

This study proposes to examine the problems of aging in the context of culture.

Cultures, in all their variety are the laboratory of Anthropology and Sociology

Non-western and non-industrialized cultures offer a challenge to theories developed in the western culture, which supposedly have universal validity. One such theory, the disengagement theory, is one of the formal hypotheses to crystallize in Gerontology, as an alternative to the long-standing activity theory.

Once formulated, the disengagement theory managed to popularize gerontological thinking in to two camps - Disengagement Vs Activity.

Both these theories are concerned about successful aging.

Activity theorists stressed that successful aging is related to maintaining reasonable activity levels and substituting new roles for those lost ones.

Conversely, the disengagement hypothesis maintained that withdrawal is a normal aspect of aging as an individual and societies are preparing for the ultimate disengagement, death. (Cumming and Henry, 1961)

This study proposes to enrich our understanding of aging by exploring the disengagement hypothesis in a cultural context.

Aging was once felt a problem for the developed western world. However,

the modernization process with its related changes has overturned the earlier social and family relations, typical of the traditional cultural patterns where the elderly were well integrated and made to feel wanted and loved.

The social expectation in Jaffna culture is that elderly persons have to be cared for by their grown-up children, preferably, their sons. It is not surprising that in the absence of other forms of provision for old age security, a high value is placed on having children.

Even in the case of childlessness the socio-cultural system does provide alternatives, including adoption, polygamy, divorce or remarriage (Thesawalamai, 1972). At the same time there were culturally approved arrangements such as *karai yathirai* and other types pilgrimages within and out side Sri Lanka. Here in *karai yathirai* the elders take leave of their families and go on a pilgrimage (on foot) to Kathirgamam. Although they think it to be a final journey most of them do return home and this process tends to strengthen their family ties. However with the present day war situations such pilgrimages are becoming rare.

In addition with the on going changes in the society and family structures, the present day welfare policies in many traditional societies are now modeling along the line of the western family structure and demote the traditional kinship values.

Increasing numbers of home for elders and demands for such centres are good indicators of this trend. (Shanmugalingan, 1982)

In this background, this study proposes to analyze this problem by selecting two homes for elders in Jaffna for in-depth study, and a home for the elders in Batticaloa for comparative analysis.

Sociology studies age from two perspectives the micro and the macro levels. These two ways of examining aging are quite different, yet complementary (Bengston, 1973)

The micro level perspective, for examining aging, focuses more on the individual. This type is more familiar to member of the helping profession. The macro-sociological view focuses mainly on change in an individual's social world.

Problems of aging faced by our families are ever increasing especially with the conditions of on going war. The

important issue is not to consider where the old person lives, and with whom he interact on a day-to- day basis, but rather what the quality of that interaction is; what satisfactions are felt to be; what points of strain and conflict are present for the older person within his family and immediate social environment. To answer these questions, it is important to do a macro study. It would be a costly venture to embark on an extensive study of this nature. So I have confined my study by selecting these Homes for elders. This study combines both these approaches.

The methodology adopted in collecting data primarily consisted of field-work. In-depth interviews were made. A number of key informants were selected by judgement sampling technique; and case histories were recorded.

Day-to-day activities of these homes were observed as participant and non-participant observer.

II- Data from the field work

Table -1: Number of Inmates

| | Shanthy Nilayam, Jaffna. | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna. | Little Sisters, Batticaloa. |
|--------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Male | 104 | 15 | 43 |
| Female | 74 | 35 | 52 |

Source: Field Survey, 1995 - 1998

Table – 2: Marital Status and Availability of Children

| | Shanthi Nilayam, Jaffna | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna | Little Sisters, Batticaloa. |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Married and having living children | 28% | 25% | 46% |
| Married and no living children here | 50% | 45% | 28% |
| Unmarried/widow/no immediate kin | 22% | 30% | 26% |

Source: Field survey, 1995 – 98

Table -3: Satisfaction of the Inmates

| | Shanthi Nilayam, Jaffna. | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna. | Little Sisters, Batticaloa. |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Satisfied with living in the Home | 12% | 23% | 29% |
| Less satisfied but accepted as there is no alternative | 76% | 63% | 37% |
| Satisfied with living in the Home while maintaining regular communication with their own homes | 12% | 14% | 34% |

Source: Field survey, 1995 – 98

Table – 4: Feelings Concerning their Families

| | Shanthi Nilayam, Jaffna. | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna. | Little Sisters, Batticaloa. |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| “We should not be a burden to them” | 12% | 31% | 48% |
| “We were unwanted so we are here” | 47% | 45% | 36% |
| “Living here, hoping to rejoin our families” | 41% | 24% | 16% |

Source: Field survey, 1995 – 98

Table-5: Anxiety over the Last Rites

| | Shanthi Nilayam, Jaffna | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna. | Little Sisters, Batticaloa |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| "Should be done by my child/ close relation" | 78% | 66% | 68% |
| "Institution can do" | 22% | 34% | 32% |

Source: Field survey, 1995 - 98

Table-6: Factors behind the Disengagement Attitude

| | Shanthi Nilayam, Jaffna. | Soosaiyappar Illam, Jaffna. | Little Sisters Batticaloa. |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Poor economic conditions of the children | 32% | 35% | 58% |
| Painful feelings of loss of earlier social and family roles | 57% | 41% | 17% |
| Developing disengagement attitudes along traditional religious normative scheme. | 11% | 24% | 25% |

Source: Field survey, 1995 - 98

Selected Case Studies

Case A

Male, 75yrs, Traditional Thavil player. Unmarried, with 7 sisters; lost parents early in life.

Achieved his ambition by getting all the 7 sisters married. In so doing, missed his chances of marriage.

Feeling unwanted by sisters, he remarked with a long sigh,

"Before being rejected from my own home, I have sought refuge in this home."

Case B

Male, 60 yrs, worked at a press; 10 children. An injury in his leg; lost his job and became dependent on the children. The children behaved independently and were indifferent. His wife also joined the children and chased him away from the home. He laments,

"They have now branded me a drunkard. Even earlier, I was talking liquor, just because I lost

my job, they wanted an excuse for chasing me away. Now I don't take liquor. I am a better man and I feel for my wife and children. But they never care to come and see me here."

Case C

A female, 63 yrs; widow; 2 sons, lived with 2nd son's family. During the crisis of recent displacement, the 2nd son was arrested by the 'security' forces. The Daughter-in-law left her alone and joined her parents. The elder son went abroad during the crisis.

She is hopeful that her 2nd son will be released.

She expressed,

"Although I am well-looked after in this Home, I still long for the day, when I can be with my grand-children"

Case D

Male, 65 yrs 3 sons and 2 daughters. All married. 2 sons went abroad. After the wife's death, he stayed with his 3rd son's family.

Being ill-treated by the daughter-in-law, he changed his residence and stayed with one daughter. These again, he was unwanted by the son-in-law. So, he sought refuge in the Elders' Home. When asked about his children's feelings,

"I should not be a problem to any of my children, but with my daughters-in-laws, I already lost myself "

he said.

Case E

Male, 70 yrs, lost his wife in a bomb attack. 2 daughters; one is at Vavuniya. He was staying with the daughter in Jaffna. During the displacement, he was left behind by the daughter and others. So, far he has not heard anything from them. Though feeling frustrated, he still hopes to see his children again.

He is also thankful to Shanthi Nilayam in which he now stays.

Case F

Female, 66 yrs; Married; no children, husband and wife staying at the Home for elders for 3 years, after the 95 displacement. In fact, they adopted 2 sons of her sister. One son completed a prestige degree at a University. The other son has entered another University.

She laments thus:

"Because we have no children, we adopted the 2 sons of my sister. What is hurting us is that they never care to come and see us. They are listening to the advice of their mother now. Such is the ungratefulness of our adopted sons"

Knowing that, I am from the University, she didn't want to disclose the name, of the 2 sons.

III also specialities of institutions
By analyzing the data, the plight of the in-mates of these institutions and the factors that have pushed them into these institutions can be summarized as follows:

1. The data reflects; such institutionalization is the last resort for helpless elders, when family relation and resources become severely strained. Ironically, we find quite a number of in-mates who have spent their wealth and resources for the betterment of their own family members.
2. Non-availability of kins, due to increasing trend of emigration, displacements, disappearance and death due to the on-going war has
3. Egoistic interference by elders and changes in traditional social roles, especially in the case of working women, who had been considered as 'kin-keepers' of our culture, is reflected in some of our case studies.
4. Though well looked after in these institutions, most of the in-mates are longing to rejoin their own families, According to the Tables 3, 4 and 5, 75% of the in-mates at the Jaffna Home-Shanthinilayam, are not happy at institutional living, and 41% of them are hopeful of re-joining their families.

In comparison, the data from Bataloa, Little Sisters home, tends to paint a different picture. However, we are able to observe more than 34% of the in-mates from this home have regular contacts with their families, where as in Jaffna Homes only 12% have regular contacts with their families. This peculiar feature is due to the poverty conditions of the in-mates of the Bataloa Home, which induces the family

members and the in-mates to come to this decision.

In conclusion, institutionalization of these in-mates has caused emotional change and painful experience. They are very much affected by the changing attitudes of their children and other relations. Anxiety over *kollikadan*, the last rites by the male children or close relatives is a notable example observed in all these home. Higher level of psychological breakdown is the result of all these cultural expectations.

Developing disengagement attitudes along traditional religious normative scheme is very low in Jaffna Home-Shanthinilayam (11%). Non-availability of the traditional way-out, such as *karai yathirai* and other long distance pilgrimages, due to the prevailing war situation is also a contributory factor against disengagement. In short the cultural expectations, as well as cultural conditions are not encouraging disengagement.

IV

Policy question and suggestions

1. This study re-iterates the proposed act of setting up a National council for elders (1997) to advise the families concerned to care for the elders.
2. Also, endorse proposed community-based care for elders with state support. As Prof.S.T.Hettigie says, the answer lies with community based care where their families or relations (if they have any), but the

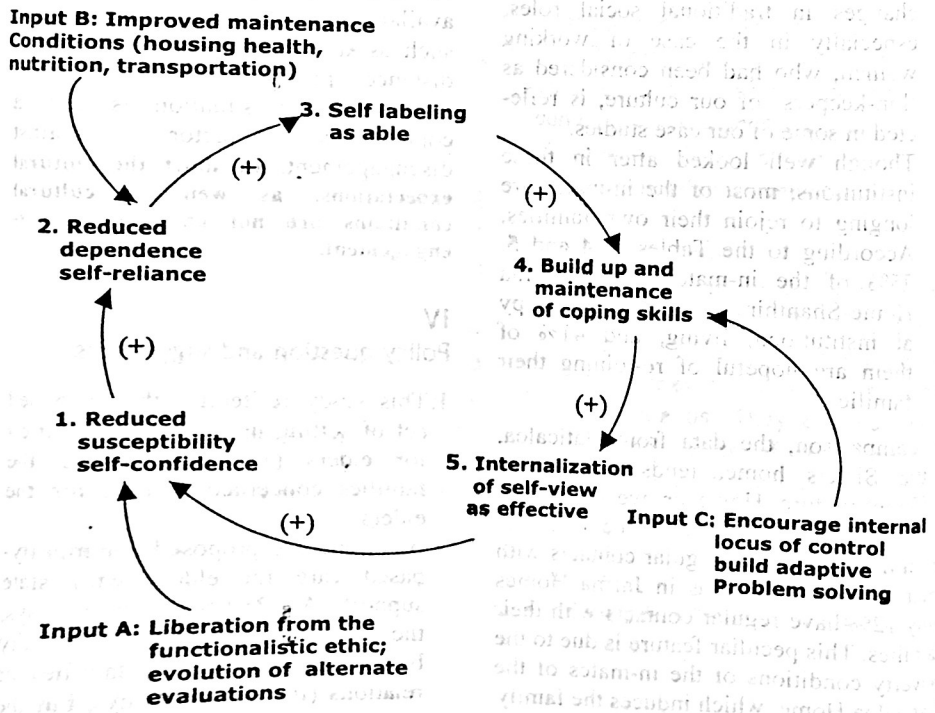
families themselves are supported in some way (health care, financial or other wise) by the state as it is becoming exceedingly difficult and impossible for the poor majority to support the expenses incurred by the aged.

3. Incorporate value education towards elders at school-level and community-level.
4. Educate elders in the present day changes at family and community levels, with stress on positive values of aging. As Blau (1973) suggests, that the middle aged individuals should develop

commitment to an interest outside of the job and the family. (eg: voluntary work in organizations; a second career..) This represents a greater source of future dividends, a potentially more constructive use of leisure time than seeking escape in drink and other vices.

In this context, the importance of social reconstruction system to ameliorate the problem of aging in our culture is clearly depicted in the following proposed models:

The Social Reconstruction Syndrome: A benign Cycle of Increasing Competence through social system Inputs



This democratic revolution must necessarily have associated with it a service revolution especially in a society like ours. As activity theory proposes, it is beneficial to the community as their immense and enriched experiences could be of great use to the younger generation.

5. Finally, to make available the real fruits of our cultural meaning of family ties, it is essential to put an end to the on-going meaningless war and to have a just and lasting political solution, only then can we get back the so called 'missing children'; and get back to the peaceful life of elders, as well as youngsters.

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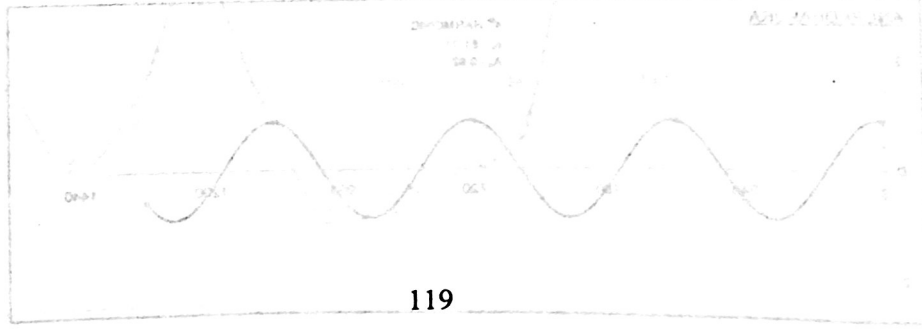
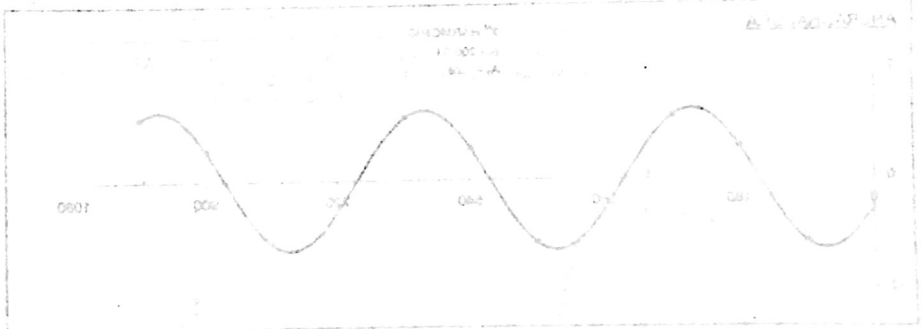
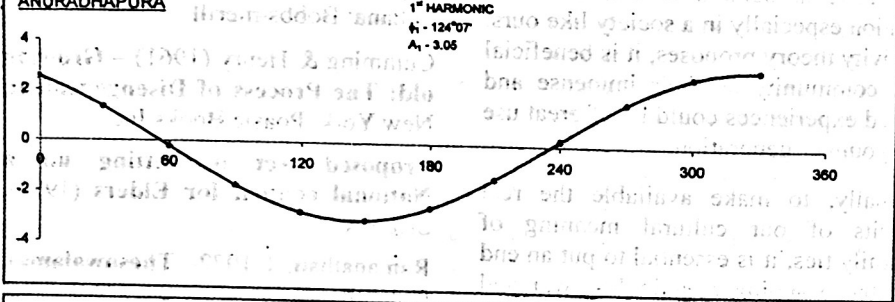
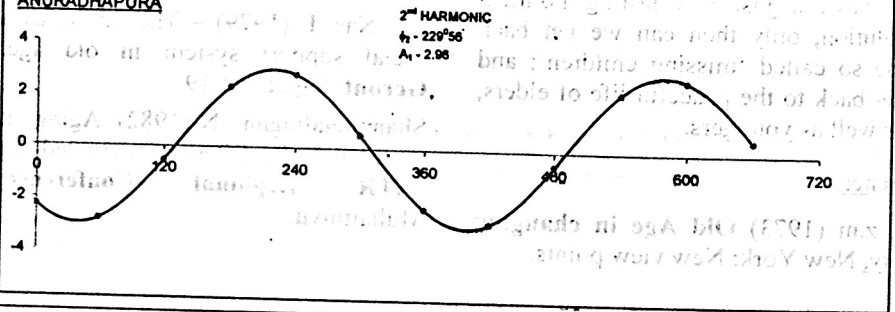


Figure - 01

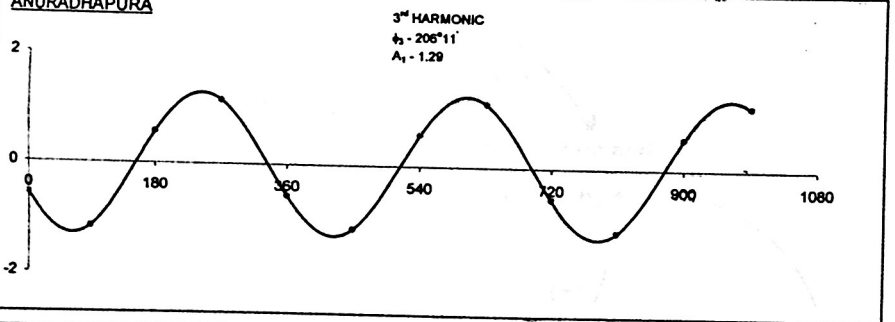
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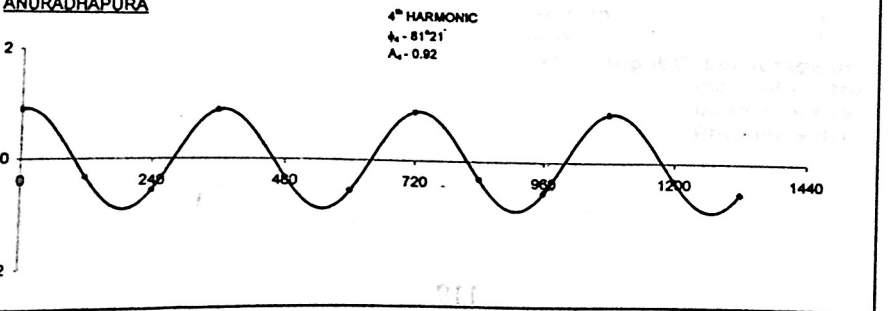
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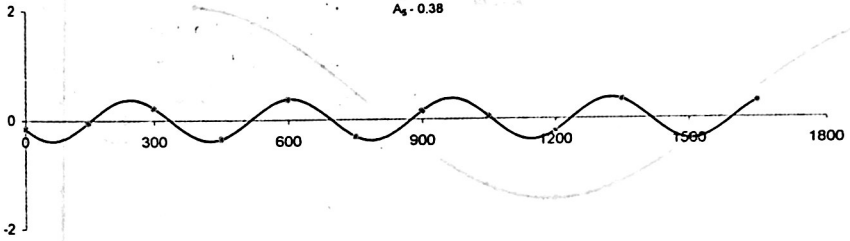


ANURADHAPURA

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$A_5 - 0.38$

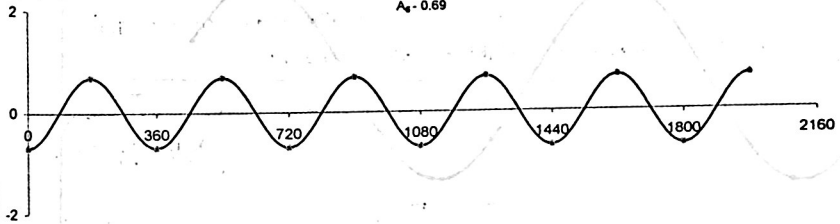


ANURADHAPURA

6th HARMONIC

$\phi_6 - 270^{\circ}$

$A_6 - 0.69$



ANURADHAPURA

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DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE

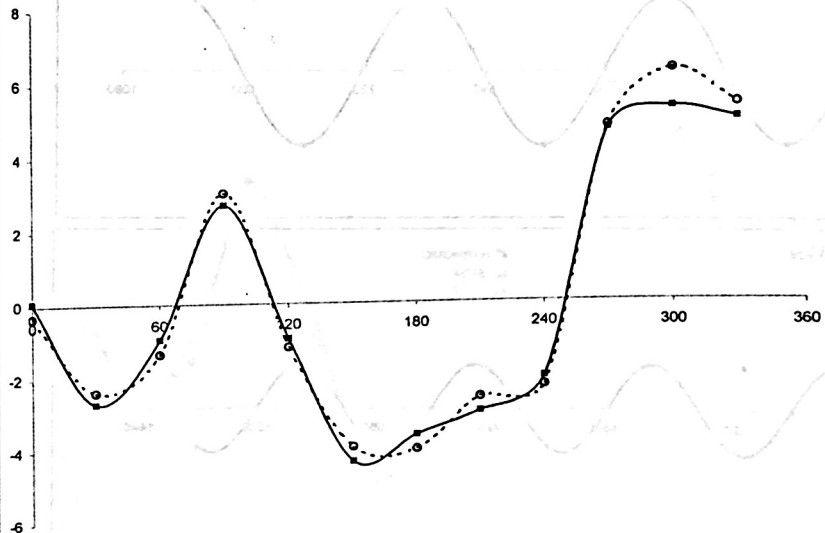
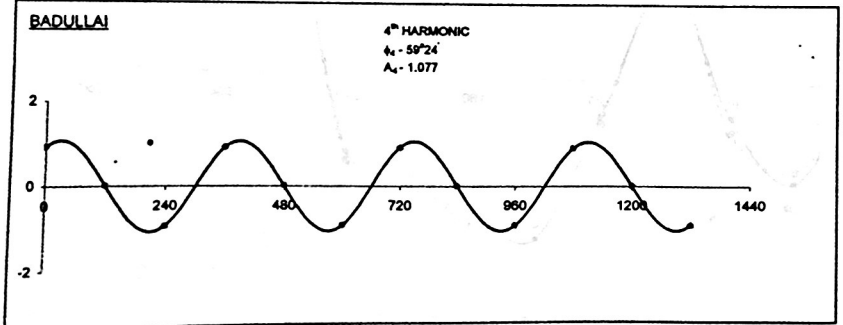
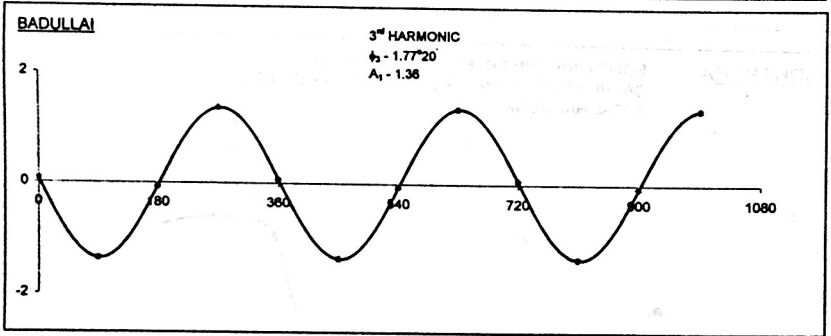
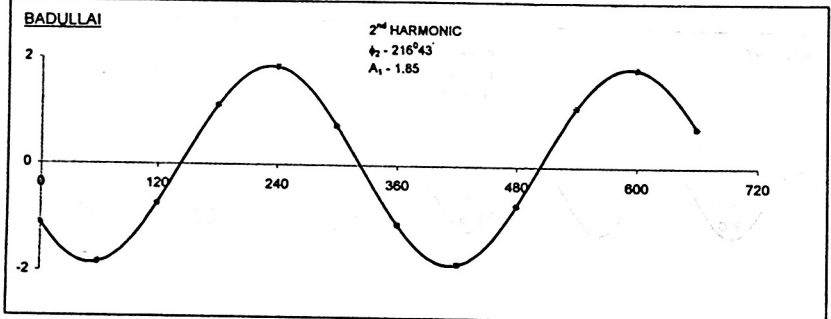
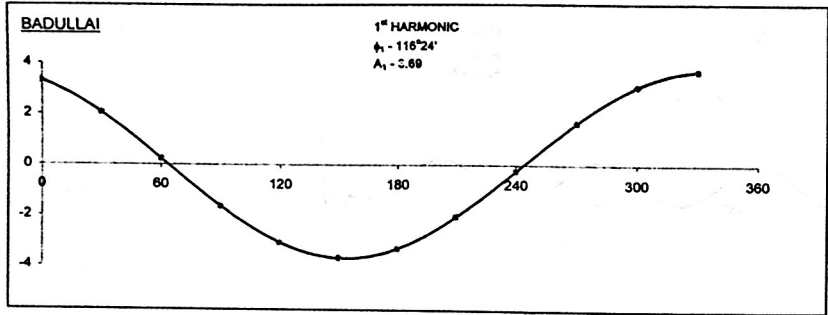


Figure - 02



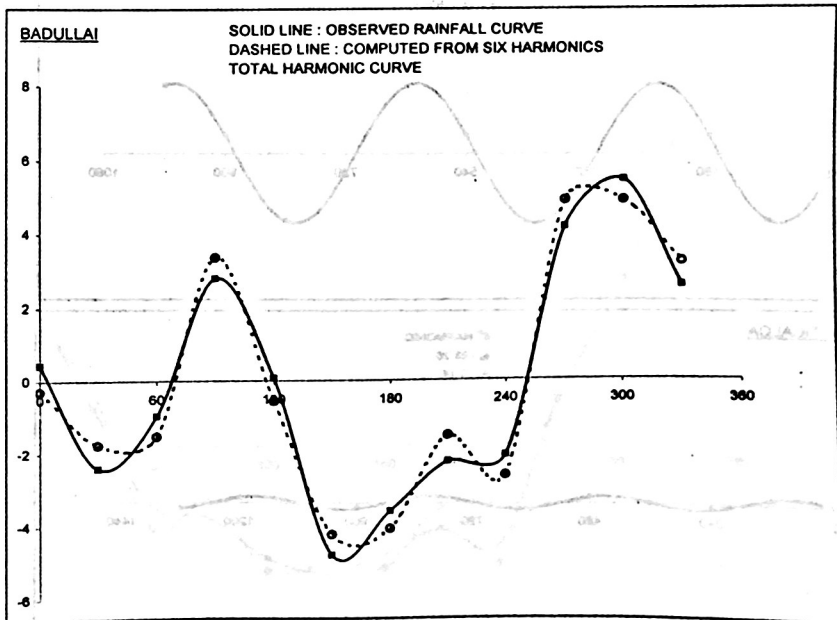
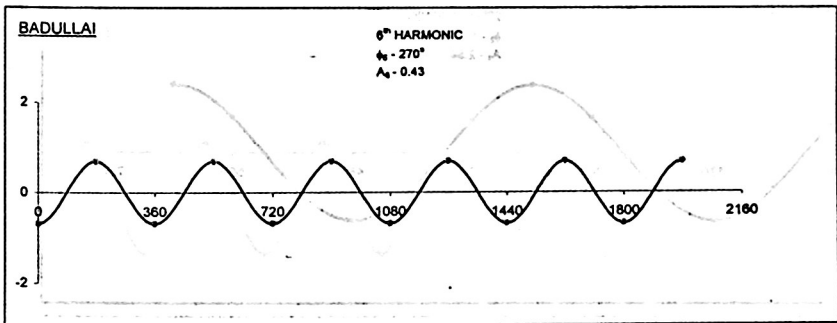
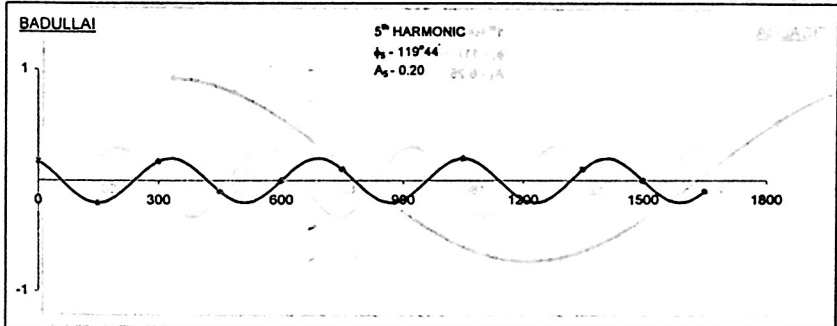
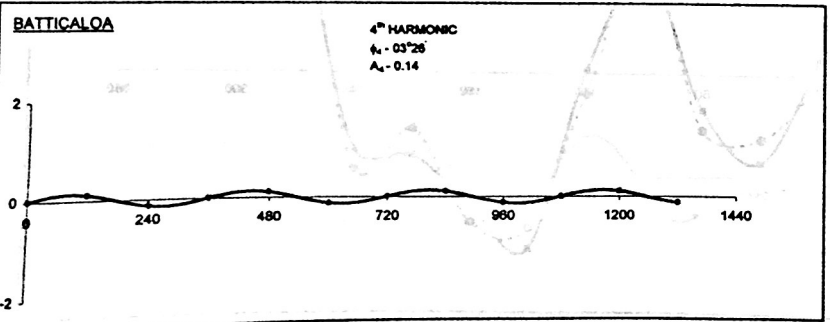
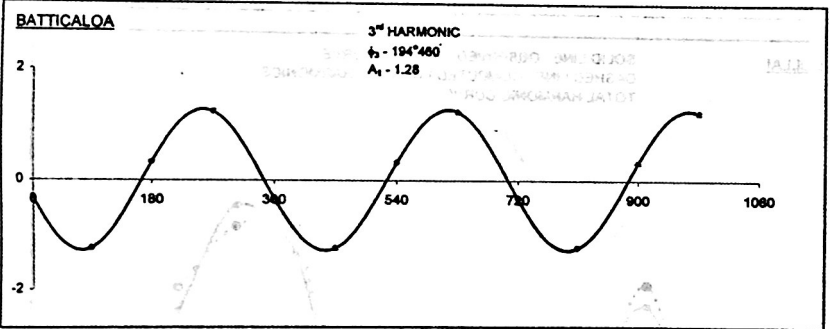
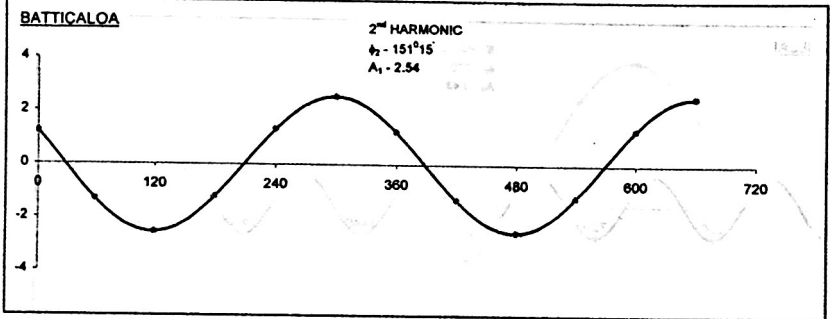
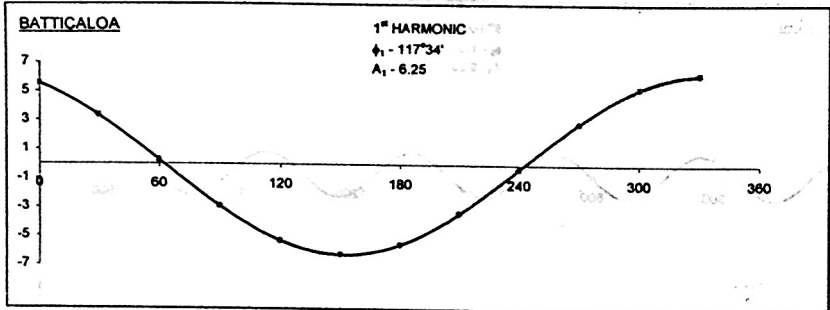
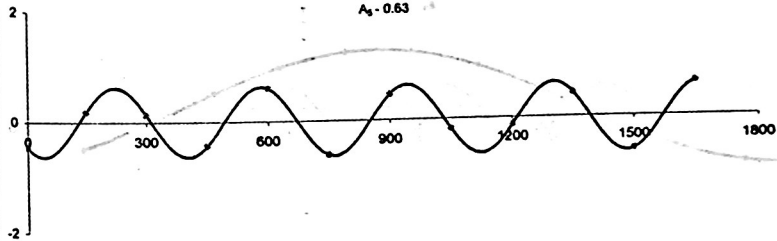


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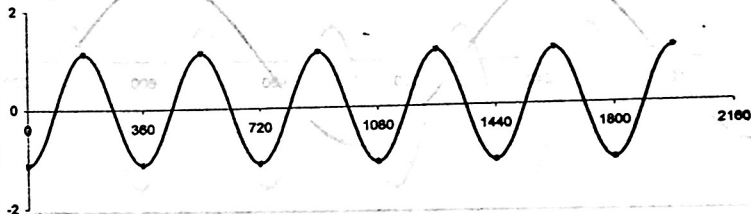
BATTICALOA

5th HARMONIC
 $\phi_5 - 227^{\circ}11'$
 $A_5 - 0.63$



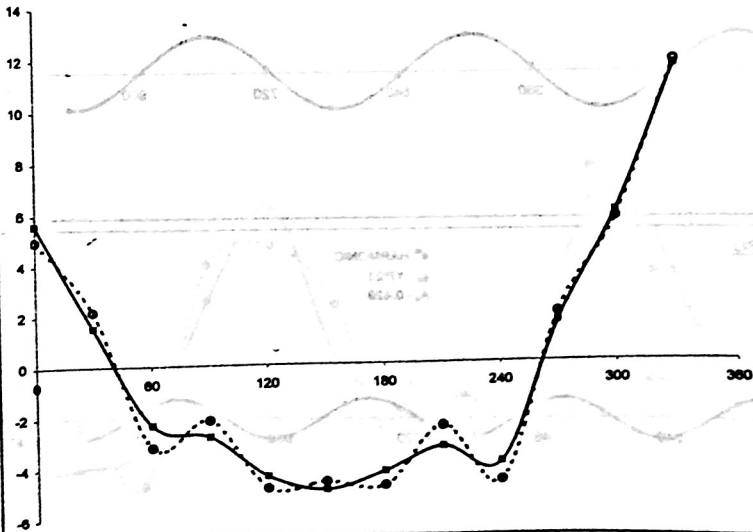
BATTICALOA

6th HARMONIC
 $\phi_6 - 270^{\circ}$
 $A_6 - 1.13$



BATTICALOA

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DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE



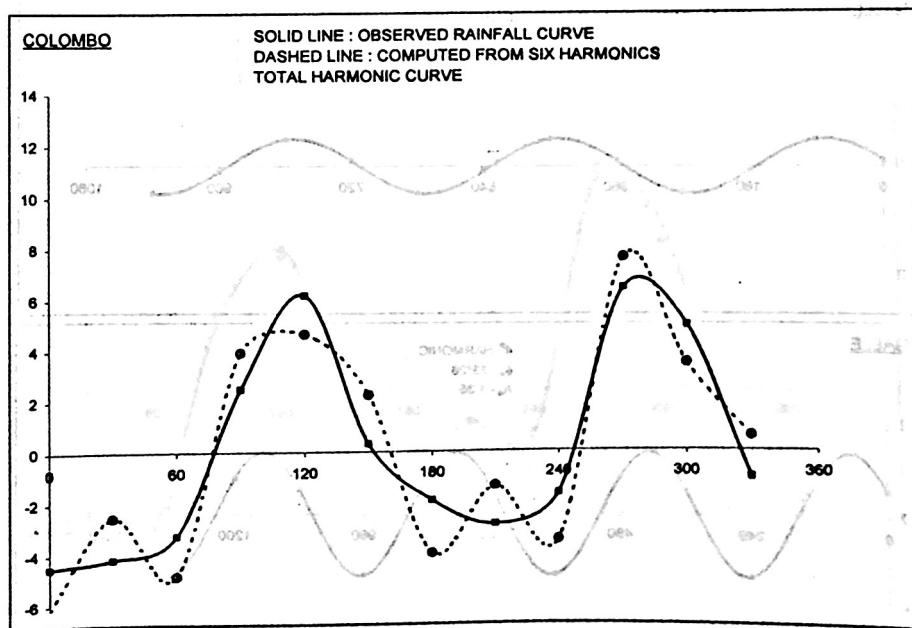
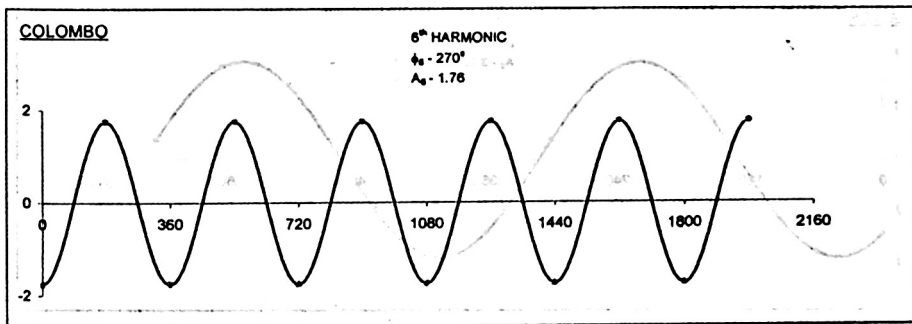
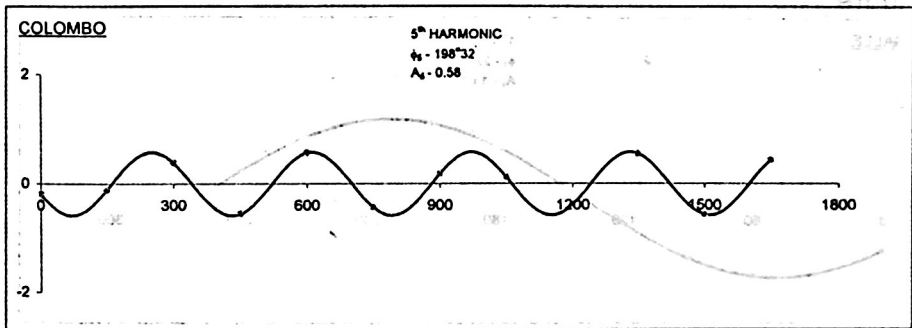
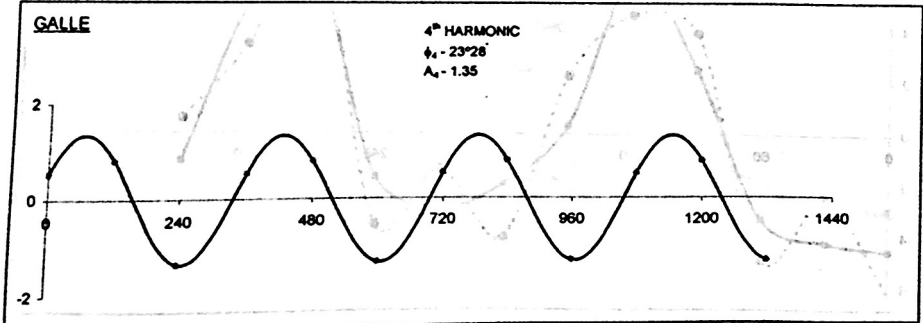
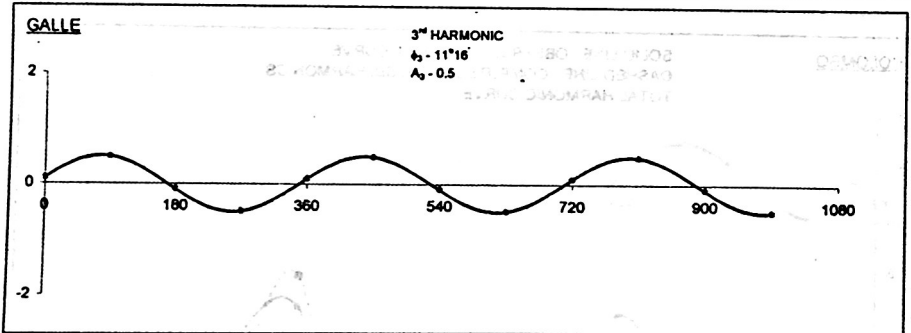
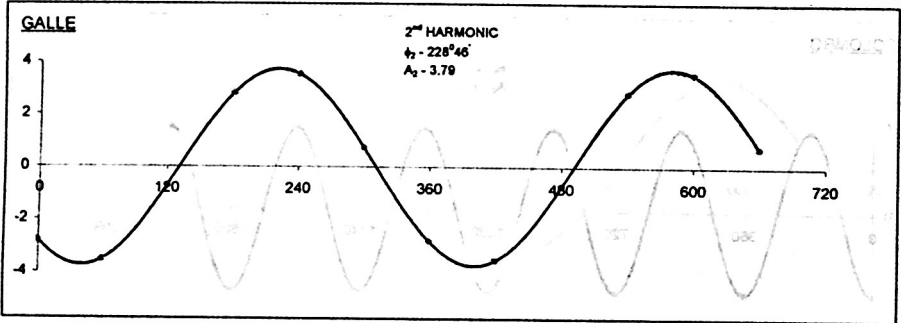
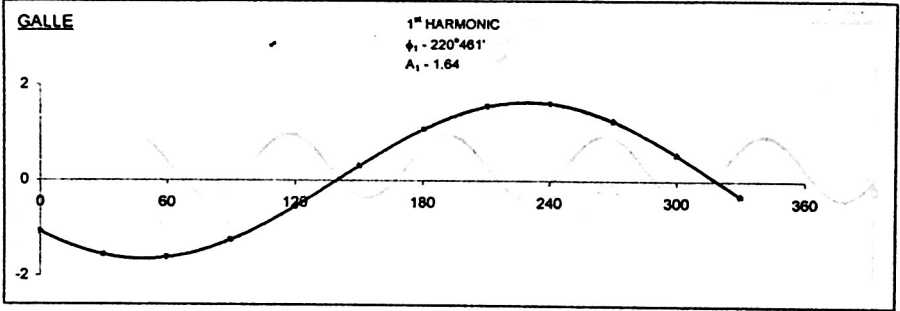


Figure - 05



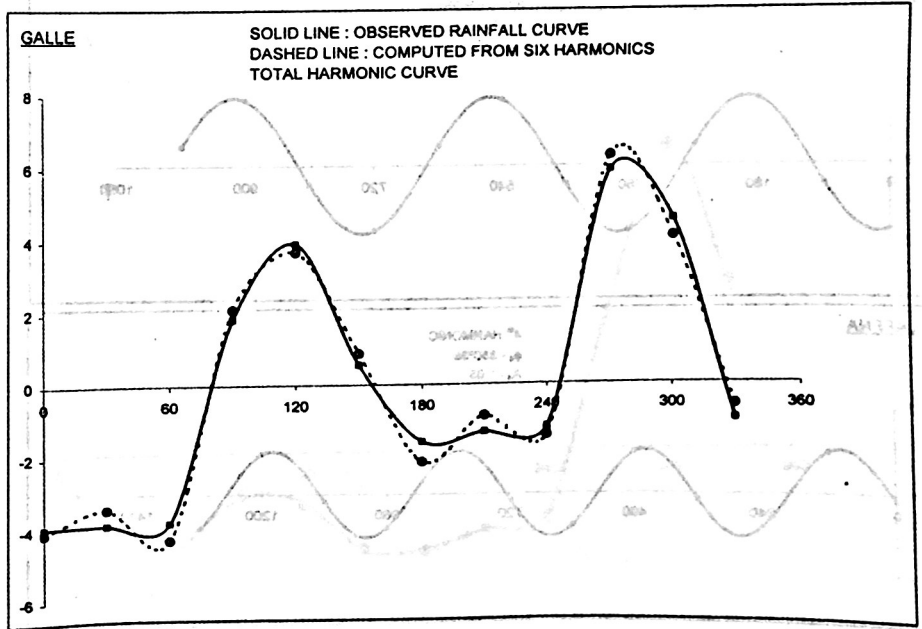
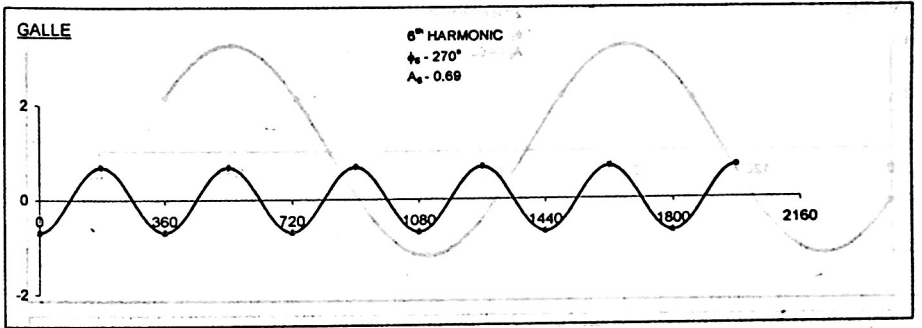
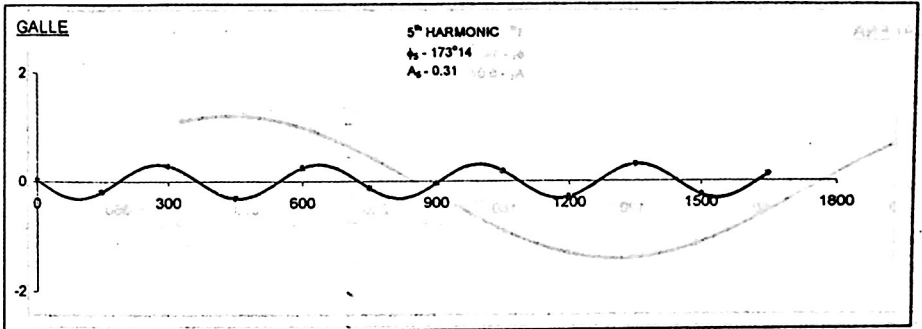
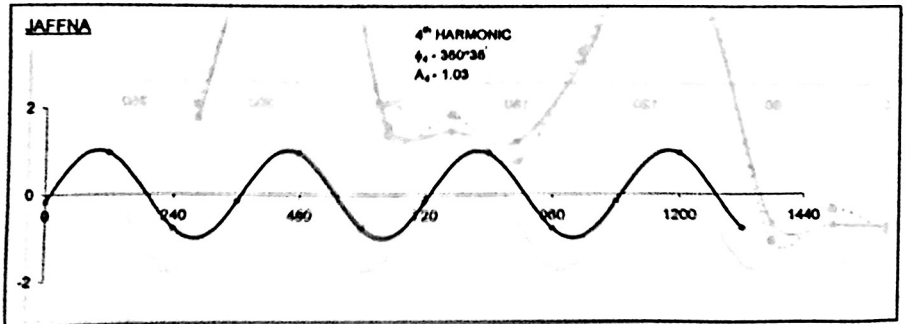
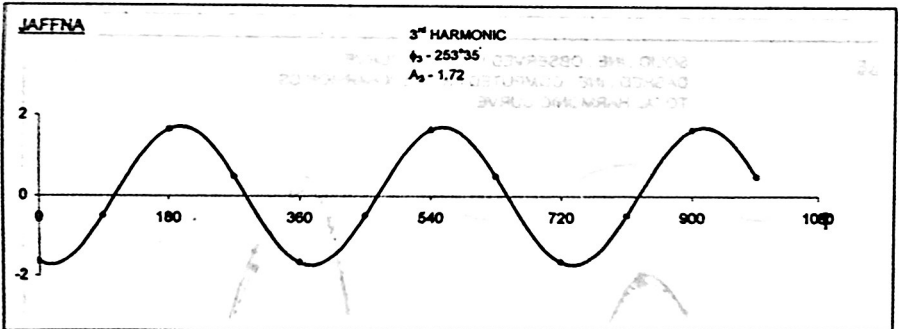
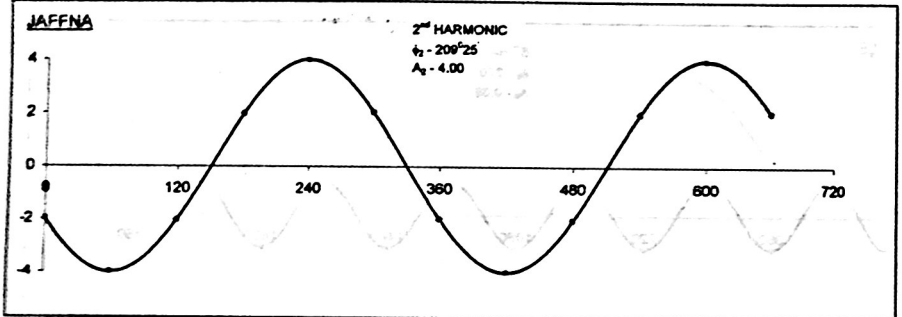
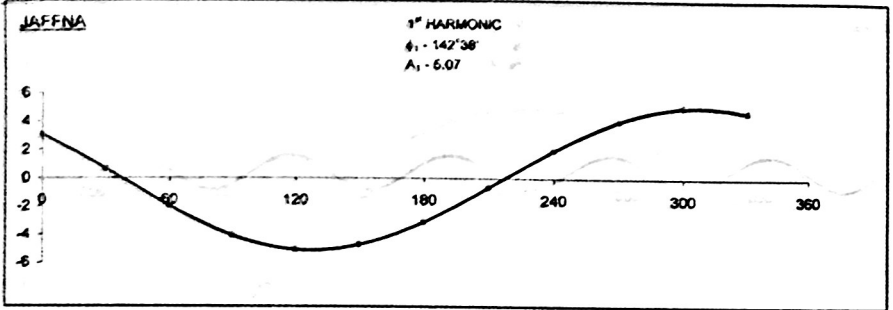


Figure - 06



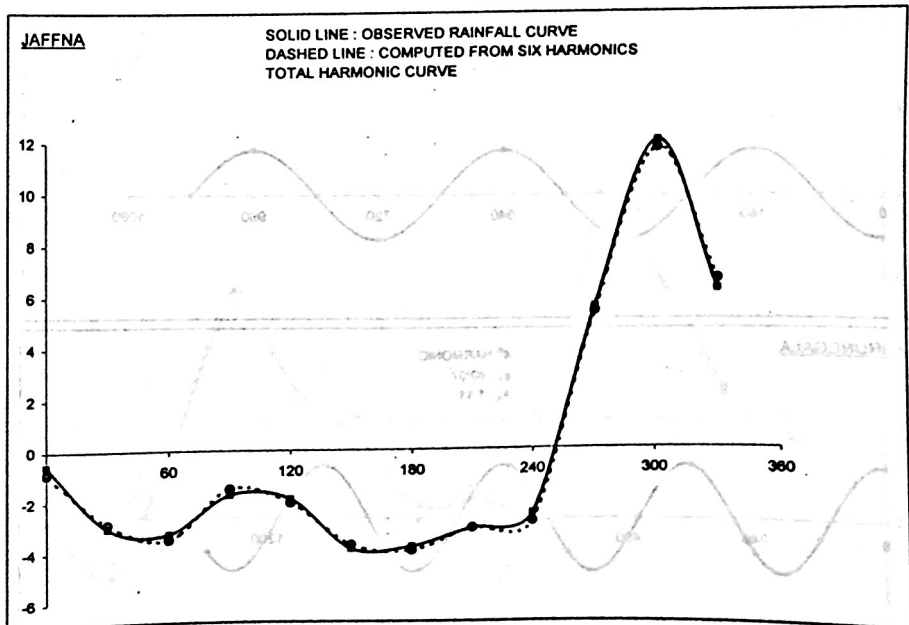
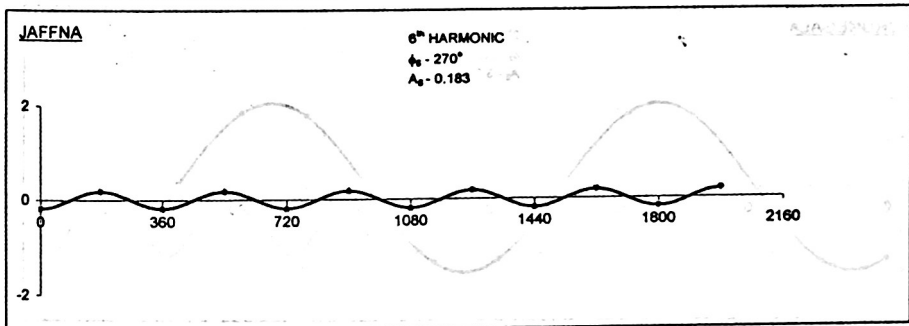
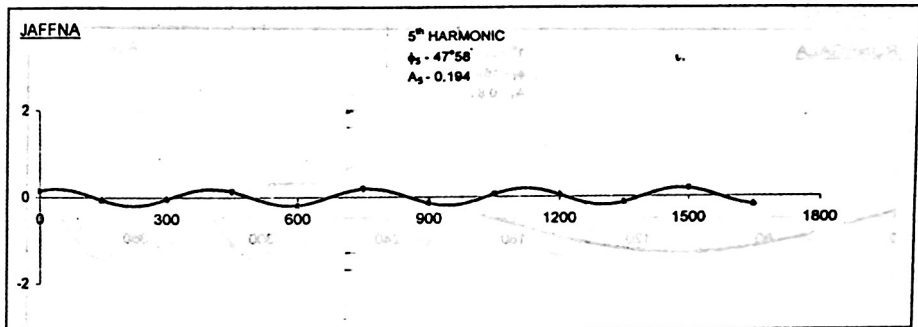
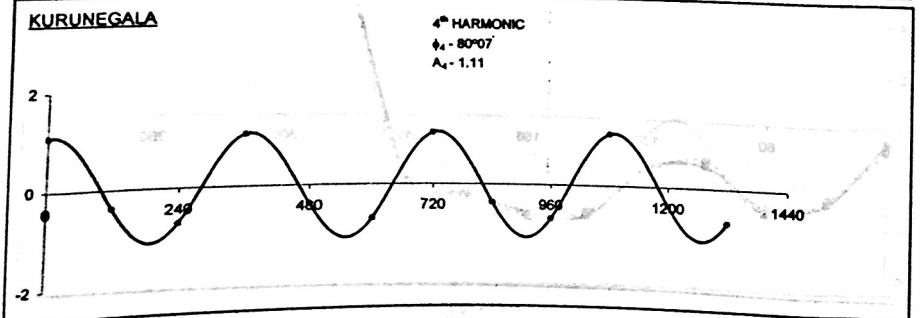
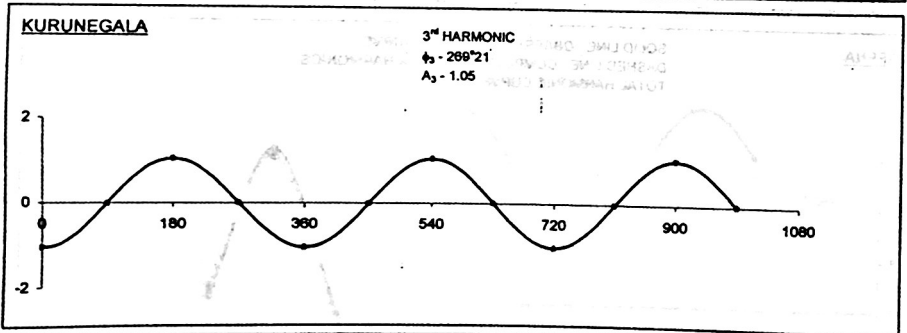
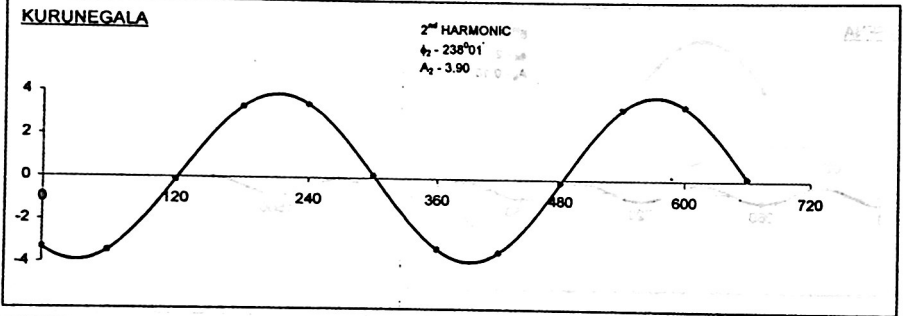
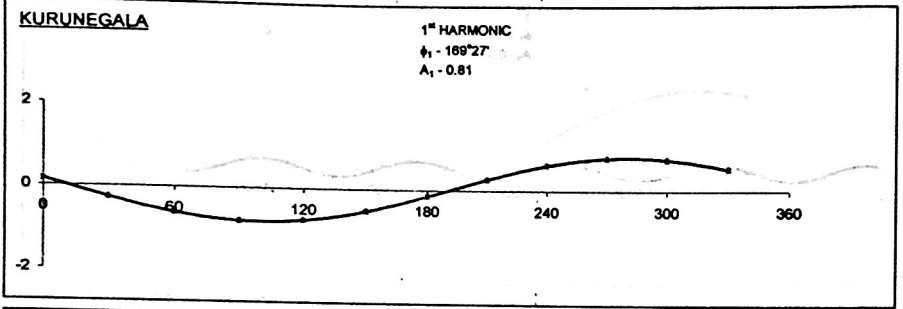


Figure - 07

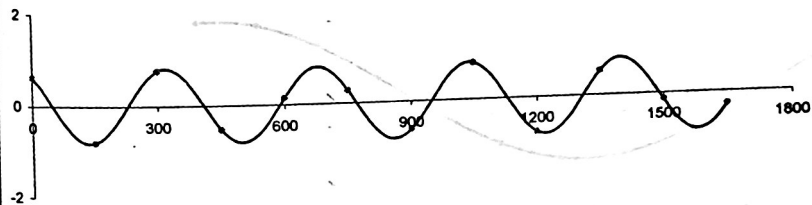


KURUNEGALA

5th HARMONIC

$\phi_5 - 130^{\circ}02'$

$A_5 - 0.82$

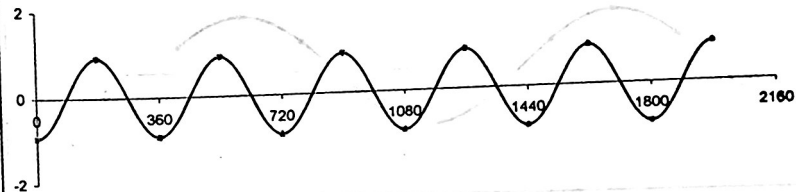


KURUNEGALA

6th HARMONIC

$\phi_6 - 270^{\circ}$

$A_6 - 0.92$



KURUNEGALA

SOLID LINE : OBSERVED RAINFALL CURVE
DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE

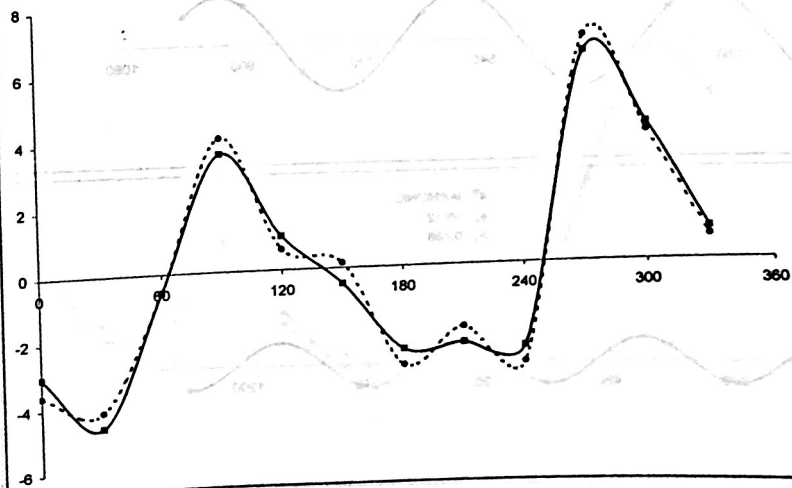
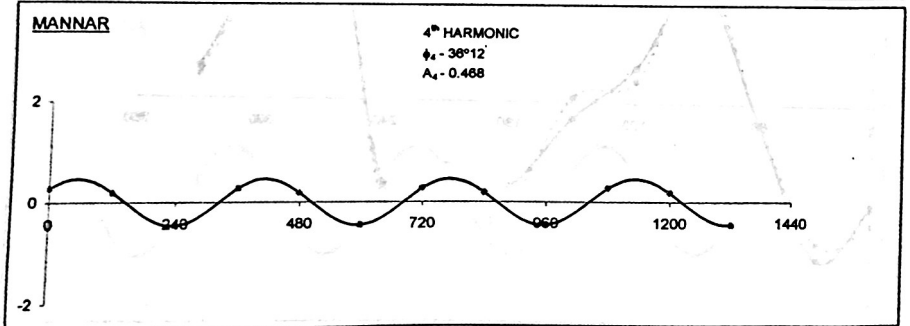
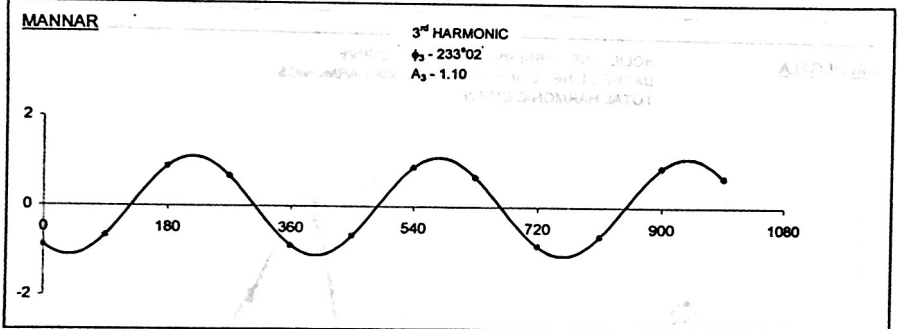
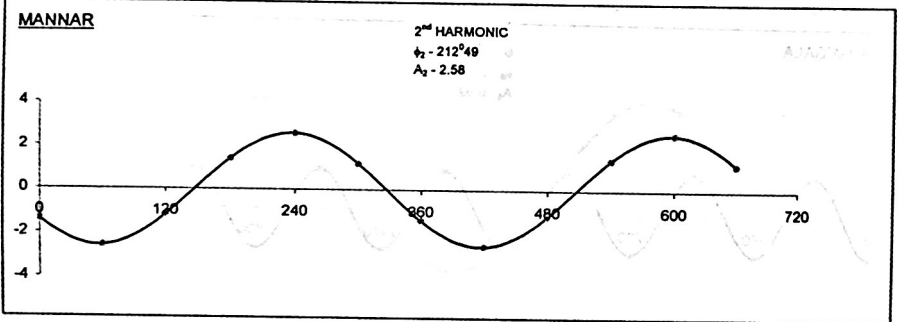
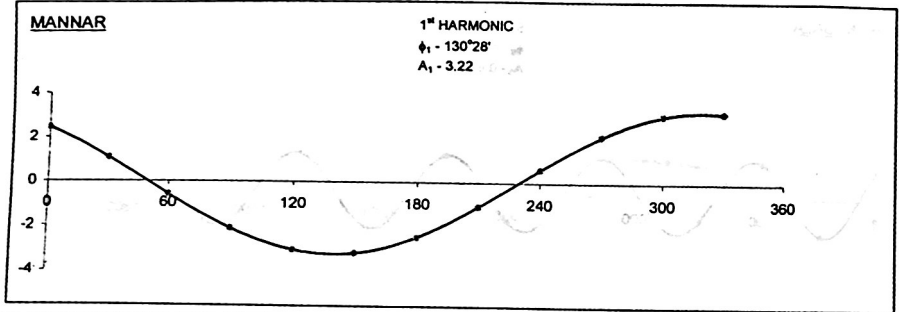


Figure - 08

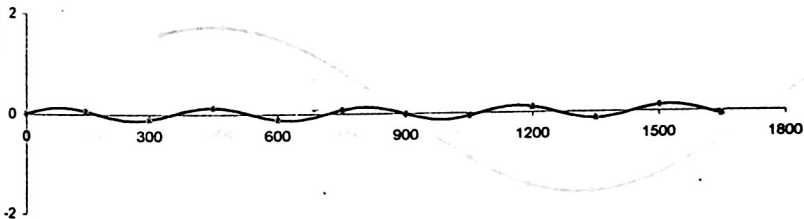


MANNAR

5th HARMONIC

$\phi_5 - 03^{\circ}18'$

$A_5 - 0.13$

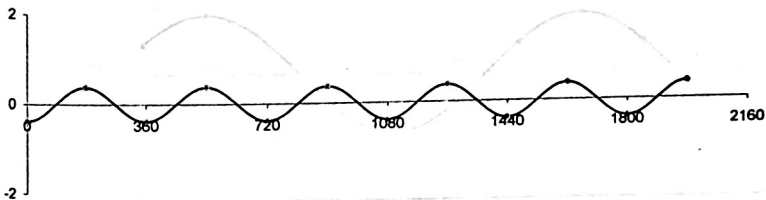


MANNAR

6th HARMONIC

$\phi_6 - 270^{\circ}$

$A_6 - 0.38$



MANNAR

SOLID LINE : OBSERVED RAINFALL CURVE
DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE

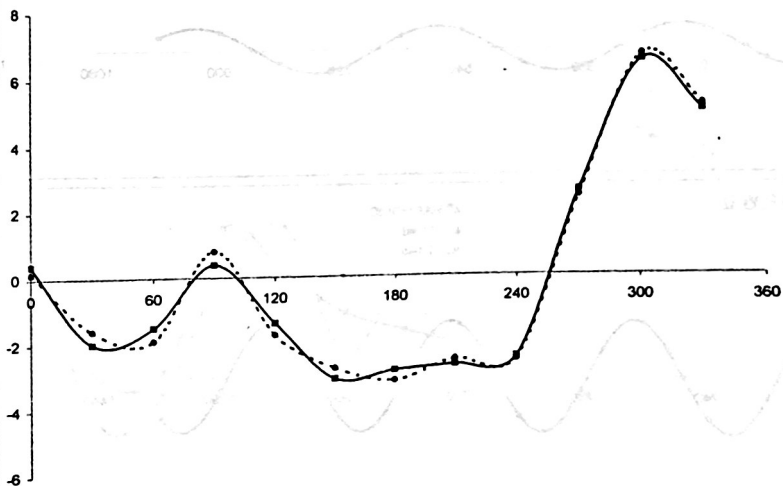
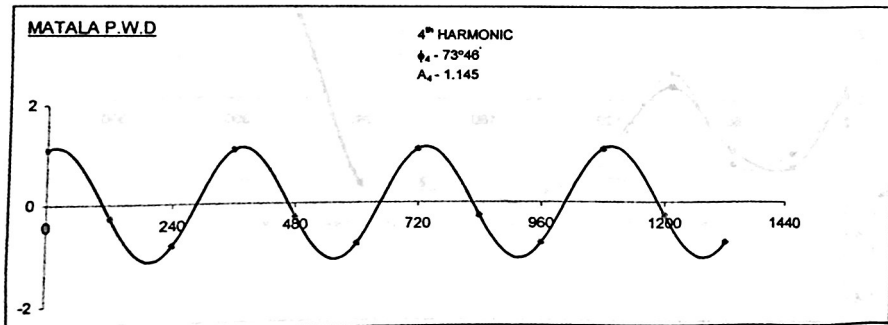
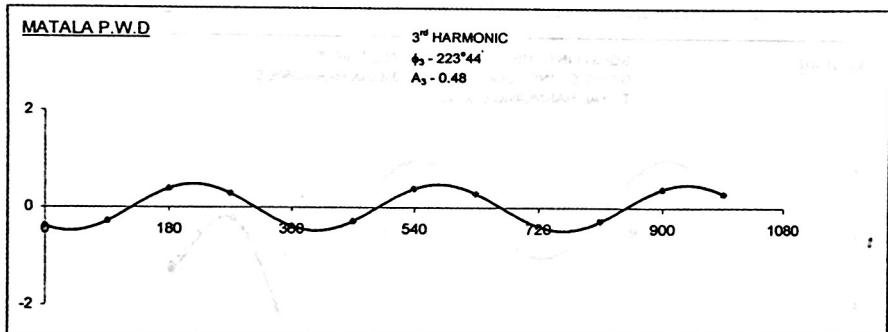
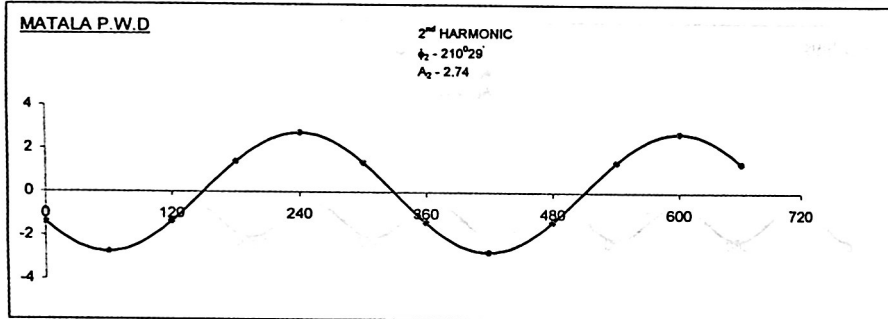
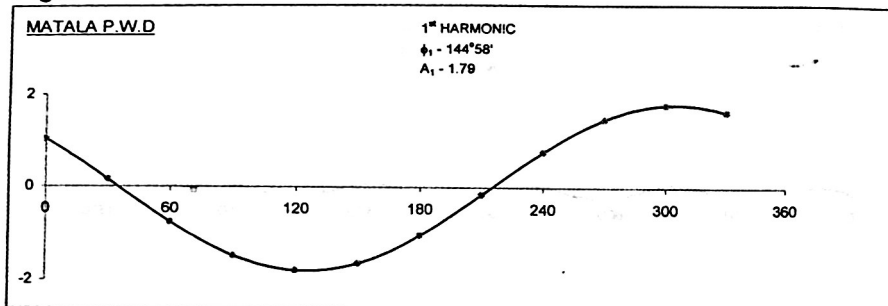
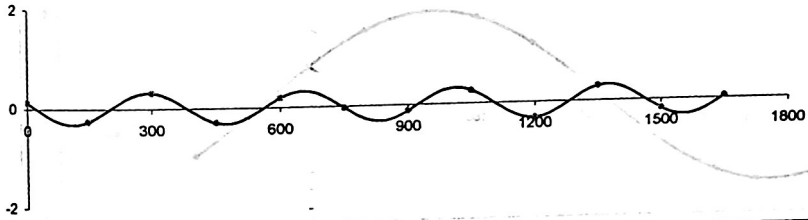


Figure - 09



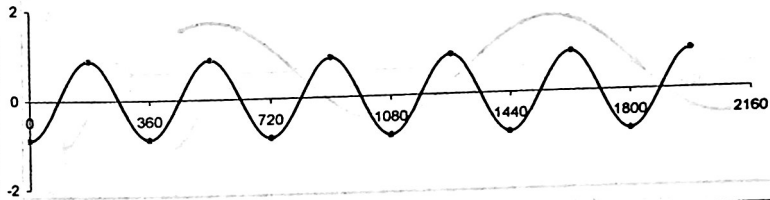
MATALA P.W.D

5th HARMONIC
 $\phi_5 - 156^\circ 40'$
 $A_5 - 0.316$



MATALA P.W.D

6th HARMONIC
 $\phi_6 - 270^\circ$
 $A_6 - 0.89$



MATALA P.W.D

SOLID LINE : OBSERVED RAINFALL CURVE
DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE

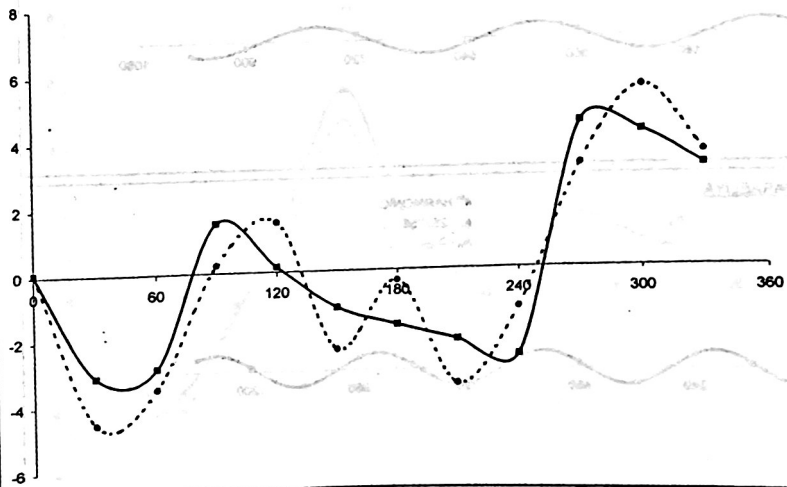
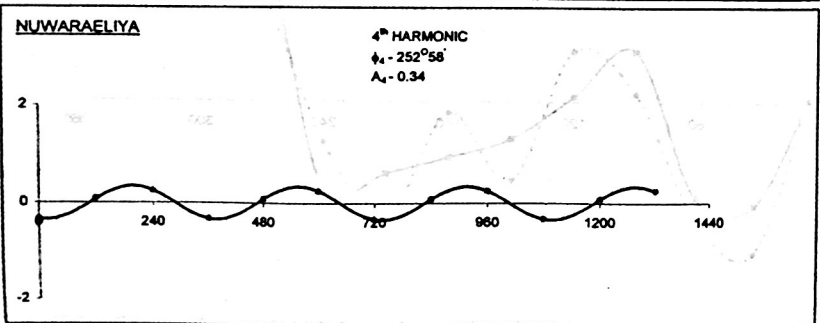
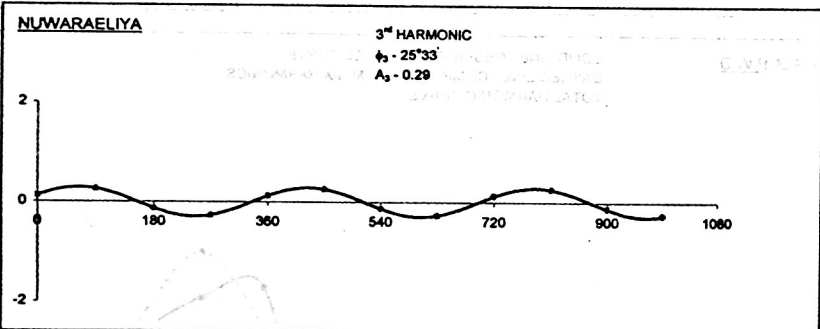
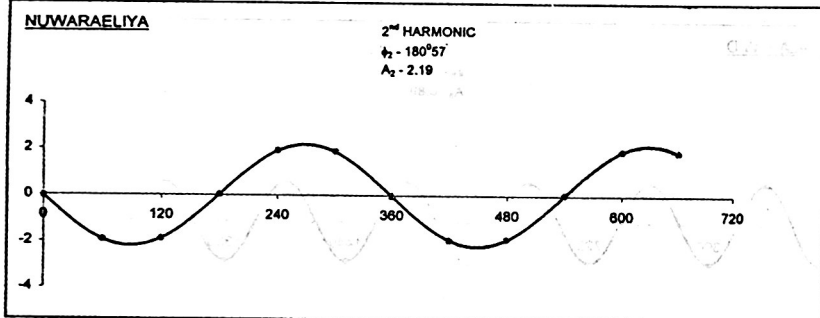
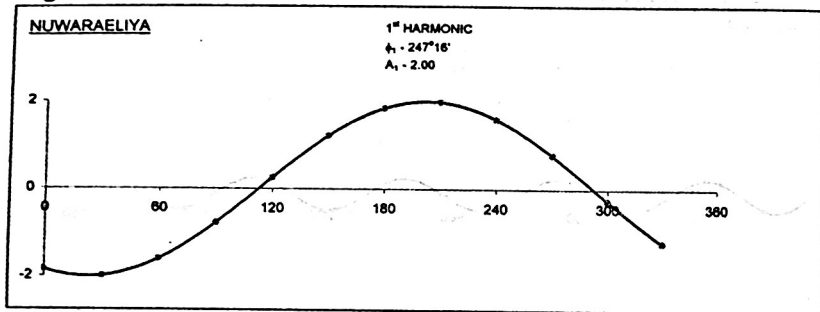


Figure - 10

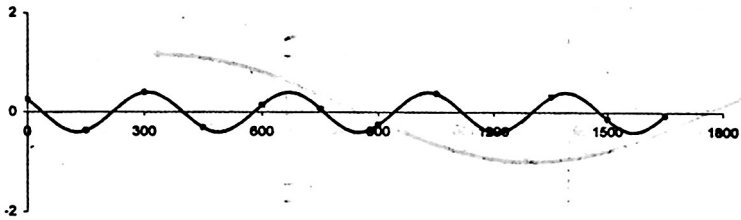


NUWARAELIYA

5th HARMONIC

$\phi_5 = 140^\circ 49'$

$A_5 = 0.40$

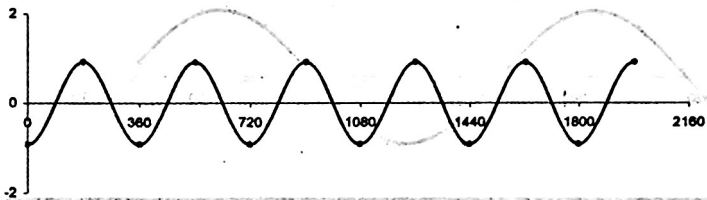


NUWARAELIYA

6th HARMONIC

$\phi_6 = 270^\circ$

$A_6 = 0.92$



NUWARAELIYA

SOLID LINE : OBSERVED RAINFALL CURVE
DASHED LINE : COMPUTED FROM SIX HARMONICS
TOTAL HARMONIC CURVE

