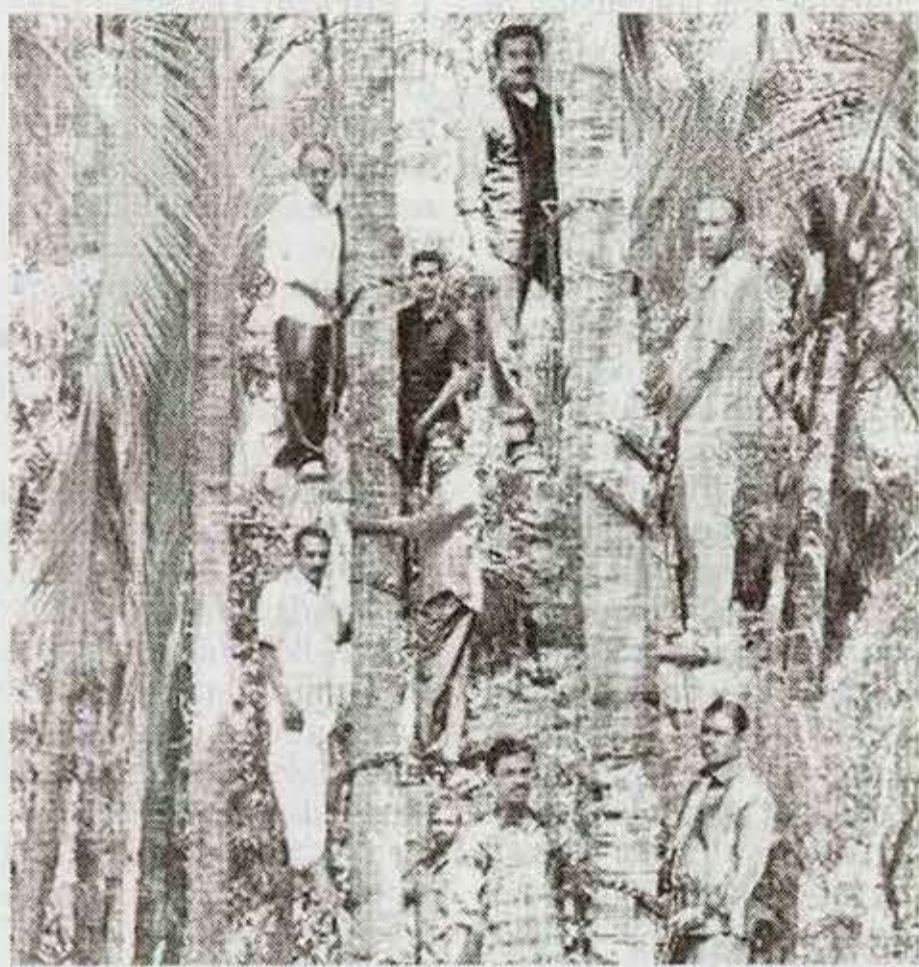


# Youths Make a Beeline for Coconut Climbing



Coconut climbers from Malappuram district posing for a photograph at Nagalassery in Palakkad district

by A Satish

**Palakkad:** V K Siddique of Thavannur in Malappuram doesn't have any qualms in quitting his 10-year-old job in Oman and returning home, all but to make a decent living out of coconut palm climbing. Siddique, in his 30s, along with four others Habeeb, Ajith, Shashi and Sadasivan are at beck and call of households to pluck coconuts and clear the crowns of palms for a modest fee of just ₹25 per tree!

The group, which was part of the Friends of Coconut Tree training programme of Krishi Vigyan Kendra, Thavannur, under the aid of Coconut Development Board (CDB), is reaping rich dividends at a time when the state is facing acute shortage of trained coconut climbers. The training has been successful enough to motivate over 3,000 men to take up coconut climbing as a decent and lucrative profession.

"We have to live and the farmers should benefit from coconut cultivation," explains Siddique on why they charge a moderate fee as against the normal ₹50 per tree which could even go up to ₹80. The profession has caught the attention of youths, especially Gulf returnees from Malappuram, who are flocking in groups to Palakkad which has a sizeable number of trees.

"If there are bulk orders from Palakkad district, we go as a group and return in two or three days," added Ajith, once a manual labourer in breaking boulders. The youths now earn a steady income and are sometimes booked for months. Pramod of Ponnani climbs 65 trees on an average daily. "Our group has been booked till March and now we get a

regular income," he said.

The in-house training for six days benefitted the youths and each participant was given a climbing machine free of cost. "Till date we have given training to 320 people in the district. Each day the participants are given a stipend of ₹350," Thavannur Habeeb Rehman, the master trainer of Krishi Vigyan Kendra. The climbers are also taught how to identify tender and mature nuts, pests and diseases associated with the palms and their management. "They come here regularly for the past two years after every 50 days

**Till date we have given training to 320 people in the district in the last three years, of which over 200 are active in the field**

and pluck coconuts for a nominal fee. Earlier, we were at the receiving end of every worker who comes at their discretion and levy exorbitant fee," said Narayanan Nair, a retired tahsildar.

The CDB began the first phase of imparting training in Kerala and Lakshadweep in association with the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in August 2011. The training involves exercises like jogging and practising yoga. On the final day, a competition is also held among the 20 members in coconut climbing using the machine.

The training at the Krishi Vigyan Kendras was imparted by master trainers from Kerala Agriculture University, Mannuthy. Machines costing ₹2,375 each are given free of cost and are supplied by Raidco and Kaico.