number of students because of his indifferent health. He feels weak and old. As a result, he makes only 10 to 15 rupees a month. Now that he has so much time to while away, he plays cards with villagers and recites poetry for which he has very

good memory. Recently he broke his glasses which was a major set back. He still continues to use this cracked lens while teaching his students.

The household

We are only four people living in the thatched hut. This includes our youngest daughter Jalaja, and son, Gyan. Of the two rooms, 6' X each in the hut, Velu and Gyan use one and Jalaja and I myself use the other. Our room is next to the kitchen which too is of the same size as our two other rooms. We can enter our kitchen only from the verandah.

Gyan, our second son is now the principal source of our support. Our first son, Dhyan, lives with his wife at her parents' house as we had some differences. We depend altogether on Gyan's earnings to run the house. He works as a coolie fisherman on a traditional craft. He has been to school for ten years as Velu was particular that this much education he must have. I thought that with this schooling he would be able to find a better regular job, but it hasn't worked out that way. Velu still makes a little money giving tuitions but that money is just enough to take care of our very personal expenses. Velu can have his tea at the tea shop and buy some beedies to smoke. I like to chew pan and buy a few odds and ends, so at least we do not have to ask our son for these very basic needs. Jalaja, has not yet started going out for work. She had such an unhappy experience, having been sent away within one month after we got her married that Velu and I do not have the heart to

push her into anything. Before her marriage she used to go out to peel prawns. On the days she got work she would easily make five rupees a day. Rather than sending her back to work as a peeler, I would like to find another suitable man for her and resettle her.

Jalaja's marriage break-up

Of our seven children, five are girls. Only the first of these girls was married in the traditional way. The next three girls have chosen Latin Christian men and this has upset Velu and me a great deal. Velu is proud of being an Araya by caste. To him, Arayas, though only fishermen now, are the descendants of the Sun god and next only to the Brahmins. We were very anxious that our last daughter, Jalaja, should be married within caste and in our own village. We both are very fond of her as she is the youngest child in the family and we wanted her to stay close to us. So we arranged the marriage for her to a boy from our neighbourhood. We gave Rs.500 in cash and a pair of golden earrings worth Rs.1,000 in her dowry. Within a month's time, however, she came back to us. Her husband and his family suspect that she was friendly with a married man. I do not believe what they or others in the neighbourhood say against my daughter.

If Jalaja was such a bad girl, they would have found it out before agreeing to the marriage. They belong to the same neighbourhood. Marriage is a sacred thing and it is sad that people take it so lightly and break it on that basis. Anyway we shall put our case before the village Araya Seva Samithi, our caste association. Since

Jalaja's marriage was registered with the Samithi, the boy's party will have to return the dowry money. May be the Samithi people will also put pressure on the boy and his family to take Jalaja back. We have nothing against them. Otherwise, we shall have to look for some other suitable match, but with the blot and so much of gossip going around in the village, it will not be easy to find one even if we promise to give a larger dowry.

My elder daughter

Our first daughter, who got married in caste, has four sons and two daughters. Her husband owns a kochuvallom, smaller of the two traditional boats found in the village, and her older son goes with him on it. My daughter supplements the family earnings by making nets at home with nylon cord supplied by the village dealer. She has now gone in for sterilization operation, though late, as a result of great pressure from the hospital authorities. She had all her children at the Indo-Norwegian Medical Centre Hospital (a Government Hospital). Unfortunately, her last son is mentally retarded. They live in one of the one hundred brick houses built by Government for fishermen in this village.

Our second daughter was also married in caste, but some years after her marriage she developed a relationship with a Christian man, who was working with her in the same peeling shed in Shakthikulangara to work as a peeler. There are no fixed hours of work for these women. When the catch is poor, not all sheds have work to offer. Also, on some days one may get work for just a couple of

hours. On the other hand, when the catch is very good, the peeling sheds ask you to work overnight because peeling cannot be put off for the next day. The families have no way of knowing why their girls have not returned home, on account of work or something else. The men, who have got newly rich over the past ten-twenty years because of the enormous increase in the availability of and business in prawns in this area, would not stop at anything that money can get for them. Our second daughter fell a prey to the lures of one such man. We have no contact with her ever since she went away to him.

Our third and fourth daughters are married to Christian boys and are staying in our own village. It came to us as a great shock when our third daughter, Suprabha, announced that she was getting married to the Christian boy in our neighbourhood. When we tried to persuade her against it on the ground that it will go against her next sister, who too was marriageable, because no one in our caste would then accept her, immediately her finance offered that his brother would marry the younger sister. Thus we were left with no option. Velu has, however, never reconciled to this. At the same time, we have not altogether cut ourselves off from these two daughters. After all we did give our consent to their marriage even though it was, more or less, forced down our throats. Of these two girls, the first has not two daughters and her husband has undergone vasectomy. The second has three sons and she herself has undergone sterilization. The children to these two girls were born in the I.N.M.C. Hospital.

Our early background

Originally, both Velu and I come from the neighbouring village of Chirayarikal, some eight kilometres away from Puthenthura. People consider Puthenthura as an offshoot of Chirayarikal since most families in these two villages are related to each other. This is particularly true of all the Arayas of the two villages.

My father not only owned a kochuvallom and a valiavallom, but also had some 12 cents of land. We were six children, two boys and four girls. All of us were delivered in the house with the help of the village midwife known locally as Padichi. We all were sent to school, but we stayed in school for varying periods depending on our interest in scholastic pursuits. My brother and two sisters went to school only for three to four years. I went to school for ten years and can read and write fluently.

My marriage to Velu

Velu approached my parents and asked for me in marriage without dowry. His problem was that his first wife, a daughter of his mother's brother, had left him. As his mother had died in a smallpox epidemic leaving behind two rather young children, Velu's family needed someone to look after them. Though Velu's father was reasonably well off, being a dry fish merchant and Velu himself was considered well reached having stayed in school for ten years, my parents were rather worried on the score that Velu had been married once before and also that his first wife had left him because he had beaten her badly. Velu's story was that his father had forced him to marry his cousin

whom he never liked. His mother had warned him against marrying the girl because she had known her. He felt he had to be firm with her when he saw her beating his little sister.

When Velu's marriage broke up, his uncle, the girl's father forecast that no woman would ever marry him, not a virgin certainly. Velu took it literally as a challenge. When he asked for my hand, I was only 14 years and had not yet attained puberty. My marriage was arranged after I attained puberty, at the age of fifteen.

Our children

In Velu's house, I became the main housekeeper and had to act as a mother to his brothers and sisters. Having heard how Velu beat up his first wife, I was quite scared. I went to my parents' house for my first confinement. I had a lot of trouble with the delivery, then to make things worse, the child, a girl, got sick. My parents took great care of me. They spent a lot of money in nursing me back to health. Velu did not even bother much about us. I was naturally upset and so were my parents. For three years, therefore, I did not go back to Velu. Then when he had an attack of typhoid, I felt he needed my help to nurse him back to health. So I took the initiative to go and see him. Looking at his condition and the state of his house, I decided to move back to his house with the child.

After our second child, a girl again, Velu decided to enlist as a gang labourer for road construction in Assam. His father was old and his business was not fetching much income. On the other hand, responsibilities and the money needed to run the home was

increasing. Velu would send me money by money order from Assam but no one ever told me about it. Once when I learnt about it from Velu's letter to me, and asked his family, there was a big quarrel. Velu's brother tried to beat me. So I went back to my parents along with my two children. I returned to Velu's house only after he came back from Assam.

Velu got back to fishing and his dry fish business once he came back. We have four more children, two more girls and two boys. I had all of them at home except the last one when my condition was so bad that I went to the I.N.M.C.H. in Puthenthura and delivered my sixth child under their care. Around this time Velu's father passed away. A friend of Velu offered to help Velu secure a steady job as a worker in a Cotton mill in Quilon city. Though Velu had both the crafts and all the nets, having four daughters and no sons made a big difference to his work. Getting labour was a problem and not economical. So Velu decided that he would take up a steady job.

Almost until ten years after our marriage, Velu's family owned both the traditional crafts known as Thanguvallom and Kochuvallom. The big craft carries a crew of 12 to 13 members but it can be used in the month of August, September and October. The smaller one is a more versatile craft which can be used for 250-270 days in a year, if one had the different nets needed in different seasons. You need a large variety of nets as the size of the mesh is important, because in different seasons, the type of fish you can catch varies. Velu's father owned practically all the nets to go with

these two crafts. Velu's family made money not only from fishing but also from dry fish business. Velu's father, his younger brother Bhaskaran and Velu himself were actively involved in all these activities. Velu's father made good profit from dry fish business and they kept the craft and gear in good condition.

Over the years, the business started deteriorating. Velu's father's health was not in good condition and Velu's brother who was married has his family to care for and was no longer available like before. The maintenance of crafts was ignored and could be used less and less. Velu and his brothers decided ultimately to sell off the craft and gear and share the proceeds. From this time onwards, Velu started going as a coolie fisherman on other people's crafts. His brother decided to devote himself fully to dry fish business.

Five years in Quilon

It was around 1962 when Velu's father died that a friend of Velu promised to get him a regular job in a cotton weaving mill in Quilon, he decided to make the move. Velu sold his five cents of land in Chirayinkil and found a house in Quilon on a monthly rent of ten rupees near the mill. The job was good. It fetched him Rs. 120 every month. But it lasted only for four years. Then there was a lock-out followed by a closure. This threw all of us on the streets. This is when I and three of my girls started going to work. Two of them had to stop going to school. We found work in a cashew factory. There are several cashew factories in Quilon

as it is the centre for cashew plantations and processing. Our job was to peel the roasted cashew and then do the sorting and grading. It was a hard job but this fetched us at least a meagre wage and saved us from starvation. Velu started giving tuitions to young school-going children. We stayed in Quilon for one more year and then decided to move to Puthenthura.

Settling down in Puthenthura

We decided to move to Puthenthura for various reasons. It was where our first daughter was living already with her husband and children. It was close to Chirayarikal. Also, quite a few of our other relatives, i.e., other than our daughters, also lived there. Then, there were opportunities for work for myself and my daughters in close neighbourhood to Puthenthura thanks to the manifold expansion in prawn catches in the area. Not the least important consideration which weighed with us was that the fact of living in a village of our own caste would help children grow up better. This would also help Velu get more tuitions. In fact, our decision to put up our hut very close to the village school was influenced by the consideration that the boys could come straight to Velu from school for their tuitions. Here, we were squatting on private property. The few coconut trees around our hut belong to the landlord who has the right to the coconuts and other-waste material from the trees. We were squatting on his land with his permission and he was living in a brick house close to us.

My daily routine as a peeler

When we moved in to Puthenthura, plenty of work was available for women in Neendakara, the neighbouring village. Only 3-4 kilometres away. I and my three girls started working for the peeling shed of a big exporting firm.

I always get up very early in the morning much before dawn and clean the front yard and the kitchen. I would wake up my daughters before taking bath so that they too could start getting ready. After my morning prayers, I would go to the tea shop to bring ready-made tea home for all of us, Velu, Myself and the girls, to share. Then there was the morning meal to attend to because the younger children, two boys and one girl, had to eat before going to school. Also, they would carry some food with them. Around 10.30 a.m. in the morning the daily grocery shopping had to be done. My grown-girls were a great help. They shared all my work with me. They would bring water from the public tap which was just a few yards away from our hut. Also, they would help me in cooking and cleaning. Around one in the afternoon after our lunch we would go together with several other women of this village and go in a group to Neendakara. Different people worked for different peeling sheds. There were nearly 200 to 300 sheds to choose from. It was a three kilometre distance which we would easily commute by walking. On the days when there was too much peeling to be done, and if it got late we would be dropped back in the village in one of the Company's vans.

The quantum of our work depended on the catch. The peak months were the monsoon months of July, August and September. We got

work without break in those months. In fact, for many days we would work over time. Though there were many peeling sheds, quite a few of them temporary ones, that would over time crop up only in season, I and my girls were working only for one shed. However, work even in our shed was not regular in other months. On an average we got work for 200-220 days in a year and the payment we received was on piece rate. The average daily wage worked out to five rupees taking all working days together.

Work descriptions

I and the girls would go straight to the boat jetty belonging to a commission agent. They owned a piece of land near the jetty and had put up a longish tin shed, 30' in length and 15' wide with a proper cement concrete brick house adjacent to it. The shed had an even floor and a drain to the side all around it. The shed and the peeling operations were supervised by the wife and her two sons. The husband had a job with the Government at the port office and so he could not run the business. They also had a general supervisor. All boats landing on their jetty if it belonged to Sakthikulangara, paid them Rs.3 as landing fees. Those that were from the neighbouring districts had to pay Rs.4 for landing their trawlers. Many trawlers migrate here during season. This way the shed owner made every day around Rs.100 just as landing fees. Then comes the auctioning and on the prawns were bought in the auction either by the lady or her sons, coolies charging Re.1 per basket would dump it on the shed floor. The male supervisor would wash and then ice it. One of the ice factories is just close to the jetty itself. During the peak season there

is a great shortage of ice. The prawns have to be used as the trawlers do not carry any ice on their trips. Once it is received, then our work starts. We usually are there waiting from 10 o'clock for the incoming catch. The shed consists of just a table and chair and a huge weighing scale. We all squat on our haunches and peel the prawns. We are paid approximately 15 p. to 30 p. per kilogram. The excess water would drain away through the drain all around the shed. The shed does have many aluminium basins for us to place the peeled meat. Each basin holds around 2 kilograms.

If there is plenty of work we could peel about 50 kilos and get back only around 10 p.m. in the night. If there was no work, had to get back or go to other sheds. The shed would be rented on to others for use. Here, the job varied from just cutting the heads and tails, to remove the shells, or to devein them completely depending upon the requirements. The rates for all the different varieties varied per basin from 15 to 20 paise per kilogram couple of years back. These would then be carried inside the factory for further processing. The methods of processing varied and the shed supervisor, a male, would give us the instructions though by experience we knew what needed to be exactly done.

If the prawns were of big sizes which take about 90-100 a pound, just the head had to be removed, washed and iced. These are big size prawns. These consist of Naran, Kandan, and Kara varieties of prawns. The other small varieties are beheaded first, then the shells peeled off, and the veins removed. We do not have any gadget to do this. Shell particles, vein bits, fibres and other dirt are

removed from the meat by continuous washing with clean water. All this meant sitting on our haunches in wet and damp surroundings from 2 p.m. to 8 p.m. and sometimes much later. We were paid according to the basins we had peeled. We could make on a normal day Rs.7 and on an overtime day Rs.15. What made the work hard was the highly unhygienic surrounding condition and lack of any basic amenities, like toilets and drinking water. We were paid on the meat content, so a bigger variety would give a 60% return and a small one which needed to be deveined gave us only 20 to 30 per cent of meat, but the wage rate was slightly higher.

Present position

Since the last two years, I am not doing anything. Until Dhyan got angry and moved out, the two boys were working and they virtually ran the house. After that we were completely dependent on our unmarried son Gyan. I and Veju spend our time praying at home and going to temples and making nylon nets in our spare time. Both Dhyan and Gyan are virtually bonded to two different craft owners. They both have borrowed over the last few years up to Rs.500 and can go looking for work elsewhere only after they redeem the debt.

We have received Jalaja's dowry money back, but must get her remarried somehow. Until that time it is a great strain on us. We probably now will have to send her out of the village as there is so much of gossip about her here. Now that Dhyan has come back from his wife's house and plans to be with us, may be we can live happily for some time. Our future is what worries us more than anything else.

Neendakara
Case Study - A

KADALAMMA

The boat manager

Everyone at the boat yard in Sakthikulangara calls me Kadalamma. This is the way we refer to the sea. It means the sea mother goddess. After all, it is the sea that nourishes and sustains us. She is like a mother to all of us fisherfolk. We are totally dependent on her bounties for our livelihood. I am called by this name more out of fun. Very often when I am waiting at the boat yard for my husband and sons, I pray loudly imploring the goddess to see that they come back safely with a good catch. It is within every's hearing. I probably articulate the inner feelings of every one. The difference is that they pray silently. The sea mother goddess has always obliged me and I don't mind if people have a little fun at my cost.

You must understand that all of us in these villages have a nick name. It is usually coined on the basis of the most obvious negative aspect of our personality. Also, we need these nick names because the same formal names occur so frequently that some additional identification does help. Among us Latin Catholics, the practice has been to have names that are of Portuguese origin. And our stock of such names is very limited. Names like Napoleon, Sebastian and Jacob occur several times over. The younger generation has now

moved to more Indian names, taken from Hindi movies. All my grand children have such names. It took me a little time to adjust to them but I must confess that these are simpler to pronounce and sweet sounding.

Growing up.

My parents had in all ten children of which only six survived, five boys and one girl. I cannot quite tell you how their four children died. All that I can say is that I do not remember any of my brothers and sisters who were grown up and then lost. None of us went to school. My parents were illiterate and so were we.

I grew up taking care of the housekeeping chores and raising my young brothers from a very young age. There was plenty of work to be done, the hut had to be swept, water brought from the well, vessels washed and cooking done. Then the menfolk had to be fed in turns as all of them would not arrive at the same time. When I was around eight years old, I started defibring coir husks. Sakthikulangara had a sizeable coir defibring activity at that time. Now they have a mechanized defibring unit employing just four to five women. Moreover, the Latin Christians have moved away from this occupation. A few Hindu families only are now involved in this activity. During part of the year, I used to collect shells with a scoop net. These shells would then be sold to a merchant who would have them crushed into lime powder.

My marriage outside our village

I was born in Sakthikulangara, but got married in a family from the neighbouring village of Neendakara. Since both the villages are physically so close and consist largely of Latin Catholic fishing households, there has been a limited amount of inter-marriage. Of course, people from Sakthikulangara always had a little feeling of superiority. Fishing households in Sakthikulangara were owning land business interests and education. Once the Project came up, they moved ahead even faster and the village became prosperous. Because of their relative prosperity, they always preferred the children to marry within their own village. This was one way of keeping the money within the village and checking that the money was not being misused. In recent years, therefore, this tendency for Sakthikulangara parents' to marry their daughters within the village has become even more pronounced.

I did not belong to an affluent fishing household. My father was only a coolie fisherman and my mother a headload fish vendor. Added to it, as a girl, I was free with young men of the village, so I was looked down upon. My parents could not find the right match for me in Sakthikulangara. I was considered immoral as I knew most of the young boys in the village. Ordinarily, grown-up girls do not talk to boys until they are married. My parents came to know of a young man in Neendakara who came from a very poor family. John was never sent to school. Evidently, even feeding him at home was a problem for his parents. He was brought up by the Parish priest.

His job was to carry the tiffin box of the parish priest wherever the priest went in the course of travels within his parish. There would always be something left over after the priest had finished his lunch. That was for John. Then, of course, he lost the job.

At the age of 12, he started going to sea for fishing. He started with the hook and line and soon started using various types of nets. Soon he joined his father and brothers in fishing operations. When I married John, he was considered a good fisherman though still very poor.

Our thirteen children

Within a year of my marriage in 1941, I was expecting my first child. I went back to my mother for my confinement. The child was delivered in the hut and its arrival was announced with the beating on the floor with the fronds of the coconut palm. Three beatings meant the arrival of a male child and ^{one} for the arrival of a female child. I was completely under traditional care, in terms of tonics, massage and bath. The fifth day the child was taken to the Church for baptism. Among the Latin Catholics, no special period of separation is laid down to keep the couple apart.

I am now married for forty years, and have produced thirteen children. All of them are living. The first eight of my children were delivered at home and subsequent five at the Project hospital. Every time I went to the hospital there would be pressure from the nurses and doctors there to persuade me to put an end to my further pregnancies. I was firm and refused to go in for any kind of prote-

ction against pregnancy. I had no problem having children. I was healthy and was prepared to have as many as God had willed for me. We have a large family of eight sons and five daughters. I had my last child when I was 44 years old. After that I had my uterus removed, when the doctors told me that I was going in for complications. I went for my operation to the Benziger Hospital in Quilon town. I breastfed all my children and never had to buy any tinned milk. I nursed all of them. If there was any problem with my milk, I would buy cow's milk and dilute it with water. When the infant was too small, I would soak a piece of cloth and squeeze the milk into the lips for it to suck. I never used any feeding bottle.

My working life

All these forty years I have been married, I have been working for a living. To start with, it was a sheer necessity that I should make my contribution of the family's subsistence expenses. Later, however, as things started improving there was no such great pressure, but I felt restless just sitting at home. To begin with, I sold fish caught in Neendakara itself. Later, I started going to Sakthikulangara. There I had many contacts of my own. Many young men whom I knew as a girl would oblige me and sell me fish at reasonable prices. Other fish vendor women soon became jealous and stories started circulating that my old boy friends were trying to entice me for sexual favours. Naturally, it made John furious. So I decided to give up fish vending altogether.

Instead, I took to collecting shells. This is an occupation normally pursued by young girls. I must confess that soon I got to know the shell merchant rather well. I would not only collect shells myself but also get several young girls to work for me. In this way, I could deal in large quantities and make good income. Again, rumours started spreading and when they reached the shell merchant's wife there was commotion. The parish priest had to intervene. That meant the end of my shell collection.

I tried to go back to fish vending, but it was hard. I did not wish to use my old contacts. No doubt all the men I knew as a girl were now married, but they would, I am sure, still have helped me. However, having burnt my fingers already, I decided not to go to any one of those men for any fish. For quite some years, it was a real struggle making just a couple of rupees after a whole day's hard work vending fish.

Our first break and boat

It was around this time in 1957 when we were really struggling that our first break came. The Norwegians had been around for some time already. After an initial period of experimentation, it was announced by Government that boats would be distributed through the Co-operative Societies. Many fishermen sent in their applications and so did John. One fine day, a card arrived from the Co-operative inviting him for an interview. Receipt of the card, I recall, was itself a matter of great excitement among us. John appeared for the interview and was told by the President of the Co-operative that

on a nominal payment of Rs.5.25 a boat would be handed over to him. John promptly cleared the formalities, which were rather straightforward, and became an owner of a small mechanized boat.

This was a 25' boat with just an 8 horse power diesel engine. He was given training to operate the boat, at the Project boat building yard. John's was one of the 67 boats distributed at that time. The understanding was that 50% of the cost price was to be paid back in easy instalments. Of course, neither John nor the others really tried to pay back. Every one took it as just a routine request which the Government will never quite enforce. John made good use of the boat. He worked very hard determined as he was to make success of the break we had thus got.

Things started really brightening for us only when we purchased our second boat in 1962. This was a secondhand 30' boat, with a 16 horse power diesel operated engine and it was capable of operating a small shrimp trawl net. This brought in very good catches. There were some days when John made Rs.70 to Rs.80, per day in season after meeting all his expenses. It was around this time that the word went round that the 'chakara' season was on in the area around Alleppey and people were hauling the naran variety of prawns. John went off immediately and stayed there two weeks. He came back loaded with money and gifts for the family. I was angry that he had not bought any gold. Our first daughter was grown up and ready to be married off. Shouldn't he have thought of it and brought some gold which we would have to give in her dowry? Immediately, he decided to

go back to fish for some more days. This was when we felt the most prosperous in our life. Not only were we able to marry off our daughter but also we bought ten cents of land in the village. We gave her a dowry of Rs.2,000 and 40 grams of gold worth Rs.540.

I gave up headload fish vending and started going to the boat yard to wait for our boat to return from the sea. As soon as the catch was landed, it had to be auctioned and money recovered, and shared. Though our sons also comprised the crew along with John, sharing had to be done if even one of the crew was not from the family. Since the boat was in the name of John, he got not only his share as crew hand, but also as the boat owner. A boat owner gets sixty per cent and the rest is shared by the crew. I participated fully in the supervision of all transactions involved after the fish was landed by our boat. So John and our sons did not have to worry about them.

Within a few years of his acquiring the second mechanized boat, our first I.N.P. boat had an accident at sea. John was far too adventurous and went to distances few others would dare go, particularly when the weather was rough. We almost gave up hope for him and our sons. Luckily, they were all picked up by the rescue team that went out in their search. But the boat was complete wreck. We sold it off and replaced it with another similar new boat with the help of a bank loan. John gave up fishing thereafter and switched over to trading in fish. Soon he became very good in buying and selling of fish and was able to make a reasonable profit.

Ever since, I have been handling the affairs of the boats. With John completely off work for a few years now, the responsibility of overseeing the business of the family is ultimately on my shoulders.

A working day in my life.

I wake up early, much before sunrise. After a wash, my first job is to go to the boat jetty in Sakthikulangara, get there. But on my way there, I stop by for tea. Being fifty seven years old now, I do not have to worry about where to have tea. Women younger than me have to be more careful and avoid tea shops populated with men. The gill netters go to sea only in the morning before sun rise and return to shore in the afternoon. I am always there before our gill net boat returns to supervise the auction proceeds of the fish at the jetty. By ten O'clock most of the work is over and I go for my breakfast to one of the few tea shops close to the jetty. Then I go back home. The running of the house is now in the charge of my youngest daughter-in-law. Between them they have divided the chores. We take our lunch around noon time. The menfolk eat first and then comes the turn of us women. Again I go to the boat yard in the afternoon also. Our second boat, the trawl netter, comes back from the sea then. Around seven in the evening, all the family members gather to offer prayers to be followed by dinner. Again, men are served first. Then comes the turn of women. I do not take any part in the household chores. My hands are full, looking after the business operations of our two boats. In addition, I participate in buying and selling prawns. I find work at the Jetty quite

exhausting, particularly now that I suffer from high blood pressure. I have to spend quite some money on medicines every month. Haven't they become expensive? When a doctor knows that his patient can afford to buy expensive medicines, he probably prescribes for you only such medicines.

Operating costs

Every trip of the mechanized boat costs about Rs.500. If the boat has to be operated for about 12 hours, we need diesel worth Rs.150. During the peak season which lasts three months every year, I get at least Rs.750 to Rs.1,000 per day. During off season, my income after covering costs is Rs.300.

As I told you, I do not just auction what we get as catch, I do participate in the buying and selling of prawns and fish also.

Originally we had put up one thatched hut on a 5-cent piece of waste land belonging to the Church. John had been supplying fish free to the clerical staff for some years, so they obliged him by not refusing our squatting on Government Peromboke waste land. In order to put up the hut we had to fill up this land with lots of earth to raise its level. For quite some years we stayed in this hut. Only in 1963 after John made some quick money did we think of buying our own piece of land. I calculated that to provide each son a 5-cent plot to build his house, we needed 40 cents of land. So whenever there was a little extra cash on hand that was not needed for our business operation, we would add on to our land. As a result, we own full 40 cents of land. Our present house was comp-

leted in 1964. It has, as you can see, walls made of burnt bricks laid in lime mortar. The roof is wooden, however, being built with coconut and anjili wood. All our doors and windows are made of the same wood.

Our house occupies an area of 23' X 16'. The rooms are 13' high. To the front and back we have 2 verandah. On the south side, which is our back side, we keep all the nets. On the north side we sit down for relaxing and sleep during the dry days. I needed all the space with thirteen children. Now of course eight of my children are married and only five are left. Of these, four are boys and one girl, for whose dowry we must provide for.

About our children

I have, as you know, five daughters and eight sons. My oldest, a boy, is 37 years of age and the youngest, again a boy, is only 13 years old. We sent all our children to school, but none stayed in school long enough to complete the full course. None really took to studying, neither boys nor girls. The longest any one of them has stayed in school is Sebastian, our 12th child. He studied up to ninth standard. I know that some people in the village look down upon us that with all our prosperity we have not educated our children. Other families which have done well have sent their children to colleges where^{as} our children have not completed even their school education. Looking back, I wish we had pushed our children much harder through school, but we had little time for it. Neither of us, John and I

myself had any time to relax. Moreover, I was having a new child practically every 18 months.

Silva, the first son

When Silva, our first son got married to a girl from Sakthikulangara, he got Rs.1,000 as dowry and some 24 grams of gold which was worth Rs.400. They have four children now, 2 boys and 2 girls. The first two were delivered at home. For the third one, my daughter-in-law went to the Mission hospital in Quilon. When she conceived again, they decided to call an end to this business. So we had to take her to the Project hospital for delivery and sterilization. The decision to get sterilized was altogether that of my son and his wife. I did not feel like coming in their way. All their children are going to school now. They live in the same compound but in a separate house. Silva is the driver of our trawler boat. Though the boat is in Silva's name, so also the bank loan, I manage the boat's affairs and handle all the boat's finances. Silva gets his share of the boat's earnings in his capacity of the driver. Silva's wife goes to the jetty and deals in the buying and selling of prawns. She works independently of me and retains whatever money she makes.

Ambrose, the second

Ambrose, the second son, got a slightly higher dowry of Rs.1,500 and 32 grams of gold worth Rs.600. His wife had five children, one of whom died just within seven days. Now she is expecting

again. They too live in a separate hut in the same yard. Ambrose has become a problem son, having become an alcoholic so early in his life. I have to support them financially, but it is worrisome that they cannot manage on their own. How long will his brothers support Ambrose once we are not around? This question has got to be faced by him before it is too late. His wife is not working as her children are still rather young. I have not advised them to go in for sterilization, but looking at Ambrose it would be in their own interest if they do not have any more children. I would than like to take her to the boat yard and initiate her into the business of buying and selling prawns. There is considerable scope for women to make a decent living in this type of work.

Our third and fourth sons

Lazar, our third son, decided to marry on his own. He met the girl when he went with our boat to Alleppey. So there was no exchange of dowry. If I had fixed up his marriage, we would have got a good dowry for him. Though he is not educated as he never went to school, he makes a good crew hand on a mechanized boat. But he did not listen to me. They have three children, two boys and a girl, all delivered in the hospital. She has got herself sterilised, but is not doing any work. She stays with us and looks after the house, but they have a separate hut on this land.

Next to Lazar comes Michael who is the most competent of all our boys in handling the mechanized boats. He wanted to marry a girl he liked when he was just 18 years old. I refused to hear.

anything of that sort. Later, I bargained with the girl's parents and when they agreed to give a dowry of Rs.11,000 and 40 grams of gold worth Rs.2,300. I gave my consent to their marriage. Just when the negotiations were about to be completed, we found out that the girl was already four months pregnant. That would have led to a lot of talk among people in the village. So we withdrew our consent. Immediately, we got Michael married to another girl for the same amount of dowry. They have two children now, one boy and one girl. His wife is not working. They too stay in a separate hut close to us on our land.

After Michael come my daughters Rose and Tracy. Rose did not go to school for more than four or five years. Instead, she would go out with girls of her age in the neighbourhood collecting shells. Also, she helped me in taking care of the house. When she was 17, we got her married to a boy called Lawrence from a neighbouring village Perinad. We gave her Rs.2,000 in cash as dowry. She delivered four children but her last child died just after two days after it was born.

My next daughter Tracy is 28 years old. Although even she did not show much interest in school, I did not allow her to go out collecting shells as soon as we started doing a little better. I got her married at the age of 18 to a boy of 25 years from Sakthikulangara. We gave away Rs.6,000 in cash and 56 grams of gold worth Rs.3,200 as dowry. She has three daughters now. She wants to have a son before stopping to have children. Her husband, though a good boat hand, is very fond of drinking and gambling. Also, he goes to

movies practically every day. So there are far too many quarrels between my daughter and her husband. He is short of money all the time and when she asks him for money to run the house, she gets beaten up. I do help her a little, but not much. He expects a lot more, seeing that we are doing so well in our work.

The sons, Albert and Henry, who came after Tracy work also as boat hands on our own boats. Both of them are now married and living separately, each in a hut of his own. Albert has two children, and Henry has one child. Their wives are not going out to work.

Jacintha, our third daughter, is 28 years old. We got her married rather early, at the age of 16 years. Her husband is a fish merchant. We gave him a dowry of Rs.12,000 in cash and 70 grams of gold which was worth Rs.3,800. She has had three children already. Of these one son aged one year got drowned in the bathwater. The other two are boys. She plans to stop pregnancies after her fourth child. Although Jacintha's husband is doing reasonably well, he squanders a lot on drinking. As incomes have increased in our village, people have taken more to drinking. Already Jacintha's husband has acquired the reputation that he never repays the money he borrows.

Christina and Lourdes, our fourth and fifth daughters, are also married. Christina was married in 1980. I had to give Rs.10,000 in cash, Rs.1,000 as pocket money and 72 grams of gold worth Rs.10,000. I do not believe in keeping girls unmarried for long. Then there is the risk of their choosing men in a hurry. In the case of my daugh-

ters, I did the selection of boys for them. True, that even selections made by parents can go wrong. Tracy's case is a clear example. But I have no doubt that the girls can go wrong more than their parents on the selection of their husbands. I hold the same opinion about the selection of brides for the boys. It should, in my opinion, be left to the parents.

Lourdes has finished sixth standard and is at home. I have to get her married, but right now she is looking after the house. I have to save for her dowry.

My youngest son George is only 13. I would like him to study in school a little longer. Let us see what happens.

Looking ahead

No doubt we have come a long way, but it was by dint of hard work put in by both my husband and myself that we have been able to achieve our present level of well being. It is reflected in our present assets and income. After we both are gone, the assets will belong to our eight sons. The daughters have already been given their share in the form of dowry. So they have no legal claim on anything more. But we cannot altogether wash our hands of our daughters, particularly when they are in difficulties. Take the case of Tracy. We shall have to leave something for Tracy so that she can bring up her family in spite of her husband's wasteful spendings. Brothers are supposed to protect the interests of their married sisters but knowing my sons as I do, I cannot leave my daughter quite to their brothers' mercy. As for our own old age, I am not worried. I still have full control over our business and hope to exercise it till we die.

Neendakara

Case Study - B

BEATRICE

the prawn dealer

After you pass the highway bridge on the Ashtamudi Lake, you have to walk about a hundred yards past the huge stone wall, enclosing the area on the west of the highway earmarked for the proposed Neendakara port. You come thereafter to a few grocery and tea shops near the road bend and then a road side water tap. At this point while the highway turns right, a good sized motorable dirt road takes you to the left. This dirt road was built by Thangal Kunju Musaliar, a rich cashew merchant who used to frequent this seaside beach to spend the evening.

Within a distance of 20 yards, the dirt road takes a sharp left turn leading on to the beach. Here, at this bend, stands on the right, one thatched hut which, unless one is careful, can easily be missed. Both the roof and the walls are made out of coconut palm leaves. The back of our hut is towards the road. Our verandah faces a small lagoon, on the other side of which is the highway. Most of the lagoon is so well covered, from one end to the other with water hyacinth called 'African Payal', that one can hardly see the water. It gives one the feeling of a green walkable stretch.

Our hut

Our whole hut stands on a raised platform, about two feet above the ground so that even during heavy rains water does not enter the hut. The platform is made out of mud and rubble. They are beaten hard to provide a solid base. Then the surface is plastered with a mixture of clay and burnt coconut husk. It is this which lends it a dull dark colour.

The largest room of our house, 9' X 8', is the family's bed room. The verandah in front of the bed room, 8' X 3', serves as our sitting room. The only item of furniture in our verandah is a long, but narrow, wooden bench for visitors to sit on. Of a number of pictures you see on the inner wall of the verandah, quite a few are of Christian saints. But there are also a large number of family photographs we have collected over the years. They are taken usually on the occasion of weddings and funerals of relations and friends.

You enter our bed room from the verandah through a proper wooden door. The small chimney lamp nailed near this door burns on kerosene oil. The door has a proper latch and I can look it both from inside as well as outside. Inside our bedroom, we have built in the left hand corner a small altar with a colourful picture of Jesus Christ. Next to the altar is a single door wooden wardrobe. The wardrobe is divided into two portions. The top half has three shelves to keep one's clothes. In the top shelf are kept my six cotton sarees and blouses, all neatly folded along with my wedding

saree which lies at the bottom. In the lower half of the wardrobe are three drawers where our children keep their books. Next to the wardrobe is a table which Jacintha, my eldest daughter who is studying in College, uses for studying at home. The altar, the wardrobe and the table take up, as you can see, the whole of the left side of the bed room. The large bed close to the back wall has wooden legs and frame. The inside of the frame is done in cane. Such a bed could cost quite a lot now, but we bought it long long back. In the night, we spread out mats on the floor for our four children to sleep. We, the parents, sleep in the bed. Francis, my husband, hangs his clothes on the clothes line running from one end of the right side wall to the other.

Our kitchen

You can enter our kitchen from the bed room. But you can enter the kitchen from outside as well. It is around 5' X 6' in area. I have three mud stoves, five or six mud pots and a few aluminium and steel vessels, plates and ladles. Steel vessels are expensive and we take great pride in possessing them. In the two shelves which we improvised by tying up two wooden planks to the poles which support the wall, I keep all my spices and groceries in cans of various sizes. Our kitchen has a small verandah of its own, facing the lagoon. Here we stack our firewood along with the large aluminium pan and basin that I take to the jetty when I go there for buying prawns.

The public water tap is just a five minutes' walk from our hut. Usually, the children, fetch water for me, for bathing as well as for use in the kitchen.

We have no latrine of our own. Since there are very few houses in the village with latrines of their own, there is nothing unusual about our doing without one. In fact, everyone, men and women, adults and children, go out to answer the call of nature. All go to the sea front. The waves are supposed to wash away the dirt. Areas are ear marked separately for men and women. So there is little scope for invasion of privacy between the sexes.

Very close to our hut are other huts. Our immediate neighbour is a very old Hindu widow living by herself in a small one room thatched hut. She makes her living by defibring retted husks and making coir ropes. She is mentally disturbed and at times keeps talking to herself for hours on end. In the other hut next to ours, lives an old couple with a mentally deranged daughter of 35. They are Latin Christians and related to me from my mother's side.

My husband changes his occupation

Francis, my husband, is now 45 years old. He is known in Neendakara as Mukadu Francis, because he comes from Mukadu, a nearby fishing village, half way between Neendakara and Quilon. While Francis's grand father was dealing in coir and copra (dried coconut kernels) Francis's father was a ferry m-an.

I was just 21 years old when we got married. We were married in the St. Sebastian's Church in Neendakara which, as anyone will tell you, is one of the oldest Churches in Kerala. Francis was 28 years old and working as a tailor in his own village. I moved to his parents' house there, stayed there for three years before we decided to move to Neendakara. That was in 1963 by when the Indo-Norwegian Fishing Project had been there already for ten years. There was a lot more of activity in Neendakara than anywhere else in the neighbouring villages. Several of my own relatives, four out of my five sisters, were living in Neendakara and their families were doing well in whatever work--all connected with fishing--they were engaged in. Francis had been a tailor since the age of fifteen and knew little fishing. Still he has not been doing well as a village tailor. He thought, or was persuaded to think, that he might make a better living in Neendakara. Moreover I was not getting along well with Francis's people. So my father put in a word for Francis with a cousin of his who already was well established as a seafood processor and exporter. As soon as Francis got the job, we moved to Neendakara. Francis sold off his sewing machine after a couple of years. That was the end of his tailoring. He, as well as myself hoped, however, that very soon we too, like my relatives, would be able to make good. Unfortunately, it has not worked out that way. For Francis, it was a major decision. He had not only to move out of his native village, but also to give up the vocation that he was pursuing for almost 15 years. He was giving up a skilled, though not

well paying, profession for an unskilled job.

Francis has been working for the same firm from the day we moved to Neendakara. With mechanization of boats and the subsequent discovery of grounds for catching prawns, the accent in fishing has shifted altogether from fishing for domestic consumption to fishing for export, as far as Neendakara area was concerned. The firm Francis works for exports prawns and squids, and has its own freezing plant.

Francis's job has been, from the outset, to sort out and grade the prawns according to the counts, pack them in cartons and load them into trucks. When he joined the firm in 1963, his daily wage was Rs.2.50. In 1978, he was getting Rs.10.00. Actually this increase in 15 years works out to a little over one per cent per year. Workers' Union is there and they made a lot of noise about wage increases, but you can judge for yourself from the experience of Francis what increases the Union is actually able to get for the workers.

Francis has now given up his job altogether. For several months, he complained of pain in the joints, and therefore, stayed at home. The Project hospital in Puthenthura is quite well staffed. But Francis did not have any faith in allopathy (modern medicine). Allopathic cure is always temporary, he believes. He was going instead for a massage as prescribed by an Ayurvedic physician, in the village. No doubt, he felt better as a result, but the moment he would go back to work his pain would reappear. That convinced him that his job gave him the pain. So he decided to give up the job.

For several months he was simply sitting at home doing nothing. That made him irritable also. For over a year now, he is actively helping me in my prawn business and that has restored our domestic peace.

Our family

We have been married for our twenty years now. Three children, all girls, were born to me, the first one in Neendakara in my parents' house, with the help of a doctor sent home by the Project hospital. The other two were delivered in the Victoria Hospital in Quilon town. It is one of the oldest hospital in the district, established as early as 1870. Nurses and midwives trained here have been staying for a long time in this village. Many families depend on them instead of going to the hospital. Since both my second and third children were caesarian cases, the doctors advised me strongly to get operated. Francis and I did discuss the matter. It was a matter of my life and death, not of limiting the number of our children. At least, that is how we thought of the matter and came to the decision that the operation had to be undergone. So I underwent hysterectomy after my third delivery. Still, both of us badly wanted a son. I cannot quite explain why we wanted a son. May be we fishermen are so conditioned since men go out to sea, never a woman. Did Francis want him more than I myself? May be, I was more keen on it, but rest assured that we may have found it harder to adopt a boy if I had not been working and doing

reasonably well as regard my earnings. So we adopted a deserted infant through the hospital. He is now six years old. We call him Yesudas (which literally means the follower of Jesus), thus departing from the usual tradition of giving Latin names. Thus we now have four children, three girls and a boy.

Jacintha's college education

Jacintha, our eldest daughter, is now around nineteen years old. Like me, she too is small-made. She has already completed her school and is in the fourth year at a College run by the Church. She is studying for a degree course in Commerce. Educating her is, however, a major expense for us. Though the monthly college fee is only Rs.15, we had to pay Rs.200 by way of special admission fee. Also, from the very beginning we had to put her on a private tutorial college. None of the regular colleges really prepare you for examinations. The teachers themselves advise students to join tutorial classes. Some of these teachers run these tutorial classes in their off hours. Then there is daily bus fare, which even at the concessional rates for students, adds up to some Rs.12 a month. If you include expenses on books and clothing, the average works out easily to Rs.100 a month.

Can we afford an expense of this order? Well, I would rather spend this much on my girl's higher education than build up savings for her dowry to be given in marriage. In fact, I am

certain that I won't be able to pay up dowry at the going rates in our village. My worry, however, is that when the time for Jacintha's marriage comes, I may still be forced to give a big dowry. That will be ruinous. If Jacintha succeeds in getting a job after she completes her degree course, there is a good chance that she will be able to get married with less if not no dowry. Once you have a job, your income is counted as a part of the dowry. At least, this is what I am counting on.

Other children's education

The 15-year old Mercy comes next. She is studying in the tenth standard in a high school in Sakthikulangara. Her education is virtually free in that there is very little to pay by way of tuition fee. Also, no expense on transportation is involved, but books and clothing are our responsibility. However, the cloth for school uniform is available through the ration shop at controlled price. Since Jacintha has not time for domestic chores, Mercy has to help me a great deal with chores like bringing water, cooking and cleaning.

Will Mercy too be sent to College? I am not so sure. She does not seem to be interested in studies as Jacintha. Also, it will be difficult for me to have two children in College at the same time. It will be beyond my purse.

The third daughter, Agnes, is 13 years old. She is studying in the eighth standard at the upper primary school in Neendakara proper. Her education too is free. Agnes, though quite studious, also helps me a great deal with housework.

Yesudas, the six year old adopted son, has also started going to the local school. The girls help him get ready for school and they look after him once they are back at home. Also, since my own parents live close by, he often goes there from school if no one is at home. Of course, now that Francis has no fixed timings to observe any more, he is very often at home when the boy gets back from school. I myself have to be at the jetty on most days in the afternoon.

My work

I have been working ever since I was a child of eight or nine. I started as a shell collector. I would go to the beach along with my mother, carrying small nets to collect shells that are washed ashore with the breakers. My mother would sell the shells to merchants in the village and make a little money over and above what she made from vending fish. As I grew up, I was more and more involved in household chores for my mother. After marriage, however, I didn't take up outside work for quite some years. Only at the age of 28, i.e., seven years after my marriage, and some four years after we moved back to Neendakara with the family, did I decide to take to work.

Francis was not doing well and had started complaining about conditions of work in the factory. Also the family was much larger now and Francis's earnings were just not enough. Already, some women in the neighbouring households who earlier were either engaged in

fish vending or doing only household chores, had started going out to the jetty to buy some catch, sort it out, peel the prawns, dry up the rest and then sell the whole thing for a small profit. I too gather courage to take a plunge. I started going to the jetty with my sister Philomena to pick up art. Soon I was fully involved.

Usually I go to the jetty at around noon time. This is a convenient time for me. I cook a meal in the morning so that the children can eat and take food to school for their mid-day meal. The meal consists usually of rice and fish curry. After I myself have eaten I clean up the kitchen and leave for the jetty, locking up the house if Francis has other plans. Often, I wear a finely checked neat Mundu wrapped on top of a petticoat and a cotton blouse on top of a bra. I carry a towel to cover my shoulders and wear rubber tongs. I also carry a small plastic purse to keep the vouchers from the firms to whom I sell prawns. While I tuck my cash into the top fold of my mundu at the waist, the vouchers are formal things to be kept differently.

Firms normally pay for the prawns they buy, from the middlemen like myself, on the following day or even later. Immediately on sale, all that I get is a voucher stating the quantity and grade of the material and the price which the firm will pay. So, the first thing I have to do when I set out for work is to call at the office of the firm concerned and claim my money.

It takes me between one half to one hour to collect the cash that is due to me. Then I head for the jetty.

I go to the jetty with my mother and sister. We wait there for the boats to come. As the boats land their catch, the auction starts instantly as the basket fulls are brought out. Cyclist merchants, all men from Quilon, and a few fish vending women from the neighbouring villages go in for fish other than prawns. As for the prawns, sometimes they are first sorted and then auctioned; sometimes they are sold without sorting. In either case, the auction takes place on the basis of visual assessment. So one has to have very sharp eyes and quick judgement in making out the grade and the weight of the prawns in a basket and decide on the spot, within minutes of the landing of baskets, what final bid to make. The bidder has also to form some judgement of the price the processed prawns will fetch from the exporting firms. The difficulty arises because this price fluctuates from day to day and quite widely, depending upon the extent of the overall catch during the day. The price can slump very fast on a day of bumper catch. The difficulty of several middle women like me is that we have to be constantly guessing the price we will get for our processed product at the end of the day. Bigger middlemen carry less risk because they have usually a much more enduring relationship with the exporting firms.

Normally, both of us sisters carry with us a couple of hundred rupees each in cash. But during peak three months we need, not less than Rs.1,500 together. Our mother only helps us with our work in organising and supervising things. Together we buy prawns for up to Rs.1,500 on a peak day. Most boat owners know us and extend to us

overnight credit even though the general understanding at the auction is that all transactions are done in cash.

There are several jetties, but all are in Sakthikulangara, i.e., the south of the highway bridge. Actually, the moment you cross the bridge, you are in Sakthikulangara. The jetty immediately to the west has thirteen landing points, each privately owned and maintained. On the eastern side, most of the space along the bank of backwaters is taken up by the four largest fish exporting firms and the Government. In the Government boatyard, boats are made and repaired. On the private yards belonging to the four firms, the biggest boatyard is the one to which I have been going ever since I started going to work. This was a relatively neat yard and has plenty of space. But my principal reason for going there was that as one of my second cousins was a major partner of the firm that owned this yard and being a known party I got better treatment from the men around here.

The west side boatyard has the appearance very much of an Indian wholesale commodities market, with lots of people willing around in small knots. Each knot consists usually of persons bidding for one or more baskets of fish catch. There is always an auctioneer in their midst whose job it is to settle the bid. Very often, he is assisted by an assistant who notes down the various bids. The auctioneer and his assistant are employed by the jetty owners. At the end of each auction the auctioneer collects a fee

of one per cent for the jetty owner. This is over and above the flat fee of Rs.2 per boat every time it comes and berths at a jetty to unload. Every auction must be settled invariably in cash. Therefore, a person who is participating in bidding must carry enough cash. Invariably the bidding starts with one rupee but it goes up fast.

Every time a boat comes and stops in a jetty there is tremendous excitement. Immediately some baskets are handed over to the crew which shovels its catch lying on the boat floor into these baskets with a spade and brings them out.

No sooner the baskets full of fish appear than a few persons, men and women gather around them. It is not always however that the catch is immediately auctioned. Sometimes, the boatmen might decide to have the catch first sorted out. There are always a number of women, young and old, wanting to work as sorters. In fact, there are too many of them. So the jetty staff have to shoo the extra ones away. The money each will get to do the sorting is always a paltry sum. At the end of a day, the lucky ones may have made as much as five rupees but most do not make more than four rupees, If a catch is auctioned without sorting, it is the buyer, who gets the sorting done immediately thereafter at almost the same spot.

At the east side boat yards also, every basket of catch goes through the same motions except, as already stated, that the place is far less crowded and also somewhat better organized. Boats that do not belong to the company owning the yard are also allowed to berth here. The terms are the same as for boats berthing at the west

side boat yard. The boat yard which I frequent has four jetties.

I have been involved in prawn business for almost ten years now. I still vividly remember how I started my work by borrowing one hundred rupees from friends and relatives. I participated in a number of auctions and made some profit. Since then I have never looked back. In the beginning, I would buy prawn and get some coolie to transport it home for me. The prawns were then peeled and cleaned and the meat placed in an iced basin. If the quantity of prawns was too much for the family (i.e., my self and my daughters) to peel, then I would call women from the neighbourhood to help me peel. Payment for peeling was, and is, made by the number of basins peeled. Each basin holds around two kilograms of peeled meat. It is always women and their children who did the peeling, and there was never any problem mobilising the number required even though peeling was done in the evenings. Gradually, as I bought larger and larger quantities I needed outside help with peeling, more and more often.

During the lean periods, when catch is little, the women who work for me come to borrow small amounts from me. These loans are given orally and carry no interest but an obligation to peel for the lender as and when required. As the scale of my work expanded, we bought two cents of land from the Church, next to my mother's hut, and put up a small peeling shed with an attached room. The peeling shed has a raised cement plastered floor with a slope so that the water gradually drains out on its own as the prawns are being peeled and cleaned. On one side is built a small circular trough, again cemented, for keeping the fish, if any, in the baskets.

After the prawns are peeled and cleaned, the meat, as it is called, is sold to one or the other of the prawn exporting firms. I take it to the firms's purchasing yard the same night, that is as soon as the peeling is finished. Since this is what everyone engaged in this business does, the exporting firms keep their purchasing booths open till quite some time in the night. The meat is graded and weighed and immediately a voucher is issued to the seller for presentation the following morning for encashment.

Investment in second-hand boat

I have done reasonably well in my business of buying, processing and selling prawns. Whatever I earned was reinvested in my business. Since Francis was earning independently, I did not have to spend much out of my earnings on the family. A major part of my earnings could be put back in my business. Some time in 1972, along with my youngest brother, Antony, who himself drives a mechanised boat, I purchased a second hand boat, on partnership basis. It was a 25' boat with Bukh engine. Antony was supposed to operate the boat. Thus, while he would, therefore, get both the 10 per cent share as the driver, and half of the 60% belonging to the owner, I was to get only the other half of the latter. Both of us had to share the expenses on deisel and repairs equally. Unfortunately, however, the investment in the boat turned out to be a disaster in the sense that the boat has been in and out of the repair yard all these past eight years. We have spent no less than another Rs.10,000 on repairs. Still the boat is not all right. Today, I have a debt of Rs.5,000.

My family

My father, 75 year old Joseph, is among the oldest residents of Neendakara. He is known as Joseph Moola as his house is a corner house. It is built here on a 10 cent piece of land which belonged to the Church. He, like several others, was squatting here for several years. Then the Church wanted him to vacate the land. While all the other families moved away, my father refused to oblige. He went to Court and got his claim established to his piece of land. Now he has a comfortable three-room wooden house which is electrified. Also, it has all the necessary furniture such as cane seat chairs, one bed, one mirrored almirah and a couple of wooden stools. The house had been done up when my youngest brother, Antony, the boat driver, was staying with our parents. Now he and his wife have set up a separate house of their own.

Joseph, my father was an ordinary fisherman. He fished mostly with a cast net -- a net that you may throw by the sweep of your arm standing at the bank of the sea. My mother, Thresia, was a fish vendor selling fish from door to door as well at the Sakthikulangara fish market. Since both my father and mother belong to Neendakara I have scores of relatives living in the village. I can count on my finger tips more than thirty first or second cousins. My parents are now quite old but in good health. My father is seventy-five years old and my mother is sixty-eight. They had ten children, five boys and five girls. My mother was married when she was fifteen years of age. They lost two children as infants, both male children,

and then a daughter when she was 18 years old. Now I have three brothers and four sisters alive. Both my parents come to the boat yard and take active part in the business. All my brothers and sisters are living in the village and working. My brother Ben owns a workshop to repair boats. He went for a I.T.I. diploma. Another owns a small gill net boat with me. My other brother, Sebastian, is doing fish business on his own. My other sisters are also involved in prawn and fish work.

Running the house

As I have told you already, I go to work only around noon. When Francis was going to the factory he had to take one meal at the work site but now that he is not going there any more we take our morning meal together before I leave for my work. Francis comes to the jetty an hour or so later.

We have a ten unit ration card. I buy all the ration rice and sugar that we are entitled to buy. I find buying everyday a nuisance. Moreover, involved as I am in my business I do not have that much spare time for shopping. Of course now Francis helps with major shopping. But I am the one who does whatever shopping like buying of vegetables, tapioca and fish has to be done.

I start the morning by making tea with milk and sugar. I buy milk from a nearby tea shop for 75 paise in a steel container. We take tea in glass tumblers which we keep in the cupboard when not in use. They break very easily if left on the floor and we cannot replace them often. I also make *puttu*** and boil some half a kilo

** A mixture of rice flour and coconut kernel (shavings) filled in a bamboo tube cooked by passing steam through it.

of green grams to go with it as our breakfast. While the girls eat puttu at home they take rice and fish curry to school and college in their tiffin boxes. Since it is not certain what time I would get back home from work, the evening meal has to be cooked by Agnes with the help of Mary. If Jacintha is back on time from her tutorial college, she too helps in cooking. The girls have quite a mutual understanding between themselves. So one does not notice such tension in the home. Looking after little Yesudas is no problem either, particularly now, since Francis is mostly around in the house.

Our daily earnings

I am unable to say what my average daily earnings are. How would you make an estimate of the daily earnings when business fluctuates so very wildly from day to day and from season to season. You have to remember that in Neerakara area the whole prawn business is virtually concentrated in two to three months in the rainy season. I can tell you this much, however, that but for my decision to start working, it would have been a hard to mouth existence even for our medium sized family.

May be you can form some idea of our earnings from the expenses that we have to incur for our living. Though, as you can see, we live very modestly, our monthly expenses cannot be less than Rs.500. When Francis had his factory job, he was able to contribute some Rs.150 a month towards the family expenses. The balance was made up out of my earnings. In addition, it has been possible for me to get

some small items of jewellery from time to time for our three daughters. Then there is this investment in land and second hand mechanized boat. Of course, since the land prices have gone up fast in recent years, my investment in land has proved good. But I doubt that our mechanized boat in which we have together sunk some Rs.20,000, will fetch more than half that sum. That has turned out to be a major mistake. I also require a working capital of Rs.1,000 to transact my daily business. Still, the debt I have to repay is only Rs.5,000.

Looking ahead

The mechanization of boats and the discovery of prawn in Neendakara sea did not benefit the women directly because we women do not go out to sea for fishing. Some people might, as you say, even complain that the Project, as such, completely ignored women because no thought was given to what would happen to women of the Project households when the proposed changes would be introduced in the technology of fishing and related fields. How can they say that knowing that women in the Project area were beneficiaries directly of such facilities as hospital service and the supply of piped drinking water. But I am not really worried about whether they had thought of men first and women later. The fact remains that for women not only from within the Project area, but also from outside immense new work possibilities were thrown open. Take my own case; but for the Project, I would have been like one of those headload fish vendors you see in other towns and villages eking out a miserable living. I have no doubt that even a family of such modest means as ours can think of our future with some confidence only because of the Project. May be many have become very rich, but at least we have become better off than before.

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