PRECIS.

# Migrants, Proletarians or ~~Malayans? South Indians on the~~ Plantation Frontier in Malaya

by Ravindra K. Jain

This is a study of the social adaptation of Tamil-speaking labourers from South India to life on Pal Melayu, a rubber estate in Malaya. Pal Melayu in its west coast Malayan region is conceptualised as a social system or a 'social field'. The social process - a syndrome of social action over time - is perceived as an interaction between analytically separable 'industrial' and 'community' subsystems comprising the estate social system.

In the first two chapters, social process on Pal Melayu is viewed historically. Chapter one outlines the social organisation of rubber production and of the community life of Indian labourers resident on the estate before World War II. The European management of the estate, assisted by the educated Asian staff, adopted a paternalistic policy towards immigrant Indian labourers to secure their commitment for an enterprise marked by mercurial fluctuations in the price of rubber. In implementing this policy the European manager and assistants and Tamil recruiter-foremen (kanganies and head kanganies) played active roles in the community life in the labour 'lines'. Employer paternalism had important repercussions on the social organisation of the labouring community. The social realignment of the Indian community on Pal Melayu followed the closed system of social stratification defined by the occupational hierarchy of the estate. In

household activities respectively is retained. The extended family cannot function efficiently on the estate; yet, in a few cases, the

the status-group stratification Indian labourers, Asiatic staff and European bosses occupied the lowest, intermediate and highest rungs respectively. The Japanese occupation hastened the process of an increased Asianisation of estate bureaucracy on Pal Melayu. During the reoccupation, Indian labourers welcomed the restoration of the European Company's status quo on the estate but authority had to be reconstituted on a different basis. The political and economic forces unleashed by the war, especially the rise of a trade union movement, led the Company to adopt a policy of 'welfare paternalism' for estate labourers. The rise of the Asian bureaucracy and trade unions on Pal Melayu forms the theme of the second chapter.

Chapter three presents an ecological, demographic and occupational picture of Pal Melayu today. The spatial and occupational correlates of the present-day social stratification on the estate are highlighted and the numerical preponderance of local-born over India-born residents in the labour 'lines' is noted. Chapters four, five and six provide a synchronic description and analysis of the social process on Pal Melayu. The influence of regular wage-earning and living on the estate upon the family life and the earning, spending and saving behaviour of Indian labourers is discerned in chapters four and five. Women as well as men earn wages on Pal Melayu but a man as husband/father wields effective authority as the social and economic head of the household. The organisation of domestic activities is adjusted to the rhythm of work on the estate; yet, to a large degree, the traditional sexual division of labour between men and women for outdoor and indoor household activities respectively is retained. The extended family cannot function efficiently on the estate; yet, in a few cases, the

extended family form and in a large number of cases extended family sentiment have been preserved. A common style of life, common dependence on wages for a living and a common pattern of expenditure make all residents of the labour 'lines' a social proletariat, bound by a sentiment of solidarity and ties of reciprocity. Yet, there are real differences of income between households that are correlated mainly with differences in skill in money-handling. Thus, there appears an economic stratification in the social proletariat between 'line' entrepreneurs and the true economic proletariat. Economic inequality coexists with social equality in the labour 'lines'. In chapter six, we return to the comprehensive social stratification on Pal Melayu today. The equality and solidarity of the social class of labourers emerges in high relief when relations between them and the social classes of the European management and Asian staff members are considered. On Pal Melayu, social classes still rest on the occupational structure but certain roles have changed. The European manager no longer participates directly in the community activities of labourers; on the other hand, a member of the Asian staff has been raised to the level of a 'super-staff' to take over some of the benevolently paternalistic functions of the European manager. The role of the super-staff and other members of the Asian staff in decision-making by committees and associations of the community subsystem forms the theme of the second part of chapter six.

The evidence presented in the thesis justifies the conclusion that it is the interpenetration of the industrial and community subsystems on Pal Melayu that still defines the structure of the

estate society but the economic organisation and occupational hierarchy of the estate has differential impact upon the institutional pattern of the labouring community. In chapter seven this conclusion is summarised and the wider social matrix of the closed system of social stratification on the estate is considered. The government's policy of laissez faire towards private enterprise helps in the retention of some of the colonial features of the estate social system. While the majority of Indian labourers on Pal Melayu feel satisfied with their present economic lot, they have no opportunities for socio-economic mobility within the estate. As regards such opportunities outside the estate, the social class of estate labourers on Pal Melayu finds itself, and feels itself to be, unfavourably placed vis-a-vis other ethnic groups. Indian labourers are not forced to take up Malayan citizenship or invest their savings in Malaya and where possible they retain strong ties with ancestral or natal villages in India. As a result the community subsystem on a rubber estate exists as an enclave of Indian proletarians in a Malayan milieu.

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# MIGRANTS, PROLETARIANS OR MALAYANS ?

## SOUTH INDIANS ON THE PLANTATION FRONTIER IN MALAYA

by

Ravindra K. Jain

A thesis submitted for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the Australian National University.

549314

# CONTENTS


| | | | Page No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Acknowledgements | | | (i) |
| A note on genealogies, indigenous terms and measurements | | | (ii) |
| Preface | | | (v) |
| Chapter One | The Pre-War Plantation | | 1 |
| Chapter Two | The Rise of Asian Bureaucracy and Trade Unionism | | 120 |
| Chapter Three | Pal Melayu Today | | 174 |
| Chapter Four | Family and Household | | 212 |
| Chapter Five | Economic Organisation | | 269 |
| Chapter Six | Social Stratification and Political Process | | 341 |
| Chapter Seven | Summing Up | | 428 |
| Appendices | I | Coffee Planting in 1895 | 462 |
| | II | Kangany recruitment | 465 |
| | III | Household organisation of my neighbours | 478 |
| | IV | Average annual earnings of a tapper, weeder and relief tapper | 498 |
| | V | Expenditure cycles of Pal Melayu labourers | 501 |
| | VI | Cittu | 568 |
| | VII | Two cases of dispute 'on' and 'off' work | 577 |
| | VIII | Social situations 1, 2 and 3 | 587 |

| | | | | Page No. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Tables | No. | 1 | Pal Melayu rubber acreage | 10 |
| | | 2 | Pal Melayu labour force | 34 |
| | | 3 | Annual Tamil labour turnover (1926-1940) | 36 |
| | | 4 | Tamil labour turnover for four-year periods : 1926-1937 | 47 |
| | | 5 | Labour turnover for four-year periods 1926-1937 summarised | 48 |
| | | 6 | India-born population on Pal Melayu by native district, residential division and sex | 68 |
| | | 7 | Labour force on Pal Melayu by sex and age : 1930-1959 | 146 |
| | | 8 | Indians on Pal Melayu by religion, residential division and language | 192 |
| | | 9 | Indians on Pal Melayu by sex, residential division and age | 194 |
| | | 10 | Indians on Pal Melayu by sex, age, place of birth and residential division | 196 |
| | | 11 | Indians on Pal Melayu by residential division and number of changes of location | 199 |
| | | 12 | Occupational structure of the Pal Melayu labour centre | 202-203 |
| | | 13 | Family structure | 215 |
| | | 14 | Family and household | 240 |
| | | 15 | Household size | 241 |
| | | 16 | Monthly earnings from estate work | 285 |
| | | 17 | Percentage distribution of regular monthly expenditure by households and items | 293 |
| Maps | No. | 1 | The Pal Melayu region | (xxvii) |
| | | 2 | Pal Melayu settlement pattern app. 1925 | 24 |

| | | | Page No. |
|---|---|---|---|
| Maps (cont'd) | 3 | Madras State | 69 |
| | 4 | Pal Melayu Division I (tapping sections) | 176 |
| | 5 | Pal Melayu settlement pattern 1962 | 181 |
| | 6 | Pal Melayu labour centre | 186 |
| Diagrams | 1 | Estate bureaucracy, Pal Melayu, app. 1915 | 26 |
| | 2 | Quarterly average of the London rubber price (1929-1933) | 42 |
| | 3 | Estate bureaucracy, Pal Melayu, 1962 | 206 |
| | 4 | Paradigms of paternalism | 366 |
| Genealogies and Extracts | | Genealogy I | 76 |
| | | Genealogy II | 470 |
| | | Extract from Genealogy I | 491 |
| | | Extract from Genealogy II | 220 |
| | | Extract from Genealogy II | 479 |
| Photographs | | | 612 |
| References | | | 622 |


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Canberra, Australia.
June 20, 1965.

A note on genealogies, indigenous terms and measurements.

Genealogies:

I have given only two genealogies and extracts from them to help in the location of persons described in specific situations. The system of drawing up the genealogical diagrams is similar to that followed by Turner, 1957. I take a horizontal rather than a vertical temporal axis so that the names or symbols for those in the highest generation are written not at the top of the page but at the left-hand side. Generations are marked A B C .... from higher to lower. In genealogy II (p. 470) and extract (p. 220) I have shown a half-generation, C1. This is because a man (B25) has married his sister's daughter (C12). The children of this couple may then be shown to belong to generation D, i.e. one generation below their mother's. But in the kinship system of Pal Melayu labourers, children derive their kinship status from their father, not from their mother, and should be placed in generation C next to their father's. Since C is the maternal generation and in the thinking of the people mother and child cannot belong to the same generation, I plot the children and step-children of this couple in a half-generation C1. If I had more cases of marriage between a man and his sister's daughter - a norm among some non-Brahman Tamil castes - there would have been more half-generations plotted in genealogies.

Marriage in the genealogies is denoted by the sign '⌐' rather than the usual '=' sign. Although most Tamil marriages

are said to take place among relatives I have shown marriages where the kinship links could be traced on genealogies given by informants on Pal Melayu by a dotted sign '┌┐'.

Indigenous terms:

To minimise the distortion of meaning of some indigenous terms translated into English and to preserve the local idiom, I have transliterated several Tamil terms into Roman script. These terms have been bracketed after their English equivalents. The transliteration exhibits only the equivalent of the written word. A phonetic representation of the word is not attempted. The composition of compound words is made clear by marking off the components with hyphens, e.g. kaṇakka-p-piḷḷai. I have not given plurals for Tamil terms nor made such a term plural by adding an 's'; thus I no-where use the hybrid "'kāvaṭis' even though more than one 'kāvaṭi' may be indicated by the context (p. 535). I have let the reader decide for himself whether the term is being used in a singular or plural sense in a particular context. For the transliteration of Tamil terms I have followed Tamil Lexicon (6 Vols.), University of Madras, Madras, 1936 (see p. Ixviii of Tamil Lexicon, Vol. 1 for the key to the transliteration).

The transliteration of Malay terms is well established in English usage since Malay is commonly written in Roman script. I have used R.J. Wilkinson's An abridged Malay dictionary (romanised), London and New York, 1957, as a standard reference for Malay words.

A Tamil word like 'kangany' has become part and parcel of European languages spoken and written on Malayan estates. In this thesis I have adopted its standard transliteration in Malayan estate English. The same applies to the spellings of Tamil proper names.

Measurements:

The following Malayan measurements are used in the thesis :-

| | |
|---|---|
| Weight: | 1 katti = $1\frac{1}{3}$ lbs. |
| | 1 picul = 100 katti = $133\frac{1}{3}$ lbs. |
| Volume: | 1 gantang = 1 imperial gallon. |
| Currency: | 100 cents = 1 Malayan dollar. |
| | 1 Malayan dollar = 2s. 4d. sterling. |
| Area (Tamil): | 1 kāṇi = 1.32 acres approximately. |

# P R E F A C E

Indians (including Pakistanis) constitute approximately 11% (786,000) of the population of the Federation of Malaya and are, after Malaysians 50% (3,510,000) and Chinese 37% (2,595,000), the third most numerous ethnic category in the country.[1] Indians in Malaya follow a variety of occupations but from the beginning of the present century Tamil-speakers from the Madras Presidency (present Madras State) migrated in large numbers to become labourers on rubber and other estates in Malaya that were mostly owned and managed by Europeans. The heavy concentration of Indians in the rubber estate industry of Malaya has persisted to this day. In 1960, there were 2,306 rubber estates[2] in Malaya employing 285,300 persons of whom 60,740 were Malays, 85,540 were Chinese and 138,200 were Indians (Report 1962:50). Since the estates mentioned in the above Report include those owned by Asians as well as Europeans, these figures do not give an accurate estimate of the still bigger proportion of Indians among employees, mostly labourers, on rubber estates owned by Europeans. On rubber estates owned by

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1 These population figures are based on the 1957 Census Report and do not include the population of Singapore. Throughout this thesis I treat the Federation of Malaya before the formation of Malaysia on 16th September, 1963, as the political unit in which the field-study was conducted.

2 "An 'estate'...comprises land(s) under a single legal ownership aggregating not less than 100 acres." Personal communication from the General Secretary, the United Planting Association of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, August, 1961.

European companies and boasting of "an old and stable resident labour force" Indians, mainly Tamils, constitute anywhere between 80 to 100% of the residents in the labour 'lines'. This is specially true of rubber estate labourers in the west coast states of Selangor and Perak. In consequence, "a common form of Indian local community in Malaya...(is)...a body of workers on an estate, housed and supervised by an industrial concern" (Freedman 1960:165). In this thesis, I describe and analyse the social adaptation of a people of Indian origin to life on a rubber estate on the west coast of Malaya.[3]

- (1) -

Indians on a Malayan rubber estate are ethnically distinguishable from Chinese, Malays or Europeans who may also reside on the estate. There has been little miscegnation on estates between the Indian and other ethnic categories. Thus, culturally and racially, Indians constitute a recognisable category on a rubber estate. There are variations, however, within the Indian category. Many of these variations are patterned. Indians on a rubber estate are distinguishable by language, religion and place of origin in India. Except for religion which, in the case of many Indian or Ceylonese Christians tends to become an achieved

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3 The field-work was carried out in two trips from Canberra in January, 1962, and May, 1963, for periods of twelve months and six months respectively. At the end of the field-work I was able to pay a brief visit to two villages in South India from where a portion of the population of my intensive study in Malaya had emigrated.

criterion, the rest are ascribed criteria of distinction within the Indian category. Among the distinguishing criteria of achievement within the Indian community on a rubber estate, occupational status and education are the most important. There usually is a correlation between the criteria of ascription and achievement in the Indian community resident on an estate. The majority of semi-literate labourers are found to be Tamil Hindus from Madras State while members of the staff are mostly English educated Christians hailing from Kerala (Malayalees) or from Jaffna in Ceylon (Jaffna Tamils). By and large, this pattern of social stratification of Indians on a rubber estate is as true today as it was in the past.

However, social stratification among Indians resident on a rubber estate is part of a larger pattern of social stratification, that imposed by the occupational hierarchy of the estate. Whether one tries to explain the overlap between distinctions of ascription and achievement in the Indian community on a rubber estate/or to discover the comprehensive occupational structure into which Indian labourers and members of staff find themselves in an enterprise for the large-scale production of rubber, it becomes apparent that the traditional categories of South Indian society and culture fail to unravel the principles of social organisation. It is important to realise that the Indian community living on a rubber estate comprises either the pre-war immigrants from India or their children and grand-children. Further, the majority of them are labourers who

have known no other locale in Malaya than a rubber estate. For such people, therefore, living and working on the estate is a matter of "specialised adaptation" (Wolf 1959).

A field-study of the Indian community even on a rubber estate in Malaya may perhaps be made in terms of "cultural persistence" (cf. Klass 1961). An anthropologist attempting to make such a study would need to develop a comparative framework for 'Indian' institutions found in the Indian village society and a rubber estate in Malaya. It is doubtful, however, if such a study would lead to an increased understanding of any aspect of the Malayan society (or of the Indian society) though it might, if the student were to examine the same institution in two different socio-cultural contexts, lead to a better comprehension of that particular institution. Even so, to accomplish such a task successfully he would have to formulate a conceptual view of the "socio-cultural context" spoken of earlier. To me it is not clear how within the body of a single study, incorporating the results of fieldwork, one can grapple simultaneously with two nexuses as different from one another as the Indian village in an Indian civilisation and a Malayan rubber estate in the Malayan plural society. No wonder then, that studies of cultural persistence or continuity in anthropology have remained studies of cultural form, largely unrelated to the contemporary social situation (Smith, R.T. 1963).

I have adopted an approach to my study which would enable us to view the Indian community on a rubber estate as a sector of the

Malayan society. Two important clarifications must, however, be made at this juncture. Firstly, the viewpoint that Indians on a rubber estate ought to be seen in relation to the Malayan society does not prejudice my fieldwork and its results in the direction of making my people seem more Malayan than they actually are. I have tried to be sensitive to all relationships, attitudes and customs of the people that are overtly or covertly Indian. This I leave the reader to judge for himself from the description and analysis presented in the study. Secondly, perhaps more importantly, my major operational concepts are not designed to cover the Malayan society as a whole. I shall return to this important issue later but must mention here that in common with most social anthropological or "micro-sociological" (Firth 1958:17) field studies I have had to delimit - geographically and conceptually - the area of my investigation to the rubber estate and the 'region'.

Conceptually, I have used the terms 'estate social system' and 'social field' often synonymously but mainly in an operational sense. The reasons why the latter often substitutes for the former are, firstly, that the idea of a social field enables us to conceptualise social action occurring outside the limits of the estate but having an impact on social process on the estate. I have found the concept useful for incorporating the idea of the 'region' in a study primarily of a single rubber estate. Secondly, while the term 'social system' is a concept generally understood among social scientists, it has been elaborated in a specialised

sense by the sociologist Talcott Parsons (cf. Parsons 1951). As the key concept in an integrated theory of social action "the social system" may illuminate the analysis of social process in the social field but unless it is considerably modified it cannot be used as an operational concept in a field-study. The concept of the "social field", on the other hand, has the merit of having been developed and utilised in field-studies of complex societies by social anthropologists (cf. Barnes 1954; Epstein 1958).

Barnes speaks of three "regions or fields" in the social system of Bremnes, a parish in Western Norway (Barnes 1954). "Firstly, there is the territorially-based social field, with a large number of enduring administrative units, arranged hierarchically, one within another....The second field is that generated by the industrial system. Here we have a large number of interdependent, yet formally autonomous units....connected with one another functionally rather than hierarchically, yet each organised internally in a hierarchy of command....The third social field has no units or boundaries; it has no co-ordinating organisation. It is made up of the ties of friendship and acquaintance which everyone growing up in Bremnes society partly inherits and largely builds up for himself" (pp. 42-43). In the first social field the units of the system endure and membership changes only slowly. The units of the second social field often are true social groupings as well as units of organisation, that do not necessarily persist through time, nor does their membership remain fixed. The elements of the third

social field, which Barnes examines closely to define the class system of Bremnes, are not fixed. New ties are continually being formed and old links are broken or put into indefinite cold storage. The conceptualisation of Bremnes society into three social fields has helped Barnes to analyse the social stratification and political process "in a land which prides itself on its affirmation of social equality" (p. 40). Thus Barnes found that the herring-fishing industry in Bremnes was intersected by a social field (third in the above formulation) through which an individual fisherman could move fairly freely along lines of friendship and local knowledge, seeking in the main the achievement of economic goals (p. 42).

To a large degree, the social system of a typical rubber estate in Western Malaya is the converse of that found in the Norwegian parish of Bremnes. Inequality rather than equality and a rigid rather than an open and flexible system of social stratification obtains on a rubber estate. This does not, however, invalidate the perception of the main units of the total situation on a rubber estate also in terms of analytically distinguishable social fields of Barnes' conception. The social process - a syndrome of patterned interaction over time - in the total situation on an estate can also be understood as the 'intersection', the 'interpenetration'[4] or simply interaction among the various units

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[4] For a specialised industrial sociological application of the concept of interpenetration, implying that "the wider social consequences of technological change ultimately react back upon the firm", see Feldman 1962.

or 'social fields'. I have replaced the 'social field' of Barnes by 'subsystems' and posited the whole of the rubber estate, the industrial organisation and institutional pattern of the community, as comprising a single social field. Thus, except in the marginal case when the social field is said to include not only the rubber estate but also the region, my social field is synonymous with the estate social system. The community of Tamil labourers on the estate comprises one part of the estate social system and I designate this part as the 'community subsystem'. It comprises social relationships 'off' work. In other words, this operational concept subsumes the institutional pattern of the labouring community which has made its social adaptation to conditions on the rubber estate. The other subsystem, of course, concerns the 'adaptor' in the adaptation situation. It is to the social organisation of production of rubber on an estate - to social relationships 'on' work - that I give the term 'industrial subsystem'. The concept of the industrial subsystem of the estate social system is akin to the sociological conception of an economic organisation[5] as a formal organisation (cf. Blau and Scott 1962; Etzioni 1958).

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5 The I.L.O. Committee of Work on Plantations defined plantations as "large scale agricultural units developing certain agricultural resources of tropical countries in accordance with the methods of western industry....The institution is essentially a large-scale enterprise depending on large capital investment, a large supply of labour, extensive land areas, well developed management and specialisation in production for the purpose of export" (I.L.O. 1950: pp. 5 and 9). Without prejudice to the Committee's remarks about

In the delineation of both subsystems and in their interaction I have been concerned both with the role-definition and role-playing of the social actors.

The hypothesis that I examine in detail is that the industrial subsystem influences the community subsystem on a Malayan rubber estate. It is to perceive this influence that I have studied social process on a large-sized rubber estate in Malaya.

It was only after I had been in the field for nearly six months that I began to formulate the conceptual approach adopted in this study. An early realisation that the community life on all rubber estates that I had visited was dominated by the Asian bureaucracy had a considerable influence on my thinking about the estate social system. However, I kept reminding myself that these overt patterns of domination should not blind me to the wider contemporary and traditional social forces - whatever their sources - of regulating social action in the labour 'lines'. R.T. Smith's strictures against a simplistic correlation between the economic system of the plantation and the family-type of communities living on it provided a welcome corrective (Smith, R.T. 1959:158 and 160). At the same time his criticism could not deter me from considering the comprehensive system of social stratification found on an

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5 cont'd...
"the methods of western industry" in the social organisation of estate production, I adopt this definition to characterise the economic structure of rubber estates in Malaya.

estate, based primarily on the occupational hierarchy of the estate, as an institution worthy of being studied in its own right. By adopting wide and flexible operational categories like industrial and community subsystems, through an easy substitution of the concept estate social system by that of a wider regional social field, and by limiting the area of observation to only a few institutionalised social relationships in the community subsystem, I think we minimise considerably the dangers of a crude economic determinism of social facts. I feel that R.T. Smith's general criticism of students of plantation social systems is in fact applicable to only a small minority of scholars who may have viewed this institution as a closed and isolated system.

These last remarks bring me directly to the issue of relating one's observations about the estate social system to the wider society, national or international. There certainly is an historical side to this relationship, brilliantly summed up by one of the foremost sociologists of plantations, Edgar Thompson, in his concept of the plantation as a "settlement institution" (Thompson, E.T. 1957:29-33 and 1959:27). The earliest human component on a rubber estate in Malaya consisted of immigrants - planters, supervisors and labourers. The only indigenous factor was the tract of land which they jointly worked and inhabited. It was the way in which these people incorporated their statuses and purposes into the land that gave rise to characteristic social relationships among them. The estate became a stratified local grouping.

Nevertheless, all this development took place in a wider economic and politico-legal framework which is associated with imperialism and colonialism. Historically, therefore, by relating the estate social system in Malaya before the second world war politically to the metropolitan authority and economically to metropolitan markets one is able to view the institution as part of an emergent Malayan plural society. The diachronic perspective in the first two chapters of this thesis is not intended to help 'explain' what follows in the succeeding chapters; its primary purpose for me is to clarify the socio-cultural integration of the estate society and of its integration with the wider society in the early phases of the settlement institution in Malaya.[6] If I do not talk about Malaya in more general terms it is mainly because such studies have already been made by historians and political scientists and that I needed to view that history from the point of view of the lower participants in that process, the immigrant estate labourers who would soon die out. As shall be seen in these chapters, I have found it useful to apply the concepts of the estate social system, social field and subsystems for the diachronic description and analysis too.

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6 For the relevance of history "as a series of functional constellations arranged ordinally" in the study of societies featuring plantations, see Mintz 1959:48 and 1961:530.

The same problem of relating the microcosm to the macrocosm appears in the synchronic section of the thesis. The difficulty of conceptualisation is greater here because the colonial framework of the society has disappeared and the existence of a plural society itself has become doubtful. Nevertheless, 'plural society' still serves as a convenient summary description of a multi-racial society in Malaya. Perhaps I could have begun by asking how far the ethnic division of Malayan society has changed to a division into classes. Perhaps I could have chosen an ethnically mixed rubber estate (clearly not typical) for my intensive study and compared the relationship between status, power, ethnic type, occupation and cultural difference within the plantation, with these features outside in the wider society and in each of its major components (cf. Smith, M.G. 1961). In doing so, however, I would have had to change the entire conception of my study and would certainly have needed more time than there was at my disposal. Despite the existence of local studies of Malay and Chinese communities by social anthropologists and despite recommendations by Firth more than a decade ago for "inter-cultural studies" (Firth 1948:35-38), the Federation of Malaya remains <u>sociologically</u> uncharted. The study of the inclusive structure, the Malayan or Malaysian society as a whole, is certainly not the task for one man. One can only hope that co-ordinated field-studies will some

day be made in Malaya as they have been made elsewhere[7] to determine the contours of the whole society and culture. Whether the emphasis would be cultural-ecological as in the Puerto Rican studies or structural after the conception of British social anthropology, we feel certain that when such an integrated view of the Malayan society becomes available the ethnography reported in these pages will be usable for a wider interpretation. In the meantime, what I purport to offer here is a definitive study of Tamil family, economy and politics in its most typical setting in Malaya, the agro-industrial industrial system of a rubber estate. What we may lose by not being able to relate the facts from this study holistically to the Malayan society may be compensated for by having a framework of the Indian community which will enable us to take into account the labourers' nexus with India, if any.

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7 The work of Julian Steward and his associates in Puerto Rico (Steward 1956) is a pioneering effort in this direction. Studies of particular plantations and peasant communities were made and linked up with a horizontal scheme of national society. A number of local communities were chosen, after a survey, as instances of cultural variations or types within the island and studied intensively. The communities were focussed upon as parts of the larger national whole, as well as examples of unique instances within that whole. Historical and institutional studies at the national level were to provide the linkages of the local communities to the national scene. Community studies of the selected units were oriented to the 'cultural ecological hypothesis' that Steward formulated in his study of the hunting bands (Steward 1936).

- (2) -

In terms of the research ends stated earlier, I sought to conduct my field-study on a rubber estate which showed the following characteristics :-

(1) Fairly large size;

(2) Employing Tamil labourers:

(3) Owned by a European company; and

(4) Stable.

There existed some information about size and ownership of rubber estates in Malaya but virtually nothing on the size, ethnic composition and stability of the labour force. Information was also lacking on the lay-out, distance from towns and regional racial composition of the areas in which estates occurred. I considered it hazardous to settle down upon the study of any one estate without having an idea as to its 'typicality' in terms of my research interests. For this reason, and to utilise profitably the time which the company bureaucracies (managing agencies) took to decide whether they would permit me to visit and, if selected, stay on their estate, I carried out a reconnaissance of selected rubber estates on the west coast of Malaya. Malaya has an active union of plantation workers and an association of employers which includes most of the large corporations owning rubber estates. I had been in correspondence with both these bodies from Canberra and contacted their general secretaries and other officials in Kuala Lumpur for assistance in chalking out the reconnaissance.

Expectably, discussions with the union and the association did not lead to the formation of a sociological typology of large sized rubber estates with a predominantly Tamil labour force. The union classified estates likely to be of interest to me into three categories :-

(1) Benevolently managed;

(2) Neutrally managed; and

(3) Exploitatively managed;

and offered to arrange visits to representative estates in each category. The association was more sceptical about offering a typology or to sponsor visits to particular estates without consulting the agencies. It soon became clear to me that the main help which the union and the association could provide was :-

(a) To establish my bonafides among their members as a researcher;

(b) To offer such information as they had and were willing to give me for planning the reconnaissance; and

(c) To let their official views, as representatives of the labourers and employers respectively, become known on matters that interested me.

Perhaps I ought to mention here in paranthesis that working my way through bureaucracies of different sorts was inevitable for the assignment I had in Malaya. The perplexities faced and skills needed for their solution are of a different order from those we deal with as anthropologists in tribal or even rural communities.

It is true that in any fieldwork the anthropologist has to obtain clearance from some authority before he may proceed with his more commonly appreciated business of making rapport, participating in community activities, collecting the census, etc. Yet the initial problems of obtaining a clearance prove more abiding when one studies a rubber estate or a resettled aboriginal station. As a student of the rubber estate social system, I had to learn to live with the management bureaucracy and the central bureaucracy of the trade union! Members of the estate staff and trade union officials were actively, perhaps more legitimately, interested in the problems of the people among whom I lived. With the estate bureaucracy, I could assume a definite attitude of non-involvement by taking the manager and the office staff into full confidence; yet, several members of the Asian field staff considered my lack of social mixing with them and my preference for the company of labourers as distinctly devious and invidious. It led to difficulties which I do not have space to recount. With the employers' association I had no contact after the initial enquiries. We usually think of a bureaucracy as governed by formal rules which may often cause delays; the employers' association fitted this description well and truly in certain aspects of my dealings with it. The labour union in Malaya, on the other hand, is a bureaucracy of quite another sort. I never had occasion to experience delays due to lack of human understanding on the part of union officials; on the other hand, I was often overwhelmed with

courtesy and helpfulness. Personally, I feel most grateful for their attitude; yet in the field I often wondered if their generous solicitude did not create problems. Despite my appreciation of the union's tasks, there was little identity of interests between me and the union leaders. Until such time that I could evolve a formula for maintaining 'attached-detachment' with them, I had to seek fresh rationalisations every time I chose to pursue a course of action contrary to that suggested by my well-meaning friends in the trade union.

In the actual reconnaissance I relied on direct contacts with the managers or agency houses. I visited fourteen estates in the states of Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Johore. Besides being able to talk to managers, members of Asian staff and labourers to formulate my research strategy, I was able to pick out 'constants' and 'variables'. The constants were :-

(1) European manager;

(2) Asian, primarily Indian, staff:

(3) Large number of directly (as opposed to 'contract') employed Tamil labourers:

(4) Factory for at least the preliminary processing of latex;

(5) Estate branch of the National Union of Plantation Workers; and

(6) Social amenities such as temple, school, dispensary, creche, playgrounds, cinema, co-operative store or large general provision shops.

The variables were :-

(1) Distance from towns and the degree of geographical isolation;

(2) Proportion of Indians, Chinese and Malays in relation to estate size;

(3) Proportion of ethnic groups in the nearest town and in the district;

(4) Nature of the labourers' contract with the company direct or through a contractor; and

(5) Length of residence of the Indian community.

After a careful consideration of the results of the reconnaissance and taking into account the attitudes displayed by managers and agency bureaucrats, I short-listed the estates from among which to select the unit of my field-study. At this stage I ran into fresh difficulties for even those agencies which had earlier assented to my visits to rubber estates and shown me round with enthusiasm began to have second thoughts about permitting me to stay on or near their property for investigating into the social life of their labour force. My approach through the proper channels - the association and the union - had allayed their suspicions about ulterior political motives in the research; still, as a student sponsored by a foreign university I was unfavourably placed to mobilise any sanctions against a business corporation's refusal to let me conduct a field-study on one of its estates. I am deeply indebted to Mr. T.K. Critchley, the

Australian High Commissioner in Malaya, but for whose active intervention on my behalf at this stage, the present study may have never been made.

By the time an agency finally permitted me to study one of their estates, I had already spent six months in Malaya and gained valuable first-hand knowledge of the superstructure of the estate society. While still awaiting approval from a managing agency, I had carried out a sociological census of an Indian agricultural settlement - one of the very few of its sort in Malaya - near the west coast town of Port Dickson in the State of Negri Sembilan. From this experience I gained insights into the pattern of social adaptation of a Tamil-speaking community of ex-estate workers living on the peripheries of large estates and partly dependent on them economically. Perhaps a bigger advantage was the opportunity afforded by this study for practising my spoken Tamil which I had started learning in Canberra. Yet these were not my principal targets in Malaya and therefore, as soon as the unit of my major investigation was determined I should have sought accommodation in the labour 'lines' of the estate which I have throughout called by the pseudonym "Pal Melayu".[8] This was not permissible within the conditions laid down by the agency, viz. :-

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8 As far as possible I have tried to conceal the identity of people and places described in this thesis by giving them pseudonyms.

"(a) There is no interference with the estate organisation and work;

(b) You will reside outside the estate and proceed with your own transport to the estate daily."

My wife and I lived for a month in a government rest-house and for another month-and-a-half in a manager's bungalow, situated approximately five miles and three miles respectively from Pal Melayu. At the end of this time I succeeded in persuading the manager of Pal Melayu to let us live on the estate and we spent the remaining six months of my first field trip and the whole of the second field trip of six months living there. In the first period we shared the bungalow of a staff member (a junior conductor) and in the second, a labour 'line' in a house-block of Division I (see Map 6, p. 186). Most of the period during which we lived outside the estate was utilised for making a house-to-house sociological census of the estate population. This was also the phase of getting to know the people with whom we were to live and share most of our activities subsequently. I did not attempt to become a rubber tapper for it would have meant a considerable drain on my time and energies for 'off work' data collection. On the other hand, somewhat later when the estate bureaucracy no longer considered me as an intruder, I ventured to accompany my tapper and weeder friends to their 'tasks' and began to be accepted as a member of a couple of informal gossip groups of young men who gathered together during the tiffin interval

between tapping and collection. My wife's active presence in the field was of undoubted help in our adjustment as a couple living among other families in the labour 'lines'. Of course, she spent a large part of her time in the company of women - housekeeping and gossiping. The ease with which we were accepted in the labouring community increased perceptibly after we moved in to live with them in a house-block. I could never reconcile the tantalising earlier experience of living in a staff-house with our later residence in a labour 'line' where an informant, otherwise quite free and frank in his opinions, would suddenly lower the pitch of his voice or make ready to leave on hearing the voice of the junior conductor living in the neighbouring apartment separated only by a thin wall. Occasional contact with our neighbour and the opportunity of observing his movements were poor compensation for uninhibited interviewing with the labourers. There were other problems which most fieldworkers have to face. Firstly, I had to learn my Tamil in the field. It was only towards the end of the fieldwork when an old informant, whose opinions I respected, was heard telling a visitor inquisitive about us, "Oh, this 'bai' (corrupt for Hindi 'bhai', used by Tamils in Malaya to designate a North Indian) now speaks our language quite well - we taught him". I know, however, that it would take a much longer study and practice to learn to speak Tamil correctly. Of this I was made conscious early in my encounters with Tamil-speakers in Madras. Secondly, we had our

problems of health. The damp climate of Malaya, especially of the woody rubber estate, caused a skin-disease from which I was fortunate to recover before my field work ended. This did, however, made us to decide to send our only daughter, then barely eight months old, to her grandparents in India. My wife had to bear the separation and we had to justify our decision to the people of Pal Melayu. The latter task was rendered easier because many labourers of Pal Melayu maintain regular contacts with their natal villages in India and locally born children (although barely so small as our daughter) are often sent with close kinsmen for a visit to the homeland. Thirdly, some members of the middle-rung of the estate hierarchy comprising educated Indians remained dissatisfied with us for reasons mentioned earlier. But then in a fieldwork one cannot expect to please everybody and I feel happy that we made so many friends and so few enemies.

- (3) -

Finally, a few words about the region in which I made the study. Pal Melayu lies in the flat southern valley of Sungei Chempaka about ten miles east of the Straits of Malacca. The northern limit of our region is the river and the western, eastern and southern limits are three towns (Map 1, p.xxvii).[9] The soil here is clayey coastal alluvium, low in humic content, with a more

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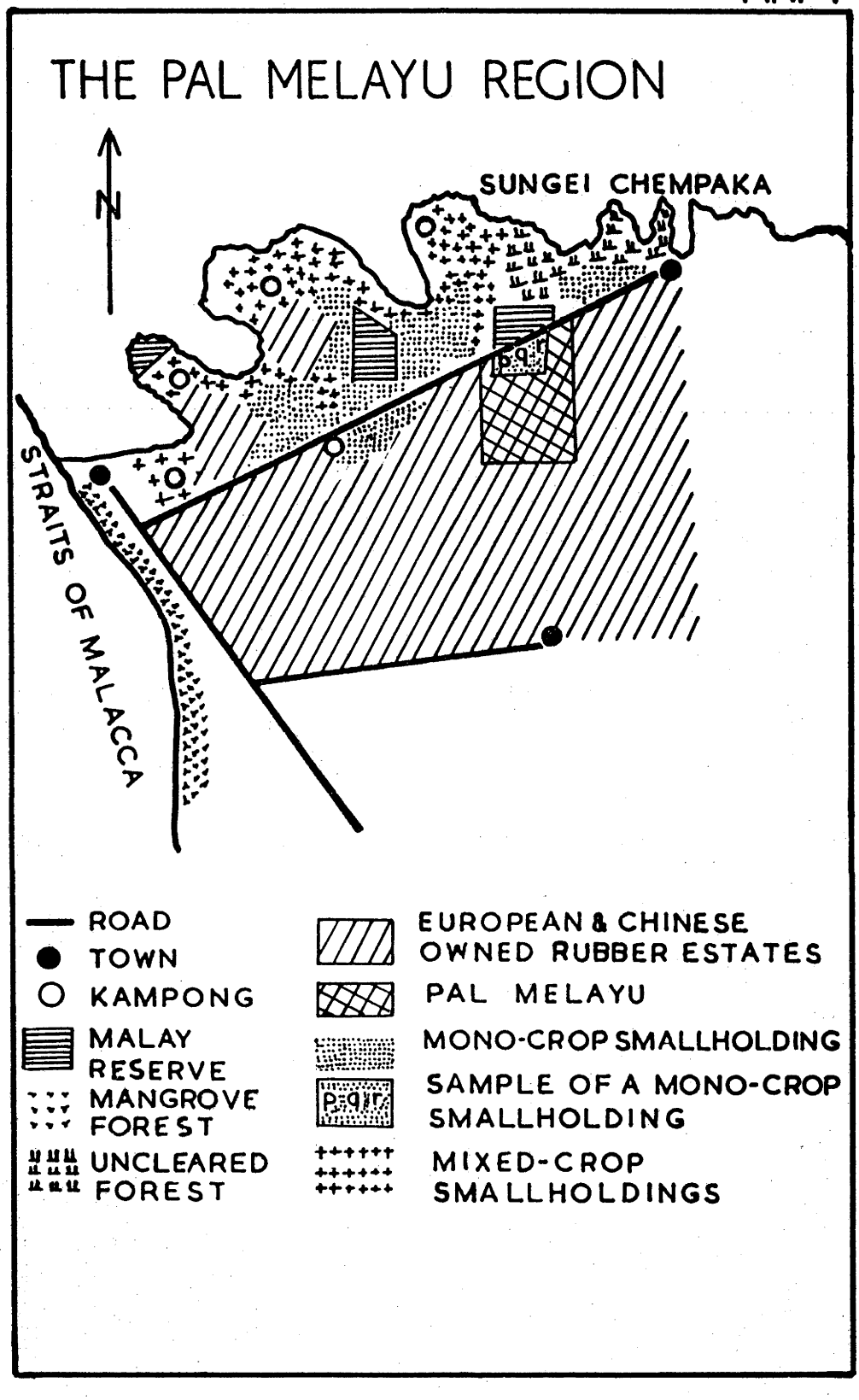
9 The term 'region' shall be used in this sense throughout.

MAP I


THE PAL MELAYU REGION
N
SUNGEI CHEMPAKA
STRAITS OF MALACCA
p.q.r
ROAD
TOWN
KAMPONG
MALAY RESERVE
MANGROVE FOREST
UNCLEARED FOREST
EUROPEAN & CHINESE OWNED RUBBER ESTATES
PAL MELAYU
MONO-CROP SMALLHOLDING
SAMPLE OF A MONO-CROP SMALLHOLDING
MIXED-CROP SMALLHOLDINGS

extensive spread to the south than to the north of the river. The northern valley plain of Sungei Chempaka is soon interrupted by an extensive peat swamp, most of which is useless for development. Pal Melayu lies outside the eastern edge of one of the west coast 'dry' belts where rainfall totals are less than 90 inches. The mean annual rainfall on Pal Melayu was 96.04 inches (1961) and the mean annual temperature 81 degrees F (1961). In the equatorial climate of the region, seasons can be distinguished by changes in rainfall rather than of temperature. The rainfall distribution shows two maxima and two minima in a year. The influence of both the North East (late November or early December to March) and the South West (June to late September or early October) monsoons is weak due to the sheltering effect of the mountains of Eastern Malaya and Sumatra respectively. The maxima occur during the transitional seasons of April and October/November. The October/November maximum is usually the larger. July is the driest month and February the second driest. Much of the rain on Pal Melayu and its region is thus conventional and boundary rather than orographic (Dale 1959:26).

The natural vegetation in the region is typical of low latitude tropical areas. There is very little primary forest left here. West of Pal Melayu along the narrow coastal strip seawards there is a dense mangrove Forest Reserve. Towards the east, between the southern bank of the river and the main road, there are narrow patches of unalienated government land overgrown

with the rain forest. There are three Malay Reserves in the area where only Malays may cultivate; one facing Pal Melayu and the other two westwards at various distances in the Sungei Chempaka delta.

The most imposing feature of the natural landscape, viewed from a high vantage point, is the zigzag terminal course of the river coiling into large and small bends. The earliest human habitation in this valley was along the banks of Sungei Chempaka and subsidiary rivers which traverse the delta. There are still Malay kampongs[10] situated on the river banks. These are reminiscent of a period when this was an unopened country with the rivers as the only means of transport and communication. In the first decade of the present century with the building of roads and establishment of plantation crops, land utilisation in this area began assuming its present shape. By the first two decades, all available land in the southern basin of Sungei Chempaka was alienated for agricultural purposes.

The present pattern of land utilisation in the region is characterised by the cultivation of cash crops on agricultural holdings of all sizes. For purposes of delineating this pattern, it is useful to distinguish between estates (100 acres and above) and smallholdings (below 100 acres). There is a broad regularity in the geographical distribution of these types of holdings which

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10 'Kampong' is the Malay term for 'hamlet'.

is partly related to the historical sequence in which land was alienated for agricultural purposes. The smallholdings may further be sub-divided into mono-crop and mixed.

The estates occupy nearly two-thirds of the entire area under cultivation in the region. These range in size from over 3,000 acres to 150 acres or less. Considerations of accessibility and safe distance from the tidal river and the availability of larger tracts of contiguous land for planting have resulted in the extension of the large estates on the southern side of the main road. The estates are invariably mono-crop and are mostly planted with rubber. In the absence of adequate natural drainage such as obtains on foothill locations, success in planting rubber on this flat coastal land has had to be ensured by means of an efficient system of artificial drains. Channels are, therefore, found on most of the estates which keep the water table at an average depth of more than 42 inches by draining superfluous water into Sungei Chempaka. The ownership of the majority of the estates is in the hands of corporations, whether European or Chinese. Of the twelve rubber estates in the region, seven are European-owned and five Chinese-owned. Estate rubber production is characterised by heavy capitalisation. There is a high degree of standardisation and specialisation of processes on European-owned estates and to a lesser extent on those owned by the Chinese. Again to a large extent rubber estates depend upon wage labour. All European-owned estates of the region employ a labour force containing over 90% of

resident South Indians and a small population of Chinese and Javanese contract labourers. Only the larger of the Chinese-owned rubber estates have labour 'lines' which are occupied by contract labourers, mainly Chinese, employed by a 'kepala'.[11] The smaller Chinese estates have an unspecialised and non-resident labour force also working under a contractor.

There is very little subsistence agriculture on the estates; almost the only crops of this sort are vegetables, betels, plantains and tapioca grown by the labourers for domestic consumption on patches of land provided by the management.

The smallholdings in the region range in size from one to fifty acres. In general, the size of mono-crop holdings tends to be larger than of holdings under mixed cultivation. All except a few roadside mono-crop holdings are rubber plantations while the number of holdings under atap[12] increases on the bank of Sungei Chempaka. Most of the rubber smallholdings are absentee-owned. These are tapped by either resident or non-resident tappers who

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11 'Kepala' is a Malay term meaning 'head' or 'headman'. On Chinese and some European estates a kepala is a Chinese labour-contractor, often for an absentee-owner. On such estates, labourers are not paid wages directly by the owner. On the other hand, the owner and the kepala enter a 'third-party contract' according to which the owner pays an amount for the work done to the kepala and the latter pays wages to labourers hired by him.

12 'Atap' is a Malay term for thatch weaved from the leaves of the trunkless palm, Nipa fruticans.

are paid by the owners according to the weight of the produce or by a daily rate. Only the large smallholdings have smokehouses. Often smallholdings are leased on a yearly basis, especially by Malay landowners. In the Pal Melayu region such rubber holdings are usually of a small size and are tapped by the tenant and his family. A few Chinese owners of rubber holdings live on their property and tap the land with the help of a few hired labourers.

Smallholdings of mixed crops are scattered all over the arable valley with prominent clusters in and around the older Malay kampongs of river estuary. Rubber, coconuts, fruit trees and vegetables are usually planted on one plot of land. Nipa palm grows wild on the river bank and on patches with brackish water. It has great utility as thatching material for kampong houses and for making mats and baskets. It forms an economically valuable adjunct to most of the peasant holdings in these kampongs. Land under mixed cultivation, while partly meeting the subsistence needs of the farmer, constitutes the most important source of cash income for the majority of Malay peasants in the region.

In the pattern of human settlement in the region the estate and the riverside kampongs mark two discrete types while an almost continuous chain of kampong houses at various distances on either side of the main road constitutes an intermediate third type. The first has a predominantly Indian, the second a mainly Malay and the third a mixed population. The third type is interspersed by one large kampong in a Malay Reserve. The distal towns

constituting the western and eastern limits of the region are typical Malayan towns also with a mixed population.[13]

Bunga Raya (population 2,200), the west coast town, is significant for the region as an administrative centre. Besides having the Government buildings and Courts, it also has the only secondary English school in the surrounding country. It is not provided with a railway line and has had an atrophied commercial existence ever since the hinterland of Sungei Chempaka became well connected with the developing areas eastwards and southwards. The Chinese in the town are mainly fish contractors and shopkeepers catering to the needs of adjoining villages. One prominent Indian businessman owns a bus company and the main provision store of Bunga Raya is in the hands of combined Malay and Indian Muslim interests. There are small Chinese and Indian (Tamil, Hindu and Muslim) restaurants. The rest of the population consists mainly of the workers and staff of the various Government departments. The population of Bunga Raya Town Board consists of about 45% Chinese, 37% Malays and 16% Indians.

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Within the scope of my study it was not possible to carry out a house-to-house census of the Malay and Chinese population in the region. The only complete population figures available from the 1957 census are those for the three mukims (administrative sub-divisions of a District) within which Pal Melayu is situated. The population and relative percentages for Malays, Chinese and Indians in this area are as follows :-

| Malaysians | % | Chinese | % | Indians | % | Others | % | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8,179 | 35 | 3,953 | 17 | 11,352 | 47.5 | 119 | 0.5 | 23,603 |

Compared to Bunga Raya, the eastern town of Bintang Emas (population 2,100) is of recent growth. It is contrasted with the former in being more commercialised and consequently dominated by a large business community of Chinese. The population of Bintang Emas Local Council Area consists of 72% Chinese, 23% Indians and 5% Malays. The town has a large bus station with services extending in all directions. The shops are stuffed with modernised goods such as ready-made Hawaiian shirts, Salamander shoes, fancy toys and trinkets which have an instant appeal, especially to the young among estate workers and kampong dwellers. In contrast to Bunga Raya which does not have a single photo studio there are three up-to-date studios in Bintang Emas. Recently, it also acquired the second cinema hall in the region. Near the cinema hall there is a bar which sells not only liquor but also three-digit lottery tickets. In addition, the town has a number of tea and coffee shops. All these features add to the excitement of Bintang Emas which draws into it every evening a large number of Indians and Malays from the surrounding areas on buses, bicycles and 'pirate' taxis.

To the south of Pal Melayu lies the small town of Baku Baku (population 380). The construction of a direct road from the coastal hinterland to central Malaya via Bintang Emas has diminished the earlier significance of Baku Baku as the only large kampong in the region situated on an important trade highway. Being surrounded on all sides by rubber estates with resident South Indian

labour-force, Baku Baku became the centre of Indian political activity during the brief period immediately preceding and following the Japanese Occupation of Malaya. Even today, nearly three-quarters of the town's population consists of Indians. Prior to the building of a cinema hall in Bintang Emas in late 1963, this town had the only cinema hall in the region. It also has a large group hospital with a European medical officer and South Indian staff. A cluster of shops owned mainly by Indians and a few Chinese has grown up here.

CHAPTER ONE

## THE PRE-WAR PLANTATION - I (The Industrial Subsystem)

### Initial Conditions:

In 1884 the 'Residential System' of British administration was officially inaugurated in the Malay States. The system gave the reins of administrative control of the Native States into the hands of a British Resident who built up a nexus of government departments in the charge of European staff with a District Officer as the head of district administration. In 1895 Pal Melayu was founded as a coffee and coconut estate on five hundred acres of land cleared of its secondary forest. It was the first European-owned estate south of Sungei Chempaka in the District. Half a century earlier, the same land had been planted with fruit trees by local Malays. Nothing is now known of the human settlement which grew around it then but it seems likely that the terrain was left depopulated and desolate by Malay peasants during the unsettled times of internecine fighting between rival Malay potentates two decades before the British began its *de facto* administration.

At the beginning of British rule, Bunga Raya was one of the most backward and the least populated of districts in the State, containing large tracts of unopened country some of which were suitable for agricultural development. In line with the general British policy for economic development of the States, the

District Officer at Bunga Raya was instructed to spend government revenue to develop public works, provide loans at low rates of interest and give easy terms in respect to alienation of land and taxes on new enterprises. The accent, here as elsewhere, was on economic development along capitalistic lines by the production of crops for the market on large farms owned and financed by capitalists.[1] In the adjoining districts, tin mining had been developed by the Chinese and where railway lines had been laid, Chinese and European entrepreneures were opening up plantations. In the Pal Melayu region, capital for commercial agriculture was hard to come by. The population of Bunga Raya, the only town in the district, consisted mostly of Minangkabau, Mandailing, Rawas and Bugis Malays whose chief occupation was fishing and fish-curing. The only group of commercialists was the town's Chinese traders and shopkeepers who controlled the riverine transport of tin-ore on Sungei Chempaka from inland districts to Bunga Raya. Since the early 1890s, Indian coolies had begun to be employed in the Public

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1 Evidence is at hand to show that concurrent efforts were made to encourage settled rice and fruit cultivation among indigenous and foreign Malays. In the established Malay kampongs agricultural land was brought under the control of district authorities through a compulsory registration of title deed under the Law Code of 1890. This facilitated the assessment and collection of land revenue. The intermediaries for the administration in the kampongs were headmen (penghulus), each in charge of a mukim. By appointing members of the royal household as penghulus and linking their office directly to district administration the British were able to create a facade of 'indirect rule' at the local level (see Sadka 1962:98).

Works Department. Petty Indian traders, mostly Tamil Muslims, had established shops to supply their specialised needs. But the Indian element in the population was still negligible and the lucky ones among these early Indian traders had to wait another decade or more before they could participate in the economic boom and, in their turn, invest capital in large-scale agriculture. With the opening up of railways in 1886 and the consequent diversion of the tin-route the government was keen to attract Chinese capital into commercial agriculture before it took flight from the district. When in 1893 a Chinese trader of Bunga Raya applied for 100 acres of land to plant coffee near Bintang Emas, this fact was noted with satisfaction by the District Officer in his report to the Resident. However, in all essential details the stage was being carefully set for an eventual welcome to European investors.

By the year 1895 the region had been provided with a rudimentary network of roads and postal communications. A police station had been opened in Bintang Emas. Sungei Chempaka was still an important highway for carrying passengers and goods to and from Bunga Raya and the tin-producing inland. Taking the cue from the rapid expansion of plantation agriculture in the neighbouring districts, the District Officer of Bunga Raya had the flat land on either side of the main roads surveyed and divided into sizeable plots for potential buyers. This foresight was soon rewarded. Good coffee prices in 1894-95 furnished an impetus to the extension of coffee planting in the district.

In the two months of September and October 1895, the District Officer received as many as twenty-two applications from Europeans for blocks of land varying from 320 to 1,000 acres each. The first two blocks of land to be granted were 500 acres each on the northern and southern banks of Sungei Chempaka. Soon afterwards, a similar acreage was granted for the opening up of Pal Melayu on the southern bank by the side of the newly-completed road connecting Bunga Raya with Bintang Emas.

The terms of land alienation for the first plot were the easiest possible anywhere in the world. There was no survey fee and no premium. The annual quit rent was only 50 cents per acre. The land was State-owned and was granted on lease in perpetuity. Registration and transfer of land were regulated by the Torrens system.[2] With an increase in the demand for land, new leasing terms were announced in 1905 which were calculated to reduce speculation and unearned profits in land rather than to make it more expensive. In the title deed for a second plot of 501 acres and 20 poles of land granted to the proprietors of Pal Melayu on 23rd December, 1907, the annual quit rent was $1 per

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2 Registration of title is 'the process whereby a government agency keeps a record of title of land and no dealing in respect of any parcel of land on the record is valid unless it is registered. The dealing must conform with the registry rules of conveyancing procedure and native customary modes of transfer are superseded. This system of registration of titles is often referred to as the Torrens System as it was introduced into South Australia in 1857 by a man named Torrens who was the Commissioner of Customs' (Simpson 1954:57).

acre for the first six years and $4 per acre annually for subsequent years. Among first charges a premium of $3 per acre was levied because the land had a road frontage but the survey fees and drainage charges were less than a dollar per acre. The terms of land alienation specifically laid down that at least one-fourth of the area must be cultivated within the first five years.

It is not known whether the European pioneer who opened up the estate was a proprietary planter or the representative of a joint stock company. There is evidence, however, that by 1907 Pal Melayu was owned by such a company. The company's proprietary directors and secretaries were in Europe and the estate was managed by a salaried manager who also had shares in the property. He was the son of the Prime Minister of a country in Europe and took up his appointment backed by several years of planting experience in Africa. In this early phase of the rubber industry such credentials of the personnel lent a degree of integrity and stability to attract home investors in a highly speculative enterprise. While the size of the property was still small, an experienced local planter was appointed the Visiting Agent. He advised the manager on technical matters and sent periodical reports to the proprietary company about the running of the estate.

The Corporation:

By the end of the decade, rubber established itself as a highly profitable crop. The Company was reconstituted to enable

it to expand and consolidate its planting interests. A number of European companies amalgamated to form a corporation with a locally registered centralised supervisory service (agency) for estates in South East Asia. The institution of the Agency[3] marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Pal Melayu. In subsequent years, 'the Corporation through the Agency'[4] sought to define and establish the line of centralised control over production and management of its constituent estates like Pal Melayu.

The Agency introduced uniformity and standardisation in administration and process of production on estates under its control and gave them the hall-mark of the Corporation. To the personnel of this tightly-knit structure of ownership and control down to each rubber tapper on an estate, the Company represented

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3 The Agency headquarters are situated within fifty miles of Pal Melayu. Today it is directly concerned with the standardisation of methods on all estates of the Corporation and with the policies of technical and administrative organisations. In theory it has little or no bearing on the running of one particular estate such as Pal Melayu. But in practice, even today, and more so in the past, it exercises considerable influence on appointments and transfers of staff and administrative policies and procedures on an estate. The Agency supplies a set of G.I. Books (General Instructions Books) to the manager of each estate under its supervision. These secret documents are supposed to contain all the details of administration, organisation, technique and standardisation and to serve as manuals and guides for action by the manager. The central organisation maintains regular contact with Pal Melayu through periodic visits of inspection by a Visiting Agent and other specialists. The Labour Welfare Agency plays a big role in certain areas of community life such as football and family planning on Pal Melayu. The manager maintains a multiplicity of informal relations with the European staff of the Agency.

4 Throughout the text this set-up will be referred to as 'the Company'.

the undivided fountainhead of authority. This image of the Company as being all-powerful and supreme was further strengthened among labourers on estates where the Company owned contiguous tracts of land stretching over 50,000 acres and more. The structure proved conducive to the growth of 'Company loyalties' among its employees of long standing. The actual patterns of authority and control which emerged within the basic framework of the Company at various levels of its organisation varied with the external conditions for rubber industry in Malaya. In tracing the dominant patterns of institutionalised social interaction on Pal Melayu before World War II, it would be essential to bear in mind the linkages of the local social field with the external world, namely, the superstructure of the Company and its environment.

Phase I (1895-1910):

On Pal Melayu, the first crops to be planted were coffee and coconuts. Coffee had been paying good dividends to planters in the State ever since the first European plantation had started there in 1881. Among applicants for land in Bunga Raya District were planters from Ceylon who had experience of coffee planting there and had been forced to leave the country when a leaf fungus (Hemileia Vastatrix) hit the crop in the 1880s. In contrast to Arabian coffee (Coffea arabica) which they planted in Ceylon, the planters in Malaya preferred Liberian coffee (Coffea

liberica) which was more resistant to leaf blights.[5] (For an early account of coffee planting on the west coast of Malaya, see Appendix I.)

The planters' honeymoon with coffee in the Pal Melayu region proved to be short-lived. In the late nineties, the world market for coffee became over-supplied with Arabian coffee from Brazil and the price of Liberian fell from $40 to $15 per pikul. The depression closely coincided with the first mature crop of coffee on Pal Melayu. It was apparent that in planting coffee a false start had been made. In this and the subsequent search for an alternative crop, the estate shared an experience which was common to most large-scale European agricultural enterprises in Malaya of the late 1890s.

All cautious planters of the period, however, had from the beginning refrained from casting their lots exclusively in favour of one crop. On Pal Melayu, coffee had been interplanted with coconuts. The crop could be planted with a low capital outlay and reasonable returns were expected from trees grown on coastal

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5 The Liberian Coffee plant is a bush which begins to produce fruit about three years after planting, reaches full bearing by the sixth year, and continues to produce for 25 or 30 years. The bushes were planted 30 feet apart, giving 300 per acre. The annual yield of one acre was 5 to 6 pikuls of beans. The berries ripened throughout the year but there were two main seasons during which one labourer could pick 130-140 lbs. of berries daily. Once the crop had been planted the work on an estate consisted of weeding, pruning and harvesting. After the ripe berries had been collected, the coffee beans were extracted from them by a process involving pulping, fermenting and washing and were then sun-dried, sieved, winnowed and graded for export.

alluvium within a period as short as two years. Coconut fruits obtained on the estate were sun-and-kiln dried to yield copra for export. On Pal Melayu an estimated area of not more than a hundred acres was planted with coconuts between 1895 and 1904. Precisely for the reason that it requires a low level of capitalisation and technical skill, the cultivation and manufacture of coconut has remained a small-holder enterprise in Malaya. A highly favourable location like that of Pal Melayu may have favoured estate cultivation of the crop by ensuring a higher yield per acre but the entrepreneurs then preferred the industrial crop of rubber. During the second and third decades of the century, most of the coconut trees were felled to make way for rubber planting but one coconut grove of three acres near the main entrance was retained. Until 1935, milk procured from coconut fruits on this patch was fermented to produce toddy. It was sold to estate coolies every evening under the supervision of a clerk.

Rubber was first planted on Pal Melayu experimentally in 1904. Part of the initial capital needed for planting rubber subsequently was provided by the Government through a Loan Fund. In 1906, within the first year of the operation of this Fund, the two owners of Pal Melayu obtained a loan of $16,850 on 6 per cent annual interest. However, rubber planting on the estate received its first real impetus from the Company which acquired Pal Melayu. The owners had more confidence in the crop, having

planted it experimentally on estates in Africa. Consequently, between 1906 and 1909, the Company planted 739¼ acres on Pal Melayu with rubber trees. According to a contemporary estimate, at the end of 1907 nearly 400 acres, one-third of the estate acreage, were under the new crop. The story of the rapid expansion of rubber planting on Pal Melayu during the pre-World War II years is told by figures in Table 1. However, taking the average period for the maturation of a seedling rubber tree to be seven years, it is unlikely that any of the trees on Pal Melayu would have reached the bearing age until well after the first decade of the present century. It is apparent, therefore, that the estate missed the rubber booms of both 1906 and 1910.

TABLE 1.

PAL MELAYU RUBBER ACREAGE

| Planting Year: | Area Planted During Year: | Year Bearing Began (approximately): |
|---|---|---|
| 1906-09 | 739¼ | 1913-16 |
| 1912-15 | 101¾ | 1919-22 |
| 1911-13 | 1022 | 1918-20 |
| 1907-12 | 245 | 1914-19 |
| 1910-13 | 509 | 1917-20 |
| 1910-20 | 168 | 1917-27 |
| 1920 | 168 | 1927 |
| 1923 | 282 | 1930 |
| 1924 | 298 | 1931 |
| 1931 | 20 | 1938 |

In rubber cultivation, the initial work-processes on the estate during Phase I were those of clearing and drainage. These were entrusted mainly to Chinese and Javanese contract labourers. Jungle was cleared by the slash-and-burn method. In order to achieve a perfect burn it was essential that the trees be felled to lie in one direction. Tamil coolies lacked this skill while the local Javanese were expert jungle fellers and the Chinese adapted quickly to a remunerative job. For digging drains too, gangs of Javanese organised under a headman were available locally. They welcomed such irregular jobs which could provide sufficient income but were unwilling to take up routine work which would keep them tied to an estate for a longer period. The early specialisation of the Javanese as drain diggers set the pattern for the future in the Pal Melayu region. On Pal Melayu, these gangs are still hired annually for drain repairs during the rainy season.

None of the present residents of Pal Melayu was there to witness and form his own impressions of this phase of rubber expansion. There is evidence, however, that in 1907 the estate was 1,200 acres in extent with a resident labour force of 250 Tamil coolies. The estate's European staff included the manager and a conductor. The conductor was a 'creeper', learning from

the experienced planter (the manager) all the tricks of the trade.[6] But it seems certain that the increased scale of the enterprise would have demanded the appointment of 'Asiatic' staff, possibly an accountant and a dresser to begin with.

During this period, planting was the most important of the work processes in the field. It is difficult to tell what method of planting rubber was first followed on Pal Melayu. In Malaya as a whole, in the absence of a centralised research agency for the crop, there were many false starts and idiosyncratic experimentation by individual planters (Ridley 1955:612). Gullick describes an interesting early method of planting which was simplicity itself. "....each man carried a bag of rubber seeds and a 24-foot bamboo pole. He planted a seed, laid out his pole on the ground in front of him, walked to the far end, planted another seed and repeated the process again" (Gullick 1960:92-93). The distance between trees was much greater than it is now, while that between rows was not much different from today. Consequently, the typical layout of a 'stand' was square with a lesser number of

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6 "The system was worked as follows: a young man desiring to become a planter would be put in touch with some outstanding planter in Ceylon or Malaya and, for the payment of a fee, the planter would become his tutor and teach him the rudiments of his profession. The creeper would pay his own passage out and for his keep for a period of six months. At the end of his tuition and if he had proved himself worthwhile, the tutor would endeavour to find him employment as an assistant on a plantation" (Harrison 1961:341).

trees per acre than in the 'rectangular' and 'hedge' plantings of the present time.[7] The merit of having more trees to the acre was recognised as early as 1908 (Carruthers 1908:195-6) but the systematic application of rectangular planting did not begin until Phase III. It would seem that during the period under consideration trees were planted between 100 and 200 to the acre and were subsequently thinned out to 100 or less per acre.

Post-planting care of the rubber fields included measures against drought, excess of moisture, sudden winds, insect, fungal and bacterial pests and other hazards. A bullock cart was used for spraying sodium arsenite to eradicate lalang.[8] The prevailing practice in field upkeep was clean weeding. The adverse effects of clean weeding, especially the loss of soil through erosion, began to be realised by about 1925 but it was a common practice on estates until 1930.

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7 In both rectangular and hedge plantings the distance between rows is increased at the expense of that between trees. In hedge planting the trees are planted closer to each other, four-and-a-half feet being the typical distance. This type of planting, favoured now on Pal Melayu, gives a larger number of trees to the acre without causing disturbance to the ecological balance between the plant and its nutrients.

8 Lalang is a Malay term meaning 'long-grass' (imperata cylindrica).

An interesting feature of the early industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu was the employment of a high number of resident labourers per acre. The comparative figures are as follows :-

| Year: | Labourers per Acre: |
|---|---|
| 1907 | 0.19 |
| 1940 | 0.14 |
| 1962 | 0.12 |

Even when we take into consideration the relatively larger labour requirement in the phase of extensive planting, the facts that clearing and draining were done by contract labour and tapping had not begun would suggest a tendency for labour surplus on Pal Melayu. The immediate reason for this seems to be the low level of rubber research and the prevalence of labour intensive operations on estates. But an equally important reason lay in the structure of the labour market with an overall excess of demand over supply, the general uncertainty as to future supplies at all and an acute competition for labour among employers, resulting in an abnormally high rate of 'bolting' from estates. Therefore, with the help of its trusted recruiting mechanisms in India, the Company on Pal Melayu sought to build up a reserve labour force. The Company could afford this reserve by paying low wages and creating under-employment of labour on the estate. A consideration of labour on the estate leads us to a discussion of the methods of labour recruitment and to an examination of their import for the early industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu.

On Pal Melayu, even the earliest Tamil coolies seem to have been brought from their villages in Madras Presidency by kanganies (see Appendix II) rather than under indenture. The latter type of recruitment was favoured only by the sugar-planters of Perak State who had been familiar with it from the 1860s. The system of bringing coolies as 'free' immigrants[9] recruited by a kangany, on the other hand, had been tried successfully earlier in Ceylon by many of the planters who now opened coffee and rubber estates in the Pal Melayu region. These planters had two principal objections to recruiting indentured coolies on estates. First and foremost, these coolies were an unselected lot being poor in physique and unable to do outdoor work. Many of them were 'weavers, dhobies, cooks and other men' who had no experience of agriculture. Soon after arrival in Malaya they became 'hospital birds' and were a liability for the estate and the government. Secondly, their recruitment through agents and sub-agents in South India was a costly affair. The law enabled planters to recover from a coolie within the three-year period of contract, less than half of the total amount spent on recruiting him. But in every estate there was a large number of deserters from whom nothing could be recovered and legal proceedings against whom only increased the labour costs.

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9 The term 'free' coolie refers strictly to the legal status of a kangany-recruited person who, in contradistinction to indentured labourers or Statute immigrants, had not signed a contract for a fixed period of service to the employer.

Besides kangany recruits and indentured coolies, there was a third category of 'local recruits'. It consisted of ex-indentured coolies from estates and local-born children of coolies. A local recruit, generally, was a 'free' Tamil coolie par excellence. According to a Government Commission, a 'free' coolie was "well able to take care of himself" (Report 1890: para. 315). But it seems that independence and self-reliance were not precisely the virtues which planters in those days looked for in a coolie. Indeed, they remained vehement critics of the independent-mindedness of labourers in the government works and attributed it to the system of local recruitment and indirect supervision. Only four years after the findings of the Commission came to light a planter wrote "Scarcely less desirable is the local recruit. He arrives here a humble-minded, quiet, almost naked savage, and in a few months time you see him walking along with a cheroot in his mouth, attired in a gaudy costume, with a hat on one end and a pair of shoes at the other, looking in at every liquor shop he passes and indulging in such amusements as pulling the patient Chinaman's pigtail or driving a pair of bullocks as hard as he can urge the poor beasts on through the busiest part of the town. All this is due to this fact, that as an individual he is quite out of touch with his European employer who only knows him as one of his sub-contractor's gang and who has probably never spoken a word to him since his arrival. On estates, the manager knows every coolie by name, pays him himself, supervises all his

work in person and subjects him to the strictest discipline; but on the roads and railways where the coolie's immediate boss is probably a native, himself well-schooled in all the devilries of his country, the result is that the coolie does everything in his power to imitate him and soon becomes a useless undisciplined blackguard" (Planter 1894:45-6). In the essay from which this quotation has been taken the planter makes several suggestions by which a regular labour supply may be assured but for understandable reasons his grasp of the kangany system as it subsequently developed in Malaya was imperfect. As we propose to show later, a kangany on the estate did in fact become a kind of 'native boss'. Yet, his diagnosis of the local recruits' unsuitability for estate work can be treated as an important datum for reconstructing the bases of relationship between 'higher and lower participants' (Etzioni 1961:5) in the earliest phase of the industrial subsystem of Pal Melayu. Subservience was considered an essential attribute in the labour force.

Compared with other means of recruitment the kangany system proved to be a satisfactory answer to the planters' need for a regular, cheap and subservient labour force. Towards the end of Phase I, the system had become well-established for the recruitment and supervision of the labour force on Pal Melayu. Within the context of a changing technology, the system provides a connecting theme for all four phases of the pre-war industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu.

Phase II (1911-20):

Towards the end of Phase I and the beginning of Phase II, the price of rubber rose steeply from 4s. a pound at the beginning of the century to over 12s. a pound at the peak of the boom in 1910. By late 1913, however, the financial and market uncertainties preceding the outbreak of World War I, resulted in a sharp fall in the price from 4/8d. per pound to slightly below 2s. The course of rubber planting on Pal Melayu during Phase II and possibly other features of the industrial subsystem also followed the direction of fluctuating rubber prices.

The stimulus of the 1910-12 rubber boom resulted in the greatest expansion of estate area ever. Titles for two plots of land of 544 and 622 acres each were issued in 1912 and 1915 respectively[10] which at once more than doubled the estate acreage. As figures in Table 1 show, 1910-13 was also the period for maximum rubber planting on Pal Melayu. With the onset of depression new plantings were rendered uneconomical. On the other hand, more trees planted in the earlier decades were now bearing latex and it is logical to assume that most of the coolies were diverted from planting to tapping. Some retrenchment of coolies is reported for some estates in Malaya during late 1913-14

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10 The issue of the title was usually delayed by as much as 12-14 months after the grant owing to the procedure for registration. It is, therefore, likely that the actual grant of these plots may have been in the early 1910s.

(Parmer 1960:222-5) but in the absence of labour statistics for Pal Melayu during this period it is difficult to say if there was unemployment there. Immigration of Indian and Chinese coolies was stopped from August, 1914, until January, 1915, and free repatriation was offered to all Indian and Chinese coolies from October, 1914, to February, 1915. It is again doubtful if a large number of coolies from Pal Melayu availed themselves of the latter opportunity. However, under impetus of increased demand for rubber during the war, prices improved. By mid-1915, the industry was well past the crisis brought about by the depression.

By the second decade of the present century, the first results of centralised rubber research in Malaya had begun to be available. In addition to the F.M.S. Department of Agriculture (established 1905) and the Rubber Growers' Association (established 1907) there was the Company's own research unit which had been carrying out rubber research on its Asian estates since 1909. As a result, even the earliest tapping and processing procedures on Pal Melayu represented a fair advance over those adopted by other pioneers of rubber planting in the State. The tapping system adopted on Pal Melayu throughout Phase II and a good part of Phase III was a variant of the 'herring-bone' system.[11] Tapping was

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11 Superimposed 'V' cuts on half circumference separated by a vertical distance of one foot and joined by a vertical channel to the base of the tree with one receiving vessel. For an illustration see Carruthers 1908.

done with a gouge-knife on alternate days. In terms of labour-saving and tree-economy this was among the most advanced procedures available at that time. The most important regular jobs on the estate during the latter half of Phase II were tapping, weeding and planting - in that order. In addition, a gang of coolies worked in the nursery and a gang of children collected rubber seeds. There were several gangs of tappers and weeders consisting of male and female coolies. Weeding was carried out on a task-basis and there were gangs of women coolies for weeding lalang. Organisation of the day's work was broadly along the same lines as in Phase I with only such differences in timings as were necessitated by tapping.

This phase marked the beginning of a stable labour supply in the industrial subsystem. The work processes on Pal Melayu at the end of this phase set the pattern of the demand for labour in the next two decades. From now until World War II, the balance of distribution of the labour force between tapping, weeding and planting was not much altered. The total number of labourers employed on the estate varied within limits set by the price of rubber, developments in research and technology and, last but not least, the state of labour supply at a particular time. However, just as the proportion of workers required for each operation was stabilised at this stage so also the mechanisms for labour supply were determined for the future.

Between the end of Phase I and Phase II, kangany recruitment became the established procedure for obtaining and replenishing labour supply on the estate. The method of kangany recruitment underwent during this phase a process of legitimisation and regularisation (Appendix II). In 1910 the indentured system was brought to an end and the unprecedented demand for labour in Phase II was met successfully by adapting kangany recruitment to a pan-Malayan machinery for the immigration of Indian coolies which had been set up in 1907. The operation of the machinery succeeded not only in making the supply of labour cheap but also in securing its rapid adjustment to changing demand.

The new machinery made the kangany indispensable to the industrial subsystem as a recruiter. By the end of Phase II he had become a kind of specialist for bringing people over to Pal Melayu through the maze of agents, depots, ships, camps, inspectors and clerks. Concurrent with the immigration of these labourers described in the Estate Statistical Register as 'coast recruits' - coolies brought over to Malaya from India (Coromandel Coast) by kanganies - there was a steadily growing stream of Indian immigrants described in Government reports as 'unassisted' and 'non-recruited-assisted' immigrants (Price 1960:30-3). Unassisted immigrants were persons who paid their own expenses across to Malaya. Non-recruited assisted immigrants were persons who obtained free tickets and a bonus to immigrate on applying to the Malayan Government Departments at Avadi and Negapattinam.

Immigrants in neither category were recruited from India by kanganies although a substantial number from each category chose to become coolies on estates. No doubt the majority of them were people 'well able to take care of themselves' (cf. p. 16) but cases are on record where such 'free' immigrants were also recruited by kanganies after arrival in Malaya. These, along with several other categories of men recruited by kanganies in Malaya (including coolies 'bolting' from other estates under pressure of 'crimping'), continued to swell the ranks of coolies entered as 'local recruits' in the Estate Statistical Register.

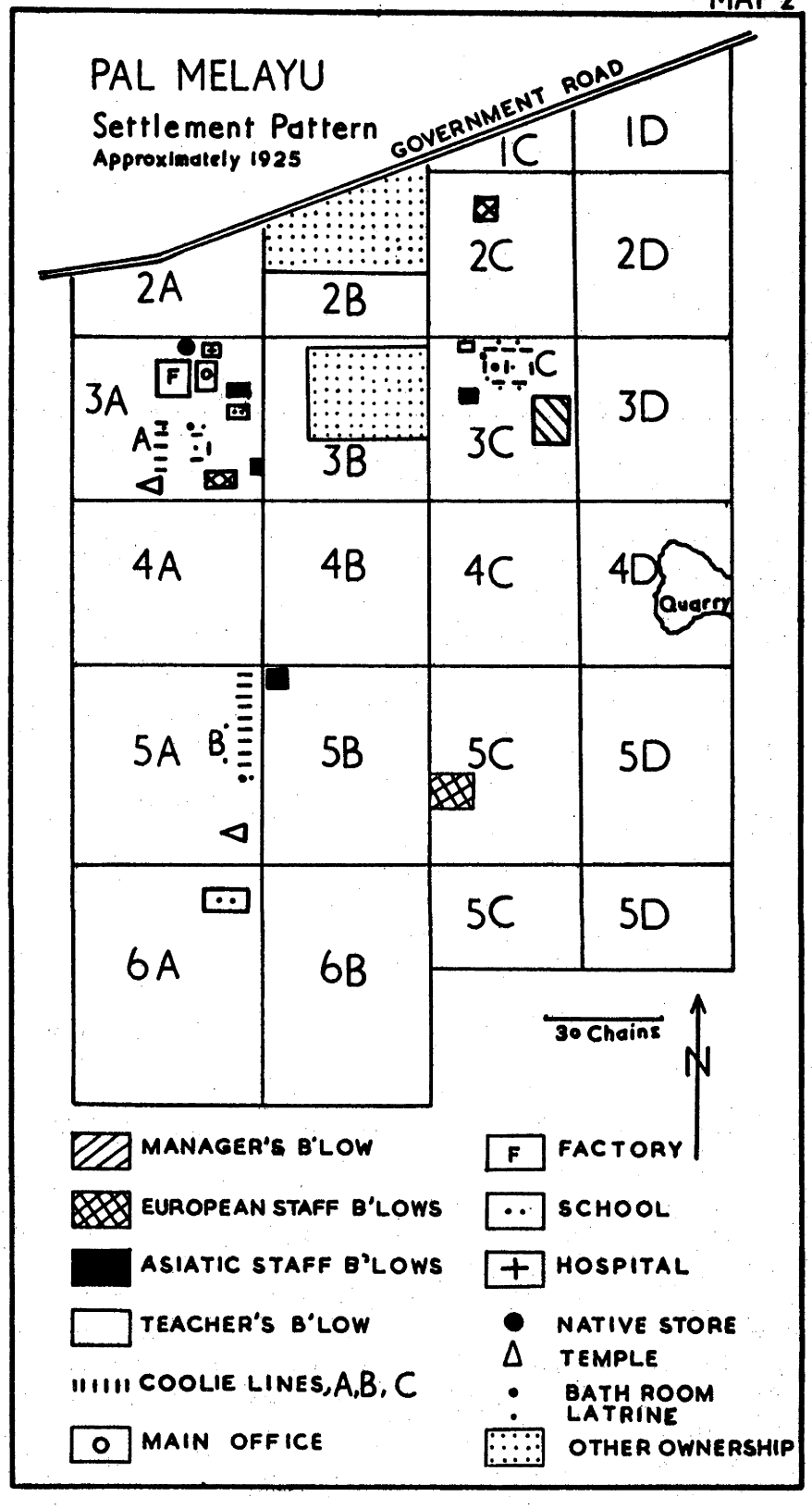
For a major part of the pre-war industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu the kangany occupied interdependent roles of recruiter and foreman. The kangany's role as a recruiter fortified his position as the first line supervisor of his gang. Conversely, in cases where a recruiter was subsequently raised to the rank of foreman, his ability to recruit coolies was being directly rewarded by the management. Whether the kangany was first a recruiter and then a foreman or vice versa, a system was now established in which the immediate supervision of labourers was linked directly with their recruitment. This basic principle of the industrial subsystem was exemplified in the constitution of work-gangs. The management rewarded the kangany by giving him authority over the gang, no labouring work to perform and higher wages in exchange for recruiting, retaining and replenishing the supply of labour. Through the institution of head kangany, the scale of rewards was

further extended. The kangany and the head kangany became important intermediaries between the estate coolie and the management which to him was the European manager and assistants. Nevertheless, a distrust of native bosses was still felt and a warning had been sounded early to the employers. Jackson cites from the Indian Immigration Department Annual Report for 1911: "The affluence and the power acquired by many of the kanganies is a matter which requires careful attention of all employers and labour; kanganies can make themselves very useful in obtaining labour and in every matter affecting its employment on the estate; but it is dangerous to allow them to get too much control into their hands at the expense of the personal influence of the manager of the estate. There are indications of such a state of affairs existing at present at some places; it will be a serious menace to the stability of labour forces throughout the country if this tendency becomes much accentuated" (Jackson 1961:118).

On Pal Melayu the autonomy of the head kangany or kangany was curtailed by making him a part of a carefully organised management bureaucracy. The functions of each official of the bureaucracy were clearly and precisely defined in the Company G.I. Books (see fn. 3 p. 6 ). Supreme authority on the estate was vested in the manager who, in turn, apportioned it to other officials of the bureaucracy according to the Company rules. Yet, for all their role playing 'on' or 'off' work all these officials were subordinate and ultimately responsible to the manager.

As early as Phase II, production and administration on Pal

MAP 2

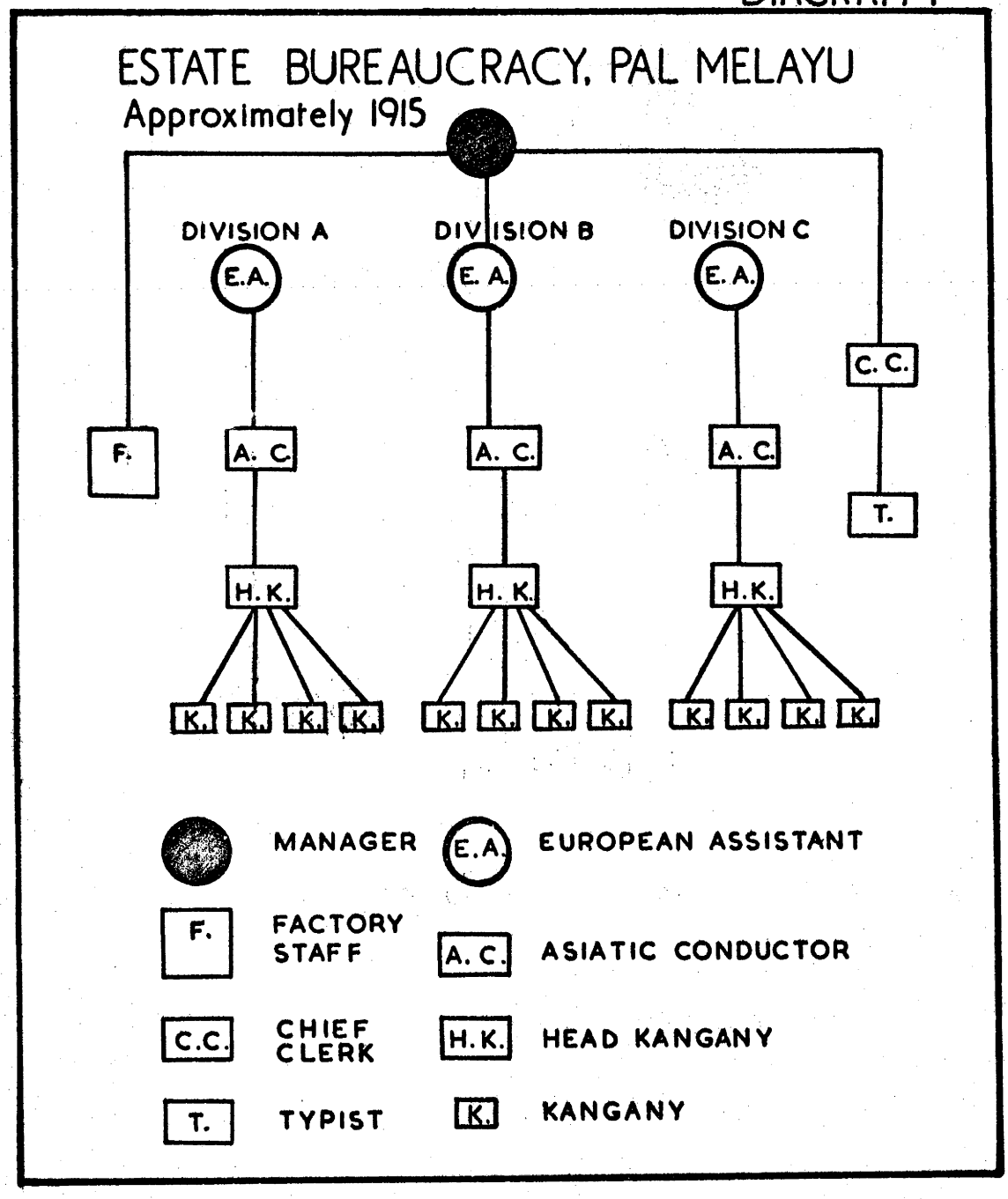

PAL MELAYU
Settlement Pattern
Approximately 1925
GOVERNMENT ROAD
1C
1D
2A
2B
2C
2D
3A
3B
3C
3D
4A
4B
4C
4D
Quarry
5A
5B
5C
5D
5C
5D
6A
6B
30 Chains
N
MANAGER'S B'LOW
EUROPEAN STAFF B'LOWS
ASIATIC STAFF B'LOWS
TEACHER'S B'LOW
COOLIE LINES, A, B, C
MAIN OFFICE
FACTORY
SCHOOL
HOSPITAL
NATIVE STORE
TEMPLE
BATH ROOM
LATRINE
OTHER OWNERSHIP

X65-190

Melayu began to be carried out through bureaucratic procedures. The estate was divided into three Divisions, each under a European assistant. Each Division corresponded to a residential nucleus; thus there were three clusters of labour lines designated as Divisions A, B and C (see Map 2). The official hierarchy for all three Divisions was similar. On each Division under the European assistant there was an Asiatic conductor, a head kangany and several kanganies. 'Office staff', comprising the chief clerk and a typist, and 'factory staff' completed the list of production-cum-administrative bureaucracy on the estate (see Diagram 1). Non-productional and non-administrative staff included the estate dresser and a school teacher.

The European manager and his three assistants were the only 'white' members of the estate management. The labourers referred to them as, literally, white men (vellai-k-kārar). The manager was known as big boss (periya-turai) and the assistant as small boss (cinna-turai). If there were more than one assistant, as on Pal Melayu, to the name or nickname of each of them was added the suffix boss (turai). The manager and assistants could speak Tamil fluently. The manager might not be present at the muster but he spent the whole of his morning in rounds of inspection of the estate. The European assistant was expected to be present at the muster twice a day. The manager and his assistants kept a close watch over the work performed by the coolies and personally looked after their promotion. Rangan kangany, who was brought to Pal Melayu by a kangany in 1912, recalled some of his earliest

DIAGRAM I


ESTATE BUREAUCRACY, PAL MELAYU
Approximately 1915
DIVISION A
DIVISION B
DIVISION C
E.A.
E.A.
E.A.
F.
A.C.
A.C.
A.C.
C.C.
T.
H.K.
H.K.
H.K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
K.
MANAGER
EUROPEAN ASSISTANT
FACTORY STAFF
ASIATIC CONDUCTOR
CHIEF CLERK
HEAD KANGANY
TYPIST
KANGANY

experiences of work on the estate :

"(My) work in the beginning was to pick up dry latex scraps. Salary for a day was 30 cents.. By working hard a tapper could earn up to $9 per month.. I learnt tapping after some time. When one day I was tapping the manager came. Seeing me work hard, he asked me if I would like to be a kangany and told me to wait for a year. But before next year the manager was transferred to another estate. When the new manager came he too was impressed with my work and decided to make me a kangany. But before that could be done the Asiatic conductor (kirāṇi) gave me the work of a watchman (kāvaṟ-kāraṉ). My work was to go to the port and bring to the estate new recruits who were coming from Negapattinam.. "

Sinnesamy kangany, the son of a mason from village Sennaisamuthiram in North Arcot, had this to say :

"The kangany brought me to Pal Melayu (about 1917) and gave me a changkul[12] to cut the drains (a weeder's work). I found it a very hard job. The European assistant (cinna-turai) at that time was a very strict man. He was nicknamed by the coolies Inspector boss (Inspector turai). One day I mustered courage and showed him my red and

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12 Changkul is a Malay term for 'a hoe used for digging'.

swollen hands. In those days weeders had their Sundays off and were permitted to learn tapping on trees in one part of the estate. The manager asked me to learn tapping which I did very quickly. So I became a tapper.. "

The increase in the number of Asiatic staff was a salient feature of the growth of Pal Melayu during this phase. Like the European planters and Indian Tamil labourers, members of the Asiatic staff were also immigrants. They came from India and Ceylon and belonged to the same ethnic group as the labourers. Yet Indian Tamils comprised only a small minority of the Asiatic staff on Pal Melayu before World War II. A member of the Asiatic staff who migrated to Malaya in 1912, began working on Pal Melayu as a probationer conductor in 1916 and returned to India after retirement in 1941, gave me the following data on the community of the pre-war Asiatic staff on Pal Melayu :-

| | |
|---|---|
| Malayalee | 10 |
| Ceylon Tamil | 8 |
| Indian Tamil | 4 |
| Sinhalese | 1 |
| Telugu | 1 |
| TOTAL : | 24 |

These figures from Pal Melayu agree with the available information about the make-up of the Indian and Ceylonese clerical class in Malaya. While estate labourers were being recruited from Tamil-speaking districts of the south-eastern coast of India, educated Ceylon Tamils supplied the earliest clerical staff on

Malayan estates and government offices. Their emigration to Malaya was encouraged by the Ceylon Government on receiving a request from the F.M.S. Government to send 'trained personnel for administrative and clerical functions' (Coomarswamy 1946:3).[13] Almost simultaneously, educated Malayalees who had earlier settled in Singapore and Penang, from villages in Kerala on the south-western coast of India, now began migrating to the Malayan mainland to take up clerical jobs on estates (Thomas 1956). It seems that the European estate managers preferred to recruit their labourers and Asiatic staff from different communities to eliminate chances of nepotism and corruption.

All members of the Asiatic staff - 'field', 'office' and 'factory' - were known as clerks (kirāṇi); sometimes the chief clerk was referred to as 'office clerk' (āpīcu-kirāṇi), the head conductor as 'big clerk' (periya-kirāṇi) and conductors as 'clerk' (kirāṇi). By this time, the Asiatic staff's participation in the industrial subsystem was defined strictly in terms of assistance to the European officers and since the latter during this phase preferred close personal supervision over the coolies, the Asiatic conductors had most of their direct dealings with kanganies and

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13 A retired planter who began planting in Malay in 1917 writes: "In my younger days, estate staff consisted almost entirely of Jaffna Tamils. One wanted a conductor, say, and the office clerk introduced a suitable man for the position. Thus, it was almost a closed shop". Personal Communications from Mr. J.A. Taylor.

head kanganies. The office staff similarly helped the manager to cope with the tremendously increased paper work necessitated by the articulation of kangany recruitment with a centralised machinery for immigration. They had little contacts with coolies in the field.

Ramasamy kangany gave me the following account of the procedure of work for labourers during this phase :-

"A kangany was put in charge of each gang of ten tappers. At 4 a.m., coolies gathered for muster and were sent to their 'tasks' by a conductor. A tapper's task consisted of 100 to 120 trees. The tappers headed straight for their tasks after the muster but the morning being still dark and chilly, they made fires near the trees and waited for the first rays of sun to appear. Tapping lasted from dawn until 8-9 a.m. and collecting began soon afterwards. Each tapper was given two buckets, one large and the other small. Latex was collected from cups into the smaller bucket and then poured into the large one. The large bucket was provided with a covering lid and had to be carried on head to the store - a distance of nearly three quarters of a mile - where each tapper emptied it into a tank. (Ramasamy said that the bucket was covered with a lid because the management did not want a kirani of any other estate to see how much latex a tapper was able to collect. The manager feared that if a good tapper's

working capacity became known to the kirani of another estate, the latter might try to crimp that labourer by offering him higher wages.) There was no weighing of the latex. The tappers finished their morning job by 11 a.m. At 3 p.m. there was another muster to check if the coolies sent out to their jobs in the morning had actually performed the tasks. After the second muster, tappers were sent to their tasks again - this time to clean the trees and to sweep the surrounding place with brooms. Dry leaves and branches had to be burnt. Also, every tapper, whether male or female, had to cut three logs of wood and place them by the side of the gravel road near his task. A bullock cart was sent round the estate to collect such logs and bring them to the factory for use as fuel for the boiler. For their afternoon work, weeders were required to sweep estate roads (gravel paths) and burn the rubbish. Wages were paid on the tenth of each month. On pay-day, the manager came on a motor cycle while a few Asiatic conductors rode bicycles. Female coolies carried infants to work because there was no creche. Tappers were not closely supervised and a conductor came to visit the tasks only twice or thrice in a week."

Phase III (1921-29):

The decade of the twenties has been described in rubber circles as the 'crazy twenties' because of the rapid fluctuations in the price of rubber. During the period of World War I (1914-1918) Malayan producers faced an acute shipping shortage which led to the accumulation of vast rubber stocks. Combined with this were the general uncertainties of the times. Consequently, the price of rubber during this period remained low in comparison to the pre-war years in Phase II but was high enough to make it profitable to the producers. At the end of the war, however, the rise of manufacturing industries, particularly the automobile industry in the United States, created an unprecedented demand for rubber. The expanded market absorbed not only the accumulated stocks from the war years but also the increased supply from estates where the extensive plantings of 1910-12 were now coming into bearing. So heavy was the demand that in spite of increased supplies the price remained remarkably steady and was actually higher in the last quarter of 1919 than in either the second or third quarters. In mid-1920 the post-war slump hit the manufacturing industry in the United States which was then consuming nearly two-thirds of the world's production of rubber. Towards the end of 1920 the United States more or less stopped buying rubber from Malaya and the price of rubber fell abruptly from 2s. to 10d. per pound. From then until 1922, while the heavy production from plantations continued to pour

into the market, the price of rubber remained considerably below the average cost of production. From 1st November, 1922, until 30th October, 1928, rubber production on estates and smallholdings in Malaya and Ceylon was restricted under the Stevenson Scheme.[14] The short-term effect of the Scheme was to create artificial scarcity, increase demand and restore the price of rubber to pre-slump levels. But in the long run it failed to stabilise the price and led to an extension of rubber planting elsewhere, provoking the hostility of American manufacturers. Especially during the period of uncontrolled competition between the removal of restriction in 1928 and the depression of the thirties, many of the large estates found it difficult to increase their production sufficiently to meet the growing demand and thus compete effectively in the rubber market.

The industrial subsystem of Pal Melayu during Phase III fails to reflect equally all these trends of the macrocosm. The trend of fluctuations in the size of the labour-force from 1920-29 serves to illustrate this fact (see Table 2). The year of greatest reduction in the labour force corresponds with the onset of the slump. Perhaps the drastic cut in the labour force

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14 Each rubber producer was assessed for a standard production which was related to his output for the year ending October, 1920. His actual output was subsequently limited to a proportion of this standard. The initial quota was 60 per cent of the standard. The quota was subject to quarterly revision and variation, within limits laid down in the agreement, as average prices diverged from the norm. The sanction imposed was a prohibitive export duty on amounts in excess of quota (see Allen and Donnithorne 1957:122).

TABLE 2.

PAL MELAYU LABOUR FORCE - 1920-29.

| Year | Tamils | | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Men | Women | Children | |
| 1920 | 684 | 314 | 94 | 1,092 |
| 1921 | 354 | 165 | 62 | 581 |
| 1922 | 387 | 211 | 81 | 679 |
| 1923 | 375 | 201 | 85 | 661 |
| 1924 | 436 | 257 | 131 | 824 |
| 1925 | 469 | 267 | 154 | 890 |
| 1926 | 455 | 294 | 140 | 889 |
| 1927 | 309 | 197 | 75 | 581 |
| 1928 | 378 | 238 | 113 | 729 |
| 1929 | 436 | 284 | 63 | 783 |

Note: There were no Chinese or Malays in the labour force.

was affected by a change in the tapping system rather than by the abandonment of mature trees for compulsory rest from tapping. It is not known what steps were taken to economise on weeding because clean weeding seems to have been the order of the day and children - all weeders - still retained their ratio in the labour force. In terms of the stability of the labour force, it is interesting to speculate what may have been the lot of 511 Tamil labourers who were lost to the estate in 1921. Unfortunately, no detailed figures for labour turnover are available for the period prior to 1926 but in the light of the subsequent pattern it is probable that a certain proportion would have been 'dependants taken off' who were never repatriated while others were persons

'paid off' who may have rejoined Pal Melayu as local recruits after serving for a few years elsewhere in Malaya. In any case it is clear that irrespective of the Stevenson Restriction Scheme, the labour force on Pal Melayu was built-up almost continuously from 1922-27. In 1922 some labourers would have been recruited for tapping trees which came into bearing that year. During 1922-23 it is also likely that production was curtailed by some reduction in the frequency of tapping on older trees which needed to be rested. This would have made only a few tappers redundant as suggested by the small decrease of only 18 labourers in 1923. The increase of 163 labourers during 1924 seems unusual for a period when a recovery in the price of rubber was still not in sight. Even the planting of 98 new acres in that year would not require so large an increase. The continuation of this trend for labour-force in 1925 and 1926 may be taken to indicate the return of normalcy as the price of rubber recovered. In the next year, 1927, Pal Melayu lost 308 labourers. The reason for this lay not in adjustments of the work processes within the estate but, it would seem, in the greatly increased demand for labour on Malayan estates as a whole. In that year, as many as 253 persons 'bolted' though this figure was still less than the number of bolters in 1926. (For this and the subsequent discussion see Table 3.) On the other hand, both the number of persons 'paid off' and of 'dependants taken off'

TABLE 3.

ANNUAL TAMIL LABOUR TURNOVER (1926-1940)

| | GAINS: | | | | | LOSSES: | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Coast recruits | Local recruits | Transferred from other estates | Dependants taken on | Total | Paid off | Bolters | Died | Transferred to other estates | Dependants taken off | Total | NET GAIN OR LOSS |
| 1926 | 384 | 51 | - | 186 | 621 | 247 | 267 | 10 | - | 98 | 622 | - 1 |
| 1927 | 219 | 55 | - | 134 | 408 | 290 | 253 | 7 | - | 170 | 720 | -312 |
| 1928 | 13 | 206 | - | 164 | 383 | 52 | 74 | 7 | - | 102 | 235 | +148 |
| 1929 | 237 | 113 | - | 173 | 523 | 196 | 101 | 8 | - | 164 | 469 | + 54 |
| 1930 | 448 | 272 | - | 194 | 914 | 376 | 269 | 9 | 50 | 115 | 819 | + 95 |
| 1931 | 5 | 185 | - | 363 | 553 | 230 | 149 | - | - | 354 | 733 | -180 |
| 1932 | - | 127 | - | 388 | 515 | 239 | 102 | 2 | - | 347 | 690 | -175 |
| 1933 | - | 447 | - | 66 | 513 | 214 | 133 | 1 | - | 172 | 520 | - 7 |
| 1934 | 273 | 205 | - | 165 | 643 | 167 | 110 | 7 | - | 120 | 404 | +239 |
| 1935 | 143 | 193 | - | 181 | 517 | 358 | 98 | 3 | - | 272 | 731 | -214 |
| 1936 | 3 | 174 | - | 193 | 370 | 123 | 63 | 4 | - | 195 | 385 | - 15 |
| 1937 | 222 | 238 | - | 164 | 624 | 163 | 163 | 4 | - | 174 | 504 | +120 |
| 1938 | 34 | 223 | - | 152 | 409 | 223 | 76 | - | - | 150 | 449 | - 40 |
| 1939 | 12 | 184 | - | 207 | 403 | 117 | 107 | 3 | - | 246 | 473 | - 70 |
| 1940 | 2 | 122 | - | 144 | 268 | 61 | 89 | 2 | - | 137 | 289 | - 21 |

show an increase while on the supply side only a small number of 'coast recruits' was taken on. It is remarkable that in 1928 'local recruits' were as many as 206 while the number of 'coast recruits' dwindled to a mere 13. It would seem that with an increase in rubber prices and a consequential rise in the quota for rubber production in 1926-27 there was a scramble for labour which continued into 1927-28 even when the rubber prices and quota relapsed somewhat. As we shall see more fully in the next section, under these conditions 'every labourer was worth his weight in gold'. 'Crimping' was rife; it meant that estate employers who had suddenly become aware of the possibilities in a sellers' market for labour began to spirit away labourers from other estates under inducement of higher wages. Under these pressures the number of persons 'paid off' and of 'bolters' mounted and the employers who lost labour could hope to replenish it only by recruiting - either from India or locally. If the former failed the latter was more expensive. (The mechanism of taking dependants 'on' and 'off' was a safety valve which worked only in normal times.) In the years 1927-28, Pal Melayu seems to have been caught up in this dilemma. By 1929, however, the situation seems to have been brought under control, mainly through striking a more judicious balance between 'coast' and 'local' recruits.[15]

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15 The difficulties of assessing repercussions of developments in the commodity market upon the industrial subsystem of a single

The 'crazy twenties' provided the planters with their first taste of the mercurial rubber market. The experience served to reinforce the conviction that a stable force of Tamil coolies controlled by kanganies was the only safeguard against so capricious an undertaking as the running of a rubber estate. On Pal Melayu, the realisation of this fact introduced a new element in the relationship of coolies with the manager which extended not only to the community subsystem but to the work situation as well. Since the beginning of kangany recruitment, paternalism had been the keynote of the relationship between the higher and lower participants of the industrial subsystem. In numerous statements culled from the life-histories of both old labourers and managers on Pal Melayu, the manager and his European assistants of those days are described as the 'father and mother' of the Tamil coolies. Interestingly enough, from

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15 cont'd...
estate such as Pal Melayu are immense. These are further aggravated when our information about the estate during this period is confined to incomplete labour statistics and interviews with largely non-literate informants. Insomuch as they are more than merely descriptive of conditions in the region, the above suggestions are offered as plausible hypotheses. Any effort to arrive at a more definitive explanation of these trends on Pal Melayu - a worthwhile exercise in its own right - must take into account the Corporation as the mediating factor between the macrocosm of the rubber market and the industrial subsystem of an estate. The broad policies of work processes, labour recruitment and utilisation and management practices on Pal Melayu would be defined for any phase by special considerations such as the trend of buying in its particular world-market, the attitude of the particular Association of Investors to which it belonged and the policy of production allocation between the various estates of the Corporation. Further research into such aspects of decision-making in the industrial subsystem may be conducted by the use of Company records.

the beginning, these are precisely the terms in which the attitude of the kangany or the head kangany towards the labourers is also epitomised. In this phase, the management deliberately designed the structure of human relations with the coolies to conform to the paternalistic principle. In times of such acute need for a stable labour force as the mid and late 1920s, the manager on Pal Melayu manipulated roles in such a way that for the coolie he and his European assistants became the benevolent father-figure while the head kangany and his kanganies represented their punitive counterparts. The capture and chastisement of bolters as well as the field supervision of labourers was entrusted increasingly to the kangany, head kangany, probationer conductor (kaṇakka-p-piḷḷai) and Asiatic field conductors. The European staff, including the manager, occupied itself more with planning, administration and top-level supervision. At the same time, it became a common practice for the manager to visit the 'task' of a tapper or a weeder, especially a female labourer, and talk informally on matters concerning his or her family such as the sickness of a child, marriage of a daughter or son, and so forth. Ranganathan mentioned with a moment of pride how the boss (turai) would come and talk to his tapper-wife in her task 'touching and admiring her jewellery' to show his solicitude.[16]

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16 Of relevance here is Rober K. Merton's concept of 'pseudo-gemienschaft', defined as "the feigning of personal concern with the other fellow in order to manipulate him the better" (Merton and others 1946:142; for its application in the analysis of an industrial situation see Gouldner 1955:70-85).

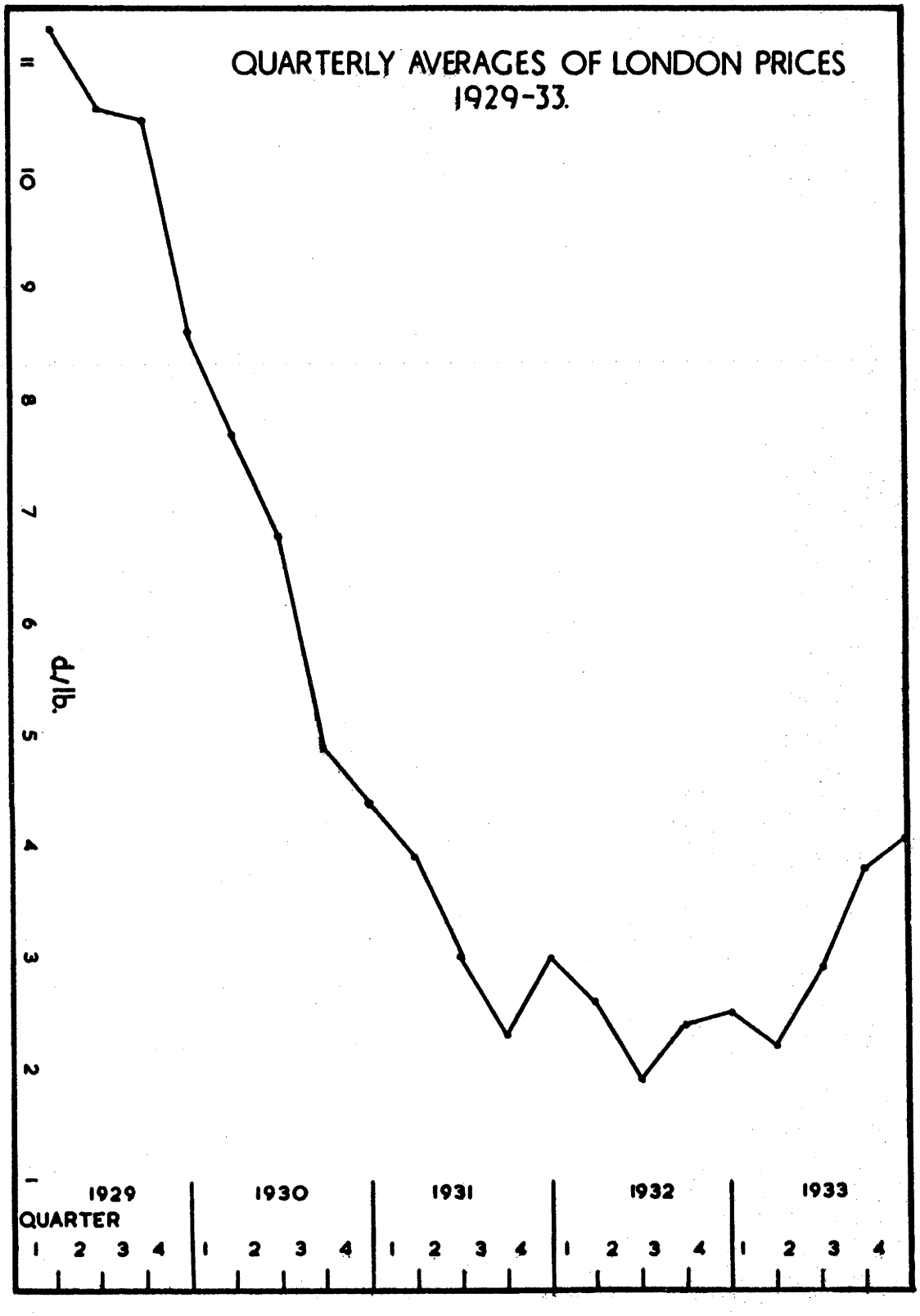
Phase IV (1930-41):

After a short-lived boom in 1925, rubber prices began to fall from 1926 onwards. Nevertheless, all through this period the estate producers of rubber did not fare as badly as the falling prices might suggest. The high figures for internal labour turnover on Pal Melayu during the second half of Phase III are a fair index of the keenness among estate producers in Malaya to secure labour for maximising production within limits set by the Restriction Scheme. A secular rise in the world demand for rubber during the last years of the Scheme helped to absorb all supplies and to prevent the price from being unprofitable to producers. Also, during the worst period of the depression the estates had effected considerable economies. The reduced cost of production enabled producers to obtain a sufficient margin of profit even during 1928-29 when, following the removal of restriction, supplies became uncontrolled and the price fell to 10d. a pound. But that was about as far as the industry could go for not very long after the removal of restriction the trend for demand was completely reversed. From the beginning of 1930, buying by the United States manufacturers continued to dwindle rapidly, surplus stocks began to accumulate and by the summer of 1930 rubber producers in Malaya realised that the industry was in the grip of a world depression. Between 1929 and 1932, the average price of rubber on the London market fell from 10$\frac{1}{4}$d. a pound to 2$^{5}$/16d. a pound and the lowest price was reached in

June, 1932, with a London price of 1.7d. a pound. Diagram 2 shows the quarterly averages of London prices from 1929-33.

One of the first abortive efforts to check the declining prices was made by the Rubber Growers' Association which arranged to stop all tapping on British and Dutch estates during the month of May, 1930. The 'tapping holiday' did not help matters at all and the price was down to 6d. by mid-June of that year. Between 1931 and 1933, efforts made to negotiate another Restriction Scheme failed, each successive failure having an adverse effect on price. It is remarkable, however, that the rate of production on Malayan estates during 1930-32 was maintained at the same level as in 1929. To a certain degree this was inevitable owing to the large fixed capital outlay and the inelasticity of supply characterising estate production of rubber. But even in 1932, because of the drastically reduced cost of production, relatively few firms became bankrupt. On Malayan estates generally costs of production were cut in three principal ways: (i) Substantial reductions in salary and wage rates; (ii) Employment of fewest possible number of persons to carry out absolutely essential maintenance and cultivation work; and (iii) Increased efficiency, hastened by the spur of necessity, partly through the application of newly-discovered methods. The new cost of production estimated for a 'majority of Malayan companies' at 3d. or even lower by the end of 1932 by no means represented a new level of proper normal costs; in not making proper allowance for maintenance or

DIAGRAM 2


QUARTERLY AVERAGES OF LONDON PRICES
1929-33.
d/lb.
11
10
9
8
7
6
5
4
3
2
1
1929
1930
1931
1932
1933
QUARTER
1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4 1 2 3 4

amortisation, it could not be expected to last beyond an emergency period of perhaps two or three years. The Governments of the principal rubber-producing countries and the planters persisted, therefore, in their efforts to reach agreement on a Restriction Scheme. The International Rubber Regulation Agreement, with a currency of four years, was ratified by the British, Dutch, French and Siamese Governments in 1934 and was brought into force on June 1st of the same year. An International Rubber Regulation Committee, comprising Government representatives and planters from participating countries, was constituted to administer the Agreement. Under the terms of the Agreement, each rubber-producing country was annually assigned basic production quotas. An export quota, actually a percentage of the production quotas, was fixed quarterly by the Committee. Estate production was geared to export quotas for which the estates were assessed on their output during the period 1929-32. New planting was forbidden with few exceptions and replanting was restricted. Under the protection offered by the Scheme the price of rubber showed a steady increase from 1934-37 with an average price-fall of only 2 cents per pound in the year 1938 when the Scheme was brought to an end. The work of the Committee has been vehemently criticised for having been discriminatory against smallholders (Bauer 1948). We are not interested in that controversy. Its outstanding achievement from our point of view was to provide a guarantee against the violent fluctuations of

rubber price during the rest of Phase IV.

Even if one knew the economics of labour utilisation on a rubber estate it would be difficult to predict which of the various alternatives would have been adopted by the management on Pal Melayu when faced with the depression from 1930-33. Interviews with labourers who worked during this period were not very helpful in eliciting the nature of changes in the work situation. Information obtained from them could be summed up in these words :-

> About the year 1930, the price of rubber fell to $4 per pikul. On Pal Melayu, men and women labourers received a wage of 30 cents and 24 cents respectively for three-quarters of a full day's work. This meant that those who worked as tappers in the morning had to weed in the afternoon. If a tapper felt disinclined to do the afternoon's work, his wages were proportionately cut. Many labourers, mostly weeders, became unemployed but they were not forced to vacate the 'lines'. The manager promised to give them work when it was available. Some of the labourers stayed on but a large number preferred to return to India through free repatriation (taruma order). Although tapping was not abandoned in any part of Pal Melayu, some estates of the region adopted selective tapping. In general, more people seem to have been repatriated from other estates than from Pal Melayu

because the manager of the latter was able to give work to at least one member of most of the families. It is not known if any of the persons discharged from Pal Melayu went to live with his kinsmen on another estate but there is evidence of the reverse taking place.

The manager of Pal Melayu from 1931-34 described it to me as 'a very difficult period'. In approaching the crisis, the Company adopted a code that no member of the staff - European or Asiatic - would be retrenched. Nevertheless, in 1932 or 1933 all three European assistants on Pal Melayu were shifted to other estates of the Company. The Asiatic conductor of Division A was also made the head conductor of all three Divisions. In the latter capacity he became the immediate boss of Asiatic conductors on Divisions B and C. There can be no doubt that this reorganisation was caused by the need to economise. For understandable reasons the manager whom I interviewed put these changes in mild terms, saying that the difficult times were overcome 'by increasing our discipline and by the very good and willing cooperation of the labour force'. The manager's reference to discipline is almost certainly a euphemism for the transfer of European assistants and the salary-cuts which all members of the staff had to suffer. As to the co-operation of the labour force, he meant the stable core of old labourers who, under a sense of loyalty to the Company (matched, presumably, by a degree of alienation from the home-village), stayed on and

worked for the estate at a mere pittance of a wage.

A third body of evidence concerning certain developments during the four years of depression is furnished by figures for labour turnover (see Table 3). In Table 4, figures for the years 1926-37 are grouped in three successive periods - A, B and C - of four years each. Thus period B (1930-33) covering the depression is shown relative to the periods of four years preceding and succeeding it. Comparative evidence from the three time-periods is synoptically stated in Table 5.

The comparison highlights the following trends during period B which may be of significance for the industrial subsystem :-

(1) An increased volume of labour turnover;

(2) Decrease in the number of coast recruits and increase in the number of local recruits;

(3) Increase in the number of dependants taken 'on' and 'off'.

What picture of an industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu during the depression emerges in the light of this evidence? From the large number of recruits which the Company obtained from India before immigration was stopped on 1st August, 1930, it would appear that the initial fall in prices was not followed by a policy of reducing the labour force. The large number of local recruits employed throughout this period further suggests that the Company could not afford a drastic reduction in its labour force. There

TABLE 4.

TAMIL LABOUR TURNOVER FOR FOUR-YEAR PERIODS : 1926-1937.

| | | GAINS: | | | | | LOSSES: | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Time Period | Coast recruits | Local recruits | Transferred from other estates | Dependants taken on | Total | Paid off | Bolters | Died | Transferred to other estates | Dependants taken off | Total | NET GAIN OR LOSS | AVERAGE END-OF-THE-YEAR LABOUR FORCE FOR EACH FOUR YEAR PERIOD |
| A | 1926-29 | 853 | 425 | - | 657 | 1935 | 785 | 695 | 32 | - | 534 | 2046 | -111 | 745 |
| B | 1930-33 | 453 | 1031 | - | 1011 | 2495 | 1059 | 653 | 12 | 50 | 988 | 2762 | -267 | 653 |
| C | 1934-37 | 641 | 810 | - | 703 | 2154 | 811 | 434 | 18 | - | 761 | 2024 | +130 | 617 |

Note: There were no Chinese or Malays in the labour force.

TABLE 5.

LABOUR TURNOVER FOR FOUR-YEAR PERIODS 1926-37 SUMMARISED.

| Category | 1926-29 | 1930-33 | 1934-37 |
|---|---|---|---|
| GAINS: | | | |
| Coast Recruits | Maximum | Minimum | Intermediate |
| Local Recruits | Minimum | Maximum | Intermediate |
| Dependants taken on | Minimum | Maximum | Intermediate |
| LOSSES: | | | |
| Paid off | Minimum | Maximum | Intermediate |
| Bolters | Maximum | Intermediate | Maximum |
| Dependants taken off | Minimum | Maximum | Intermediate |
| Net Gain or Loss : | -111 | -267 | +130 |

were two main reasons for this. Firstly, in order to run the estate with profits however much reduced, during a period of unregulated production and uncontrolled competition, output on Pal Melayu had to be increased rather than decreased. Thus no areas with mature trees were rested. Secondly, 580 new acres came into bearing in 1930-31 (see Table 1) resulting in increased demand for labour on the estate. At the same time, labour costs were reduced by adopting the principle of choice between a full day's work or three-quarters of a day's work (see p. 44). This meant that a labourer either had to do more work for the same wage or had to pay from his old wage another labourer whom the Company employed to do the extra work. The second alternative seems to

have been more widely adopted and had the effect of reducing the labourer's wages. The reduction in wages led to labour losses - mainly in an increased number of labourers 'paid off'. It is difficult to determine how those labourers listed as 'paid off' were divided among coastal and local recruits and employees of long-standing who gave notice or who were dismissed by the Company. There is no doubt that the Company would have been concerned to retain coast recruits whose recruitment had been costly and who, being brought by a kangany, were more amenable to control. To check a heavy loss of coast recruits the management adopted the policy of offering occasional employment to their dependants. Thus labourers were given an opportunity, howsoever inadequate, to augment their drastically reduced wages. To a certain extent the policy succeeded in keeping a number of older employees on the estate. But there were still considerable inducements, especially for the newer coast recruits, to leave the estate. Unexpectedly poor working conditions and free repatriation to India, financed from the Indian Immigration Fund, were certainly the most powerful among these. To meet labour scarcity, local recruits were employed in increasing numbers. With the ban on fresh immigration from India, their recruitment became indispensable. Increase in unemployment on smaller estates resulted in an increased supply of local recruits. Compared to coast recruits their recruitment was inexpensive and they could be as easily discharged as they were employed. Local recruits, along with dependants taken 'off'

and 'on', made the major contribution to the high labour turnover on Pal Melayu during the depression. But it was the presence of the large transient labour force that enabled the estate management to carry out its labour-saving experiments. It was largely as a result of these experiments that the average end-of-the-year size of the labour-force was brought down from a high of 745 for period A to 653 and 617 for periods B and C respectively.

From 1934 to 1937, rubber production on Pal Melayu was controlled under the International Rubber Regulation Scheme. In 1934, immigration of coast recruits was resumed.[17] Through an increase in the number of coast and local recruits and a decrease in the number of bolters and persons paid off, the year ended with a positive balance of 239 labourers. This marked the beginning of the post-depression stabilisation of the labour force on Pal Melayu.

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17 There was no kangany recruitment on Pal Melayu in the post-depression period. Coast recruits during this period were of two types :-

(1) Former employees who had been repatriated to India during the depression; and
(2) 'Informally' recruited independent immigrants.

In 1934 and 1935 the Malayan and Indian Governments agreed to resume immigration on a quota basis. Coast recruits only of type (2) were counted in the quotas. But recruits of both types were assisted immigrants in that they were granted free passage to Malaya upon the production of certain documents. For recruits of type (1) a note or letter from the estate manager was accepted as sufficient proof of previous residence. Beginning in 1935 the Labour Department provided identification certificates for employers to give to their labourers returning to India. The certificates promised the labourer work should he return to Malaya by a certain date. He could, if he wished, bring his wife and children back to Malaya with him. Recruits of type (2) were

The volume of labour turnover was reduced; fewer local and more coastal recruits were taken on. In this, as in other sources of labour gains and losses, this period stood in an intermediate position with regard to periods A and B. Only the number of bolters declined significantly below earlier levels indicating increased stability. The period ended with a positive balance of 130 labourers while the size of the average end-of-the-year labour force for period C fell to 617. In the remaining years of Phase IV there was a further fall in the average end-of-the-year labour force and a similar reduction in labour turnover indicating that the trend towards stabilisation had strengthened. The reduction in the labour force during this period was related not only to the compulsory restriction in production but also to certain technical advances in the rubber industry during and soon after the depression. In tapping, the 'fourth daily full spiral' system was introduced. Under this system trees were tapped on every fourth day but the tapping cut - a spiral cut around the entire circumference of the tree - was double the length of the previous standard system, namely, the half-alternate-daily method

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17 cont'd...
friends and kinsmen of labourers already working on estates. When the estate needed more recruits the labourers could obtain from the manager bearer-letters for their friends or relatives in India. On producing these documents they were granted free passage to Malaya. On Pal Melayu both these types were covered by the generic term 'surat system' (surat is a Malay term meaning letter). In 1938 the Government of India banned all assisted labour immigration to Malaya and the small trickle of immigrants arriving on Pal Melayu in 1939-40 consisted of migrants in categories excepted from the prohibitory order.

under which the trees were tapped on one-half the circumference every other day. Bark consumption was equal in the two systems but the former needed fewer tappers and gave higher yields per acre. A tapper narrated how under the new system increased yields per tapped tree necessitated the buying of bigger latex cups. For a brief period at the inception of the new system and before bigger cups were introduced tappers were asked to replace the full cup with an empty cup of the same size. This meant in effect that in order to carry out his increased duties, a tapper had to spend a part of his tiffin rest period working. A protest was lodged with the manager, not against the longer hours of work but against the curtailment of the tiffin interval. The problem was solved by introducing bigger cups. It has been estimated that tapping costs per pound on fully matured areas were generally 30-40 cents lower on the fourth-daily than under the alternate-daily system. Supervision costs were also reduced since the area tapped on any one day was only about one half of that under the alternate-daily system.

Another significant change during this period affected the weeders. The practice of clean weeding which, since Phase III, had been under fire of criticism by agricultural scientists was now abandoned. It is difficult to estimate the extent of reduction in labour force made possible by this innovation. Selective weeding was now combined with the selective planting of cover crops which would have absorbed a part of the displaced labour

force. An effect of these changes was that emphasis on supervision in the field was diverted from weeding to tapping.

The Industrial Subsystem in Transition:

In the last years of Phase IV the Company embarked upon an explicit programme of rationalising the administration and organisation of production on estates under its control. It was thought that the relative stability in the price of rubber, the acquisition of a nearly-permanent labour force, the level of technical progress defining a minimum standard of labour requirements with the successful reduction of staff under the forced circumstances of the depression - all warranted such a move. The impending threat of another European war acted as a catalyst in the early implementation of plans expected to ensure simplicity and efficiency in running the estate during a crisis. On Pal Melayu the arrival of a new manager in 1934 provided a suitable occasion for initiating these changes. Soon after assuming office, he drew up plans for a more rational decentralisation of administration on the estate than had been possible under the existing system of three atomistic Divisions, loosely co-ordinated from a single main office located in Division A. Under the new scheme, the number of Divisions would be reduced to two and these would be consolidated into a single centrally located divisional centre with a divisional office. A European assistant would be instituted in that office in charge of the

Division. As before, there would be one Asiatic conductor for each Division but he would now be directly under the European assistant and not under an Asiatic head conductor. The plan stipulated doing away entirely with the last named official. To assist the Asiatic conductors' work in the Divisional centre probationer conductors could be appointed. The plan also envisaged the eventual disappearance of head kanganies and the complete subordination of kanganies to conductors. Thus administrative functions would be divided between the main office (with the European manager and his Asiatic office clerks) and a Divisional office (with the European assistant, Asiatic conductors and probationer conductors). The organisation of factory would remain unchanged. The manager would continue to be the overall head of the estate with complete superordination and authority over the Main and Divisional offices and the factory.

A cardinal feature of the scheme for administrative reorganisation would be a radical change in the settlement pattern of the estate. By the mid-1930s the spatial planning for these changes had been completed. The first new buildings to be erected were labour lines, that is, residential accommodation at Division II of the new Divisional centre. In 1938 the entire population of labourers and staff from the old Division B shifted into 26 house blocks (104 'lines') and the bungalows built there. But this was the only physical change which could be introduced before the war.

Within the old setting, however, initial efforts were made to effect some of the administrative changes stipulated by the management. Its policy at this stage seems to have favoured cautious but bold innovations. The first step was taken when the new manager of Pal Melayu dismissed Vythalingam, the head kangany of Division C. This was an unusual thing to happen. It is said that Vyathalingam, like all other head kanganies, had amassed much wealth but around 1934, unlike the others, he bought a car. His son-in-law, also an employee of Pal Melayu, once drove this car to overtake the manager's vehicle. The incident led to the dismissal of Vyathalingam, his wife, daughter and son-in-law from the estate. I had some difficulty in verifying all the facts of the story. As far as I can ascertain, no Tamil employee had a car during that period but it is certain that Vyathalingam and his family were dismissed by the new manager. Further enquiries revealed that this head kangany had been a particular favourite of the previous manager. From the narrator's point of view then, the car myth was presumably intended to be a parable which might be entitled "The Fall of the Favoured". From a sociological point of view, it is an apt illustration of the familiar phenomenon of managerial succession in industry where each successor in quest of recognition overturns some of the cherished institutions of his predecessor. However, in the context of the influences at work in shaping the industrial subsystem at that time the manager could take such a drastic step

to intimate to the Company his firm intention to carry out the programme of rationalising his administration. After the removal of the head kangany, a probationer conductor was appointed in the Division. However, during this period the substitution of the Asiatic head conductor by a European assistant was not accomplished.

In 1937, the system of paying 'head money' (talai-kācu) came to an end. Under the system of head money each head kangany received a bonus of 1 or 2 cents for every labourer recruited by him or recruited for him by another kangany for each day that the recruit turned out to work. Some ordinary kanganies who had been appointed recruiters directly by the manager received their own head money. Thus all head kanganies and some kanganies on the estate received this bonus in addition to their wages. The management rationalised its decision in two ways. First, all the head kanganies were now gone and second, head money had become unnecessary because all post-depression recruits including those who came through 'bearer-letters' (see pp.50-51 fn. 17) were self-reliant and had not the need to look to their kangany (foreman) as the provider. Undoubtedly, stopping head money adversely affected the income of those recruiting kanganies who had always received head money and were still employed on Pal Melayu. Precisely for the same reasons as led to the stoppage of head money the management now sought to subordinate the kanganies more completely to the kirani. Anticipating by a few years the future pattern of administration through a Divisional centre, strict procedures were

instituted according to which the kangany had to take orders from the kirani by visiting him at his office each afternoon. The system of arbitration of disputes arising among labourers in the work situation also underwent a thorough change. In the days of the head kangany such everyday happenings were never brought to the notice of kirani but now the kanganies were instructed to follow a set procedure. The kangany was denied the authority to arbitrate in a dispute and punish the guilty. He had only to record the case and present it in the afternoon along with the plaintiff, witnesses and the accused to the Divisional conductor who then brought it to the notice of the head conductor. What was adjudged to be an even more radical change was the practice, newly introduced, of following an identical procedure when a tapper or a weeder made faults in his work. This was definitely the beginning of a transformation in the status positions of kirani and kangany in the industrial subsystem of Pal Melayu. While the kangany, the former recruiter-foreman, was increasingly reduced to the status of a foreman, the marginal kirani was being elevated to the position of an effective intermediary between the European manager and labourers (tolil-āḷi). As developments in the Pal Melayu industrial subsystem soon after re-occupation were to demonstrate, these changes foreshadowed the emergence of a bureaucratic structure in which the educated kirani rather than the illiterate kangany was to be given the key role in the industrial subsystem.

It should, however, be pointed out that the fall in the kangany's status in the industrial subsystem was not matched by a decline in his real influence among labourers. In adopting various measures to downgrade the kangany the management on Pal Melayu seems to have been unduly impressed by the large number of coast immigrants not recruited by kanganies in the post-depression labour force. This official reckoning overlooked the fact that a large number of recruits migrating under the surat system were in fact clients of a kangany. More often than not, these recruits had obtained bearer-letters from the estate manager on the recommendation of a kangany. Moreover, most local recruits - by no means an insignificant proportion of the labour force - were brought by a kangany. No change in the industrial subsystem could immediately affect the existing networks of kinship and economic ties into which a kangany found it advantageous to enmesh a new recruit. The immediate net result of the management's interference with the kangany's status was a perceptible decline in the foreman-recruiter's commitment to management goals. The kangany's role in certain unprecedented economic and political developments in the estate and the region in the last years of the 1930s and the first couple of years of the next decade was to show this clearly.

Towards the end of Phase IV, the social isolation of Pal Melayu had begun to break up slowly. Paradoxically enough, the more stable the labour force became on Pal Melayu the greater was its awareness of the wider world. Authors have expressed surprise

and bewilderment over the fact that the same half-starved Indian labourers who voluntarily immigrated to Malaya with the knowledge, and in some cases personal experience of the excruciating circumstances of the early 1930s, should be raising a cry for higher wages on estates from 1937 to 1941 (Thompson 1943:156). The fact is not so inexplicable if one bears in mind the accumulated social experience, even though of illiterate labourers, of the vicissitudes of the rubber industry. A large proportion of the post-depression labour force, especially the men who migrated to work on Pal Melayu after 1934, were people who understood much better than their forebears their stake in the new country and its rubber industry. Besides, ever since 1930 and to a large degree independent of fluctuations in economic conditions on estates, Indian nationalist ideas had begun to percolate among estate labourers. Not the least influential in the wide circulation of these ideas were vernacular papers published in Malaya and containing, in addition to local items, news about Mahatma Gandhi and the nationalist movement in India. As early as 1922, Tamilaham, a Tamil weekly published from the Malayan capital, raised a voice against the poor conditions of Indian labourers on rubber estates and discouraged more people from leaving the shores of their country (Parmer 1960:64). Tata Vattiyar (literally, grandfather-teacher) the oldest teacher of the Tamil Primary School on Pal Melayu, recalled that this paper was being received by post and widely read by literate persons on Pal Melayu in the 1930s.

He also described how, under his encouragement to celebrate Mahatma Gandhi's birthday, school pupils on Pal Melayu organised themselves into a band and how, holding the Indian nationalist Tricolor and putting on Gandhi caps, they marched around the rubber estate to the tune of Indian patriotic songs. Even more significant as manifestations of a newly awakened sense of pride in India's national heritage were the activities of groups of youthful estate labourers. On national occasions such as the one mentioned earlier, these young men clad themselves in shirts, the Indian wrapper skirt (vēṣṭi) and Gandhi caps of homespun cotton cloth (Khadi), garlanded portraits of Indian leaders, made speeches and had themselves photographed (see Photograph 1 p. 612).

The organisation is remembered by labourers throughout the region under different names (including union or sangam) but by far its most popular designation is Nathan's Party (Nathan kalachi).[18]

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18 Information about Nathan's Party and its activities and leaders is scrappy for many persons now living in the region and known to have been closely associated with it now deny having had a connection with it. Much of the documentary material - minute books, notifications and circulars - has not survived the disruption caused by the Japanese Occupation. It is thus possible to form only a general picture of the movement.

The headquarters of Nathan's Party was located in a town some 25 miles south of Pal Melayu and surrounded by some of the oldest company-owned rubber estates in Malaya. The membership of the Party was drawn from amongst Indian labourers on all such estates. In some cases estate committees were formed. On Pal Melayu each Division had a committee. Stringent Trespass Laws prevented speakers from outside holding general meetings on estate premises. Members from estates met periodically, therefore, at a regional office. The office for the Pal Melayu region was located in the abandoned Tamil school building at Baku Baku. Among those

In 1940-41, Nathan's Party succeeded in organising strikes on estates including Pal Melayu for a 10 cent increase in daily wage from 40 cents to 50 cents. In an early morning haul one day in 1941, the police arrested Nathan and his associates and according to informants on Pal Melayu deported them to India. This, the first strike on Pal Melayu, was ill-organised and lasted only one morning. But it came as a shock to all those people who were deeply entrenched in the estate social system. The management responded characteristically by immediately capitulating to the labourers' demand. To most of the old labourers on the estate

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18 cont'd...
attending these meetings from Pal Melayu were labourers, kanganies and Tamil school teachers. No women participated in the estate or regional meetings of Nathan's Party. Arjunan kangany was the president and Muthusamy teacher the secretary of the committee on Division B. Ranganathan kangany, who had been one of the estate committee members of Nathan's Party on Division C, recalled what the leaders said in public meetings that were held at Baku Baku: "We were told to work only for eight hours, not to work for the kirani in spare time, to wear shoes before the European bosses and the kirani and to raise our standard of living to the level of the staff. In the meetings we used to hold on the Division, I repeated these ideas before the labourers". Most of the public meetings were addressed by Nathan himself who was considered to be a powerful speaker. His deputy in the Pal Melayu region was a young tapper named Somu. He worked on an estate near Pal Melayu and lectured to estate labourers in his spare time in the afternoon. Nathan was the editor and the sub-editor respectively of Tamil weekly and daily newspapers. The wider political affiliations of the Party and its leaders are shrouded in obscurity. In Baku Baku, the Party shared its office premises and cyclostyling machine with the local Central Indian Association of Malaya (C.I.A.M.). It is also known that Nathan was a great personal friend of one of the past presidents of that organisation. On the other hand, it has been alleged that the Tamil weekly edited by Nathan was financed by the Malayan Communist Party (Gamba 1962:503). Whatever their political affiliations there can be no doubt that leaders of Nathan's Party would have been suspect under the ever watchful eyes of the planters and the Government (Parmer 1960:66).

the strike was a very confused incident. In Nadesan's words: "While they were still in their tasks the tappers heard that a band of Indian workers (Nathan's men) who had struck work elsewhere were coming to hit them with sticks. Scared, they ran back to the 'lines'. Thus there was no work that day but there was no strike. (Sic)" The implication of his statement was that the procedure of a strike and, perhaps, even the issues at stake were not very clear to the majority of labourers. The same impression is created by the popular reference to this strike throughout the Pal Melayu region as Nathan-led disorder (Nathan piraḷi). Nevertheless, some people emphasise the outcome of the incident rather than the procedure followed. A local born tapper who would have been a young man of 18 at that time put the whole thing more simply: "We wanted a 10 cents increase in our wages. We stopped work for a day and got what we wanted".

Summary and Conclusion:

The foregoing delineation of the industrial subsystem on Pal Melayu has shown the gradual development of the plantation as a 'settlement institution' in a Malayan region. The characteristic social relationships in the institution evolved within the changing techno-economic environment of the rubber industry. The social system of the production organisation was characterised by patterned interaction between the higher and lower participants of the enterprise. Between European manager and assistant on the

one hand and coolies on the other, the head kangany, kangany and kirani acted as important mediators. Of these, the head kangany and kangany proved to be indispensable links during the first three phases of Pal Melayu's history. Not only did they influence the turn out, standard of work and efficiency of the labour force but they also secured compliance to the management goals from their recruits during the vicissitudes of the rubber industry in Malaya. More than the kirani, the head kangany and kangany were the agents to translate management paternalism into practice within the work situation. Their role did not, however, preclude that of European boss himself; in fact, the latter jealously guarded his position as the master of the enterprise from whom alone the kirani and kangany derived their authority. Also, by Phase III, the European bosses had so manipulated role-playing in the industrial subsystem that for labourers they became the benevolent father and the kangany their punitive counterpart. This type of role-playing by officials in the occupational hierarchy of Pal Melayu was not confined to the work situation but extended to the community life of the lower participants as well; it is a theme we shall elaborate in the next section. The combined patterns of social interaction in the 'industrial' and 'community' subsystems gave Pal Melayu during a large part of the pre-World War II period the character of a closed system - a "total institution" (Goffman 1961:3-124).

In Phase IV, however, economic and political pressures began to impinge upon the closed social system of Pal Melayu. The changed character of the Indian labour force prompted the Company to initiate changes in the administrative structure of the estate. A cardinal feature of the new programme was the substitution of the head kangany and the kangany's authority by that of the kirani. On the part of the manager, this was a miscalculated move. It alienated the kangany from the management just at a time when the first stirrings of semi-nationalistic political consciousness were beginning to be felt among the labourers. The strikes of 1937 and 1941 which made the first cracks in the old system were symptomatic of greater changes to follow.

## THE PRE-WAR PLANTATION - II: (The Community Subsystem)

### Settlement Pattern:

Map 2 shows the settlement pattern of Pal Melayu prior to the changes of 1938. It is clear from the records of land alienation that the portions 2A, 2B and 3A, 3B were the first to be purchased. In consequence, the first official and residential areas grew up in this part of Pal Melayu. To the old residents of the estate it is known as the old plantation (palai-tōṭṭam) while it is entered in the Company records as Division A. The area was settled early in Phase I when it consisted of 'the manager's bungalow, conductor's house, eight sets of coolie 'lines' and a native store'. There was, in addition, a Muniandy temple and several small shrines dedicated to Munnadayan and Perumal or Ramar. Each set of coolie 'lines' consisted of twenty ground floor rooms (each 10' x 10') built back-to-back; thus each side of the row contained ten rooms. Although each room had a door, the ten rooms of each row shared a common long verandah with a railing around it. There was only one main entrance to the verandah and thus to the several doors. Each household was allocated one room and the verandah space outside it. Since in all the households the verandah was utilised for making a cooking hearth, the verandah served as a series of kitchens as well as a passage. Wherever possible, the kangany was allocated the first room closest to the main entrance.

The location of the kangany at the end was calculated to provide him with a vantage point for keeping a close watch over the off-work movements of his gang labourers. (I could not ascertain the exact location of head kangany in the labour 'lines'.)

The earliest manager's bungalow and bungalows for members of the Asiatic staff - head conductor, office clerk and dresser - were built of timber with roofs of corrugated iron. The latter were more spacious and detached but built after the general pattern of the labour 'lines'. Living accommodation was provided free to members of staff as well as to labourers. A Tamil Primary School was founded on Pal Melayu only in 1924. Before that, one of the literate tappers conducted an afternoon class for labourers' children.

The founding of Division B followed the expansion of estate acreage southwards. Within Phase II, it came to have more houses than there were in Division A. With its own head kangany, conductor, teacher and a European assistant, the Division became a well-equipped community centre. The hospital and main office were still situated near the estate entrance but the appearance of a new Division demonstrated the process by which the immigrant community reorganised its social ties in adaptation to a new and planned locale. Divisions A and B formed the basis for two distinct clusters of kin, kangany and neighbourhood ties. Between them cross cutting ties were established through marriages in Malaya and India, frequent inter-estate and inter-division

movements, and above all by the centralised administrative organisation of the industrial subsystem.

Division C was the last residential nucleus to emerge on Pal Melayu. It was founded at the end of Phase II and followed the settlement pattern of the two earlier Divisions. The new 'lines' were raised up on wooden stilts instead of being built at the ground level. Like other Divisions, Division C also had a school teacher. Unlike the teachers of Divisions A and B who lived in coolie 'lines', the teacher here was allocated a bungalow which was also used as school building. The manager's bungalow on Division A was demolished and a new bungalow was built on Division C.

Recruitment and Migration:

The India-born population on Pal Melayu today is derived from ten administrative districts of the old Madras Presidency of South India. The majority of the population in eight of these districts are speakers of Tamil but in the districts of Sittur and Coimbatore there are large numbers of persons speaking Telugu and Malayalam respectively. Table 6 shows the distribution of the India-born population by native districts. It is clear that the number of immigrants was largest from districts closest to Madras, with North Arcot and Chingleput jointly accounting for 78% of the total (see Map 3).

TABLE 6.

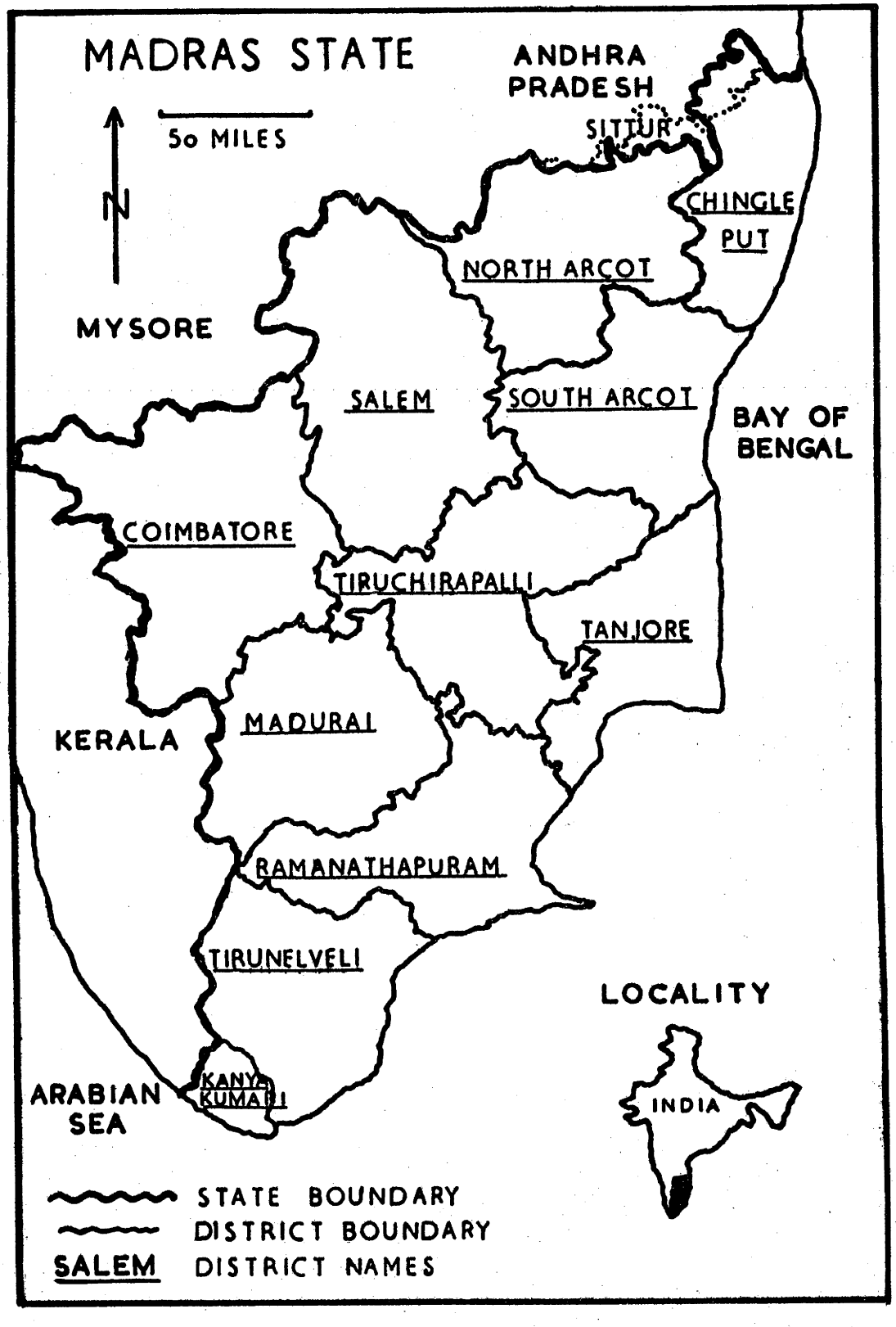
INDIA-BORN POPULATION ON PAL MELAYU BY NATIVE DISTRICT, RESIDENTIAL DIVISION AND SEX.

| DISTRICT: | DIVISION I: | | | | DIVISION II: | | | | TOTAL: | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | T | % | M | F | T | % | M | F | T | % |
| North Arcot | 20 | 23 | 43 | 37.1 | 57 | 50 | 107 | 73.8 | 77 | 73 | 150 | 58.0 |
| Chingleput | 14 | 18 | 32 | 28.1 | 10 | 10 | 20 | 13.8 | 24 | 28 | 52 | 20.0 |
| Tiruchirapalli | 12 | 10 | 22 | 19.4 | 7 | 1 | 8 | 5.5 | 19 | 11 | 30 | 11.7 |
| South Arcot | 3 | 4 | 7 | 6.2 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 3.4 | 6 | 6 | 12 | 4.7 |
| Tanjore | 3 | 1 | 4 | 3.6 | 1 | - | 1 | 0.7 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 1.9 |
| Madurai | 1 | - | 1 | 0.8 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1.4 | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1.2 |
| Salem | - | 2 | 2 | 1.7 | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | 2 | 0.7 |
| Sittur[ø] | - | - | - | - | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1.4 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0.7 |
| Coimbatore | 2 | - | 2 | 1.7 | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | 0.7 |
| Ramanathapuram | 1 | - | 1 | 0.8 | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 0.4 |
| TOTAL : | 56 | 58 | 114 | 100.0 | 80 | 65 | 145 | 100.0 | 136 | 123 | 259* | 100.0 |

ø Until October 1st, 1953, in Madras State; thereafter in the newly formed Andhra State.

* Excludes 5 persons born in South Africa and 4 persons whose native districts in South India are not known.

MAP 3


MADRAS STATE
ANDHRA PRADESH
50 MILES
N
SITTUR
CHINGLE PUT
NORTH ARCOT
MYSORE
SALEM
SOUTH ARCOT
BAY OF BENGAL
COIMBATORE
TIRUCHIRAPALLI
TANJORE
KERALA
MADURAI
RAMANATHAPURAM
TIRUNELVELI
LOCALITY
INDIA
ARABIAN SEA
KANYA KUMARI
STATE BOUNDARY
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
SALEM DISTRICT NAMES

On Pal Melayu there is no-one today who has been an indentured labourer or whose parents had been such. The earliest published source does not mention how the 400 labourers who were then employed on Pal Melayu were recruited. Bhaskaran kangany of Kallar caste from a village in Pudukottai Taluka of Tiruchi rapalli District, Madras State, is the earliest recruit still alive on Pal Melayu. In 1910, at the age of 15 years, Bhaskaran and his elder brother, Balakrishna, came from India to Malaya "in play and without the knowledge of our parents". A kangany recruited them for Karappu, the Kallar head kangany of old Division A. Within five years of their arrival both Balakrishna and Bhaskaran were made kanganies and the former began to recruit for Karappu from Tiruchi District.

During Phases III and IV, a number of kanganies of Vanniar caste recruited men from their own and neighbouring villages in the eastern sub-divisions (tāluks) of North Arcot District in Madras State. A list of all these kanganies and their recruits would account for nearly three-quarters of the India-born population resident on Pal Melayu at the present time. We shall take up for intensive analysis the recruits brought over by kanganies from three villages lying within a radius of ten miles from one another. Collectively, these kanganies recruited during the period 1915 and 1935 approximately (see Appendix II).

Social Organisation.

Household and Family:

As early as 1904-08 kanganies on Pal Melayu were instructed to recruit "by preference, whole families, more apt to settle down than bachelors, but many bachelors joined in and were, in fact, the most active and useful element of the labour force".[19] Each married couple on arrival was allowed one room (lāyam) while identical accommodation was shared by two or more bachelors. Domestic groups based on nuclear families and bachelors' lodges were thus the two most common type of residential arrangements in the pre-war period. True joint households based on patrilateral or patrilineal extension were few in number and shortlived, being confined almost exclusively to newly-arrived immigrants. On the other hand, common cooking and income-expenditure arrangements sometimes existed among close kin occupying contiguously situated rooms. In a large majority of cases the person to join was an unmarried cognate or an affine of the household head. Such an arrangement could rarely survive the many quarrels and quibbles that were bound to arise in joint living; where it did it was rare, though not altogether unknown, for this unit to outlast the marriage of the joining kinsman. This applied equally to arrangements in which the joining person was a close kin, such as a sibling, and others in which he was more distantly related. For

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19 Personal communication from an ex-manager.

a longer or a shorter period, however, this 'joint' household functioned as an effective domestic group. It was essentially a grouping of convenience and mutual aid to its members. A number of men who immigrated to Pal Melayu as adult bachelors entered one or more such arrangements before acquiring a wife and setting up their own domestic group.

It was not always easy or even possible for a young man to find a nucleus of domestic group with which to become attached. The predicament of Rangan is a case in point. When Rangan was kidnapped by a kangany from his village in the company of 'friends' he was only 12 years old. At the depot in Kuala Klang (Port Swettenham) the 'friends' parted company, having been assigned different estates. On the basis of his tin-ticket number, Rangan was brought to Pal Melayu by a Sikh watchman (Bengali jaga)[20] and asked to stay in a 'line' of Division A with other bachelors.

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20 The term 'Bengali' is used by a number of Malayan Tamils to designate a 'Sikh', actually a native of the province of the Punjab. This is a most curious usage as in India a 'Bengali' is a native of Bengal Province of undivided India (West Bengal State of India today). West Bengal is at least 500 miles east of the Punjab and the language and other ethnic characteristics of the true Bengali and the Sikh are quite dissimilar. The Malayan nomenclature for Sikhs would seem to have been derived from the fact that unlike the Tamils who came from Madras, Sikh emigrants to Malaya embarked from the port of Calcutta, the capital of West Bengal State. In the early decades of the present century when emigration to Malaya of both Tamils and Sikhs was considerable, contacts between them in India itself were almost non-existent. Consequently, the Sikhs arriving in Malaya, initially to the Straits Settlements from Calcutta, came to be known among their own countrymen from southern India by the province of their port of embarkation - Bengal.

Jaga is a Malay term meaning 'watchman'.

his neighbours asked him to take an oil bath "to make me feel happy". They also gave him food for the evening. The next morning a kirani advanced him $2 and four gantangs of rice against his wages. From that day onwards Rangan began to cook rice for himself but arranged to get (buy?) curry from his neighbours. A few months passed when one day he discovered a patrilineal link with Marudai, a woman who had joined (cērttu-k-koḷu-tal - see p. 88) his recruiting kangany. He moved to live with the couple and for the time being at least his troubles came to an end. But if we follow Rangan's story further we find that nearly twenty years later, as he still remained a bachelor, the problem reappeared when Marudai decided to return to India. There was no suitable girl in sight to be his wife but on Marudai's insistence Rangan agreed to invite Amirdam, a widow of the same caste but not related to him or to Marudai, to join him for cooking. Ever since her widowhood, Amirdam had lived with her married sister on another estate. A few years after Amirdam joined Rangan, her sister died leaving two infant twin daughters. The infants were brought up by Amirdam in Rangan's household while their father returned to India. In the meantime, Rangan married a girl, Anjalai, whose parents and younger brothers also came and settled down in a contiguous but separate household on Pal Melayu. Within a couple of years of their arrival Anjalai's parents died and her two younger brothers came to live in Rangan's household. In due course, Rangan had his own children. All the children were

brought up by Amirdam and Anjalai. The latter died in giving birth to her son Ganesan now aged fourteen years. Today Rangan, Amirdam and Rangan's three unmarried sons and one married son with his wife and child live together in one household.

As a second example of the household and family during this period it is instructive to follow the vicissitudes of a domestic group which immigrated to Pal Melayu as a patrilineally extended family and was later joined by an affine. In the homeland village society, extended household implies a common hearth, a common purse and adjacent rooms under a common roof. While the first two of these attributes were present in such households on Pal Melayu, adjacent rooms were not always provided by the management. Members of a household could occupy contiguous rooms only when such accommodation was vacant; much else depended on the neighbour's willingness to shift and make room. Clearly this was not always possible, nor could a solution be found by putting up another structure as could certainly be done in the village. The obvious alternatives were either to live at a distance from one's parents and married siblings or to share the limited accommodation. For reasons of sheer convenience the latter alternative seems to have been more frequently adopted. It was also thoroughly acceptable to the economically-minded management

and, in addition, suited its custodial arrangements.[21] While some attempt was usually made by householders to segregate the married from the unmarried, if only with the help of flimsy curtains and partitions, difficulties and misunderstandings frequently arose.

In the 1920s, Ponnusami (Genealogy I A1) immigrated to Pal Melayu and settled down in three rooms of Division C with his wife (Genealogy I A2), a married son and his wife, an unmarried son and three unmarried daughters. A few years later, one of his daughters (Genealogy I B5) was married and her husband (Genealogy I B4) was allocated a 'line' close to Ponnusami's family. In the same year, Ponnusami died and the management asked his widow (who stopped working) to move in with her children and vacate a 'line'. After the move, the widow, her married son and daughter and unmarried children shared three rooms. Her married son Elumalai (Genealogy I B6) was made a kangany and the other son Samu (Genealogy I B11) became a teacher. At the same time, rumours grew that the young widow was having illegitimate sexual relations

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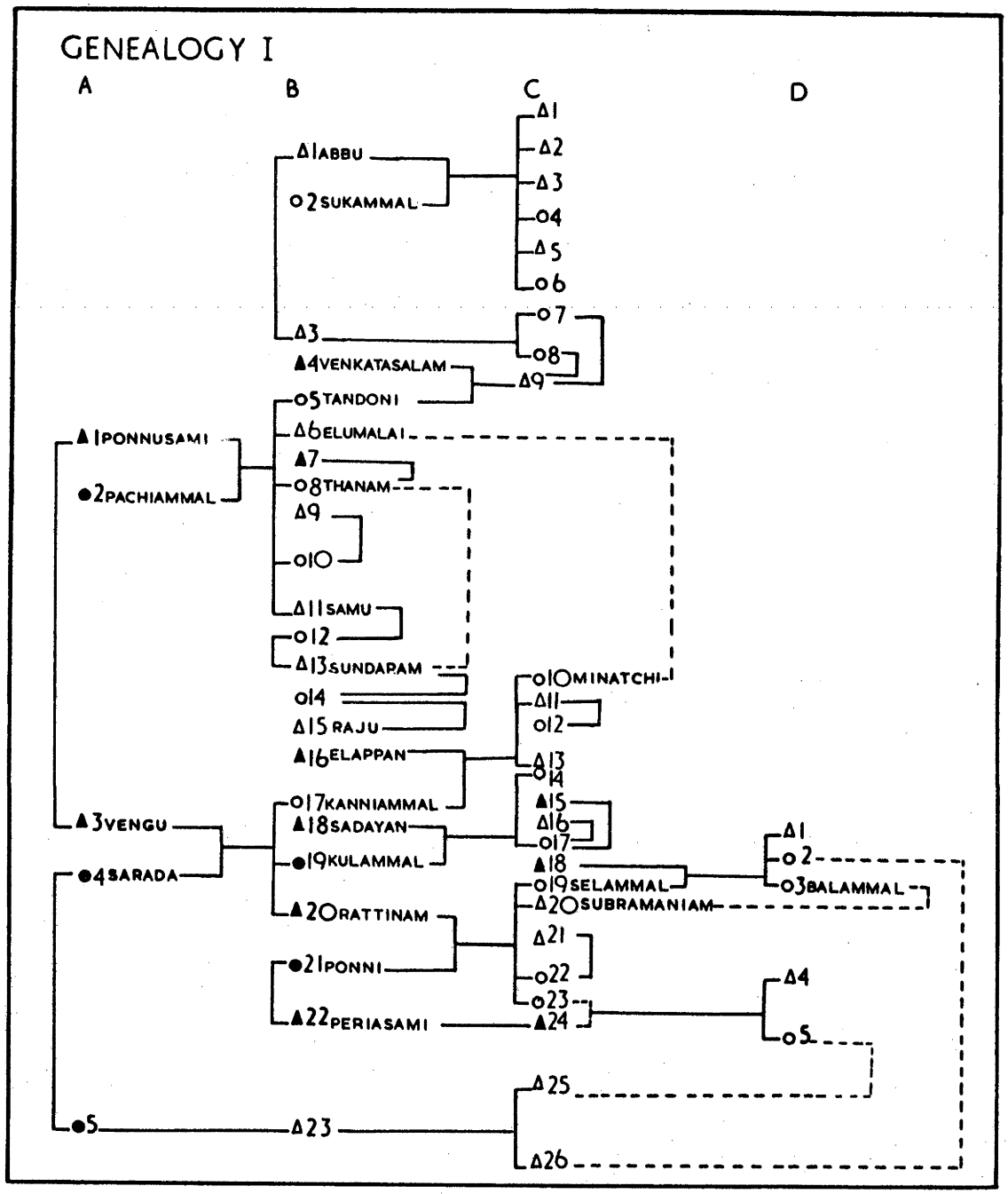
21 In tracing the history of the building of coolie 'lines' on Malayan estates one repeatedly comes across the planters' cynical rationalisations of their devices in terms of Tamil coolies' social customs and values. For instance, "double 'lines', that is, 'lines' two rooms broad each facing on to a 2 ft. verandah, will be found much more economical than the long single 'lines', besides being dearer to the heart of the gregarious coolies. Not more than six coolies should be put in each room but the planter need have no apprehensions on the subject of mixing the sexes as the Tamil coolie is most philosophical in this respect - a young unmarried woman not objecting in the least to reside with a family or even to sharing her quarters, if necessary, with quite a number of the opposite sex" (Planter 1894 b:90; italics mine).


GENEALOGY I
A
B
C
D
Δ1 ABBU
o2 SUKAMMAL
Δ1
Δ2
Δ3
o4
Δ5
o6
Δ3
o7
o8
Δ4 VENKATASALAM
Δ9
o5 TANDONI
▲1 PONNUSAMI
●2 PACHIAMMAL
Δ6 ELUMALAI
▲7
o8 THANAM
Δ9
o10
Δ11 SAMU
o12
Δ13 SUNDARAM
o14
Δ15 RAJU
▲16 ELAPPAN
o17 KANNIAMMAL
▲3 VENGU
▲18 SADAYAN
●19 KULAMMAL
●4 SARADA
▲20 RATTINAM
●21 PONNI
▲22 PERIASAMI
●5
Δ23
o10 MINATCHI
Δ11
o12
Δ13
o14
▲15
Δ16
o17
▲18
o19 SELAMMAL
Δ20 SUBRAMANIAM
Δ21
o22
o23
Δ24
Δ25
Δ26
Δ1
o2
o3 BALAMMAL
Δ4
o5

with her son-in-law and their joint living arrangements were cited to support such a contention. The scandal became unbearable for the two brothers, both in responsible positions, and they cut off all relations with their married sister and her husband. Elumalai, with his wife and mother, set up a separate household. Samu married and was allocated a teacher's house. Elumalai, as head of the family, married off his two sisters with whom his relations remained cordial. The husband (Genealogy I B7) of one of the sisters (Thanam - Genealogy I B8) was killed during the Japanese Occupation and his widow again came to live with Elumalai. There, Thanam had a liaison with a lorry driver from another estate. (An informant claimed that she became pregnant.) Elumalai kangany salvaged the reputation of his sister and the family by devising a strategem. Among the lucky men returning from the Siam Death Railway was Sundaram (Genealogy I B13) whom the Japanese had recruited forcibly. Sundaram was a brother-in-law of Elumalai's younger brother Samu. During her husband's absence, Sundaram's young wife (Genealogy I B14) had been receiving various sorts of help from her neighbours. In some sections there were rumours about her improper relations with a neighbour, Raju (Genealogy I B15) whose wife had died. Elumalai exploited the situation to his own advantage. As soon as Sundaram arrived, Elumalai lost no time in convincing him of his wife's unfaithfulness. An instant demonstration was arranged. (While Sundaram's wife was away on work Elumalai got someone to enter her room and lock it

from inside with instructions not to open the door.) Elumalai led Sundaram to a 'line' (the latter's own house) where his wife was supposed to be staying with her lover even at that time of the day behind bolted doors. They banged at the door but no-one responded. This was the moment of truth for Sundaram. Elumalai, as the well-meaning elder affine, pointed out to Sundaram the utter futility of pursuing such a woman. He made the generous offer of giving his own widowed sister, Thanam, in marriage to him. Following this, Sundaram set up his new household with Thanam while his first wife and her 'lover' became man and wife. Both couples are now living on Pal Melayu.

Limitations of data about family on the pre-war plantation preclude the building up of a family typology or a detailed consideration of kinship relations within the domestic group. It would seem, however, that the circumstances of emigration from India and the immigrants' sheer dependence upon the management for accommodation on the estate affected both the organisation of the household and perhaps to a lesser extent the structure of relationships in the family. The structure of the domestic group was flexible; at different times the same household showed a variety of personnel including kin and non-kin. The case of the household set up by Rangan shows how difficult it was for a bachelor immigrant to achieve even a semblance of viable family life. He had to activate a remote kinship tie, co-opt a non-kinswoman to his household and accept numerous new obligations. The domestic arrangements growing from these

affiliations had further to be fitted within the limited accommodation provided by the estate. That this last circumstance of early family life on Pal Melayu imposed a strain on the normal pattern of domestic relationship is exemplified by the fate of Ponnusami's family after he died leaving behind a young widow. This case also substantiates a feature of family life, earlier brought out in the case of Rangan's household, namely irregularities in the socialisation of children following upon the death of one or both parents.

What is probably remarkable in this general picture of disorganised family living is that domestic life was still based on continuous male-female co-operation between man and woman. Rangan's case is an apt commentary on a man's need of a woman for household organisation. Similarly, there is no evidence about long-term familial arrangements with female heads - either young widows or wives separated from their husbands. As is evident in the case of Thanam, sister of Elumalai, and even in that of Pachiammal (Genealogy I A2) who formed a joint household with her son-in-law after her husband's death, a woman, though she may be economically independent, still needed male support. As will be shown later, a widow or a divorced woman on Pal Melayu, rather than setting up an independent household, either returned to her natal home or formed a stable irregular union with another man.

Extra-familial kinship and internal migration:

It is difficult to determine the proportion of persons who came to Pal Melayu with or without kinship already there. Persons in both categories not only created new kinship ties but also discovered them in the course of their wanderings in Malaya. Owing to the wide horizontal recognition of kinship among Tamil non-Brahman castes the creation or discovery of any one kinship link by a person resulted in numerous further linkages for him.[22] In consequence a person had a wide range of kin (sondakārar) among his caste fellows (cāti-k-kārar). Usually these were also the people of his own village (ūravinar) or from nearby villages, not all of whom were his kinsmen but with whom he had sentiment of solidarity. The multiplicity of latent kinship ties, coupled with absence of their localisation in Malaya, makes it difficult to speak in terms of kinship groups beyond the families in any one estate or region. The composition of any person's kindred on Pal Melayu or any other big estate in Malaya was influenced greatly by immigration as well as internal migrations. For instance, in a single village of Damal in North Arcot District in the period 1919-1935, there were at least seven and possibly more kanganies, recruiting men for different estates in Malaya extending from Kedah to Johore. While it was generally true that a kangany

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22 My understanding of Tamil social structure in South India is based on published accounts by social anthropologists (esp. Dumont 1950-51:3-26; 1961:75-95 and Gough 1956:826-53).

recruited mostly among kinsmen, this category itself was nearly as wide as the spatial boundaries of the local subcaste of the kangany. This meant a considerable overlap in the kinsmen - potential recruits of various kanganies - belonging to the same subcaste in one or more village of the same area in India. It made for a wide dispersion of kinsmen on Malayan estates. At the same time factors such as fluctuations in rubber price and consequent irregularity of employment on any particular estate necessitated considerable internal migrations. Displaced persons undertook longer or shorter journeys to reach their kinsmen who provided some security in an industry at a time when modern safeguards such as trade unions were lacking. These movements, whether they involved an individual, a family or a wider assortment of kin, were made easier by the fact that estate labourers had no fixed assets to move with them.

The case of Rattinam kangany (Genealogy I B20) and his kinsmen provides a good illustration of some of these processes at work. Rattinam, who died a few years ago on Pal Melayu at the age of 75, migrated from Damal in 1919 with his wife Ponni (Genealogy I B21), born in South Africa, and three unmarried children (two daughters and a son). He went to India three times to recruit and was made a kangany. Later he had several recruiting kanganies under him, one of whom brought Rattinam's eldest daughter, Selammal (Genealogy I C19), her husband and their son from Sittur in 1926. (In India, Selammal missed her parents

badly, began to weep and persuaded her husband to go.) Later Selammal's husband also went to recruit for Rattinam. Rattinam's second daughter (Genealogy I C23) was married to a man (Genealogy I C24) on another estate of the Pal Melayu region. After marriage, however, Rattinam found a job for his son-in-law on Pal Melayu. In the same year Rattinam's youngest daughter (Genealogy I C22) married a non-kinsman and this couple also came to settle on Pal Melayu. Thus Rattinam succeeded in drawing three affines (sons-in-law) to Pal Melayu. All these kinsmen lived in contiguously situated 'lines' of Division A. Among themselves, the three sons-in-law of Rattinam were 'agnates' (sagalanpadi paṅkāli).

In 1934 the erstwhile manager of Pal Melayu was transferred to a west coast estate more than 200 miles to the north. The manager had been very favourably impressed with Rattinam and he asked him to move to the new estate. Rattinam's wife and unmarried son migrated with him along with his three married daughters, their husbands and their three children. The four households formed the same cohesive unit of co-operation on the new estate. During the period of Japanese Occupation, they escaped together to a nearby town. There, for fear lest "he be sent to work on the Siam Death Railway like other unmarried young men" (Selammal's version) Rattinam's younger son, Subramaniam (Genealogy I C20) was married to his own elder sister's daughter (Selammal's daughter Balammal - Genealogy I D3). The groom was

then 18 years old and the bride only 9 years. Although Subramaniam was not taken, Selammal's husband was taken away to Siam from where he did not return. The strengthening of her 'alliance' with the natal group and the death of her husband made Selammal, who had small children, even more dependent on Rattinam and later on Subramaniam. They now formed a common household group. After the Japanese Occupation the husband of one of the daughters of Rattinam chose to take a partly independent course of action. In 1948, following a quarrel with a kirani on the new estate, Rattinam decided to leave the Company and found work on another estate of that region. In this he was helped by an influential kinsman (Genealogy I B23) whom he had discovered during his stay on the new estate. This man was a kirani on a tin mine. While Rattinam and one of his sons-in-law went to work on the estate now suggested by the kirani-kinsman, the husband of Rattinam's youngest daughter decided against leaving the Company and returned with his family to work on Pal Melayu. Many years later, after the marriage of two granddaughters (Genealogy I D2 and D5) to the kirani's sons (Genealogy I C25 and C26) and the death of his wife, Rattinam rejoined the Company and returned also with his 'group' to Pal Melayu. Thus ended nearly twenty-five years of sojourn in another part of Malaya by four closely related families from Pal Melayu.

Marriage:

For a number of non-Brahman castes in Tamil-speaking districts of Tanjore and Madurai in south India, the smallest unit of endogamy is constituted by a man's matrilateral and patrilateral cross cousins (real or classificatory) and by the daughters of his elder sister (real or classificatory). The widest unit of exogamy for the same peoples is constituted by a man's own patrilineage and agnatically related patrilineages. In actual practice, however, marriages do not always take place within the narrowest and widest limits of endogamy and exogamy respectively. Thus among non-Brahman castes throughout the Tamil country persons may marry within the limits of caste or sub-caste endogamy, among cognates who are real or classificatory affines or even among unrelated families. In this basic feature there are very few differences between castes of the Vanniar category and Adi-Dravadian castes, such as Paraiyan and Pallar. Marital residence is patrivirilocal and intermarrying kin groups are usually scattered over a small area in one or more villages within a radius of 20-25 miles. Within the endogamous limits, widow and widower remarriage is permitted and where a man can afford it he may take more than one wife.

During the period under review on Pal Melayu, it is valid to distinguish between primary, secondary and irregular unions between men and women. In a primary union the traditional norms

of endogamy and exogamy were complied with. A primary marriage took place either in the bridegroom's house or in a temple. Usually a non-Brahman marriage priest officiated at the ceremony. The proof of marriage consisted in the testimony of witnesses, among whom were included prominent kanganies and close kinsmen of both bride and bridegroom. They were nominated to head the respective sides in marriage at the engagement ceremony (uppu-tāmpūlam) at the bride's place. For a man as well as a woman it was necessary to obtain the kangany's consent before marriage could take place. When a person failed to do so, he was severely punished. According to a woman informant who was herself married on Pal Melayu, a marriageable young girl had no alternative but to marry a person chosen for her by the parents and kangany. If after marriage she ran away from her husband's house, her parents would not offer her a refuge. According to the same informant, a girl's parents kept a strict watch over their daughter's morals. Since at that time girls were married before puberty, instances of pre-marital sex relations were rare. However, if a boy and a girl were caught in such an act, the punishment could be very severe indeed. It is said that on a neighbouring estate there was a very cruel kangany whom the manager had given a gun to maintain order on the estate. He had the liberty to shoot anyone whose actions were considered repugnant by the community. He once shot dead a boy and a girl who had been intimate and hung their bodies upside down on a

rubber tree in an isolated corner of the estate. The same kangany is reported to have killed a gang member who married a Ceylonese girl without consulting him.[23]

There was a simple but set procedure by which a man or a woman could obtain a divorce. The aggrieved party approached the manager for a hearing. The manager, aided by the kirani and the kangany, usually had a good knowledge of both the parties. If granted a hearing, the husband and wife, accompanied by their respective marriage witnesses (natu-t-tirumaṇa-maṉitaṉ), appeared in the manager's office for a judgement. If a divorce was granted, the woman returned the marriage badge (tāli) to the man. It signalled the formal dissolution of marriage in the presence of the manager and at least some of the persons who had participated in the marriage as representative of either side. My informants underscored the practice by which a woman could obtain a divorce on Pal Melayu as offering a contrast to the practice of divorce by male initiative only in the traditional village society.

It is clear from the genealogies of present inhabitants of Pal Melayu that second marriages took place for both men and

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23 It is difficult to vouchsafe the accuracy of these startling stories. Other informants did refer to the atrocities inflicted by the particular kangany but no-one said that he killed people. Even the original informant failed to uphold this in the face of close cross questioning. But even if one ignores the facts of the case, the fable reveals a high degree of aggressive dominance and control of the kangany in the matter of his recruits' marriages.

women. Men entering into such unions were widowers, divorcees and polygynists; women were frequently widows and divorcees with or without children. A certain number of such persons of either sex had been deserted by their spouse of a previous union. While in the majority of cases such a marriage was a secondary or tertiary union for both, in some cases one of the partners was an unmarried person. Within the range of secondary marriages, one could distinguish between formalised and unformalised unions. In the former case, the ceremony of nāṭu-vīṭu-tāli was performed. This was a simple ceremony held in the house of the bridegroom. In the presence of witnesses from both sides and amid chants of sacred hymns by a priest, the groom put a tali round the neck of the bride. By a few people on Pal Melayu such formalisation of secondary unions was, and is, believed to confer legitimacy to the offsprings of this and the former unions of the spouses. In the majority of cases, however, a nāṭu-vīṭu-tāli ceremony was never held and thus in traditional terms the secondary union remained unformalised. It is important to realise, however, that the unions we have described as secondary marriages - whether formalised or not - were contracted according to the traditional rules of marriage.

In India, all cases of unformalised secondary marriages (i.e. unions contracted according to traditional rules) as well as of cohabitation (i.e. unions formed in contravention of traditional rules such as caste endogamy) are instances of

cērttu-k-koḷu-tal (literally, joining together, as in play) and do not generate alliance between groups of affines. On Pal Melayu such domestic unions of convenience and co-operation between persons of opposite sex have been known from the time of the earliest immigrants and contribute substantially to the network of inter-personal and group alliances.

Cērttu-k-koḷu-tal unions formed in Malaya could always be adequately rationalised by the couples concerned in terms of situational factors. My informants, however, were not prepared to give a similar justification to couples who formed similar unions in India in order to emigrate to Malaya. For this reason particular instances of cērttu-k-koḷu-tal of the latter sort are not freely talked about publicly in the community of Pal Melayu. The suppression of facts is the more noticeable in regard to living couples who are known to the elder members of the community as having emigrated under the guise of such irregular unions. I was able to obtain information and thoughtful comment on these unions for the early period on Pal Melayu if I was content with generalities and did not ask for personal identities.

It is not possible to construct a full typology of such unions. The most common type seems to have been that of lovers who presented themselves as husband and wife at the emigration depot. It is fair to speculate that a good number of such couples would have consisted of unmarried persons, unable to marry each other under caste restriction. Still others were

married persons escaping from unsatisfactory marriages. In all such escapades the kangany had to connive at the union. Officers at the emigration depot could be easily cheated as any couple was accepted if the woman had a marriage badge (tāli) round her neck. A marriage badge could be bought cheaply at any local market. In some instances the man and woman intended to live as husband and wife on Pal Melayu but in others cērttu-k-koḷu-tal was effected by the kangany between a man and a woman who may have been completely unknown to each other. Each wanted to emigrate but for reason such as the restriction of law neither could do so without a partner. Sometimes the discrepancy in the ages of partners forced into cērttu-k-koḷu-tal was very great. As an informant put it metaphorically "a man could put a marriage badge round the neck of his mother and bring her over to Malaya".

Needless to say, the cērttu-k-koḷu-tal unions of emigrants were notably brittle. It mattered little whether such unions were formed solely to facilitate emigration or were, in addition, motivated by affection. The common underlying principle was the same - it was a joining and not a marriage, the couple could as easily fall apart as they had come together. The adult members of Pal Melayu community were impressed by the ease with which the woman in a cērttu-k-koḷu-tal could obtain a separation from her husband. "All she had to do was to hand him back the marriage badge." After that she was free to join another man and yet another, thus forming a chain of cērttu-k-koḷu-tal throughout her

life as a female estate worker. In this she was helped by her independent economic status, the overall scarcity of women and the permissive attitude of the management.

To sum up, there is ample evidence, if only of an indirect nature, to show that a considerable number of early emigrant couples of non-Brahman castes (including Adi Dravida castes) were in traditional terms not married; their unions were short-lived and women of such unions frequently joined in succession a number of different men. At the same time, there are definite indications, first, that such unions were considered repugnant in the community - women who 'joined' men frequently were invariably described by informants as "loose charactered and quarrelsome". Secondly, in native thinking great care was taken to distinguish unions based on cērttu-k-koḷu-tal from regular marriage and formalised secondary unions (nāṭu-vīṭu-tāli). Indeed, as pointed out before, the theory of regular marriage on Pal Melayu contained injunctions which purported to curtail all freedom of the girl. She had to accept the person chosen for her by the kangany and her parents and were she to leave her husband, her parents would not accept her back (see p. 85). It is at least conceivable that such stern injunctions were intended to bring regular unions in sharp contrast to the undesirable cērttu-k-koḷu-tal. Thirdly, native theory notwithstanding, I have inescapable impression that in practice even on the pre-war plantation cērttu-k-koḷu-tal unions multiplied far and wide beyond

the range of original immigrants.

How is this contradiction between native theory and actual practice to be resolved? There is no doubt a historical explanation in terms of the exigencies of life on a rubber estate. This, what may be termed a commonsense explanation, is the one most commonly offered by the people themselves when asked to account for the increase in the number of cērttu-k-koḷu-tal unions on Pal Melayu. It 'fixes' the prolific increase in the number of such unions to a single major event, namely, the Japanese Occupation of Malaya from 1941 to 1945.[24] From an analytical point of view, however, this event constitutes not so much an explanation as an exemplification par excellence of an instance of organisational adjustment in the marriage institutions of non-Brahman people from South India consequent upon their transmigration to Malaya. If one were to summarise the adjustment in a sentence, it was the transformation of cērttu-k-koḷu-tal from a label attached to certain irregular unions in village society to a social category to which a large number of secondary unions could be assigned. While traditionally cērttu-k-koḷu-tal referred to unions that did not lead to recognised affinal alliance, on Pal Melayu cērttu-k-koḷu-tal unions generate these alliances as effectively as any 'regular' union. All that has happened is the

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24 I use the term 'fix' advisedly because the Japanese Occupation has become a powerful fixation beyond which most of the people on Pal Melayu refuse to look for historical explanations.

legitimisation of irregular unions - both the unformalised secondary unions and casual matings - without the necessity of a ceremonial ritual or expiation. The source of this legitimisation, I strongly suspect, has been the paternalistic European manager of the pre-war plantation who, it will be recalled, formalised divorce even in regular unions by a simple system of the recall of the marriage badge. It seems worth asking if this was not based on a view of all Tamil marriage as cērttu-k-koḷu-tal and a failure to distinguish between the numerous irregular unions of Palla and Paraiyan castes (more numerous on Pal Melayu in the pre-war period) and the caste marriages of the non-Brahman subcastes.

Political Process:

Community life on Pal Melayu may be said to have begun in the first decade of the present century. The area around the present factory (paḷai-tōṭṭam or the old plantation) was the hub of activities. Coolie 'lines' formed the nucleus of human habitation. Ties of village, caste and kinship were, in some cases, supplemented, in others, replaced, by those of neighbourhood. In this community kanganies enjoyed a status higher than the rest. Their superior occupational position as recruiter-foreman was reinforced by a wide ramification of their kinship ties among labourers. The kirani and European bosses (veḷḷai-k-kārar) were marginal to the community itself although as agents of the

industrial subsystem they played a definite and important part in its ongoing political process. In subsequent decades as the estate grew in area and population it was segmented into three Divisions each under an 'overlord' or a head kangany. This led to an increase in the scale of the political process to include inter-Divisional relations. Finally, towards the end of the pre-war period external political factors initiated further changes in procedures for the regulation and control of group activities in the labour 'lines'.

Organisation of Festivals:

The organisation of the annual religious festivals provided an occasion for joint action by the community. The character of the political process on such occasions is brought out clearly in the following accounts. Notable in all these examples is the domineering and to a certain extent coercive role of the head kangany, especially at the junctures of decision making.

Speaking of an early period (the 1920s) an informant said: "On Tipavali[25] day, each tapper had to pay a sum of $5 to the head kangany. At the time of worship only he should get into a trance; if anyone else went into it the head kangany would beat him. The head kangany collected from the coolies a sum of $3,000 or $4,000 but he would buy a goat for $7 only (Sic). He would cut the goat into many parts and each coolie would be given

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25 An annual Hindu festival celebrated in the month of October/November.

one latex-cup full of meat as his share. Should a coolie ask for more, he would be beaten".

Nadesan recalled that the head kangany not only distributed mutton but also head cloth (tuṇṭu) and wrapper skirt (vēṣṭi) to all his men. But why was Tipavali celebrated as the annual festival? Certainly not because of any village tradition but possibly "because the manager got his bonus at that time". And indeed in this festival the manager's participation was fairly stereotyped. On Pal Melayu he paid 50% of all costs incurred in celebrating Tipavali. The manager's financial contribution was always thought of as his own rather than the Company's. Besides, there was an exchange of prestations between the labourers and the manager. From money contributed by all of them, the labourers bought a present (varicai) for the manager and handed it over to him collectively at his bungalow. The manager then asked women labourers to perform a folk dance (kummi-y-aṭi-tal) and offered sweets and money to labourers and their children.

At some time after all three Divisions had come into being, Āṭi tiru-vilā, the traditional village festival held annually in honour of Goddess Mahā-māri-amman[26], was revived as the main celebration on Pal Melayu. It seems that at one time both Tipavali and Āṭi Tiru-vilā continued to be celebrated until the

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26 A Tamil deity, variously regarded as the Goddess of Chicken Pox or as Rain Goddess.

former was dropped out and became the household festival that it is today. This change would have no doubt involved mutual agreement on the part of head kanganies and prominent kanganies of all three Divisions. Possibly the consultations proceeded with the good offices of the head conductor or office clerk. Unfortunately the details of what happened are no longer discoverable.

Rangan kangany described one celebration of Āṭi tiru-vilā in which a big fight followed a quarrel between himself and the head kangany of another Division. The incident occurred as the image of the Goddess was being carried round the estate in a 'temple chariot' (tēr) - in this case a palanquin carried on the men's shoulders. Although every Division had its temple, the temple chariot customarily started from and ended at the oldest temple, Muniandi temple near Division A. "On that particular day", said Rangan, "as the procession reached the 4A-4B/5A-5B junction (see Map 2) and was about to set out on the road leading to Division B, a coconut was broken and camphor was lighted. Ordinarily the coconut will break into many pieces and the children will pick them up. This time, however, it did not break but rolled into a nearby drain. Sami, a boy of the Paraiyan caste working in my gang, ran and picked it up but Aiyappan, the head kangany of Division B, came and asked him sternly to give back the coconut. Sami refused to give it because according to the customary rule for such occasions, the

one who gets the coconut shall have it. Yet the head kangany slapped the boy and snatched the coconut from his hand. Sami, followed by his widowed mother, came to me crying and the latter said, "I never hit my own son - how dare the head kangany do it". I had just then taken an oil bath and put on a new dress for the festival. I was infuriated. Taking a long stick in my hand I ran barechested to Division C and lay in wait for the temple chariot to arrive. As the temple chariot approached the first 'line', I steered my way up to the drummers and hit them left and right with the stick. The persons carrying the chariot were the next to take the beating. These people hit me in retaliation and a fight broke out. The chariot was pushed aside and it caught fire from the flame of the ceremonial lamp.
The conductor, European assistant and 'doctor' (dresser) rushed to the spot and the kirani took the stick away from my hand and sent me home."

Administration of Justice:

How was justice administered in such disputes? In following Rangan's story further, we can see one way of tackling such quarrels. "Next morning", continued Rangan, "I was summoned to the main office after the head kangany had lodged a complaint. The manager asked me for an explanation of my

behaviour. I said that the blame lay with the high caste people[27] of Division B. My further suggestion that how could a single man hit three hundred persons evoked laughter among the kirani and the manager also joined in the amusement. I was let off without any punishment. The conductor called me to his house that evening, offered me drinks and good advice and later asked me to promise never to wield a stick again in a fight. Being very drunk, I promised by extinguishing the flame of a lamp with my palm.[28] Believe me or not, since that day I have never used a stick in a quarrel."

There were, nevertheless, less simple and more painful procedures by which peace and order was maintained in the community. For most of the pre-war period, there was no popularly elected council of elders (pañcāyam). Most of the judiciary and police functions were unevenly, irregularly and overlappingly distributed among kanganies, head kanganies, kirani and European bosses. The kanganies and head kanganies, as men on the spot in the 'lines' of particular Divisions, were expected to know whatever went on in their Divisions. The

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27 Presumably Aiyappan had suggested to the manager that Rangan (himself of a high caste) had led the lower castes in a fight against higher castes. Rangan's own version of the incident, especially his insistence that he hit the drum-beaters (Paraiyan) first, underscored the non-caste nature of the dispute.

28 Fire as witness.

responsibility of every kangany was specific to his gang members and that of a head kangany to all residents in his Division. As regards the degree of effective control which they could exercise over ordinary labourers, the head kangany and kanganies were in many respects more powerful than the kirani. During the first two decades of the century the head kangany is said to have wielded the authority to kill people for indulging in pre-marital sexual intercourse without legal proceedings being brought against him. While there is no conclusive evidence that he could shoot people, as some of my informants asserted, it is conceivable, as one informant stated, that sometimes the wounds caused by excessive beating with a cane became septic, the man was declared sick and sent to the hospital where later he died. At some later date, perhaps in greater deference to the Labour Code, the management introduced some regularity in the administration of justice in the labour lines. It restricted the kangany's high-handedness but failed to eliminate it completely. He could still inflict direct corporal punishment on labourers found guilty of such common offences as drunkenness and thefts. But his jurisdiction was more or less confined to domestic matters and squabbles over money. In this he could occasionally impose fines but in normal course justice was channelled through the office of the European assistant who held a 'court' every afternoon in his office. According to the

gravity of his offence, in an order of decreasing security, the offender was dismissed, fined, stopped from work or caned. The kangany executed the orders of the European assistant. All amounts received as fines were credited to the temple fund. In some cases of domestic disputes, the right of direct appeal to the manager was enjoyed by all labourers. This applied specially to appeals by wives against their husbands.

More serious quarrels called for the intervention of officers higher up in estate hierarchy but on Pal Melayu actual interference by police seems to have been rare. On estates of the Pal Melayu region in the mid-1920s there were sporadic outbursts of violence between the numerically dominant Pallan and Paraiyan castes on the one hand and the higher non-Brahman castes on the other. The oldest employee on Pal Melayu (himself a Christian) described the former as "rowdy types". The trouble assumed serious proportions on one estate where two men were murdered in cold blood and their bodies were dragged on to the main government road. The murderers were two men of the Pallan caste who, along with a number of others, had earlier been served notice by the manager on Pal Melayu. In dismissing these people, as in all other major decisions, the manager was exercising his own discretion. The range of judicial functions performed by him was very vast indeed.

Group Processes - Kangany and Men:

One final aspect of the political process on Pal Melayu for which we have data needs to be considered here. It sheds light on contrasting patterns of relationship between the kangany and his recruits. The relationship between recruiter-foreman and his men was one of great dependence of the latter on the former. It constituted a major source of the kangany's authority over his gang in the community subsystem. The kangany exploited this dependence for his personal advantage, especially to further his economic ends. The cycle of economic exploitation sometimes began in the recruiter's village as in the case of Ranganathan kangany. As we have already mentioned, his father was a mason who had acquired sufficient capital to practice money-lending in the village. His debtors were mainly farm labourers from whom recovery of loans was difficult. While Ranganathan was on Pal Melayu, he devised a plan to combine money-lending with recruitment. All debtors of his father unable to pay their loans were coaxed to migrate to Pal Melayu. There, they were told, would be regular employment, monthly wages, good prospects of paying off their debts quickly and a splendid opportunity to save. The argument had appeal and thus 'poor relatives' were trapped into recruitment. By the time of Ranganathan's recruiting trips, the practice of treating a labourer's passage as an advance to be deducted from wages had become illegal. A recruit of Ranganathan could thus land in Malaya technically free of current debts but

still carrying the burden of outstanding debts incurred in India. These latter remained outside the jurisdiction of the government or estate authorities. Furthermore, as soon as a recruit settled in the 'lines' and especially if he was a family man, he had many needs besides the ones provided for by the management. Their satisfaction would be arranged by the kangany who would thus burden his recruit with new debts. On pay day, a substantial part of a recruit's wages would be 'legitimately' pocketed by the kangany.

It was not a far-sighted policy for a kangany to be relentless in extracting profit from his recruits. A recruit could always 'bolt' in which case the kangany stood to lose everything - head money (see p. 56), principal and interest. On the other hand, by joining his debtors to a savings-group (cīṭṭu) initiated by him, a kangany could ensure repayment of loans often with increased profits to himself. At the same time, the mechanisms of cīṭṭu provided a means of spreading equally among the subscribers the financial risk involved in discontinuing a cīṭṭu cycle before its completion.[29] The intricate connections between recruitment, money-lending and cīṭṭu may not be obvious to all old-timers on Pal Melayu but all these elements are severally mentioned when I asked them to account for the accumulation of wealth by a kangany like Ranganathan.

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29 For the dynamics of cittu see Chapter 5.

A kangany was often the prime source of solidarity for a gang of labourers. He could lead the gang in group actions outside the work situation. Yet these actions could be of far-reaching significance for the industrial subsystem, as, for example en masse movement of his gang from Pal Melayu to another estate. I was repeatedly told by managers and clerks how closely Tamil labourers clung to their kangany in the pre-war period. An oft-cited example is that of Pakiri kangany leading his men out of Pal Melayu in the mid-1930s. This incident also demonstrates the element of reciprocity in the kangany-recruit relationship. Four men of Pakiri's gang were served notices because of unsatisfactory behaviour. Pakiri said that if his men were going to be discharged he would leave too. When these men were dismissed, Pakiri carried out his threat. With him nearly 150 other labourers (local recruits) left for an estate in South Malaya. Some of them found the water on the new estate uncongenial and moved back to another estate nearer Pal Melayu. Later Pakiri and the rest also joined them there. Pakiri still had friends on Pal Melayu and visited them often. A kirani of Pal Melayu once approached him and asked him to go to the manager's office. The manager expressed his concern over the loss to the estate of such a valuable kangany as Pakiri and asked him to rejoin Pal Melayu with all his men. Pakiri came away saying that he would consult his men. But in fact he left the matter there because leaving en masse the new estate would have amounted to betraying the trust of his new

masters. The manager of Pal Melayu persisted in his efforts. Whenever Pakiri went to visit friends on his old estate and the manager spotted him, there would be an exchange of greetings. The manager once jokingly asked if Pakiri had come to 'crimp' his labourers for the new estate. Next morning, while Pakiri sat in a shop in Bintang Emas, the manager, who was passing through the town in his car, saw Pakiri, stopped his car, came up to him and presented him with $10. The manager also made a deal with the head conductor of the estate where Pakiri was working to induce the people to return to Pal Melayu. Through these efforts Pakiri and some of his men were persuaded to come back and settle on Division A.

In the above instance, the kangany came close to playing the role of a popular leader of his men because he was able to obtain the best terms of payment for himself and his gang in a free labour market, characterised by competition among employers. Did he become a kepala? (see p.xxxi fn. 11 ) Perhaps he did to the extent that he could make his men leave the contract with the Pal Melayu management and enter the services of other estates. But here ended the similarity between him and a kepala for Pakiri did not become a contractor paymaster of his men. Further, Pakiri was unable to uphold his independence for long and inevitably returned to Pal Melayu. This outcome was probably typical for a person entrenched in a role that made conflicting demands on his loyalties. What is more, the foreman-recruiter's

commitment to the ends of the management seemed to vary inversely with his championship of the lower echelons in the estate organisation. In the kangany's efforts to balance conflicting loyalties, the solidarity of the gang suffered.

THE PRE-WAR PLANTATION - III: (The role in the community subsystem of the higher participants of industrial subsystem.)

In our examination of the major social process in the pre-war community subsystem of Pal Melayu, the higher participants of the industrial subsystem also seem to play a role. What were the values governing their role-playing and what was the pattern, if any? Here we shall try to answer both these questions by focussing on such roles as already implied in the foregoing description and by adducing fresh evidence if that can illuminate the analysis.

To tackle briefly the problem of the values; it can be easily shown that role-playing by the higher participants of industry (European bosses and kirani) in the community subsystem of the lower participants (labourers) was prompted by the same idealogy of management paternalism which led to the setting up of informal patterns of inter-action in the work situation.[30]

In the early days and at any rate ideally, the manager was the sole embodiment of paternal authority for labourers; realistically too the size and scale of the enterprise was small

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30 I shall not here go into the further 'why' question, that is, whether or not this was 'necessity' paternalism (cf. Pendleton 1961-62:27).

and the Asian bureaucracy had not appeared in such a form as to stand between the manager and the labour. The small size of the estate helped the manager to form a self-image of the pioneer planter and the over-lord of the estate with inclusive powers over men and materials in his purview. Perhaps this self-image had something to do with the actual verbalised pattern found among Tamil labourers expressed as "manager is our father and mother" (turai nam-m-uṭaiya ammā appa). To the extent that the scale of the enterprise permitted, many of the social arrangements sponsored by the management were formed in keeping with this self-image of the planter. When asked to comment upon his 'close' relationship with the labourers a planter says: "The good manager was looked upon as the mother and father of the labourers who usually brought all his troubles to the office in the afternoons for solving by the manager... The manager knew all his labourers, their relations on the estate, their particular virtues and weaknesses, their character and, in fact, about all there was to know of them. The kangany licence recruiting system which operated in those days .... resulted in something of the nature of one large family with the manager at the head ...."[31] This idealogy, qua ideology and as the basis of organisational arrangements in relation to the community subsystem in the early 1930s, was spelled out to me

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31 Personal communication from an ex-planter.

clearly, among others, by L, an ex-manager of Pal Melayu with a long and impressive record of planting in Malaya. "It was a great challenge", said L, "to have a very large family of Indians under your control, handling them, working with them, fairly, justly ... and taking a tremendous interest in their welfare. It was an essential for success in those days to have the trust and confidence of your labour force. Without that you could achieve very little. When I worked with that labour force on Pal Melayu I even chose the people they were going to marry... They used to bring their children and asked me what I would call them and I gave the names..." To the manager it seemed important that the labourers should look upon him as their 'father and mother' and a wise manager succeeded in this.[32] It was always a problem how to engender this attitude quickly in an unfamiliar labour force, e.g. when the manager was transferred to a new estate. L had a device which was pre-eminently successful. When he was transferred from one estate to another estate of the same company, he would take with him to the new place a certain number of his trusted workers and kanganies. They acted as dependable agents for him in the new labour force (see p. 82). As L put it: "This

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32 All writings by Malayan planters known to me have paid attention to this relationship with the labourers. (For three varying interpretations - satirical, erotic-mystical and pragmatic - see Boulle 1959, Faucounnier 1931 and Harrison 1961, respectively.)

nucleus of labourers in whom you had confidence could at once generate the same confidence in the new labour force. They would say, "You know he is a good European boss (turai), a kind boss, a first-class boss"." While this was the way in which the planter could maintain himself as the father and mother of his labour force, there were set procedures by which he could establish himself as such in the first place. In examining these, we pass on from the sources of paternalism to its practice and pattern.

The translation of the paternalistic ideal into practice was achieved by a system of delegated authority flowing from the manager. The manager vested in the European bosses (including himself), kirani and kangany differential rights of intervention in the community subsystem. The actual playing out of these roles by the officials constituted their institutionalised pattern of interaction with the labourer in the community subsystem. The question may at once be raised whether role-playing in the above-mentioned sense exhausted the limited of interaction between the labourer and the rest? Were there no regular relationships between them outside the occupational frame of reference? This brings into question the character of social stratification, especially the nature of status-groups on the pre-war Pal Melayu. The issue will be taken up at length

elsewhere but here we must point out to the rigidity of separation between the strata - European bosses, kirani and labourer. In the Weberian sense of the term, each of these categories formed a caste (Weber 1958:188-189). Each was ethnically distinct from the other and all three were organised in an hierarchical order. There was no inter-caste mobility, just as there was complete endogamy within each caste.[33] The castes were distinguished by important status symbols - housing, styles of dress, modes of conveyance (on foot, bicycle or motorcycle) and elaborate rules of deference and demeanour. Apart from having such communications as were necessitated by the demands of office, members of higher castes had no regular social interaction with the lower. Thus it was that in the work situation only the crystallised pattern of interaction among castes existed. The system of social stratification was founded on an occupational basis and it was rigid.

The need was thus apparent for intermediaries or brokers to facilitate contact and communication between the labourer and the higher echelons. In the beginning, kanganies were used as contact men in the community. Subsequently gradations were created among the kanganies. The basic division was into head kanganies and ordinary kanganies. Ordinary kanganies

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33 This did not preclude illegitimate sexual relations across caste lines; on the other hand, such liaisons constituted an important mechanism of inter-caste communications essential for the maintenance of the estate social order.

were further sub-divided into those who received the head-money and those who did not. The manager delegated roles of authority to each head kangany in his Division in the same manner as he did to the European assistants and conductors. While officially each head kangany was subordinated to the conductor and assistant in his Division, yet his role-playing in the community subsystem was far more effective than of either of his superordinates. While the head kangany belonged to the same status group as the labourer he was also a person of great influence in the community as recipient of a large sum of head-money and direct boss of kanganies. The same could be said of ordinary kanganies receiving head-money if only to a lesser degree. The result of this elaboration was that the head kanganies and other important kanganies were no longer mere contact men between the labourers and their superordinates in the Division; they themselves began to wield effective authority derived from the manager. To the labourers of the pre-war period, this contrast between the effective authority and hence prestige of the head kangany and the kirani was very obvious. As an illustration my informants recalled the celebration when a head kangany returned to Pal Melayu from a recruiting trip to India. Festoons were tied on poles along the path leading from the main gate to the Division in his welcome. The head kangany led the procession back into the 'lines' with the kirani walking behind him.

The manner in which a particular head kangany carried out in the community the functions assigned to him by the manager varied a good deal. The personality and personal interests of the head kangany and his relations with the other kanganies in the Division were important variables. As we saw in the section on the industrial subsystem, coercion was the principal sanction behind the performance of custodial functions in the community. All head kanganies favoured that a 'bolter' who was caught should be flogged although the sentence could be carried out by one of the kanganies. In most other respects, however, these functionaries of the management did not resort to force. Indeed the performance of management-supported paternalistic functions demanded tact and persuasiveness on their part. There is evidence that a kangany could use his patron-client tie with a recruit as a sanction to secure compliance from the latter. The matter could be as simple as that of keeping the 'line' clean or of extinguishing all lamps in the 'lines' after 9 p.m. It was the kangany and the head kangany who could be held responsible for any act of violence in the 'lines' and great vigilance was demanded from them. The kangany, as agent of the management, was expected to reach out to help a labourer even in personal affairs. He was expected to undertake long journeys for his recruits, as for instance, to search for the deserting wife of a man. "It was directly in the kangany's line of authority", said L, an ex-manager of Pal Melayu, "to finance the marriage

of a recruit or to see that a deceased member of his family was given a decent burial." The kangany was expected to spend a portion of his perquisite head-money to help his men out on such occasions demanding considerable expenditure.

Despite the granting of perquisites, privileges and power ('a system of rewards') to the kangany, he was still a man of the management among his people. There was no caste barrier between him and the labourer; on the other hand there were pre-existing ties, such as those of kinship. The apprehension of split loyalties kept the manager constantly on his guard. One device to guard against the kangany's overaccumulation of power mentioned earlier was to create a hierarchy of kanganies controlled by the manager. Particular kanganies could be moved up and down in the hierarchy at the manager's sole discretion. A kangany could secure the manager's favour only by showing complete commitment to the goals of the management. For a specially worthy kangany, such as Karappu, the amount of head-money was doubled but for one who displeased the manager, such as Vythalingam, summary dismissal was not at all an unusually hard punishment. A manager could cut himself off from the labouring community at his own risk; excessive reliance upon the kanganies was to be avoided.

It is perhaps in the light of such reasons that one can understand the direct and regular participation of the manager in certain areas of community life. During his term as the manager of Pal Melayu, L influenced a number of marriages - most

of them informally. The parents of the bride or bridegroom often approached him to attend the marriage ceremony. L sometimes considered whether that particular match would be suitable or not. If he thought that it would be otherwise, he made his views known to the parents concerned. They often concurred with his views and reconsidered the whole marriage. In bringing his influence to bear upon the course of a marriage, however, L weighed the facts carefully, realising the importance of his decision "in the life of the individuals and the families concerned".

As in their social interaction in the work situation, so also in their relationship with labourers 'off' work, the kirani stuck closely to the role assigned them by the management. This role was to mediate, warn, interpret (to the manager) and, depending upon a particular kirani's skill and personality, even to play one party of labourers against the other for some benefit of the Company. In actual role-playing, however, there were important differences as between field kirani (conductors) and office kirani (chief clerk, accountant and typist). In their occupational status field kirani of any Division were placed in between the head kangany and the European assistant. As we have seen, both these officers played effective roles of authority in the various social processes in the community. The manager defined the community role of a field kirani strictly in terms of assistance to the superordinate European boss and guidance to the kanganies and head kanganies. In his capacity both as an

assistant to the European assistant and guide to the head kangany a field kirani was not given a role of direct authority; what was even worse, the opportunities open to him for playing any dominant role at all were severely limited. There existed numerous direct links between the head kangany, kanganies and all the European bosses. In relation to the community subsystem, therefore, the field kirani had more the shadow of authority than its substance. It was an invidious position vis-a-vis the lower status group - the labourer; and the field kirani tried to make good their lack of effective authority in the community subsystem by paying meticulous regard to status symbols. Talk of the olden days on Pal Melayu can often arouse an experienced worker to draw a caricature of the stickler (a field kirani) who would insist that a labourer must get down from his bicycle while passing in front of a staff bungalow or that a Tamil coolie must not put on shoes or groom his hair in any but the traditional style with a tuft. In relation to the kanganies, on the other hand, the attitudes of the kirani are known to have been characterised by warmth and friendliness. The permissive relationship between the kirani and the kangany seems to have been a foil to the former's distant relationships, compulsory and self-chosen, with the European bosses and the labourers respectively. The interactional situation was rather different for the office kirani. The chief clerk, in particular, since he was the closest to the manager, enjoyed a high prestige

among labourers and kanganies. He thus wielded considerable influence in the community subsystem again mainly through informal ties with kanganies and head kanganies.

Before assessing changes in the interaction pattern following the great depression, comment seems necessary on the significance of certain ceremonies embracing the whole of the community on Pal Melayu. One of these was mentioned earlier, namely, the collective gift-giving to the manager on every Tipavali. The combined celebration was spread over two days. On the first day there was worship, sacrifice and feasting in the temple to which the manager was specially invited. He was garlanded with jasmine and marigold and sprayed with attar of roses. Care was taken to see that the share of a labourer unable to attend the feast was sent to his 'line'. The cost of the temple ceremony and feast was shared equally by the labourers and the manager. Other European bosses also made monetary contributions to the ceremony but the kirani paid nothing. All members of the staff, nevertheless, joined in the festivities. On the day after Tipavali festival prestations were carried by all labourers in a procession to the manager's bungalow. On Pal Melayu the main gift was usually a gold ornament such as an expensive ring. A planter has thus described the occasion:

> "...and suddenly from the forest edge burst forth a machine-gun volley of tomtoms and the strident arrows of trumpet calls. A joyous crowd scattered beneath

> the palms. The handsome Mukkan, clad only in a scarlet loin cloth, balanced upon his head a large tray of presents: goat flesh, bananas, shaddocks, little green limes that bring good luck and bottles of beer and gin, without which latter it would seem that happiness for Europeans is incomplete...." (Faucounnier 1931:54).

The organisation of the prestation ceremony may be interpreted as an annual dramatisation of the estate social system. In each Division contributions were collected from gang members by the kanganies and were in turn deposited with the head kangany. The head kanganies jointly bought the gift. If it included a gold ornament, that was made by the community goldsmith. In the gift-bearing procession, the drummers were always men of the Paraiyan caste who were paid for their services both in cash and kind. Thus in one single ritual a variety of roles from the community and the industry were jointly played out. In some respects the roles of the community and those of the industry were clearly at odds with each other but the contradictions were accommodated in the structure of the ceremony. Thus, while on the one hand only the Paraiyans played the drums (a community role) labourers of all castes (Paraiyans and clean non-Brahmans) as labourers walked in the same procession to the manager's bungalow. The substantive aspect of the ceremony was, of course, a

reaffirmation of the tie between the labourer and European boss. In the exchange-oriented Tamil society, this ritual gift-giving to the manager was a method of reciprocating, and ensuring its continuance in the future, of his benevolent paternalism .

A parallel dramatisation of role-playing within a Division could be seen in the ritual gift-giving to the head kangany whenever the latter left Pal Melayu to recruit labourers from India. All the labourers in his Division paid their contributions to the gang-kangany who in turn bought a present for the head kangany. It was presented to the latter at a ceremony held in the Division. A similar ceremony was held to felicitate the assistant on his home leave and retirement.

It seems significant that no ritual of prestation was ever held for a kirani. Perhaps this is yet another proof of the kirani's marginal status in the estate social system before World War II. How did the kirani's increased official powers in the late 1930s influence his role-playing in the community subsystem? It is evident that in the industrial subsystem the kirani rose in power at the expense of the kangany. The switch was made by the management. Its principal repercussion in the community subsystem was to align the labourer and the kangany in a joint front against the management. The opportunity for political alignment was provided by the agitational activities of Nathan's Party. In a limited sense the kanganies became the contact men between the labouring community on Pal Melayu and

radical leaders of the region. However, the communications between them were poor. There was lack of clarity in the aims of Nathan's Party and the kanganies lacked training for such leadership roles as they were now asked to take up.

In the meetings of the Party the kirani were criticised just as much as the European bosses - the main targets of attack being the invidious rules of dress and demeanour imposed by them on labourers. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that the C.I.A.M., the movement from which Nathan originally splintered off and with which he probably maintained close contacts even later on, was nationalistic in origin. The moderate wing of the movement was still strong in Baku Baku and its leadership was dominated by the local Indian middle-class, mainly shopkeepers and businessmen. They were quite satisfied with passing resolutions condemning mistreatment of coolies on estates and expressing token support for the Indian struggle for independence. The fact of their being Indian and members of the local middle class would have greatly favoured the kirani's participation in the moderate politics. Presumably because of their better education they would also have made better contact men between the labourers in the estate and political currents outside. But very significantly, the kirani adopted a policy of complete disentanglement with these currents. In fact, a Divisional conductor is on record as having caned Nadesan's school boys when they marched round the estate singing patriotic songs on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday.

Why did the kirani adopt a distant attitude towards the Indian nationalistic movements of the region? Further, why did they adopt a punitive attitude towards an innocuous display of nationalism by school boys on Pal Melayu? It was certainly a question of their loyalty to the white masters. Could they not have moved closer to the labourer and asserted their Indian-ness above industrial loyalties? But here we come face to face with a dilemma. The kirani were either the management's men or nobody's men. While the European bosses formed one status group and all labourers and kanganies another, the kirani stood in between, unable to move above and unwilling to come down. The kirani class had been created by the European bosses from the stream of comparatively well educated immigrants from India to stand in between them and the mass of the labourers. Apart from the industrial subsystem it had no rationale for existence. Their increased power in the industrial subsystem in mid- and late-1930s was indeed a passport for entry into the community subsystem. But since it was issued to them by the management, the only kind of role-playing it permitted was of an authoritarian nature. It meant, in effect, that either the kirani would have to curb any show of popular resentment against the management or must join with the rebels. Motives for the latter choice were lacking although its possibility was not ruled out by the character of the movement. The kirani, tied to the European boss in a closed system of stratification, were inevitably led to sacrifice their Indian loyalties to those of the industry.

## CHAPTER TWO.

## RISE OF ASIAN BUREAUCRACY AND TRADE UNIONISM.

### A 'Total Institution':

On Pal Melayu before the Second World War the economic organisation of rubber production served to orientate social relationships in the work situation. These relationships were characterised by superordination and subordination. Even informal relationships in the industrial subsystem were to a large degree calculated by the higher participants to secure greater efficiency and compliance from lower participants in the task of producing rubber. Management paternalism functioning through its official hierarchy - most effectively through the office of the kangany - was built into the system of production. It was extended to embrace crucial areas of the community subsystem of labourers. The social system of Pal Melayu as a whole before the second World War was thus highly stratified and rigid.

From the point of view of a labourer recruited into the system, Pal Melayu took on the aspect of a total institution. Whether a person was born into it or was introduced as an immigrant, he found it difficult to escape from the closed world of the estate. While he stayed in Malaya serious limitations were placed upon an estate coolie's spatial movements and occupational mobility. This is not to deny the considerable

inter-estate movement of labourers owing to the excessive demand for labour in pre-war years but it is equally true that in almost all the essential details of its organisation any one large-sized estate under European ownership and control resembled another. The relationship between the higher and lower participants, cross-cutting the industrial and community subsystems, was repetitive from one estate of the Malayan west coast to another. It seems that opportunities for occupational mobility, whether within the estate or outside it, were almost non-existent for the majority of labourers. Within the estate the utmost extent to which a labourer could aspire was to become a kangany or a head kangany. Only in the 1930s one hears of the son of a kangany being made a probationer conductor on Division C of Pal Melayu. A change to a higher occupation was equally rare for an estate coolie for he rarely possessed the skills, the contacts or the finance to effect such a change. A partial exception to this rule was found among the kanganies. At least two literate kanganies - both unsuccessful recruiters - managed to get themselves appointed as teachers of the estate Tamil Primary School. One of these men was later able to combine teaching with shopkeeping near the entrance of Pal Melayu and, in due course, became a land-owner. He still remained a teacher and in that capacity belonged to an intermediate status group between the kirani and the labourers. In relation to estate social stratification as a whole, teachers of Tamil Primary Schools

occupied a marginal position. However, they were closer to the kirani and labourers than to the middle-class Indians of the region - businessmen, professional people and employees in the government office at Bunga Raya.

Pal Melayu as a total institution possessed this characteristic; not only were the lower participants ('inmates') cut off from the rest of the world but the higher participants ('staff') also conducted all their major social activities within the limits of the estate. We saw this with regard to the kirani; the fact that they were tied to the European bosses as subordinates in a closed system of stratification accounted for their condemnation of the nationalistic spirit among their own class compatriots in the region. The relative social isolation of the European bosses from other white men in the District was typified in the exclusive planters' clubs and in the even more exclusive club for the European personnel of the estates of a particular company. That the entire life of a European planter was dedicated to his job above everything else constitutes the theme of many a tale of lament by the Planter's wife.[1] One of the fascinating aspects of the study of this closed world would be the impact of this environment on the 'self' of the participants (Goffman 1961); in the foregoing we have chosen, instead to study some of the social processes which typified

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1 For a faithful depiction of their plight see Boulle 1959.

Pal Melayu as a total institution.

The external forces of the late 1930s were earlier described as marking the beginnings of a change in the Pal Melayu social system. When compared with the upheaval caused by three and a half years of Japanese Occupation, however, the earlier changes begin to appear even more significant as reminders of the resilience of the pre-war estate social system. We need not here go into the pan-Malayan details of this significant event in the recent history of Malaya but it will be necessary to recount the course of the Japanese Occupation in the Pal Malayu region for an appreciation of the post-war changes in the total institution.

The Japanese Occupation:

For the workers on Pal Melayu the coming of the Japanese in late 1941 ("those swarms of uniformed short brown men riding bicycles and holding guns") was an unforgettable experience. They came from the north, crossing Sungei Chempaka over a bridge about 5 miles east of Pal Melayu. Having entered the Pal Melayu region they blew up the bridge to impede the progress of enemy forces. Although a large number of Europeans had taken flight from the region, still the Japanese bombarded Bunga Raya. The soldiers entered Pal Melayu and plundered whatever the workers had grown on their kitchen gardens. The loot was utilised to feed Japanese soldiers camping near Bunga Raya. Within a short

period of their infiltration, the Japanese established a military administration in the District. A District Committee, headed by an English-speaking Japanese military official, was formed. To keep the rubber estates in production the Committee appointed senior members of the Asian staff on estates as managers (kandakus). Each kandaku looked after one or more contiguously-situated estates under the direct supervision of Japanese soldiers. In the region as a whole, normal business activity and communications were not disrupted. The Japanese are known to have seized some private cars for their own use but the owners were assured that these would be returned upon resumption of normal times. Throughout the region the military administration imposed a ruthless code of justice. People still recall with horror the beheading of many residents by the Japanese on the mere suspicion of even so petty a crime as stealing. The severed head of the murdered accused was often mounted on a pole and installed at a prominent road junction for public exhibition. The object of such brutal displays of authority was to secure from all subjects absolute compliance to the rule of the new masters.

The last pre-war European manager of Pal Melayu began his unsuccessful escape to Europe via Singapore in late 1941, a couple of days after the Japanese had bombarded Bunga Raya from the air. When he left, the Japanese forces had not yet entered the Pal Melayu region. Yet the progress of their two-pronged

attack on the Malayan peninsula, matched by the military unpreparedness of the British, had sent most of the Europeans from Central Malaya scurrying down to Singapore for safety. The Japanese captured the manager of Pal Melayu in a Malayan town while he was en route to Singapore. He later went to Siam as a forced labourer and died there.

What happened to production on Pal Melayu following the departure of the manager is not known. There are outstanding gaps in the story of events leading up to the Japanese Occupation just as information is incomplete about the phase between Japanese surrender and Reoccupation. It is reasonable to suppose, however, that the manager on the eve of his departure would have enjoined the Asian staff and labourers to stay on. On another estate of the region at the same time, the departing manager gave definite instructions to his Malayalee chief clerk to keep the estate running. This European manager even entrusted most of his personal property to the care of the kirani. Most of the kirani on Pal Melayu were there when the Japanese assumed control over estate production. Paul, the Tamil chief clerk of Pal Melayu, was appointed the first kandaku in early 1942. In less than six months he was replaced in office by Sivan, the Malayalee head conductor. Paul attributed his removal to the manipulations of his successor. Paul was appointed by the District Committee but Sivan is believed to have pulled a few strings with the higher-ups in the Central Committee

to secure a decision in his own favour.

Under the kandaku the rest of the Asian staff on Pal Melayu carried out their former tasks with very little change. But the spirit in which some of the kirani began working at the onset of the Japanese Occupation was very different from that which characterised their former role-playing in the industrial subsystem. Being the most educated of all Indians on Pal Melayu the kirani were highly sympathetic to the pro-Asiatic propaganda of the Japanese. They expected a favourable change in the master-employer relationship under the Japanese. As Paul put it: "Even we educated people thought that the Japanese, being Asians, would treat us as equals". But they were due for a shock (or so it would seem) as the 'tyrannical treatment' accorded them by the Japanese was soon to show.

The position of the kirani during the Japanese Occupation was once again marked by contradictions but of a new sort. He now had increased responsibilities and powers as kandaku and as the distributor of the food ration of rice, sugar, ragi and tapioca among labourers. At the same time, he was made to suffer all kinds of indignities, including physical assaults at the hands of the Japanese officers. This mistreatment of the kirani by the Japanese bosses stood in sharp contrast to the formerly considerate behaviour of the European bosses towards him as exemplified in the latter's use of the prefix 'Mr.' whenever talking to an Asian staff member. Each member of the

staff on Pal Melayu recalled being beaten by the Japanese at one time or another on such flimsy grounds as supposed disobedience. What was even worse from the kirani's point of view, he was assaulted in front of the labourers. The Japanese kept a close watch over the activities of the kirani for fear of his divided loyalties. On hearing from some kanganies that Paul was clandestinely helping the pro-British guerillas, the Japanese beat him severely. Nevertheless, in the best interests of his personal safety and security of job the kirani rarely supported the guerillas or their agents. But sometimes it was difficult to avoid them as when they terrorised the kirani to extort contributions of money, food or clothing for the guerillas. During the Reoccupation some kirani tried to make capital out of this forced assistance. The white masters were told by the kirani that the help given by them to the guerillas was voluntary. This was said in order to impress upon the white masters that even during their absence the kirani showed unswerving loyalty to the British cause.[2] Nevertheless, in factual terms this claim of the kirani could be easily contradicted by a much fuller record of mutual antagonism between them and the guerillas throughout the Occupation.

The sad plight of Indian estate workers during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya has been a subject of much comment. At

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2 For an absorbing account of the alliance between guerillas and the Allied Forces during the Japanese Occupation see Chapman 1949.

least one official report stated that the occupational group of Indian labourers suffered more than any other section of the Malayan population during the period 1942-1945 (Burgess and Musa 1950:8-9). Del Tufo linked the decline in Indian population during the inter-census years, 1931-1947, directly to the Occupation (Tufo 1949:34). In common with estate workers all over Malaya Indian labourers on Pal Melayu experienced an acute struggle for physical survival. Very little is known about wages and what is even more important the purchasing power of money. The importation and distribution of food was rigorously controlled by the military authority. Almost all items of food were rationed and supplied by the Japanese through the Asian staff on a weekly quota. A labourer got only two tins of rice in a week, a quantity that was felt to be utterly inadequate. This supply was barely sufficient for two square meals and for the rest of the time they subsisted on a diet of self-grown tapioca. The Japanese allowed trees to be felled in one part of the estate and the cleared land was cultivated by labourers. Tapioca and vegetables were the chief crops to be planted there and a proportion of the yield was commandeered for use by the Japanese Army. Tapping and working in the gardens meant longer hours of work for men and women. Hard work and paucity of food resulted in deaths from malnutrition. In some cases people had no proper clothes to put on. Many labourers stayed away from work for this reason. "The kanganies entered

labour 'lines' with sticks in hand and started beating up men and women for not going out to work. Some women ran out wearing gunny bags." Certain other privations suffered by the labouring community were due, in large measure, to its cloistered and dependent existence in the days of the European bosses. For instance, I was told by a number of informants how during the Japanese Occupation the grass in front of the 'lines' grew man-high but nobody was sent by the management to mow it!

The rise of the kirani to positions previously occupied by European bosses had important repercussions on the traditional pattern of relationship between the kirani and the labourers. Historically it meant a continuation (and premature culmination) of the process of bureaucratic development on Pal Melayu which we noted towards the end of the 1930s. But both the source and character of this development during the Japanese Occupation were very different from its pre-war manifestations. In this later period the sudden rise of the kirani was a matter of expediency rather than design and calculation. It derived as much from the pro-Asiatic commitments of the Japanese as from their total ignorance of running rubber plantations. Furthermore, the authority which legitimised the kirani in his new position was based on coercion rather than on benevolent paternalism. The character of the kirani's relationship with the labourers (and of the Japanese with the kirani) was strongly

influenced by the circumstances of military rule. There was no place in it for subtle role definitions and role-playing which had characterised the system at an earlier day. No wonder, therefore, that on Pal Melayu during the Occupation the more tyrannical a kirani was the more successful be became with the Japanese. Conversely, in the eyes of the Japanese military officers a kirani who identified himself with the labourers was at best incompetent and at worst suspect. In either case he was penalised.

It is against this background of the redefinition of authority on Pal Melayu that one can try to understand the many stories of ruthless treatment meted out to labourers by the kirani under the aegis of the Japanese. The villain of the piece on Pal Melayu was Sivan, the former head conductor and the Occupation period successor of Paul as kandaku. His atrocities ramified in many directions and always had the backing of the Japanese. In many cases the latter personally persecuted the labourers. One of the most brutal acts of mass persecution of Tamil estate labourers in the Pal Melayu region (especially in terms of its consequences) was their summary recruitment for work on the Siam Death Railway. In fact it may legitimately be claimed that the large number of Tamils among labourers being taken to Siam was due in no small measure to the help which the Japanese instantly received from the kirani on estates. Sivan went in wholeheartedly to round-up

able-bodied men for despatch to Siam. A youth who had been married only three months before being taken to Siam described how a clique, consisting of his own elder brother (a kangany), Sivan kirani and the Japanese officer, made it impossible for any forced recruit to escape. Another estate worker said that Sivan told all women whose husbands had been taken to Siam to consider him as their husband. He is said to have revelled in sadistic forms of torture which were joined in by the Japanese as well. According to a woman labourer, Sivan and the Japanese once ordered some women workers on the estate to come to the dispensary. There behind closed doors they were stripped naked and beaten by the Japanese soldiers. Women were frequently beaten at the office. They were tied to a chair and caned by the kangany under instructions from Sivan. The office peon, a Tamil resident of Division I, informed me that he was asked to wait with a bucket of water to wash blood from the wounds of those who were beaten. Then there was the famous case of a tapper who was killed by Sivan kirani in the tapping task. Kandan, husband of Parvati (present resident of Division I) and another tapper were suspected of stealing. I got two versions of the punishment inflicted upon them by Sivan. According to one version both these men were dumped into an empty latex-tank which was later sealed from the top. One man managed to escape but Kandan was suffocated to death. In the other

version only Kandan is said to have succumbed to the injuries he received when Sivan beat him savagely. As we shall later see, the labourers, kanganies, a teacher and a clerk filed a suit against Sivan during the Reoccupation.

Almost concurrent with the forced recruitment of estate labourers for work on the Siam Death Railway was a drive, spearheaded by the Indian Independence League, urging all Malayan Indians to join the Indian National Army.[3] At the same time, anti-Japanese guerillas operating from a jungle camp about seven or eight miles south east of Pal Melayu had already exerted some pressure upon the young Indian estate worker to swell their ranks. These three 'pulls' were characterised by unequal degrees of compulsion for the people of Pal Melayu and expectably there was an inverse correlation

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3 The Indian Independence League (I.I.L.) was formed on 28th March, 1942, at a conference in Tokyo. It aimed to organise relief and deploy men and resources in the Japanese occupied territories of South East Asia for launching an armed struggle for Indian Independence. A conference of Indians from all parts of Malaya had sent a goodwill mission to the Tokyo conference. Under the inspired leadership of Rash Bihari Bose and Subhash Chandra Bose (Netaji) branches of the I.I.L. were opened in all parts of Malaya. From late 1942 the League began recruiting soldiers for the Indian National Army (Singh 1958). In the Pal Melayu region the I.I.L. Committee opened offices in Bunga Raya and Baku Baku. The chairmen in both the places were local Indian businessmen - a Chettiar money lender and a cinema-hall proprietor, respectively. The leadership of the I.I.L. was derived from the business class throughout Malaya because collection of funds had a high priority in the League's activities.

between the degree of compulsion attached to a 'pull' and the extent of popular support for it. It should, however, be immediately added that 'popular support' for a 'pull' away from the estate had no meaning for this community apart from indicating a choice for the best among many unpleasant alternatives. There is no evidence that the labourers on Pal Melayu joined the I.N.A. for 'nationalistic' reasons. If there was a trace of nationalism in their decision to join the I.N.A., it could be summed up in these words of an ex-I.N.A. officer (present school headmaster on Pal Melayu): "For the estate workers the sole justification for joining the I.N.A. lay in the guarantee of a more honourable end in the cause of the country as against the ignominous death of a forced labourer in Siam". For the majority of labourers who did join the I.N.A. (they numbered about 5,000 from the Pal Melayu region alone) it appeared above all to be the most rational choice open. Adaikalam kangany, a tall and sturdy young man of 28 years in 1942, made no bones about this fact. He said his parents forced him to register as a soldier in the I.N.A. Otherwise they felt certain that Adaikalam would have to go to Siam; the Japanese were not likely to spare a man with such good physique.

A number of interviews which I had with estate labourers in the Pal Melayu region convey a distinct impression of the widespread sympathies which existed between estate workers and

the anti-Japanese guerillas during a large part of the Occupation period. In this region at least a large number of guerillas were Indians, mostly ex-labourers from estates. Their attack was directed mainly on two groups of people :-

(a) Rich and middle-class Chinese and Indian businessmen including supporters of the Japanese and some prominent office-bearers of the Indian Independence League;

(b) Pro-Japanese estate kirani.

Their activities included extortions of money, murders, raids on the Japanese-held police stations and armouries and dislocation of Japanese supply lines. The guerillas maintained contact with the estate workers through agents who enjoyed the confidence of the Japanese. An agent in the Pal Melayu region was 'Baby', brother of a Sikh Superintendent of Police, stationed in Bintang Emas. Among his helpers on Pal Melayu was a younger brother of the Malabari Muslim (Kaka) shopkeeper. 'Baby' and his associates visited the estate in a jeep as suppliers of food and clothing to the Kaka shop. In fact, they exploited these opportunities for making direct contact with the labourers, hearing their grievances against particular officials - Indian or Japanese - assuring them of adequate retribution and accepting from them gifts of food and money for the men in the jungle. There is evidence that news of guerilla

activities was received with great enthusiasm in the labour 'lines' and a large section of labourers looked to these men for deliverance from the rule of tyranny. In the second largest estate of the Pal Melayu region a band of mixed Chinese and Indian guerillas murdered the Asian kandaku, notorious for his maltreatment of labourers. Yet the violent and clandestine operations of the guerillas were always a potent source of grave doubt and misgiving for the ordinary unlettered estate worker. While the results of some of the efforts of the guerillas were certainly impressive, both their present methods and blue-prints for the future were neither clear nor convincing to the majority of estate labourers.

The experience of Indian estate labourers taken by the Japanese to Siam was traumatic. It was a huge population movement which began in early 1943. "If all those taken to Siam from the region were to stand in a row", remarked one informant, "the first man would be in Bunga Raya and the last one in Pal Melayu" (a distance of approximately 13 miles). Indian labourers were told they would have an easy job and good money in Siam. Conditions they were expected to meet there were contrasted favourably with the existing uncertainties of food supply and wages in Malaya. Reluctance to leave was dealt with sternly and even physical force seems to have been employed in recruiting men. This in itself was nothing new -

at least for a large number of older recruits. However, in their train journey from Kuala Lumpur to Bangkok and, even more so, during the 11-day long arduous trek from Bangkok to the place of work, these labourers saw their former masters - European bosses - reduced by the Japanese to the lowly position of white coolies. Siam-returned labourers claim that white prisoners were treated with more brutality than Asiatic ones. But the life of even the latter was very hard indeed. Ramaiyya gave a graphic account of life under the Japanese in Siam. "We were put in tents and were sent out to work from early morning until 8 p.m. Our job was to clear the jungle and lay down the railway line. We carried large logs of wood on elephant-back. If a man refused to work he was asked to climb a coconut tree on the river bank and the tree would be cut. At the end of eight months, out of a total of 2,000 workers only 800 survived. Out of about 100 persons from Pal Melayu working with me only three returned. Many died due to brackish water and pneumonia fever." Sinnesamy kangany was made the foreman of a gang of labourers on the Death Railway too. In that capacity he earned a high wage of $70 a week (of inflated Japanese currency). From his savings in Siam he bribed several officials to arrange his escape to Malaya. Yet he brought $4,000 with him to Pal Melayu. Ordinarily, however, it was not easy for an Indian labourer to escape. The other two men who returned to Pal Melayu could do so only after the completion of

the Railway on 17th October, 1943. All three men returned while Pal Melayu was still under the Japanese Occupation.

As the period of the Japanese Occupation prolonged, so also the situation with regard to food, wages and inflation deteriorated. Tin and rubber production came almost to a complete standstill since Japan's industries could not use Malaya's full output of these materials. When the Japanese occupied Malaya, they introduced their own currency and for some time both Japanese and British currency were valid. Later they proclaimed that British was no longer legal tender and ordered the surrender of all British currency under pain of punishment. Consequently some British currency was surrendered while the rest went underground. Gradually inflation set in and prices began to rise - not so much through a shortage of articles but through bad distribution and graft. Labourers on Pal Melayu bought what they could by selling their personal effects, including clothing. Driven by the sheer necessity of finding food for themselves, individual men took up jobs elsewhere leaving their families behind on Pal Melayu. A number of families moved to a nearby coal mine which was being worked frantically by the Japanese to supply them with gun-powder and fuel. Thanks to the typically Japanese method of labour-maximisation (Fisher 1947:94) the mine absorbed a large number of labourers from nearby estates. The labourers received more money for less work as well as a regular supply

of rice. Another lot of estate labourers from Pal Melayu migrated across Sungei Chempaka to an agricultural settlement where unemployed persons were allotted land for the cultivation of food crops under Japanese supervision.

No account of the experiences of Pal Melayu labourers during the Japanese Occupation would be complete without reference being made to events immediately following the Japanese surrender of August, 1945. The interregnum between the Japanese surrender and the establishment of the British Military Administration in September, 1945, lasted 30 days. In common with certain other parts of Malaya, the Pal Melayu region during this brief period witnessed unbridled violence - plundering, arson and killing - by gangs of guerillas who now came out into the open. Ostensibly, their attack was still directed towards the old enemies - the estate kirani and other stooges of the Japanese - but in the ensuing mob violence the labourers suffered too. Besides, many fake leaders appeared and forced contributions of money from estate labourers in the name of the guerillas. Agents of the guerillas approached Paul, the chief clerk of Pal Melayu, more than once during this period to obtain compulsory contributions from the labourer's wages. Gangs of Chinese entered coolie 'lines' and stole anything they could lay hands upon. They drove away the labourers' cows. Old residents of Pal Melayu have not forgotten the injustice done to them by the 'guerillas'. Even

today they point out to certain rich shopkeepers in Bintang Emas as having been plunderers during the 30 days of lawlessness. While there certainly were among these bandits members of the Malayan People's Anti-Japanese Army, there were others who could best be labelled 'opportunists'.

Reoccupation - The Bureaucracy:

From early September, 1945, until 31st March, 1946, Malaya was governed by the Supreme Allied Commander through a British Military Administration (B.M.A.). A month after the establishment of the B.M.A., the first interim general manager of the Company's estates in the region arrived from Europe. The problems of reconstruction on Pal Melayu were many. Considerable replanting had been done in 1941 but in all save a few areas of the estate young rubber trees suffered permanent damage through failure to thin them out. No new plantings had been carried out. Lalang overgrew rubber fields and estate buildings. In the phase of terrorism prior to the Reoccupation estate machinery had been damaged, buildings mutilated and office records (including the G.I. Books) looted. Fortunately, comparatively few rubber trees were felled to make room for cultivating food crops. Only two areas in blocks 1D and 2D were denuded in this way and these were replanted in 1946 and 1948 respectively. Shortage of equipment, such as tapping knives, buckets, bulldozers and the like, was acute. During

the long period of no tapping in certain parts of the estate, trees had been rested. As a result, yields from such trees in the post-Occupation period were larger than ever before. Nevertheless, the increase was impressive only in terms of short-term economy. In the long-term view, replanting could then be deferred only at the risk of running down assets. Thus over and above the work of short-run reconstruction there were more fundamental tasks awaiting the post-war planter. Through generous financial support by the government and the formation of a co-operative body including all prominent planting companies of Malaya the estate rubber industry in Malaya was soon able to command most of the resources needed for its post-war reconstruction.[4]

At the beginning of the Reoccupation, Europeans were in short supply on estates, as elsewhere in Malaya. Most of those who had been in Malaya before the war had either been captured by the Japanese or escaped to Europe. A large number of the former had been killed as prisoners of war and those who survived were so impaired in physique that they had to be granted leave to recoup in their own countries. These Europeans as well as those who had effected a clean escape to

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4 The co-operative body, called Malayan Rubber Estate Owners Company (MREOC), was formed in July, 1945. It was organised in seven major groups of companies comprising 1,365,158 acres or 163,000 acres less than the 1938 total of "European" estates in Malaya. For its organisation and achievements, see Report 1946.

Europe at the beginning of the war kept returning to Malaya in an irregular trickle. The interim general manager was himself a military man, one of the lucky few who escaped Japanese imprisonment and emerged comparatively unimpaired from the war. For nearly a year after his arrival in Malaya he worked without a European manager or assistant on Pal Melayu. Nevertheless, his task was facilitated by the enthusiastic co-operation he received from the much tormented labourers and, somewhat surprisingly, from each and every kirani on the estate. We shall deal with the kirani first, whose ambivalent role during the Japanese Occupation was examined in the preceding section.

The European bosses, it seems, were quick to assess the role played by the kirani under the Japanese. They thought it politic to emphasise his positive contributions of saving the estate from the 'scorched earth' policy of the Japanese. Owing to the severe shortage of trained European personnel in Malaya, they decided to make full use of the superior experience of more responsible jobs which the Asian kirani acquired under the Japanese. Thus it came about that far from being impeached and penalised as 'Japanese collaborators' the kirani was hailed by Reoccupation planters as the saviour of the industry. The kirani, on his part, lost no time in adjusting his attitudes and loyalties to the changed circumstances. By making high-sounding claims of his

unflinching loyalty to the 'white' cause throughout the Japanese Occupation, the kirani further cemented his ties with the old masters. Thus through a collusion between the needy planter and the adaptable kirani the fiction was allowed to grow that the latter had been forced to work for the Japanese 'under duress'.

There is no doubt that the labourers on Pal Melayu heaved a sigh of relief at the return of the European bosses. Everywhere there were moving scenes of joyful reunion, marked by a spontaneous display of loyalty among estate labourers for the European bosses. These occasions were described to me by various managers in tones surcharged with emotion. "You could see it on their faces, in their eyes; their past suffering as well as the present joy. They said, 'now our boss (turai) has come, everything will be alright'." For the estate labourer the Reoccupation signified the end of the reign of terror with the promise of future contentment. The feeling of euphoria at the return of the European bosses was certainly the predominant immediate reaction. It did not imply, however, that estate labourers, shaken by the tantalising experience of three and a half years, could accept a reconstitution of the old system of authority on unchanged terms. Living through the Japanese Occupation they had learnt to act in concert not only without the necessary patronage of the higher participants of the organisation but in some cases against a person higher up in

the hierarchy. The conduct of the legal proceedings against Sivan kirani during the first months of the B.M.A. administration, though unsuccessful provides an illustration. The leadership in this case was assumed by Nadesan teacher who was able to collect signatures from all estate workers on a petition against Sivan kirani right under the latter's nose. Prominent kanganies from each of the three Divisions joined in the venture. With their help Nadesan collected from a number of labourers statements detailing the mistreatment which they suffered at the hands of Sivan. Paul clerk, a rival of Sivan, gave Nadesan and Ranganathan kangany a letter addressed to a man (a former clerk on Pal Melayu) in Klang who would show them the police station. On the day following their return from Klang after lodging the report at the police station, a white man (inspector of police) came in a van and took Sivan and several witnesses to Klang for cross questioning. A suit was filed against Sivan. He had to spend a lot of money on his defence and engaged the services of the best Indian lawyer in Malaya. The major charge against Sivan was that of homicide, the murder of Kandan. At that time the conductors on Pal Melayu were also Malayalee. It is alleged that Sivan conspired with one of them and removed from the check-roll the page for the particular day when Kandan was murdered. In the place of the old one, a new page was inserted with Kandan marked absent on that day. Thus the court found Sivan not guilty and

dismissed the case against him. It is important to note, however, that although the court acquitted him yet Sivan's crime was neither forgotten nor forgiven. Three years later while eating food in a Tamil restaurant in a town about 70 miles south of Pal Melayu Sivan was shot dead by the bullet of a person described as a 'communist'.

The above characterisation serves to highlight the temper of the labour force at the beginning of the Reoccupation. It should, however, be noted that the labour supply was inadequate on Pal Melayu owing to the wide dispersion of labourers mentioned before. One of the first tasks to which the post-war manager addressed his attention was the collection of more labourers. Such kanganies as remained on Pal Melayu and teachers such as Nadesan were sent out to call back old labourers. Some of these labourers could be found employed in nearby places. Most of them were attracted back to their old jobs on the estate by the 'generous' offer from the European boss of rice, clothes and facilities for the hospitalisation of sick people. For recalling these labourers Nadesan was rewarded by payments in cash and kind - a salary increase of $30 per month and a gift of 10 gantang of millet. But a large number of labourers resident on Pal Melayu before the war were now irretrievably lost to the estate. These included men who lost their lives working on the Siam Death Railway and others who took up jobs

in places far away from Pal Melayu. Exact figures are not available but the proportions of losses of the first category was much higher than of the second. In short, the pre-war labour force could not be reconstructed on Pal Melayu. New men had to be recruited and the proportion of women and children in the labour force perceptibly increased. Unfortunately, labour figures on Pal Melayu are not available for 1945 and 1946 but the trend towards increased employment of women and children is clearly indicated by comparing figures for 1940 and 1947. This trend stabilised in subsequent years (see Table 7).

These changes in the structure of labour force had a profound effect on the position of the kangany in the estate social system. Sinnesamy, who has been a kangany both before and after the war, described the change in these words: "After the war, the labourers spread to many places and persons belonging to one gang could never get together again. That is why today relatives and village people are all scattered in far away estates. After the war, the responsibility of the kangany was no longer necessary and it was taken over directly by the management. In the olden days since the kangany was a recruiter he had much power. Now the labourer finds his own way and the kangany is no longer required. The greatness of the kangany is no longer there." To this general observation Ponnan added a tail-piece which was revelatory of the change

TABLE 7.

LABOUR FORCE ON PAL MELAYU BY SEX AND AGE : 1930-1959.

| Year | M | F | *Children | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1930 | 509 | 289 | 80 | 878 |
| 1931 | 390 | 238 | 70 | 698 |
| 1932 | 306 | 169 | 48 | 523 |
| 1933 | 288 | 162 | 66 | 516 |
| 1934 | 394 | 254 | 107 | 755 |
| 1935 | 310 | 167 | 64 | 541 |
| 1936 | 324 | 166 | 36 | 526 |
| 1937 | 385 | 225 | 36 | 646 |
| 1938 | 350 | 215 | 41 | 606 |
| 1939 | 317 | 192 | 27 | 536 |
| 1940 | 301 | 193 | 21 | 515 |
| 1941 | | | | |
| 1942 | | | | |
| 1943 | | | | |
| 1944 | | | | |
| 1945 | | | | |
| 1946 | | | | |
| 1947 | 256 | 229 | 102 | 587 |
| 1948 | 214 | 214 | 86 | 514 |
| 1949 | 239 | 225 | 107 | 571 |
| 1950 | 197 | 196 | 15 | 408 |
| 1951 | 206 | 190 | 26 | 422 |
| 1952 | 201 | 184 | 37 | 422 |
| 1953 | 234 | 209 | 29 | 472 |
| 1954 | 242 | 198 | 39 | 479 |
| 1955 | 278 | 224 | 40 | 542 |
| 1956 | 251 | 206 | 42 | 499 |
| 1957 | 259 | 197 | 6 | 462 |
| 1958 | 254 | 220 | 17 | 491 |
| 1959 | 250 | 228 | 15 | 493 |

*Below 16 years.

from the kangany's personal point of view. Many of the persons who did not return to Pal Melayu after the war, said Ponnan, were gang-labourers who had borrowed money from him. With the loss of these men all the credit with interest was also lost!

When the initial period of resettlement of Pal Melayu was over, the Company resumed its pre-war policy of rationalising estate administration. It was now a fact that the kangany had lost much of his former influence in the community subsystem. In 1946 labourers from the old Divisions A and C were shifted to the newly-built Division I. With this the most important step was taken towards the present settlement pattern of Pal Melayu. A European assistant operating from the Divisional office was put in charge of the Asian field staff. The office of the manager and his Asian office staff continued to be in the old Division A, rechristened the 'Factory Division'. An Asian head conductor was retained directly below the European estate assistant. He was assisted by two Asian conductors, one each for Divisions I and II. In 1948 when replanting began on a large scale, the head conductor was removed as redundant but two junior conductors were added, one each for Divisions I and II. There was thus a net increase in the numbers of Asian salaried staff at the lower levels of the official hierarchy. From 1946 to 1956, a number of inexperienced Europeans served as assistants on Pal Melayu but they all proved inefficient. In October, 1956, Dina was appointed the first Asian estate assistant of Pal Melayu and he has continued in office to the present day (1963). The appointment of an Asian estate assistant in 1956 saw the culmination of a process by which an Asian bureaucracy was

created in post-war Pal Melayu (see Diagram 3). Relationships between the European boss and labourers became progressively impersonal. For the first time under normal circumstances the kirani found himself in a position of effective role-playing. Nevertheless, the exact definition of these roles, as in any bureaucracy, were still provided from the top. Further, while it was true that the kirani now came to have direct relationship of authority with the labourers, the former was still responsible for all his acts to the manager - the biggest boss on the estate. The position of the kangany in the industrial subsystem was now confirmed as that of a foreman. The practice of paternalism as a cardinal principle of the relationship between the higher and the lower participants on Pal Melayu had to undergo commensurate changes.

Reoccupation - Trade Unionism:

Economically, for a labourer on Pal Melayu, the aftermath of the Japanese Occupation was marked by confusion. No doubt the return of the European bosses saw the resumption of rice rations (stopped during the last days of the Occupation) and supply of other essential goods. An end was put to unemployment. Last but not the least, to old labourers who had suffered during the three and a half years, restoration of the old system of paternal care now seemed only a matter of time. There were, at the same time, certain disconcerting

features of the Reoccupation. Some of the labourers who stayed on Pal Melayu during the Occupation and most of the others who returned from work elsewhere, had saved considerable amounts of money. To these estate labourers, non-recognition of the Japanese currency by the B.M.A. appeared an inequitious step. Moreover, "the pre-war price system was a casualty of the Occupation in the sense that the public, once used to handling large sums of currency for small items of goods or services, now tended to place little value on the notes or coins of low denomination" (Firth 1948:11). The change in currency landed the labourer in a quandary about assessing the true value of his money. In their recollection of the Reoccupation days some workers clearly betrayed this sense of uncertainty. On my suggestion that prices after the Japanese Occupation must have risen, Ramaiyya replied, "No, on the contrary, prices were now falling. The wages were the same as before - 50 cents per day. Since 1953 the wages increased but so also the prices". In talking about post-war prices and wages he was using a dual standard - that of the inflated Japanese currency for the former and of the pre-war normal currency for the latter. The post-war high cost of living was also not at once apparent because needs had been much constricted during the Japanese Occupation. It is certain, however, that whether or not the labourer immediately perceived it, he was soon to grow increasingly aware of the economic

stringency he now had to suffer. Rice, sugar and textiles were being supplied by the estate on a weekly quota under a rationing system. The weekly quota for rice was fixed at 2 katis per head at the official rate of 30 cents per kati. There is evidence, however, that this supply of rice was inadequate and labourers had to buy more quantities of rice from shops in Bunga Raya at a black-market rate as high as 90 cents or $1 per kati. Since all rationed commodities were supplied by the manager through the kirani, there were frequent allegations that the latter kept a portion of the quota for their own use or even sold it in the black-market. One informant said he knew that a clerk was feeding his cows boiled rice while the labourers did not have enough to eat. One change had, undoubtedly, been introduced by the Japanese in the people's diet. Tapioca began to be used regularly to supplement rice at mealtime. Although the forced cultivation of tapioca under the Japanese gave the crop a bad name among Tamil labourers, yet they found it an indispensable supplement throughout the food shortage of the Reoccupation.[5]

The restoration of the tapper's daily wage to the pre-war level of 50 cents was thus entirely out of tune with the

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5 In their resistance to tapioca, thus, the comparison between the kampong Malay and the Indian estate labourer is highly suggestive. R. Firth writes how unpopular and notorious tapioca became among the former and, I am told, this prejudice has not been overcome to this day (Firth 1948:12).

fourfold or more increase in the prices of ordinary consumer goods. In October, 1945, when the B.M.A. ordered an increase in wages to its own labour force, it also raised the wages of estate labour on the Malayan mainland. On Pal Melayu the small increase of 15 cents became operative in November, 1945. The administration gave two main reasons for the smallness of this increase; firstly, it could not consult the employers, who were away recuperating from the Japanese Occupation, and secondly, the workers were in receipt of many amenities from the management in addition to the wages. The points made by administration were good as arguments but in factual terms the normal functioning of estates demanded that by whatever possible means the economic sufferings of the labourers should be alleviated by the employers. From the end of 1945 until 4th July, 1946, wages in the rubber industry were arbitrarily paid and varied from estate to estate. Pal Melayu was no exception to the prevailing circumstances. Following a circular issued by the United Planting Association of Malaya on the latter date, a further wage increase was granted to estate labour but the increased wages were still well below the real wages of 1941. At the same time, while the pre-war budget for an Indian labourer at the end of 1939 was approximately $7 per month for food, the same budget at the end of 1946 would cost approximately M$60 (Firth 1948:13).

It is evident, therefore, that whatever other causes might have been behind the so-called 'unrest' on estates during the Reoccupation, the economic cause was not the least significant.

On Pal Melayu one does not hear from the labourers, even when they are encouraged to recollect, many stories of strikes and labour triumphs over management such as have been recorded for estates in other parts of Malaya during this period (Gamba 1962a:278-303). As we shall later see part of the reason for relative quiescence on Pal Melayu lay in the efficient implementation of the 'welfare paternalism' of the Company by the Asian bureaucracy. Nevertheless, from interviews with ordinary labourers, kanganies, teachers, clerks and businessmen in the region one is able to piece together an account of the rise and fall of nascent trade unionism in the Pal Melayu region from 1946 to mid-1948. We may here note the salient features of this development as it affected the labouring population on Pal Melayu.

A word needs to be said about the background of trade unionism among estate workers in the Federation of Malaya immediately following the Japanese Occupation. As Rangaraju, a thirty-eight years old labourer on Pal Melayu described it to me, beneath the superstructure of the present National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.) lies the sacrifice of numerous unknown Indian leaders who struggled for a better deal for the estate labourer soon after the war. His version of this

'little known phase' in the history of plantation workers' union ran as follows: The period (roughly from end-1945 to 1948) may be described as the 'first emergency'. It was created by the action of the British Government of Malaya against guerillas who had actually helped in the former's fight against the Japanese. Rangaraju at the time of the Occupation was a tapper on an estate in Perak. During the latter part of the Occupation he went underground and joined the guerillas in the jungle. There was a good number of Indian guerillas although the Chinese were there too. The leader of the Indian guerillas was an estate labourer named R. Balan. In their hideout the guerillas received cyclostyled pamphlets in Tamil apprising them of British success towards Reoccupation. These, asserted Rangaraju, were printed in Britain. Soon after the Reoccupation, the guerillas came out into the open and began to move about freely in towns and estates. They had been promised back-pays and 'other rewards' in recognition of the services rendered to the British Government. In actual fact, however, the British on their return refused to grant adequate wages and did nothing to improve food supplies. The guerillas had helped the poor people against the Japanese and the rich during the Occupation period; now they formed unions and incited labourers to present their demands before the management. (Rangaraju did not say what the ideological affiliations of these unionists

were - only when speaking of the 'first emergency' he said that "communists or socialist front" were active throughout this period.) However, those unionists relied too heavily on the strike weapon. The Government, instead of rewarding these ex-guerilla leaders began to arrest them. All unions except those recognised by the Government were outlawed. A proof of the Government's treachery against these leaders was, said Rangaraju, the treatment accorded them after they had been invited to a royal ceremony in Britain.[6] The occasion was exploited by the Government to note the leaders' addresses and photograph them. When they were back in Malaya every one of them was tracked down, arrested or deported to India without trial.[7]

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6 This is a reference to the guerillas' participation, at the invitation of the British Government, in the victory celebrations in London (cf. Silcock and Aziz.1950:25).

7 In detailing Rangaraju's version of these developments I have not picked on the story of an 'atypical' or 'marginal' person among the youth of Pal Melayu. On the contrary, Rangaraju is the acknowledged leader of the youth on Pal Melayu by virtue of many firsts to his credit (see pp. 170-173). Further, most of these facts came out in a group interview with five young men of Pal Melayu - all of whom are active variously in their capacities as committee members and office-bearers of the local NUPW, MIC, panchayat and youth association. It is also known that on several occasions in the past more than one of the participants in the discussion group had been opposed to Rangaraju. Each participant was given ample opportunity to speak his mind but nobody challenged any of the facts set forth by Rangaraju. All, however, openly acknowledged the superiority of Rangaraju's wider experiences.

Against this generalised picture may be set the details of this movement in the Pal Melayu region. Something about the nature of the evidence first. There is no doubt that these 'unions' were regarded by the Government as being communist infiltrated and their leaders were persecuted. The fall of these unions and their leaders was followed by the twelve-year long emergency which ended not very long ago. My informants were still wary of disclosing their affinities with a movement that they have since discovered was communist-infested. In the thinking of an average estate worker today a communist is equated with a bandit. Expectably, therefore, I had limited success in getting all the facts and possible interpretations of this movement from my informants.[8]

The fact is significant that the first post-war union on estates of the Pal Melayu region is still known among its

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7 cont'd...
The facts as set forth by Rangaraju have a broad correspondence with the information supplied by Charles Gamba for this phase (Gamba 1962a). The interpretation of these facts differs even within the region, as between Rangaraju and others, up and down the socio-economic hierarchy of Indians.

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One of the more candid informants was a Tamil school teacher who turned out to be a renegade fellow-traveller. He enjoyed the trust of a union-leader-turned-guerilla during the Emergency and clandestinely offered him food at his place every night. One evening, while the guerilla was still at the teacher's bungalow, the host's son informed the police and the guerilla was arrested. Today the teacher is proud to tell that his son received a reward of $5,000 from the Government and claims that he could have told the police more about 'communist' leaders if only they had set a reward for each of them.

members after the name of its founder - a tapper named Mohan. Mohan sangham was formed immediately after the Reoccupation. Mohan, a Tamil speaker, had been a coal-face worker in a mine with a predominantly Chinese labour force and a long history of labour unrest. In 1937 during a strike at the colliery, the workers had taken possession of the whole property and defied the police. They had set up an internal government which included an elaborate defence system and a court to deal with criminal offences and settle coal disputes (Pallitt 1951:33). The colliery's Labour Association, the only union of its kind in pre-war Malaya, had a mixed Chinese and Indian membership (Awebery and Dalley 1948:21-22). This association had been the training ground of Mohan. During the Japanese Occupation Mohan became a rubber-tapper on a Chinese smallholding in the Pal Melayu region and acted as an agent between the guerillas and estate labourers. After the war he organised a regional general union with its headquarters in Baku Baku. A prominent colleague of Mohan was a Malayalee named Krupp. Apart from the fact that he was an estate kirani in pre-war days nothing is known of Krupp's career. Names of other regional leaders such as Somu, Kuppusamy and Segaran are also known widely to the rank and file of estate labourers on Pal Melayu. These leaders went from estate to estate and made speeches in Tamil to convince people of the need for a union. According to one informant Krupp laid much stress on the need for reform among

the labourers. He asked for :-

(1) Workers' unity;

(2) Cleanliness;

(3) Better food and clothes;

(4) Abstention from alcohol;

(5) Thrift;

(6) Better care of children; education and cleanliness;

(7) Need to fight the management for higher wages.

Another informant said those speeches emphasised more the need to secure better conditions of work from the management. The demands were :-

(1) A higher salary;

(2) An eight hour working day;

(3) Better housing and water supply.

Immediately after their speeches on each estate these organisers formed a branch of the union by enlisting members and electing office-bearers. Ponnan, now a tapper on an estate near Bintang Emas, was one of the three close associates of Krupp when the union branches were being formed on estates. (His other two colleagues are now a Town Board labourer and a barber respectively in two nearby towns.) He gave me an estate-by-estate account of the process with interesting sidelights on the attitudes of estate managements and the police. On their arrival on the first estate the Malayalee Christian kirani phoned the police. The police came, rounded up the leaders

and took them to the Bintang Emas police station for interrogation. A large crowd of Tamil labourers gathered outside the police station. When questioned by the sergeant about the motive of his visit to the estate Krupp frankly told him that he and his associates wanted to form a union to improve the conditions of estate labour. The sergeant rang up the kirani and told him sternly not to interfere with those men - "it is not your father's estate". The leaders were led back into the estate by the cheering crowd and a branch was formed there. The same evening at 9 p.m. they formed a branch on another nearby estate without opposition. Next morning they came to Pal Melayu and there, too, the management offered no resistance. On the next estate, however, they were told by the labourers themselves to first seek the manager's permission. The manager told Krupp that his labourers suffered none of the disabilities that needed to be removed and so the union was unnecessary. The leaders came back dissatisfied and urged the labourers, outside the estate premises, to form a union. But the people there were too afraid and a branch could not be opened. The manager of that estate, presumably an influential man, informed a big police officer who personally came and questioned the leaders on the very next day. But he did not arrest anybody.

Members and office-bearers for the estate committee on Pal Melayu were elected from each Division. It is important

to note that of the four top office-bearers from both the Divisions three were kanganies and one a teacher. The monthly subscription for the union was 50 cents. It was collected by the secretaries and deposited at the regional head office every month. Public meetings of the union were held at Baku Baku.

Nadesan, the union secretary for Division II, was once called to deposit the subscriptions at the central headquarters. There he realised for the first time the heavy domination of Chinese in the union. He remained on his guard and gradually other features of the movement came to light which made him suspect that it was a 'communist union'. For instance, a youth army or volunteer corps (thondar-paṭai) had been formed under the auspices of this union. Young men were given sticks and taught to brandish them. Nadesan held that such activities encouraged violence in the youth. He also alleged that use was being made of the volunteer corps to assault and threaten people. At the same time certain pamphlets were being distributed by the union which were aggressively anti-management in tone. The rules of attendance at union meetings had also been made very rigid. Nadesan was irked by the punctilious character of these rules and held it against the union as another proof of its involvement with the communists. Finally, he looked askance at this union because

estate managers and other big people were gravely suspicious of its activities. On all these grounds Nadesan resigned his secretaryship of the union and was succeeded by Seethapathi a tapper of Division II.

It seems certain that at least a few of the regional leaders, perhaps including Mohan, proved to be corrupt and dishonest. The story of Mohan's embezzlement of the union's funds and flight to India is widely known and was repeated in almost every estate of the region. Only one informant strongly denied this charge against him. He asserted that Mohan was arrested in a surprise raid by the police and deported to India without anyone's knowledge. Whatever the truth, the union outlived Mohan's exit. His successor was also a former labourer at the coal mine but one who had himself been a guerilla during the Japanese Occupation. Nevertheless, this leadership was short-lived. My informants refer to a time (no year and date supplied) when the Government passed a law outlawing this union and allowing the police to arrest its leaders. Most of the arrests were made at a big rally of union members gathered from many districts. The labourers heard later that some of those arrested had been deported to India while others had escaped into the jungle as guerillas. The Emergency followed hard on the heels of these confusing and sudden developments; and in the hearts of many a great fear set in. P.P. Narayanan, the General Secretary of the

National Union of Plantation Workers, has well summed up the then prevailing mood :

> "Fear of terrorist activities; fear of arrests and deportation by Government; fear of employers. In an ordinary worker's mind there was now confusion and misunderstanding" (cf. Gamba 1962 b:30).

It is difficult to prove or disprove generalised statements, so often made, about the intimidatory practices of the guerillas. On Pal Melayu the labourers' support for the ex-union leaders, Indian guerillas of the Emergency, was largely spontaneous. It might well be that this particular estate, because of its proximity to a police station and the greater vigilance of an efficient management, was not troubled by extortionist guerillas as much as smaller Chinese-owned and mismanaged estates were. It is likely that most of the guerillas who came for food to Pal Melayu were friends of long standing or kinsmen of the helping labourers. But I was told by several young men, who would then have been in their late teens or early twenties, how they braved the soldiers and the dark to carry food for the guerillas at the dead of the night to the edge of the plantation. For the Tamil youth, born and brought up in Malaya, some of these unknown guerillas were undoubtedly heroes. It stands to reason, therefore, that the challenging spirit first infused by the pioneer unionists was not extinguished among the youth even when Mohan Sangam and

its leaders had disappeared. The urge for collective action outside management paternalism manifested itself in a variety of ways, sometimes leading to skirmishes with the newly entrenched Asian bureaucracy. Certain incidents occuring within the first few years of the next union on Pal Melayu were to show this clearly.

The new union - the Plantation Workers' Union (PWUM) as it was then called - differed radically from the earlier union. The events leading to the rise of this union and the process of its final amalgamation with other unions resulting in the formation of the present National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW), have been fully recorded in a recent study by Charles Gamba (Gamba 1962 b). Gamba has pointed out that the leaders of this union were personae gratae to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (I.C.F.T.U.) on four counts - their militant anti-communism, their mild socialist views, their strong control over the estate workers and the personal ability of the General Secretary of the PWUM, P.P. Narayanan. Since the I.C.F.T.U. itself was welcomed in Malaya by the Government, the employers and the British colonial authorities, the PWUM could also claim wide acceptance in official circles (Gamba 1962 b:54). At that level the union's stand on communism and socialism left little scope for its identification with the earlier movements.

On the estate front, however, one of the first tasks of the new unionists was to make their position vis-a-vis the past unions perfectly clear to all concerned. In 1952 when the leaders visited Pal Melayu to open a branch of the union their work was considerably facilitated by the manager's ungrudging permission to them to hold a meeting on estate premises. For the labourers this was a proof of the new union's bona fides. It followed logically that the new union would be free of communist influence. The leaders of the union also made this point strongly in their speeches. Nevertheless, from the beginning this union had to face two major difficulties. First, a scarcity of community leaders except those who had already been utilised by the management through the panchayat and, second, the intransigent attitude of the Asian bureaucracy. From the point of view of the working of the union both these difficulties were in fact facets of the same general problem - that of sustaining the union on the local level after it had been sponsored 'from outside'. It is doubtful if the union could find a solution of this problem then or even now. Of the four office-bearers elected to the first estate committee of the PWUM on Pal Melayu three were kanganies (two presidents, one for each Division, and the secretary for Division I) and only one was a tapper. All the three kangany-office-bearers were alleged to be the henchmen of the management. Ponnan, the tapper

secretary of Division II, was put in the minority of one as the only person to raise his voice against poor working conditions and malpractices of the kangany and kirani through their influence in the panchayat and temple committee on Pal Melayu.

It is necessary to say a few words about these bodies on the estate. The only pre-war panchayat on Pal Melayu was formed by the management in 1935-36 on Division C to take over the functions of a head kangany (see pp.55-56). This panchayat was revived during the Reoccupation. In 1946, on the eve of the shift of the entire population of old Division C to new Division I, the panchayat raised funds from all residents on the Division to finance the building of a temple in the new locale. A sum of $300 to $400 was collected and a temple had been built before the people moved into the new 'lines'. In Division II there was no formal panchayat. Āṭi tiru-vi̲lā, the annual religious festival on Pal Melayu, was still celebrated jointly by the labourers of both Divisions. (For all practical purposes, Factory Division was treated as a part of Division I.) Until 1957, before the main temple was built at the Divisional centre, the celebration of Āṭi tiru-vi̲lā was conducted from the old Muniandy temple by a festival celebration committee. Every year a chairman for religious affairs (taruma-karttā) and committee members were 'elected' from each Division. All the elections were unanimous and

chairmen for religious affairs were invariably the same kanganies re-elected year after year. There was considerable overlap between the office-bearers of the community panchayat on Division I and divisional representatives on the festival celebration committee. Moreover, the same kanganies who were active on the community panchayat and the festival committee also occupied offices in the estate branch of PWUM from 1952 to 1956.

Ponnan tried to break the kanganies' hold over the community bodies but even at this stage in the history of Pal Melayu he utterly failed in his efforts. Indeed he had to pay for it with his job. It is instructive to follow the story of Ponnan's vicissitudes as a commentary on the invidious state of labour relations existing on Pal Melayu during the early years of the PWUM.[9]

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9 We have seen that Ponnan, the union secretary from Division II, had earlier been an active member of Mohan Sangam (see p.157). During the Emergency he also had some friends among the guerillas. After being elected to his office in the new union, Ponnan encouraged labourers to demand from the management whatever they considered to be their legitimate due. The labourers were then uncertain about how much wages they received each day as the result of a new wage rate and cost of living allowance. On each wage day, therefore, Ponnan asked the kirani to let him examine the Register for the benefit of those members of the union who may have doubts to clear up. This made him very unpopular with the kirani. Another issue that had been disturbing the labourers then concerned the use of their monetary contributions for the celebration of Āṭi tiru-viḻā. Many of them suspected that large amounts were being misappropriated by the kanganies.

The ousting of Ponnan was symptomatic of the future growth of a moderate local leadership of the NUPW on Pal Melayu. The estate branch of the union increasingly looked to the national and regional union officials for guidance. During this phase the wide publicity accorded by the union to its policy of solving differences with the management through democratic means had reached the labourers' ears. The union monthly Sangamani was widely read in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu. It disseminated the news of the union leaders'

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9 cont'd...
A more serious allegation was that the kirani were in league with the kanganies in the embezzlement of funds. Ponnan believed some of these charges to be true but the domination of the union committee by the kanganies made probing into the matter by that body well nigh useless. Later in the same year labourers on Division II elected Ponnan to the festival celebration committee also. In that capacity, he organised the Thaipusam festival for the first time on Pal Melayu. In order to exclude the corrupt kanganies of Division II and the panchayat of Division I from gaining control of the ceremony, Ponnan personally collected rice and money from labourers. Thaipusam was thus celebrated for three years (1953-55). Since the kanganies had no role in it they were antagonised. So also were the kirani. Six of the kanganies began to poison the ears of the Divisional kirani against Ponnan alleging that he had incited labourers against the management. This kirani, taking advantage of the split among the labourers and falsely assured that no concerted action would be possible against him, became increasingly haughty and arrogant in his behaviour towards the labourers. That he had entirely misjudged the temper of the labour force was soon proved when one morning soon after the muster he was ambushed and severely beaten by a group of labourers from Division II. Ponnan was the first on the suspect list of assailants but he convincingly proved to the manager that he was not present for muster that morning. Several labourers were, nevertheless, served notice and more than ever before the kirani assumed an attitude of open hostility towards the type of aggressive unionism which Ponnan seemed to champion.

efforts to talk 'the management union' (Malayan Planting Industries Employers' Association) into improving wages and working conditions on estates. Open hostility to the management was discouraged and the 'hot-headed radicalism' of the former unionists was exposed as unsound tactics. In consequence, the type of unionism which ultimately struck roots on Pal Melayu was one that could coexist with the welfare paternalism of the post-war management. Insomuch as the management and the union

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An opportunity was soon found to punish Ponnan for his progressive ideas. Nine young men, including Ponnan, jointly bought a mobile film show unit. The idea was undoubtedly borrowed from a similar unit of the Company which screened Tamil pictures for labourers on all its estates. On Pal Melayu a film show was held twice a month. Its cost was met through compulsory monthly deductions for a 'cinema fund' from each labourer's wage. The young men complained that films shown by the Company were obsolete but the management paid no heed. Ponnan suggested that they could do much better than the Company film show. Muthu, with right sort of contacts in the town, spotted a second-hand mobile unit going cheap. The 'cinema group' bought the machine and intimated the manager that the Company film show was no longer required. For some time the plan worked out smoothly. The 'group' was able to screen more recent Tamil films for the same price not only on Pal Melayu but on the adjoining estates as well. Then a kirani grew restive and handed a notice to Ponnan stating that the film van would not be allowed inside the estate. No reason was given but the kirani said he was acting upon the manager's instructions. The driver of the van 'a humorous man' began parking it in front of the assistant's bungalow, still technically outside the estate entrance but the cinema show was stopped. Ponnan, as union secretary, wrote a letter to the manager calling his action unjust. The manager did not reply but Ponnan was served notice. The kirani is later reported to have told labourers that the manager took action against Ponnan because the name of the estate had been written on the film show van first in Tamil and then in English! From the management's point of view, the action had a salutary effect on the other young men who soon sold off the van, thus clearing the way for the Company van to reappear.

recognised and respected each other's sphere of rights and duties, the dilemma of scarce leadership at the local level was resolved by sharing it. There is evidence to suppose that such a happy state of affairs did in fact exist on Pal Melayu in the late 1950s.

'Welfare Paternalism':

The welfare paternalism of the management was an adaptation of the pre-war paternalism to the changed circumstances of the period after the war. The rapid growth of a popular and legitimate trade union lent an urgency to such a programme. The panchayat and temple committees had always worked in unison with the management. In 1956, the estate temple committee's proposal to build a big temple at the Divisional centre received whole-hearted support from the management. The new Asian estate assistant agreed to be the official treasurer of the temple fund and a committee of kanganies was formed to work out the details of the project. The kanganies obtained the labourers' consent for a contribution of $12.00 per labourer. The amount was paid by each labourer in the form of one day's salary ($3.00) per month for four consecutive months. The assistant, as treasurer, deducted the amount from the check-roll as a compulsory and uniform contribution from each labourer. The temple, which cost a total of $22,000 was built in six months. The image of Goddess Mahā-māri-amman was shifted from the old Muniandy temple and

installed in the new temple early in 1957. The new temple, with its large verandah, soon became a venue for most of the meetings of various committees on the estate. Its median location between Divisions I and II also served to heighten the separate identity of each Division as a distinct community. The building of the new temple and concentration of political activity around it had important implications for the development of factional quasi-groups on Pal Melayu.

In 1958-59, instructions were received from the Company head office to establish a Welfare Panchayat Board (known to the labourers as 'Management Panchayat') on the estate. The new European manager of Pal Melayu set up the first Management Panchayat with himself as the ex-officio chairman, the Asian estate assistant as the vice-chairman, the senior conductors of each Division as secretaries, three members from each Division (nominated by the manager) and representatives of the union committees and community panchayats from both Divisions. The main concern of the Management Panchayat was to discuss improvements in the living conditions of labourers. At the meetings of this panchayat the labourers presented their demands and difficulties and management's representatives let the former know the Company's stand on those matters. Besides, the latter also advised the former on such improvements as could be brought about through the labourer's own efforts. The Management Panchayat arranged for regular visits to the estate by women

welfare officers attached to the Labour Welfare Department of the Company headquarters. These officers advised estate women on improved methods of child-rearing and family planning. In due course, the Management Panchayat established a strong liaison with the community panchayat.

The union on Pal Melayu failed to offer a positive programme for youth. This element of the estate population had come to assume an important role in the social and political processes of the post-war estate community. It is to the credit of the management that it recognised the new aspirations of the young worker. Under the auspices of the management, a football team was constituted. The new manager also encouraged such positive manifestations of collective activity by young men as the formation of an orchestra group or band (vāttiya-kuzu). The idea of organising a band on Pal Melayu was introduced by Rangaraju in 1954. He had been a member of one such group on the estate where he was formerly employed. Even before Rangaraju joined Pal Melayu, Muthu had met him on an estate where the sisters of both these men were married. They became fast friends. Muthu was attracted by Rangaraju's description of the band and persuaded the latter to obtain a job on Pal Melayu. Since Rangaraju was married to a girl from Pal Melayu, his father-in-law recommended him to the manager, making a special point of Rangaraju's ability to start a band. Soon after Rangaraju joined Pal Melayu a meeting attended by about twentyfive

young men was held in the school building. Rangaraju laid stress on the value of the band as a way of utilising the leisure collectively "rather than spending money on drinks in the kaka shop, fighting among ourselves and beating wives at home". From the thirteen members who joined the band, a president, secretary and treasurer were elected. The members agreed to pay a monthly subscription of $25.00 per head. From each member's monthly subscription, a sum of $10.00 was paid to a Tamil music instructor and $15.00 to the shop in Bintang Emas from where musical instruments had been obtained under a hire purchase agreement. At the next annual sports of the Estate Primary School, members of the band, resplendent in the glory of the shining new instruments and a special dress of coat and tie, played such elementary music as they had been able to learn by that time. The manager was pleased to note the development and presented them, on request, a sum of $100.00 as his contribution towards the purchase of instruments. Although the band had been successfully launched it was soon hounded by financial difficulties. Members failed to pay their subscriptions regularly. Rangaraju and Muthu now embarked upon another scheme. A member of the band was encouraged to invest his savings in buying a van. The van would normally be used by the owner for commercial purposes but on certain days of the month the band agreed to hire it for making trips to other estates. It was the beginning of the band as a party of roving musicians

who gave a performance wherever they received an adequate payment. An added attraction of the troupe was a young dancer, the twelve year old sister of a member, who performed to the accompaniment of popular tunes from Tamil films played on a guitar. The Asian estate assistant took a special interest in the band and on being approached by its members even agreed to deduct the members' subscriptions to the instrument fund from the Estate Register of Wages.

In the last years of the '50s, youth associations were formed on both Divisions of Pal Melayu, independent of management sponsorship or patronage. The first association, the 'Elainyar kuzu', was formed on Division I. It originated when certain young men of Pal Melayu who had been hired to decorate the marriage-booth (maṇa-v-aṟai) for Muniandy's marriage were having their tea. There were both married and unmarried men in the group. Rangaraju suggested forming a youth association for the purpose of decorating the marriage-booth and holding a tea party for presenting a decent gift to any member of the association who got married. For married members without children, a similar presentation ceremony should be arranged on the birth of the first child. Whenever a member of the association decided to leave the estate for good, a prestation farewell should be arranged. This, said Rangaraju, would be conducive to the unity and solidarity of young men. The idea was enthusiastically greeted by all who were there present. Members

of the association were asked to pay a monthly subscription of $1.50. Additional subscriptions were required from members if the regular fund failed to cover the costs of a prestation tea party. All young men of Division I older than 18 years could join the association. During its first year, the association had a membership of forty. Five office-bearers were elected :- a president, secretary, treasurer and two auditors. Three simple rules were to be observed at a tea party :-

(1) obeying the president;

(2) no noise; and

(3) no smoking.

Within a year of the formation of Elainyar kuzu in Division I, an identical association, Narpani kuzu, appeared in Division II. The moving spirit behind Narpani kuzu was Batumalai, the son of Nadesan teacher. Both these associations had an exclusive membership of Malaya-born young men who had no loyalties split between India and Malaya. Unlike the parental generation, for these young men, living and working on Pal Melayu was more than a mere sojourn. A spirit of rivalry grew between the two associations and developed into the nascent factionalism among young men which one finds on Pal Melayu at the present day.

## CHAPTER THREE

## PAL MELAYU TODAY.

### Pal Melayu - Rubber Ecology:

Surrounded on the east, west and south by other company-owned rubber estates and having a road frontage to its north, Pal Melayu occupies a total acreage of 4,500 acres. Rubber is the only crop planted and it covers nearly 4,000 acres of land. Of this nearly 64% is mature and tapped and the remaining 36% is immature rubber. We earlier noted the importance of drainage for the successful planting of the rubber tree (see p. xxx.). A criss-cross network of drains is spread all over the flat rubber land of Pal Melayu for regular evacuation of drainage water into Sungei Chempaka. Most of the drains are artificially cut. The only source of natural drainage is the rivulet Sungei Durian serving four eastern blocks of the estate. In addition, there are two pumps with a combined capacity of sump and pumping into the river 480,000 gallons of water per hour, mainly from the low lying swamp areas of IC and ID. Bridges have been built at convenient points across the drains. Inspection tracks have been laid out to facilitate access to most of the areas under tapping. These paths are dotted with weighing stations in all corners of the estate.

Within this landscape are organised the major productive tasks of tapping, weeding and processing on Pal Melayu. We

shall examine these processes in relation to Division I. (The pattern follows a largely similar course in Division II.)[1]

Tapping:

The whole planted area under mature rubber trees in Division I is divided into four sections - 1, 2, 3 and 4 - which are tapped in daily succession. Sections 1 to 4 are arranged west to east and each successive section broadly covers one part of the estate from north to south (see Map 4). Each section is divided into 191 'tasks' thus making a total of 764 tasks on Division I. The number of trees per task varies from 400 to 450, there being more trees to a task in areas where trees are old and the yield per tree is low. Every permanent tapper is allocated a task in each of the four sections.

After a morning muster at which all labourers must report by 5.30 a.m., tapping on Pal Melayu begins at 6 a.m. and continues till 9.30-10 a.m. Within this period each tapper is expected to have finished all his trees. This consists of removing with a tapping knife a thin shaving of bark from the surface of a groove made into the bark of each tree (a half spiral tapping cut) to a depth of about 1 mm from the cambium. Every tapper collects these coagulated strips and cup-lumps left over from previous tapping in a small cane pouch tied to his or her waist. This collection is known as scrap rubber.

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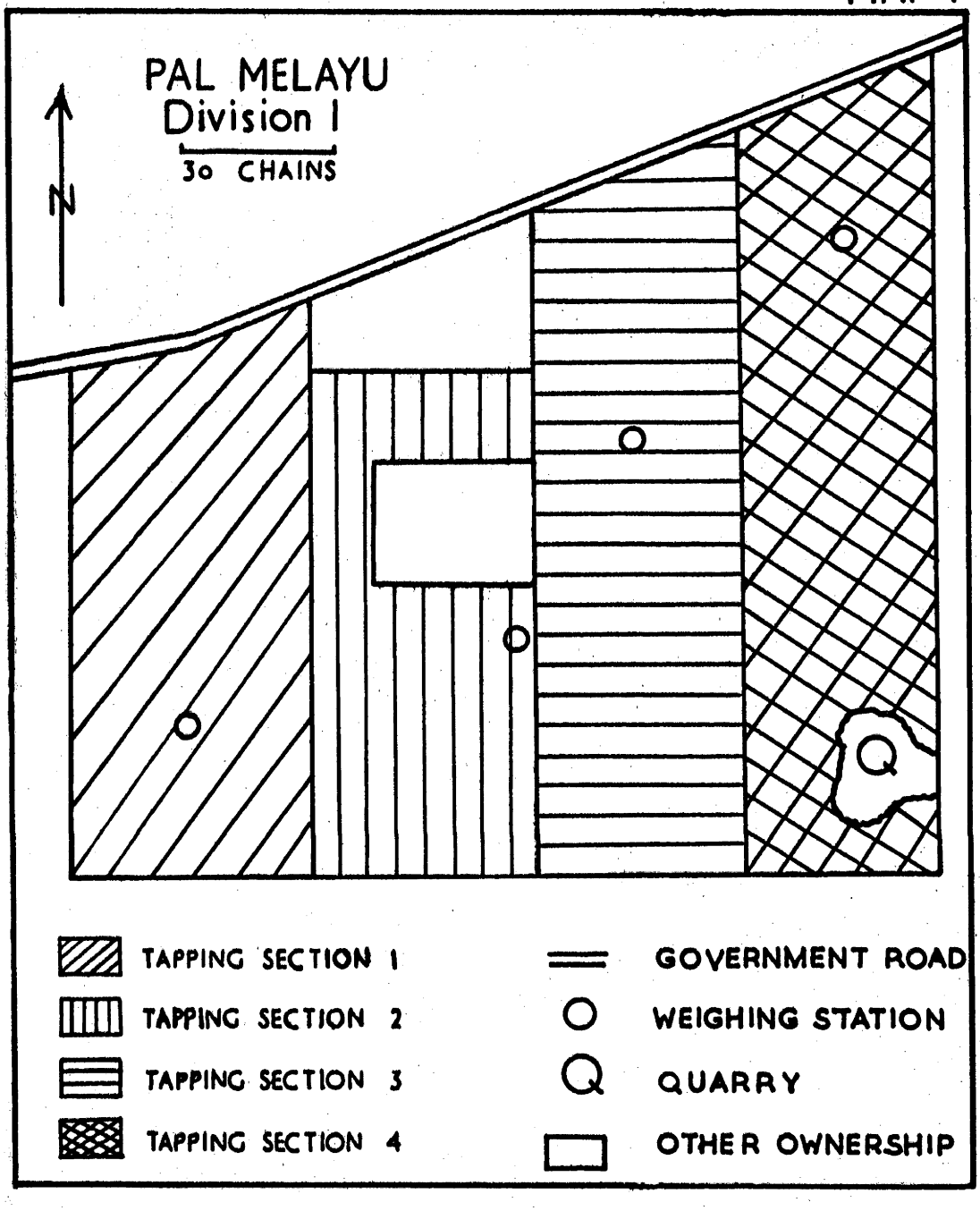
1 In referring to the various numbered blocks and to Divisions I and II, I have borrowed the system of mapping adopted by the Company.

MAP 4


PAL MELAYU
Division I
30 CHAINS
N
Q
TAPPING SECTION 1
TAPPING SECTION 2
TAPPING SECTION 3
TAPPING SECTION 4
GOVERNMENT ROAD
WEIGHING STATION
QUARRY
OTHER OWNERSHIP

The common controls which underlie all rubber tapping and make for skill differential are those concerned with bark consumption and the angle and depth of tapping. Tapping has to start at dawn because as the day temperature rises there is loss of water by transpiration. Due to the reduced swelling of the trunk the yield of rubber trees falls off rapidly from dawn until later in the morning.

Once a tree has been tapped latex begins to ooze out of the cut, follows its line downwards and is made to drip into a latex cup with the help of a spout made of galvanised iron. The cups are locally made of brown earthenware and glazed on the inside. By 12.30 p.m. the flow of latex stops, all cups are nearly full and collection begins. From the cups each tapper transfers the latex to five gallon buckets and then to ten gallon ones. These buckets (usually two per tapper) are carried to the nearest weighing station. A kangany is in charge of each weighing station. Each 'weighing-kangany' is helped by a tapper who is appointed for this purpose at the beginning of the year. As each tapper brings in the latex, the weighing-kangany's assistant pours it into a large bucket attached to a spring balance. The kangany, sitting on a bench and table, records the reading in a register against the tapper's name. The reading shows the total 'wet poundage' brought by a tapper. A quantity of this latex is then poured into a graduated iron cylinder and its dry rubber content (d.r.c.) calculated by means of a hydrometer. After the kangany

has noted this reading too, his assistant is permitted to pour the entire latex back into the tapper's buckets. The tapper then carries the buckets to the Company lorry and empties them into large tanks placed on the lorry. After every tapper assigned to a weighing station has brought in his collection the lorry moves on to the next weighing station in its journey towards the factory. The scrap rubber (p.175) collected by each tapper is also weighed and its quantity recorded in the register against the tapper's name.

The order of weighing the tappers' latex is strictly determined by the principle 'first come, first served'. Obviously, the weighing-kangany's assistant, himself a tapper, has to finish tapping and collection sooner than anyone else. Indeed, a tapper is selected to do this extra work on the basis of his speed in tapping and collection. After the day's weighing is over, he has to clean the weighing instruments and the bucket and bring them back with him next morning. For all this extra work he is paid $10.00 per month in addition to his wages. Extra payment for the weighing-kangany is also at the same rate.

Weeding:

The principal objective of weeding is 'the adjustment of competition for soil nutriments between the young rubber plant and the ground cover so that the rubber plant may at all times have the advantage in the portion of soil occupied by its system' (Edgar 1958:160). The actual operations designated by

this term on Pal Melayu are, however, far wider. The term weeding is used for almost everything connected with the productive upkeep of the estate such as clearing drains, tending the nursery, quarrying for road gravel, road making, etc., in addition to the usual tasks of destroying the obnoxious or parasitic weeds through paint-poisoning, spraying and the like.

Processing:

The estate has a modern factory with a smokehouse, a continuous sheeting battery and coagulating tanks adapted for continuous coagulum necessary in manufacture of concentrated rubber. Until 1958, a highly favourable American market for such latex made it profitable to keep the plant running to its full production capacity. The estate processed not only its own latex but bought a substantial quantity (as much as 50% of the total) from smallholders from over a distance of as many as 80 miles at a price attractive to the sellers. The demand for concentrated latex fell off by mid-1958 and buying latex from outside sources became uneconomical. The factory on Pal Melayu closed down at the end of that year and its own latex has since been processed at the larger plant of a nearby estate owned by the Company. In a few years time an increased output of latex is expected from the newly matured rubber on the estate and on its outlying Division situated 12 miles away with 600 acres of high yielding rubber planted in 1960 and it is hoped that processing on Pal Melayu may then be resumed. Meanwhile, a

skeleton factory staff is maintained for the upkeep of the machinery and the running of a mechanical workshop. Control of the supply of electricity and water on the estate is also regulated from the factory. There is a carpenter's workshop situated near the labour 'lines' which is concerned primarily with building repairs.

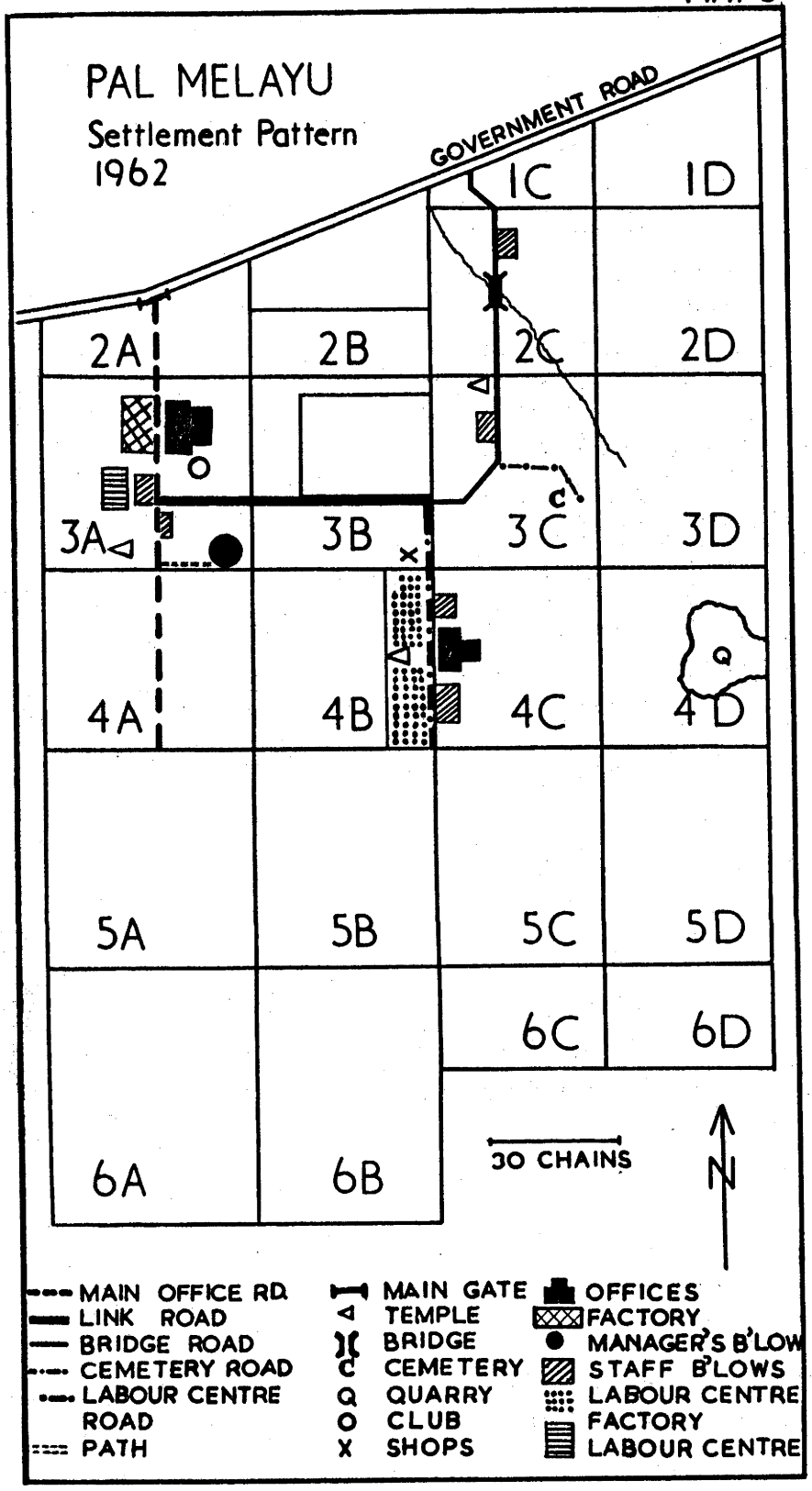
Pal Melayu - Social Landscape.

Settlement Pattern:

In its settlement pattern, Pal Melayu is a miniature township with its own roads, houses and 'lines', wards called 'Divisions', school, temples, dispensary and club (see Map 5). Its social landscape is characteristic of a large agro-industrial unit with a resident labouring and non-labouring population.

From the Government Road there are two entrances to Pal Melayu. The western entrance is the principal one. From here a gravel road runs right up to the boundary between Blocks 4A and 5A. Since it passes by the main office it is popularly known as the Main Office Road. Like most of the other buildings (including residential ones) the main office is upraised on stilts, has floor and walls of wood, pillars of concrete and roof of corrugated iron. It consists of two rooms of almost equal size, one occupied by the manager and the other by the clerks and typists. In one corner of the verandah which runs along three sides of this building is the telephone exchange. Facing the main office are the factory and store buildings. At the end of

MAP 5


PAL MELAYU
Settlement Pattern
1962
GOVERNMENT ROAD
1C
1D
2A
2B
2C
2D
3A
3B
3C
3D
4A
4B
4C
4D
5A
5B
5C
5D
6A
6B
6C
6D
30 CHAINS
N
MAIN OFFICE RD.
LINK ROAD
BRIDGE ROAD
CEMETERY ROAD
LABOUR CENTRE ROAD
PATH
MAIN GATE
TEMPLE
BRIDGE
CEMETERY
QUARRY
CLUB
SHOPS
OFFICES
FACTORY
MANAGER'S B'LOW
STAFF B'LOWS
LABOUR CENTRE
FACTORY
LABOUR CENTRE

the office and factory area, a path branches off the Main Office Road and leads eastwards to the Asian Staff Club. The Club is equipped with a badminton court, a lounge equipped with a radio, and a bar. Further down the main road there are roadside bungalows of office and store clerks. Behind a row of four such bungalows along the western edge of the Main Office Road there are fifty-six houses comprising the Factory Labour Centre. These houses were rebuilt in 1953 after demolishing the old barrack type back-to-back 'lines'. The present settlement consists of seven rows of eight houses each. The houses are in the form of ground floor concrete cottages, paired so as to provide a common verandah for each set. Since the closure of the factory, this Labour Centre has provided accommodation for the families of tappers and weeders as well as the skeleton factory staff. A non-metalled road branching from the Main Office Road leads to the manager's bungalow in the east and the oldest estate temple dedicated to Muniandi and Mariamman in the west. The manager's bungalow occupies a large area, being provided with a number of rooms and spacious lawns including a tennis court. The oldest temple is shaded by a huge bo-tree (Ficus religiosa). It consists of two main standing images of Muniandi and Subramaniam. Facing the image of Subramaniam is the bull Nandi in stone and in front of all this stands as guard an image of Munnadayan, flanked on either side by stone icons of horses.

The most important metalled road breaking eastwards from the Main Office Road is the one which begins in front of the staff bungalows and reaches to the point where only one southward turn is needed to arrive at the Divisional Labour Centre (henceforth Labour Centre) which is the most densely settled part of the estate and the arena for most of the social action on Pal Melayu. This road also joins up with the third major metalled road in the northern part of Pal Melayu, the Bridge Road, running from the eastern entrance inwards. For this reason we may call this east-west road the Link Road. Its eastern extension is towards the cemetery.

The Bridge Road is so called after its most distinctive landmark - the prominent concrete bridge over Sungei Durian. A short walk south from this bridge takes one to a roadside bungalow similar to the manager's but of smaller dimensions. Past the bridge from behind the rubber trees of Block 3C, standing images of Muniandi and Munnadayan (draped in a yellow cloth) stare at passersby. About thirty yards before the junction of this road and Link Road, there is another roadside bungalow of a clerk for bark measurement. Bridge Road via the Link Road connects the Main Government Road with the Labour Centre Road. It constitutes the shortest route in and out of the estate from the Labour Centre and is consequently much used. The distance along this route from the Divisional office to Bintang Emas is four and a half miles.

A metalled road branches south from the Link Road at a distance of 1½ miles from the eastern entrance and 1 1/5 miles from the main office. It forms the 60 chains long Labour Centre Road which runs as south as the boundary between Divisions I and II. The built-up area on either side is known as the Labour Centre. Moving on this road from north to south, the first building to the right is a 'shophouse'.[2] It is partitioned lengthwise into two equal portions of identical design and accommodation, each occupied by a Malabari Muslim (Kaka) and a Chinese shopkeeper. The ground floor of each section consists of general provision store, restaurant-cum-bar and courtyard situated front to back. A staircase in the courtyard leads to a living room on the first floor. The goods supplied by these stores range from foodstuff, clothes and footwear to badminton shuttlecocks and postage stamps. A few paces south of the shops by the roadside there is an open compound. This is the muster ground for Division I. The main residential area of the Labour Centre starts soon afterwards. The layout of the Labour Centre and spatial distribution of Divisions - 'lines', garden lots, bungalows, office, store, school buildings, temples, creches and dispensary - is shown on

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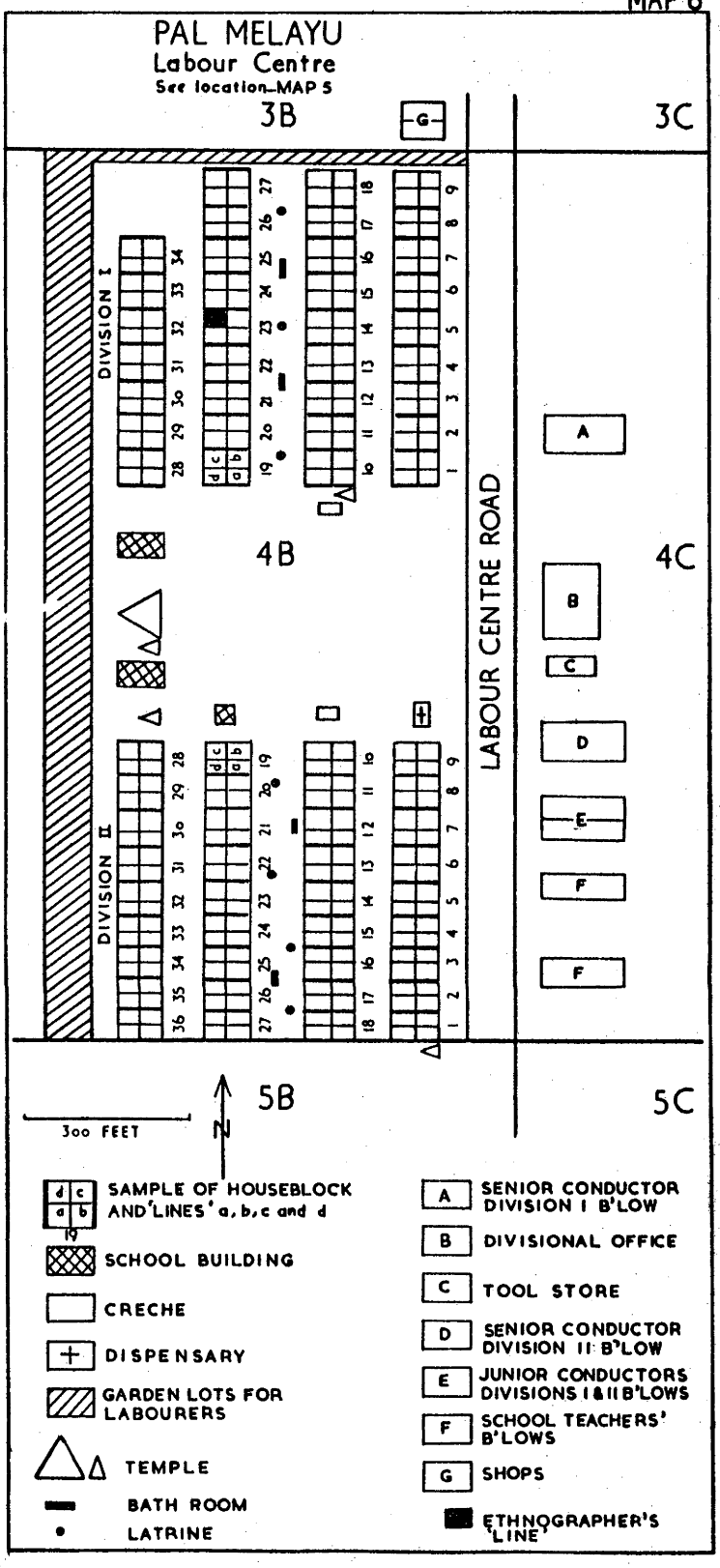
2 Shophouses are a recurrent feature of the Malayan townscape. The combination of residential and business premises here seems related to the immigrant character of the majority of shopkeeper-traders.

Map 6. It has the settlement pattern of a planned community with two major residential nuclei, Divisions I and II. The dichotomy between the two Divisions corresponds to a division in the allocation of tasks of the labourers on Pal Melayu. Usually labourers have their tasks nearer the residential Division. Viewed in the perspective of the earlier settlement pattern of Pal Melayu these resettled Divisions also reflect two distinct clusters of kin-and-neighbourhood ties. In terms of the local organisation of the community it seems valid to describe them as two 'wards' of the Labour Centre. (The single residential nucleus of the Factory Labour Centre would thus form the third ward of Pal Melayu.)

In each Division there are four rows of houses for labourers. The number of house-blocks in each row is nine (except for the last row of Division I with only seven house-blocks). Each house-block consists of four houses. There are thus, in all, 34 house-blocks or 136 houses in Division I and 36 house-blocks or 144 houses in Division II. On Pal Melayu, from the manager down to a labourer the term for a labourer's house is 'line' (Tamil: vīṭṭu; Estate Tamil: lāyam).

A house-block occupies an area of 32' x 24'. Each building is upraised on fifteen pillars of concrete, 15 feet in height. A wooden floor is laid on top of these pillars and four rooms comprising two sets of two laterally situated rooms each are built back-to-back; thus one set faces the east and the other

MAP 6


PAL MELAYU
Labour Centre
See location-MAP 5
3B
3C
4B
4C
5B
5C
DIVISION I
DIVISION II
LABOUR CENTRE ROAD
300 FEET
N
SAMPLE OF HOUSEBLOCK AND 'LINES' a, b, c and d
SCHOOL BUILDING
CRECHE
DISPENSARY
GARDEN LOTS FOR LABOURERS
TEMPLE
BATH ROOM
LATRINE
A SENIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION I B'LOW
B DIVISIONAL OFFICE
C TOOL STORE
D SENIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION II B'LOW
E JUNIOR CONDUCTORS DIVISIONS I & II B'LOWS
F SCHOOL TEACHERS' B'LOWS
G SHOPS
ETHNOGRAPHER'S 'LINE'

the west. Each set is provided with a centrally situated common staircase and a common first floor verandah, both covered with sheets of corrugated iron. There is a common roof of corrugated iron over all four rooms. Each room with its verandah, one-half staircase and the ground floor space underneath it constitutes a house ('line'). The room has a floor space of 10' x 12'. It has wooden walls, two windows and one door. The ground floor space is mostly uncemented although occasionally the occupants plaster it with cowdung. It has no walls but only a cemented cornice. An open cooking hearth is built in the middle of the floor to serve as a kitchen.[3] There are public bathrooms and latrines separately for men and women. It is not uncommon though for some people to use the drains outside their houses for certain of these purposes. Water for household use has to be carried in buckets from taps so distributed in the Division as to be within a reach of 100 feet from any house. No furniture is provided with the houses and there is no electricity. No house rent is charged from the labourers.

At the back of the fourth row in Divisions I and II, there is a continuous strip of land 100' x 2838' reserved for the kitchen-gardens and cattlesheds at the Labour Centre. A

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3 These old-type cooking hearths are being progressively replaced by standing hearths of concrete in one corner of the floor space as an item in the Company's programme for the modernisation of the Labour Centre. At present the number of new hearths is very small.

narrower strip is being utilised for the same purpose along the northern side of Division I. The basis of land allocation is roughly the size of the family but much depends upon the discretion of Divisional conductors in charge of allotment. The entire land is in use, planted mainly with vegetables, tapioca and betel. Fruit cultivation is limited to papaya and plantains. The produce is mainly used for domestic consumption with some sale within the estate yielding only a small profit.

The playgrounds, school, main temple and dispensary belong jointly to both Divisions irrespective of their location. Besides the centrally situated football field in front of the main temple, there is a smaller 'cinema ground' by the side of the Divisional Office in which a mobile cinema van of the Company screens Tamil movies for labourers and staff every fortnight. The present accommodation for the estate Primary School (Tamil) was described to me by the manager as an important desideratum in the full nucleation of the 'line-site'. As it is, the three school buildings contain class rooms for standards I to VI.

The main temple on Pal Melayu is both a geographical and a social centre of the community. An image of Mahamariamman, to whom this temple is dedicated, is installed facing eastwards, in the sanctum sactorum. The building has a carved vault, several crudely painted frescoes depicting gods and a large verandah. Situated within the compound of the main temple are two other shrines. One lies about 20 feet to its north-east

under a bo-tree and is known as the Shrine of the Nine Planets (Nava-k-kirakam kō-v-il). About 10 feet to the south of the main temple is a Muniandi shrine, housed in a small concrete building with a room and a verandah. It has two fierce looking standing images of Muniandi in the room and of his guard Munnadayan in the verandah. Behind the main temple there is a temple store.

Right opposite the temple, across the football field and the Labour Centre Road, there is a 60' x 30' building known as the Divisional Office. It is divided into three rooms of equal size, the central one being occupied by the Divisional officer (Asian estate assistant) and those to its north and south by the senior and junior conductors of Divisions I and II respectively. By the side of this building there is a tool store, one portion of which is occupied by the carpenter's workshop. Other buildings on the same side of the road are the spacious bungalows of conductors and smaller ones of school teachers.

Widely used Tamil names exist for most of the roads and other topographical landmarks on Pal Melayu and its region, reflecting a high degree of identity between the territory and its inhabitants. Estates and other settlements in the region are named according to their road distance from the old town of Bunga Raya. Within the estate a road may be named after the number of the block through which it runs (Munsi or 3C Road), a landmark near it (Malamedu or Quarry Road), nature of the

land (Pasa or Slope Road ID) or the type of vegetation (Rojakadu or Rose Forest Road - for the northern road in 2D where the overgrown weeds during the period of Japanese Occupation had flowered bright red).

In brief, the physical layout of Pal Melayu shows all the characteristics of a planned community. Further, it shows the influence of centralised control over community living. Unlike other Indians inhabiting kampongs and towns, the people of Pal Melayu do not have to build or rent their houses nor do they need to go out of the estate for their basic educational, medical or religious requirements. The standardisation of working life thus permeates community living too. There is little room for the play of individual choices and tastes in certain essential aspects of living. House types, for instance, are pre-determined by a person's occupational status on the estate. All the house-blocks and houses for labourers at the Divisional Centre must conform to a common plan for 'labour lines', not only in architectural design but even in upkeep. For instance, no labourer occupying a 'line' may plant flowers to decorate the front of his residence. Similarly, a labourer risks his job on the estate if he puts up a tin shed to serve as a bathroom, even on an area of land provided to him by the Company. The labour 'lines' on Pal Melayu thus present a stereotyped appearance; 'line' after 'line' and row after row built to a common plan and maintained in that order. As we shall see, this is one

manifestation of the proletariat status of the labouring community on Pal Melayu.

Demographic structure:

At the end of 1962, the total resident population of Pal Melayu was 1,536. Of this the Indians numbered 1,509 (98%).[4] The spatial distribution of Indian population on Pal Melayu by religion and language is given in Table 8. It shows the preponderance of Tamil-speakers (93.2%) and Hindus (96%) in the population. Tamil is the lingua franca of Pal Melayu since it is spoken by all non-Tamil speakers as well. It is significant that the greatest concentration of native Tamil-speakers is to be found in the main residential areas of labourers (Divisions I, II and Factory). These areas are also conspicuous for their large Hindu population. The bungalows which are allocated to members of the estate staff and two senior teachers of the estate Primary School contain a mixed population of Hindus and Christians and of speakers of Tamil, Malayalam and Punjabi.

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4 The details of non-Indian population on Pal Melayu are as follows :-

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Europeans | ... | 2 |
| Chinese | ... | 15 |
| Malays | ... | 10 |
| Total | ... | 27 |

The Europeans are the manager and his wife. There are two households of Chinese in Division I and six in Division II. There are two Malay households, those of the manager's cook and driver.

## TABLE 8.

## INDIANS ON PAL MELAYU BY RELIGION, RESIDENTIAL DIVISION AND LANGUAGE.

| RELIGIOUS GROUPS | LANGUAGE | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | TOTALS | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Division I | | | | | Division II | | | | | Factory Division | | | | | Bungalows | | | | | Shophouses | | | | | | | | |
| | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | Ta | Te | M | P | T<br>% | % |
| Hindu | 658 | | 18 | | 676<br>46.6 | 581 | 45 | | | 626<br>43.1 | 118 | 9 | 8 | | 135<br>9.3 | 14 | | | | 14<br>1.0 | | | | | | 1371 | 54 | 26 | | 1451<br>100 | 96.0 |
| Muslim | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 2 | 2<br>100 | | | 2 | | 2<br>100 | 0.2 |
| Christian | | | | | | 4 | | | | 4<br>7.7 | 6 | | | | 6<br>11.6 | 26* | | 16 | | 42<br>80.7 | | | | | | 36 | | 16 | | 52<br>100 | 3.4 |
| Sikh | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | 4 | 4<br>100 | | | | | | | | 4 | 4<br>100 | 0.4 |
| " TOTAL | 658 | | 18 | | 676 | 585 | 45 | | | 630 | 124 | 9 | 8 | | 141 | 40 | | 16 | 4 | 60 | | | 2 | | 2 | 1407 | 54 | 44 | 4 | 1509 | 100 |
| PERCENTAGE | 97.4 | | 2.6 | | 100 | 92.8 | 7.2 | | | 100 | 88.0 | 6.4 | 5.6 | | 100 | 66.7 | | 26.7 | 6.6 | 100 | | | 100 | | 100 | 93.2 | 3.6 | 2.9 | .3 | 100 | |

Ta : Tamil
Te : Telugu
M : Malayalee
P : Punjabi

Based on sociological census taken by me in July, 1962.

* Includes eight (8) Jaffna (Ceylon) Tamils.

The only Indian Muslims on the estate are two brothers from Malabar who run one of the two provision stores on Pal Melayu.

The main demographic results of a sociological census taken in Divisions I and II of the Labour Centre are contained in Tables 9 to 11. The total population is 1306. The population is distributed unequably in the two Divisions - 676 and 630 in Divisions I and II, respectively. The females outnumber males by a narrow margin in Division I (348 females to 328 males) but the ratio is reversed in Division II (291 females to 339 males). The combined total for both Divisions shows 667 males and 639 females.

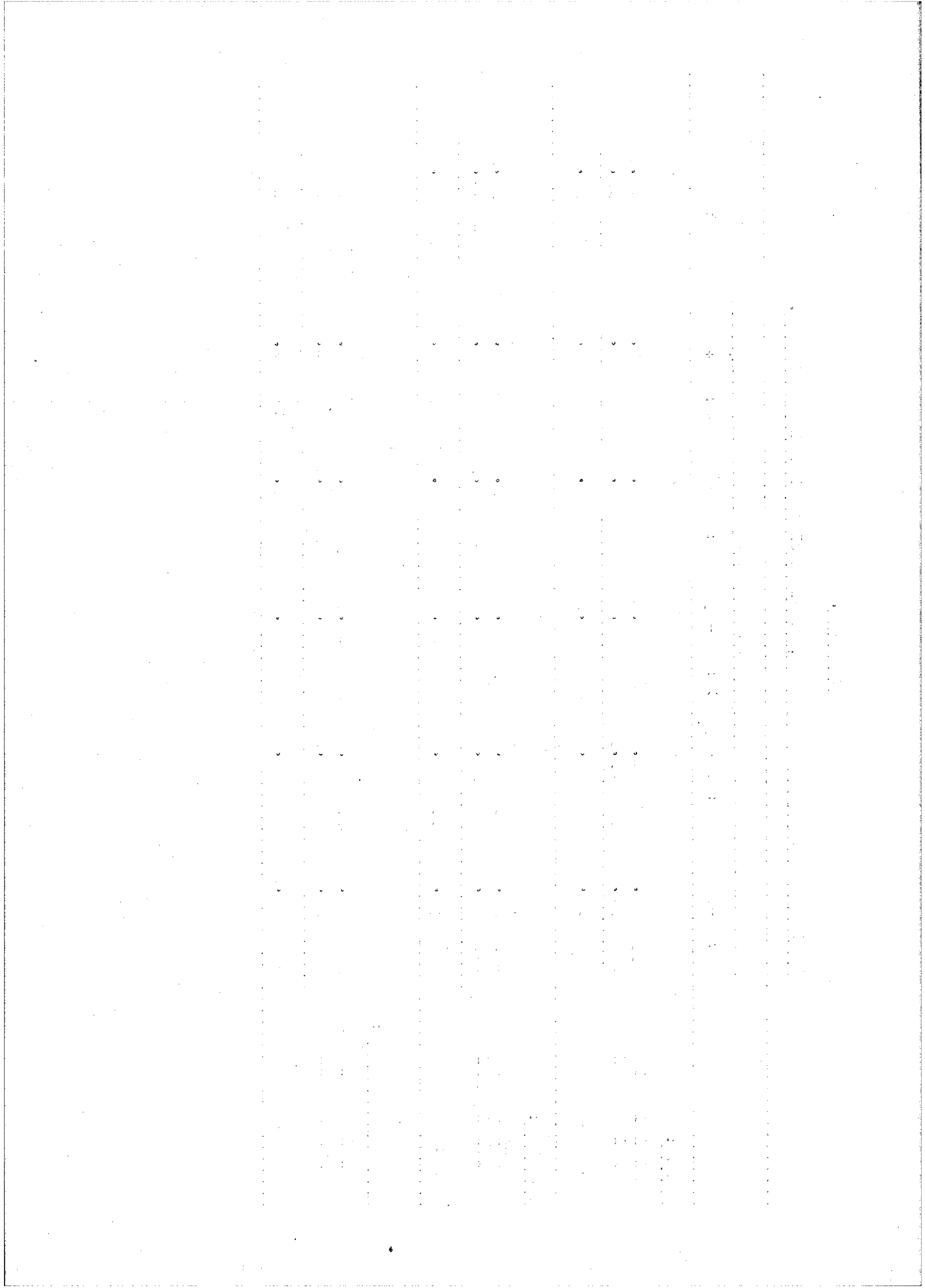
The most notable feature of the age structure is that 91.7% of the population falls in the first three groups (46 years and below) and 50.3% in the age group A (13 years and below)only. There are variations in sex ratio in different age groups but only in age group B does the number of females consistently exceed that of males (see Table 9).

There is an absolute majority of people born on Pal Melayu (54.4%) with a somewhat larger total for Division II than for Division I. The number of persons born elsewhere in Malaya, on the other hand, is greater in Division I. The total for both Divisions in this category accounts for 25% of the total population . Of the 268 persons (20.5%) in the population born in India and South Africa, all except five (four men and one woman) were born in the former country. Division II has a larger

TABLE 9.

INDIANS ON PAL MELAYU BY SEX, RESIDENTIAL DIVISION AND AGE.

| | AGE GROUPS | | | | | | | | | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | A : 0-13 | | B : 14-25 | | C : 26-45 | | D : 46-65 | | E : 66+ | | | |
| | | % | | % | | % | | % | | % | | % |
| MALES: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Division I | 155 | 47.3 | 70 | 21.3 | 67 | 20.4 | 33 | 10.0 | 3 | 1.0 | 328 | 48.5 |
| Division II | 184 | 54.3 | 52 | 15.3 | 70 | 20.6 | 30 | 8.9 | 3 | 0.9 | 339 | 53.8 |
| Total | 339 | 50.8 | 122 | 18.3 | 137 | 20.5 | 63 | 9.5 | 6 | 0.9 | 667 | 51.0 |
| FEMALES: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Division I | 175 | 50.3 | 85 | 24.4 | 65 | 18.7 | 20 | 5.7 | 3 | 0.9 | 348 | 51.5 |
| Division II | 143 | 49.2 | 70 | 24.0 | 62 | 21.3 | 13 | 4.5 | 3 | 1.0 | 291 | 46.2 |
| Total | 318 | 49.7 | 155 | 24.2 | 127 | 19.8 | 33 | 5.3 | 6 | 1.0 | 639 | 49.0 |
| MALES & FEMALES: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Division I | 330 | 48.8 | 155 | 23.0 | 132 | 19.5 | 53 | 7.9 | 6 | 0.8 | 676 | 100 |
| Division II | 327 | 52.0 | 122 | 19.3 | 132 | 20.9 | 43 | 6.8 | 6 | 1.0 | 630 | 100 |
| Total | 657 | 50.3 | 277 | 21.2 | 264 | 20.2 | 96 | 7.3 | 12 | 1.0 | 1306 | 100 |



number of people born in India than Division I (see Table 10).

The majority of persons born in India emigrated during the first four decades of the present century. Immigration into Malaya continued on a much reduced scale in the years following the Government of India's ban on assisted emigration of unskilled labour to Malaya in mid-1938 (see p.51 fn.17). In the present population of Divisions I and II of Pal Melayu the trickle of new immigrants from India in the years 1941-1961 consisted of 8 males and 17 females. All the females and 3 males emigrated under the first excepted category of the ban as "wives and minor children who wished to leave India purely for the purpose of joining husbands and fathers in Malaya" (Price 1960:33). The remaining 5 male emigrants were unassisted non-labourers - 2 barbers, 1 washerman and 2 'for business'.[5]

Among estate workers of the region, Pal Melayu enjoys the reputation of having an old and established population. The reasons for this are obvious. The flat rubber land here does not present hazards of accident and strain in tapping and carrying latex to weighing points such as labourers experience on hilly estates. Also, unlike some other estates where one has to travel on an estate road for ten miles or more before the Labour Centre may be reached, the easy accessibility of Divisions I and

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5 For the native districts in Madras State of the India-born population on Divisions I and II of Pal Melayu see Table 6 and Map 2, pp.68-69.

TABLE 10.

INDIANS ON PAL MELAYU BY SEX, AGE, PLACE OF BIRTH AND RESIDENTIAL DIVISION.

| SEX | AGE-GROUPS | PLACE OF BIRTH AND RESIDENTIAL DIVISION | | | | | | | | | TOTAL | % |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Pal Melayu | | | Elsewhere in Malaya | | | India & South Africa | | | | |
| | | Div.I | Div.II | Total | Div.I | Div.II | Total | Div.I | Div.II | Total | | |
| Men | A: 0-13 | 121 | 159 | 280 | 33 | 25 | 58 | 1 | - | 1 | 339 | |
| | B: 14-25 | 40 | 29 | 69 | 30 | 20 | 50 | - | 3 | 3 | 122 | |
| | C: 26-45 | 21 | 14 | 35 | 20 | 12 | 32 | 26 | 44 | 70 | 137 | |
| | D: 46-65 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | 31 | 30 | 61 | 63 | |
| | E: 66+ | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 | |
| | TOTAL: | 182 | 202 | 384 | 85 | 57 | 142 | 61 | 80 | 141 | 667 | 51.0 |
| Women | A: 0-13 | 134 | 115 | 249 | 41 | 28 | 69 | - | - | - | 318 | |
| | B: 14-25 | 32 | 24 | 56 | 46 | 35 | 81 | 7 | 11 | 18 | 155 | |
| | C: 26-45 | 15 | 7 | 22 | 19 | 15 | 34 | 31 | 40 | 71 | 127 | |
| | D: 46-65 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | 19 | 13 | 32 | 33 | |
| | E: 66+ | - | - | - | - | - | - | 3 | 3 | 6 | 6 | |
| | TOTAL: | 181 | 146 | 327 | 107 | 78 | 185 | 60 | 67 | 127 | 639 | 49.0 |
| Men and Women | A: 0-13 | 255 | 274 | 529 | 74 | 53 | 127 | 1 | - | 1 | 657 | |
| | B: 14-25 | 72 | 53 | 125 | 76 | 55 | 131 | 7 | 14 | 21 | 277 | |
| | C: 26-45 | 36 | 21 | 57 | 39 | 27 | 66 | 57 | 84 | 141 | 264 | |
| | D: 46-65 | - | - | - | 3 | - | 3 | 50 | 43 | 93 | 96 | |
| | E: 66+ | - | - | - | - | - | - | 6 | 6 | 12 | 12 | |
| | TOTAL: | 363 | 348 | 711 | 192 | 135 | 327 | 121 | 147 | 268 | 1306 | 100.0 |
| | % : | 27.8 | 26.6 | 54.4 | 14.7 | 10.4 | 25.1 | 9.3 | 11.2 | 20.5 | 100 | |

II on Pal Melayu facilitates contacts with the Tamil population of other estates and towns in the region. Moreover, compared with almost any other estate in the area, it has much better facilities for housing, water supply and medical care. These factors seem to have kept the labour turnover on Pal Melayu in recent years within bounds. It is not possible to give figures for the number of persons leaving the estate every year much less to tabulate the reasons for their decision. Nevertheless, it may be said with a fair amount of certainty that inter-estate migration is much less from Pal Melayu than from other estates. On Pal Melayu 101 (46.5%) out of a total of 217 household heads have never had a job except the one here. Nor had they at any stage left Pal Melayu to work elsewhere. The employment histories of the remaining 116 household heads showed the nature and extent of their internal migration for jobs. Of these, 93 had had jobs on other estates before joining Pal Melayu. Thus a total of 194 household heads, representing 89.4% of the total, have a background of living only on estates. There are 16 household heads (7.3%) whose movements before joining Pal Melayu had included at least one estate and one non-estate (kampong or town) area. Only seven household heads (3.2%) came to Pal Melayu with a background of living in a non-estate area only. In the working life of the majority of household heads on Pal Melayu, then, this estate has provided the only background of community living. Even those who had other experiences did not encounter many

different backgrounds; their movements were few and largely inter-estate (see Table 11). In their wanderings they were helped by the lack of any non-transferable property, the presence of a wide network of ever-helping kinsmen over the entire area dominated by large-sized rubber estates and the relative ease with which jobs could be found for their families on these estates.

Before summarising the conclusions from our demographic analysis, we may briefly look at the pattern of nativity and migration of estate staff. Staff members and their spouses are born either in India or Ceylon but the majority of children are born and brought up in Malaya. Since inter-estate migration is limited to infrequent transfers within the Company, the staff represents a stable element in the estate population. The chief clerk is the oldest employee with more than thirty years of continuous service on Pal Melayu. Most of the present members of the field staff succeeded the Company's employees of long standing who retired from active service and returned to their home countries with life-long pensions.

The major conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing analysis is that beginning from an immigrant base the population of Pal Melayu has in the course of post-war years become stable and self-sustained. There persists a small trickle of new immigrants comprising mainly of the women from India married to their young kinsmen on Pal Melayu. This fact explains the large number of India-born women, compared to men, in age groups B and C. But

TABLE 11.

INDIANS ON PAL MELAYU BY RESIDENTIAL DIVISION AND NUMBER OF CHANGES OF LOCATION.

| Number of Movements | Number of Migrating Household Heads | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Only Estate | (%) | Estate & non-Estate | (%) | Only non-Estate | (%) | Total | (%) |
| 0 | 101 | ( 52.0) | - | - | - | - | 101 | ( 46.5) |
| 1 | 69 | ( 35.5) | - | - | 7 | (100) | 76 | ( 35.0) |
| 2 | 16 | ( 8.2) | 7 | ( 43.8) | - | - | 23 | ( 10.6) |
| 3 | 6 | ( 3.1) | 3 | ( 18.7) | - | - | 9 | ( 4.1) |
| 4 | 1 | (*) | 2 | ( 12.5) | - | - | 3 | ( 1.4) |
| 5 | - | - | 2 | ( 12.5) | - | - | 2 | (*) |
| 6 | - | - | 2 | ( 12.5) | - | - | 2 | (*) |
| 10 | 1 | (*) | - | - | - | - | 1 | (*) |
| TOTAL : | 194 | (100) | 16 | (100) | 7 | (100) | 217 | (100) |
| % : | 89.4 | | 7.3 | | 3.2 | | 100 | |

(*) Less than 1%.

perhaps the most important source of population growth apart from natural increase indicated by the large number of children born on Pal Melayu is internal migration. The age and sex composition of nativity-category 'born elsewhere in Malaya' points strongly in that direction. From Table 10 it will be seen that this category comprises a larger number of women than men. Further, the relative excess of females over males is most marked in age group B which would include a large proportion of women migrating from other parts of Malaya after their marriage with Pal Melayu young men. The large number of children (age group A) born elsewhere in Malaya also indicates that some families have certainly migrated to Pal Melayu from other parts of the country in recent years.

Occupational Structure:

The majority of persons on Pal Melayu are non-working dependants. These include children below 13 years, retired non-pensioned old persons, unemployed and incapacitated men and women. Only about a third of the total resident population is economically active. There are two main differences between the occupational structures of labourers and staff. Firstly, labourers are paid wages at a daily-rate or a piece-rate whereas all members of staff (and only a few residents on the labour 'lines') receive a monthly salary. Secondly, the staff are all men while both men and women work as labourers. We shall first examine the occupational structure of labourers in the population

of Divisions I and II at the Labour Centre (see Table 12) and then look at the official hierarchy of staff on Pal Melayu (see Diagram 3).

Labourers:

The number of economically active persons on both Divisions is 542 or 41.5% of the total population. Of this, 52.7% are men and 47.3% are women. The category (economically active persons) comprises two groups - estate workers and pensioners (95.5%) and non-estate workers (4.5%).

Tappers, weeders and kanganies account for 93% of the estate workers. Women outnumber men as tappers and are only a little short of being equal as weeders. All the kanganies are men. The minimum age for starting work on the estates is 16 years and there is only optional retirement after the age of 50 or 55. In the organisation of tapping on Division I (see Map 4) 198 tappers of Division I, together with 10 tappers resident in the Factory Division, are divided into 12 gangs. There are 4 and 8 gangs of 18 and 17 tappers each, respectively. Husbands and wives or frequently one of the parents and a grown up unmarried daughter are put in the same gang. Each gang is under a kangany. One of the gangs (with 17 persons) consists of relief tappers[6] who are put on to tapping or weeding jobs according to the need and availability of a day's work on the estate. Gangs of weeders are organised in

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6 On the estate relief tappers are also known as 'ganti' tappers. 'Ganti' is a Malay term for 'substitute'.

TABLE 12.

OCCUPATIONAL STRUCTURE AT THE PAL MELAYU LABOUR CENTRE.

| OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: | DIVISION I. | | | | | | DIVISION II. | | | | | | TOTAL. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | % | F | % | T | % | M | % | F | % | T | % | M | % | F | % | T | % |
| ESTATE WORKERS AND PENSIONERS: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Tappers | 91 | 63.4 | 107 | 77.3 | 198 | 70.3 | 82 | 69.3 | 89 | 75.4 | 171 | 72.4 | 173 | 66.1 | 196 | 76.5 | 369 | 71.2 |
| Weeders | 27 | 18.6 | 20 | 14.7 | 47 | 16.8 | 18 | 15.2 | 20 | 17.0 | 38 | 16.1 | 45 | 17.0 | 40 | 15.6 | 85 | 16.4 |
| Kanganies | 15 | 10.4 | - | - | 15 | 5.3 | 13 | 11.0 | - | - | 13 | 5.5 | 28 | 10.6 | - | - | 28 | 5.4 |
| Drivers & Cleaners | 5 | 3.4 | - | - | 5 | 1.7 | 1 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.5 | 6 | 2.3 | - | - | 6 | 1.2 |
| Carpenters | 1 | 0.7 | - | - | 1 | 0.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.4 | - | - | 1 | 0.2 |
| Storekeepers | 1 | 0.7 | - | - | 1 | 0.3 | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.4 | - | - | 1 | 0.2 |
| Creche Matrons | - | - | 1 | 0.7 | 1 | 0.3 | - | - | 2 | 1.6 | 2 | 1.0 | - | - | 3 | 1.2 | 3 | 0.6 |
| Gate & Timekeepers | 1 | 0.7 | - | - | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.5 | 2 | 0.8 | - | - | 2 | 0.4 |
| Peon | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.4 | - | - | 1 | 0.2 |
| Telephone Operators | 1 | 0.7 | - | - | 1 | 0.3 | 1 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.5 | 2 | 0.8 | - | - | 2 | 0.4 |
| Dresser's Asst. | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | 0.9 | - | - | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.4 | - | - | 1 | 0.2 |
| Pensioners | 2 | 1.4 | 10 | 7.3 | 12 | 4.4 | - | - | 7 | 6.0 | 7 | 3.0 | 2 | 0.8 | 17 | 6.7 | 19 | 3.6 |
| TOTAL : | 144 | 51.4 | 138 | 48.6 | 282 | 100 | 118 | 50.0 | 118 | 50.0 | 236 | 100 | 262 | 50.7 | 256 | 49.3 | 518 | 100 |

Table continued .....

TABLE 12 - CONT'D.

| OCCUPATIONAL GROUPS: | DIVISION I. | | | | | | DIVISION II. | | | | | | TOTAL. | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | % | F | % | T | % | M | % | F | % | T | % | M | % | F | % | T | % |
| NON-ESTATE WORKERS: | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Midwife | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - |
| Petty Shopkeepers | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 3 | - | - | - | 3 | - |
| Priest & Astrologer | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Vendors | 2 | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 3 | - | 1 | - | 4 | - |
| Butchers | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| Taxi-driver | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Teachers | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| Hospital Apprentice | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Drummer | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Tailors | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| Goldsmith | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - | - | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| Tin mine workers | - | - | - | - | - | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| Barbers | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | 1 | - | 2 | - | - | - | 2 | - |
| TOTAL : | 8 | | 1 | | 9 | | 13 | | 1 | | 14 | | 21 | | 2 | | 23 | |
| Estate Workers & Pensioners: | 144 | 94.7 | 138 | 99.3 | 282 | 96.9 | 118 | 90.1 | 118 | 99.1 | 236 | 94.4 | 262 | 92.6 | 256 | 99.2 | 518 | 95.7 |
| Non-Estate Workers: | 8 | 5.3 | 1 | 0.7 | 9 | 3.1 | 13 | 9.9 | 1 | 0.9 | 14 | 5.6 | 21 | 7.4 | 2 | 0.8 | 23 | 4.3 |
| GRAND TOTAL : | 152 | 52.2 | 139 | 47.8 | 291 | 100 | 131 | 52.4 | 119 | 47.6 | 250 | 100 | 283 | 52.3 | 258 | 47.7 | 541 | 100 |

the same way as tappers but since weeding jobs require manual labour rather than skill, the bases of gang formation are sex and age. There are three gangs - 'Men Gang', 'Women Gang' and 'Youth Gang' (14-16 years) - each under a kangany. As in the case of tappers so also for the organisation of weeders' gangs on Division I, the total number is reached by adding to the 47 weeders resident in Division I, 25 weeders resident in Factory Division. Tapping and weeding in Division II is carried out by labourers resident in that Division. The pattern of work organisation is identical in Divisions I and II.

As a supervisor of his gang the kangany leads his men to the field and closely scrutinises their performance. He is expected to wield the tapping knife himself if he finds a gang member repeatedly making wounds to the trees because his immediate boss, the conductor, holds the kangany responsible for any faults by a member of his gang. In turn, the kangany can impose formal and informal sanctions on a gang member, the former by lodging a complaint with the conductor leading to the defaulter's stoppage of work for a few days and latter by denying him concessions that he (the kangany) holds.

Of the remaining 7% in the category 'estate workers and pensioners' more than half are pensioners. Of the 19 pensioners, 17 are women and only 2 are men. The large number of women pensioners appears to be related to their earlier retirement from active work than men. Eleven of the 17 women

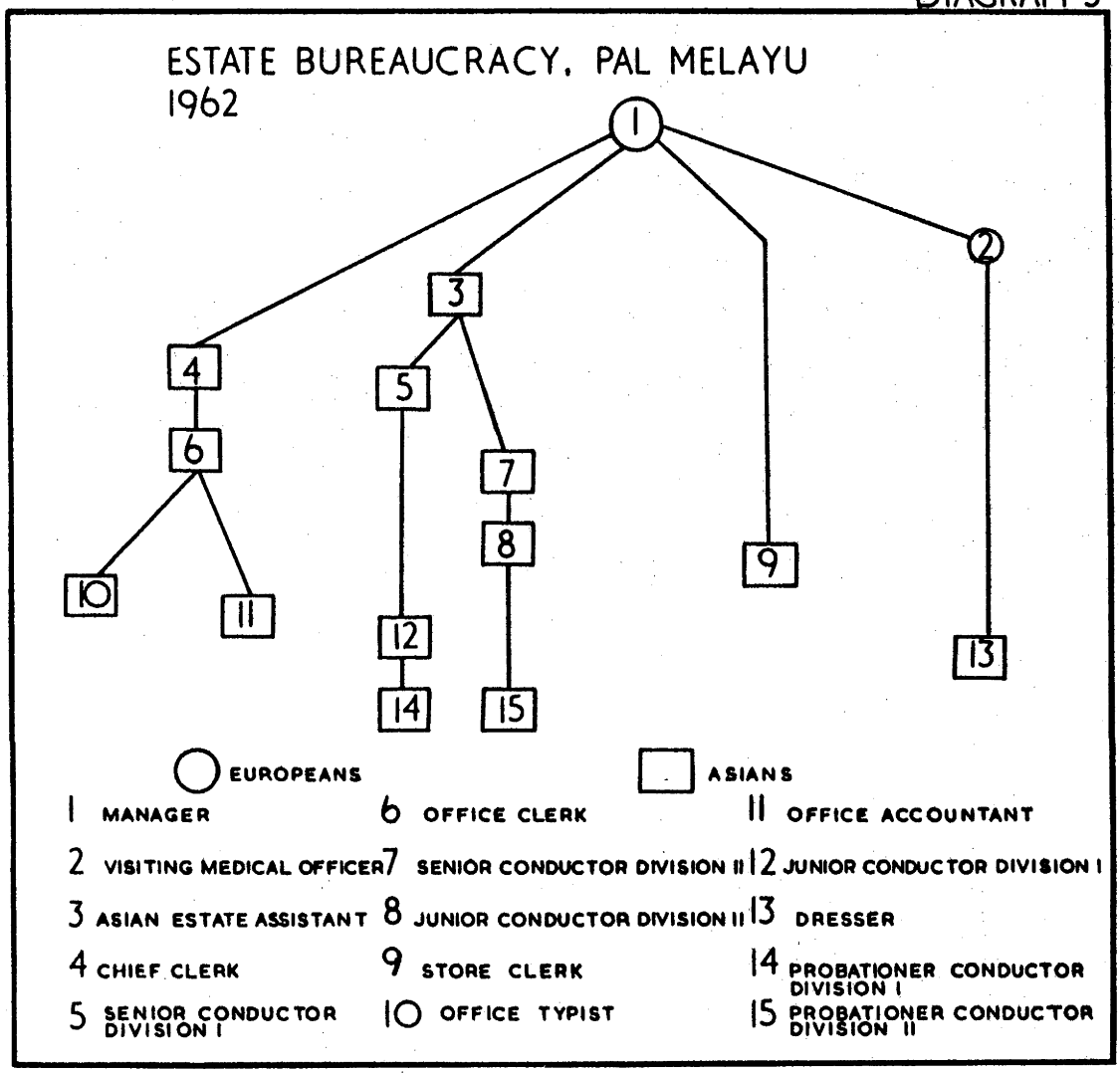
pensioners are widows. Three widows live alone and eight live with their sons. Of the remaining six women pensioners five live with their working husbands and one lives on Pal Melayu with a son while her husband is in India. A small number of estate workers (3.4%) are employed in various non-field jobs. All the males in this category work in the factory, store, offices (as peon or telephone operators), at the gates and the Labour Centre. There are three women matrons to nurse infants left behind in the creches by working mothers.

Non-estate workers are permitted to stay in the labour 'lines' if other members of their families work on the estate. There are 24 persons in this category, all of whom excepting one midwife are males. Five of them have exclusively external sources of earning a livelihood - such as teaching at a Tamil school in Bintang Emas, tin mining and apprenticeship in a government hospital. The remaining 18 exhibit varying degrees of economic dependence on Pal Melayu. In general, the goldsmith, drummer, taxi-driver, tailors and one of the two priests have a large clientele outside the estate. Petty shopkeepers and vendors have outside customers only on festivals and film shows. The barber and butcher thrive on the patronage of resident labourers only.

Staff:

Diagram 3 represents the official occupational hierarchy of Pal Melayu. The diagram is based on an organisational chart

DIAGRAM 3


ESTATE BUREAUCRACY, PAL MELAYU
1962
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
EUROPEANS
ASIANS
1 MANAGER
2 VISITING MEDICAL OFFICER
3 ASIAN ESTATE ASSISTANT
4 CHIEF CLERK
5 SENIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION I
6 OFFICE CLERK
7 SENIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION II
8 JUNIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION II
9 STORE CLERK
10 OFFICE TYPIST
11 OFFICE ACCOUNTANT
12 JUNIOR CONDUCTOR DIVISION I
13 DRESSER
14 PROBATIONER CONDUCTOR DIVISION I
15 PROBATIONER CONDUCTOR DIVISION II

supplied by the Company. The various offices in the hierarchy can be distinguished in terms of their constituent roles which may be classified as administrative and supervisory. We may first note the supervisory functions of the manager, Asian assistant, conductors (senior and junior) and probationer conductors. Their administrative roles shall be treated next.

Manager:

The manager performs a wide range of executive and administrative functions of planning and co-ordination of work on the estate. In his daily work routine he divides his time between field and office. A large part of the morning is devoted to the former but the entire afternoon and a greater part of the total time is taken up in discharge of office duties. The manager on Pal Melayu has no direct 'welfare' functions such as those of settling quarrels in relation to the community of labourers. Nor is he concerned directly with supervising the work of his subordinate officials or labourers in the field. These functions are left to the assistant. The manager's morning trip round the estate is mainly for an inspection of the technical aspects of rubber production in which greater attention is paid to special experimentations rather than to routine tasks. In this category may be included an engineering project such as the building of a bridge or a time-and-motion study of the performance of a diesel mower as a possible replacement for some of the manual weeding. Inasmuch as these projects are entrusted

to the direct supervision by the assistant, the manager's daily inspection of them also includes his supervision of the assistant. On the other hand, except when accompanying the 'Tapping Controller' or the 'Visiting Agent' on their periodic inspection of the estate, the manager rarely visits labourers in their tasks. A visit by the manager at any other time causes surprise and speculation among tappers. It may even lead to considerable consternation as in the case of Sinnedu, a tapper with a beard. One day while he was going home for tiffin during the interval between tapping and collection (10 a.m. to 12.15 p.m.) Sinnedu suddenly saw the figure of the manager approaching towards him. Frightened, he hid himself behind a tree. But the manager (grown more suspicious due to Sinnedu's bearded appearance and manner of hiding) pulled out his pistol. Sinnedu staggered out of the hiding and fell on his knees apologising with folded hands for attempting to go home for his tiffin!

Asian estate assistant: (commonly known as 'assistant')

He is responsible for executing all long term field plans which are chalked out periodically by the manager in consultation with him. He has to submit to the manager a weekly report concerning progress in field and costs of input and output. He may share supervision tasks with the conductors, especially if the manager expects him to be there. He is in charge of overall supervision of the work of conductors in both Divisions and this takes him on his motorcycle to a large part of the estate every day.

Conductors and probationer conductors:

"The conductors are to the assistant what the assistant is to the manager." The role of the conductor was thus summarised by the manager. Conductors are indeed the first-line supervisors of all labourers which explains why there are four of them on two Divisions of the estate. On each Division the work of supervising tapping and weeding gangs each working under its kangany is shared by a senior conductor, a junior conductor and a probationer conductor. At the morning muster (see p. 175) at 5.30 a.m. in each Division, labourers stand gangwise facing their kanganies. The senior conductor appears and inspects the gangs while the kanganies report absentees. Replacements are then ordered by the conductor from the gang of relief (ganti) tappers (see p. 201). The muster is then called off and the workers are on their way to their trees. The conductor prepares the muster-chit and takes it to the Divisional Office where it is checked by the assistant and later sent to the manager who gets it by 8 a.m. The conductors and probationer conductors begin their tours of the tapping area by 9 a.m. and are expected to be supervising kanganies and gangs until 2 p.m. During this period they keep an eye over the timing and performance of various jobs, from tapping through collection and weighing to transportation of latex to the factory.

Some of the supervisors are also administrators. The main administrative duty of the manager lies in co-ordination. He is assisted by the office staff

(nos. 4, 6, 10 and 11 in Diagram 3). Labour administration is carried out largely by the assistant and conductors at the Divisional Office but recruitment and discharge of labourers is looked after by the manager from the Main Office. In their administrative functions, too, the senior conductors of Divisions I and II are subordinated to the assistant. All financial dealings such as the payment of wages and advances are personally handled by the assistant. Each afternoon, the senior and junior conductors of both Divisions receive complaints from the kanganies against labourers who may have misbehaved or made mistakes in their work. According to the gravity of the charge, the junior or senior conductor weighs the facts on the testimony of the kangany and other witnesses and pronounces a punishment. This procedure is fairly standardised in dealing with such common complaints as bad tapping or truancy. Complaints against misbehaviour, though it may occur in the work place, often have a direct bearing on the relationship between disputants in the community. These cases are, therefore, jointly heard by the assistant and the conductors (junior and senior). There is a larger number of witnesses and the procedure of arriving at a decision takes a long time. Often a kangany may be directly involved as when a tapper complains of rough treatment at the hands of the kangany. Such cases crop up every mow and then but I never found a single instance where the kangany may have received punishment. In the first place, it is always difficult for a tapper to find

witnesses against a kangany. Secondly, unless the kangany's rough treatment involved physical assault the labourer is told to consider the former's action as an exercise of the normal supervisory powers of the kangany. On the other hand, a conductor is often able to find faults with the kangany. Usually, however, this is an aspect of supervision because a kangany is let off with nothing more than threats and warnings. One of the accepted codes of behaviour in dealing with the kangany is that he shall not be scolded in front of his gang.

Most important of all are the decisions sought by the labourers from members of the Asian staff in their (labourers') personal disputes. In a hierarchy of formalisation of the kirani's administrative roles, these decisions occupy the lowest place. In spite of the Community Panchayat he is approached for these decisions because of the high honour as well as the high office of the kirani in the eyes of the labourers. Here is clear case of the persistance of old notions of authority among labourers. Residents in the labour 'lines' often look up to the kirani for decisions in their marital disputes, quarrels over cittu and allocation of funds for temple festivals.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

The majority of the population on Pal Melayu consists of men and women who are either estate labourers or their dependants. In exchange for the workers' labour, the management provides both wages and housing - pre-requisites for the physical sustenance of the domestic group. Further, under conditions of estate living people cannot build houses to suit their needs nor always obtain accommodation where they would like to. It is apparent, therefore, that as a domestic group grows in size it may split into a number of residential units. This circumstance of life on an estate renders the criterion of 'a common roof' unsuitable for the definition of a family there. The management is obliged to provide one 'line' for each married couple working on the estate but it cannot guarantee that the close relatives of the couple will be provided accommodation in 'lines' of the same house-block or of nearby house-blocks.

It is useful, therefore, to discuss domestic groups from two points of view - as households and as families. A household is defined by the sharing of common meals and a common purse by all its members even though all its members may not live in the same 'line' (see pp.239-240). Although in the majority of cases a household is also the family unit, in some cases one family consists of two or three households. This happens when regular domestic co-activity, except the sharing of a common purse and

common meals, takes place between more than one closely related households that are proximately situated to one another. Besides the kinship ties of its members, the diacritical marks of the family on Pal Melayu as distinct from the household are common procreation, common socialisation of children, exchange of goods and services without strict reciprocity and compliance to the authority of a senior member. In this sense, the household may be regarded as a sub-unit of the family.

In the following discussion the family concept is used in explication of the kinship structure and values of the domestic group on Pal Melayu. Division of a single family into more than one household is related primarily to the organisation of economic activities in that group.

Family Structure:

The domestic family is known as kuṭumpam. Most domestic families on Pal Melayu are composed of a single nuclear family containing a man, his wife and their unmarried children. There are 60 complete nuclear families, which I identify by the serial numbers 1 to 60, representing more than half (56%) of the total sample,[1] of 108 domestic families on Pal Melayu. Each of the

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1 The statistical sample of families and households consists of the entire population of Division I. A systematic comparison of family structure in Divisions I and II convinces me that no significant variations exist in this regard between the two samples. I have, therefore, generalised for Pal Melayu on the

incomplete nuclear families - Nos. 61 to 66 (6%) - lacks one or other of the three essential components of the nuclear family (i.e. a man, his wife and unmarried children). Each of the nuclear families with parents and/or siblings - Nos. 67 to 83 (16%) - and with other kin - Nos. 84 to 89 (6%) - is formed by the addition of one or more kinsmen to a complete or incomplete nuclear family.

Compared to the above nuclear families, Nos. 1 to 89 (84%), only domestic families 90 to 108 (17%) are not nuclear in structure. The latter include extended families - Nos. 90 to 96 (6%) - and families of 'other type'- Nos. 97 to 108 (11%) (see Table 13).

In complete nuclear families 1 to 58 a man has only one spouse living with him although children born from previous unions of the spouses are present in a few cases. Only in families 59 and 60 more than one wives of a man's polygynous unions are alive.[2]

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1 cont'd...
basis of figures from Division I. I have numbered the families of my sample from No. 1 to 108 for convenience of exposition.

2 Both polygynous families and nuclear families with step-children have elsewhere been regarded as species of larger domestic groups, 'composite' families (cf. Murdock 1949:23-40).

TABLE 13

FAMILY STRUCTURE

| Type of family | Serial Numbers | Number of units | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Complete Nuclear | 1-60 | 60 | 56 |
| Incomplete Nuclear | 61-66 | 6 | 6 |
| Nuclear with parent and/or sibling | 67-83 | 17 | 16 |
| Nuclear with other kin | 84-89 | 6 | 6 |
| Extended | 90-96 | 7 | 6 |
| Other | 97-108 | 12 | 11 |
| TOTAL : | | 108 | 100% |

Incomplete nuclear families 61-64 comprise widows with unmarried children. None of the widows has cognates or deceased husband's agnatic kin to fall back on for support. One of them became partly dependent on a neighbour after her husband's death. The head of incomplete nuclear family 65 is a man whose wife had eloped and formed a certtu-k-kolu-tal union (see p. 88 ) with another man. It is not clear why the deserted husband has not married a second time. Finally, family 66 is incomplete at the base, that is the present couple is childless but the head's children from the deceased first wife formed separate nuclear families.

Nuclear families with parent and/or sibling provide the connecting link, so to speak, between the nuclear family type and the extended family type of domestic group on Pal Melayu. In families 67 to 76 a widowed mother is living with her married son and in families 77 and 78 a widowed sister is living with a married brother. In the former case all ten mothers lost their husbands while their sons had not yet reached marriageable age. Each widowed mother had to bring up one or more sons before he could marry and form a nuclear family of his own. The units in which these sons grew up were thus for varying periods of time incomplete nuclear families with female heads (mothers). Today, these families have advanced one stage further in the developmental cycle as all family heads are married males (sons). It is interesting to note, however, that in all these families brothers began to separate from one another as and when they got married, leaving the mother to choose which son she would like to live with. In family 77 a widow lives with a married younger brother who is also her daughter's husband. Today this widow has two grown-up married sons also living on Pal Melayu. But she continues to live with her son-in-law/brother with whom she has lived since she lost her husband and came to live with the family of her father. In family 78 too, the widow had rejoined her father's family and when her parents returned to India she continued to live with her married younger brother. Families 79 to 82 may be described as

incomplete extended families. In families 79 and 80 one of the parents has returned to India; in family 81 both parents have returned and in family 82 one of the parents has died. In the last family (83) of this category, a bachelor whose parents have died lives with his married elder brother's nuclear family.

It is more difficult to summarise in neat subtypes nuclear families with other kin. Each family shows variation as to the number and type of kin attached to its nuclear core. It is important to note, however, that only family 84 has been derived from the extended form. The 'other kin' in families 85 and 86 include married daughters separated from their husbands. In families 87 and 88 the coresident kin are female affines of the head. In the last case (89) the coresident kinsman is the sister's son of the male head.

On Pal Melayu an extended family is a domestic group formed by the joining of two or more agnatically related nuclear families.[3] Extended families 90 to 95 are formed by the joining of the nuclear families of father and son. Family 96 is a large fraternal joint family comprising nuclear families of three brothers and the

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3 The following patrilineal features of the non-Brahman Tamil society may account for the persistence of the extended family on Pal Melayu :-

(i) The notion of ancestral property (palai cottu). When asked to say if they owned land in their natal village in India, many workers mentioned with unequal degrees of certainty that they had a share there in the ancestral property (palai cottu). In a few cases this clearly referred to an undivided plot of land patrilineally inherited by a group of brothers. In one case it had not been

incomplete nuclear family of their deceased father. This family, the second largest domestic group on the estate, is headed by a widowed mother with married and unmarried children.

Families of 'other type' - 97 to 102 - contain only one person; two bachelors, two widows and two widowers. Families 103 to 105 are incomplete nuclear families, two headed by widows and the third by a widower, each containing a married daughter now separated from her husband. In family 106 a daughter's husband is living matriuxorilocally. In family 107, a male head lives with his three unmarried sons, one married son, son's wife and

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3 cont'd...
partitioned among brothers for three generations. Three brothers who are coparceners of such a plot of land are living on Pal Melayu. One of them has bought some land independently and another looks forward to buying a few acres in the near future. However, they are all agreed that the ancestral land should be made over to their sons without partition.

(ii) Worship of ancestors. In most families ancestor worship is offered to the male head's deceased parents to commemorate their death anniversaries (tivacam).

(iii) Patronymy. A male child often takes the name of his father's father.

(iv) Patrivirilocal marital residence for a longer or a shorter period after marriage.

Each of the two pairs of nuclear families 4 and 87 and 89 and 66 consists of separate nuclear families of father and son, i.e. the nuclear families of neither pair are 'joined' in a single extended family. In each case, there is a complete break of relations between father and son. Further, the father's present wife in the parental nuclear family is in neither case the married son's own mother, nor even her close kinswoman. Conversely, all examples of extended families on Pal Melayu show that the tie between a married son and his own mother (or her close kinswoman) has kept in check the antagonism between him and his father.

child and a barren widow who had joined him before his marriage to look after the household. Ever since the head's wife died in giving birth to their last son the widow has been the senior female in the household. The head's children call her grandmother (pāṭṭi). There is a persistent quarrel between the father and the married son over the control of family finances. The daughter-in-law and 'grandmother' are also not on good terms since the latter often goes to visit her sister's daughters leaving the former to do all the household work. Finally, family 108 is based on the polygynous union of the male head. It consists of the male head, his two wives, his separated married daughter, his unmarried children from both wives, his second wife's son by her deceased husband, the stepson's wife and the second wife's mother (see extract from Genealogy II). This is the largest single domestic group on Pal Melayu but showing signs of imminent segmentation. The group has always been split in two or three households between which conjugal ties of the male head provided the only connecting link. Relations between three sets of half siblings within the group have been strained. It seems

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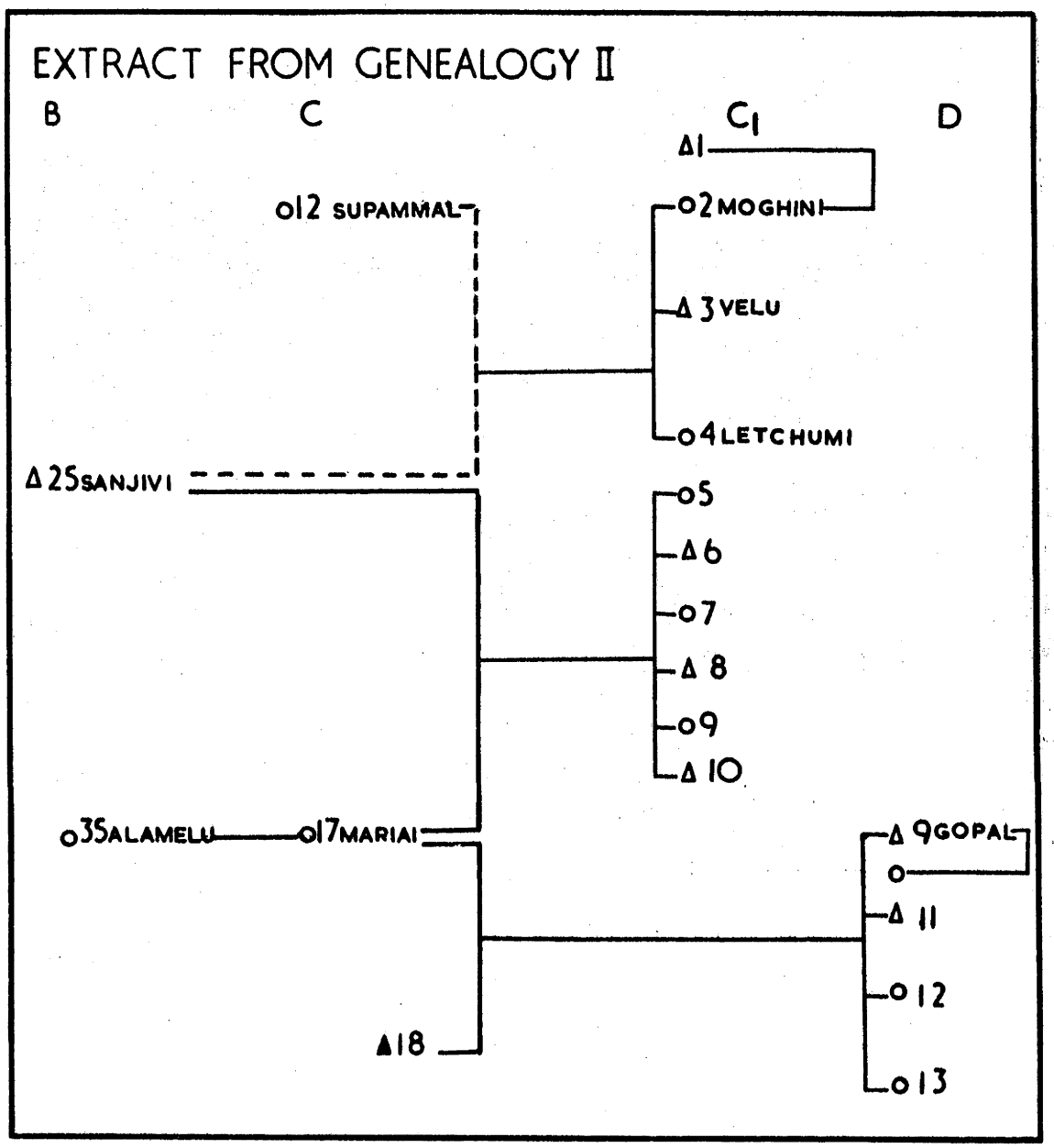
3 cont'd...

Not enough generations have lived on Pal Melayu to enable us to speak with certainty about a 'true' patrilineally extended family type (cf. Firth 1964:87) but I have classified as such certain agnatically related nuclear families which show the following features - common socialisation of children, intensive inter-visiting, regular exchange of goods and services without strict reciprocity and acceptance of the authority of an elder.


EXTRACT FROM GENEALOGY II
B
C
C1
D
Δ1
o12 SUPAMMAL
o2 MOGHINI
Δ 3 VELU
o4 LETCHUMI
Δ 25 SANJIVI
o5
Δ6
o7
Δ 8
o9
Δ 10
o35 ALAMELU
o17 MARIAI
Δ 9 GOPAL
o
Δ 11
o12
o13
Δ18

only a matter of time before the married stepchild - the only married 'son' of the head - decides to separate and form his own nuclear family.

This last case exemplifies the conflict that a widow with children may have to face should she form a certtu-k-kolu-tal (see p. 88 ). After his marriage her son from the first union is likely to grow increasingly resentful of any intervention in family affairs by the mother's 'lover'. For the same reason, relations between a woman's children of the two unions (half-siblings) may also become strained. At this stage a woman is faced with a dilemma. She may have to choose between continuing to live with her son or casting in her lot with the lover. Where such a choice is available to her a woman often decides to be with her son at all costs. Male responsibility in certtu-k-kolu-tal unions is notoriously weak when a man has a family from a primary union, as in the case at hand. However, while in this case the widow and her lover happen to be living and working on the same estate, there are other instances where after a few years of cohabitation and procreation the man disappears - either for good or to return occasionally as a chance visitor. To prepare for such an eventuality a woman would certainly like to secure the support of a grown-up son if she has one, provided that he is willing to accommodate half-siblings. The latter becomes a doubtful proposition when the affines exercise more pull over a man's decisions. A mother may thus be left alone to earn and

bring up the children with irregular support from her lover.

This example further shows the influence of the marital tie of parents on the form of the family. In earlier instances non-realisation of the extended family form was related, at least partly, to the irregular marital tie of the father (see p. 218 fn. 3 ); in this case it is the irregular tie of the mother which threatens the persistence of an extended family.

Family Roles:

Kinship roles in the nuclear family:

The nuclear family, the prevailing type of domestic group on Pal Melayu, contains three major sets of kin-relationships; between spouses, between parents and children, and between siblings. The patterned behaviour of family members occupying relative statuses within each set defines kinship roles in the domestic group. These roles set the pattern of expectations among kinsmen in the family and household activities are organised in keeping with the role-expectations. The description of family roles in this section is intended to clarify the kinship matrix of household organisation on Pal Melayu. We shall deal with each set of relationships in turn.

1. Between Spouses.

Male dominance characterises the relationship between husband and wife. The family undoubtedly functions through co-operation and consultation between husband and wife but the man is always the

superior partner. The terms of reference most frequently used for wife and husband on Pal Melayu are peṇṭāṭṭi (from peṇ-cāti - literally 'womankind') and puruṣaṉ (literally 'man') respectively. These terms suggest that difference of sex rather than discrepancy of age is the significant correlate of dominance in the spouse relationship. This also conforms with the norm of male superiority in Indian culture. Obedience and submissiveness is expected from a wife. On Pal Melayu she is supposed to bear occasional beatings from the husband with equanimity. A wife who retaliates her husband's beatings gets a bad name among men and women alike in the community. Nowadays too frequent thrashings by a husband often lead to separation and divorce. Although a wife is normally a wage earner like her husband, she hands over nearly all her earnings to him. This reinforces the husband's status as the provider of his family. The only money a wife may keep to herself are the proceeds - usually in small change - from the sale of vegetables she may grow in the kitchen garden. She may either save this money for a rainy day (it is often needed if the husband is addicted to drinking or gambling) or spend it for buying small luxury items for herself. Her major assets are her jewellery. No husband may take away her gold ornaments to the pawn shop without consulting his wife. In cases where the norm is violated, a woman who sets aside the usual rules of deference and demeanour and picks a quarrel with her husband will have the sympathy of her neighbours.

2. Between Parents and Children.

All fathers on Pal Melayu are indulgent towards infants of either sex. A child below five years is often carried in his arms or fondled on the lap by the father. If there is more than one infant in a nuclear family, the youngest is accorded this privileged treatment. A father tries his best to satisfy the instant yearnings of a child for food. On Pal Melayu cooking and eating take place on the basement of each 'line' so that members of each of the two or more households in one block carry out these activities in the full view of the others. Unless relations between them are strained the neighbours are expected to offer any attractive morsel, such as biscuits or lollies, to each other's infants. Small children are not discouraged from accepting or even demanding these things from a neighbour and the latter's refusal to give may create a serious misunderstanding between the adult members of the two households, especially between the mothers. The mother shares her husband's attitude of affection towards infants but she often accuses him of doting upon them and spoiling their habits. Her accusation is a fair one. A father can give affection to infants without having to assume any of the responsibilities of child rearing. A working mother on Pal Melayu, on the other hand, is fully responsible for bringing up an infant and she soon has to get used to making matter of fact arrangements such as leaving him in the creche during working hours, regulating his feeds, and so on.

During the longest period of the children's socialisation, from the age of about five to twelve years, parental roles become even more clearly differentiated. During all these years a child retains his intimate contact with the mother. But his frequency of regular interaction with the father falls off sharply as soon as he has outgrown the age of being fondled on the lap or carried in the arms. At the same time, however, a child's major encounters with the father take place in situations where the latter's role as the provider is conspicuous. Take, for instance, the occasion when a Tamil child on Pal Melayu gets his first pair of shoes. Usually this coincides with his entry into school at the age of seven years. Invariably the child is taken to the shop by his father to get his first pair of shoes. Henceforth, the former must report to the latter if a new pair is needed. The same applies to the child's need for a hair-cut, a pencil or a shirt.

A Tamil father is rarely seen beating a child, whereas the smacking of a child by a mother, using either hand or stick, is a common sight on a typical afternoon on Pal Melayu. This is the usual pattern of corporal punishment for children in the household. For the children, the frequent use of physical force by the mother does not make her the more dreaded of the parents. As an eight year old once told me, "That is <u>her</u> way, who cares?" While the mother's caning may be of no avail, father's scolding is often taken seriously. The disciplining of the children on

Pal Melayu is not the father's regular business; it is left more or less to the mother but when he has the occasion to intervene the matter is often of a serious nature. Normally a father spends a major portion of his hours after work away from the children. On the other hand, all children are expected to be playing around the 'line'. They should be within the calling distance of their mother whose after-work hours are devoted to household chores following a minimum of rest. She has to have the help of her children readily available. Especially valuable for her are the services of the eldest daughter. As we shall see, however, on Pal Melayu all children are a help to their mother and their usefulness serves to strengthen the traditional Tamil value concerning the desirability of having many children.

The children's association with their mothers is one of warmth and tenderness. She is the one who looks after all their personal needs and comforts. As a disciplinarian she may beat the children or use the sanction of food to secure compliance from a wayward child. Although a child may occasionally be singled out for such punishment it does not imply that affection, even verbalised, is lacking or discrimination is practised among children. If there are several children in a family, some going to the school, others helping parents in their 'tasks' and others working as wage labourers, the mother makes a conscious effort not to discriminate among them. To each child a special virtue, such

as skill, industry or scholarship, is attributed so that none should suffer by comparison with the other.

When a child in the family attains adolescence and adulthood, he is likely to become a labourer on Pal Melayu. At this stage the father has to accept his responsibility as a job-getter for his children. Until the time a child begins to earn, the father must provide for his needs. It creates a direct economic dependence of grown-up children over their father. Even when they begin to earn wages, male and female children are dependent upon their father until they get married and form their own nuclear families. The mother retains her responsibility of training the daughters but grown-up sons no longer remain in the charge of their mothers. The relationship between a father and his unmarried adult son is characterised by superordination and subordination. The former uses monetary sanctions to secure compliance from the latter. The father, on his part, is obliged to spend a considerable amount of money to obtain a spouse for his son. A man who keeps a son unmarried for a long time is criticised for being miserly and mean. A bachelor without a father or other close agnatic kin to arrange for his marriage has widespread sympathy from the community.

Daughters have few specific obligations towards their parents. As members of their parents' nuclear family, they are expected to be obedient, helpful and considerate. Owing to the male-dominant norms of Tamil society they show a greater degree

of compliance to parental authority than their brothers.

Sons are expected to help their aged parents even in the work situation, viz. in carrying latex from the 'task' to the weighing station. After the parents' retirement from the work, a younger son who may be staying with them is obliged to look after them and provide for their comfort. Death ritual of karumāti for parents must be observed by all sons either collectively or separately. Married daughters as well as their husbands are required to play highly specific roles in these rituals.

3. Between Siblings.

Although siblings belong to a single generation, they are internally divided by sex and age. All siblings, irrespective of sex, are playmates until the age of six or seven years. After that sex segregation of siblings appears incipiently with brothers and sisters forming separate play groups. In a large family with many children, the discrepancy of age between eldest and younger siblings is usually great and the differentiation of sibling roles by age and sex can be clearly observed. Relationships between brothers is usually one of comradeship and solidarity. On Pal Melayu no serious divisive forces exist between unmarried brothers although relationship between them was often typified by my informants by a Tamil saying: "Until five years, brothers; later, coparceners" (Aintu vayattil aṇṇaṉ tampi, pattu vayattil paṅkāḷi").

There does seem some justification, however, for so describing the orientation of relationships between brothers whose father has property in India or Malaya. For example, Sinnesamy kangany has two sons, aged 14 and 9. Besides having four kāṇi of ancestral land in his natal village in India, Sinnesamy has also a bank balance to his credit. While I was sitting in my house one morning, Sinnesamy's eldest son, Sanmugam, came excitedly to inform me that his father had won $3,000 in lottery. Spontaneously he began to give other details of his father's savings and money-lending activities ending on a note that was momentarily shocking to me. Sanmugam said that his father had sent money regularly to his parents in India and that therefore before his death Sinnesamy's father (Sanmugam's grandfather) had designated Sinnesamy as heir to land and property. In Malaya, since Sanmugam had for a long time been the only child born to his parents, Sinnesamy has nominated Sanmugam as heir to his provident fund. The crux of Sanmugam's statement was, "My brother Velayutham was not then born and so he will not have any share".

As they advance in age, a stage may come when the relationship between one or more elder brothers and some of the younger siblings becomes characterised by the latter's dependence on the former. This happens conspicuously if a male sibling is the eldest child in a family of many children of varying ages. The eldest brother in this case will be called by all his younger

siblings as periya-aṇṇā or periya-aṇṇaṉ. His status is adjudged to be next only to his father's and is indeed paternal in many of the features. If the father dies, the widowed mother and all younger siblings stay with him. On Pal Melayu this has happened frequently in the past and in every case the eldest brother is known to have paid the marriage expenses for his younger brothers. In one case, after the parents of four unmarried brothers and one sister had died during the Japanese Occupation, the periya-annan struggled hard to bring up his younger siblings. Two of the brothers were lost during the Occupation. Early in the Re-occupation the periya-annan became a fish seller, enabling him to make a living while carrying out a search for his lost brothers. He succeeded in finding them, brought them up on Pal Melayu and got them married. Once they were married, the brothers set up their own nuclear families and today relations between them are estranged.

Within the nuclear family, relationships between brothers and sisters are not significantly differentiated by the age factor. The association of younger brother with elder sister is a close one since the latter substantially shares with her mother the task of child-rearing in the family. Nevertheless an elder sister is not expected to smack or even scold a child left in her care; any threatening attitude she may adopt towards the latter is immediately checked, often punished, in the child's presence. The child, therefore, learns to distinguish from an early age

mother (amma), who wields real authority, from elder sister (akka) who has authority delegated to her by the former. Strong male dominance among siblings of the same generation also inhibits the growth of deferential behaviour towards elder sister. The younger siblings often order her to do odd jobs, such as serving them food, bringing their clothes or cleaning the sitting bench. If the age disparity between an elder sister and a younger brother is great the former becomes a potential mother-in-law (mamiyar) for the latter. For such a future possibility there is however little awareness in an elder sister before her marriage and it does not affect the tenor of interpersonal relationships between her and younger brother in the nuclear family.

There is no distinctive feature in the relationship between two sisters except that they work in close co-operation in the nuclear family.

Kinship roles in the extended family:

In the patrilineally extended family certain new kinship roles are added to those already described for the nuclear family. Yet, some of the latter also need redefinition when they are placed in a larger kinship universe consisting of as many as three generations. Within the structure of an extended family also a husband retains superiority over his wife. This holds true even in those cases where a man's wife is his own elder sister's

daughter or a close kinswoman of his parents. Parental intervention on behalf of the daughter-in-law in a quarrel between husband and wife may become the cause of a married son's separation from his father's extended family. Once the husband decides to separate, the wife can do little to change his mind. It is obvious that in an extended family the father's authority over married sons is considerably toned down. In fact, it can be shown statistically that extended families of economically active fathers and sons are remarkably short-lived on Pal Melayu. This is precisely because of an inherent though often latent tussle for true headship of the family between father and married son. On the other hand, when a disabled or retired father lives with his married son, the redefinition of familial roles is achieved with considerable ease. The dominant relationship between parents and sons then is characterised by filial piety on the part of the son and willing submission of de facto authority on the part of the father. Often a mother - as distinct from a stepmother - plays an important role in the persistence of an extended family even after father and son have formed separate households. Her ties of affection with the son counterbalance the divisive force of the tussle for authority between father and son.

The relationship of a daughter-in-law with her parents-in-law is marked by freedom and lack of constraint. This holds

true for new brides as well as older ones. Actual cordiality and affection characterises this relationship in cases where the daughter-in-law has been known to the family ever since her childhood - as when the son marries a cross-cousin or an elder sister's daughter. The contrast with any kind of avoidance relationship is easily brought home here by means of a simple incident which I watched occurring in my neighbour's house.

Ranganathan kangany's grandsons, Murugan and Tanapal, gave new pencils to their grandfather to be sharpened. Ranganathan began sharpening the pencils with the tapping knife of his daughter-in-law, Kamala. When he had practically finished the job, Kamala saw her tapping knife being misused. She rushed at Ranganathan and angrily snatched away the knife from his hand, shouting all the while what business he had to blunt her knife while he could have used his own. (As a tapping kangany Ranganathan has to keep a knife in his bag although he rarely uses it, while Kamala has to use hers every morning.) Unruffled by his daughter-in-law's outburst, Ranganathan quietly took his own knife and finished the work to the apparent delight of his grandsons.

There seems to be an undercurrent of hostility in the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law but there is a perceptible difference in their mutual behaviour patterns, depending upon whether the latter was a sondakārar (kin, including affines) or a non-relative (ācal) before marriage.

In either case the mother-in-law dominates but in the former situation her criticism of the daughter-in-law's imperfections is soothed by an occasional display of spontaneous affection. The mother-in-law may openly take sides with a related daughter-in-law against another who is not related. Ever since Katai's son married his mother's brother's daughter, Sadasiammal, he has been suffering from leprosy. Many women, including Katai's second son's wife (an acal) Mangiammal, blamed Sadasiammal for her husband's unfortunate disease which has prevented him from working. There was constant bickering between sisters-in-law and although Sadasiammal worked as a tapper, Mangiammal openly taunted Sadasiammal that the latter's family was living as a parasite on her (Mangiammal's) husband's earnings. Upon this, Sadasiammal decided to form a separate household while still living in the same house-block. Thus the extended family split into two households. For practical considerations, Katai and her husband continue to form a part of their younger son's household but the former is openly more attached to her brother's daughter and her children. Even today if someone suggests that her daughter-in-law might be the cause of her son's misfortune, Katai shifts the blame on her own son retorting with an adage from the Hindu epic Rāmāyaṇa.[4]

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[4] Katai said, "Sita touched Ravana, he was defeated; Sita touched Ravana, he died" ("Cītai toṭṭān, Rāvaṇa paṭṭān; Cītai toṭṭān, Rāvaṇa cettān"). She compared her daughter-in-law

A daughter-in-law is expected to be obedient and hardworking. Many mothers-in-law on Pal Melayu consider Malaya-born girls to be lacking in precisely these virtues. They often give this as the reason for preferring an India-born daughter-in-law.

Other dyadic relationships in a patrilocal and agnatically extended family include those between a woman and her husband's brothers and sisters. Again, the roles exemplifying these relationships are differentiated by factors of age and sex. There is a relationship of privileged familiarity between elder brother's wife and husband's younger brother (maccunan). If day to day relations between them are business like, these do, nevertheless, take on a special light-hearted flavour on festive occasions. One such occasion is the third and final day of the annual Mahamariamman festival/(tiru-vila) in the month of Ati (July-August). On that day the sacred thread (kāppu) is untied at the temple to rejoice at the happy conclusion of the festival and the end of the inauspicious month of Ati. Throughout the morning turmeric-yellow water is thrown at one another by friends and kinsmen. Among kinsfolk, anni and maccunan figure prominently. The throwing of coloured water is accompanied by much hilarity, even

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4 cont'd...
to Sita, the consort of god Rama, and her own son to Ravana, the demon king of Ceylon. The adage says that it was the divinity of Sita which led to Ravana's defeat and death after he had abducted her.

ribald joking and horse-play. A woman's relationship with her husband's elder brother is somewhat similar to that with her father-in-law. While she addresses him as mama he calls her by name. Instead of avoidance, there usually is a relationship of respect and affection. Of course, there may be real avoidance between them if the difference of age between the brothers is slight.

The pattern of privileged familiarity between anni and maccunan needs an explanation. As suggested by Professor Radcliffe-Brown, there seems to be here a mechanism for combining social disjunction with social conjunction (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 92). The conjunction aspects of the relationship flow from the facts that the anni is usually younger in age to a maccunan and was a potential spouse for him before her marriage. However, after marrying her maccunan's elder brother, the anni stands in a superior relationship to maccunan. The latter cannot even inherit her after his brother's death. There is thus a disjunction, despite the possibility of a sexual interest in anni. Avoidance is not appropriate to relationship since both anni and maccunan belong to the same generation and while the anni stands in a superior relationship, the maccunan is often senior in age. In other words, they are social equals. A solution is therefore found by acting out the conjunctive aspect in a standardised symbolic form. Especially, on an occasion when the entire community is in a mood of rejoicing, the social manifestations

of mutual sexual interest between anni and maccunan are permitted mock play.

The age factor becomes important in regulating relationships between a woman and her husband's female siblings. The husband's elder sister is rarely the member of the extended family into which a woman is married for the marriage of younger brothers before that of sisters is highly unusual. On the other hand, a woman's relationship with her husband's unmarried younger sister is often very close. They are often co-workers in the household but since the management of the household is in the hands of the mother, the daughter has the edge of superiority over the daughter-in-law. The forms of address which these kinswomen adopt towards each other depend upon their relative age. If almost of the same age, they use the self-reciprocal term anni; if the husband's younger sister is younger than ego she will be called kulantai; if she is older then the term will be amma.[5] Wives of two brothers in an extended family are 'sisters'. Their sisterly relations may, however, be seriously

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5 In the kinship terminology one must note here a possible variation. In some non-Brahman families a daughter-in-law may use the same terms for her husband's siblings as are used by her husband. This is a feature of the Brahman kinship terminology and has been related to the terminological assimilation of a woman with her husband's lineage (Gough 1956: 845). Its adoption among certain families on Pal Melayu may be attributed to a conscious effort on their part to follow the superior practice of Brahman castes in India.

affected by the tenor of relationship between their husbands and vice versa. As shown earlier, misunderstandings between these kin are among potent sources of fission of the extended family on Pal Melayu.

Summary:

The dominance and authority of men is the main feature of the family. The pattern of male dominance is best exemplified in the authoritarian role of the husband/father in the family but it extends also to the mother/son and sibling relationships. There is no economic independence of wife in the family who is dependent upon her husband for the control and expenditure of even her own share of cash income. Her only personal assets are the jewellery. Since husbands on Pal Melayu often run out of cash several days before the wage day, the wives may hand them their jewellery to obtain cash from the pawn shop. Jewellery thus enables a wife to have some influence in matters of family finance. In all other respects, however, she is completely subservient to her husband. The father exercises authority over sons and daughters alike but as children in the family grow up, monetary sanctions become increasingly important for securing compliance from sons. No such change of sanctions seems necessary to secure compliance from even grown-up daughters who habitually obey their father through fear ingrained in them during early socialisation. The mother is never an authority figure in the family on Pal Melayu.

Relationships between siblings in a nuclear family and among affinal relations of the same generation are again permeated by male dominance. The age factor counts for little in the mutual behaviour patterns between siblings of opposite sex. Brothers, younger and elder, order their sisters about. Among brothers, however, the status of the eldest is definitely higher and in some cases approximates that of the father until the younger brothers are married. The main characteristic of the relationship between a daughter-in-law and her parents-in-law in an extended family is the absence of avoidance and the ease with which her integration with the new family is achieved.

The Household:

The membership of a household consists of kinsmen. There is only one household on Pal Melayu with a non-kin member (see p. 219). The defining criteria of a household on Pal Melayu are two: first, a common kitchen, and second, a common purse. A common kitchen in the context of living in the labour 'lines' means that the same hearth and cooking utensils are used and all members of the household eat at one place. A common purse implies the control of most of the cash earnings of the members of a household by one man or woman - the household head. The connotation of the phrase 'control of household purse' will become clear in the discussion on the household head. Spatial proximity or distance of the 'lines' in which members sleep is largely irrelevant to our

definition of either the family or the household on Pal Melayu. For instance, families of two brothers or a father and a son living in adjacent 'lines' of the same houseblock and sharing some household resources in common would still constitute two separate households if each family cooks the food and budgets its finances independent of the other. Conversely, kinsmen residing in distantly situated 'lines' but pooling their earnings under one household head and cooking and eating at one place would constitute one household.

On Pal Melayu there is a broad correspondence between the family and the household. Each 'nuclear family' (1 to 89) is organised in one household. Extended families (90 to 92) consist of two households each and family of 'other type' (108) consists of three households. Thus the 108 families on Division I live in 113 households (see Table 14).

TABLE 14

FAMILY AND HOUSEHOLD

| Family Type (number of units) | | Household (number of units) |
|---|---|---|
| Nuclear | 89 | 89 |
| Extended | 7 | 10 |
| Other | 12 | 14 |
| TOTAL : | 108 | 113 |

Table 15 shows the total size-range of households on Pal Melayu. The average size is six members and the maximum number of households are found in the size-range 3 to 8 persons per household.

TABLE 15

HOUSEHOLD SIZE

| Size-Category | Number of Households |
|---|---|
| 1 | 7 |
| 2 | 2 |
| 3 | 11 |
| 4 | 16 |
| 5 | 19 |
| 6 | 11 |
| 7 | 15 |
| 8 | 13 |
| 9 | 8 |
| 10 | 5 |
| 11 | 1 |
| 12 | 3 |
| 13 | 1 |
| 14 | - |
| 15 | - |
| 16 | 1 |
| TOTAL : | 113 |

The Household Head:

On Pal Melayu each household has a head. The term for household head is 'responsible person' (mutal-ālī). The fact that a person is recognised as the household head by the estate management is of utmost importance. He is the intermediary between any member of the household and estate management. In 97 out of 113 households the head is a male and only 16 households have female heads. A male head is usually a person with the kinship status of husband/father in the domestic group. He is thought to be the provider of the household. In sheer economic terms, however, in the majority of instances he is one among several contributors to a common fund from which the needs of the household are met. Leaving out of account 7 single-person households where the head is the only earner of cash, each of the remaining 106 households has an average of 2.7 earners of cash including the head; of these 1.3 earners are males and 1.4 earners are females. It is thus apparent that the male head's function as the provider of the household does not consist in his capacity to earn most of the cash or even more cash than anyone else in the household can singly earn.

Within the household the head controls the purse. This is presumably the most ostensible and exclusive role of the household head. In this capacity he personally handles all the major cash dealings in the household. His normal monthly economic activities, from one wage day to the next, include the receipt of

all cash earnings of the household; a minimum of individual allocation of cash to the earning members; conduct of almost all major cash expenditure; and finally participation in one or more saving-groups (cittu). The normal pattern of wage-getting on Pal Melayu recognised by the management is that the head may claim from the Divisional Office the wages of all estate-working members of his household. Undoubtedly, on any particular wage day a member of the household other than the head may turn up to receive the combined wages but in this the former acts strictly as a bona fide bearer for the latter. One important variation should, however, be noted. A particular member of the household may insist upon receiving his own wages independently. Often such a person is a son who has recently been married. For a few months the father may condescend to let the son have his own wages; the daughter-in-law's earnings are thought to make up for the loss to the household fund. In most cases, however, the receipt of his own wages by the son constitutes the initial tep in a process of gaining economic independence which enables him to break away from his father's household and set up his own.

The household head keeps all the ready cash with him - some on his person and the rest in a steel or wooden trunk (pe̱ṭṭi) kept in the living room. Ordinarily no-one in the family, not even his wife, may take money out of the petti, which is kept locked. In a few households on Pal Melayu the wife has free access to cash in the box but she must obtain the husband's permission before

using it for any but the routine household expenditure. The extent to which a household head allocates cash to other members of the household for independent spending varies a good deal from one family to another. The typical pattern is that each earning adult, male or female, receives monthly pocket money. In most of the smaller households with younger heads (age-group 20-35) the working wife receives a sum of $5 to $10 per month as pocket money. She may spend it on buying trinkets, pieces of cloth or cosmetics from hawkers. Some women save this money for several months for buying jewellery. All wage-earning male adults in the household, including the head, spend a substantial amount of the total earnings on personal items, such as drinks, lottery, cinema, visiting, etc. The exact manner in which a young man obtains this cash from the household head varies. In most cases the head acknowledges the enhanced needs of an adult son or brother and lets him have a portion of his monthly wages. Often a father poses no serious obstacles to paying son's monthly subscription for the band, badminton or any other collaborative venture among young men. In some cases where a father is known to be miserly, the son may get the necessary cash for personal expenditure by borrowing money from others in the community. All such borrowing as well as credit from the shop is obtainable only on behalf of the household head and accordingly the responsibility of debt repayment rests with him rather than the borrowing member.

None of the non-earning members of the household normally have independent spending rights. Their needs are catered for by the household head. A partial exception are children and adolescents studying in the English Secondary School. Each student member of the household receives an average of $2.00 per month as pocket money. The only cash which other children, including those studying in the Estate Primary School, receive is the small change which the parents get in their paypackets and distribute among children on each pay day.

All economic transactions have to be negotiated by the household head who alone can represent the household in the community. In a very broad sense, since the head is thus concerned with making vital economic decisions for the household, his functions enumerated above can be treated as aspects of political headship. In relation to the community, however, the household head no longer enjoys the prerogative of representing the household on community bodies. Membership of the local trade union is not compulsory but ordinarily all male and female workers in the household are paying members. Meetings of the trade union are attended by the majority of male workers in the community, not merely by the heads of the households. If the womenfolk from most households do not attend these meetings it is mainly because the household routine does not permit their participation while traditional Tamil values also say that the place of the woman is

in the kitchen. Even in the community panchayat no young man in the community stays back or abstains from speaking even though his father is supposed to represent the entire household. Thus even the panchayat on Pal Melayu today is no prop to the political headship of the household head.

Finally, we may note that the management on Pal Melayu no longer considers headship of the household a necessary qualification for nomination or election to political office under its control. On the contrary, the estate management today has the avowed policy of securing from the younger members of the community increased participation on its welfare bodies. Thus on the school committee and the management panchayat, to take two examples, there is an equitable representation of old and young workers. While the old ones are invariably household heads, the young ones are not always so.

On Pal Melayu there are only sixteen households with female heads. Three of these are single-person households, each consisting of a widow. One of the widows is an ex-estate worker on a pension but the other two make a living by selling fried gram and ground nuts (Malay, kachang) and cookies (palakāram) in the labour 'lines'. Twelve of the remaining thirteen female heads are estate workers. Each of the thirteen has at least one son living with her. These households may be classified into three categories on the basis of the eldest son's socio-economic status:

first, where he is an estate worker (8 households); second, where he is an adult non-worker (4 households); and third, where he is a non-school-going child (1 household). In three of the eight households of the first category at least one of the estate working sons is married. In each of these three households the eldest married son shares effective headship with his mother in certain specified areas of social life. He is the one to whom invitations from other households in the community are addressed, and he is the one who normally attends meetings of all estate associations. But he is still not the household head because the control of the purse as well as of such assets as the deceased father may have left remain firmly in the mother's hands. Usually there is a close connection between the widow mother's ability to hold the household purse and the inheritance left by her husband, the latter often being the sanction behind the former. This is the case in all of the three abovementioned households. The number of such households on Pal Melayu is insignificant as compared with those households where a widowed mother lives with the nuclear family of her married son under the full headship of the latter (see p. 216). This is obviously related to the general inability of an average estate-working father to save sufficiently, if at all, for his posterity. For the same reason none of the female heads in the remaining five cases of the first category is likely to sustain her authority after the marriage of her wage-earning son. On Pal Melayu the phenomenon of adult non-working

sons, not one of the seriously disabled, is typical of female-headed households. In all four households where this is the case, mothers complain that their sons are disobedient, rude and good-for-nothing. Three of the mothers became widows while these sons were babes-in-arms while the fourth had been carrying the burden of the household single-handed ever since her marriage. Her husband suffers from chronic asthma. The fate of the eldest son in these households is an apt commentary on the consequences of disrupted socialisation of children in the families of working mothers, unsupported by wage-earning males. As we shall later see, the execution of normal family roles within the household on Pal Melayu is based on a subtle division of labour between husband and wife. The absence of one or the other of the spouses is thus fraught with grave consequences for the normal functioning of the family unit, specially for the socialisation of young children in it.

Household Organisation:

The organisation of activities in a particular household is dependent upon its size, age and sex structure, kinship base and the proportion of workers and non-workers in it. I have chosen two households to portray their 'typical' daily routine. Each unit represents a particular combination of variables in household organisation and yet each may be said to represent a 'type' of household on Pal Melayu. Furthermore, neither household is atypical in the community. This assertion rests on a thorough

personal acquaintance with the structure and organisation of all households on Pal Melayu.

For the sake of convenience and accuracy, I describe the typical daily routine in the households of my neighbours - Ranganathan kangany and Abbu driver in Appendix III, pp. 478-497.

Family and Household - The Developmental Cycle:

The outstanding feature of household organisation is the rigid separation of functions between men and women. The sexual division of labour in the household is based on the performance of most of the outdoor activities by men and indoor activities by women. In its application to working mothers and wives on Pal Melayu this norm is self-perpetuating. Early initiation into the grind of household work is an important element in the socialisation of a Tamil girl on Pal Melayu. The pattern of work in the household is characterised by co-operation among the female members. In this particular respect the manner in which Kamala and Papati share domestic chores in Ranganathan kangany's household is typical of most of the other households on Pal Melayu. Normally a husband, father, brother or grown-up son remains outside the circle of a woman's helpers in her household tasks. Co-operation between mother and daughter or between sisters is an imperative necessity when these women have not only to carry out domestic chores but in addition are required to work on the estate during fixed hours. When a woman who is a working daughter in her family of orientation

becomes a working mother in her family of procreation she is already socialised to carry out all indoor activities of the household with her own daughter's help. The cycle of female co-operation is repeated from one generation to the next. As constant companions in household work for a long time, mother and daughter develop a strong emotional attachment towards each other. In contrast to the complementary bond between father and son the tie between mother and daughter normally outlasts the latter's marriage.

As most of the women in the community follow a similar routine within a common time schedule and physical setting of the estate, there appear sexually exclusive informal groups of women in work as well as in leisure. The group of young girls who wash clothes and of older women who play tāyam daily at the same time and place on Pal Melayu are but two examples of such a development. Even in the industrial subsystem such exclusive groups form spontaneously during the break between the tapping and collection. Nevertheless, when men and women actually work as tapper-members of one gang the regularity of their contact leads to situations in which the norms of sexual segregation are most frequently violated. Illicit love affairs on Pal Melayu are known to begin and continue most commonly in the work place.

The nature of tasks normally performed by boys of the household differs from those performed by the girls. A girl is taught at an early age to carry out by herself some of the more

vital domestic duties such as cooking food, minding children, cleaning the house and washing clothes. In other words, she is trained to be a substitute for her mother. A boy, on the other hand, is never thought to be more than a mere helper to his mother or elder sister. He never does the washing or cooking for the household although he may occasionally mind a younger sibling. His most common contribution in a household is to run errands, bring household provisions from kaka shop and go up and down the 'line' or to the neighbour's house at his parents' command. Thus from the beginning the orientation of a boy in relation to household work is towards outdoor rather than indoor activities. Related to this orientation is the fact that a boy on the threshold of puberty begins to receive instructions more from his father than from the mother. From this stage on a son is his father's apprentice. The status of an elder male, an heir apparent to his father, is normally granted to a son soon after he becomes an earning member of the household. This stage marks a turning point in the familial and community affiliations of a man. As an adult male his participation in the indoor activities of the household declines and adaptation to the male role in a sexually segregated pattern of family and community living begins. A son drifts away from his mother and co-operates with his father in the outdoor household activities. At the same time, in relation to the community, he acquires an independent status in the trade union and youth associations. The bond between father and son -

oriented as this relationship is to a superordinate and subordinate pattern - is largely impersonal and lacks the emotional quality of the mother-child relationship. In some respects the son's independent political status in the community is incompatible with his economic dependence on his father. In the field of household organisation, especially on the question of allocation of cash, a father and his grown-up son have to come to a rational arrangement (see p. 244). Quarrels frequently arise between father and son owing to the latter's dissatisfaction with this arrangement and occasionally an unmarried son may break away from his father's family. This may happen if he has a married kinsman, commonly a married elder brother or a married elder sister (particularly one wanting to marry her daughter to the younger brother), willing to accommodate him until marriage. The difficulty is in a way peculiar to a society where men are so systematically excluded from doing household chores. Furthermore, after his separation from his father's family a dissident son must accumulate sufficient personal savings to be able to obtain a spouse. If this process is delayed for long, as is likely to happen in a society where a father usually finds a job for his son, his marriage may be postponed indefinitely and the very purpose of separation will be defeated. Thus, for practical reasons, grown-up sons in most of the households on Pal Melayu continue to live with their parents until they are married. Should adjustment with father demand from the son a considerable sacrifice of self-interests the latter

establishes an independent household after his marriage although not immediately after it.

On Pal Melayu the fission of the household may or may not denote the fission of the family. In a number of cases the former is related to the incompatibility of economic arrangements between a father and married son such as mentioned above. In still others, the inadequacy of housing on the estate, the unavailability of a 'line' for a married son in the vicinity of his father's 'line', may lead to the fission of a household. Once economic difficulties have been smoothened by the separation of budgets within the family and members of both households are living in proximity, the extended family may outlast the fission of the household. This process hass occurred, perfectly or imperfectly, in all but one example of extended families on Pal Melayu. It is evident in all those cases where both father and son, though they disagree on matters of running the household, have approached the estate management to allocate them nearby 'lines' for their separate households. The persistence of the extended family is most conspicuous in the socialisation of children and the conduct of family rituals such as the death anniversary of ancestors (tivacam). Family fission, on the other hand, may take place in either of the two ways. Firstly, either the father or a married son or both may deliberately seek a discontinuation of family ties. This often happens when a son has left his natal home even before marriage, following a quarrel.

A break of this nature is usually accompanied by the son taking up residence in an estate far away from where his father lives. In relatively few cases of this sort the households of father and son are on the same estate. In instances of the latter sort the quarrel is normally patched up in due course and the fission of the family becomes only a phase in its total cycle. Secondly, a family may break when a married son has to leave the estate for taking up employment elsewhere. In this case the socialisation of the children takes place in a nuclear family or in any other domestic group of which their father becomes a part. The extended family sentiment may, however, still be retained and continue to manifest itself in the annual visits to their family of orientation by married sons living elsewhere in Malaya. In a family with many sons, one or more married son may leave in this manner while another or more may continue to live with the father's family after marriage.

The important point, however, is that in the developmental cycle of the domestic group on Pal Melayu the point of fission of both the household and the family is reached soon after a son's marriage. In terms of household organisation three alternative possibilities exist :-

(a) Fission of the household accompanied by fission of the family;

(b) Fission of the household but continuation of the extended family: and

(c) Continuation of the household and the extended family.[6]

In either of the first two eventualities the household organisation of a domestic group is set along the same lines as before the son's marriage. This is more so when the household is a large one. Nevertheless, in either case both the household head and his wife have to sustain some loss. The former loses control over the earnings of his son and son's wife. It often happens that a man has to incur substantial debts in order to meet the expenses of his son's marriage. He hopes to pay them off with the increased household earnings which the working daughter-in-law will make possible. If, on the other hand, the son decides to separate before these debts are cleared, it imposes special financial hardship on the head and other members of the household. As for the head's wife, she is adversely affected by the loss of the services of the daughter-in-law in household chores. A woman cannot count upon her daughters for eventually all of them have to be married off. A daughter-in-law is expected to serve her during the old age and until the end of her life. If she has several sons, a mother tries her best to marry at least one of them to her brother's daughter or her daughter's

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6 The fourth logical possibility, continuation of the household despite fission of the family, is excluded by the nature of productive activities in the family - wage labour on the estate instead of subsistence farming.

daughter, hoping that a related daughter-in-law (sondam marumakal) will consent to stay with her. In a society where both men and women have a long working life the need to have sufficient adult members of each sex in the middle stage of the domestic group's developmental cycle is specially acute. On the other hand, there are few incentives for a son to continue living with his father's household after marriage. There is no landed property on which father and son may jointly work to make a living nor does a son ordinarily hope for a substantial inheritance after his father's death. Yet if he continues to live with his father it would mean a compulsory contribution on his part towards the upbringing of his siblings. If there is no special reason, he is not likely to forego the economic independence which is his due as an adult married male member of the community.

In the majority of cases, thus, the sons keep separating from their fathers as and when they get married. But because a woman's reproductive cycle is long and the total number of children born in the family is large, so a middle-aged couple approaching old age is rarely left without unmarried children to help them in household work. Moreover, additions to the household by co-optation of kinsmen goes on continuously. Solidarity between mother and daughter rather than between father and son outlasts the marriage of children. To a certain degree the former compensates for the loss of the latter.

On Pal Melayu there is no compulsory retirement for workers. Moreover, there are jobs on the estate such as those of weeder and kangany which do not demand heavy manual labour. For these reasons a man's working life is long. It enables the male head of the household to wield effective authority and carry out most of the outdoor activities until the last stage of the developmental cycle of the domestic group. In this respect a male household head never becomes dependent on his working wife except perhaps when he is bedridden with old age and disease.[7] Even in the latter eventuality he continues to receive a pension from the estate. Although he may not carry out all cash activities personally, yet he is normally consulted in any major disbursement of cash in the household. For the community and the estate management he remains the household head.

As said earlier a single household comprises an extended family only under special circumstances. Normally it is only a phase during the first few years after son's marriage. During June-August, 1962, there were seven extended families living in ten households on Pal Melayu. Four of the families comprised one household each and three comprised two households each. By October, 1963, one more family split up into two households. Thus at the latter date the same seven extended families lived in eleven

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7 Note the contrast in this respect between the household head here and in the East Indian family on plantations in British Guiana (Jayawardena 1963:53).

households - three families comprised one household each and four families comprised two households each. The separating son was given a 'line' in the row opposite his father's. In this case the son separated primarily in order to obtain more accommodation but subsequently found it convenient to separate his kitchen and purse also. In one of the three existing cases of a single household comprising an extended family, the son was married only two years ago and the father has been contemplating returning to India shortly. In each of the remaining two cases a different set of factors has been operative in containing constituent families within the household. In one household, comprising the nuclear families of father and two sons, the latter married in 1959 and 1963. Another son, the eldest, was married in the early 1950s and subsequently went away to work on another estate. In the existing household, the head, his wife, both married sons and their wives, are all tappers. In addition, the household earnings are considerably substantiated by a father-son orchestra of clarionet and drum which is hired to play music on ritual occasions on Pal Melayu and other estates. Through joint living, members of the household are able to enjoy a higher standard of living. Relations between father and sons have so far been amicable. Although the former cannot drive yet he has bought his sons a car which they use for pleasure and profit. The other household is atypical. It is based on a patrilaterally extended family or a fraternal joint family

comprising the nuclear families of three brothers and the incomplete nuclear family of their deceased father (no. 96 see pp. 217-218). The widowed mother is the head of the household. During their father's lifetime, the sons had married and formed separate households in accordance with the normal pattern of household fission on Pal Melayu. The father died, leaving his widow and unmarried children. At this crisis, the brothers decided to rally together to help their mother. In so doing they were not oblivious of their rational interests, for the example of certain other households had convinced them of the economic advantages to be gained from joint living. All five brothers and three married brothers' wives became estate-working members of the large household while the mother and the unmarried sister stayed home to carry out cattle-rearing on a small scale. The mother's status as the household head here is not comparable to that of a male head in any other household. In this household she is not a controller of cash. This function is still carried out by her eldest son although not in the same manner as by a father in a patrilineally extended family. Each brother enjoys a greater degree of freedom of personal expenditure. The mother's major role is the regulation of indoor activities in the household, especially in the allocation of duties to her daughters-in-law and daughter. Her control over them is undisputed by the sons, although between sons there are often quarrels which the female head is not always able to settle.

Typically on Pal Melayu a man dies before his wife. When this occurs in the later stages of the domestic cycle, the widow often goes to live with a married son. If there is more than one son, a situation such as described above may result. On the other hand, if a woman becomes a widow while her children are unmarried (as often happened in the past) she invariably returns to her natal group and adopts either of the following courses :-

(1) Brings up the children in her male kin's household until such time that one of her sons can assume headship of a separate household;

(2) Forms a union with another man - possibly a widower;

A woman without close male kin willing to support her may be forced to adopt a third alternative :-

(3) Bring up her children single-handed while having a temporary liaison, and some financial support, with another man.

Ordinarily, thus, a widow's return to her natal group implies only a temporary stay in the father's or a brother's household but it may become permanent if she does not form a subsequent union or has no son to support her and assume the headship of a separate household. Her lasting reintegration with the natal group may be achieved in another way also. To take an example, Selammal, a young woman widowed during the Japanese Occupation, returned to

her father's family with her unmarried children. She married her daughter to her own (Selammal's) younger brother, Subramaniam, and thus secured a permanent place in her natal household. Selammal's two sons have subsequently married and formed separate households but she continues to live with her brother/son-in-law (see also pp. 83 and 216).

The widow's dependence on her natal kinsmen derives from the traditional Tamil non-Brahman norm which keeps a woman close to her family of orientation even after her marriage (Gough 1956:845). Support for the widow and her children is thus a matter of kinship obligation for her father and brother. It might be supposed that the economic independence of a woman working on estates will lead to the attenuation of this obligation. This is far from being the case. The management on Pal Melayu and other estates known to me is always wary of retaining young widows in service. This attitude partakes of the general policy of the management to discourage the employment of women without male supporters. Historically, this policy was motivated by considerations of creating a stable labour force on estates. It had to be somewhat relaxed during the Re-occupation. As of today the normal expectation of the management from a young widow is that she will join her natal kin. In a case that came to my notice, the conductor of an estate telephoned the senior conductor of Division I, Pal Melayu, to tell the parents of a widow to go and bring her from the estate where she had been married. In this particular

case a 'brother' of the widow's deceased husband was alleged to have coerced her to stay with him. The kirani's solicitude on behalf of the widow was part of his normal protective and peace-keeping functions in the labour 'lines'. Generally, from the widow's own point of view too, the chances of securing a stable secondary union are enhanced when it is arranged by her male kinsmen. For a father or a brother, his kinship obligations notwithstanding, the acceptance of a widowed daughter or sister as a working member of the household is economically advantageous. Through a concurrence of these factors there is little difficulty in the retention, and even strengthening, of the traditional kinship obligations towards a widowed kinswoman.

Normally only widowers marry widows. The chances of a widow's secondary union vary inversely with her age and the proportion of marriageable widows to widowers in the society at large. Owing to considerable disparity of age between man and woman in Tamil society at the time of marriage, the number of widows is likely to be in excess over that of widowers even in normal times. The Japanese Occupation accentuated this imbalance and many widows found it impossible to form secondary unions. Most of the widows on Pal Melayu were thus forced to adopt alternatives (1) or (3). Eleven households still headed by widows all came into being by these processes. Three of these are single-person households. In seven households a widow lives with her unmarried children including at least one son. In two of

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these seven instances a daughter separated from her husband has also joined the household of her widowed mother and in one case the additional members include not only a married daughter but her husband who thus lives matriuxorilocally. Only one of the households headed by a widowed mother contains a married son and even he has married but recently. On the other hand, there are ten households with a widowed mother and a married son in each of which the headship has already passed from the former to the latter. These households represent the last stage in the developmental cycle of domestic groups with widowed mothers and sons (see p. 216).

An interruption is caused in the normal developmental cycle of a nuclear family if the wife dies before her husband. There are four widowers on Pal Melayu who did not marry a second time after their wife's death. At the time of his wife's death, each widower had only unmarried children including at least one daughter. In all except one household the daughter at the time of her mother's death was too small to look after the household chores. One man joined the household of his married younger brother while each of the remaining two formed short-term liaison with a widow. The man who joined his brother continued to live in that unit. One of the men who had joined a widow forced the latter out after his son was married and objected to the presence of his father's mistress. The responsibility for household chores was smoothly taken over by the daughter-in-law. In the second case, the joining widow deserted her consort and his two daughters. The daughters eventually

married and left their father to cook for himself.

If a nuclear family acquires property in India, the last stage of its developmental cycle is likely to take a distinctive form. The domestic groups on Pal Melayu may then be formed around property interests in India. The successful conduct of these interests requires: (1) presence of reliable kinsmen in the village; (2) frequent visits from Pal Melayu to the natal village in India; and (3) the possibility that senior members of the family, possibly the migrant couple, may return and settle down in the village. These conditions are often met by spreading the membership of a patrilineally extended family between Pal Melayu and the village in India. At least four nuclear families with parent and/or sibling are in fact such 'incomplete extended families'. There are two cases of nuclear families with siblings in each of which both the parents of the siblings have returned to the natal village leaving their unmarried adult children in the household of their married eldest son. Members of the Malayan counterpart of the extended family keep sending their earnings to parents in India. In the third case both parents returned to India with similar arrangements but the mother divides her time between living in the son's household on Pal Melayu and her own household in India. The fourth case is that of Ranganathan kangany's family. He sent his wife, Suppu, and two unmarried adult sons to Chennasamuthiram ten years ago while Ranganathan and a younger son remained in Malaya in the household of his

eldest married son. One of his sons who went to Chennasamuthiram married a daughter of Suppu's younger brother, Gopal. Gopal had been looking after Ranganathan's personal land, apart from his ancestral land. Through the marriage alliance Ranganathan took the first step towards an eventual control of affairs by his own family without offending his trusting affine. Suppu was supposed to return to Pal Melayu but there was no love lost between her and the daughter-in-law in Malaya. So she has remained in the village and looks forward to her husband's return. Ranganathan cannot leave because he still has a substantial amount of money with his debtors. However, all the family expects to be together in Chennasamuthiram one day.

At several points in the above discussion we noted the presence of a widowed or separated married sister or daughter in the household of her brother or parents respectively. The social status of these 'other kin' is different from certain others in the same general category of kinsfolk who join a household from the outside, as it were. On Pal Melayu a large number of these others are the household head's affines. Often their acceptance in a household is a matter as much of rational calculation as of kinship obligation. Such kin are present in five households based on the nuclear family. In each case the joining kinsfolk make a positive contribution to the domestic economy. For instance, in one case a married couple brought up the head's deceased sister's son in their own household. Nevertheless, this boy was not sent to the school with the

head's own children. Instead he was trained to help the head's wife in carrying latex in her task. In a year's time he is expected to become a tapper and further augment the family's income. Practical motives are apparent also in a case where two sisters of the head's second wife are staying in the household. All children from the head's first wife are now married and separated and so one of the second wife's sisters helps with the household chores while the other works as a tapper. Similar considerations prompted the selection of a bridegroom for a girl in a nuclear family where she is the elder of two children. In this case the age differential between sister and brother is such that the latter would marry and bring in a spouse to relieve his mother's burden of household work no less than ten years after his sister's marriage. The mother of the children succeeded in influencing her daughter to assent to marry a man who agreed to live patriuxorilocally.

Conclusion:

The household is the effective unit of domestic economy on Pal Melayu. Its size and membership is influenced greatly by conditions of living on the estate, particularly the accommodation provided by the management and the dependence of household members on wage labour rather than subsistence agriculture. The majority of households on Pal Melayu are based on the nuclear family. It is the predominant domestic group in which the procreation and

upbringing of the children takes place. Daughters marry patrivirilocally and in the majority of instances a son forms a separate household shortly after his marriage. The formation of a separate household by the son often means fission of the family. This fission is helped by the workers' lack of a stake in land and of other forms of property and by their sheer dependence on wage labour wherever that may be available. On the other hand, continuity of the extended family sentiment may outlast the fission of the household as in cases where common socialisation of children, intensive inter-visiting, regular exchange of goods and services and compliance to the authority of an elder characterises the family life of closely related households. Spatial contiguity may help in the maintenance of family ties but it is not essential. The occurrence of a few cases of the extended family among Tamil labourers of Pal Melayu may be attributed to the retention of the patrilineal norms of traditional non-Brahman kinship system of South India but the evidence in this regard from the developmental cycle of the domestic group on Pal Melayu is inconclusive. The kinship structure of the domestic group here shows a great variety of situational adaptations. Among factors affecting the course of this adaptation have been the general instability of migrant life heightened by the unsettled times of the Japanese Occupation and the partial dependence of many labourers upon village ties in India. The extent to which the economic organisation of the

estate has influenced the family on Pal Melayu is not commensurate with the changes it has brought about in household organisation. In terms of their earning capacity women workers on Pal Melayu are economically independent but in terms of familial values as wives, daughters, mothers or sisters, they are still subordinate to and dependent upon their male kinsmen. The estate management is aware of these values and recognises the senior man in a household as the household head. The values of male dominance are internalised in children through their socialisation in the family. As adult members of the community they assume the appropriate sexually segregated roles which conform with the division of labour in the family. If families and households split, it is mainly through economic differences between father and son. The mother in the Tamil family on Pal Melayu may help to smooth these differences but she is unable to hold the family together without male consent and support.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

Working as labourers for cash wages is the major economic pursuit of residents in the Pal Melayu labour 'lines'. Of 676 persons resident on Division I, 294 (43.5%) are economically active as bread-winners while the remaining population consists of dependants, some of whom have irregular cash earnings. All except 12 persons engaged in major economic activities are employed as estate workers on Pal Melayu. Most of the estate workers perform labouring jobs in the industrial organisation but a few are low-paid white-collar workers. Tappers, weeders, kanganies, carpenters, drivers and cleaners comprise the former category while a storekeeper, a gatekeeper, a peon, a telephone operator and a dresser's assistant comprise the latter. There is a third category of retired workers who receive pensions from the estate.

None of the twelve economically active persons classified as non-estate workers receives wages or a salary from the estate. Most of them provide goods or specialist-services to the labouring community. A mid-wife, petty-shopkeeper, temple-priest and astrologer, vendors, butchers, drummer, goldsmith and barber can be placed in this category. There are others, like a teacher and a hospital apprentice, who are white-collar workers outside the estate. The clientele of the community specialists is not confined to Pal Melayu alone and they sell their goods

and services in neighbouring estates and towns as well. Non estate-workers are permitted to live in the estate labour 'lines' because one or more members of their family work on the estate.

Wages and Salary:

Estate workers resident in the labour 'lines' are divided by the people themselves into two categories - those who receive their pay from the Divisional Office and those who are paid at the Main Office. The former category consists of the majority of labourers. They are 'daily rated' or 'piece rated' employees of the estate and receive a variable sum as wages twice in a month (on 'pay day' and 'advance'). We shall call this category 'wage earning labourers'. The latter category comprises skilled and white-collar workers receiving a fixed monthly salary. We shall designate them as 'salaried' workers.

Wage Earning Labourers.

The method of calculating the wages of labourers in this category differs according to the nature of tasks performed and is determined by direct negotiation between the employers' association (M.P.I.E.A.) and employees' union (N.U.P.W.). We shall consider the wages and systems of payment for the following classes of workers :-

(1) Tappers;

(2) Weeders;

(3) Kanganies.

(1) Tappers:

At the beginning of the year, each tapper is allocated a 'task' consisting of 400-500 trees in each of the four tapping sections on a Division (see Map 4). The daily earnings of a tapper are calculated on the basis of the work performed by him in his task each morning. The wages of a tapper consist of a 'guaranteed factor' and an 'output factor'. The guaranteed factor is made up of a 'basic element' and a 'price element'. The basic element in the guaranteed factor is determined by the price of rubber. For example, when the monthly average price of rubber is 60 cents a pound the basic element is $2.20 a day. The price element in the guaranteed factor is 14 cents a day for every complete 10 cents by which the monthly average price of rubber exceeds 60 cents a pound up to a maximum of 160 cents a pound. In addition to the guaranteed factor, a tapper is paid an output factor in accordance with the average daily poundage of latex (dry rubber content - d.r.c.) brought by him during the month. Such average is calculated to the nearest pound. Rubber fields are divided into three categories - A, B, C - on the basis of the age and yield of the trees. More than two-thirds of the planted area on Pal Melayu is under category A. A tapper working on these trees is paid an output factor of 6 cents a pound for poundage in excess of an average of 15 pounds. A tapper is also paid 4 cents a pound (wet weight) for the scrap brought by him.

Kannairam, a 20 year old male tapper on Pal Melayu, illustrated the process of monthly wage earning for tappers by an example. He gave me the following record of his average daily earnings on each of the four tapping-sections during the month of October, 1962 :

| Sections (Cat. A) Each | Total Collection (Annual variation) | DRC (per gallon) | Total Dry Latex | Excess Poundage | Scrap |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| First | 6 glns. (5-7) | 3 lbs. | 18 lbs. | 3 lbs. | 5 lbs. |
| Second | 9 glns. (6-13) | $3\frac{1}{2}$ " | $31\frac{1}{2}$ " | $16\frac{1}{2}$ " | 5 " |
| Third | 10 glns. (7-14) | 4 " | 40 " | 25 " | 7 " |
| Fourth | 7 glns. (5-10) | $3\frac{3}{4}$ " | $25\frac{1}{2}$ " | $10\frac{1}{2}$ " | 5 " |
| Total for 4 days: | 32 glns. | $14\frac{1}{4}$ " | 115 " | 55 " | 22 " |

In accordance with the prevailing price of rubber the guaranteed factor was $2.45 per tapping day. Thus on four days :-

Guaranteed factor = $2.45 x 4 $9.80

Output factor = .55 x 6 c $3.30

Scrap = .22 x 4 c $0.88

Total: $13.98

Average daily earnings for October $13.98 ÷ 4 = $3.49
say $3.50

Number of days worked in October = 24.

Thus approximate earnings for the month (less bonuses) = $3.50 x 24

= $84.00

Kannairam informed me that his monthly earnings from tapping are supplemented by the payment of one or more bonuses in a month. He knew about three such bonuses :-

(1) Two days' extra pay each month for satisfactory work.[1] The quality of the work is to be adjudged by a kirani (junior conductor). A day's pay is calculated to be the average daily wage in the month concerned; thus for Kannairam in October, $3.50. If his work during the month has been satisfactory, i.e. he had not wounded the trees or misbehaved with a superior, Kannairam is entitled to a bonus of $7.00 which would bring his earnings to $91.00.

(2) A three-monthly bonus of 2 days' extra pay. This is a kind of overtime payment. According to the wage agreement between N.U.P.W. and M.P.I.E.A., estate workers are entitled to 16 days' annual leave with pay. But according to an arrangement between the management and labourers on Pal Melayu, tappers avail themselves of only 8 days' leave in a year. The remaining 8 days constitute working holidays for all tappers. Thus on these days in addition to his normal daily wages each tapper earns overtime. The 8 working holidays on Pal Melayu are distributed two apiece in each quarter of a year.

(3) A three-monthly bonus of one day's extra pay for 75 days of work during this period (90 days).

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1 This is in fact a payment for work performed on the 7th day.

Other payments which may augment a tapper's monthly earnings (not mentioned by Kannairam but shown on the estate Register of Wages) relate to a 'special allowance', late tapping and evening collection. (For an extract of a tapper's annual earnings and standard deductions from the estate Register of Wages, see Appendix IV, Chart 1, p. 498)

(2) Weeders:

As said earlier, the term 'weeder' includes a variety of fieldworkers on an estate. Next to tappers weeders constitute the most numerous category of workers on Pal Melayu. In contrast to tappers, weeders are daily-rated labourers. As workers they are also considered to possess a lower level of skill than tappers. In general, therefore, the average earnings of a weeder are lower than those of a tapper. There are three gangs of weeders, namely 'men gang', 'women gang' and 'youth gang'. In the men gang, which consists of 39 field workers, the daily rate of pay ranges from $2.50 to $3.50. Only one man, a gardener, is paid at the lowest rate ($2.50). All workers in this gang who are employed in actual weeding are paid at a daily rate of $2.90 when the price of rubber is between 70 and 80 cents per pound and at a rate of $3.05 per pound when the price of rubber is between 80 and 90 cents per pound. Eight persons in the men gang are listed as factory workers and each receives a daily wage of $3.00 to $3.50. At the beginning of every year there is some reshuffle in the work and occupational status of

weeders in various gangs. According to the latest adjustment, one of the factory workers from the men gang has been raised to the rank of a kangany under whom nine ordinary weeders from the same gang have been constituted into a separate 'sprayers gang'. The kangany is paid a special daily rate of $4.00 and each gang member receives a daily rate of $3.50.

The 'women gang' comprises 17 weeders under a male kangany. The daily wage rate paid to female weeders is $2.30, slightly less than 4/5ths of the rate for men. Finally, there is a mixed gang of fifteen male and female weeders, known as 'youth gang'. All members of this gang are between the ages of 14 and 16 years. They are beginners as estate workers, being paid an average daily rate of only $2.10 and given opportunity to learn tapping on Sundays.

Weeders are entitled to the same paid holidays as tappers but the calculation of their earnings for paid holidays differs. In the case of a tapper, earnings for a paid holiday are equal to his average daily earnings in the month preceding that in which the holiday is taken. In the case of a weeder, on the other hand, these earnings are determined by the daily-rate payable to him during the month in which the holiday is taken. There is a compulsory weekly day of rest (Sunday) for weeders. Thus, unlike tappers, a weeder has no opportunity to earn '7th day extra wages' in a month. He may, however, earn overtime if the management is able to provide extra work. Besides, a weeder is

entitled to a special allowance payable to him at the discretion of a kirani (junior conductor). On average, a weeder works for a lesser number of days and earns fewer bonuses than a tapper. A comparison of Appendix IV, Charts 1 and 2, pp. 498-499, provides an idea of the proportionately lower average annual earnings of an average paid weeder compared to those of an average tapper.

Relief Tappers:

There is one gang of 17 relief tappers on Pal Melayu. A relief tapper works as a field worker and is only employed as a tapper when such work becomes available owing to the absence of a regular tapper. His total days of work are thus divided between weeding and tapping. While a relief tapper works as a tapper the rules of payment to regular tappers are also applicable to him. As a weeder he is paid a daily rate of $2.30. The average annual earnings of a relief tapper are shown in Appendix IV, Chart 3, p. 500.

(3) Kanganies:

Of the 15 kanganies on Pal Melayu, Division I, eleven are tapping kanganies and four are weeding kanganies. The former are considered piece-rate workers. Like tappers their daily wages also contain a guaranteed factor. This factor varied between $2.45 and $2.60 per day during 1962. A substantial proportion of the tapping kanganies' daily wages is constituted by the payment he receives for 'low grade rubber'. In fact he does not

actually collect low grade rubber in the field because his duties are exclusively supervisory. It seems that a kangany's payment for low grades is fixed as a percentage of the total remuneration received by the eighteen tappers of his gang for bringing in scrap rubber. The exact way in which this calculation is made is not known to me nor do the kangany's wages feature in the Agreement between the N.U.P.W. and the M.P.I.E.A. In all other respects, the calculation of earnings for a tapping kangany is governed by the same rules as are applicable to tappers.

Weeding kanganies are paid a daily rate that varied between $3.30 and $4.00 during 1962. Other rules of payment to weeding kanganies are the same as for weeders.

On Pal Melayu, one weeding kangany and four tapping kanganies receive higher wages than the rest. This weeding kangany is in charge of the 'sprayers gang'. He is paid a daily rate of $4.00 the year round. All the four tapping kanganies who receive higher wages possess an elementary knowledge of the three R's. Each of them is in charge of a weighing station. It is his responsibility to weigh the latex brought in by each tapper to that station and to record the amounts accurately in a register. For this extra work he is paid $10 monthly in addition to his other wages (see p. 178).

Salaried Workers.

The category of monthly salaried workers who receive wages from the Main Office is not numerous. In fact, only three resident estate workers of Division I and two of Division II can be placed in it. Nevertheless, it is a significant category insomuch as it constitutes a reference-group for the labourers. It can rightly be called a higher sub-status group among residents of the labour 'lines'. The three workers from Division I in this category are a peon-cum-telephone operator, a carpenter and a lorry driver, each receiving a monthly salary of $130 to $150. In daily life they are sharply distinguished from other residents by having skilled jobs, different hours of work and no direct supervision. Each of them enjoys frequent and often informal contacts with the kirani on the lower rungs of the staff hierarchy. They are also better informed about happenings outside Pal Melayu which are likely to affect the industrial organisation of the estate. News of forthcoming events, such as changes of personnel or staff promotions, are conveyed to labourers through them. In sheer economic terms these monthly salaried workers may be richer than most weeders but actually poorer than some tappers and most of the kanganies. Nevertheless, their main capital is skill and better contacts. To a certain degree it is convertible into cash. The carpenter runs a steady private business of selling furniture to estate workers. Naturally his own living room has also a profuse supply

of these. The peon-cum-telephone operator has to carry estate account books to the Company head office twice a month. He regularly earns a monthly travel allowance and brings back with him prestige goods such as a cheap cane chair or plastic curtains with bright floral prints from the bigger town market. The chief clerk has presented him with old or discarded household effects such as a kerosine stove or an almirah with a big but cracked mirror. The same holds true, to a lesser extent, of the lorry driver. His chief source of additional income is overtime work which is available to him on at least ten days in a month. Of these three, the peon has been able to raise his economic status above others. His son who recently passed the L.C.E. (Lower Certificate of Education) Examination has been appointed a teacher in the Estate Primary School. His eldest daughter is married to a postman in a town while a younger one is the only girl in Pal Melayu labour 'lines' studying at the Secondary English School in Bunga Raya.

Fringe Benefits.

Before concluding the section on earnings at different occupational strata in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu, it is necessary to consider the fringe benefits which the management provides for its workers. Most of these benefits are equally distributed among all labourers on Pal Melayu. The important ones may be enumerated as follows: free housing with a plot for gardening, water supply and medical care, creche and primary

school, sick leave for all and maternity allowance for women labourers. There is no compulsory insurance yet but all employees earning $400 or less per month are covered by the provisions of the Workmen's Compensation Ordinance (No. 85/1952) and the Employees' Provident Fund Ordinance (No. 21/1951). The latter came into force on 1st July, 1952. A monthly contribution averaging 5% of the employee's earnings is made to this fund by the employer and also by the employee. A sum equivalent of 10% of an employee's earnings is thus remitted to the Fund each month. An interest of 4% per annum is added to the amount which is placed to the credit of the employee. Withdrawal in a lump sum is permitted when the employee has attained 55 years of age or is permanently incapacitated from engaging in any employment or is leaving Malaya for good or on his death, in which event the sum is paid to the nominee or nominees appointed by him. It is obvious that E.P.F. benefits are not equally distributed among all employees since contributions to the Fund vary with an employee's earnings.

The fringe benefits mentioned above are provided by the estate management in accordance with the statutory requirements laid down in the Labour Code and various ordinances of the Ministry of Labour. On Pal Melayu, certain other amenities are provided in addition to statutory requirements. These include a 'non-contributory retirement gratuity' for old workers which the Company introduced in 1950. The gratuity is known among labourers as 'service money'. It is governed by the

Company's 'Labourers and Artisans Retirement Gratuity Fund'. All labourers and artisans employed on the Company's estates become eligible for membership provided that they have been employed for not less than fifteen years after reaching the age of 14. The continuation of the non-contributory gratuity after the introduction of the E.P.F. was decided on by the Company "in order to provide for old workers who would not have time to build up reasonable savings in the E.P.F. by the time of their retirement". Gratuities are paid to workers engaged prior to January, 1942, when they retire after reaching the age of 50 years and in the case of workers engaged thereafter when they retire after reaching the age of 55 years. The rate of gratuity is calculated at ₹25 for each year of service after reaching the age of 14. In certain exceptional cases of certified sickness or disablement the gratuity may be paid before the worker reaches the age of 50 or 55 and in certain other special cases where the worker has continued to work up to the age of 60 and has "no visible means of support" (to be decided on the merit of each case by the manager) and provided that he or she has served the Company for a minimum period of 20 years, the Company may agree to pay the gratuity by instalments. When the original entitlement has been exhausted, these instalments are normally continued at the same rate per month until the worker passes away.

Other amenities to workers include an arrangement for paying an advance in the third week of each month against the worker's wages of the succeeding month and of a special bonus (cantōṣa-campaḷam) of $10 to each worker for the Tipavali festival in October-November. A worker is allowed an advance of up to $50 in a month. The actual amount payable to a needy worker is left to the discretion of the assistant.

Non-estate workers:

A few of the non-estate workers are indirectly dependent upon the management. The temple priest (pūcāri) is one. He is paid a monthly salary from a temple fund which is maintained by a monthly contribution of $1.00 by each estate worker. The priest's employers are all the estate workers, represented by an annually-elected Temple Committee. The committee fixes his terms of appointment and conditions of work. His performance during the past year is reviewed at a meeting of the general body of workers which takes place in the temple courtyard at the beginning of every year. The renewal of a priest's contract of service is dependent upon a favourable verdict by the general body. However, deductions from a worker's salary for the temple fund are made by the management and the paymaster of the priest, as well as the controller of the temple fund, is the Divisional officer (assistant). Moreover, free accommodation for the priest is made available by the management. Since the priest's wife and

family are in India he has no other claim to be provided with free accommodation on the estate. The only person who runs a tea shop in the labour 'lines' of Division I is an ex-estate worker. During five years' stay in his natal village in India, he ran a similar shop jointly with his brother. On returning to Pal Melayu he reckoned this to be a profitable business, especially when combined with selling vegetables and cookies. The shopkeeper enjoys a monopoly on the Division. The convenient situation of the shop in the labour 'lines' has added to its popularity. Of the two vendors, one sells bootleg liquor (samsu) in the labour 'lines'. He buys it from an illicit Chinese distillery situated across Sungei Chempaka and smuggles it into Pal Melayu in sack-packed and sealed oil cans carried on bicycle. To avoid Bintang Emas police station on the way he takes a shorter route through swamps and nipah palms. He sells half a bottle of samsu for $2.50 which is 50 cents cheaper than the price charged at the Chinese provision store on the estate. His net profit from the sale of one bottle is estimated to be 70 cents. Given the limitation of his transport for smuggling, the man is able to bring in not more than two cans, equivalent to five bottles of samsu, per trip. Normally, his stock lasts for two days and a trip is made to the distillery every alternate day. On festive occasions, such as Tipavali, the demand for liquor rises and a daily trip is justified. During months of heavy rain, however, it is often difficult to make a trip for

several days at a stretch. Usually at least one out of every five bottles is kept for personal consumption since both the vendor and his wife are heavy drinkers. When all these factors are taken into consideration the average monthly earnings of the samsu seller would not seem to exceed $30.00. Moreover, it is a risky business and instances are known when the samsu seller has had to pay an instantaneous bribe of $20.00 or more to a policeman. On the estate, he transacts his business during the night. The estate kirani are aware of these activities but so long as peace is maintained in the labour 'lines', they do not raise any objection. The other vendor makes paper flowers and peddles them for sale in the region. It is not a very remunerative occupation; this man is forced into it due to his poor eyesight which disabled him as a tapper. The drummer, goldsmith and barber belong to the appropriate castes and offer specialist services to the community. They were originally attracted to Pal Melayu because of its large and settled population of Indian estate workers.

Income Groups:

On the basis of above delineation of earnings on Pal Melayu we may now suggest the broad income groups into which 113 households on Division I fall (see Table 16). Two points need to be noted at the very outset. First, all income derived from subsidiary occupations has been left out of account in calculating the average monthly earnings of each household.

TABLE 16

MONTHLY EARNINGS FROM ESTATE WORK.

| Income Groups | Average Monthly Income | Number of Households |
|---|---|---|
| A | Below ₹70 | 3 |
| B | ₹70 to ₹300 | 79 |
| C | ₹301 to ₹450 | 27 |
| D | Above ₹450 | 4 |
| | TOTAL : | 113 |

Reliable figures are not available for income derived from subsidiary occupations. This is a function partly of the irregularity of such income and partly also of unwillingness on the part of some household heads to reveal it. In the majority of cases, moreover, households do not keep account of these irregular earnings. This is specially true of petty income derived from the sale of vegetables or eggs as well as of earnings in the form of interest on money invested in a cittu or other mechanisms of 'money-rolling'. Second, the income groups delineated below are suggestive merely of the average monthly earnings in a household; there is no implication that they provide the basis for economic stratification in the community. The latter, as we propose to show in the conclusion of this chapter, depends upon the handling of earnings in a society where cash is scarce. Indeed, a

major interest in bracketing households by income is to show subsequently how unequally the functions of entrepreneurship are performed in the various households within any income bracket.

The major sources of variation in household-income are as follows :-

(1) Number of economically active persons in the household; in Table 16, there is one wage-earner to a household in Category A, one or two in B, three or four in C and more than four in D.

(2) Occupational statuses of economically active members.

(3) Job attendance. There is a slight sex differential in the incidence of absenteeism with the women labourers working a slightly lower average of days in a month than the men.

(4) Job skill. This variable is more significant for tappers than weeders. Skill influences a tapper's daily output directly. Indirectly an unskilled tapper may wound the trees with the tapping knife and as a punishment be forbidden to tap for several days.

The range of variation in the average monthly earnings in five major occupational categories on the estate is as follows :-

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (i) | Weeder and relief tapper | $60-$90 |
| (ii) | Field kangany | $90-$100 |
| (iii) | Tapper | $100-$110 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| (iv) | Tapper kangany | $100-$130 |
| (v) | White-collar and skilled salaried workers | $130-$150 |

Subsidiary Occupations:

For the majority of estate workers on Pal Melayu the eight hour working day begins at 6 a.m. and ends at 2 p.m. No time is lost in going to and fro the place of work since the labour 'lines' are situated centrally within the estate. It is conceivable, therefore, that many estate workers should try to augment their earnings by pursuing subsidiary occupations in the after-work hours. In fact, this is not done to any appreciable extent. The altogether busy daily routine of working wives and mothers discourages them from pursuing economically remunerative hobbies such as sewing, basket weaving or other handicrafts. Those women who do not work on the estate engage in these economic activities and even in a semi-outdoor occupation such as cattle rearing. At least two women pensioners from the estate earn an amount of $5 to $10 per month by selling cookies in the labour 'lines'. However, since very few adult women are non-estate workers the number of women engaged in subsidiary occupations is very low.

The menfolk undoubtedly have more leisure than women but there is widespread disinclination among men to do a job demanding manual labour outside the work situation. Working in the garden

constitutes a partial exception to this tendency. But regular gardeners are conspicuously elderly persons or younger persons who are goaded by their elders in the family to go and work in the garden. Usually there is a division of labour between an old father and his son or sons; the former works in the gardem while the latter collects and chops firewood from the fields and brings household goods for cash or credit from the shops. In addition to alloting a garden plot to each family at the back of the labour 'lines', the management also allows estate workers to plant flowers and vegetables in a narrow strip of land in front and by the side of a 'line'. The latter patch is often cultivated by women. The crop of vegetables, betels or fruits from either plot does not yield a substantial monetary profit but disputes often arise in regard to the occupancy of bigger plots.

Another small number of persons in the community supplement their cash earnings by doing a more or less regular job in the afternoon. Some of these jobs are specialist occupations performed by persons belonging to a certain caste. Earlier we mentioned the case of a goldsmith, barber and drummer who do not combine their caste occupation with estate work. But there is no traditional sanction against working as a tapper, weeder or factory labourer among persons of the non-Brahman castes represented on Pal Melayu. Thus we find the washerman (vaṇṇān) barber and drummers (Paraiyans) working on the estate as well as carrying out their traditional jobs in their spare time. There is

no person of Brahman caste on Pal Melayu. A man of Padayachee caste who worked as an apprentice of a Brahman priest at Mahamariamman temple in a town officiates as a priest in most of the marriages. He is known as an 'Iyer' and conducts marriage rituals in Sanskrit during the spare time after his job on the estate as a weeder. A man of the Nair caste is a type of indigenous medicine-man (mantiri-kiravar). He specialises in the diseases of women and children and charges a small customary fee for the treatment.[2] Some men perform services directly related to the work situation. Knife-sharpeners are in this category. They charge a fee of $1.00 for sharpening a tapping knife or weeding sickle. One man repairs bicycles and another is a painter. There are two part-time butchers who do a thriving business during the month of Tipavali. Tailoring as a side-line is popular with men who have been able to invest their savings in buying a sewing machine on hire-purchase from Bintang Emas.

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In a case witnessed by me a mother came to Nair with her one year old child complaining that the latter was suffering from diarrhoea. She brought with her a customary fee of $1.00 and offered it to the mantiri-kiravar on a betel leaf. Nair's wife quickly arranged the ritual instruments needed for diagnosing the malady. After incanting mantiram addressed to Vikkinēcuran, Pairavan and Kāḷi, waving incense smoke from an earthenware lamp close to the child's face and massaging the child's forehead with cantanam water, the mantiri-kiravar said, "The child is caught by a devil who has caused piḷḷai-tōcam. But I am a staunch devotee of Kali and have done penance, praying to her. She will certainly help me and no-one else. I do not care for the money; I only pray the goddess. You bring the child tomorrow if he is not cured; in the meantime give him this cantanam water. In any case bring the child the day after tomorrow." Nair's wife then filled a small

Cattle-rearing is a favoured subsidiary occupation of older men of means but owning a car and driving it as a pirate taxi appeals greatly to fun-loving, semi-literate young estate workers. There are thirteen second-hand cars owned by estate workers on Pal Melayu, five of which belong to men resident on Division I. Buying a car, keeping it on the estate and driving it for profit involves a person in complicated networks of relationship within the estate. It should perhaps be mentioned here that an estate worker does not add greatly to his monthly cash income by driving his car as a pirate taxi. In addition to the heavy costs of running a second-hand car on estate roads each car owner has to pay a road tax of $10.00 per month to the estate. It is not always possible for him to find a passenger from the estate going to the town and even if he does find one it is not certain that his passenger will pay the fare. In fact as in other economic transactions within the estate, in hiring a taxi also the credit system is widespread. Yet, owning a car has great prestige value. At the same time, it enables a young man to hang about the town and acquire those characteristics of town culture which are highly valued among the estate youth.

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2 cont'd...
phial with cantanam water and gave it to the mother. The latter took leave to go by folding her hands and bending forward respectfully. After she had left, Nair told me that the devil had attacked the child through the mother's carelessness. An infant had recently died in the same row of 'lines' where the woman lives. All mothers with unweaned infants should see such a child before he is buried. But the mother of the child now suffering from diarrhoea had failed to do so. The devil had thus found an opportunity to cause sickness in the child.

Expenditure:

The pattern of expenditure among labourers on Pal Melayu is marked by regular and irregular features. The regularity of expenses can be seen in three major cycles, namely the monthly cycle, the annual (festival) cycle and the life cycle, in which every household participates. Each of these cycles prescribes a number of items of expenditure that are obligatory for every household head in the community. Certain other items, on the other hand, may be part of the regular cycle of one household but not of another. These may be called the optional items in a cycle of expenditure. Besides the regular expenditure cycles, there are other expenses which are incurred irregularly, i.e. with no predictable periodicity. Indeed, some of these expenses never recur. Both recurrent and non-recurrent irregular expenses may also be classified as obligatory or optional.

The above scheme of classification of expenses on Pal Melayu is conceptual. It is based on a careful study of household budgets and ceremonial expenses and tallies with the people's own notions about planning the expenses (celavu-yōcaṉai). The introduction of these categories in the present discussion would seem to have an analytical value. It suggests a possible way of showing the dynamic relationship between earnings, expenditure and savings - through the mechanism of credit - in the wage earning community of Pal Melayu.

Regular Expenses:

The details of regular expenditure in the labouring community of Pal Melayu have been set forth in terms of monthly, annual (festival) and life cycles in Appendix V, pp. 501-567. We may briefly note here the major features of spending behaviour associated with each cycle.

The Monthly Cycle.

It is dependent upon the payment of monthly wages to the labourers by the estate. Just as the household earnings for each month are roughly determinate so also, broadly, are the items of regular monthly consumption and the amount of money that must be spent on them. Table 17 provides an idea of the proportionate spending among the various items. Food and drinks account for more than 70% of the regular monthly expenditure in a household. Rice is usually bought on credit from estate shops or from Bintang Emas once or twice in a month but liquor must be paid for in cash. Generally, the quantity and quality of food consumed in households does not vary with the economic status of the heads. Other items of regular monthly expenditure can also be related to the common status of the people as estate labourers. Kerosine lamps are needed in all households but pressure lamps may be owned by only a few households. Nevertheless, the sharing of such items as pressure lamps or pieces of furniture goes on continually. These items, necessitated by the conditions of life on the estate (no electricity; no furniture supplied by the estate),

TABLE 17

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF REGULAR MONTHLY EXPENDITURE - BY HOUSEHOLDS AND ITEMS.

| HOUSEHOLDS | ITEMS AND PERCENTAGES | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Name of Head | Food and Drinks | Fuel and Lighting | Toilet Articles | Laundry | Compulsory contributions (E.P.F., Foot-ball & cinema) | Lotteries | Incidentals | Total |
| PONNAN | 81.37 | 1.21 | 1.73 | 0.17 | 3.70 | 5.20 | 6.59 | 99.97 |
| VEERASAMY | 72.38 | 1.34 | 4.79 | - | 6.30 | - | 15.16 | 99.97 |
| MUNISAMY DHOBY | 72.04 | 1.29 | 5.03 | 0.36 | 4.60 | 12.93 | 3.73 | 99.98 |
| MANIAM | 84.62 | 3.03 | 1.41 | 2.53 | 4.51 | 3.52 | 0.35 | 99.97 |
| MEAN AVERAGE : | 77.6 | 1.71 | 3.24 | 0.76 | 4.77 | 5.41 | 6.45 | 99.97 |

are not treated as status-symbols within the labour 'lines'. Perhaps a household which borrowed a cane chair from another would return the obligation by lending its mortar and pestle. Table 17 shows that in Maniam's household as high as 3.03% of the monthly expenditure is allocated to fuel and lighting compared to less than 2% in other households. The higher expenditure in Maniam's case is accounted for by fuel. While the other three household heads, like the majority of people on Pal Melayu, collect their firewood free of charge from the estate, Maniam gets his supplied by a Chinese woodcutter in Bintang Emas. This is correlated with Maniam's "extravagent habits typical of young men" as an old India-born worker put it to me. Maniam is the youngest of four household heads mentioned in Table 17 and the only one among them born in Malaya. In his regular monthly expenditure Maniam also spends a proportionately bigger amount than other household heads on laundry. Compulsory contributions represent deductions made by the management every month from the wages of each worker. As an item of expenditure, thus, it is standardised and invariable for each household. Incidental expenses vary widely in the same household from one month to another and among households in any month. These have been listed among regular monthly expenditure, however, because at least some amount is spent on items such as transport, medicine or stationery every month. Compulsory contributions and incidentals represent two extremes in the pattern of monthly expenditure; the former is accurately

predictable while the latter is wholly unpredictable. The introduction of 'lottery' as an item of expenditure in most households is related to the newly-started Forecast Three Digit Lottery with a regional sales office in Bintang Emas. It accounts for varying proportions of people's monthly expenditure.

The Annual (Festival) Cycle.

There are a number of major expenses which must be incurred every year. New clothes have to be made every year. If there are school-going children, new books must be bought. A number of household goods, such as broomstick, utensils, lamps, etc., may need to be replaced annually. Similarly, a tapping knife, although its edges are sharpened every two months, does not last for more than a year. These are commonplace items that need annual replacement owing to the regular wear and tear. In practice, they are bought as and when the need becomes pressing. This is uniformly true of the items that can be bought on credit. But the purchase of others has to be postponed until sufficient cash can be raised. Availability of surplus cash is dependent on the saving mechanisms of a particular household head; and the majority of these arrangements are akin to a savings bank account rather than a current account. This means that a person may not be able to realise the cash for annual purchases just at the time he wants it. Hence the periodicity of annual purchases varies considerably from one household to another and it is difficult to speak of an annual cycle in the same sense as of a monthly cycle

with its rhythm determined by a regular system of wage-payment.

There is, however, a marginal area of expenses incurred every year on festive occasions which constitutes an annual cycle of expenditure on Pal Melayu. This cycle deserves special attention also because festivals constitute set reference-points in the people's own system of reckoning the periodicity of major purchases during a year. The practice does not always correspond with the theory and yet the theory persists and finds verbal expression. Thus, the association between Tipavali in Kartigai month (October-November) and buying of new clothes is very strong, to the extent that a pair of wrapper skirts bought in mid-August may still be thought of and described as a 'Tipavali purchase'.

Cooking of special food characterises all festivals on Pal Melayu. With the exception of temple feasts and in household cooking on certain days when only vegetarian food may be eaten, each of these occasions is marked by cooking special meat dishes. Meat of goat and chicken is a favourite of the Tamils of Pal Melayu. The annual cycle has two main type of festivals; those that are celebrated in the family and others that are celebrated by whole or a part of the community in one of the temples. All family festivals on Pal Melayu include the worship of ancestors and other deceased members of the family. During the celebration of most community festivals the image of Goddess Mahamariamman is carried in a procession round the labour 'lines'. If the celebration is organised on a Divisional basis the procession does not proceed to

the labour 'lines' of the other Division. In this case there is also no participation by residents of the other Division except in attending the free film show held on the 'cinema ground'. In celebrating community festivals all estate workers make similar monetary contributions. The expenditure per household is thus standardised on the basis of the number of working members in it. Besides the regular contributions, households also spend a variable sum of money on special dresses and trips to the town. Spending is more variable, though on largely predictable items, during family festivals. Tipavali, celebrated during October-November, is the biggest and most expensive of the family festivals. During Tipavali some money has to be spent on buying new clothes and, ideally, for making gold jewellery. The association of Tipavali with buying clothes is traditional while the making of new jewellery does not seem to be a norm among non-Brahman agricultural castes in South India. On Pal Melayu, while the majority of households find it difficult to make new jewellery, most household heads manage to redeem their gold ornaments from the pawn shop. To be able to put on one's jewellery during Tipavali is a distinct value among the women of Pal Melayu.

The diverse character of the annual festival cycle on Pal Melayu makes a quantitative statement of average annual expenditure in a household difficult. For the same reason it cannot be said with certainty as to what proportion of the annual

earnings in a household is spent on festivals. Three general observations may, however, be made about spending behaviour during the festivals. Firstly, there is a broad uniformity among households on the items of expenditure during a festival. The items are defined by the common cultural background of the labourers, their similar economic status and by the stereotyped availability of goods needed for celebration. Secondly, the expenses of even family festivals tend to be shared among households which may not necessarily be related to one another by kinship or affinity. This tendency is best exemplified by the pattern of sharing goats for meat during Tipavali. On a day such as Poṅkal (usually mid-January) the sharing of expenses may take the form of hiring one taxi by a number of household heads to bring supplies for the celebration from the town. Thirdly, these festivals are celebrated on a bigger scale, with more expenditure, than in the villages of Madras State in India from which many of the present residents or their fathers emigrated to Pal Melayu. Again, it is not possible to exemplify this point of view by comparative statistics from Pal Melayu and the Indian villages concerned. I formed this impression during my brief stay at Damal and Chennasamuthiram soon after my Malayan fieldwork. This is also the considered opinion of my informants on Pal Melayu who have visited their natal villages in India in the last couple of years.

The Life Cycle.

The third cycle of regular expenditure is related to the performance of rites de passage in the family. Not all the rites (caṭaṅku) mentioned in the almanac (pancāṅkam)are observed. The important ones are those related to childbirth, a boy's first hair cut and ear-boring, a girl's puberty, marriage and death. Each of these occasions is characterised by a celebration and prestation of gifts among kinsmen. For the person who holds the ceremony as well as for those who attend it a life cycle ritual is an occasion for spending. The amount which is spent varies with the significance of the ritual in the total life cycle and scale of celebration. The latter depends largely on the economic status of the participants and in some rituals upon the current standing of the person who holds the ceremony in the social debt-credit ledger of the community.

Of all life cycle rituals, marriage is the most ostentatiously celebrated one. A Tamil marriage is marked by a long chain of prestations among kinsmen and affinal relations, beginning a long time before the actual wedding (tiru-maṇam or kāliyaṇam) and outlasting it by several months. Among the non-Brahman Kallar of Madras State in India, the principal gift-exchange during all major life cycle rituals takes place between groups of relatives who are real or terminological 'kinsmen' (paṅkāli)and 'affines' (māman-maccunan). The gifts given during this "external exchange" are known as cīr. During the prominent life

cycle rituals there also takes place an "internal exchange". It usually consists of monetary contributions by a man's 'kinsmen' towards the cost of the ceremony. These contributions are referred to as Moy (Dumont 1957:30).[3] A broadly similar pattern of exchanges, with similar terminological distinctions between cir and moy, obtains on Pal Melayu but there are significant differences. Firstly, on Pal Melayu an 'affine' may present money instead of the culturally prescribed cir. This substitution often occurs when the recipient of cir is so poor that he is unable to bear the cost of the ceremony in spite of a moy or when his celebration of a life cycle ritual in the family is calculated to raise funds. The deviation from the traditional pattern in this case is a direct outcome, it would seem, of the people's sheer dependence on monetary wages and the absence of any form of subsistence agriculture. In such a society, cash tends to be valued above all other forms of gift. Secondly, in both internal and external prestations certain other people who are neither 'kinsmen' nor 'affines' also participate. These others may be

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3 Dumont's formulation of prestations in the Tamil society is part of his theory that a Tamil marriage is the reaffirmation of an alliance between groups which continues over several generations. The prestations connected with marriage are part of a still longer chain of prestations between the same classes of relatives who reinforce their alliance through intermarriage. An examination of this hypothesis against data from Pal Melayu cannot be undertaken within the scope of the present chapter.

one's neighbours of the same caste or even people of another caste. This is one manifestation of the importance in the estate Tamil society of people's universalistic ties of solidarity as labourers which cut across the particularistic ties of caste and kinship (see also Chapter VI, p. 362). Thirdly, in all prestations associated with life cycle rituals, the idea of an economic exchange is heavily underscored. In a sense, this feature of the exchange follows from the earlier characteristics; prestations are evaluated in monetary terms and the wide range of participation, especially by the non-kin, in the exchange necessitates imposition of external sanctions. These sanctions are ensured by making a careful and public note of contributions given as cir and moy.

Because of the great importance of exchange in them, life cycle rituals fall on the border-line of expenditure proper and what we have described in the next section as savings and credit mechanisms in the community. Like the latter, life cycle rituals on Pal Melayu involve participation by all members of the labouring community largely, though not absolutely, irrespective of caste and economic stratification. The expenditure incurred during these rituals has this special quality: it gets repaid in the long-run. While there is a tendency in this cycle for losses (expenditure) and gains (earnings) to even out, as we shall see later, there are some who make a margin of profit and others who suffer a commensurate loss.

Irregular Expenses:

Essential irregular expenditure has to be incurred on items that are either bought once for all or renewed or replaced whenever the need be. Establishment expenses are usually of this sort. As noted earlier, the estate provides unfurnished accommodation to labourers. At least wooden benches, sitting mats and cupboards have to be arranged for by the residents of the labour 'lines'. Similarly, suitable substitutes have to be found for electricity. A substantial proportion of a household's earnings goes into the purchase of clothes although the periodicity of this expenditure is not always fixed. While special dresses may be bought on festivals and at life cycle rituals, new clothes for daily wear have to be bought as and when the old ones wear out. One can thus see womenfolk buying their own and children's clothes after each pay-day. These are usually obtained on credit from itinerant vendors. Men usually buy clothes (principally cotton wrapper skirt, shirts and shorts) round about Tipavali and Tai-p-pūcam. Often, school uniforms for children are bought at the beginning of the school session. The common factor in the buying of clothes is that ready-made dresses are preferred; there is little sewing by women labourers and the local market is usually well supplied with cheap ready-made garments imported from Hong Kong. Other essential items of purchase for the working community are tapping knives, sickles, baskets, etc. The same can be said of bicycle. Buckets are

provided by the management.

Spending on medical consultations and medicines is another drain on the labourers' earnings. This is somewhat a paradox considering that medical amenities are provided free to all estate workers and their dependants. These facilities are fairly comprehensive and include treatment at the estate dispensary, hospitalisation at a group hospital in Baku Baku and transport costs for patients recommended by the estate dresser to visit an even bigger hospital at the national capital. The paradox is resolved, however, when it is realised that estate workers still have a deep-seated mistrust of western medicine and an equally strong faith in the efficacy of the indigenous pharmocopaeia. We earlier cited the example of an indigenous medical specialist (see p. 289 fn.2). There are at least half a dozen such specialists in both Divisions of Pal Melayu and many more believed to possess greater powers in the region and beyond. Limitations of space forbid an extensive treatment of the system of holy medicine men. Some of the Tamil Hindu mantira-vāti reside in temples, others in house shrines. The Tamil Muslim 'sāin', to whom people from Pal Melayu repair, is a businessman who lives in his own house in Bintang Emas. Malay bomohs live in kampongs and there is a famous one attached to a mosque to whom many of the Tamil estate workers go for consultation. All the medicine men operate as spirit-mediums and in the case of the mantira-vati possession, signified by going into a trance, is often the principal means of

communication with a deity. They charge a variable amount for their fee which, during several visits, runs into sums over $100.00 depending upon the seriousness of the disease and the efficacy of the treatment. Other items of expenditure include several visits to offer worship at a particular shrine and expensive offerings of food, lime fruit, clothes, etc. However, from the point of view of a patient, the most expensive phase of the system is the initial wandering to locate the right doctor for his particular disease.

It is , however, the expenditure on irregular inessential items which, if carried to an excess, may easily involve the household concerned in a cycle of permanent indebtedness. To a large extent, the purchase of such items on Pal Melayu is dependent on their availability, advertisement and prestige-value. Objects which have a special appeal for the young estate labourer include watches, transistor radios, motorcycles, cars and sports goods. There are often fads and fashions for particular goods. At one stage badminton became a rage and the Kaka and Chinese shops on the estate began to be well-stocked in shuttlecocks. At another period the young married couples became greatly interested in buying cane furniture. Most of the items in the category of expenditure under consideration have a display or entertainment value but some of the goods may yield profit. A sewing machine or a car may be placed in the latter category but not always. Especially in the case of an old sewing machine or car the cost of

maintenance and repairs may by far exceed any profits that may be derived by tailoring or driving the car as a pirate taxi. Cattle rearing is all too rare these days and almost entirely confined to the older generation. Yet, once a cow is bought it is made to yield good returns.

Expenditure - Conclusion:

On Pal Melayu, the three expenditure cycles show two characteristics: uniformity and universality. By uniformity is meant the relative fixity of items on which money must be spent and universality refers to the applicability of this scheme of expenditure to practically every household on the estate. This is not to deny that minor variations may appear in the expenditure cycles of particular families but these have a tendency to even out in the long run. Generally speaking, differences in economic status are not indicated by differential spending. The example of life cycle rituals, in particular, shows how erroneous it may be to infer economic status, even in the objective sense of higher earnings and savings, from the scale of celebration. The celebration of an ostentatious tiraṭṭi is notoriously related to a person's quest for cash from a bigger moy. The basic fact remains that all those who live in the labour 'lines' are wage earning estate-workers and that they belong to the same cultural group. These give rise to common and egalitarian values which make for both uniformity and universality in our sense. We shall follow this theme later. There is a third characteristic which

may be deduced from the data on expenditure - that estate-workers on Pal Melayu are conspicuous spenders. It is not possible to support this contention with comparative statistics either from Indian villages or from non-estate Indian settlements in Malaya but both qualitative and quantitative evidence adduced in the foregoing discussion and Appendix V points strongly in that direction. The ability of estate workers on Pal Melayu to spend more is a function, it seems, of regular cash earnings from estate labour. In terms of the overall pattern of expenditure on Pal Melayu the expenditure on ritual items is at least matched, if not exceeded, by money spent on secular items having a predominantly entertainment value. Expenditure on the former items is apparent in the celebration of festivals and life cycle rituals. Regular items in the latter category include Ekor, drinks, visiting involving heavy spending on taxis.

Lest the emphasis on regularity in expenditure convey a false impression it is well to remind ourselves of the importance which 'incidentals' assume in the actual spending in a household. Varieties in the expenditure of particular households may be introduced not only by the 'incidentals' but by differential spending in the community on items described under annual irregular inessential expenditure. This might, in fact, prove to be the most potent source of creating permanent indebtedness in a number of households on the estate. We shall examine this aspect of spending behaviour on Pal Melayu more fully in

connection with economic stratification in the labour 'lines'.

Finally, before we conclude the present discussion, it is worth recapitulating how expenses are actually incurred in a household. The head of the household controls the purse and takes most of the decisions about how money will be spent. In general, not only the male head but all adult men in the household spend a fair share of the monthly earnings on personal items. In this field there is often a cleavage of interests between an older man born in India and a young man born in Malaya. The young men on Pal Melayu have formed exclusive groups such as Kuzu and Band for which a regular subscription has to be paid. The cleavage might generate a conflict as in a case where the old-timers favoured the celebration of a traditional festival whereas the majority of youth wanted a secular festival. The management of public funds on the estate then requires the accommodation of these opposed interests.

Savings and Credit:

On Pal Melayu, savings are mainly related to consumption rather than to capital formation. Where the latter is the motive behind savings, we speak of entrepreneurship in the 'lines'. The 'line' entrepreneurs should be distinguished from the majority - the proletariat. Both entrepreneurs and proletariat participate in common saving mechanisms. But in order to emphasise the fact that only some people derive from these mechanisms savings which they invest, it is better to speak of them as mechanisms for both

savings and credits. The distinction between the two categories of people in relation to savings will become clearer as we proceed.

More specifically the saving mechanisms on Pal Melayu have grown in response to a need common to all estate workers, namely the temporal adjustment of regular wages with irregular expenses. Cash surplus is also needed in each household for conspicuous expenditure on ritual and other items. At present no commercial banking facilities are available within a radius of thirty miles from Pal Melayu and if the experience of post office savings services is any indication, such facilities are unlikely to prove attractive to estate workers if and when they are introduced. The post office banking facilities are both physically and culturally remote. Besides being impersonal and difficult to operate they do not derive from traditional system of reciprocity, nor do they offer the material advantage provided by other arrangements that we shall describe.

Much of the savings on Pal Melayu are carried out through the working of cittu groups[4] and purchases of jewellery.

Jewellery.

Women in every single household on the estate have had jewellery at one time or another and there are hardly any even now

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4 The literature on these and similar arrangements, under different rubrics, has accumulated in recent years. For the latest systematic and comprehensive survey see Ardener 1964: 201-209.

without at least small amount of it. Gold ornaments figure at every important life cycle ritual. At the engagement ceremony a daughter is given away for gold (see Appendix V, p. 549 ). An oath taken by touching gold is very sacrosanct. The buying of gold ornaments is thus a traditional Tamil activity. On Pal Melayu some jewellery is bought from the estate goldsmith, usually by placing orders and depositing part of the price. Nevertheless, not everyone who places an order is able to pay a deposit. Therefore, the estate jeweller has to put his own capital in making the jewellery. Conversations with Thangavelu jeweller on Pal Melayu revealed that he owns limited capital for investment; borrowing from moneylenders would involve him in the payment of exhorbitant interest. He can, therefore, accept only a few orders at one time and these only from people who can pay in cash, even if they do not make a deposit. Owing to his difficulty the community goldsmith on Pal Melayu combines his own business with doing paid work for town jewellers. Thangavelu's scarcity of capital has also attracted directly more wealthy Indian jewellers from towns. They are able to supply jewellery on terms that are more favourable to buyers on Pal Melayu. Firstly, they do not insist on the payment of deposit. Secondly, they even supply jewellery on hire purchase terms. The amount of monthly instalment is fixed by the jeweller. The buyer has to arrange for guarantors acceptable to the jeweller. The guarantors stand surety for the buyer and agree to pay from their own pockets

in case of non-payment in any month. Guarantors are relatively easy to find because men belonging to the same saving groups often have exact knowledge of one another's finances. Such men are often ready to help one another, thus forming a sort of a league for mutual help. Thirdly, town jewellers enjoy more popularity in the 'lines' because their home visits confer honor on estate workers. These jewellers are also better salesmen, visiting the 'lines' equipped with illustrated catalogues of latest jewellery, set in vogue by and named after popular Tamil film actresses.

The mode of payment for jewellery is often determined by the purpose for which it is needed. Purchase of jewellery for a son's marriage or even for the puberty ceremony of a sister's daughter can be planned well in advance. An occasion such as marriage requires a sum much larger than what is needed to buy only jewellery. Therefore, the likelihood of cash payment is increased. The cash may be obtained by any other mechanism of saving. On the other hand, at times the need for jewellery may arise more unexpectedly as when a child's leg is paralysed and the grandmother takes a vow to offer a gold replica of the leg to a certain deity within a few days time. In such a case the buyer has to seek credit from the jeweller. Occasionally, however, one finds a person already in urgent need of cash also buying jewellery on credit. With this jewellery as pledge he obtains a loan from the pawn shop in Bintang Emas. But this

course is open only to someone who expects to receive a large lump sum of cash in the near future - as through a cittu. With this money he can redeem the jewellery from the pawn shop and at! the same time pay the jeweller's bill. Thus, in the long run, by buying jewellery on credit rather than obtaining a loan from a money-lender the man gains in two ways :-

(i) he earns the difference between the higher rate of interest charged by the money-lender and the lower rate charged by the pawn shop;

(ii) in this process he converts a portion of his cash savings into jewellery - a 'soft' saving into a 'hard' one. The latter is more conducive to thrift.

For the majority of workers on Pal Melayu jewellery serves its prime economic purpose as a pledge against a loan from the pawn shop. The pawn shop is a government licensed establishment for money-lending. The pledge prescribed by the pawn shop is one sovereign per $25 or part thereof. The time for redemption is six months. A period of grace of one week is permitted after six months. Then the jewellery is sold either by auction or shop sale. The jewellery deposited there is safe because a detailed official receipt is issued to the pawner; and the rate of interest, which is always lower than that of a money-lender, is fixed. In the pawn shop at Bintang Emas money is lent at the following rate of interest :-

| | | Annual rate of interest |
|---|---|---|
| $1 to $10 | 4 cents per dollar per month | 48% |
| $11 to $49 | 2½ " " " " " | 36% |
| $50 to $1000 | 2 " " " " " | 24% |

It was always difficult to find out the interest charged by money-lenders; firstly, because it fluctuated widely from time to time and from borrower to borrower, and secondly, because the lender and the borrower gave different versions - with the former giving a lower figure than the latter. I suppose we shall be justified in placing the range between 120% and 24% per annum. The latter rate, a trusted informant confided to me, was charged only from kinsmen.

A man obtains a loan from the pawn shop under a variety of circumstances. In every case he must seek the consent of the woman to whom the jewellery belongs. If the purpose of the loan is known to her, she usually does not raise any objection. But ordinarily a woman refuses to part with her jewellery if the husband fails to take her into his confidence. The man then may try to take the jewellery away without her consent. Quarrels frequently arise between husband and wife or son and mother over precisely this issue. The woman charges the man with theft. It may lead to separation.

In one case a young man pawned his wife's gold ring. When the wife discovered this, she considered the matter to be serious and asked her husband to explain. The husband gave a story but she refused to believe it. Rumours had reached her

ears about illegitimate sex relations between her husband and a Paraiyan woman and the additional detail that an abortionist's services had been paid for by her husband sparked off a quarrel. Her public accusation against the husband was not that he had had illegitimate relations with another woman but that he had stolen her jewellery to pay for the abortion. In this particular case, the woman was handicapped, being a bride from India. Her widowed mother-in-law supported her but in the absence of male support she could make no move to secure redress from the community panchayat.

The above instance shows that while considering the economic functions of jewellery its social and psychological value should not be underestimated. This is also revealed on a festival like Tipavali when there is a brisk two-way trading of jewellery between 'lines' and the pawn shop. Every household head is goaded by the women members of the family to bring jewellery back for a fine display on the big day. On the other hand, less fortunate people may have problems in raising sufficient cash for such items as sugar and meat. Such people are pitied by others and they pity themselves.

Finally, we may consider those few people in the labour 'lines' who use their jewellery either for capital investment in India or for earning credit in Malaya. Conspicuous in the first category are two old ladies - ex-estate workers on Pal Melayu - who keep shuttling to and fro between India and Malaya.

Some members of their families are land-owning agriculturalists in India and others are estate workers on Pal Melayu. During each trip from Malaya to India they carry on their persons large quantities of gold jewellery. In a letter to her brother in India to whose daughter she wanted to marry one of her sons, one of these ladies wrote, "I have made jewels of fifteen sovereigns for your daughter. Do not give her in marriage to anyone. I want to make the alliance and we will talk about it personally".[5] Besides being used to secure a bride from India, gold is sold in India and yields one-and-a-half to two times its price in Malaya. Often this money is invested in buying land or advanced agricultural equipment. The fact that some family groups returning to India after retirement on the estate carry substantial savings in the form of gold jewellery has become well known among villagers in India. In one case that came to my notice a village official used unfair means to extort money from a Malayan repatriate when she tried to make a chain from the gold she had brought from Malaya.[6]

On Pal Melayu related or friendly families may help one another out with jewellery when cash is needed for a celebration.

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5 Letter to Gopal Gaundar, Chennasamuthiram, from Suppu, Pal Melayu, August, 1952.

6 Letter to Suppu, Chennasamuthiram, from Ranganathan, Pal Melayu, August, 1953.

In the majority of such cases the lender has no expectation of monetary gain from the borrower. In some cases, however, there is clear evidence that jewellery is lent interest-free by a money-lender in the hope of making the borrower his future client. Often it is a way in which a rich person extends his money-lending activities among poor and needy kinsmen.

Cittu.

Within the first few days of my investigations on Pal Melayu, I came across the mention of cittu. From then on it was to be a term heard as frequently as work (vēlai), clerk (kirani), etc. and I gradually realised how important it was in the life in the 'lines'.

A cittu is a savings-group comprising members who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given, in whole or in part, to each contributor in rotation.[7] At the time I began taking a census there were at least a dozen cittu in operation on Division I alone and practically 85% of the household heads were members of one or more such groups. The majority of the remaining 15% had at one time or another been members of cittu and this applied even to the newcomers, i.e. those who had joined Pal Melayu from another estate. Enquiries on rubber estates throughout the west coast region of Malaya

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7 I have adopted Ardener's definition (Ardener 1964:201) but changed its first part to suit the facts of this arrangement on Pal Melayu.

revealed that cittu was equally pervasive in all the labour 'lines' with Tamil residents.

Before coming to the details of cittu on Pal Melayu one may gain in clarity by stating its most rudimentary form. As a statement of the model, Ardener's succinct description is applicable to the cittu on Pal Melayu: "Ten men meet every month and contribute one shilling each to a fund which is straight away handed over to one of their members. The following month another member receives the fund and so it continued, members receiving in rotation, until at the end of ten months, each member will have put in ten shillings and received ten shillings....The first member to receive the fund becomes a debtor to all the other members and remains one until the last contribution has been made; the last member to receive it becomes creditor to all the members throughout; while the other eight members move in turn from being creditors to debtors.... The advantages to all members are not equal. Some of the most important differences between (saving-groups) are in the ways in which the advantages and disadvantages are distributed or balanced between members." (Ardener 1964:201-202). One can therefore isolate three elements in cittu: regularity, rotation and debtor-creditor relationships among participants.

Linguistically, two forms of cittu are distinguished by the people - known as cittu by auction (ēla-c-cīṭṭu) and cittu by lot (kulukka-c-cīṭṭu). These refer to two different arrangements

by which the order of rotation is determined, viz. auction in the former and lottery in the latter (see Appendix VI, pp. 568-576).

As said in the model statement, the advantages from a cittu are not equally distributed among all members. This is certainly true of ela-c-cittu on Pal Melayu. Generally speaking those who receive the fund early lose while those who receive it later gain. At the outset it must be admitted that all early recipients do gain in one way, i.e. they are able to get money with little delay in the hour of maximum need. Their economic disadvantage can be expressed in two ways :-

(i) early recipients receive smaller funds than later recipients;

(ii) at the end of the cycle some of the earlier recipients may find that the total sum received by them (as fund and discount) has been less than their total contribution.

It is in trying to account for these two results of a completed cycle of ela-c-cittu that one begins to recognise its character as a 'credit association' in which some members pay, while others receive, an interest.

To begin with the first proposition, the smaller funds of early recipients are directly related to the larger number of needy bidders and higher bids during the early stages of cycle. The higher the bid, the lesser is the fund. Towards the later stages of the cycle, on the other hand, there are not as many

contenders for the fund as there were at the beginning. Usually those who have waited for funds for many months can afford to wait a couple or three months more. The result is that the last two or three recipients of the cittu reach agreement on the order of receiving a fund. There may be little or no bidding at all. Low bids will mean larger funds and reduced discounts. Contributions from members, the majority of whom have already received their funds and who cannot participate in bidding, will rise. Thus in a way, the early recipients will pay interest to the later recipients. The second proposition, that some of the early recipients may find their contributions to have been in excess of the amount received, is also explained by the above stated mechanism of the distribution of advantages and disadvantages.

The chief motive behind a kulukka-c-cittu is often that of having fun and excitement from a game of chance. This is specially true of the low denomination cittu, like those made up of contributions as low as $1.00 per head. As in ela-c-cittu, here also the organiser gets the first fund. The order of receiving funds for other members is determined by chance. In object-cittu such as the ones organised for supplying furniture, gold chains or sewing machines to the members, the profits of their respective organisers accrue from a special discount which each organiser receives from the seller on goods bought in large numbers.

Cittu is as integral a part of the economic life of labourers on Pal Melayu as wage-earning. The earlier discussion of expenditure shows clearly that people on the estate need to spread their purchasing power over time. In other words, to bring about an adjustment between wage-earning and spending they need to withhold part of their monthly wages. The cittu provides the ideal answer to this need.

That is the theory; the reality is much more complex. The dynamics of ela-c-cittu show that debtor-creditor relationships among members is built into the system. It means that in a completed cittu cycle at least as many members if not more pay interest as receive it. Bids are often high and with the exception of those towards the bottom of the list of recipients most of the members receive small funds. These features of ela-c-cittu on Pal Melayu are related to a fundamental characteristic of spending behaviour on Pal Melayu, namely that people spend before they save. This in turn is made possible by the ease with which money can be borrowed and goods obtained on credit. Nevertheless, not all goods can be obtained on credit nor money loaned for very long periods. There is thus always a need for cash for current expenditure as well as for the repayment of loans, especially those obtained by pawning jewellery. If, as is the situation on Pal Melayu, many people wish to obtain their cittu funds urgently, bidding will naturally be high and individual profits from the cittu will be very

unevenly distributed among earlier and later recipients of the fund. These conditions give greater opportunity to entrepreneurs for strategic participation in cittu and the gulf between those who participate in the cittu with advantage (interest-takers) and those who participate at a disadvantage (interest-losers) widens. The only advantage which the interest-losing early recipients of funds might derive is that they may be able to redeem jewellery from the pawn shop or to pay a shopkeeper for goods already obtained on credit. Usually there is no net economic advantage in this. As shall be shown later, in the hands of entrepreneurs, cittu becomes a means of profiteering at the expense of the majority of the labourers, the proletariat.

It is important to note, however, that disadvantageous participation in cittu is not obvious to the majority of labourers and that by the people themselves cittu is always hailed as a saving-device and not as a 'rotating credit association'. Even those who are able to see through the mechanism and comment bitterly on the exploitation by profiteers have, in the end, a good word for the cittu. After all, it is something which enables them to save. In several group discussions, I found great difficulty in making the switch over from cittu to banking facilities. Most of the discussants failed to appreciate the connection between the two, so very habituated had they become to the credit-saving system on the 'lines'.

The pervasiveness of cittu on Pal Melayu may be explained in terms of an interaction between two main forces. Firstly, it conforms with the traditional patterns of reciprocity as exemplified in ritual prestations - cir and moy. We have been able to show the commercialisation of the kinship values on Pal Melayu. Reciprocity has been transformed into repayment (see Appendix V, pp. 560-567). Cittu, understood by the people as a system of mutual assistance, falls into line with moy and cir. Secondly, given the inevitability of credit born out of their inability to raise large sums except at exhorbitant rates of interest, cittu appears as a particularly apt means of repaying debts. It possesses the great merit of making the fund available to any member no matter how few contributions he may have paid. Moreover, cittu contributions are linked to pay-days which makes the task of self-discipline easier for the contributor. Those who may be contributing to one or more cittu every month get used to calculating their monthly earnings, available for regular cash expenditure, minus the cittu contribution. Last but not the least, cittu as a form of raising capital conforms with the egalitarian norm of the proletariat. With relatively minor exceptions, all those who participate in a cittu belong to the same social class. The procedures are democratically constituted, meetings take place in the 'lines' and I never noticed a feeling of constraint on the part of any members, however needy, in approaching the organiser

for clarification on a matter of doubt. It is a community mechanism *par excellence* since membership cuts across caste or income distinctions.

## Economic Stratification - Credit and Debt; Entrepreneurs and Proletariat.

All labourers on Pal Melayu own jewellery and most of them join cittu. But the amount of jewellery owned by individuals and families differs just as household heads participate with differential advantages in cittu. Further, differences between individuals and families in the amount of jewellery owned and advantageous and disadvantageous participation in cittu persist over time. Thus, if one examines a number of completed cittu records on Pal Melayu, Division I, the names of a few individuals would be found to occur at the bottom of all lists of recipients. Similarly, some people will be found obtaining funds very early in the cycle of many different cittu. Differential ownership of jewellery and participation in cittu are but two manifestations of the economic stratification of estate labourers into relatively rich and poor economic categories. This economic inequality coexists with the type of social equality mentioned earlier, namely that all residents in the 'lines' are wage labourers, share a common pattern of expenditure and, generally, a common style of life. The difference is brought about by the manner in which people handle their cash earnings. The rich on Pal Melayu are those who do not only work for money but also

know how to make money work. The rest - the majority - constitute the proletariat. The important point about economic organisation in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu is that entrepreneurs and proletariat form a single little community and participate in common arrangements for savings and credit. The dynamics of economic stratification in the 'lines' can, therefore, be understood in terms of the relationship which estate workers have with one another in these institutionalised systems of savings and credit. In these systems the entrepreneurs are creditors while the proletariat are debtors. The former gain the interest which the latter lose.

Entrepreneurs.

The Tamil shorthand term for entrepreneurship on Pal Melayu is 'rolapaṇam' for which the closest English equivalent is 'money-rolling'. Money-rolling consists of making money yield more money. The reward of entrepreneurship is profit received in the form of interest on cash. But all cash, as principal and as interest, must be kept in circulation. It should be invested again and again and more interest earned. The two major attributes of those said to be most successful entrepreneurs are the skilful handling of cash and the qualities of a broker. From the various examples of money-rolling by people on Pal Melayu, it is possible to distinguish three kinds :-

(i) cittu organisation and participation;

(ii) money-lending;

(iii) creation of patron-client ties with other labourers in the 'lines'.

The essence of money-rolling lies in the skilful combination of these three. We need not repeat what has been said already about the professional cittu organisers and kanganies who combine money-lending and cittu. It is noteworthy that these very persons - professional organisers and kanganies - also join other people's cittu, earning high interest. Of professional cittu organisation, advantageous cittu participation and money-lending all combinations are found. It is an observed fact that some of the recruiting kanganies of the pre-war period and other labourers who have definite stakes in India are among the most successful entrepreneurs. Many of them have established their patronage over others. Their sphere of influence, in terms of their clientele, often shows a similarity. It includes kinsmen, fellow-villagers and men of the same caste. In the case of kanganies, membership of the gang often supplements, and at times substitutes for, the bonds of affiliation between patron and clients.

Shopkeepers.

In a discussion of economic stratification in the 'lines' it is important to examine the role of the bigger entrepreneurs who are on the margin of the estate community, as it were. A characteristic of labourers on Pal Melayu, both proletariat and 'line' entrepreneurs, is that they buy most of their necessities

from stores on credit. As noted earlier, these stores on Pal Melayu are run by a Chinese shopkeeper and a Malabari Muslim (Kaka). Both these shopkeepers play vital roles in the economy of the 'lines' - not only as suppliers of goods on credit but also as cittu organisers and business partners of 'line' entrepreneurs. In the last mentioned role, the shopkeepers borrow money from 'line' entrepreneurs. The Malabari Muslim often pays the loan, with interest, to the 'line' entrepreneurs' nominees in India.

From the point of view of his entrepreneurship, we may ask the question: What does the shopkeeper gain by supplying goods on credit? There are at least four clear advantages :-

(1) He is able to secure regular customers. There are other devices used by the shopkeepers to oblige their regular customers such as annual distributions of free gifts of sari, footwear, soaps, etc.

(2) At least the labourers feel that the shopkeeper charges a few cents extra on things which are not paid for in cash. Possibly this increases profits from sales on credit.

(3) The shopkeeper has a very effective device for getting the principal as well as the interest back from a person on whom debts have accumulated. This is by forcing such a debtor to join in a cittu. A cittu organised by either of the shopkeepers is always of

high denomination and includes a good number of 'line' entrepreneurs. The presence of the poor debtors in such a group serves as a bait to attract richer members who all look forward to having a share of the high interest that will inevitably be paid by the poor debtors.

(4) Often an estate worker who is the shopkeeper's business partner (see p. 325) agrees to stand surety for the debtor. The guarantor is often a 'line' entrepreneur and a patron of the man whom he has introduced to the shopkeeper. This gives the shopkeeper an opportunity to oblige the 'line' entrepreneur.

However, the shopkeeper does not possess an unlimited capacity to supply goods on credit. In fact, like 'line' entrepreneurs, he too invests most of his cash in money-lending. That he is able to supply goods on credit at all is related to the fact that he himself buys from bigger stockists on credit. It is possible that his suppliers too may have obtained goods on credit from the importer and the importer from the exporter. Burton Benedict has described this system for Mauritius and the same holds true for Malaya (Benedict 1958:216). The effect of this process at each stage is to restrict the size of the business (Ward 1960). On Pal Melayu itself, there are two stores (and recently a third) of identical size which supply

goods on credit. Even these are not able to supply all the credit needs of the buyers, with the result that a large number of workers from Pal Melayu regularly get goods on credit from at least half a dozen similar stores in Bintang Emas.

The small shopkeepers on Pal Melayu find money-lending more profitable than actual shopkeeping and the latter is often used as a bait to attract more cash from labourers in order to lend more. Through their contacts with the town suppliers of goods and in their particular community associations, the Chinese and Kaka shopkeepers meet compatriots in need of finance. By virtue of these communications with other businessmen the shopkeepers are able to play the role of broker in towns, something normally beyond the ken of a 'line' entrepreneur.

The money-lending activities of the Kaka shopkeeper have an added 'Indian' dimension. An estate worker with substantial savings which he wishes to invest in his village in India hands them over to the Kaka. The latter promises to pay the money in rupees to the worker's nominee in the Indian village. The same function can be performed, and is indeed performed, by post offices and commercial banks but the rate of exchange offered by the Kaka is better than the official rate. While the official rate is about Rs 1.50 per Malayan dollar, the Kaka offers the 'black market' rate of Rs 2 per Malayan dollar. He may pay an even higher rate, depending upon how profitable it is for him to have more dollars for some immediate use. In fact the system is

nothing more than this. The rich estate worker lends money to the Kaka and the Kaka lends it to other needy small businessmen. In the first transaction the Kaka pays interest, in the second he receives interest. His profit accrues from two factors:

(1) He receives more interest than he pays. Usually the difference is of 24% per annum;

(2) He is able to repay his money-lenders in India in rupees.

This is made possible by the fact that the Kaka's Malayan business has its counterpart in his village in India. Knowledgeable people, such as those estate workers who have been to the Kaka's village in India, claim that he has a thriving business and vast properties there. Munusamy washerman of Pal Melayu described him as a capitalist (parappurāja). At least one member of the staff testified to the truth of this statement adding that he himself had been sending money to his village through Kaka. It is my guess - although for obvious reasons verification was not possible - that the Kaka is able to pay a higher than the official rate of exchange on dollars received by him in Malaya for rupees in India because :-

(a) He may be saving tax on profits both in India and Malaya. An important element in Kaka's monetary transaction with estate workers and their nominees in India, as well as with the borrowers in Malaya, is that there are no documents. Lending and borrowing is arranged by word

of mouth. Estate workers who have to write to their kinsmen in India about receiving payment from the Kaka use codes. In the beginning I was baffled by these code messages unexpectedly appearing in otherwise meaningful letters (in Tamil) as so many noughts and crosses or letters in Roman script.

(b) He may be buying smuggled Indian money (rupees) cheaply in Singapore for re-exporting it to his money-lenders' nominees in India. Any Indian tourist in Singapore is likely to be confronted by illegal money-changers. They operate at all tourist shopping centres, at Raffles Place generally and especially in Change Alley.

The majority of the money-changers whom I saw in Singapore were Indian Muslims from Malabar and Madras. The maximum price they offered for Indian Rs 100/- was $40.00, i.e. at a rate more than 20% below the official rate of exchange. They were able to carry on a brisk trade because the Indian Government permits only a very small amount of foreign exchange to Indian travellers going abroad while many Indian tourists attracted by the free port of Singapore like to have more money to spend. These tourists smuggle Indian currency into Singapore and exchange it for Malayan dollars at whatever rate is available. The estate Kaka's agents could also conceivably be in this crowd of money-changers.

In their relationship to the shopkeepers, all estate workers who obtain goods on credit from the shop fall into two categories:-

(1) Those who are only debtors; and

(2) Those who are debtors (for goods) but also money-lenders.

The distinction follows the line of cleavage between proletariat and 'line' entrepreneurs. The majority of estate workers find themselves in a position of permanent disadvantage in the various savings-mechanisms in the community and their indebtedness to the shops is in conformity with their general poor status. The 'line' entrepreneurs obtain things on credit not because they lack capital but because, like the shopkeeper himself, they have invested all their ready cash to earn more interest. One of the modes of investment is to lend money to shopkeepers either by joining cittu launched by them or, as with the Kaka, lending him their savings to be recovered with interest in India. It is in this sense that the debtor-cum-money-lender estate worker ('line' entrepreneur) is sometimes spoken of as the shopkeeper's business partner. Somewhat crudely stated, a result of the presence of shopkeeper businessmen on economic stratification in the labour 'lines' is to make the rich richer and the poor poorer.

The Proletariat.

The foregoing discussion of the role of the entrepreneur in the economy of the 'lines' shows the interlocking nature of various savings-credit mechanisms. An entrepreneur makes his profit by combining advantages from each of these mechanisms. He is undoubtedly an interested party in securing the participation

of the majority of the estate workers. He does so by patronising certain members of the community who thus become his clients. But in order to survive effectively in the 'lines' these mechanisms must have a functional value for the workers themselves.

Why do these people, who do not even plan to increase profits by earning high interest, join the cittu, borrow money and obtain credit from the shops? In the large majority of cases they have no other way out, i.e. they must join one or more of these arrangements for their sheer physical survival. The inevitability of their participation is generally not a function of their poorer earnings though this may sometimes be the case. Nor can it be explained in terms of expenditure alone, for there are others in the community who may spend the same amount without being the losing partners in the saving-credit mechanisms. Their losing partnership is often attributed to lack of sophistication in handling cash, reflected in maladjustment between earnings, spending and saving. For them at any rate savings can become the means of obtaining credit, a fact which applies to the majority of participants in ela-c-cittu and to all those who obtain credit from the shop without being money-lenders.

At the time of my fieldwork, a few families did not participate in any of these mechanisms. One of these was the family of my neighbour Abbu driver (see Appendix III, pp. 490-497). Abbu and his wife earn about $200.00 monthly. Their regular monthly expenditure could broadly be listed as follows :-

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Alcoholic drinks for head and his wife | ₵90 |
| 2. | Food | ₵90 |
| 3. | Schooling of children | ₵10 |
| 4. | Miscellaneous | ₵10 |
| | TOTAL : | ₵200 |

The family budget is very tight and any rise in 'incidental' expenses leads to curtailment on items (2) and (3). There is little scope for reduction in the amount spent on drink as both husband and wife are addicted to alcohol. Abbu finds the payment of cash for food, instead of obtaining it on credit, distinctly onerous but this is a self-imposed discipline or, rather, one imposed on him by his wife. Sometimes food rations run out before pay-day and Abbu then approaches friends and neighbours (including the ethnographer) for small loans. In order that these loans may again be available next month, Abbu repays his lenders on the pay-day itself. It is important to note, however, that in the process of arriving at this state, Abbu has had to part for good with all his jewellery. Moreover, he is fortunate in not having to incur any large expenses up till now. It is likely that in Abbu's household the present pattern of cash dealings will be retained for some more time to come. In fact, when a son and a daughter become earning members of the household, there will be more money to spend. Perhaps he will hold the puberty ritual for his daughter and the ear-boring ceremony for his younger son.[8]

8 These life cycle rituals are also described in Appendix V, pp.541-546.

What does the future hold for Abbu? There is little likelihood that he will put his money in cittu and start saving the surplus. Other uses for money will be found such as buying a radio or another bicycle. Both these commodities can be bought on hire purchase. Perhaps he will make some jewellery as he did on winning $600 in an Ekor lottery a year ago. A need for great expenditure is, however, likely to arise within the next five years, for instance at his eldest son Chandiran's marriage. Like all fathers do on the eve of their son's marriage, Abbu will gather money from all possible sources. He will borrow money and pawn the jewellery. Like most members of the proletariat on Pal Melayu he would not start saving for the marriage by joining a cittu a year or more in advance. Debts will accumulate but Abbu will rest assured with the expectation of repaying all creditors from the increased earnings made possible by the daughter-in-law's job on the estate. In actual fact, marriage expenses will outlast the ceremony and Abbu and his son, with their wives, will begin depositing their earnings in cittu. There will not be enough cash to buy food and other essentials so that credit will have to be taken from one or more of the shops. If, in the meantime, Chandiran decides to separate, Abbu will be left alone to repay his creditors from his and his wife's earnings. When credit in the Kaka and/or Chinese shops will reach a certain limit, pressure will be put on him, as on all non-money-lender debtors, to settle accounts.

Threatened with the stoppage of essential supplies Abbu will borrow more money. The effect would be his eventual inclusion into the ranks of those who participate in community credit-saving arrangements at a regular disadvantage. Perhaps in this period Abbu will win another Ekor or a younger son may become a Tamil school teacher but it will be a long time, if at all, before Abbu's debts are paid off.

These steps in Abbu's likely story have been constructed from known cases. It can be safely said that the majority of estate workers have been drawn into savings-credit arrangements in roughly the manner described. The sequence of steps, the needs and the amounts involved have, of course, varied in each case.

Finally, in the light of the people's differential participation in savings and credit mechanisms on Pal Melayu, we may return to the question raised earlier on, namely the relationship between earnings from the estate and economic status. More specifically, to what extent are a person's chances of becoming a 'line' entrepreneur dependent upon his higher earnings from the estate? Conversely, what is the correlation between proletariat status and lower earnings? It may perhaps justifiably be said that a person's higher occupational status as a kangany is often conducive to his role as an entrepreneur. But except in the case of pre-war kanganies like Ranganathan who earned large sums of money as labour recruiters, present-day kanganies do not

earn very much more than tappers (see pp. 286-287). Thus, more than higher earnings, it is still the kangany's control over a gang of labourers which may mark him out as a potential 'line' entrepreneur. Moreover, household income on Pal Melayu is not dependent upon the earnings of the head or any one member. As shown earlier (p. 286 ) a crucial variable in the total earnings of a household is the number of economically active members in it. Thus, to take a single example, a household with one kangany and one tapper earns lesser than another with two weeders, one tapper and a 'ganti' tapper.

In order to examine the correlation between earnings and entrepreneur-proletariat status dichotomy on Pal Melayu, we may consider the income-categories of Table 16 on page 285. What do we find? None of the three households of pensioners in category A belongs to the entrepreneur class. But significantly enough, nor do any of the four households in category D qualify as entrepreneurs! The latter enjoy the reputation of being well-to-do but that is all. On the other hand, all the entrepreneurs belong to categories B and C and the majority to category B. As an illustration of the relative independence of 'line' entrepreneurship from higher earnings on the estate and to highlight some of the other attributes needed for that role, we shall consider two cases. Munian tapper is a successful 'line' entrepreneur. He is the head of a household which belongs to the income category B. Rangan kangany is a proletariat

although he heads a household belonging to the income category C.

Munian tapper:

Munian is the organiser of a large number of cittu. He has found a secure investment for the money he earns as a 'line' entrepreneur. A few years ago his father went back to India and bought four acres of land in his natal village. His son Munian has been sending money through Kaka and money and jewellery through his mother Pattu who keeps travelling between India and Malaya almost every year. With the money Munian's father has been able to instal a pump-set on his land and through improved irrigation of fields to augment the produce from cultivation. Moreover, Pattu who had had a penchant for small money-lending on Pal Melayu has begun practising it on a bigger scale in India. Thus Munian is in constant need of cash to practise money-lending himself and to remit money to India. Organisation of cittu is an effective device of obtaining a ready supply of cash.

Munian's cash dealings with the cittu members, the Kaka and parents demand a good deal of organisational skill and manipulation. As an example of the latter, he once sent all the monthly cittu collections to India and to avoid the recipients of the fund went away on a fortnight's trip to a relative's house on another estate. By the time he came back, he was able to arrange sufficient cash from the Kaka and other borrowers to enable him to pay off the fund.

In some respects Munian's money-rolling techniques are the shopkeepers' tactics in miniature. The only difference is that while Kaka and the Chinese shopkeepers combine cittu with both money-lending and credit, Munian is able to combine it only with money-lending. That is how he is able to enrol members for his cittu. Munian's strategy consists of a few standard moves: he marks out someone who can be persuaded to buy a car, a radio or similar expensive item; Munian then finances his purchase; finally, repayment of debt from the 'client' is secured by enrolling him in a 'Munian cittu'. Often this is combined with general patronage which includes introducing the client to the Kaka or the Chinese shopkeeper for supplying goods on credit. For Munian, this becomes, in addition, a means of cementing his own ties with the shopkeeper concerned.

Rangan kangany:

Before the marriage of his eldest son, Kannan, Rangan kangany was a well-to-do man though never an entrepreneur. There were four wage-earners in his household of six members. Even at that time, however, the individual earnings of Rangan were spent on drink more or less after the pattern in Abbu's household. Substantial debts began to accumulate as Rangan began preparing for Kannan's marriage. After Kannan's marriage, Kannan's wife also became an earning member of the household. But the addition was soon countered by the retirement of Amirtham. To repay their debts, both father and son joined cittu; at the same time, however, Rangan continued to spend heavily on drink. In fact,

even Kannan followed in his father's footsteps and took to regular drinking. The household expenditure was met with the wages of Kannan's wife and younger brother. As Kannan's cittu neared completion, Rangan expected him to join yet another one to repay the still outstanding debts; on the other hand, the newly married son decided to separate from his father's household. To begin with, Kannan made it a practice to obtain his own and his wife's wages and disappear from Pal Melayu for a few days after the pay-day. During her husband's absence, Kannan's wife often moved to her mother's brother's household, also on the same Division of Pal Melayu. This was the phase of father-son relationship in its economic context when I first knew Rangan's family. Forced in a situation of having to pay off all debts single-handed, Rangan might have been expected to cut expenditure on drink but this was a constant tussle. The family suffered owing to reduced rations and its reputation suffered through the criticisms of creditors. Rangan's personal suffering was acute owing to the lack of money to buy drink. In a fit of desperation he once got heavily drunk on a pay-day and attempted suicide. There were serious quarrels, even exchange of blows, between him and Kannan. It is obvious that at the root of all this trouble lay economic factors; not lower earnings but mismanaged ones. Shortly before I left Pal Melayu at the end of 1963, Kannan had obtained a separate 'line' in the Factory Division. This put an end to the immediate

suffering brought by everyday quarrels in the household. Nevertheless, the proletariat status of this kangany persists and is likely to continue for a long time.

Summary and Conclusion:

Economic organisation in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu then is characterised by a combination of equality and inequality. Equality refers to common dependence on earnings from work on the estate and a common pattern of expenditure. The residents in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu share these characteristics with plantation workers elsewhere described as the proletariat. Yet, people possess unequal degrees of skill in handling their finances. Entrepreneurship thus brings about a stratification of the community into rich and poor. Since all estate workers participate in common arrangements of savings and credit, the analysis of relationships among participants in these systems helps us to understand the institutional basis of economic stratification in the labour 'lines'.

The savings-credit mechanisms on the estate are related to, on the one hand, the needs of a community of people earning small though regular cash wages and on the other hand, to traditional systems of mutual assistance in Tamil society. There is a complex interlocking of savings and borrowing in these systems. It is important to realise that in the value-system of the people of Pal Melayu these systems are looked upon primarily as devices

for helping one another out in time of need. That they help to sustain stratification in the community is either not realised or underplayed. The values of the proletariat apply equally to the economic proletariat as well as to the 'line' entrepreneurs. One could state the economic organisation on Pal Melayu in dialectical terms: traditional and proletarian values lead to systems of mutual assistance; these systems create or sustain class distinctions. The paradox is resolved if it is realised that entrepreneurs enter these systems as well as the needy ones.

## CHAPTER SIX

## SOCIAL STRATIFICATION AND POLITICAL PROCESS.

Implicit in our delineation of the plantation institution in earlier chapters has been a concern with both social stratification and political process. We had noted two overlapping modes of social stratification on Pal Melayu, namely status-groups and bureaucratic hierarchy. Political process was understood in terms of role-playing by members of the official hierarchy (mainly kangany, head kangany and kirani) in certain group processes in the labouring community. The role-playing of these officials followed on their role definition by the management. Generally speaking, in the conduct of the governmental process on Pal Melayu before the Second World War administrative authority and political power were concentrated in the hands of a few 'higher participants' of the total institution.[1] The kangany and the head kangany - occupying an intercalary position between the higher and lower participants - facilitated the conduct of the political process in accordance with the management goals. During the post-war period changes in the external political system necessitated a reorganisation of roles and functions in the bureaucracy and a redefinition of the management ideology. It

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1 The analytical distinction between 'administration' and 'political system' aspects of the governmental process is similar to that suggested by M.G. Smith (Smith 1956:54).

led to an increasing, though by no means total, separation between authority and power on the estate. Stated in abstract terms, the theme of this chapter is to analyse, in the light of the changing character of the governmental process on Pal Melayu, the nature of social stratification and political process and the inter-relationship between them at the present day.

- (1) -

Social stratification on Pal Melayu is raised on the occupational hierarchy. However, it no longer seems possible to speak of social stratification on Pal Melayu in terms of either status-groups or classes. In fact, the social status of occupational groups on Pal Melayu comprises elements denoted by both these ideal-typical concepts of Max Weber (Weber 1958:180-194). To speak of status-groups alone is to exaggerate the closeness of strata, whereas we propose to show that individual mobility from the lowest to the next higher stratum may become possible in the near future. Nor is the stratification on Pal Melayu to be understood in terms of an 'estate system' (Marshall 1963:183-184). The word status, in the context of an estate system, is used to denote membership of a group carrying distinctive rights or duties, capacities or incapacities, determined or upheld by public law. Even if the politico-legal

structure of pre-war Malaya provided negative sanctions to uphold such a system,[2] constitutional changes in the post-war period culminating in the declaration of the present Constitution on 31st August, 1957, have removed the legal basis for discrimination among citizens of Malaya represented on the occupational hierarchy of Pal Melayu. On the other hand, the fact that social stratification on Pal Melayu still rests on the occupational hierarchy of the industrial subsystem suggests that a social class system in the sense of a status-hierarchy determined by the social evaluation of stratified roles in the productional organisation describes the situation. We shall speak of social stratification on Pal Melayu in the sense of a hierarchy of social classes based on evaluative criteria concerning the economic and 'prestige' or 'honour' ranks of the members.

In the context of the Pal Melayu social field, we may speak of the internal and external systems of social stratification. The internal system of stratification is co-terminus with the industrial subsystem. In other words, the occupational stratification on the estate provides the framework for social classes. The external system refers to a social class system

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2 I have in mind here one of the general conditions mentioned by Wolf and Mintz for the development of the hacienda and the plantation (Wolf and Mintz 1957:385-386). The colonial politico-legal structure of pre-war Malaya provided important sanctions to regulate the distribution of surplus produced and to discipline the labour. On the latter point see Parmer 1960.

built on the evaluation of occupational roles in a variety of economic contexts - such as business, professions and the civil service. In terms of our social field formulation, this system of social stratification may be used to describe social classes in the Pal Melayu region and in the nation as a whole. In our effort to understand the relationship between social stratification and political process on Pal Melayu, however, considerations of the external system will enter marginally.

The internal system of social stratification on Pal Melayu comprises the same three social classes that were earlier designated as status-groups (see p. 109). These are: the Europeans (vellai-k-karar), Asian estate staff (kirani) and the labourer (tolil-ali). As during the pre-war days so at the present time also the social classes have a spatial referent. The manager's bungalow occupies a central position with reference to the Asian staff bungalows and the labour 'lines'. He occupies the biggest bungalow with extensive lawns and a tennis court. The bungalows of the office and field kirani are situated close to the Main and Divisional Offices respectively. In location, size and structure these bungalows are sharply distinguished from the manager's bungalow on the one hand and labour 'lines' on the other. They are smaller, modestly furnished and built after the structure of the house-block at the Labour Centre. The nucleated settlement, limited floor space, lack of kitchen and of an independent bath and toilet, etc.,

characterise the labour 'lines' (see p. 187). Along with dress, the living arrangements of the people on Pal Melayu serve as the most ostensible diacritical marks of social class stratification. In the following discussion of the internal social stratification of Pal Melayu we shall note other such diacritical marks, including behaviour patterns, membership of exclusive voluntary organisations and values which members of one social class hold in common. Many of these features become symbols of status-distinction when relationships are examined across the strata.

Europeans (vellai-k-karar):

Their style of life is distinctly different and more luxurious than the rest. The manager's bungalow is held to be an index of the prestige and prosperity of the Company. On estates where there are other white men besides the manager, the bungalows of all such people are patterned after that of the manager. The manager of Pal Melayu is a paying member of three clubs in the region. Two of these are 'white' clubs and one is mixed. Both white clubs have an exclusive membership of European planters. One of these is the Company club where the manager of Pal Melayu plays regular tennis; the other, having a golf course, is frequented by him once or twice monthly. The mixed club at Bunga Raya is the hub of Asian civil servants working at the District Office. On a formal occasion such as

Merdeka Day function the manager pays a token visit to this club. Within the estate, the manager is invited to attend all big functions in the Asian staff club and the labour 'lines'. With the exception of the annual festival in the estate temple which the manager and his wife attend each year, none of the other functions is attended by him or any other European. The only function which the manager of Pal Melayu attended at the Asian staff club was a farewell party arranged in his honour. What is true of the manager's participation in social gatherings applies even more rigorously to his interpersonal relations with members of the lower social-classes. There is no social inter-visiting between the manager and any member of the Asian staff but on the New Year's Day the manager throws a beer party to members of the Asian staff and their families. The diacritical traits of membership in the social-class under consideration are too numerous to mention. These apply to dress, food, carriage, speech, daily pattern of activity, public appearances, etc. The group is strictly endogamous. There may exist - as have existed in the past - extra-marital relations between European men and women of all three Asian races in Malaya. The Indian mistress of a European manager or assistant is often the gardener's wife or the cook's daughter.

There has been no significant change in the way of life of Europeans and in their social intercourse with the Asians after Merdeka. They still get paid very high salaries which are

justifiable in functional terms. Speaking of the western managerial community in South East Asia as a whole, Palmier gives three principal reasons: "In the first place it is said, in a country where great inequalities exist (as in Asia), a person must have a superior standard of living to insure respect. In the second, a high salary forms a barrier against the ever-present danger of corruption. And, of course, it is necessary to attract staff; no Westerner is going to leave home for a pittance.... When capital is scarce, its price rises; the capital invested in any Westerner commands the highest price of all capital in Asia" (Palmier 1958:407). On Pal Melayu this gap in the salaries of the highest social class and the lower social classes serves to fortify the European manager's supremacy. It renders ludicrous some of the Company's recent efforts to Malayanise the outlook of its European personnel. The change in terms of style of life of the manager often amounts to nothing more than the appointment of a Malay cook and a Malay driver to his staff of domestic attendants. Yet, the consequence of the change in attitudes has more important implications than meet the eye of a casual observer. The important change in terms of the political process has to do with the European's (and the Company's) greater tolerance, often implicit support, to certain type of regional political participation by members of the estate staff. In this respect, there is a clear contrast with an earlier imperialist attitude (p. 119). It leads to the development of new political relations between the Asian

staff and the regional middle class which is one of the most portentious recent developments on the estate scene.

Asian staff (kirani):

Occupationally and socially, the kirani occupy an intermediary stratum between Europeans and labourers. They are ethnically distinct from Europeans but not from labourers. All members of the staff are Indian or Ceylonese. Education is the single most important criterion which marks this group off from the social class below it. All staff members possess School Leaving Certificates.

To a lesser degree, staff members are distinguished from labourers by the criteria of religion and community. The majority of staff members on Pal Melayu are Christians. There seems to be a positive correlation between their being Christians and their ability to educate themselves. However, here we shall not enter into that discussion. As to their community, some staff members hail from the Malayalam speaking state of Kerala on the south western coast of India (Malayalee) and some from the Tamil speaking state of Jaffna in Ceylon (Ceylonese Tamil). The numerical preponderance of Indian Tamil over Malayalee and Ceylon Tamil Asian staff on Pal Melayu has occurred only since World War II. After the war a large number of Ceylon Tamils were repatriated at the Ceylon Government's expense (Coomarswamy 1946:3) and their jobs on estates were increasingly filled by educated Indian Tamils.

The kirani have always formed a closed occupational group. On the pre-war plantation there was virtually no individual mobility from the labouring class into that of the estate staff. The only exception is the instance of a kangany's son who was appointed a probationer conductor on the old Division C (see p. 121). The non-recruitment of Asian staff from the ranks of labourers was correlated with their lack of schooling in English medium schools. Today the situation with regard to the education of estate worker's children has improved but not to the extent that would enable a large-scale breakthrough of the educated members of the lower class into the social class of the kirani. The issue of the estate workers' mobility will be examined elsewhere. The point worth making at this stage is that those who constitute the social class of kirani - from the assistant down to a probationer conductor - are people whose parents did not belong to the labouring class. The trend of recruiting the kirani from an educated 'middle class' of white collar workers has persisted unchanged since the pre-war days. The members of the kirani social class are therefore inheritors of a style of life which characterised their fathers, if not their forefathers. As officers of the estate bureaucracy, their salaries, housing, other conditions of service and their 'official' role-playing in the community subsystem of labourers serve to underscore the 'difference' from the labouring class. We may here note some of the major diacritical traits of this social class.

The house in which a kirani lives is bigger than a labour 'line' and shows more lavish spending on furnishing and decoration. There is a remarkable uniformity in the way the kirani furnish and decorate the drawing-room of their bungalows. The pattern reflects common aesthetic tastes, including a common interest in the display of certain items shared by all members of the kirani social class. It provides a ready index of continuity in the social background, educational level and status-needs of the kirani. There is often a profusion of paper or plastic flowers and of plastic curtains and table-covers. Symmetrical decoration is another characteristic; for example, identical crude and biggish wooden elephants are displayed as curios on either side of a cornice and identical luridly coloured litho-pictures of Jesus Christ may be hung on walls facing each other. The drawing-room of a kirani is virtually an inventory of what he has achieved in terms of worldly success and of what distinguishes him from the lower social class. One often finds framed copies of testimonials - educational or professional - decorating the walls that are already studded with framed photographs of the family registering all major events of the kirani's life cycle. Tennis and badminton rackets are placed in the drawing room and a camera frequently displayed with crockery arranged in a glass cupboard. Traditional Indian musical instruments played in most 'middle class' families of South India are conspicuous by their absence. The expenditure on reading

material is insignificant for several 'light' magazines are taken at the Asian staff club. At the end of my fieldwork I did notice, however, the same old copies of the 'Reader's Digest' for the year 1947 placed below the central table in the chief clerk's drawing room which I had seen in exactly the same position more than a year earlier.

The kirani receive monthly salaries that are fixed according to their occupational status on the estate. Nevertheless, in contradistinction to the labourers among whom the pattern of consumption varies but little with earnings and job-status, expenditure on status needs among the kirani is graded strictly according to the estate occupational hierarchy. The above items relating to the style of life represent a common denominator of the kirani social class but certain important variations need to be noted. For example, a car is not the status symbol of the kirani as a whole but it functions in that sense for all kirani in the rank of senior conductor and above. The fact became apparent to me on noticing that the cars of the chief clerk and one of the senior conductors were not used even once during the entire period of my stay on Pal Melayu. Both were vintage cars which, having developed mechanical troubles, were left to rest in peace right in front of the kiranis' doors. One of these owners fondly described his vehicle as a 'Rolls Royce'. Thus, while their own cars decorated the house front these kirani hired a pirate taxi whenever they needed to visit the town. Similar differences in expenditure

according to the occupational status became apparent in the kirani's dress (white to khaki from higher to lower), standards of hospitality to guests (beer to orange drink from higher to lower) and frequency of visits to the town (high to low from higher to lower). In the last respect the young probationers who are bachelors constitute a partial exception. They visit towns more frequently than the rest "to escape from the dull and boring existence on the estate".

One must mention here a sub-class of the kirani social class which, for lack of a more suitable term, may be designated as super-kirani. Only the Asian estate assistant on Pal Melayu belongs to this sub-class. The appointment of the Asian staff in a position of high responsibility is a very recent trend. It is one manifestation of the Company's Malayanisation programme. As in any innovation of this sort, the earliest incumbent of super-kirani positions on the estate has to be the social guinea-pig. He has no set grooves to fall in and must subject himself to experimentation. Some of the conflicts of the Asian estate assistant on Pal Melayu, including his urge to enter the regional Indian middle-class politics, can be attributed to the novelty of his office and the absence of a defined set of social norms to regulate his behaviour.

As a whole, the kirani earn higher monthly salaries than the labourers. In the majority of cases, they supplement their earnings by cattle-rearing. Labourers and their dependants are

usually willing to oblige a kirani by tending his cows and selling the milk for low wages. For these reasons, despite the fact that there are no other wage earning members in their households, the kirani are able to secure larger total and net earnings than the proletariat. Most members of the staff on Pal Melayu are able to save money either through Kaka or in the local banks.[3] It is mainly in comparison with the 'line' entrepreneurs that the economic status of staff members cannot always be spoken of as higher. Indeed, on many points the economic interests of the kirani and 'line' entrepreneurs seem to flow in a common channel. Land-buying in India is one such matter. It entails a similar attitude among 'line' entrepreneurs and the kirani on the question of obtaining Malayan citizenship. If a person born in India obtains Malayan citizenship he gains certain advantages in Malaya but he has to forfeit other advantages in India. Most of the immigrants with vested interests in the Indian villages try to combine the advantages and minimise the disadvantages accruing to them through the application of the citizenship legislation in both countries. A course that is commonly adopted by an India-born

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3 My data about saving mechanisms and the extent of savings among staff members is deficient. For someone like myself, trying to study social stratification as a participant member of the lowest stratum, the difficulty ofmixing with the higher social classes was at times unsurmountable. This was specially true towards the end of my field work when the estate bureaucracy became better informed about my moorings in the labour 'lines'.

couple is that the husband obtains Malayan citizenship while the wife retains her Indian citizenship. What is true of labourers is true of staff (and I am told of even the highest government officials who were born in India). The common economic status of staff members and some of the estate labourers does not, however, bring the two classes together to an appreciable degree. As we noted in the last chapter, all labourers living in the labour 'lines' irrespective of varying incomes and savings constitute a social class, a social proletariat, in terms of a common style of life. A question that may profitably be posed at this stage is whether or not the economic parity of 'line' entrepreneurs with the kirani constitutes the necessary first step for an eventual individual mobility in the next generation. We shall not attempt to answer the question here but might suggest that this progression is neither necessary nor sufficient for the type of mobility that seems likely to take place in the future.

Notwithstanding their social class distance, there often are economic ties between the kirani and labourers. These are usually ties of unilateral economic advantage to the kirani. The labourers gain in prestige and often in securing favourable treatment in the work situation. The kirani's common membership with labourers in cittu (p. 569) is but one example of this relationship across strata. Some other examples are :-

(1) Sale of milk of kirani's cows in the labour 'lines'.

(2) A staff member may borrow money from a 'line' entrepreneur

or even an ordinary labourer who may have received a large prize in lottery. No interest is paid on the loan.

(3) A staff member's wife may give sewing lessons to girls on the estate and the dresser hold a night class to teach English to the labourers' children. Both charge fees.

These ties are always informal in character and care is taken not to bring them into the open. The kirani fears that the manager might look upon these activities unfavourably. Should these ties become apparent to an outsider, as they did to me, loss of face is avoided by a rationalisation repeated to in more or less the same words by various kirani. These people will tell you how "fabulously rich" the labourers (implying all labourers) are. A stock illustration provided is of Ranganathan kangany's solid investments in India. It soon becomes apparent that the staff members' rationalisation is based on a fallacy of false generalisation.

In relation to the superior social class of Europeans, the attitude of the kirani continues to be loyalist in the extreme. This is nowhere better expressed than on social occasions, previously mentioned, when the Asian staff collectively meets the European manager and his wife. High regard is paid to rules of deference; no member of the staff may sit next to the manager nor may any one speak to him or his wife unless he is spoken to.

Of course, as often happens in other super-sub-ordinate relationships (but usually not outside the work situation) a kirani is expected to laugh at every single joke cracked by the boss. At the New Year's Day beer party at the manager's bungalow, glasses of beer are ordinarily handed out by the manager's bearer (domestic servant). Should the manager himself give it to someone, the recipient immediately puts his left hand under his right forearm stretched out to accept the glass of beer. This is a traditional Indian custom of showing extreme humility, as resulting from a lower social and/or ritual status in social interaction with a superior. The custom applies to situations of giving as well as receiving between persons occupying higher and lower statuses in relation to each other; in either case the lower status actor supports his active forearm with the other hand. The perception of the kirani's subservience in mundane interaction with the European boss helps one to appreciate similar attitudes in other more crucial matters such as those concerning industrial relations between those two social classes seen as employers and employees. It is not too big a leap, perhaps, from the beer party to the meeting of the regional A.M.E.S.U. (All Malayan Estate Staff Union) where most of the occasions for making and passing resolutions are at least partly exploited by the members to reaffirm their loyalty to the employers. The point is brought to one's realisation with some force when a meeting of the staff union being held to discuss the unfair sacking of an old kirani

by a European manager opens on the following note: (I reproduce from the official minutes) "In his opening address the Chairman, Mr. ... , thanked all the members for their co-operation and enthusiastic activities for the Union. He explained details of the recent agreement between the Union and the employers' association. He also pointed out that since we are getting better privileges from our employers they expect from us better efficiency and honest hard work. He, however, regretfully revealed that most of the disputes and dismissals on estates were instigated by our own brethren and requested that this must be stopped."

Within the general framework of subordination to the European employers and superordination over the labourers, the kirani on an estate such as Pal Melayu form a cohesive group in the eyes of the members of other social classes on the estate. The Asian staff club on the estate is a symbol of this cohesion. Interpersonal dissensions between staff members like the ones alluded to in the opening speech of the chairman of the regional staff union exist even on Pal Melayu. That relations between the estate assistant and the chief clerk are strained is a matter of public knowledge on Pal Melayu. It was a labourer who gave me a vivid first-hand account of the wordy quarrel developing into a duel with chairs between these two kirani during the Christmas evening celebration at the staff club. Yet, for a labourer (just as for the manager, I should imagine) these are internal divisions

which, if anything, serve to sharpen the boundaries around the group in question as a whole. Even alignments among labourers supporting one or the other kirani are more akin - to employ a broad analogy - to two mediaeval armies each fighting for a monarch. The fact that the kirani are like monarchs while the labourers are mere soldiers is all important. The locus of power struggle must lie somewhere above; in the realm of sovereignty or, to change the metaphor, between kirani who enjoy nearly equal statuses in the official hierarchy.

Finally, the kirani on Pal Melayu are beginning to be drawn into a regional 'Indian middle class'. This again is an incipient trend generated on the one hand by the formation of A.M.E.S.U. and, on the other, by increased participation by members of the estate staff in the race-class politics of the Malayan Indian Congress. A historical survey of this important development in the region is outside the scope of the present discussion. In parts 2 and 3 of this chapter, however, we shall take into account the external system and examine some aspects of the participation by the estate staff in regional politics.

Labourers (tolil-ali):

The diacritical traits of this social class have been examined at length in previous chapters and these need no repetition. A question that is vital to an understanding of the labourers as a social class and one that was implicit in the last

chapter, pertains to the sanctions which support an egalitarian ideology despite occupational grades among labourers on Pal Melayu. The sanctions which bind labourers in a distinct and unified social class are derived mainly from their occupational status as workers in contrast to others on the estate who are kirani and Europeans. The exhaustive social stratification of the whole population of Pal Melayu into these three social classes leaves little room for manoeuvre for the members of any one social class. Regular interaction in super- and sub-ordinate status positions in work and in leisure become constant reminders to the members of each social class as to where they stand. The labourers are the most numerous of the three social classes. They all share a common style of life, the essential rudiments of which have been planned and standardised by the management. Officers of the estate bureaucracy exercise control over the allocation of labour 'lines' and the estate dresser is entrusted with the task of regular inspection to see that a minimum standard of cleanliness is maintained by the residents. He is authorised to warn a household head who doesn't keep his premises tidy. Should a household head repeatedly disobey his orders the dresser reserves the right to lodge a complaint with the divisional conductor. In that eventuality, the estate labourer concerned may be stopped from work for a day or more. This applies to every household head resident in the labour 'lines' regardless of whether he is a weeder, tapper, relief tapper, kangany, factory worker, skilled

worker or white collar worker. Thus, the occupational category 'labourer' has a specific correlate in living conditions and it is subordinate to European and kirani, not only in the work situation but in the off-work community living too.

It may be argued that their common subordination to the rules of the official bureaucracy ('management') and sheer dependence upon provisions of the Company constitute negative sanctions for the unity of the labourer. It is quite true that collective action by the labourer as a whole is generated only when this relationship, namely subordinate-superordinate between the labourers and the official bureaucracy, is threatened (see Appendix VIII, Social situation 3, pp. 605-611). In other words, the solidarity of the labourers is a function of the social stratification found on the estate. Nevertheless, this statement needs qualification by adding that the solidarity of the labourers, based primarily on the negative sanction of bureaucracy and management, has come to be fortified by other positive and negative sanctions related not only to the industrial subsystem but to the community subsystem as well.

To begin with the community subsystem, once the labourers were forced into a situation of 'closed resources' (Wolf and Mintz 1957:385) proletariat bonds were strengthened through the marriage alliance. In contrast to the Indian caste system permitting hypergamous inter-caste marriages, the social class system ('caste' system of Weber in terms of stratified status-groups) on Pal Melayu does not permit of marriages between men of

the higher class and women of the lower class. In the endogamic category, castes and sub-castes form the units of endogamy. Marriages across caste lines are rare but inter-sub-caste marriages are known. A Tamil marriage leads to the continuation or creation of wide horizontal ties of kinship and affinity and in an inter-sub-caste marriage the proliferation of these ties is even greater. Given the likelihood of (i) a numerically dominant caste in the labour 'lines' of a typical large-sized estate such as Pal Melayu,[4] and (ii) the regional localisation of some castes in Malaya, it is expected that the social network of kinship and affinal relations will be widespread and tight. On the one hand, kinship and marriage provide a principle of cohesion among a large number of labourers who are members of intermarrying sub-castes and who have large kindreds. On the other hand, in institutionalised relationships other than those of marriage, distinctions between ritually higher and lower castes have become less important and are recognised only idiosyncratically in keeping

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4 Castes and sub-castes represented in Division I of Pal Melayu can be grouped into two categories: non-Brahman and Adi-Dravida. I enumerate the various castes and sub-castes in both categories. Figures in brackets denote the number of families.

| Non-Brahman (72) | Adi-Dravida (36) |
|---|---|
| Vanniar Gounder (40); Vanniar Padyachee (12); Vanniar Naicker (3); Vanniar Reddi (1); Kallar (3); Yadavar (2); Muttaraca (1); Mudaliar (1); Nair (3); Vaittiar (1); Nadar (1); Pattar (1); Acari (1); Vannan (2). | Ambattan (3); Paraiyan (19); Palla (14). |

with the values of an agro-industrial society. The particularistic moral basis of the caste system exemplified in rigid notions of purity and pollution has given way to universalistic distinctions. There certainly are members of service-castes who perform specialised services. But they reckon their profits in purely economic rather than traditional terms. Also non-servicing members of the service-castes receive these services along with the others. Thus there are no separate washermen or barbers for clean and unclean non-Brahman castes. The extent to which notions of purity and pollution still regulate social interaction between members of higher and lower castes is largely a matter of individual choice. Informal social sanctions such as stigmatisation of the non-conformist have lost traditional force while formal sanctions such as action by the panchayat to regulate intercaste relations are non-existent. On the other hand, influences are at work which preach the gospel of social egalitarianism among the labourers. One such agency of social reform, the Pan Malayan Dravadian Association (P.M.D.A.) is active in the Pal Melayu region and the ideology associated with it has exercised considerable influence on the thinking of the Malaya-born youth on estates. To sum up, once the industrial subsystem of the estate defined the labourer as the lowest social class, bonds of marriage alliance and increasing breakdown of barriers between castes in the labouring community strengthened the we-group feeling of the working class proletariat.

The solidarity of the labourer social class may provide the necessary condition for its mobilisation against the management. But it is not a sufficient condition nor has it often been coupled with other factors like economic distress needed for the outbreak of such antagonism. The high-price-low-wage phases just before and after the Second World War were the only occasions in the history of the institution in Malaya when communist unions could initiate a class-like war between the management and the kirani on the one hand and labourer on the other. The policies of the present moderate N.U.P.W. are adapted to the prevailing policy of accommodation or "peaceful co-existence" between the labourers and their super-ordinate social classes. The policy of accommodation derives basically from the extreme dependence of the labourer upon the 'Company' and 'management'. Thus, although the N.U.P.W. serves to symbolise the unity and solidarity of the labourer social class, the union avoids clashes with the established pattern of authority on the estate. Similarly, the management permits the union to function peacefully on the estate inasmuch as union officials - local, regional or central - accept the administrative system on the estate including the bureaucratic welfare paternalism. Indeed, as one of the social situations in part 3 of this chapter would show the union often functions to restore the status quo on the estate. I think that the principle of accommodation at the local level is among the factors that lie at the root of the happy management and union relations

in the Malayan rubber industry. It is a direct result of the working out of this principle that few industrial disputes on estates take the form of labourers versus the management or the Company. The antagonistic contra-position of labourers with either or both of the other two social classes and the possible developments of militant classes of the Marxian conception is thus averted.

- (2) -

Committees and Associations:

Committees and associations constitute the major mechanisms for obtaining leadership and consensus in the community subsystem of Pal Melayu. These range from committees closely associated with the administrative functions of the estate bureaucracy to independent and voluntary associations organised around the specific interests of its members. The major committees and associations are as follows :-

(1) Management regulated committees:

management panchayat; school and football committees; community panchayat and temple panchayat.

(2) Youth associations:

Elainyar Kuzu and Nārapaṇi Kuzu; estate band.

(3) The Labour Union:

Estate Branch of National Union of Plantation Workers (N.U.P.W.)

(4) Political Party:

The Malayan Indian Congress (M.I.C.).

(5) Reform Organisation:

Pan Malayan Dravadian Association (P.M.D.A.).

Except for categories (1) and (2) which are purely local, the rest are national in scope. Neither the M.I.C. nor the P.M.D.A. have offices on the estate but each has its branch headquarters in a town of the Pal Melayu region.

Management regulated committees:

'Welfare paternalism' of the management (see Phase III, Diagram 4) provides the main ideological charter for bureaucratic control of decision making in the community subsystem of Pal Melayu. These decisions pertain to various areas of community living on the estate and cover a wide range of subjects such as education, water-supply and interpersonal disputes among labourers. The task of decision making in regard to public matters is carried out by committees in which the higher participants of the institution - the assistant and the field kirani - play varying degrees of direct and indirect roles. Certain type of decisions, mainly those relating to interpersonal disputes in the work situation and the actual organisation of collaborative ventures in the labour 'lines' may be made by the field kirani outside the committees.

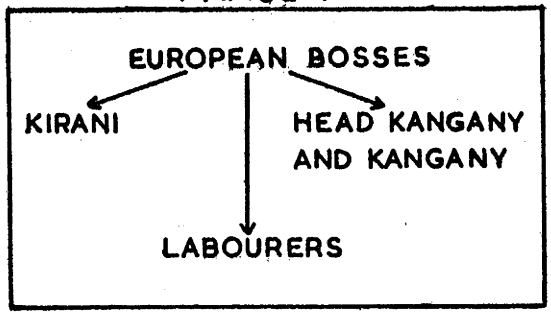
The Management Panchayat:

The management panchayat is a relatively new mechanism (see p. 169) instituted by the management for 'democratic' decision making on matters concerning living conditions in the labour 'lines'.

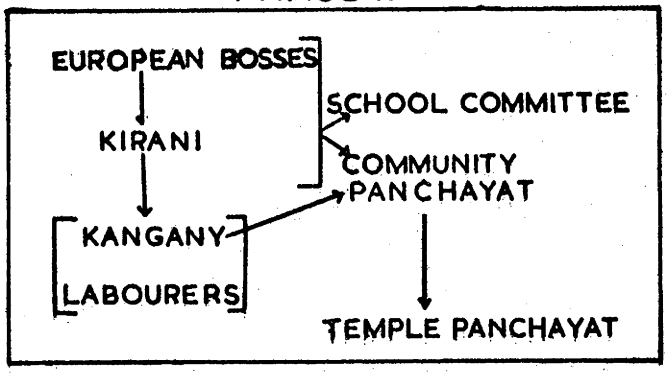
DIAGRAM 4

# PARADIGMS OF PATERNALISM

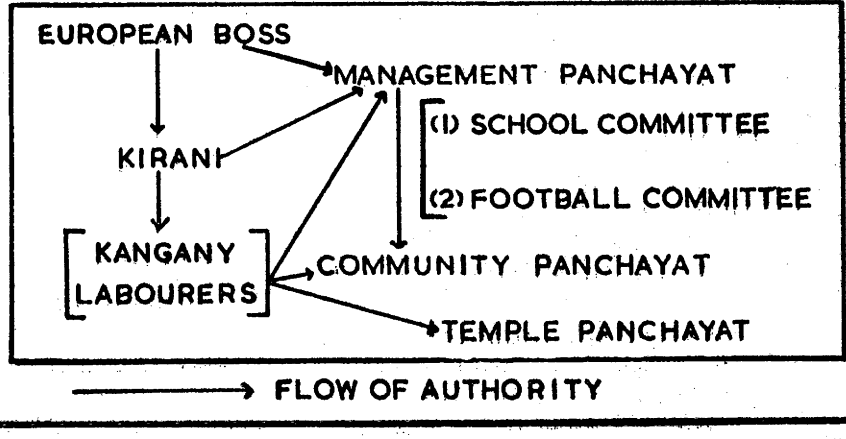
## PHASE I




## PHASE II




## PHASE III



It is a management-sponsored committee in which members of the estate bureaucracy meet popularly elected representatives of the resident population on both Divisions to discuss issues affecting the welfare of the estate community. The constitution of the committee remains the same as before. Its ex-officio chairman, vice-chairman and secretaries are the estate manager, assistant and senior conductor of both Divisions respectively. There are twelve representatives of the labouring community: the chairman and secretaries of the union and community panchayat committees on both Divisions and two members nominated from each Division by the manager. The committee meets at irregular intervals but at least once in each quarter. The usual procedure is for the committee vice-chairman (assistant) to initiate discussion on behalf of the management and for the community panchayat chairman to speak for the labourers. All officials and members are free to participate in discussions. However, with the exception of the panchayat chairman and union representatives, the voices of other representatives are rarely heard.

The principal feature of the interactive situation in the management panchayat is the supremacy of the management representatives in decision making. This is shown both in the restricted participation of the lower participants and in the manner of parrying employed by the assistant. Further, the management can always procrastinate even a promised action by

referring to a superordinate authority, the Company.[5] Yet concessions have to be made because the union representatives are really neutral contact men between the people at large and this management-controlled committee. Furthermore, these contact men could even be effective because they sit on the union committee which is technically independent of and to a certain extent contraposed to the management-sponsored committees.

We may briefly mention two subsidiaries of the management panchayat, namely the football committee and the school committee. The former comprises members of the estate staff and the captain of the estate football team. Although labourers take an interest in football matches in which the estate teams participate they are indifferent to the politics of the football committee. The school committee comprises a chairman (estate manager), vice chairman (Asian estate assistant), secretary (school headmaster) and four ordinary members (estate labourers as guardians' representatives) two from each Division. The ordinary members are nominated each year by the assistant. The two guardians' representatives from Division I for 1963 are kanganies whose sons have passed the L.C.E. examination and are now teaching in Tamil primary schools.

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5 As an example, in a committee meeting held on 16/10/62 the assistant agreed to only two of the nine points raised by the labourers' spokesman for consideration by the management. Major matters such as providing electricity in the 'lines', opening a club and a library, reducing road tax paid by pirate taxi drivers, etc., were defeated by employing mechanisms referred to above. The only two points conceded by the management related to the prompt availability of the Company's ambulance van in cases of accident and the payment of a uniform advance of $30 for both

The Community Panchayat.

There is a community panchayat on Division I and its counterpart on Division II. The two panchayat function jointly or separately as needed. The community panchayat was instituted by the management and what little is known about its early functioning suggests that the kanganies as management men completely dominated decision making in it. At the present day, the community panchayat does indeed assume a more democratic shape. With a solitary but, as I shall presently show, most important exception none of the meetings of the community panchayat during 1962-63 was attended by members of the staff. In the community panchayat committees that I knew on both Divisions I and II, the union chairmen were co-opted as ex-officio members. The deliberations of the panchayat meetings present an air of free discussion by young and old and members of all castes - a freedom that I found conspicuously lacking in meetings of the management panchayat. And yet, on closer examination, it is apparent that the community panchayat on Pal Melayu is heavily regulated by the management. The influence of the management can be studied at two levels - at the level of election and at the level of sanctions.

Office-bearers of community panchayat for both Divisions are annually elected at a special meeting of the management panchayat committee. Until I had seen the actual elections, the procedure

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5 cont'd...
tappers and weeders (instead of $25 only for weeders) during Tipavali.

was not clear to me from the informants' accounts. I had only been told that at the election of office-bearers for the community panchayat the manager and the members of the staff are present. All adult residents of the estate labour 'lines' are invited to the meeting. There in the presence of the manager and other members of the staff, they are asked to elect by show of hands the office-bearers for the community panchayat. The attendance at this meeting is usually thin, for the special character of this meeting of the management panchayat remains insufficiently clear to many labourers. An ordinary labourer keeps track of community panchayat meetings taking place in the temple courtyard for these are announced by Paraiyan tom-tom beaters virtually from 'line' to 'line'. On the other hand, like all meetings of the management panchayat, the meeting for the election of the community panchayat office-bearers is also notified only on the Divisional Office notice board. The kanganies usually know the date in advance and are expected to inform all members of their respective gangs. But the kangany can afford to be selective, especially if he is planning, as he usually does, an election manoeuvre. And after all, not every labourer is all that interested in who gets into the panchayat; politics is not a favourite hobby of the Pal Melayu proletariat. Even those labourers who gather to elect the office-bearers of the year feel constrained in exercising their free vote in the presence of their bosses. At the election meeting, raising one's hand to vote is courting identification.

With whom should a labourer identify himself? Certainly with the manager or a kirani if it be known, as is often known, who his candidate is. When this consideration is uppermost in the minds of most voters, the kangany who is groomed to chairmanship by a benign boss is bound to be the one who gets the chair. The embarrassment of a vote is usually avoided and the chairman unanimously chosen. It is in this way that I understand the recurrence of unanimous elections of kangany chairmen for the community panchayat committees on Pal Melayu.[6]

As has been shown before, the manifest function of the community panchayat - that of settling disputes - is not an exclusive one. The kirani in the Divisional Office share it to some extent. But unlike the Divisional Office, the panchayat is a public forum. In this respect, to a certain degree, the panchayat has a built-in sanction; that of securing from the members of the community compliance with the shared ethical norms of the society for fear that non-compliance will lead to a public accusation in the community. The consideration of a 'loss of face' may not always lead to a greater compliance but it does serve one useful purpose. Once a person has been publicly accused in the panchayat he defends himself and may even bring

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6 I have gained insights into the political process on Pal Melayu from Barnes' appraisal of politics in rural Britain (Barnes 1959:art 4) and his penetrating analysis of voting behaviour in Norway (Barnes 1954:39-58).

counter charges against the complainant. Not only does the procedure bring rivalries and alignments into the open but it also throws up the values perfectly or imperfectly shared by the members of the society. Often the panchayat helps to shape up these values (see Appendix VII, Case (a), pp. 577-582).

The sanction for decisions taken at the community panchayat is invariably a monetary one, controlled by the estate bureaucracy. All panchayat decisions - whether they relate to interpersonal quarrels over repayment of loans, inter-group quarrels over marital issues or matters concerning moral turpitude - are conveyed to the Divisional officer (assistant) who decides the punishment. It consists usually of deductions from a person's wages which are credited to the Temple fund. Corporal punishment is no longer inflicted. The last case known to me is that of a bunch of school boys who attempted the theft of stationery, furniture and paint, etc. from the Divisional Office in 1960. The culprits were soon found out in the labour 'lines'. Each was tied in turn to a chair in the Divisional Office and the senior conductor administered fifty strokes of rattan.

Temple Panchayat.

The temple panchayat conducts its work through a committee comprising an equal number of popularly elected representatives from both Divisions of the estate. The committee holds office from one main festival to the other; in other words for each main festival a new committee is elected. A few days before the

festival, elections for office-bearers from both Divisions are held simultaneously in the temple courtyard. Before the election of the new committee, the outgoing committee members have to give an account of expenses incurred during their term of office. Their chances of re-election are strictly determined by their past performance. There is close cross-questioning from community members of all castes and age groups. If any office-bearer fails to satisfy a member about the way a certain amount was spent on a particular item the latter reserves the right to censure him in public by demanding an immediate explanation. An office-bearer so cornered has little chance of being re-elected. Often enough, he has no other recourse but to pay a deficit from his own pocket. Since a large sum of public money is involved (a sum of $1,300 seems to have the standard monetary requirement for Ati-tiru-vila or Tai-p-pucam in 1963) people are relentless critics of mismanagement of funds.

The chairman of the committee is called chairman of religious affairs (taruma-kartta) under whom there is a secretary and ordinary members. He is usually a person senior in age, office and experience. The choice usually falls on a kangany, often the chairman of the panchayat. Among his other qualifications, the chairman must be able to approach the kirani for funds. Therefore, a person like Kandasamy kangany, who is known to be a favourite of the assistant, has been elected chairman for the temple committee three times in succession. The secretary, on the

other hand, also occupies the unenviable position of treasurer and accountant. He is the one most frequently changed at an election. The young committee members too keep changing according to the order of rotation agreed upon among the youths of a Division.

A noteworthy feature of election meetings for the temple committee of Division I is the enthusiastic participation of young men. Most of these men are members of the youth association (Elainyar Kuzu). They arrive together and sit together. Through their unity they make their voice felt in the deliberations and nominate candidates decided upon in advance. Usually they too concede the office of taruma-kartta to a senior man but the secretary and at least half of the ordinary members are their nominees. I have noticed in the election manoeuvres of these young men a conscious effort towards caste egalitarianism. The underlying assumption among them is that if you can get a young man of the Paraiyan or Palla caste as a member of the temple committee you really demonstrate the absence of caste among Malayan Indians. The manoeuvres of the older generation are not motivated by an egalitarian ideology. These are based on an acceptance of the status quo, i.e. one who holds a superior job on the estate is also best qualified for holding an office in the community. One might expect rivalries between kanganies, all the eighteen of whom hold equivalent statuses on Division I. But here comes into play the principle of accommodation which is in

fact one of the structural principles of the estate society upheld by the immigrant generation. Kanganies work in rotation as chairman for religious affairs on temple committees, the pecking order having been determined by the estate bureaucracy. Any sign of imminent conflict like that between two senior kanganies, Munusamy and Kandasamy, in an election meeting I attended, is quickly sensed by the older heads and no efforts are spared to reach an amicable compromise. In this particular case, the name of Munusamy was bracketed with that of Kandasamy as co-chairman for religious affairs for Ati tiru-vila.

The politics of elections for the temple committee on Division II are fought in similar terms - young men and old men; kanganies and labourers; grades among office-bearers. Yet the actual process of election throws up some interesting contrasts with Division I. In Division II, one finds a less united block of youths led by two men, Selvuraja and Batumalai. The former is the son of an old kangany with a large kinship network in that Division and the latter is the son of 'Grandfather teacher' (Nadesan). Young men of Division I say that youth leaders of Division II are the blind followers of older men, leaders of a bygone era. To a degree their strictures are correct. The conservative character of politics on Division II is exemplified in the scrupulously maintained distinctions there between secular and religious community activities. In the former sphere, the youth of Division II has followed the lead given by the young men of

Division I. They too have formed a youth association through which to organise a prestation tea party after a member's wedding. The association here, as on Division I, has a mixed membership of young men of all castes. Indeed, Andi, a man of the Paraiyan caste, is the most active organiser and present secretary of the youth association on Division II. Also, both Selvuraja and Batumalai have at one time or the other held important offices in the association. However, when it comes to the sphere of organising religious festivals and electing a temple committee the solidarity of young men of Division II accepts, rather than challenges, the principle of caste distinctions. As in Division I, so here temple politics is dominated by kanganies. Likewise, the older community heads of Division II have had to concede to the management-sponsored move of giving the youth greater representation on community bodies (see p. 246).
In contrast to the situation on Division I, however, the youth representatives of the temple committee of Division II are the kanganies' nominees. Men like Batumalai and Selvuraja obey their fathers' commands in matters of religion and see to it that no-one may propose the name of a Palla or Paraiyan youth for election to the temple committee. All temple assemblies are attended by men of all castes and everyone present has a right to vote by the show of hands. Indeed, Andi, who is a close ally of Batumalai and Selvuraja in the secular field, carries on a brisk canvassing among the members of his caste to muster support for the young

men of 'clean' non-Brahman castes who may be contesting elections in the temple committee on 'the youth association ticket', as it were. But the important fact remains that neither Andi nor any other man of the lower castes may be elected to the temple committee on Division II. Some of the new leaders of Division II thus provide the old leaders with convenient pawns to play the game of temple politics along traditional lines and the youth association is made to acquiesce in the principle of caste held by the elders.

Youth Associations:

The first generation of local-born Indians has come of age on Pal Melayu. The values and aspirations of these young men have been shaped to a large degree by the conditions of existence on the estate after World War II. The phenomenon which we referred to earlier as the Rise of Asian Bureaucracy and Trade Unionism (Chapter Two) was co-eval with the growing up of this generation. Also, these local-born young men were more sensitised to the currents in the region and the nation. They participated in these developments to a much greater extent than their forbears. As boys in their teens many of these young workers on Pal Melayu clandestinely helped the guerillas (see p. 161). The majority of them attained adulthood in the post-Merdeka (after August, 1957) period and enjoyed citizenship of Malaya. Economically, they became estate workers at a time when the Korean war boom reacted favourably on the world market for rubber, leading to successes

for the N.U.P.W. in its negotiations for improved wages in the industry. The socialisation of this generation thus belongs to what may be termed as an era of minor emancipation for estate labourers in Malaya. A critical factor in understanding the socio-cultural attitudes and personality type of the younger generation, however, is that their socio-economic emancipation was not accompanied by a revolution in the estate workers' attitudes towards education. The majority of young estate workers on Pal Melayu completed their primary education at a time when the present expansion of educational facilities within the easy reach of the ordinary estate worker was a thing of the future. An even more important factor which inhibited greater striving for education among estate labourers was their newly-won sense of dignity in their occupation. Rubber tapping was never so remunerative an occupation as after the wage agreement between N.U.P.W. and M.P.I.E.A. in 1956. Therefore, for a labourer it became a worthwhile objective to plan for his son's future in terms of his own job. Education up to the Tamil primary school level was deemed sufficient for a boy or a girl who soon thereafter (within two years of passing Standard VI at the age of 16) could obtain a job on the estate. The craving for mobility through higher secondary-level education is a relatively recent development and one that has yet to take firm roots in the thinking of an average labourer.

Youth associations on Pal Melayu have emerged only since 1959 (see p. 172). We shall refer to the youth associations on Divisions I and II as E.K. (Elainyar Kuzu) and N.K. (Narapani Kuzu) respectively. All thirty-nine members of E.K. and forty-three members of N.K. (figures for 1963) share the social background sketched above. The ages of the members of the two associations range from 19 to 33 and 18 to 32 respectively. The majority of members are Malaya-born bachelors. Each association has an annually elected committee consisting of a chairman, secretary, treasurer and four or five committee members. Members of each association pay a monthly subscription of $1.50 but it may be increased in any month to meet the cost of a prestation tea party. Formal meetings of the association are not held at a set periodicity. Informally, the association is a vehicle of youth solidarity on a Division in which capacity it may assume the function of a pressure group in the temple, union or panchayat politics. At one time or another the school, temple or panchayat committees have approached either one or both association committees on Pal Melayu for assistance in making arrangements for a celebration. The management panchayat has no formal nexus with the association. Informally, the manager and Asian assistant have been actively interested in the musical band which is an auxiliary of E.K. More recently during 1964 my informants wrote to me about a growing rapproachment between the management panchayat and youth associations. My discussions with the regional officials

of the N.U.P.W. revealed that they were unaware of the existence of youth associations on the estate (1963). Considering that all union activity on Pal Melayu is initiated by these officials there was no question thus of the associations being invited to assist the local union in any way.

Since 1961, E.K. has begun celebrating an annual secular festival called Festival of the Tamil People ('Tamizhar Tirunāl').[7] Significantly enough Tamizhar Tirunal is not celebrated by N.K. who, for the first year at any rate, held a parallel but different celebration on Division II. Indeed, factionalism between the youths of two Divisions initially crystalised around this celebration. In launching an appeal for funds for the Festival, Rangaraju had the co-operation of his fast friends, Muthu and Muniandi. The organisers claim to have approached the then secretary of the estate union on Division I to join the appeal but he refused. However, all members of E.K. agreed with the plan and they decided to ask N.K. to co-operate. The chairman of N.K. then was Batumalai whose leadership of the youth on Division II was of a conservative brand. Not only did he refuse to join the celebration of Tamizhar Tirunal but is reported to have

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7 The editor of a Tamil language daily newspaper from Singapore gave publicity to the idea of Tamizhar Tirunal to be celebrated by all Tamil-speakers throughout Malaya and Singapore. Rangaraju was among those who read the appeal and introduced the idea of holding this festival on the estate. The style of celebration was meticulously copied from newspaper reports of similar celebrations in urban centres.

criticised it as 'Paraiyan Tirunal' (Festival Day of Paraiyans). Undaunted by criticism and lack of co-operation from the youths of Division II, members of E.K. went ahead with the plans for celebration. They collected $66 in contributions from E.K. members and pawned the jewellery of a member's sister (living with her brother on Pal Melayu after separation from her husband) for another $100.00. The kirani made contributions from $3.00 to $5.00 per head and the senior conductor of Division I presented a crate of orange drinks in addition. With the money a set of microphone and loudspeakers was hired and prizes were bought for winners of various competitions designed for the evening. The assistant helped the young men enthusiastically and supplied them with wooden beams from the estate, free of cost, to make a dais. However, he strategically avoided personally attending the function leaving the senior conductor of Division I to do the prize distribution.

The chairman of N.K. had tried to impute a lower caste character to the E.K. celebration. This was meant to be a personal attack on the main organiser (a Paraiyan by caste) of Tamizhar Tirunal on Division I. Yet it had the effect of making the youth on both Divisions sensitive to caste differences. A group of four young men of the Paraiyan caste on Division II decided to secede from N.K. and applied for membership of E.K. The E.K. committee granted membership to them. Nonetheless, members of E.K. were not unimpressed by the allegation about the

lower caste character of the Festival. The imputation brought caste feelings to the fore and generated a conscious attitude of caste egalitarianism among members of E.K. At the same time, sensitivity to caste matters had a contrary effect too, creating a minor caste cleavage in E.K. A splinter group of lower caste members of E.K. came into being during the first celebration. A few young men of the clean non-Brahman caste were making a dais when a resident of Division II, a Paraiyan by caste, passed by and poked fun at their labours. The former retaliated by dubbing him a fool, attributing his senseless remarks to his low caste status. Someone said, "Paraiyan's wit is half wit" (Parai putti, arai putti), and another, "A crab strikes against a rock and he knows but a Paraiyan has to be shot at to be brought to consciousness" (Paṭṭaltān teriyum naṇṭaku cuṭṭaltān teriyum paraiyan). These remarks were overheard by three Paraiyan members of E.K. also working there. They took strong exception to caste derogatory comments by certain members of their own fraternity, formed a splinter group against the current leadership of the Festival and tried to capture the leadership of Tamizhar Tirunal during the second celebration in 1962.

It is important to note, however, that the intra-Divisional difference among some of its members failed to undermine the solidarity of E.K. vis-a-vis N.K. Because of the different values upheld by youth leaders on Division I, consciousness of caste led more to caste egalitarianism than to discrimination along caste

lines. This stood in contrast to the attitudes of N.K. whose chairman had chosen to emphasise the latter. The splinter group of E.K., therefore, did not act like the cessionist group from N.K. On the other hand, it sought to compete for leadership within E.K. basically against the ideology displayed by N.K. The intra-divisional faction on E.K. was thus subsumed in the inter-divisional rivalry between youth associations.

The rivalry between the associations in regard to Tamizhar Tirunal had an interesting manifestation. After refusing to co-operate with E.K. in Tamizhar Tirunal, N.K. members decided to hold a separate festival on Division II on the same day. They called their festival the 'Annual Anniversary of N.K.' although the first years celebration was never followed up. During the first year the functions of Tamizhar Tirunal by E.K. and the Anniversary of N.K. were held on the same ground at the same time from daises built opposite each other. Speakers on each side tried to outdo the other by the sheer volume and speed of oratory blurted over microphones.

As became his official position as Divisional officer, the estate assistant assumed a posture of apparent neutrality in the rivalry between the associations. It was most apparent in his refusal to give away the prizes at Tamizhar Tirunal. On the other hand, just as members of E.K. claim to have received monetary and other assistance from the assistant (cinna-turai) so also the members of N.K. obtained concessions by approaching him. It is

equally apparent that the Divisional officer (assistant) made no effort to bring together the youths of the two Divisions. Further, the senior conductor of each Division patronised the function held on his Division. The bureaucracy seems to have accepted the split and its officers played their roles accordingly.

Limitations of space forbid an extended treatment of the organisation of second and third Tamizhar Tirunal celebrated in 1962 and 1963 respectively. In the festival in 1962, the splinter group of E.K. captured the leadership by forming a clique with the chairman of the community panchayat and the estate assistant. However, in 1963 the old group was back in power again through elections. The splinter group was ousted because it failed to render satisfactory account of expenditure for the second festival. In the second and third Tamizhar Tirunal too, there was no participation by any resident of Division II. The role of estate bureaucracy during the latter festivals was the same as before except that the assistant began to participate openly in the deliberations.

Finally, we may indicate some of the salient features of the programme of Tamizhar Tirunal reflecting a major cultural-ideological orientation of the young men on Pal Melayu. The programme is chalked out by the E.K. in advance. It consists mainly of speeches and individual or group contests in which only men take part. Spectators include men, women and children resident on Division I. All members of the staff are invited but for

obvious reasons the senior and junior conductors of Division II do not attend. The assistant presides over the function while the chief clerk gives away the prizes. The assistant and the senior conductor (in his capacity as announcer) keep moving off and on the stage; in the audience, all kirani are provided with chairs while labourers watch the show sitting on the ground. Occasionally, one or two kanganies also sit on chairs, especially when they are among the judges for a certain contest.[8] Song and elocution contests are held separately for young boys who study at the primary school and for young men most of whom are estate labourers.[9]

The Band (vattiya-kuzu):

The band comprises ten members, each of whom plays an instrument or sings. All the members are estate labourers in the age group 20 to 26. The band has its own annually elected leader, secretary and treasurer. In recognition of his pioneering role in starting the band, Rangaraju, who is neither an

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8 Comparable ceremonies where orthodox roles are reversed or at least side-stepped are a feature of other total institutions too (cf. Goffman 1961).

9 In 1963, a competitor entering the elocution contest had the choice of three subjects: (1) Behaviour of students; (2) Duties of students in Malaya; and (3) Comparison between Bharathi and Valluvar. None of the seven speakers chose the third topic, a fact which was lamented by several other speakers that evening, all of whom emphasised the need for preserving Tamil language, literature and way of life in Malaya.

instrumentalist nor a vocalist, continues to enjoy the status of an adviser to the band. In fact, until 1962 he was its ex-officio treasurer. Rangaraju's old ally, Muthu, was the leader of the band and the alliance between them defined the character of the band as an auxiliary of E.K. To a certain extent this character of the band has been retained. All members of the band are also members of E.K. At all functions organised by E.K. the services of the band are requisitioned free of charge. Very recently, however, the band has been fostering linkages independent of E.K. The key factor in this development has been the great interest shown in the band by the assistant. After the 1959 national elections, the assistant had become keenly interested in the Bintang Emas region politics of the Malayan Indian Congress (M.I.C.). He saw in the band a very potent vehicle of self-publicity as well as a means of establishing a personal nexus with the ambitious young men of the estate. The former redounded to the furtherance of his leadership in Bintang Emas M.I.C. and the latter helped in the aim of spreading the welfare paternalism of the estate among young workers. The very nature of the corporate activity of the band limited its membership to less than a dozen. Any new recruitment to the band was determined strictly by achievement. Thus the assistant found the band a convenient and manageable unit for patronisation. In due course, the band obtained all the necessary instruments ("an advance of $400 from the assistant was a big

help") and a uniform of white jacket, red necktie and black trousers and shoes. The assistant treated the band as his very own showpiece, carrying its members in his own car and in taxis, paid for either by him personally or by the Party, to cultural evenings and dinners of the M.I.C. in other Malayan towns. Members of the band thus became objects of envy for other estate labourers including members of E.K. The leader of the band told me that he could see why other labourers were envious of him and his colleagues. "The people see the assistant giving us lifts in his car and what is even worse they (estate people) are jealous of the higher wages for lesser work which members of the band receive as weeders in a special gang." (This was an allusion to the gang of chemical-spraying weeders referred to earlier.) The band has thus become another potential pressure group in the political process on Pal Melayu.

The Labour Union:

Estate Branch of the N.U.P.W.

In considering the estate branch of the N.U.P.W. on Pal Melayu we pass on to an association which, in contrast to the ones mentioned earlier, is independent of any degree of management control. One might go even further and suggest that the union committee is opposed[10] - I prefer 'contraposed' (in the sense of

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10 In a note entitled 'Trade Unions' in a recent report to the Company headquarters, the estate manager of Pal Melayu wrote: "Branches of the National Union of Plantation Workers exist but

structural rather than a necessary ideological opposition Marxian or otherwise) - to the management in general and in the field of social relationships 'on' and 'off' work, to the management-sponsored paternalistic welfare mechanisms in particular. We realise that the union's primary role in relation to the management is one of improving wages and regulating conditions of work and that its contraposition to the management-sponsored paternalistic associations has to be largely negative. In other words, the union is unable to sponsor comparable democratic associations on the estate which might supplement, if not supplant, the management-sponsored bodies. There is here an historical and structural circularity which merits clarification. In the Pal Melayu social field the union is largely an external phenomenon while the management, in ideology and associations, is internalised. I am not qualified to analyse the important socialisation process for people born and brought up on Pal Melayu which has made the particular internalisation possible. Our analysis about this aspect must therefore rest on social manifestations of this process.

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10 cont'd...
they are not very active. Older members of the labour force appear to be contented but some of the younger generation show considerable interest in the trade union organisation. Labour Welfare Committee meetings are held quarterly." This statement contains at least two clear implications about the management's view of the local union: (a) Trade union activity, or at any rate its excess, among labourers is a sign of discontentment; and (b) The estate may check this discontentment and, by implication, vigorous trade union activity, through its welfare agencies.

We have observed this historically and we shall do so in terms of the present political process on Pal Melayu. What one might try to demonstrate is the 'externality' as I put it of the union. Its most important manifestation on Pal Melayu is the centralised control of the union and absence of grass roots leadership.[11] We shall try to substantiate this point of view through an examination of the structure and function of the union on Pal Melayu.

Elections for the estate union committee take place in the middle of each year in the presence of the 'section officer' of the Bunga Raya region and the 'state branch secretary'. Both are salaried officials of the union with their head offices in the same union building which houses the central bureaucracy of the N.U.P.W.[12] They arrive on the estate in one or more union cars and proceed straight to the Main or Divisional Office for discussions with the management. This is a period of considerable waiting and anxiety for estate labourers who make some arrangements to welcome the union officials in one of the school buildings. Sometimes one or more members of the unionists' party ('field officers') arrive at the school building before the secretary and section officer are able to come. The election meeting is

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11 For a social analysis of a similar phenomenon in Hawaii in terms of reversal of roles in paternalism see Pendleton 1961-62: 32-39.

12 For an account of the administrative and organisational set-up of the N.U.P.W. see Gamba 1962:63-100. For a justification of its bureaucratic structure by the Union's general secretary see Narayanan 1960:254.

attended by the working male population of both Divisions but the attendance tends to be low; not more than one half of the working male population attends the meeting. In the classroom where elections are held, the union officials occupy the teachers' chairs while the labourers sit on benches facing them. Orange drink is offered as a mark of hospitality to the visiting union officials. (Arrangements for all meetings attended by union officials are broadly similar to the ones made for election meeting.) As in the election for the temple committee, so also in this election, the outgoing committee has to present a statement of accounts. The collection and remittance of monthly subscriptions takes place through a standardised procedure. Money is collected on the pay day and according to a rule laid down in the N.U.P.W. Constitution the secretary of the estate union committee has to hand it over to the branch secretary before the fifteenth of each month. The possibility of mismanagement of funds arises when the secretary is entrusted with any special collection launched by the union such as an appeal for a hostel building for estate workers' children studying in a town. There has been a case in the past when a union secretary was removed from office by public censure on a charge of practising money-lending with funds thus collected from union members. Voting in the election for the union committee is thus mainly on the merit of the candidates. Although the earlier union committees on Division I of the estate had kangany chairmen the

trend for the last four years has been for the same labourer, a weeder who practises as a marriage priest and astrologer in his spare time, to be re-elected chairman each year. It is no coincidence that this man who has proved so successful as union chairman is a most unsuccessful estate labourer. Even before he became interested in the union, Parameshwar was a reluctant worker, much prefering the easy-going job of marriage priest to the drudgery of daily tapping. Yet work he must because of his large family. The uncertain income from the seasonal job of a marriage priest is clearly insufficient to make ends meet. The result in Parameshwar's case is the familiary phenomenon of job displacement. Parameshwar's inefficiency caused the manager to demote him from a tapper to a weeder. But over many years Parameshwar has learnt to live in poverty and perpetual indebtedness. As shown later, he has also acquired a courage of despair in dealing with the management. In this lies one of Parameshwar's chief qualifications for being re-elected union chairman year after year. With one outstanding exception, union chairmanship on Pal Melayu does not appeal to the more successful or the ambitious type of estate labourer. (The exception is the chairman of Division II who consistently takes the management line on the union committee!) The same holds true if only to a lesser extent for other office-bearers of this committee. The secretary and members of the estate union are often young men of one of two sorts. Either they are those who are frustrated in

their efforts to win favours from the management or they are half educated men uncertain about what the future holds for them. As in the case of the chairman, in the majority of cases other office-bearers are also elected unanimously.

Once a committee has been formed, the ordinary member's interest in the local N.U.P.W. begins to wane. From time to time notifications and circulars are issued from the central or regional offices of the N.U.P.W. for members on estates. These pertain to a variety of subjects. I shall cite the instance of three such notifications received on Pal Melayu within six months of an election meeting held in June, 1962. One notice displayed on Kaka and Chinese shops emphasised the lessons to be drawn from the management's manipulation of workers on an estate where caste factions had weakened the labouring community; the moral being 'unity is strength'. The notice was also meant as an appeal for regular payment of subscriptions. Only a small minority of workers read the notice; since the estate in question is situated next to Pal Melayu those who are interested in such matters were already well informed about the happening there. To take another example, the estate union secretary received a cyclostyled appeal in Tamil from the central N.U.P.W. urging office-bearers to form youth and ladies' sections of the union on Pal Melayu. The secretary entrusted the task of enlisting members to a young committee member. The latter entered a few names on a cyclostyled form provided with the appeal and posted it back to

the union headquarters. That was all there was to the move up till the time I left Pal Melayu at the end of 1963. Finally, a couple of months after the local elections the estate union secretary received ballot papers for distribution among all members to enable them to exercise their voting rights in elections for the national executive. The committee failed in its efforts to convene a general meeting of union members on Pal Melayu. Some estate workers, on being told informally in the muster ground about the candidates, mentioned their choices. That was enough for the committee to make up its mind. In the evening the office-bearers gathered in the school building and marked the same choices on every single ballot paper on behalf of all union members on the estate!

There is little ambiguity however in what the estate workers expect from the union. That is also their sole justification for the payment of membership dues. On past experience they believe that the union would prove effective in securing redress of their genuine grievances against the management. Every member of the union exercises his right to lodge a complaint about any aspect of working or living conditions on the estate which he considers unjust.

A worker who brings his complaint to the chairman or secretary of the estate union has no doubt about who is going to act for him, certainly not the office-bearers of the local union but the same officials who come in cars and proceed straight to

meet the management. The labourers' role expectation from office-bearers of the estate union committee is based on experience. In the majority of instances the local office-bearers act as nothing more than contact men between the regional and central union officials on the one hand and the union members on the other. (For a typical example of a grievance brought to the union by a labourer, the action he seeks from the local union and role-playing by officers of the union, see Appendix VII,(b) pp.583-586.

It is perhaps in implicit recognition of the dependent role of locally elected office-bearers that on the one hand the regional union officials try to reach out personally to their members on estates and on the other they claim to leave the doors of the central and regional bureaucracy wide open for any union member or office-bearer. It leads to a type of centralised functioning of the N.U.P.W. which results in delays, inefficiency and red tape. There appears an unavoidable gap between the members' expectations from the union and the realisation of these expectations. Among ordinary members on an estate like Pal Melayu, this generates a distrust in the top leadership of the union. Many labourers who experienced frustration in direct approach to the top union leaders described the union as a publicity stunt. Stereotyped images are formed about the luxurious living of these leaders, their expensive foreign trips and their preoccupation with money-making. The person responsible for spreading such stories is as likely as not to be a labourer who

would have spent $20 or more in addition to losing a day's wages on a round trip to the central headquarters, hoping to be able to see a national office-bearer and returning disappointed after a long day's wait.

Nevertheless, as said earlier, union officials are well trained in the art of collective bargaining for wages and in other industrial negotiations with the management's representatives. Normally therefore they are able to deliver the goods to the labourers. Their successes in the field of wages and conditions of work have kept the reputation of the union high among labourers and the union membership on estates steady. Despite reactionary recrimination against individual leaders of the union, therefore, the union as a whole has staked its claim to success on a record of steady achievement and solid results.

Political Party:

The Malayan Indian Congress.

As an association, the M.I.C. branch at Bintang Emas is external to the community of labourers on Pal Melayu. On the estate there are less than thirty paying members of the M.I.C. although the annual subscription of the Congress is as low as $1.00. Indeed, even this limited membership of the M.I.C. from Pal Melayu is of recent growth. The regional branch of the M.I.C. has existed in Bintang Emas at least since 1948. But unlike the regional Indian middle class, especially the town

business community and Tamil school teachers, not many estate labourers seem to have attended M.I.C. meetings.

The present (1963) committee of the regional M.I.C. comprises a chairman (Asian estate assistant, Pal Melayu),[13] a vice chairman (senior conductor and chief clerk on an estate), honorary secretary (teacher, Tamil primary school, Bintang Emas), two honorary assistant secretaries (another teacher from an estate Tamil primary school and a Tamil Muslim shopkeeper, Bintang Emas), two auditors (an estate conductor and a rice mill proprietor in Bintang Emas) and 24 representatives - 6 from Bintang Emas (all shopkeepers) and the rest from nine estates with one from a tin mine. Of the representatives only one is an estate conductor, the rest are all labourers and kanganies. There are four representatives from Pal Melayu - two from each Division. Both representatives from Division I are members of the band. Besides them, all other band members are also paying members of the M.I.C. Committee meetings of the M.I.C. are held monthly and general meetings quarterly.

When it is not campaigning for the election of an Alliance candidate, the regional M.I.C. is supposed to promote the welfare of the Indian community.[14] Under the assistant's leadership a few

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[13] The assistant gained prominence in the regional M.I.C. after the national elections of 1959 in which he actively canvassed for the Alliance candidate. He has continued to hold the office of the chairman, M.I.C., Bintang Emas, for four years in succession.

[14] The Constitution of the Malayan Indian Congress states the following aims and objects :-

gains have been made in this direction. The biggest of these has been the building of a National Type Group (Tamil) Primary School at Bintang Emas[15] at a cost of about $80,000 (see Appendix VIII, Social Situation 2, pp.592-605). Other welfare activities in which the M.I.C. engages include help to the Indian population to secure Malayan citizenship, free distribution of powdered milk and wheat flour to 'needy' estate labourers, occasionally approaching an estate manager for improvements in hospital or school facilities for labourers and the organisation of recreational activities for the youth.

There can be little doubt, however, that the Committee of the regional M.I.C. is as much interested in its own welfare as in that of the people whom it serves. For instance, there is ample evidence that the chairman uses his office to boost his personal leadership in the region. We shall note here some of

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14 cont'd...
" (a) To promote, safeguard and foster the political, economic, educational, cultural and social interests of Indians in Malaya.

(b) To represent, express and give effect to Indian opinion in Malaya.

(c) To promote and maintain inter-racial goodwill and harmony.

(d) To consider all questions affecting the interests of the whole or any section of the community. ...."

15. The opening of the Group School is in pursuance of the Government policy of grouping small primary schools into larger units, the stated reason being to facilitate teaching of the National language (Report 1956:para. 64). In 1960 a Review Committee supported this policy for certain "other reasons" as well. It believed that Group Schools could do much to solve the staffing problems of small schools and to improve standards (Report 1960:para.140).

his manoeuvres to create these political alliances. Among the assistant's political allies in the regional M.I.C. from the estate outwards are: a hard core of active and ambitious young men on the estate (the band); the headmaster of the new Group School in Bintang Emas who lives in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu with his father, a kangany on the estate; Tamil school teachers in Bintang Emas and a few of the kirani. We need not repeat the sources of the assistant's influence on the estate; one should add, however, that in spite of being a non-Tamil, through his long contact with estate labourers the assistant now speaks fluent Tamil. What is more, he understands Tamil customs and where possible makes use of this knowledge to attract popularity. This is apparent, to take but two examples, in his suggestion to the manager that he should present a big bell to the estate temple and in his insistence that the opening ceremony (tirappu-vilā) of the New Group School should include the lighting up of the ceremonial lamp. He carries with him the same advantage in dealing with the Tamil school teachers whose knowledge of English is very inadequate. It has enabled the assistant to establish camaraderie with his colleagues in the M.I.C. This relationship with a super-kirani belonging to a higher economic stratum is personally very gratifying to the lower middle class Tamil school teachers and kirani. In talking to me many of them betrayed their exultation at being able to visit the assistant at his bungalow any time they pleased. They

also emphasised how enthusiastically the assistant participated with them in social activities. As an example, when a Tamil school teacher, secretary of the regional M.I.C., was due to leave for a trip to India, the assistant organised a farewell supper at the new Group School hall. It was attended by 100 members of the Congress - teachers, businessmen and estate workers - each of whom contributed a sum of $3.00. A noteworthy feature of the farewell party was the presentation of gold chain and ring to the chief guest. One notices here the extension of a Tamil pattern of celebration in the wider arena of a regional political association. The band provided the music. Professional photographers were engaged to cover the function. A few days later, photographs of the function appeared in the show windows of Bintang Emas photo studios - visual symbols of the espirit de corps among members of the M.I.C. One could record similar triumphs of personal leadership by the assistant, scored with the help of the band and school teachers. Thus his reputation among the educated people of the region as a "public spirited man" and "one upon whom the Government might soon confer a title such as a J.P. (Justice of the Peace)".

The assistant is not without his detractors in the regional Congress. Dissatisfaction against the assistant's leadership is voiced by a relatively small section of Tamil businessmen in Bintang Emas led by a goldsmith. They have chosen to play up the fact of his being non-Tamil. Nevertheless, they fail to turn this

fact into a political issue. It is true that the majority of members of the local M.I.C. are Tamils but those who vote at the association's elections are ones with an understanding of its 'Indian' rather than 'Tamil' character. A regular member's commitment to the M.I.C. is to a party which forms a part of the "Government that rules the country".

The Government recognises three major racial groups - Malay, Chinese and Indian - and requires their co-operation for administrative purposes; the Tamil, Malayalee, Punjabi or Bengali identity of particular Indians has no meaning in the governmental context. By the logic of the Government, then, a large number of M.I.C. members, realising by experience in what lies political effectiveness in a plural context, choose an Indian who may be able to co-operate across racial lines. The small opposition, basing itself on parochial considerations, is rendered largely ineffective and is reduced, as in the regional M.I.C. at Bintang Emas, to unsuccessful criticism of certain moves made by the assistant. It is a fact that the assistant plies smoothly across racial lines, part of the reason being that he is an 'outsider' in his own racial group.

Reform Organisation:

Pan Malayan Dravadian Association.

The P.M.D.A. aims to introduce reforms among Malayan Tamils.[16] As a particularistic association appealing to the Tamil heritage of estate labourers it is contrasted with the Malayan Indian Congress. The reform ideology of the P.M.D.A. has been borrowed from the 'Self Respect Movement' (cuya-mariyātai-iyakkam) which was launched in South India in the 1920s by the non-Brahman leaders of the 'Justice Party' and later championed by the 'Dravadian Party' or Dravida Kazhagam (D.K.) of Madras (cf. Jayaraman 1964:1555). The movement is aimed at removing social evils from among the Dravadian people. A host of these evils, the leaders of D.K. believe, come from Vedic influences introduced into peninsular India from the north. N, the chairman of the P.M.D.A. in the Pal Melayu region, had his schooling in India, was influenced by the movement, and when economic circumstances forced him to migrate to Malaya he became a founder-member of the Malayan variant of the Indian Dravadian movement.

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16 Among its stated objectives are :-

" (a) To promote the intellectual, social, social reform, physical educational, economical, industrial, temperance and moral advancement of the Dravadians.

(b) To conduct marriage, funeral and other ceremonies in reformed style.

(c) To encourage citizenship rights for all those who regard Malaya their real home and object being their loyalty."(Sic)

N is a practising barber and his saloon serves as the branch headquarters of the P.M.D.A. The membership of the association is open to "all Dravadian male or female of over 16 years of age (Dravadian here include Tamil, Telugu, Malayalee and Kanarese)". The chairman claims that the association has 100 members among estate labourers of the Pal Melayu region. There is no local branch of the P.M.D.A. on Pal Melayu, however. The only field in which its leaders are known to have been active in the region is that of 'reformed marriages'. In such a marriage Vedic rituals are not held, expenses are curtailed and a certificate of registration is issued to the married couple.

The sectarian character of the P.M.D.A. circumscribes its effectiveness in the wider field of social welfare of the Indian community. Its leaders like N and R are, therefore, to be found supporting, and not initiating, welfare programmes for estate workers. The regional M.I.C. recognises, however, the appeal of the P.M.D.A. among certain sections of the estate population. In a drive to help estate labourers acquire the Malayan citizenship or in seeking contributions from labourers for a building fund the M.I.C. leaders make it a point to include active members of the P.M.D.A.

In contrast to the role of comparable Dravadian associations as political parties in South India (Rudolph 1961) the P.M.D.A. in the Pal Melayu region (and to the best of my knowledge in Malaya as a whole) plays a non-political role in the estate Tamil

society. The emergence of a political party in Malaya of 'Tamilian' or 'Dravadian' orientation is not possible. First and foremost, its small membership would render it politically incompetent in the Malayan plural society. Furthermore, the true loyalties of an Indian minority political front of this sort would remain suspect in the eyes of the present government or any government. The sentiment of nationhood in a young and newly independent state with a plurality of cultures but a recognised pre-eminence of Malays in the political field runs counter to any suggestion that a minority might try to amass political power through cultural domination. It is certain that if the P.M.D.A. ever took an openly political stance in Malayan politics it would not only meet with stubborn opposition from all sides but might even imperil the safety and security of Indian minority interests in that country. These facts are clearly recognised by the leaders of P.M.D.A. It is in tacit acceptance of this position that the P.M.D.A. has remained strictly non-political and loyal as stated in the clauses of its Constitution (see fn. 16).

In the Pal Melayu region, then, the P.M.D.A. is a loosely knit association, relying for its activities on one or two individual leaders. The association is both politically and culturally ineffective. However, the Tamil reformist position espoused by it has a great appeal among two categories of estate workers - the lower caste people and young men born and bred in Malaya. The lower castes on Malayan estates have had

unprecedented economic mobility and opportunities of economic levelling with the non-Brahman castes. Among them the urge to reform has followed on the heels of their rise from economic backwaters. To the youth the reform ideology provides a fillip to their search for identity. What could be more living symbols of their identity than Tamil language and culture which the reformist leaders uphold in the unadulterated form.

However, the chief source of appeal of the reform ideology to the youth of Pal Melayu is neither the P.M.D.A. nor the D.K. but the Tamil writings of young leaders of the 'Dravadian Progressive Party' or Dravada Munnetra Kazhagam (D.M.K.) which formed originally as a splinter group of the D.K. in Madras State. Novels by the popular D.M.K. authors like Karunanithi are imported to Malaya and read avidly by Tamil young men and women in Malayan towns and estates. Some of my young friends on Pal Melayu showed me these books. One of these contained a blistering attack on the sexuality of Vedic and Pauranic Hindu gods and goddesses, supported by long excerpts from ancient texts. It is apparent that the authors of such books have succeeded in combining their message with popular appeal. For purposes of political propoganda in Madras State the D.M.K. has always exploited the mass media, not only of literature but of films and theatre as well. Some of the well known lyric writers and film stars of the Tamil screen have been active supporters of the D.M.K. Tamil cine-magazines of Malaya are full of news about them while their

message reaches the Malayan estate worker directly through Tamil films shown on the estate. Viewed in this perspective, even the programme of Tamizhar Tirunal on Pal Melayu (pp. 384-385) is a manifestation, in a labouring community of Malayan Tamils, of the influence of the popular reform ideology which an author has aptly characterised as "populist radicalism" (Rudolph 1961).

Before concluding this account of committees and associations on Pal Melayu, a word needs to be said about the 'temple assembly' character of some of the meetings held on the estate. Its implication for the people is simply this. A public meeting held in the temple, irrespective of the purpose for which it is convened or the association that has sponsored it, is an occasion for airing views that need public hearing. Usually the community panchayat meetings assume this character. As noted earlier, except when bigger union officials pay a visit, the local union committee rarely convenes a meeting of its members. Thus typically in one meeting of the community panchayat I attended the issue of the resignation of the union chairman was hotly debated! Similarly, there is neither any restriction nor previous notice about committee members of the Division II panchayat attending a meeting of Division I panchayat and vice versa. The flexible and embracing character of the temple assemblies has important implications for the communication of decisions between various associations within and across divisional boundaries. In cases

where alliances are sought between Divisions I and II such as for a joint celebration of Tamizhar Tirunal, informal communications precede formal consultations. The former serve as curtainraisers for the latter enabling the mobilisation of opinion and conveying of decisions back along informal lines. For both parties, the informal system of communications reduces the strain of conveying unpleasant decisions.

Summary:

We may try to summarise our observations about the role of committees and associations in the regulation of political process on Pal Melayu. In the foregoing account formal units of political activity have been classified as internal and management-regulated or external and independent. In committees and associations of the former sort, members of the estate Asian bureaucracy play a variety of roles to control the making of decisions that are vital to the community subsystem of Pal Melayu. The rules of the estate bureaucracy define these roles but their playing out is managed by members of the staff both formally and informally. Although formally kanganies are foremen of gangs of labourers, they are still useful as contact men between the bureaucracy and the labourers. Members of the Asian staff maintain informal communications with kanganies and other labourers whose loyalties they can count upon. The community leaders manage to get elected to committees concerned with the maintenance of peace and order on the estate and with the organisation of traditional communal

activities like the celebration of temple festivals. Thus directly and indirectly social control in the labour 'lines' remains in the hands of the estate bureaucrats. The internal politics of management-regulated associations is marked by an incipient factionalism between Divisions I and II and a feeling of solidarity among the youth of each Division. The latter is embodied in youth associations, one on each Division. Ideologically, both youth associations on Pal Melayu have grown from common needs, aspirations and attitudes of the Malaya-born young men. As youth solidarities, these associations epitomise the quest for cultural identity in the first generation of Indians born locally in Malaya. It is significant that these young men espouse the reformist ideology and adopt the cultural and organisational style of a radical and separatist, aggressively Tamilian or pro-Dravadian, political movement of South India. The internal politics of youth associations devolves around cleavages - inter-Divisional, inter-caste and with regard to differential patronage from the estate bureaucracy. Unlike the committees and panchayats, youth associations on Pal Melayu are neither sponsored by the management nor explicitly regulated by it. Nevertheless, the last named source of cleavage in the internal politics of youth associations has set members of the band, originally an auxiliary of the youth association on Division I, above the rest of the youth. It caused, as shall be seen in the following section of the chapter, pervasive disequilibrium in the

estate social system. Culturally, the band represents the Malayan, as distinct from the Dravadian Indian, mode of identification of a section of the estate youth.

The estate branch of the N.U.P.W., the regional M.I.C. and the P.M.D.A. are associations of national scope. Each represents a distinct interest of the people - economic, political and moral respectively - and each is independent of control or regulation from the estate bureaucracy. All labourers on Pal Melayu are members of the union. To the extent that it is structurally contraposed to the management and within the policy of peaceful co-existence advocated by the union policy makers, the estate branch of the N.U.P.W. provides a relatively independent forum of discussion and decision-making by the people. But this freedom is greatly curtailed by the centralised bureaucracy of the trade union and the dependence of the local union committee upon salaried officials at the regional and headquarters levels. Yet, it fulfills the main task of getting the workers satisfactory wages and conditions of work on the estate. The P.M.D.A. neither is nor can be a political party; it is organised specifically around reformist ideas and serves as one of the agencies for preserving Tamil culture among Indians on estates. On Pal Melayu the P.M.D.A. does not generate any associational activities but collaborates with the M.I.C. in its social welfare programmes. Although the M.I.C. claims no large membership on the estate the active participation in the regional branch of the M.I.C. by a

super-kirani of the estate produces strains and conflicts in the internal politics of Pal Melayu. We noted the organisation of the estate assistant's game of power within the estate and in Bintang Emas but the conflicts inherent in a combination of bureaucratic and popular leadership roles become apparent in role-playing. These shall be discussed in the following exposition of actual social situations.

Conclusion:

In Appendix VIII, pp. 587-611, I describe three social situations (cf. Gluckman 1958) as dramatisations of political process on Pal Melayu. The social situations are inter-linked chronologically and through common social actors and social groups. Social situation 1 deals with the organisation and celebration of the annual Festival of Āṭi in August, 1962. In social situation 2, I describe the opening ceremony of the new Group Tamil School in Bintang Emas in December, 1962. Social situation 3 deals with the organisation of a strike on Pal Melayu in March, 1963.

The first and third situations arise in an area of regular social interaction between the industrial and community subsystems of Pal Melayu (the internal system). The social field for the second situation is the region and includes factors of external social stratification and association, namely the regional socio-economic hierarchy and the Bintang Emas branch of M.I.C. respectively (the external system). In the above dramatisations

the political process is discerned not only in the power-seeking and decision-making roles that the actors play as individuals occupying fixed status-positions but also in manoeuvres, patterns of informal interaction on formal occasions and in 'role releases'. It is hoped that this study of social situations may elicit some of the social norms which govern the relationship between the industrial and community subsystems in the political field. To that extent this exposition will constitute a further demonstration of the welfare paternalism hypothesis suggested earlier.

We shall try to delineate first the internal system by relating social situations 1 and 3 and then show the relationship between the internal and external systems by relating social situations 2 and 3.

Social Situations 1 and 3:

The Internal System - Rituals of Rebellion.

To begin with the organisation of Ati tiru-vila, the first thing that I wish to emphasise is the wide range of social participation in decision making. Here we examine the work of an elected committee working in active collaboration with its constituents, the bulk of the estate labourers. Women workers are excluded as they would be in South Indian village society and this exclusion is reinforced in the circumstances of estate life when women have double duties as workers, wives and mothers. Aside from this fact, voices were heard of young and old, of tappers and

kanganies and of persons belonging to the lower castes. The work of the committee was democratically structured.

Turning our attention in this example to the aspect of interaction between the community and the industrial subsystems two factors are sociologically significant. First, even in this community-oriented religious festival the estate management is indispensable as the agency for resource allocation. The part which the members of the estate staff play in this process is not entailed in the official definition of their roles but is popularly bestowed. Secondly, the deliberations showed the existence of a wide consensus about the desirability and the rationality of this control by the staff. One may go a step further to suggest that this is in fact a reflection of a still higher level of consensus - that in the legitimacy of the plantation social order. By this social order I mean the norms and values which govern the regular and systematic interaction between the industrial and the community subsystems. In this microcosm of a microcosm, as this social situation may be described, one discerns a pattern of group conflict; that between Divisions I and II. However, this conflict is crosscut by a division based on age, generation and long-term interests. The issue over the evening's entertainment in Ati tiru-vila is debated not only between Divisions I and II but also among the adults on the one hand and the youth on the other. It is also resolved at two levels. When the kanganies and elderly persons dissuade dissension they appeal to a unity which is framed

in terms of harmonious living within the estate. For these 'Indian' Indians of Pal Melayu this is an unalterable fact of social existence in that country. For them the appearance of a conflict is only a reminder of the need for consensus. Any particular difference of opinion is satisfactorily resolved by the principle of accommodation, as in the case cited.

It is different for the young men who have higher stakes in that country. The heat of their discussion in this particular context is in fact one of the weaker manifestations of a semi-institutionalised pattern of conflict. In this case the point at issue, whether to invite the drama group or not, is neutral so far as the estate staff is concerned. But in another context, especially in their parallel and rival organisation of Tamizhar Tirunal which is exclusively youth-oriented, the two young men's associations of Divisions I and II vie with each other mainly in terms of gaining greater participation and co-operation from the staff. In their present form these youth associations as factional quasi-groups seem to make a positive contribution to the cohesion of the estate social order.

The example of the strike enables us to push this analysis a little further and to examine some of its ramifications. Our interest in this social situation is again centered on its implications for the estate social order. The strike affords a perfect illustration of an individual struggling against a social order by overreaching his assigned role. The assistant in this

situation was guilty of a breach of estate norms when he scolded the kanganies as a group before the tappers. He was guilty in another way also; he had usurped the privilege of a supervisory function which belonged rightfully to one of his subordinates (a senior or a junior conductor). His apology over the phone could be interpreted as his realisation of the first breach. But of the second breach of norms he was to be guilty increasingly. With the arrival of a reputedly weak manager he took upon himself the task of maintaining discipline and in this process assumed a variety of roles which were at odds with his status in the social order. This is implied in the repeated statements by tappers that the assistant was doing things they had never seen done before. The strike then symbolised a collective protest against an individual's interference with the social order. In the organisation of the strike we again notice the same regard to democratic procedure alluded to earlier. In this sense it was a ritual which highlighted the cohesion of the system and the strength of its norms. For the appreciation of the strike as a ritual of protest it is not without significance that the only demand shouted collectively at the manager when he came to address tappers in a meeting soon after the strike was "Remove Dina. Either Dina or we". They were referring to the assistant by his personal name not by his office. The symbolic nature of the action also helps to explain why, when an official from the union headquarters suggested that the assistant should apologise before the estate

union committee, its members jointly refused. The secretary spoke for the committee and perhaps also for Pal Melayu workers as a whole when he said, "No, we do not want him to apologise. He is after all our boss. Yes, we shall look forward to his transfer. But we shall be happy if he does not behave as he did".

Social Situations 2 and 3:

The internal and the external systems - Estate Bureaucrat as a Party Leader.

The foregoing analysis of the strike in terms of the internal system of the estate needs to be supplemented by an examination of the relationship between the internal and external systems. This brings social situations 2 and 3 into a meaningful relationship with each other. The two dimensions of the assistant's career - as a bureaucrat and as a regional leader - will be the focus of our attention. We may frame our question thus: What did the bureaucrat's role as a regional leader have to do with the strike on Pal Melayu and vice versa? The answer to this question might shed light on the general problem of the relationship between authority and leadership and the degree to which a single actor may combine the two in the Pal Melayu social field today.

The personal factors underlying the assistant's political ambitions in the Pal Melayu region should be noted. He was born in India but came to Malaya with his parents at an early age. His father was a watchman (jagah) in the bungalow of one of the directors of the Company (then an estate manager) which owns Pal

Melayu. The director kept a kindly eye over the boy and encouraged him to study. Under the patronage of the director, the assistant was able to obtain a School Leaving Certificate and became a clerk at the Company headquarters. While still a clerk, he obtained some technical qualifications through correspondence courses and was appointed Tapping Controller. In that position he visited the Company's estates for periodic inspection of tapping procedures. He subsequently rose to be the head conductor on a Division newly bought by the Company, the Outside Latex Purchase Officer, the head conductor on Pal Melayu and finally the Asian assistant (known among Asian kirani of the region as assistant manager). All through this period the assistant maintained his contacts with the director. In his present capacity, the latter spends most of his time in Europe but returns to Malaya for short periods every year or so. Being fond of the Company's old bungalow near Pal Melayu he often takes a vacation there. Every time the boss returns to his bungalow the assistant resumes his old routine of personally looking after him. Some of the older kirani of the Company criticise the assistant for his flattery but even they cannot deny that through a combination of his working ability and opportunism the assistant has risen to the status of the only super-kirani which the Company has in the Pal Melayu region.

The fact that he belongs to a section of the Malayan Indian community which has always had the function of keeping Tamil coolies from bolting away from estates enables the assistant to

exploit a cultural stereotype for retaining authority over his subordinates. He enjoys the reputation of a "strong man", an image often elaborated by labourers by reference to the assistant's imposing physique and turban. In conversation, the manager once described him to me as "a dare-devil". As a cultural type the assistant does not fit into the conventional kirani class. It is interesting to compare a super-kirani of the assistant's background and cultural affinities with another who has graduated to that status from a conventional kirani background. More often than not, the latter type belongs to a company which, for economic reasons, is unable to support a centralised administrative organisation on estates. Economy in such companies often includes the appointment of inefficient European managers who may agree to work for lower salaries. They are nominal managers, even in the Company's estimation, while the actual work is carried through an Asian super-kirani, designated as head conductor, assistant or even chief clerk, who "manages the show". The status of super-kirani for such individuals often means nothing more than a licence to exercise more power in the industrial subsystem including perhaps lesser supervision from the top and greater freedom in making money through backhand methods. Such super-kirani always have a future stake in India. Thrift rather than conspicuous expenditure characterises their style of life in Malaya. They are reticent participants in the M.I.C. thus betraying the conservative attitude typical of the old kirani.

The Company on Pal Melayu, on the other hand, is economically buoyant. In the post-independence period it has not only retained but increased its centralised control over estates. In terms of the total acreage owned by this Company in Malaya it may be said to possess "an estate in the State". It has, therefore, to have a specific orientation towards the goals of the Government and must meet them at some point. In keeping with the democratic principles of a newly independent state, the Labour Welfare set up of the Company is aimed at transforming their estates into "welfare estates". The office of the Asian estate assistant derives from the policy of Company-welfare (its manifestation on the estate being welfare paternalism). At the same time, it falls in line with the promised Asianisation of the higher staff. In the present assistant on Pal Melayu the Company have chosen an incumbent to the new office, a person whom the director has known intimately and whose loyalty to the Company cannot be doubted.

From his own point of view the assistant's sallies into the regional politics may be thought of as moves to justify the Company's choice. It seems that role-playing in the regional M.I.C. is for him a means to an end - perhaps a striving for position after retirement in the Company's Social Welfare set-up at the headquarters - rather than an end in itself.[17] European

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17 Politics as an end would imply ambitions of contesting election to the Parliament or State legislature. In the considered opinion

owners and managers, as we saw, have changed their views about kirani participation in regional politics, especially if the latter's involvement be with the right-wing ruling party. The assistant is basically correct in maintaining that the Company will take a favourable view of his chairmanship of the regional M.I.C. The assistant's emphasis on educational improvement is closely allied with the welfare aims espoused by the estate management. His special mention of the Company's estates in his speech at the school opening was one manifestation of the way in which the assistant combines the roles of company bureaucrat and leader with benefit both to himself and the management.

Certain conflicts and strains are, however, built into the dual role-playing. They impose definite limits on the bureaucrat's capacity to play leadership roles in the region. These conflicts can be demonstrated with reference to the strike and its consequences - seen in relation to the assistant's present and potential leadership in the region.

Conflict 1. It would be difficult to establish a direct nexus between the assistant's successful display of regional leadership (social situation 2) and his aggressive behaviour in

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17 cont'd...
of other knowledgeable men in the region, the assistant would fare badly as a candidate in the general elections where voting is by secret ballot. In talking to the assistant, I got the impression that he too did not have any such ambition.

the work situation on the estate leading to the strike (social situation 3). Here are involved issues of individual psychology which we are not qualified to handle. Nevertheless, it is as well to reiterate the novelty of the office of the Asian estate assistant in the staff-bureaucracy of Pal Melayu. While there was a dominant manager on the estate he could certainly prescribe rules and procedures for the assistant but in the absence of such a boss the latter had a fairly free ground for manoeuvre. A few weeks after the school opening the estate manager went on leave and nearly three weeks elapsed between his departure and the arrival of the new manager. During the interim period the assistant officiated as manager and it was then that estate labourers complained of rough treatment from him. In a similar situation, a conservative super-kirani might have been expected to carry out his additional duties without exercising the authority of a manager. On the other hand, the assistant began introducing innovations which the labourers considered onerous. We also noted the rumour which circulated in the labour 'lines' about the new manager's inefficiency. For many it followed that the assistant would now have great power. They rationalised his power in terms of the great influence he could wield in the Government. It was said that "the assistant is a big man now". It was as if the assistant had carried the halo effect of his leadership in the region to his office as an estate kirani. Yet, in terms of the labourers' socialisation to estate norms, an Asian

kirani could do only certain things and the assistant a few more. Any suggestion that he might supersede the manager was heretical. To the extent that the labourers thought certain actions by the assistant to be of this nature, they rebelled. Indeed, even after the strike, when notices were served on a few tappers signed jointly by the manager and the assistant, a rationalisation was needed. A man to whom such a notice was served and the local union secretary both attributed the assistant's influence to supernatural powers. They said that the assistant possessed a magic formula (mantiram) which made the manager do what the former wished.

Conclusion. However important an Asian kirani might become, in the eyes of a labourer on Pal Melayu he is and ought to be subordinate to the European manager.

Conflict 2. Disequilibrium had been caused in the internal system owing to the assistant's favouritism towards a group of young men (the band) in the external system. The strike forced the assistant to review his policy and brought the internal system back in equilibrium.

In social situation 3 we pointed out that a young tapper named Arokkiam incited the large gathering of labourers at the temple assembly on the evening before the strike. I knew Arokkiam well. An active member of E.K. he was elected its chairman in elections held after the strike. He was one of the many E.K. members who disliked members of the band for their

aggressive and supercilious behaviour. There were good reasons for hate and envy of the members of the band by the other young men. Members of the band went out of their way to exhibit their closeness to the assistant. Worse still, confident of protection from their patron, a few of them began to take undue liberties with other labourers. There was, for instance, a case, referred to the community panchayat, in which a member of the band had slapped another member of E.K. In his defence, the former said that the latter had spoken ill of him before others. That this was a lame defence was obvious to everyone but the accused couched it in a roundabout manner. He said the incident took place after the football match and only "a few minutes earlier the assistant had dropped me from his car". His answer was cited as typical of the trend of thinking of the members of the band who "walked, talked and moved about" with a superior air just because they got special favours from the assistant.

In social situation 1, it was pointed out how staff participation in factionalism between young men of Divisions I and II symbolised the unity of the estate social system. But favouritism towards the band - a sub-association marked by close recruitment and its utilisation by the assistant in a social situation where other young men participated as onlookers (social situation 2) - created a cleavage among the youth symptomatic of disequilibrium in the internal system. In his favouritism towards the band, the assistant played a role in the external

system which reacted unfavourably on the internal system by creating a pressure group subversive to the assistant's authority. It seems that the assistant quickly learnt the lesson with regard to the young men. One of his first acts after the strike episode was to arrange a picnic of all members of E.K. and N.K. under the aegis of the M.I.C. Latest reports from Pal Melayu (1964-1965) suggest that he has partly succeeded in securing the co-operation of the youth associations in furthering the estate policy of welfare paternalism but has had to restrict his showmanship with the band.

Conclusion. The assistant either has to take all or none of the youth with him in his regional leadership; else the reaction will be a split among the youth, eventually subversive to the assistant's authority as a bureaucrat.

Conflict 3. This may simply be stated as a conflict between social norms of a successful estate bureaucrat and a popular regional leader of the M.I.C.

Concern with the maintenance of peace and order in the labour 'lines' is a considerable and persistent responsibility of any kirani as may be seen from visits, at any time of day or night, by kanganies or other labourers bringing reports and asking mediation in disputes. The pressure of this responsibility is heaviest on the Divisional kirani, i.e. the assistant and the conductors (senior and junior). However, while each of the latter is responsible for his own Division, the assistant has to bear the

responsibility for the whole estate and is answerable to the manager for any disturbance of peace in the labour 'lines'. Further, the assistant may not rely exclusively on the conductors for his information about what goes on in the labour 'lines'. He has to be on his guard against possible alliances between a group of labourers and the kirani. Added to these normal duties is the assistant's commitment to the welfare programme of the management; requiring his encouragement and even personal participation in certain associational activities in the labour 'lines'. For this reason he builds channels of direct informal communications with the labourers. As a result, no less than the Divisional conductors, he keeps receiving his agents on and off work. The assistant's round-the-clock pre-occupation with the labour 'lines' is bound to affect the normal pattern of domestic relationships. The degree to which a super-kirani may be alienated from his family members will vary greatly among individual incumbents of this office; depending mainly upon the type of informal communications which the bureaucrat chooses to establish.

The pre-war European planter often rationalised his sexual liaisons with native women as an efficient means of learning the language - the so-called 'sleeping dictionary' method - and maintaining informal contacts with the labourers. On Pal Melayu too this method seems to have been popular with European managers and assistants in the past and knowledge of such liaisons

was fairly widespread in the labour 'lines'. There is good evidence that the Asian kirani also had similar relationships with women of the labourer class but these were neither as openly discussed nor as easily tolerated by the people as liaisons between their women and Europeans. The Company also tended to view these relationships of the kirani as signs of excessive familiarity with labourers. Cases are known when Asian kirani were dismissed or transferred from estates of this Company on account of "female troubles". Equally, labourers are known to have assaulted a kirani on the pretext that he was unduly interested in their womenfolk. The important point, however, is that sexual morality among the people of Pal Melayu is a highly individual matter. In most of the cases where a kirani's sexual involvement with a woman labourer led to group antagonisms against him, the moral aspect was subsidiary to the political one. With due caution a kirani may still carry on with a female labourer without causing disturbance in the internal system.

As a non-Tamil super-kirani on Pal Melayu, it has been possible for the assistant to rationalise a liaison with a girl (a relief tapper, daughter of the watchman in the assistant's house, resident on Division I) in more or less the same way as it would have been for a pre-war European boss. The labourers tolerate this relationship with the girl, which is a public knowledge not only in the labour 'lines' but even in the region as a whole. In the eyes of the management the highly paid and

highly powered office of the Asian assistant seems to nullify any danger that the liaison will breed familiarity with labourers. It was my impression that the highest European officer of the Labour Welfare group at the Company headquarters, a close friend of the assistant, appears convinced that the relationship is innocuous, perhaps a part of the welfare paternalism strategy of the assistant.

The assistant's domestic life has disintegrated under these pressures. He considers it to be the price he has had to pay for his rise in the Company. The immediate reason for the separation of his wife and unmarried eldest daughter was his liaison with the watchman's daughter. I was told and could verify that the assistant's wife suffered a mental shock from the episode.

The assistant's bosses may sympathise with or even provide compensation for the familial disintegration in a loyal employee's personal life, related directly or indirectly to his job-commitment.[18] The labourers, by and large, knew about the quarrel between the assistant and his wife, just as they knew about his liaison. Yet, the assistant, being a non-Tamil, is a cultural outsider for them. Their dominant reaction, therefore,

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18 For a reverse case of strain on the job performance of a bureaucrat owing to his domestic commitments see the role of the Conservation Officer in a Saskatchewan frontier community (Worsley 1964:383-384).

is one of puzzlement and of rationalisation in terms like "that is the way of these people". Of course, labourers do not stand in a position of offering sympathy to a super-kirani. Within the internal system of the estate these reactions of the management and labourers prevent the transformation of personal matters into political issues and insulate the assistant's authority against subversive manoeuvres by a hostile group of labourers or kirani.

In the context of the assistant's leadership in the regional M.I.C. however, both facts of his personal life cast an unfavourable reflection on his character. It is important to bear in mind the historical and ideological linkage of the M.I.C. with the Indian National Congress. The former has imbibed from the latter some of the Gandhian ideals like austerity, self-sacrifice and dedication to the cause. A large part of the appeal of the most popular national leader of M.I.C. for Malayan Indians lies, it is said, in his typical Gandhian dress of home-spun cotton (Khaddar), long shirt and wrapper skirt. Members of the regional Indian middle class dominating the M.I.C. in Bintang Emas, despite a certain commercialisation of their values, still pay homage to leaders whose personal lives do not violate the cherished Indian norms of domestic bliss and sexual morality. While as a man of power and action in the Pal Melayu region the assistant may create awe, he fails to command the respect he would need to be a popular leader. Here then the social norms of estate life are at loggerheads with the values of the regional

Indian middle class. In private conversations with me certain members of the latter social class, especially Hindu Tamil businessmen of Pal Melayu region active in the regional M.I.C., expressed their dissatisfaction over this aspect of the assistant's character.

The lack of respect for the assistant among the regional Indian middle class has the potential of causing disturbance in the internal system of Pal Melayu. Here again, as in conflict 2, the estate assistant's actions in the internal system, when linked with the external system generate a negative feedback. Thus, in this particular case, the watchman's elder brother K, realising the political potentialities of the charge against the assistant, threatened to leave the estate and bring the matter to public notice. By the time the assistant could set his clique at work against K, the latter had mobilised support in the estate among his kinsmen and fellow castemen. They claim to have the moral support of an office kirani, rival of the assistant.

Conclusion. An estate bureaucrat's leadership in the regional M.I.C. will be based on a compromise between the social norms of the estate and the values of the regional middle class. There are definite limits to this compromise and thus to the success of the bureaucrat as leader.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

## SUMMING UP

Pal Melayu began as a rubber plantation at the turn of the century. From the beginning it was owned by Europeans. The Corporation to which the estate belonged in the first decade of the present century laid down the procedures for producing rubber on the estate and entrusted supervision and standardisation to an Agency. The internal bureaucracy of the estate was simple to begin with. The European staff organised and controlled production and administration on the estate. With the expansion of estate acreage and increase in the number of labourers, Asiatic staff - educated Asians - began to be employed to fill clerical and supervisory roles on the estate under direct control of the European staff and the remoter control of the European manager. The labourers constituted the most numerous element of the estate population. On Pal Melayu, Tamil labourers were employed from the earliest times. The recruitment of labourers was through the 'kangany system' in which deserving labourers were promoted to the rank of recruiter-foremen as head kanganies and kanganies. They not only recruited, replenished and retained labourers for the estate management but also supervised them 'on' and 'off' work.

Historically, Pal Melayu furnishes an instance of the plantation as a "settlement institution". European entrepreneurs and bosses, Asiatic staff and Tamil labourers were all immigrants

to Malaya. Further, their immigration was motivated by an explicit interest in working on a rubber estate. To a certain degree, a prior knowledge of their occupation in the new country generated among these immigrants a commitment towards the enterprise they were going to join. For each of the social classes on the pre-war plantation the nature of the commitment varied. For the European bosses it meant securing profits for the Company and to themselves. For the Asiatic staff, security of service through loyalty to the European bosses constituted the criterion of commitment. For the labourer, commitment was nearly synonymous with dependence on wage labour but not necessarily on one estate or on an estate at all. Indeed, commitment towards the enterprise was weakest among the labourers and many of the devices used in the early phase of rubber estate industry in Malaya consisted precisely in mechanisms to hold Tamil labourers on to an estate. To a large extent, the weak commitment of labourers to estate was a function of mercurial fluctuations in the price of rubber in world market. Within the first two decades of the present century, estate investors in rubber found out that it was not only necessary to have an abundant supply of immigrant labour but also of cheap labour and of labour that could as easily be dispensed with (through repatriation to India) as it was recruited. The depression of the early 1930s when the government offered free repatriation constituted in a way a test case of the estate labourers' commitment to the enterprise, and in another, of

the degree of loyalty (as an alternative to natural commitment) which a company had been able to create among its labourers. We noted that on Pal Melayu some labourers stayed on during the depression despite unemployment, partial employment and reduced wages. Further, a large number of labourers who had to be repatriated during this period actually returned to work on the estate.

The question upon which attention was focused in the diachronoic section of the thesis relates to the management mechanisms on Pal Melayu to create loyalties towards the enterprise among labourers. The policy and practice of paternalism had its beginnings in the pre-war plantation. The European bosses established personal relationships with labourers in pursuance of this policy. At the same time, however, because of status-group separation between the white men, Asiatic staff and labourers, there were definite limits beyond which direct contact between labourers and officers of the estate bureaucracy could not proceed. The head kangany and the kangany, as the management's agents among labourers, proved indispensable as contact men. It may be said with sufficient justification that these labour-members of the estate bureaucracy (head kangany and kangany) proved to be the most efficient agents of management paternalism and were the single most important force in winning the loyalties of the labourers towards the estate in the pre-war period. Often the means employed by them verged on coercion. Inflicting corporal

punishment on a recruit who bolted and creating debt-bondage among recruits are two examples of kangany coercion during this early period. Increasingly, the European bosses were so able to manipulate roles that within the framework of management paternalism the kangany and the head kangany became their punitive counterparts. For a large part of the pre-war period, the Asiatic staff scarcely had any effective paternalistic roles to play among the labourers.

A major observation to be made in regard to the practice of management paternalism is that it was inclusive of what we have called the analytically separable 'industrial' and 'community' subsystems of the pre-war plantation. This inclusiveness was a significant element in the definition of paternalism. It derived from the character of the "settlement institution" and was helped by the fact that accommodation was provided on the estate to all employees. The nucleation of coolie 'lines' facilitated the custodial arrangements of the management. At a time when the demand for labour far exceeded its supply and labourers bolted under pressures of crimping from other estates, the management entrusted the kangany and head kangany with the responsibility of preventing coolies from leaving the estate by planting him at the head of the coolie 'lines'. In normal times too, the head kangany and the kangany had important functions of maintaining peace and order in the coolie 'lines' and of keeping the coolies satisfied. At the same time, the manager neither lost his direct touch with

the labourers nor let the influence of any head kangany or kangany exceed his own. In its turn, the policy of paternalism brought about changes in certain features of the social structure of the Tamil community on Pal Melayu.

Changes in the character of paternalism and in the pattern of effective authority on the estate were initiated by internal and external factors. Internally, in the late 1930s, the Company sought to rationalise the administrative structure of its estates. The experience of the depression when the Company had to work with a substantially reduced European staff on the estate led to the retention of that pattern even after the emergency was over. The changes also saw the abolition of the office of the head kangany and of head money. Many of the changes planned during this period were interrupted by the Second World War and the period of Japanese Occupation of Malaya. In the post-Occupation period the rationalisation programme was resumed by the Company but the changes brought about by the war added new dimensions to the task. Forces unleashed by the war constituted the major external factor in the changes in the estate social system after the Japanese Occupation. Economic stringency of the post-war period gave rise to militant trade unionism among estate labourers. Nationalistic pressures for independence of Malaya and the change of government in Britain led to the planning of self-rule for colonies. To combat industrial unrest in the colonies during the post-war period, the British Labour Government laid the

foundations of a moderate trade union movement in the countries concerned. Under the guidance of the Trade Union Adviser of Malaya, the present leadership of the N.U.P.W. was trained. The organisational ability of these leaders and the improvement in the world price of rubber after the Korean War boom led to the achievement of improved wages and conditions of work on estates. The N.U.P.W. thus came to possess the numerical and moral strength which it commands among the estate labourers today.

The impact on Pal Melayu of these macrocosmic changes in the national economic and political scene was pervasive but not revolutionary. Perhaps it is fair to say that the Japanese Occupation brought about a more fundamental change in the social organisation of the estate than the independence of Malaya. It is important to note, however, that the experience even of the Japanese Occupation for the majority of estate labourers was as unpleasant as it was startling. The return of the British government and of European bosses was widely welcomed. Nevertheless many of the old kanganies were gone and a large portion of the pre-war labour force was irretrievably lost to the Company. Coupled with its awareness of the anti-management forces which now existed among estate labourers was a realisation by the Company that it could no longer afford to count upon old loyalties among labourers. The Company adapted the principle and practice of paternalism to the changed temper of the times. To suit the nationalistic (Malayan) and democratic aspirations of the new

nation and to come to terms with the newly arisen trade unions, the Company embarked on a policy of 'welfare paternalism'.

In part II of the thesis, our interest shifts from the formation of the plantation institution in Malaya and its impact upon the community subsystem of Tamil labourers then to the present day patterns of adaptation of certain institutionalised social relationships in the labour 'lines' to conditions of work and living on Pal Melayu. More specifically, we set out to examine the family and household, economic organisation, social stratification and political process in the labouring community, as these are influenced by institutionalised relationships in the work situation (the industrial subsystem). There are two slightly varying foci from which the 'influence' is perceived. Firstly, in conformity with the view of the estate as an economic system, we discern the influence of regular wage-earning and estate-living upon the family life and economic organisation of labourers. Secondly, having posited that paternalism has survived the war in a changed guise, we note the influence of the higher participants of the organisation on decision-making in the community of the lower participants. It is in the latter sense that we have been more concerned with 'process'. The process takes place in a positional frame of reference provided by the occupational hierarchy of the estate and translatable to a very large degree into a comprehensive system of social stratification.

The main conclusion we are able to draw from the synchronic section is that it is the interpenetration of the industrial subsystem and the community subsystem on Pal Melayu that defines the structure of the estate society.[1] The economic organisation of the estate has differential impact upon the institutional structure of the community. The familial norms and values of Tamil labourers operate in an economic milieu where women as well as men work for wages on the estate. The organisation of the household is adapted to the rhythm of work processes on the estate but there is little overlap in the household functions of men and women. By and large, men perform outdoor activities while women are confined to domestic chores. Although women bring cash earnings, yet the male head of the household controls the purse and regulates expenditure. The foundations of a sexual division of labour in the community are laid down in the family and the norms of male dominance are internalised among children during their socialisation. Jewellery bought by a father for his daughter and by a husband for his wife is almost the only form in which the economic usefulness of a woman estate labourer is recognised in her family. Over her jewellery a woman has full control and even

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1 A concern with the norms of the present day non-Brahman Tamil society in India is implicit in the analysis, although the chief analytical point of view adopted here is that the social process on Pal Melayu may be perceived as an interaction between the industrial and community subsystems of the social field.

the head of the household may not pawn it for cash or use it for any other purpose without her consent. The estate management upholds male superiority in the family by acknowledging the right of the household head alone to receive the wages of all working members. Until their marriage, sons usually live with their father. Nevertheless, their political independence as earning males in the community often conflicts with economic dependence upon the father. While considerable expenditure involved in the marriage of a man prevents a son from obtaining a separation before his marriage, he usually forms his own household soon after his marriage. The formation of a separate household by the son may lead to the fission of the extended family but not necessarily. On the other hand, married daughters usually retain strong ties of solidarity with their natal group, a feature which is intimately related with a daughter's close association with her mother throughout her socialisation. The relationship between mother and daughter in the Tamil family on Pal Melayu may be contrasted with that between father and son. The former pair have to co-operate constantly in household chores while the latter pair stands contraposed on economic and political grounds.

A consideration of earnings, expenditure and savings and credit arrangements in the labour 'lines' enables us to grasp the adaptation of economic relationships among members of the community to life on the estate. Differential earnings from the estate do not create significant differences in the economic

statuses of labourers living in the labour 'lines'. Nor are the subsidiary occupations so developed as to create economic disparities among the labourers. On the other hand, their common subordination to the social classes of kirani and vellai-k-karan, a common style of life and a common cultural tradition lead to the norm of social egalitarianism. In conformity with the egalitarian sentiment expenditure from one household to another - both regular and irregular - does not differ widely. In general, conspicuous expenditure does not distinguish a rich household from a poor one. At the same time, however, real economic disparities exist between the 'line' entrepreneurs and the economic proletariat. The former are able to affect real savings and provide credit on interest to the latter. Often the entrepreneurs invest their savings in India but their main investment is still money-lending. 'Line' entrepreneurs are further skilled brokers and tend to become professionals. They work their way to wealth by combining money-lending with advantageous participation in the community credit mechanism, the cittu, and creating patron-client ties with other labourers. They also collaborate with the local shopkeepers as their 'business partners'. A place higher than that of an ordinary labourer on the estate, for example, the status of a kangany, may be of help to one aspiring to be an entrepreneur but this is neither necessary nor sufficient. Similarly, higher earnings from the estate have little bearing on a household head's capacity to become a 'line' entrepreneur. Above all, a 'line'

entrepreneur knows how to manage his expenditure profitably. This is precisely what the majority of labourers, the economic proletariat, cannot do. Their indebtedness to 'line' entrepreneurs, disadvantageous participation in cittu and accumulation of debt in the shops derives from the general lack of sophistication in adjusting expenditure to earnings. What is perhaps a telling feature of the proletariat's common participation in saving-credit mechanisms initiated by entrepreneurs is that they (the proletariat) are largely unaware, or if aware are forgetful and forgiving, about the ingenuity of 'line' entrepreneurs that enables them to draw large profits. Thus, social equality coexists with economic inequality in the labour 'lines'.

The final chapter of the thesis, entitled 'Social Stratification and Political Process', enables us to synthesise the findings of the earlier chapters concerning the relationship between the higher and lower participants of the estate organisation. We examine the comprehensiveness of the occupational stratification of the estate and its permeation into the field of social control in the community subsystem of the lower participants. The differences in the value orientations of the immigrant and local-born generations are noted as giving rise to different types of political activities. The nature of commitment of the young men and the old men to the estate social system varies. The commitment of the youth is marked by a cultural contradiction. While on the one hand, the Malaya-born young men believe they have higher stakes

in the estate social system - this is the only home they have known - there is a strong pull towards a particularistic Indian cultural movement. In some ways, the situation typifies a dilemma faced by the young Indian on a Malayan rubber estate between the universalistic values of an industrial society and the particularistic values of a home-bound ethnic minority. I think the mediating variable between these two contrary pulls is the estate society which is neither industrial nor rural. For an immigrant population, the estate social system provides openings of only partial adaptation to the national currents. There is a crisis of leadership in the political field. The estate bureaucrat is the only feasible leader but his effective role-playing in that capacity comes into conflict with his job-commitments on the estate.

In terms of the methodology adopted in this thesis, it is not just chance that I should have ended up with an exposition of social stratification and political process on Pal Melayu. As pointed out, it is in considering these aspects of the synchronic analysis that we have to turn our attention again to the wider social field, the region and the nation. It is necessary to push the 'limits of naivety' (Gluckman 1964) beyond the concept of the estate social system. Here we are confronted basically with the same sort of problem which other social anthropologists studying complex societies have to face. It calls for a re-examination of the conceptual apparatus of social anthropology, and a greater willingness on our part to equip ourselves with concepts developed

by sociologists and other social scientists. If I am unable to do so within the scope of the present study it is not due to a lack of appreciation of the merit of these ideas but because, as stated earlier, with an eye on the gains of an ethnographic approach in a pioneering study of the typical society of Indians in Malaya I chose to define the limits of naivety somewhat narrowly. It would, nevertheless, be appropriate to conclude by bringing into analytical focus those points at which the estate social system needs to be viewed as part of the total national social structure.

Ethnically and culturally, if not structurally, Malaya is a 'plural society'.[2] British colonial rule over Malaya resulted in the creation of a loosely integrated society within a common political and economic framework, comprising a plurality of social groups based on a number of ascriptive criteria, and maintaining differential social separation from one another. For purposes of descriptive classification, and in terms of the prevailing stereotypes, the major categories can be distinguished by race; thus we have the Malay, Chinese, Indian (including Ceylonese and Pakistani) and European ethnic categories in Malaya. If one were

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2 The concept of the plural society, first expounded by a colonial administrator (Furnivall 1939), has undergone considerable revision in the hands of anthropologists (cf. Benedict 1962; Braithwaite 1960; Freedman 1960; Mitchell 1960; Morris 1956 and 1957; Smith, M.G. 1960 and 1961; Speckman 1963). My own thinking on the plural society in Malaya has gained in clarity from the writings of Freedman and Benedict and a recent discussion of this concept, in relation to the published material on East and South African Indian communities, by Kessler 1964.

to analyse the major economic and political institutions of the Malayan society as a whole, it is doubtful if the various ethnic categories would emerge as structural blocks. In other words, 'Malays', 'Chinese', 'Indians' and 'Europeans' do not participate, except in certain specific contexts, as discrete social groups in the economic and political processes in Malaya today. Each ethnic category pursues a whole range of occupations and there are ethnically mixed political parties and other voluntary associations. Certainly there is still social separation among the major ethnic categories, a feature that validates limited use of the term plural society for Malaya. But one does not run the risk of being dubbed an 'arm-chair evolutionist' in typifying this as a heritage from the British colonial rule and as an unstable state of affairs in a newly-independent country. The important fact about a 'true' plural society (pluralism as a structural condition) is that its constituent orders live in mutual social separation which is associated with co-ordinate relations rather than with relations of super- and sub-ordination. This state of affairs, in all known cases of plural society, has been associated with colonial rule. In plural societies, a super-ordinate metropolitan power bars access to political power for <u>all</u> constituent social orders and thus prevents the development of an hierarchical system of inter-relationships from a co-ordinate system.

In Malaya, the various strands of the plural society, the constituent orders, were created mainly through migration. The

economic development of the colony attracted migrants from India and China. There were important differences though between Indian and Chinese immigration to Malaya. Even before the onset of British rule, there was a substantial population of Chinese engaged in tin-mining in Malaya. Although the machinery for immigration of Chinese and Indians alike was bureaucratised during British rule, the Chinese relied on their own associations and secret societies for settlement and employment in Malaya. They were not 'groomed' for their roles as labourers. In contrast, the majority of Indian immigrants were shepherded into Malaya as labourers by the agents of private employers. The private employers and the government had a common interest in the importation of cheap Indian labour to work on estates and public works. A system of immigration, settlement and repatriation of Indian labourers was elaborated through the active collaboration of interested parties (see Chapter One and Parmer 1960). It was a protective and paternalistic system. There were concurrent streams of non-labouring immigrants from India. They were differentiated from the labourers by their community, language, religion and educational background. The non-labouring immigrants became city dwellers and pursued occupations which brought them into contact with Indian labourers only in relationships of the market-place. Indian labourers and non-labourers alike looked to India as their homeland and were not inclined to champion a Malayan nationalism. Of course, in common with other orders of the plural society,

Indians were also denied access to political power in Malaya under a colonial regime. Political activity among Indians in Malaya was thus divided by cleavages of economic interest, language, religion and other community affiliations which the immigrants carried over from India. The business class had a mercantilist attitude. The only viable associations of Indian businessmen were those organised around economic interests; Chambers of Commerce and communal associations of Chettiar money-lenders and Malabari Muslim shopkeepers. There is good evidence to show that active collaboration by this class of Indians in Malaya in the I.I.L. and I.N.A. (see p. 132) was motivated primarily by a desire to safeguard their investments in Malaya. Throughout the colonial period, efforts to form a united political organisation of Indians in the country failed. As late as 1950, Indians in the professions dissented from the policies of the Malayan Indian Congress and formed an independent political party saying that the M.I.C. had an excessive interest in the amelioration of estate labourers and neglected the interests of the urban Indians (Mahajani 1960:242).

The central fact which emerges from the above characterisation of the Indian community in Malaya is that there were few unifying forces that might have welded the Indian ethnic category into a structural block. Alliances were formed on the basis of narrower criteria than that of race. There is evidence also that the upper class of Indian merchants and traders had its ties cutting across

ethnic boundaries with Malays and Chinese. Within the Pal Melayu region there were marital ties between some Tamil Muslim merchants and women of the Malay aristocracy.

Tamil labourers on estates were thus effectively cut off from other sections of the Indian ethnic category. On the other hand, as has been demonstrated in the thesis, they occupied the lowest rung on a closed system of social stratification, that of the rubber estate. Denied leadership in political organisation from outside the estate and sheltered by the protective system set up by planters and the government, the Indian estate labourers accepted their fate as a rural proletariat on the rubber estate. Little wonder, therefore, that there was no movement at any stage among them for upward economic mobility through change of occupation. The estate community existed as a colonial enclave within the larger society. Pax britannica provided the common frame of political domination for the labourers' civic existence in both the Indian village and the Malayan estate. The overall political authority was the same and estate labourers had not to choose between 'Indian' and 'Malayan' loyalties. Geographical proximity to India and unrestricted migration to and fro obviated the need to define themselves as Malayan Indians even further.

Despite independence of both Malaya and India, despite the rise of a trade union bureaucracy to look after the economic interests of estate labourers and despite the communal representation of the 'Indian' minority in the Malayan government,

many of the features of the colonial situation have persisted for estate labourers. The 'conservative' character of the policies pursued by the ruling Alliance coalition has been commented upon by those who have studies the political-economy of independent Malaya (Silcock 1963:251-275). It will be a gross simplification of the present Malayan political structure to say that Malay bureaucrats have stepped into the shoes of former British administrators and the policies of an earlier day are followed unchanged. Nevertheless, the responsible attitude adopted by the Malayan government towards foreign investments in the country (which stands in such blatant contrast to the nationalisation policy of its hostile neighbour) does make for a certain carryover of tradition on rubber estates from colonial times. The policy affects both investors and labourers. Malayanisation in the new nation is most manifest in matters of language and education but in other areas the government has acted with caution and moderation. Except through persuasive media such as mentioned before, the government does not impose national integration on the various strands of the Malayan population. Of this freedom, two features have contributed to keep the loyalties of Indian labourers on rubber estates uncommitted to Malaya; firstly, the lack of a compulsory citizenship of Malaya, and secondly, the lack of restrictions on the remittance of earnings to India. Thus, within the changed political structure, Indian labourers on estates are able to retain the old attitudes and attachments. The trade union movement has

not had a revolutionary impact upon the self-identity of Indian workers. The National Union of Plantation Workers is a union organised after the Anglo-American pattern; it is conceived as a bureaucracy and it works as one; it takes no sides on racial issues nor does it involve itself in politics. Of course, the N.U.P.W. is dominated by Indians in both membership and leadership (the latter point is true for other unions as well) and, of course, it acts as a pressure group in the Malayan politics often on the side of the ruling party. But the ideological charter of the union is far from revolutionary and as a bureaucracy interested in its own survival, the N.U.P.W. echoes the conservative policies of the government. Its effective field of action does not exceed beyond collective bargaining for wages. Its leaders have set long-term targets for the social welfare of its members and they believe that estate labourers, as estate labourers, will some day constitute the new 'middle class' of Malaya.[3]

This brings us to the long deferred question of socio-economic mobility of estate labourers; we shall again treat the Tamil labourers on Pal Melayu as the basis for our observations. The

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3 "The development of the rubber industry's 'wonder clones' will soon lead to the emergence of the tappers as Malaya's new middle class, said Mr. P.P. Narayanan, general secretary of the N.U.P.W. in an interview here last night...Mr. Narayanan, who is optimistic about the future of natural rubber thinks that the day will not be distant when rubber tappers will cease to be labourers and become the new middle class of the country, the new 'scooter-owning class' who can afford the luxury of an evening out with a girl friend." Straits Times - 28th May, 1962.

uncertain commitment of Indian estate labourers to Malaya constitutes an important mediating variable in their thinking about the future. First and foremost, we shall consider the case of the immigrant generation. They are the least concerned about improving their lot through occupational mobility within or outside the estate. Those of the immigrant generation who have vested interests in India (of which land is the commonest type) are usually the ones able to affect savings through mechanisms detailed in Chapter Five. For them, becoming estate labourers in Malaya was itself a means to socio-economic mobility in the natal village society. As remarked in Chapter Four, some of these immigrants have spread their economic interests over Malaya and India through familial arrangements. It is important to point out here that people designated as 'line' entrepreneurs are not the only ones to invest savings in India. There are cases of ordinary estate labourers (proletariat) who have not earned interest on their savings in Malaya but have been able to remit a regular sum of money to India through the post office. The standard of living they enjoy in Malaya is quite another matter; there is a degree of truth in the popular characterisation of the Tamil estate labourer as one practising frugality to excess. Even those who have not had much savings in Malaya, if they expect to get a big enough sum as 'service money' (see p. 280 ) from the Company often decide to retire with the whole or a part of their family to India. Their future plans in India vary. A kangany on Pal Melayu who has

maintained close ties with his kinsmen in India and recently married from his village a sister's daughter as his second wife, plans to migrate with his own family (both spouses; own children from the first wife and the first wife's children from her previous marriage including a married son) to the natal village. He plans to buy a car and run it as a taxi between his village and the nearest town. This kangany learnt driving in Malaya and bought a second-hand car for running as a pirate taxi. Another labourer, who remained a bachelor in Malaya and is now aged 60 years, still hopes to return to his village and marry the widowed daughter of his elder sister there. In another case, a labourer went to India on a five-year permit and began a small tea shop in his village. Near the expiry of his stay-permit, he returned to Pal Melayu, entrusting his tea shop to a younger brother. Having earned the experience of shopkeeping in his village, he set up a similar shop on Pal Melayu while his wife and children work on the estate. We already noted the cases where part of the family returned to India while another part stayed on in Malaya to earn more money.

However, the immigrant generation constitutes only a small minority of the total labour-force on estates. While it is certainly true that in some cases the elders continue to influence the plans and aspirations of the younger generation, there is in fact only a small number of extended families on a typical estate like Pal Melayu and a cleavage of interest between the immigrant

and local-born generations manifests itself in a number of respects. As seen earlier, it is the Malaya-born generation of labourers which is politically most active on Pal Melayu. This generation has experienced the impact of recent changes in the political and economic structure of Malaya. It has also had no direct experience of living in an Indian village. It is not surprising, therefore, that when they are asked to specify whether they would like to go to India the majority reply, "Certainly, yes. But only for a visit". Those who had the opportunity of such a visit usually come back disappointed with the low standard of living in villages. In Malaya, the majority of these young men do not aspire for a status higher than that of estate labourers. They put credence in the union's promise for a fair deal to estate labourers. In general, in their own estimation, the conditions of working and living on the estate which they enjoy today represent the optimum. Of the various avenues of economic mobility, those which require even a post-primary level of education or specialised skills are usually closed for these young men. The only type of skill they may acquire while still estate labourers is that of driving a car or lorry. The occupation of a driver enjoys high prestige among young estate labourers and is more remunerative than that of a tapper. But there often is an acute competition for employment as drivers on estates for, traditionally, this occupation has been a monopoly of Malays. Indeed, in many big estate-owning companies the trend for employing

more Malays in driving and other white-collar jobs has increased under the impetus of the policy to Malayanise the enterprise. Thus the tendency among estate labourers has been to augment their income by driving pirate taxis while still remaining estate labourers. The security of free housing on the estate is not the least important factor which deters a young estate worker from accepting a lowly paid semi-skilled or white-collar job in a town. On the other hand, a young man assured of accommodation in the house of a kinsman on the estate may take up such a job in a nearby town.

Buying land in Malaya or launching a business have so far had negligible appeal for the young estate labourer. There is little incentive among young men for breaking away into these occupations. Owing to their "specialised adaptation" (Wolf 1959) as wage labourers in a paternalistic enterprise, even the upwardly mobile workers on Pal Melayu may only combine working on the estate with subsidiary occupations but they do not relish the thought of abandoning altogether the security afforded by the estate. Along with a real lack of expertise for farming or business, estate labourers also have a psychological resistance to these occupations which is often rationalised in terms of stereotyped attitudes. Although I could not check the factual validity of their claims, the high price of land in Malaya as compared to its price in India and unavailability of land because of government legislation favouring Malays were the two most

commonly advanced arguments offered by estate labourers of means for not investing their savings in Malaya. In the field of shopkeeping in towns or practising money-lending on a wider scale, these estate labourers expressed a feeling of inferiority to the Chinese. Often the rationalisation offered was again a feeling of insecurity. As one labourer put it to me, "The Chinese have iron safes in which to keep their money protected but we do not have means even to protect our monthly wages". He was referring to a recent incident in which wayside swindlers had halted estate labourers and forcibly extorted wages from them. Nevertheless, his statement also echoed a widespread feeling of insecurity and incompetence in business among Indians of the labouring and ex-labouring class. These apprehensions were clearly stated by a Tamil man who had been a kangany on a rubber estate before the was and is presently a rubber smallholder in the region. During the war he was taken to work on the Death Railway in Siam. From there he escaped to Burma and somehow acquired precious stones. On coming back to Malaya he purchased four acres of rubber land and put the rest of his savings in the Indian Overseas Bank. (The details of his economic rise were supplied to me by another informant who claimed to know the smallholder intimately.) When I asked him what his plans for the future were, the smallholder gave the familiar answer of going back to India and educating his children there. He expected to sell his land at a profit. But he was unwilling to "risk" investment in Malaya. The main reasons

he gave were:

(1) Lack of security - even the police do not help "Indians".

(2) Favouritism of Malays and imposition of Malay language (and in future of religion) by the present government.

(3) Difficulties of competing with the Chinese in business.

This Tamil smallholder claims that the Chinese can work their way through a discriminatory (against non-Malays) governmental machinery with the bribe instrument. Moreover, said he, the Chinese towkays[4] help a poor fellow-countryman to get established in business by generously financing him. Such help was not forthcoming from any quarter for an Indian wanting to start a business; on the other hand, if an Indian attempted to raise his status above other members of the community, the latter will pull him down through jealousy.[5]

Finally, there is a numerically small but potentially more numerous and powerful section of the population of Indian estate labourers which receives the benefit of a secondary school education. The smallness of their number deserves attention.

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4 'Towkay' is a local term used by Malays and Indians to designate a wealthy Chinese.

5 This contrast between Chinese and Indians (sometimes 'Tamils' depending on who the speaker is) is a popularly held stereotype among Indians of all social classes. A Malayalee estate conductor put this contrast in these words: "If a Chinese tries to 'climb the ladder' other Chinese at the top will lend him a helping hand; if an Indian does the same those below will drag him down".

Primary education in Malaya is free but not compulsory. The medium of instruction in the estate primary school on Pal Melayu is Tamil. Parents aspiring to educate their children through any other vernacular (Malay or Chinese) or English medium are required to send them to town schools. Not a single child from Pal Melayu goes to Malay or Chinese primary schools but children of estate staff and of two labourers living on Division II attend the English primary school at Bunga Raya. Since all secondary and higher education is through English or Malay medium, children who have attended an English primary school score an advantage over those coming from a Tamil primary school. Besides, English primary schools are managed by boards which have been approved by the representatives either of the Minister of Education or of local authorities. Most of the primary schools on estates (Pal Melayu included), on the other hand, are still managed by unapproved committees comprising representatives of the employers (Report 1960:para. 35). As a result, even untrained teachers are appointed in the latter type of schools and teaching standards suffer. While most parents on Pal Melayu realise the importance of educating their children, the distinction between the Tamil and English media schools is not generally appreciated by the labourers. Most labourers do not look beyond the estate school and those few who realise that an English-medium school provides better education often dismiss the possibility of sending their child to it by saying, "That is where the kirani's children go; the estate school

is good enough for us labourers". This attitude is not attributable simply to fatalism. Compared to cheap schooling in the estate primary school, education for an estate labourer's child in the English school is expensive. There is no school fee but it costs at least $15 per month in bus fares to send a child to the English school. Even if parents are willing to make this sacrifice for their son's education, they are not always successful in securing a place for him in the English school. There is only one English school in the entire region; seats are limited and parents have to book a seat several years in advance. As estate labourer often lacks the requisite planning, push and contacts that will secure for his children a place in the English school.[6]

Almost all parents send their six year old sons and daughters to the estate primary school. However, less than 50% of the pupils complete all six years of primary schooling. A larger number of girls than boys have to discontinue studies, especially when they have a younger sibling to look after. Even those who complete their primary education without interruption do not necessarily join the secondary school. At the end of the six

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6 Of considerable relevance for a discussion of low socio-economic mobility among estate labourers is the syndrome of poverty, lack of education, absence of personal contacts with the powerful, lack of planning and failure to explore fully the available job opportunities, described by Lipset and Bendix 1959.

year primary course there is a national examination known as the 'Malayan Secondary School Entrance Examination'. Malay as the national language is a compulsory subject for this examination and anyone failing in it fails to make the grade needed for entry into the secondary school. Considerable weeding of primary school pupils from the estate school takes place through this mechanism as shown from the following figures :-

| Year | Number of students entering M.S.S.E.E. | Number of students eligible for entering Secondary School | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1957 | 4 | 4 | 100 |
| 1958 | 8 | 0 | - |
| 1959 | 21 | 10 | 48 |
| 1960 | 22 | 13 | 59 |
| 1961 | 26 | 16 | 62 |
| 1962 | 27 | 17 | 63 |

(Figures supplied by the school headmaster.)

No figures were maintained for the total number of pupils in the sixth year batch for each year in the period 1957-1962 nor did the school have any record of the number of pupils actually entering the secondary school from among those eligible for entry each year. These are crucial omissions in school records for it seems a pretty safe guess that not more than 5 to 10% of the total number of students joining the first year of the primary school ever attend the secondary school.

There are thus lets and hindrances at every stage in the educational career of a boy or a girl on Pal Melayu, many of them clearly the result of his or her status as an estate labourer's child. Those who do get enrolled in a secondary school do not go very far. I did not meet or come to know of a single labourer or dependant in the labour 'lines' of Pal Melayu who had attained a diploma higher than the L.C.E. (Lower Certificate of Education). A pupil from the estate primary school appears at this examination after four years of schooling at the English secondary school; for a pupil from the English primary school this period is reduced to only three years. Normally, thus, a Tamil pupil from Pal Melayu attains his L.C.E. at the age of 16 years. In actual fact, a number of these secondary school pupils keep dropping out before the four year period. In relatively few cases known to me lack of means to pay for the ward's school fees and other expenses was the main reason for discontinuation of studies. More commonly, a secondary school pupil from Pal Melayu feels incompetent in the class, faces severe criticism from his teachers, loses all interest in his studies and stops going to the school. There is seldom pressure from his parents to resume studies; on the other hand, they encourage the child to help them in their 'tasks' and learn the work of a tapper which he can easily hope to get after reaching the age of sixteen years. It ought to be noted that this period

of apprenticeship, not only for work on the estate but even at home, begins much sooner for a girl than for a boy. There is a solitary case of a girl from Pal Melayu labour 'lines', that of a peon's daughter (see p. 279), who ever went to a secondary school. She too failed to obtain the L.C.E. and has finally become a rubber tapper.

As anywhere else, there is a small number of boys and young men on Pal Melayu who are better scholars than others. In recent years they have included young men past the age of entering the secondary school but still desirous of continuing their studies. They were 'victims' of the changeover from the old educational system with no age specifications to the new one in which the age for entering primary and secondary schools is rigorously laid down. These over-age scholars were forced to become estate labourers or low-paid probationer teachers in Tamil primary schools. They approached the education authorities for instituting a 'Further Education Class' at the English Secondary School which these worker-students now attend in the afternoons. Their sole aim is to obtain the L.C.E. and become permanent teachers in estate primary schools.

It can be said without exaggeration that the desire to become a teacher in a Tamil primary school is the single most dominant aspiration of Tamil youth on estates who have either completed or are in the process of completing the first stage (L.C.E.) of secondary school education. Primary school teachers

on estates have in the past been exclusively recruited from amongst educated labourers and the same trend is likely to continue in the future. A Tamil school teacher on an estate enjoys an intermediate social status between the white-collar worker and the kirani. If his father is a kangany on the estate, he may continue to live with him in the labour 'lines'. His superior education, dress and manners serve to distinguish him from a labourer but he may still marry a related woman who is either herself an estate labourer or a labourer's daughter. He usually upholds Tamil culture and values, and the P.M.D.A. in the Pal Melayu region has its most ardent supporters among Tamil school teachers. Most Tamil school teachers today are India-born but even those who are born in Malaya show a greater degree of attachment to India than the locally born young men of the labouring class. The latter have little uncertainty about their economic future in Malaya but the economic interests of the former are inextricably tied up with the future status of the Tamil language in Malaya. Since they are also better informed and more resourceful than the semi-literate labourers they are able to plan better for an uncertain future. Most Tamil teachers whom I met seemed satisfied with their present economic lot but showed grave apprehension as to their future when, in 1967, Malay will become the medium of instruction at the primary level too. This apprehension has given rise to trade unionism among them so that they can make a collective representation for the protection of

their minority educational and cultural rights. Nevertheless, like plantation workers these teachers recognise that only constitutional means will ensure their union's effectiveness, even survival, under the present government. The more astute among these unionists realise that the problem of vernacular education was even a bigger issue with the Chinese. As one of them put it bluntly to me, "We shall leave all fireworks to them (the Chinese) but will not fail to queue up for Tamil when concessions are being offered to Chinese education in Malaya". The leaders of Tamil school teachers may or may not succeed in this political game but thinking out their problems in terms of Malayan politics is certainly not the favourite pastime of the majority of school teachers. They have created their own defences. Many of the Tamil school teachers conscientiously attend government-sponsored night classes to learn the Malay language. The upwardly mobile have created alliances with the members of the more influential Indian middle class by supporting their leadership in the regional M.I.C. It is doubtful, however, if even these seemingly Malayan Indians are truly patriotic to Malaya. For, wherever possible, they too have bought land or created other business interests in India. Like many of the estate labourers and the kirani, the majority of Tamil school teachers also consider India to be their true homeland.

There has been no vertical mobility within the estate from the position of a labourer to that of a staff member. It is not

possible to explain this lack wholly in terms of the labourer's non-attainment of the requisite educational qualifications (a secondary school leaving certificate). When the three boys on Pal Melayu pursuing studies after the L.C.E. get through the secondary school it is unlikely that any of them will be offered job as a probationer conductor or a typist on Pal Melayu. Indeed, it is doubtful if these boys will even apply for such positions. The thought of becoming a kirani on the estate is still outside the range of a realistic labourer's aspirations. Staff positions are usually filled by the staff members' children or other relatives. It is not here asserted that such jobs are hereditary on an estate such as Pal Melayu; all that is implied is that so far in appointing members of estate staff the management has considered not only the achieved qualifications of the candidates but also the ascribed ones, especially their family background. In applications received for the position of probationer conductors on Pal Melayu, the majority of applicants (including successful ones) stated their family background and the "ability to control the labour force". All appointments of the office staff known to me were made informally when another member of the staff introduced a suitable young man for a position (see p. 29 fn. 13 ).

Viewed as a single field of social relationships Pal Melayu exemplifies the rubber estate in Malaya as a closed system of social stratification; yet, contrary to the 'tribal' view of the plantation, the estate society is not - has never been - an isolated

system. A child of British imperialism, the rubber estate society in Malaya existed as an integral enclave in the plural society. The political and economic framework of the wider society provided the forces for its emergence and the policies of the metropolitan power influenced its form. To understand today the interpenetration of the social organisation of rubber production and the social structure of an Indian minority resident on a typical rubber estate like Pal Melayu, one has to bear in mind not only this historical perspective but also the unstable and rapidly changing character of a post-colonial plural society.