

Chapter 8

Question 1:

You have probably noticed that people in Kalpattu are engaged in a variety of non-farm work. List five of these.

Answer:

Some of the kinds of non-farm work undertaken by the people in Kalpattu:

Making baskets, utensils, pots, bricks, bullock carts, etc.

Working as construction workers and lorry drivers

Washing clothes

Cycle hire and repair

Tailoring

Hair cutting

Selling tea, snacks, tiffin and grocery

Question 2:

List the different types of people you read about in Kalpattu who depend on farming. Who is the poorest among them and why?

Answer:

In Kalpattu, three types of people depend on farming. These are the big farmers like Ramalingam, the small farmers like Sekar, and the agricultural labourers like Thulasi.

The big farmers are well off. They cultivate most of the land in the village. A large part of their produce is sold in the market. Many of them have other businesses such as shops, money lending, trading, small factories, etc. Hence, they have additional sources of income apart from their lands. The lands of small farmers are just enough to meet their ends. For this reason, they sometimes have to work for the big farmers. However, their condition is still better when compared to the landless agricultural labourers. They depend entirely upon the work they do on other people's farms, and go without any work for most part of the year. Hence, among the three categories, agricultural labourers like Thulasi are the poorest.

Question 3:

Imagine you are a member of a fishing family and you are discussing whether to take a loan from the bank for an engine. What would you say?

Answer:

We are told in the chapter that people whose livelihoods depend on fishing typically cannot go fishing for four months during the monsoon season as these are the months when fish breed. These months are extremely difficult for fishing families as most of them have to survive on the money borrowed from traders. Later, when the fishing season begins, they have to sell their catch to these traders because of which not much fish is left for them to sell.

Hence, one would be very cautious about taking a loan from the bank, even though an engine is an essential requirement, as this would put an additional burden on the family. However, once the loan is taken, one would have to ensure that the catch is maximum and they get the best prices for the same so that the loan can be paid off as soon as possible.

Question 4:

Poor rural labourers like Thulasi often do not have access to good medical facilities, good schools, and other resources. You have read about inequality in the first unit of this text. The difference between her and Ramalingam is one of inequality. Do you think this is a fair situation? What do you think can be done? Discuss in class.

Answer:

Though inequality at any level is a cause of concern, it would not be easy to term the situation as fair or unfair. There could be several reasons for a person to be well-off and for another person to be in an unequal position. Yet, it is the duty of the government to make sure that the problem of inequality is addressed. It is the responsibility of the government to achieve equality and justice for all the citizens of the country—whether in the urban areas or in the rural areas. One way of improving the situation of agricultural labourers is to ensure that they are not exploited. A minimum wage policy for agricultural labourers needs to be in place so that they do not have to work at low wages. The other way of improving their situation would be to set up some sort of employment guarantee scheme whereby they have a definite source of income throughout the year. The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is a step in this direction.

Question 5:

What do you think the government can do to help farmers like Sekar when they get into debt? Discuss

Answer:

A two-lined approach to this problem is needed to help small farmers like Sekar who are in debt. On the one hand, these farmers need to have access to debts on simple terms, and on the other hand, they need to be assured of regular work so that they have the means to repay the debts. The government can help refinance their loans by providing them with fresh loans on easy interest rates.

Simultaneous with this, the government should also set up some sort of employment guarantee scheme, whereby the debt-ridden farmers would have the guarantee of a definite source of income, and can work to repay their loans. Along with providing monetary assistance, the government should also guide small farmers on ways to increase the yields from their lands.

Question 6:

Compare the situation of Sekar and Ramalingam by filling out the following table:

–	Sekar	Ramalingam
Land cultivated	–	–
Labour required	–	–
Loans required	–	–
Selling of harvest	–	–
Other work done by them	–	–

Answer:

—	Sekar	Ramalingam
Land cultivated	2 acres	20 acres
Labour required	He and his family do most of the work. During harvest, he takes the help of other small farmers.	Employs a lot of agricultural labourers in the village.
Loans required	Buys seeds and fertilisers on loan from the trader.	Borrowed some money from the government bank to set up the rice mill.
Selling of harvest	Sells a part of the harvest to the trader at a lower price, to pay back the loan. Keeps the rest for self use.	Sells a large part of his produce in the market.
Other work done by them	Works in Ramalingam's rice mill. Sells the milk of his hybrid cow to the local milk cooperative.	Owens a rice mill. Buys paddy from within the village and from surrounding villages. The rice produced in the mill is sold to traders in nearby towns. Owens a shop selling seeds, pesticides, etc.