

Just Published

**Modern Poverty;
The Culture of Distribution and
Structural Unemployment in the Foothills of Kerala**

by Peter Van der Werff

Why does Kerala not engage in productive investment in order to create sufficient employment? Although it is rich in natural resources and human skills, the major problem of unemployment remains unsolved.

This book describes the frontier area of Kerala's eastern foothills. Here landless households are faced with sparse employment opportunities. In order to survive they have adopted a number of inventive strategies. They buy or sell tiny plots of land brave violent reactions by building huts along road sides or in forests, try to gain access to government funds, and bargain with shopkeepers. Nevertheless, they remain impoverished.

On the labour market, they manoeuvre themselves in order to be recruited for work on small plantations and in forests. Trade unionists prefer to organise permanent, better paid labourers, thereby alienating the casual and unskilled workers. They do not favour strategies aimed towards productive investment, whilst such policies remain beyond the poor workers' reach.

As shown in the detailed budget study, this results in a very low standard of living for the landless households. Although they constitute a smaller section of the population than in Kerala's coastal belt, the basic problems of nutrition, health care, housing and schooling are of no less magnitude.

The eastern frontier's rubber sector has been analyzed exposing an entrepreneurial climate full of delays, shortages, political deals, and mistrust. Profits are sought after through low rate, short term investments. These 'quickness' predominate over productive strategies that could create new employment.

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