CHAPTER 4

SLAVERY ABOLITION ACT V OF 1843 AND ITS IMPACT
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But for the pressure exerted by the Humanitarians neither the Indian Government nor the Colonial administrators in Britain would have done anything in the direction of abolishing slavery in India. British Parliament cleverly passed on the slavery question to the Indian Government. The Government on its part referred it to the Law Commission. The Law commission's report came for consideration in 1841. The report was a hastily prepared document and it confused instead of clarifying many points relating to Indian slavery. As Hjejle observes, "on the topic of slavery the report the commissioners produced was a confused and badly written document".¹

The Law commission in Note (B) to the penal code recommended to include the provision: "that no act falling under the definition of an offence should be exempted from punishment because it is committed by a master against a slave"² Opinions of Government officials from all over India on this clause was sought. Colonial officials recognised that forms of agricultural and domestic servitude were widespread throughout the subcontinent, but there were many reasons why they were hesitant to intervene in such matters. First, there were economic considerations. The large class of landless labourers, held in varying degrees of economic subordination
and ritual inferiority, was essential to existing systems of agricultural produc-
tion.³ At another level there was a concern to preserve the subservience of the
labouring classes in order to safeguard the stability of the social order.⁴ Majority of
the officials stated that slavery in India was mild and no action was warranted at
present.

The Law Commission, however, proposed a law which stated, "It is hereby
declared and enacted that whoever assaults, imprisons or inflicts any bodily hurt
upon any person being a slave, under circumstances which would not have justified
such assaulting, imprisoning or inflicting bodily hurt upon such person if such person
had not been a slave, is liable to be punished by all counts of criminal jurisdiction
within the territories subject to the government of the East India company as he would
be liable to be punished by such courts if such person had not been a slave."⁵

That the question of abolition of slavery did not evoke any interest from
officials is gleaned from official communications. Mr. H Chamier, the Chief Secre-
tary to the Government of Madras in his communication sent to the Government
of India stated that he "considers it will be preferable not to legislate at all in
respect of slavery till the whole question in all its bearings has been fully
considered"⁶ When the Court of Directors directed the Indian Government to pass
an act emancipating slaves, Auckland, the Governor General said that "the
inclination of my own mind is against legislation on the subject of slavery for
reformation is working its own way."⁷ However, the Indian Government was under
so much pressure that it could not postpone legislation on slavery any more. Hence there was no enthusiasm in passing Act V by the Honourable the president of the council of India. The Act was passed on April 7th 1843.

The Act emancipating slaves had the following clauses;

1. It is hereby enacted and declared that no public officer shall, in execution of any degree or order of court, or for the enforcement of any demand of rent or revenue, sell or cause to be sold, any person, or the right to the compulsory or service of any person on the ground that such person is in a state of slavery.

2. And it is hereby declared and enacted, that no rights arising out of an alleged property in the person and services of another as a slave shall be enforced by any civil or criminal court or magistrate within the territories of the East India Company.

3. And it is hereby declared and enacted that no person who may have required property by his own industry, or by the exercise of any art calling, or profession or by inheritance, assignment, gift or bequest, shall be disposed of such property, or prevented from taking possession thereof on the ground that such person from whom the property may have been derived, was a slave.

4. And it is hereby enacted that any act which would be a penal offence, if done to a free man shall be equally an offence if done to any person on the pretext of his having in a condition of slavery.

The Act 'had little to offer the slave population' as Hjejele rightly observes. In fact the Colonial Government did not want the slave community enjoy defacto freedom. It was expected from Indian officials that provisions of the law would be
made known to the slaves. But this never happened. Out of self interest the officials being slave owners themselves devised other methods to keep their slaves under subordination even before the good news of liberation had reached them. The rights and duties of people who fell within the category of bonded labour were not affected by the Act.  

Unable to find opportunities other than agricultural works due to lack of capital and prohibition on occupational mobility, landless labourers were forced by circumstances to live under their old masters by entering into a contract. By getting a small amount of money from the landowning classes, these poor men executed bonds by which they promised to serve them till such a time when they repaid their debts. These debts were never cleared and in consequence slavery was perpetuated. Indeed, the continued practice of various forms of servitude operated under the juridical protection of freedom of contract, ultimately rationalized and regulated by the colonial state.  

Landlords manipulated the loop holes in the Act to their advantage and labourers continued to be exploited. At last the IPC of 1861 made the practice of slavery a crime punishable with fine and imprisonment. The following are the provisions made to deal with persons buying and selling slaves.

Section 370 : Buying and disposing of any person as a slave.

Whoever imports, exports, removes, buys, sells or disposes of any person as a slave or accepts receives or detains against his will any person as a slave shall be
punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to seven years and shall also be liable to life.

Section 371 : Habitual dealing in slaves.

Whoever habitually imports, exports, removes, buys, sells, traffics or deals in slaves, shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term not exceeding ten years and shall also be liable to fine.  

Slave castes themselves are also to be blamed if at all the practice continued even after the passing of the emancipation Act. Landless labourers in India were highly docile and steeped in ignorance. They did not care to understand the value of freedom. The force of custom made so deep an impression that slave castes felt that it was their divinely ordained duty to serve others above them. Among the slaves themselves careful distinctions which were not overcome through their common bondage were maintained with in the hierarchy of the sub castes and there were various degrees of pollution. Further there was no collective effort to espouse the cause of landless labourers. In this favourable climate slavery continued to persist in different forms. The rise of Agricultural Capitalism, in the 19th century created a market for labour. European Planters were in need of cheap labour. By recourse to the law of contract free labourers were recruited as indentured labourers to work in overseas plantations. Indentured labourers were in no way better than agricultural slaves. Thus after the passing of the slavery abolition Act in 1843, we find slavery
assuming new forms such as

1. Personal type of slavery.
2. Indentured labour.

It is extraordinarily difficult to separate agriculstic slavery from debt bondage and to pinpoint exactly where slavery ends and bondage begins. The commonly accepted view that slavery was hereditary servitude while bondage was lifelong is not really applicable to India since bondage here was usually perceived by both masters and labourers as a heritable status.

Personal type of slavery commenced through self sale by adults or the sale of young family members by guardians in exchange for a cash loan or promise of subsistence through written agreements even though here too custom proved to be the operative factor. Servitude was supposed to last till the original debt was repaid and till then the wages due to them were adjusted against the interest due on their loans. It was usually stipulated that if the loan remained unpaid in the debtor's lifetime successive generations would be pledged to bondage until full payment was made. The debtor under bondage, however, had little scope for cash accumulation since his entire labour was pledged to the creditor in exchange for subsistence alone. Hence the prospect of repayment and release remained notional and the hereditary aspect was more or less assumed right from the beginning.

The 'contract' between the master and slave was in the form of a sale deed (adimai - chittu). These deeds assumed legal validity as per the provisions of the
contract Act of 1859. Masters gained full control over their slaves and any breach
of agreement under such a deed could be punished as per the contract Act. Breaches
of contract were severely dealt with in village or Taluk courts. The contract deeds
were usually registered in the registration offices. Very often, consent to a labouring
agreement was secured under conditions of strictly limited choice even when
negotiated in a usually 'free manner'.

It is very difficult to apply the western concept of contract in Indian society.
Indeed, the legal presumption that the autonomous individual entered the labour
market with a free contractual capacity was simply unreal for persons born into
hereditary relationships of service, with the attendant feature of debt, dependence on
patronage, and notions of ritual hierarchy. In practice, unfree agricultural slavery and
formally 'free', debt bondage were virtually indistinguishable since bondage was
often hereditary and closely associated with the cultural attributes of slavery.

In the 19th century agricultural labourers were called by two terms; pannaiyals
and 'padiyals'. Pannaiyal was a permanent farm servant attached to the land.
Padiyal on the otherhand was a hired servant receiving wages in kind. Both
Padiyals and Pannaiyals ultimately became debt slaves.

There are inscriptive and literary evidences for the prevalence of bonded
slavery in medieval times. As slaves were treated as property or commodity, the
transaction involving their sale, purchase, mortgage or transfer had to be registered
in legal documents. The sale deeds executed at the time of their disposal were
variously referred to as ‘Al vilai Pramana Isaivu Chittu’ in Tamil or Dasapathiram as the Law of Manu calls it. Periyapuranam refers to it as ‘Al Olai’. Auction of slaves in public was very much in practice in the Chola times which continued long afterwards. The auction took place in the presence of an official called Madiyastar and the price of the slaves was determined with his help. That means servitude, was given official blessings too. It goes to prove that bonded slavery has already been in Practice and the Act V only expanded the scope of bonded slavery.

In the days of Kulotunga III (A.D. 1178-1121), a severe famine ravaged the Tamil country and a Vellalan of Triuppampuram sold himself and his two daughters as slaves to a temple. It is stated that "the time was very bad, that paddy was sold at 3 nali for one kasu, that his children were dying for want of food, that consequently himself and his two daughters borrowed 110 kasu from the temple treasury and sold themselves". This happened in 1201.

In the papers on Mirasi Right, two documents relating to the sale of Paraiah slaves have been incorporated. One was executed in A.D. 1589 and the other in A.D. 1593. In the former deed, two brothers named Timmen and Shinna Timmen sold their sister Vellachi together with her daughter Periyal and grand daughter Soletchi for two pagodas. The second document refers to seven slaves, both men and women of the same caste, being sold from one master to another with the right to dispose them again, if the new master so desired. The following is the text of the document.
executed in 1589 in its English version:

May hapinesss and prosperity attend the lord of an extensive expire, the king of kings and lord of princes, the beauty spot on the forehead of the royal race, the sun among kings, who never failed in his word, the conqueror of every country he beholds, who never relinquish the country he has conquered, the receiver of tribute from every country, the receiver of tribute from 'Izha', the supreme prince, the destroyer of the forces of Tulukar, and the repressor of their desires, the mighty hero like Menu, the lord of a mighty country, the lord of horses, lord of men and lord of elephants, the rayer of sultans, the king of the greatest among kings, Rajanarayana, the sun enlightening the habitations of mankind, the friend of the weak and inexorable to his enemies, Narayana of nine crores, purandara thee (king of inferior deities) on the earth equal to Nakulan in the knowledge of horses, destinguished by the title of the protector of mankind like Raman when armed with 'bow, the karnan of the Kaliyuga for generosity, the Sultan of south, Hindu raya sultan, the prince who dismay the eight (should be seven) orders of military force, the despoiler of the honour of elegant women, the gallant of the courtesan, of the field of battle the beauty spot on the forehead of both the families from which he is descendant, the destroyer of an army of swordsmen, the 'Dattacanden' to the rayers, the protector of men in nagalogam (the world of serpents) and purandaran in Bhulogam (the earth), the lord of the north, south, east and west and of elephants the
prosperous and glorious hero, the establisher of Shozhamandalam, of Tondaimandalam and of Pandyamandalam. conqueror of the country of Izha, the king of kings and lord of kings, Sri - Vira - Pratap - Sri - Vira Venkatapati Rayer Deva Maharayer - during his regin over the earth in the year following 1512 of the Sacam being the year Hevilambi (A.D. 1589) on the fifth day of Aipisi in the Tondaimandalam obtained by conquest, in the country by Kulottunga Chola Valanadu, Puzhelcottam, in the Nadu of Ezhumbur, the village of Tandeiyarvedu, periya Thimmen and Shinna Thrimmen the sons of Cottadi, Periyan and the parseners have thus selected the price of slaves and given this bill of sale; my sister Vellatchi, her daughter Periyal, her daughter Sholetchi, total three persons when they had first cried "are there any who will purchase as Cottadumei?" These words were heard by Ottiyapa Mudeliyar, the son of Vandaraya Ulaganda Mudeliyar; one of the Vellalas residing in the village of Vallur in this mandalam, in this Cottam and this nadu, who cried again saying, I will purchase". We Periya Timmen, Shinna Timmen and their parseners and the last Ottiyapan, having agreed on among ourselves and settled to our mutual satisfaction the price was fixed in the presence of the rulers of land and the proprietors of the soil of Tiru - Mayilapur at Two Getti pagodas for these three pareya women, Vellatchi, her daughter Periyal and her daughter Sholetchi, purchased as a family of slaves and for this sum of two pagodas, we sold these three persons Vellatchi, her daughter Periyal and her daughter Sholetchi twice,
and thrice, this is the determined price, this is the fixed sale price; more
over no question shall be made respecting the quality of the coin nor
shall other writings be required to be produced no dispute exists respecting
Vellatchi, her daughter Periyal and her daughter Scholatchi, if any
arises we will stand forth and have it decided. Thus we have consented
and sold Vellatchi, her daughter Periyal and her daughter Sholetchi to
Ottiyappa Mudaliyar at the price settled, Periya Timmen, Shinna Tim-
men and their parseners. This is the mark of Periya Timmen, Shinna
Timmen and their parseners.  

Sale of slaves in public seems to have been in practice in Tamilnadu in the
medieval period. Documents of this nature are available in large numbers.

We have information about the practice of debt bondage in Coimbatore district
in the early part of 19th century. In a report on slavery submitted by the collector
of Coimbatore in 1819 he stated that "in many places where slavery does not exist
a species of bondage is introduced by ryots undertaking to bear the expenses of the
pallan’s marriage upon condition of the latter binding themselves to serve the ryots
inclusively for life"  23  Around the same time, the Tanjore collector reported that
pallar and parayar entered into a 'voluntary contract' with their masters.  24

We have a bond executed in the Tamil year 302, chitirai (A.D.1833 ).
According to this bond one Parimanam Samban of Pinchanarkoil and Kolathan
Samban of Nenmeli stood surety for money borrowed from Azhakappapillai of
Nilambadi for the marriage expenses of their sister's son Nagan. Nagan, his would be wife Pottal and Nagan's mother Parimanathi were bound to serve as slaves to the lender. They would be serving the master by receiving daily wages and kalavasam as per the contract and in case they ran away or worked under any other person, the money borrowed from the land lord was to be paid by the sureties.  

Debt slavery usually resulted from money borrowed by labourers for marriage expenses. A slave deed executed on 21-5-1854 by one Anandan Pannai-Pallan of Mandurai reads as follows:

'Where as I borrow this day from your (Kondayampettai Ramachandraraya) Rs 13 and 5 kalam of paddy for conducting the marriage of my son Govindan, I agree that the said Govindan and his entire family shall become your slaves and work in your farm. Witnesses to this are Arumugam of Nagar, the Pannai-pallan of Ayyaduraiyar and Channasi residing in Mandurai.  

J. H. A. Tremenheere, the collector of Chingleput district in his 'Note on the Paraihats of Chingleput' gives a graphic account about the status of the Paraihats in Chingleput. This condition of bonded slavery was common in other districts of Tamilnadu also during the second half of the 19th century.

Speaking about slaves, Tremenheere states that "many of the Paraihats until a comparatively recent period were slaves acrpi glibae. When slavery was mitigated and then abolished the serfs continued to work under their old masters and their
descendants continued to do so until this day under the name of padiyals. This class too had been and is recruited from the extreme poor especially by those who need Rs 10 or Rs 15 to pay a debt or marry themselves or their sons or brothers. They ‘mortgage’ themselves if the native phrase may be adopted, or some times the ‘man mortgage’ pledges their sons. Unable to check their master’s calculations, their debts before long amount to three or four times the original sum. There is only one way of leaving the service, that of getting another master to repay the debt, should any other means be tried, the Paraiah is sued either in the village or in the Taluk court, or the penal provision of the Breach of Contract Act are put in force. This is enough to bring the most obstinate to reason, and crushes out the very idea of emancipation.

It is pertinent here to cite a few examples of ex-slaves becoming bonded slaves.

1. Date 17th July 1867.
   Agreement to work in lieu of interest receiving the usual varam, in consideration of Rs 22-4 received for clearing of a debt and the debts borrowed from the father and forefathers of the executee.

2. Date 23rd August 1868. In Consideration of a sum of Rs 31 borrowed on (security of the service of) his brother, the executant engages as a farm servant in lieu of interest.

3. Date 17th July 1872. In consideration of Rs28-4 it is stipulated that one of the two executants, should do the cultivation work in lieu of interest receiving padi (measure of grain) as siraipanam (slave money). If there should be any short coming in the cultivation work, or in case of absconding, steps will be taken
under Act XIII of 1859. Service may be left after paying the amount advanced for the loss in cultivation.

4. Date 11th March 1876. "Man mortgage bonds" by father and son. For the interest on Rs 81-6 received on the Previous bond and accounts and Rs 15 received to-day in cash total Rs 96-14 (sic) the father leaves his son for service as padiyal, for wages similar to those paid in the village. Principal to be liquidated by Rs 5 per annum. In default of work due to disobedience or absence whether intentional or caused by unforeseen accident, the father to do or cause the work to be done. Four annas to be paid for each day's absence with interest at 2% mensem besides compensation for loss. "If work is stopped by us in the working season we will submit to any penalty in the Magistrate's Court. This is the man - mortgage bond executed with our free will and consent."

5. Dated 29th June 1881. For Rupees 24 - 8 borrowed for the marriage expenses of one of the executants, they bind themselves that he shall work as servant in lieu of interest, receiving the usual Kalam (Threshing floor perquisites) and a yearly pay of Rs. 4. On failure to work deductions to be made from the pay at the rate of annas 2 per diem. Service to be left after paying the debt plus any debt that may since have accrued.

6. Dated 4th October 1887. In satisfaction of the interest accruing on a sum of Rs. 33.4 arrived after settlement of accounts of a document executed by us on 6th October 1874, A son of M, one of us shall serve you as padiyal on receipt of Padi cooly at the obtaining rate in the village ... failing payment in default you may proceed to recover with costs by distress and sale of our moveable
property in due course of law. This is the promissory note executed with our free will and consent.

7. Date 15th August, 1888. For Rs. 50.7.6 (Rs. 39 - 15 - 6) found due on the settlement of old accounts and Rs. 10 - 8 received in cash for the marriage of one of the executants). He is to work receiving Seraipanam according to custom. In default they render themselves liable to act XIII of 1859.

8. Date 25th January 1890. Three persons bind themselves to do Aminji (without remuneration) work as Padiyals for Rs. 73 formerly advanced on pain of prosecution under the penal code. 29

Incidents of Man-mortgages were reported by officials of other districts too. For example George Hamnet wrote "In Timevelly, attention is drawn to three documents. The second and third documents indicate the existence of slavery among the lower orders, and of the unfair advantage taken of them by the wealthier classes".

In Tinnevelly, two Paraihas borrowed money from a creditor and promised to work during their life time at a reduced rate of wage. In case of default, or if they demanded higher rates of wages they agreed to repay the debt at 3 percent interest per annum.

In the sub-district of Nanguneri in Tinnevelly a Paraiah bound himself to perform throughout his lifetime any agricultural labour imposed on them in consideration of Rs. 15 and a daily wage of 2 seers of paddy. 30

In South Arcot district certain mortgage deeds were executed by Paraihas binding themselves to serve. The description given in one of these deeds is as follows: "The executant acknowledges the receipt of Rs. 6 and in consideration of
this sum mortgages his younger brother, who is in lieu of interest on the debt, to work as a field labourer under the grantee, who will on his part feed him thrice a day and pay him the usual harvest perquisites. The executant further binds himself to pay damages at the rate of an anna every day on which his brother absents himself from work. In Tanjore it is also stated that Paraiahs bound themselves to labour in consideration of small allowances either for life or for indefinitely long periods.  

Colonial economic and social policies throughout the 19th century were definitely not in favour of the lower strata of society. In fact the Government was supporting only the land lords. It was felt by the Government that without the help of the village communities it was impossible to carry out repair works ‘(Kudimaramat)’. This work was traditionally done by the serfs under the direction of landlords. The 1858 Madras Compulsory Labour Act provided that "any Person bound by .... (local) custom to contribute labour should pay compensation upon refusal to work, while any person refusing to furnish labour at the request of the village head during emergency circumstances would be punished with fine or imprisonment". Taking advantage of traditional practices the British administrators imposed forced labour which is an inherent part of slavery on the unfortunate labourers. Thus we find that the contract Act of 1859 and the Forced labour Act of 1858 made emancipation of slaves meaningless.

Bourdillon and Sir Arthur Cotton P.W.D Commissioners noted in 1852 that there was no district in which labour was not obtained more or less by compulsion.
"Little coercion is actually used" say the commissioners "but it is known that it will be used if required". Then they recounted the ways in which the labourers were cheated of the wages to them. The rate allowed was too low and the work done was undervalued. Furthermore, there was great delay in payment and much of the wages entered in the accounts as having been paid was never really received by the labourers who submitted to various deductions.

Writing about "the system of perpetual patching" work executed every year in the Marudur dam, which fed sixty miles of channels and two dozen tanks in the eastern Tambaraparani Valley, the Collector of Tinnevelly stated as follows:

The persons employed in these works are almost exclusively the Pallars, the slaves of the Meerasidars. The consequence is that Maramut works are carried on by making advances to the meerasidars, who pay their slaves at whatever rate they please, and always contrive to appropriate a part of the money to their own use.

The Collector further stated that "The execution of repairs has thus to be considered a source of annual income for the Meerasidar, and it is therefore in their interests to execute them as slovenly a manner as possible with a view to further outlay within a short period and so long as the cultivation of the current year is not endangered by the delay to contrive that something should still remain to be finished in the next year".

Contrary to the rosy picture given by some British Officials, Padiyals and
Pannaiyals continued to suffer even in the second half of the 19th century. In Tanjore the Pannaiyal was paid 11.2 Madras measures of Paddy in 1885. In Kumbakonam the wage of the Pannaiyal was $1 \frac{3}{4}$ Madras measures. Mr. Pennington in 1885 estimated" the whole earnings of a Pannaiyal at about 30 to 36 Kalams of Paddy per annum, worth as many rupees. and stated that the earnings of the whole family did not exceed Rs. 50, of which Rs 7-8-0 must be spent on drink". In many of the taluks of the district, they were allowed 60 gulis (. 198 acre more as yermanium or plough allotment) for cultivation, the produce of which they enjoyed rent free. Pennington was of the opinion that "the comparative poverty of the Pannaiyal class is attributed to their fondness for drink and a want of prudence and forethought in storing up paddy to provide against a rainy day ".

In the districts of Chingleput and South Arcot wages paid to the pannaiyals were not attractive. In fact nearness of Madras to Chingleput should have forced up wages there. But this did not happen.

Mr. Puckle, Collector of Tinnevelly stated that in 1872 the wages of labour in this district was high. Four annas a day for men coolies had been the general rate. He stated that an increasing number of Pallas and Paraiahs found employment at the cotton screws at Tunicorin and in the coffee estates on the hills. Writing about the condition of Pallas and Paraiahs he stated that the position of the free labourers and pallas in this district was remarkably good. They were better fed and clothed than similar classes in any of the districts south of Madras and their houses as a rule were
superior to any, very different from the squalid huts that were found else where. Brandt, Sub-collector of Tinnevelly writing about farm labourers stated that their condition was better. According to his statement all sufferings experienced by slaves in earlier times were things of the past because the strong arms of the colonial Government prevented landlords from being oppressive. In the same report however, he contradicted his own statement by saying that "so strong was the feeling of dependence on their employers and so potent the influence of the latter, that in consideration of a small present, cases of serious ill use and violence were even then hushed up." The Collector of Salem wrote that "Pallas were improvident of the morrow,""Sufficient unto the day" was their motto. They spent their money as fast as they got it. This was in contrast to the life style of Gounders who by leading a frugal life saved a lot of money. In South Arcot the Pannaiyal's wage was Rs2 per month. Though the wage of the padiyal was not attractive, during harvest seasons he could make a great haul. Occasionally the Padiyal was allowed to cultivate a small portion of his employer's estate on his own account. The general condition of landless labourers in this district was not encouraging. Colonial officials themselves observed that "the only way of escape for the Padiyal from this condition of servitude and poverty is emigration." Brandt, Sub-collector of Tinnevelly calculated the income and expenditure of a Palla and his wife living at Valliyur. The following table gives the account of the income and expenditure of the palla family.
Wages of the palla family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Kottahs</th>
<th>Marakal</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wages for nine months</td>
<td>- 3</td>
<td>- 4</td>
<td>- 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harvest allowance</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>- 10</td>
<td>- 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gleaning</td>
<td>- 1</td>
<td>- 0</td>
<td>- 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special allowances called swatantrams nallanashtam (allowances for good or bad) as in the case of a birth, marriage or maturity of a child or death in the family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Calculating the kottah at Rs. 6 in money this was Rs. 36 in the year.

**Expenditure**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Value of diet and household expenses</td>
<td>- 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drink, without which they would not work</td>
<td>- 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>- 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ \text{Total: } 36 \]

In Sheranmadevi as per Brandt’s account a Pallan and his wife got Paddy equivalent to Rs 42. With this for a considerable part of the year these labourers could not take a full meal at all.\(^{44}\)

Wages of agricultural labourers did not increase in proportion to rise in prices of necessaries of life. In 1892 at Selapalayaputhur the daily wages of a labourer was
6 small padis; at Merathur 5 small messaures and at Sanaparathi 6 padis’. It is to be noted that a labourer at Sanaparathi sixty years back received 4 measures as his wage. What little they received as wages was paid generally in grain and even that was exploited by the caste people through buying and selling of the necessaries in the village shops.45


"Labour is so miserably underpaid that the first law of life in the paracherry is that for every mouth that eats there must be two hands earning. From the child of four upwards they must all be bread-winners or they cannot be bread-eaters. It is a common thing to see the owner of a few acres seated at the head of a field commanding the labour of ten or twelve poor Paraiah women who are engaged in planting out or weeding or reaping for him. The caste man is the only member of his family engaged on his farm and this is the extent of his labour. The Paraiah woman has brought her baby with her, laying it under the shelter of a bush, or slinging it in cloth over the branch of a tree, her husband is treading the beam of some waterlift, balancing himself in mid air, scorched by the sun and worn with incessant effort, her little five - year - old is watching the baby, or seeking crabs and shellfish in the water channels to add to the evening meal, or gathering scraps of manure for the master's fields. The older children are herding sheep, tending village cattle, or
following the plough. And it takes them all to warm the hearth and make the pot boil at night. Life is almost literally from hand to mouth, and a few days without work or a sick person in the house means hunger. With all this, in the busy seasons of a prosperous year there is labour enough and no great lack of food; but between those seasons there are whole months and in years of drought there are much longer periods, when the life of the labourer is one long battle with, the ghastly presence of hunger". 46

It is true that the depressed castes found employment opportunities due to the expansion of railways and public works in the second half of the century. Yet a major portion of these caste men still worked in the fields under same old conditions.

The fact that the Padiyals in the 19th century suffered humiliations and economic privations is confirmed not only by official records but also by other sources such as missionary accounts and native folk literature. In the opinion of Lee Warner, the collector of Chingleput district even in 1888 "a large proportion of the population lives from hand to mouth, is badly housed, ill clothed and compelled to be satisfied with a nutriment far below the sufficiency diet agreed upon by doctors as necessity of life " 47

The Madras Missionary conference submitted a memorial in May, 1891 in which the Government's attention was drawn to the plight of the Paraiahs. The memorial stated that "even in ordinary years, when a large section of the Paraiahs does not obtain neccessary and proper food." 48

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Goudie one of the missionaries who lived for many years among the paraiahs of Chingleput in a letter written to his friend in 1891 stated that the Paraiahs were so oppressed that "every child of four and upwards had to help in seeking food. They are scarcely old enough to come to school when they are sent to the fields to pick up cowdung for fuel or manure or to seek crabs in the stream for food". ⁴⁹

Agrestic slaves and coolies did not escape from punishments for even minor faults committed by them. Folk songs of this period speak about how labourers for mere pittance were at the mercy of supervisors.

From two songs collected by Mr. K. Kirshnamoorthy in the Kongu region it becomes clear that wages paid to the labourers were meagre. A woman agricultural labourer received only pies three for a whole day's work. Like wise a coolie engaged in railroad construction work was also paid the same amount as wage. In both the cases the workers were at the mercy of cane wielding supervisors. ⁵⁰ With pies 3 only one litre of rice could be purchased by the workers. This definitely was not a subsistence wage.

Another work which portrays the life of agricultural workers in its colonial setting is Nandanar Charithira Kirttanai by Gopalakrihna Bharathiar (1785-1875). The hero of Bharathi's work is Nandanar, a pulaya saint who lived in the 9th century. Sekkilar in his Periyapuranam depicted Nandanar as a 'Purathondan ' (one who worships from outside the temple) longing for the blessings of Lord Siva within the frame work of caste rules. He did not come into conflict with the master under
whom he worked as a slave. Bharathi’s Nandanar a rebel was a late 19th century incarnation of the early Nandanar. Bharathi’s Nandanar, on the other hand rebelled against the socio economic evils of the day.51

Nandanar in his quest for freedom entered into an argument with his Andai or master who advised Nandanar to concentrate on his work and not to think of Lord Siva of Chidambaram, Nandan’s friends did not approve of his liberal ideas and advised him not to do anything which may hinder the slave community in general. They were afraid of the consequences of famines. In the prevailing set up they thought that they were at least assured of gruel and they might lose even that if the mad Nandan were allowed to live in their Paracherri.

Colonial revenue and social policies, according to Bharathi, rendered the position of agricultural labourers weak. They were made rather ‘rootless’. In the medieval times slaves were enjoying certain privileges. ’Unavu Urimai’ or 'right to food’ was guaranteed to the slave. Now he had no such right because he had become a wage earner. He entered into a contract which legally bound him. Famines rendered him jobless. Now there was none to give him food. Breach of contract act, according to Bharathi, further enslaved him.

According to Bharathi, the condition of a pannaiyal in the late 19th century context was really bad. As S-Ramamoorthy says, "the pannaiyal received his wage not in full. The landlord could ‘control and command’ the labourers, he could beat them with his legs, keep them chained for an indefinite period. 'chase and chase’
them whenever they fled, break their teeth and cheek and enslave them for ever. The andai (proprietor) was notorious for his arrogance, stab them with sticks, curse them with abusive words, bite them with venom of a scorpion."^{52}

**Indentured Labour**

Another form of slavery is discernible is the indentured labour system by which Indian agricultural labourers were exported to overseas colonies. Hugh Tinker calls this a new system of slavery. Growth of capitalism in the second half of 19th century coupled with abolition of slavery in the British colonies in 1833 created a great demand for labour. Capitalists through contracts recruited a large number of labourers from India to work in plantations. Speaking about this E. Sa. Viswanathan says, "with the growth of Industrial agriculture in British colonies a new movement of emmigration of Indians to work as indentured labourers in coffee, rubber and sugar Plantation became a common feature."^{53}

There is difference of opinion among scholars in deciding about the responsibility of the colonial Government in intensifying labour problems in India. Yet "whatever be the controversy about the extent of British responsibility in introducing and reinforcing bondage, there cannot be any doubt that one particular varient of it was exclusively a colonial innovation. This was the system of indentured labour supply to tea and coffee plantations in India which was derived from the model of the export of India coolies to the British colonies of Mauritius, Fiji and the West Indies."^{54}
There were several factors inducing emigration of Tamils to overseas colonies. The rigours of caste system, agrestic slavery, population density and limited economic activities in some districts were some of the main catalysts for emigration of Madrasis, as indentured labourers to Guyana, Natal, Mauritius, Re-Union, Ceylon, Malaya etc. Low castes in the Indian social hierarchy were kept under subordination by the high castes for centuries together and when opportunities were offered to better their position, they grabbed them readily. Frequent famines devastated India in the 19th century. Between 1858 and 1900, more than 20 famines occurred in British India. During famine years emigration recorded an all time high. Famines in the 19th century seriously affected the lower strata of society.

Besides these 'push' factors higher wages offered by overseas plantation owners acted as a 'pull' factor. Wages offered by plantation owners were far better than wages paid to them by landlords. A labourer in Trichy district was getting only 4 to 6 annas per month while his counterpart in Ceylon got Rs 9. Among the Tamil emigrants, a greater part consisted of pallans and Paraiahs although there were cases in which other than these people opted for emigration compelled by economic circumstances. The hardships and danger to which emigrant labourers had to submit themselves in the early years of plantation cultivation made it extremely difficult for any group other than untouchables to contemplate such a risky venture.

In Ceylon the local population was not sufficient to meet plantation requirements. So it was felt that importation of labourers from India was inevitable. The
Indian administrators in Madras made unsuccessful attempts to induce Tamils to emigrate to Ceylon in the first quarter of the 19th century when plantation industry had just begun. There was no enthusiasm on the part of agricultural serfs to go to Ceylon. This is made clear by a reply sent by the Collector of Tanjore to the chief secretary to the Madras Government who requested him to send coolies to Ceylon. He wrote that, "the serfs are here leading a frugal and contented life and they are not willing to move to Ceylon. Unless the Ceylon Government send some agents and be ready to offer some payment of money, it would be impossible to send coolies." Consequently the Ceylon Government entrusted the work of recruiting emigrants to private agents known as ‘maistrikal,’ The first batch of 150 indentured labourers was brought to Ceylon in 1828. All of them deserted the planters and returned to India within a year.

The development of coffee plantations in Ceylon after 1830 gave rise to sustained demand for labour. Extensive coffee plantations were established in Kandyan high lands. As the number of plantations increased the number of emigrants from Tamilnadu also increased. In the early years most of the labourers returned within a short period because they could not manage inhospitable conditions prevailing in most of the plantations. Planters were also not keen on protecting the interest of the labourers. No attention was made to check epidemics. There were severe outbreaks of cholera, small pox and malaria. The death rate among the emigrants was excessive. Irregular payments and exploitation by the Kanganis made
them shun service. 61

Plantations increased in number in the 1840s. But a danger in the form of a fungus threatened coffee estates. The fungus began to spread in 1869 and by 1880 a considerable area under coffee was completely destroyed. However, tea replaced coffee as a chief crop of Ceylon. Tea plantations continued to attract labourers from Tamilnadu. Systematic recruitments were made. As demand for labourers increased plantation owners entrusted the work of recruiting labourers to Indian agents called ‘Kanganies’. The Kangany system of recruitment was in force since 1837.

The Kangani (means head - man, overseer, supervisor), who was himself an Indian immigrant, supervised the work of his gang which usually consisted of 25 to 30 coolies, but if less he would also work as labourer. All gangs of coolies on an estate would be under a Head Kangany, who acted as an intermediary between an estate superintendent and the labour force with regard to the payment of wages. He virtually controlled the domestic affairs of all labourers under him. Whenever additional labour was found necessary, the Kangany was entrusted with the work of supplying it. As the number of estates increased in Ceylon more and more labourers were required. The work of supplying labourers fell on the Kanganies. 62

To meet the growing demands of tea plantations the estate owners sent their Kanganies to the Tamil districts. They were provided with a sum of money towards the payment of advance to intending emigrants and of travelling and subsistence
expenses till they reached the estate. Having received this ‘coastal advance’ a recruiting Kangany, goes back to his native village and collects some of his relatives. He used to return to Ceylon with the gang of recruits. The Kangany system was "patriarchal" in nature in the early stages of emigration. In course of time coolies not related to the Kanganies were also recruited in large numbers. 63

The early emigrants to Ceylon were from the depressed classes. Being ignorant and illiterate, the Kangnies exploited them. Estates would reward the recruiter, Kangany, with a bonus of Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per labourer recruited. The Kanganies enticed the labourers by false promises and offered enough advances for clearing their debts if any. Some even promised ‘El Dorado’ on the otherside of the sea. 64

The recruiting Kangany usually paid some money in advance to the intending emigrants. The advance, together with the amount of the travelling expenses and food till he reached the estate in Ceylon, formed the debt with which each labourer started his life. As an intermediary between the planters and the labourers, the Kanganies assumed full powers in matters of money transactions. They usually maintained false accounts and swindled the money which actually belonged to the labourer.

Here is an example of how coolies became Kanganies and Kanganies became planters. The following story is narrated by Dick Kooiman.

"Among the first so-called coffee coolies recruited by Motchakan, was P.D.
Devasagayam (1822 - 1884). This Devasagayam came from a poor shanar family, converted by Mault. After receiving his education at Nagercoil Seminary he worked for the LMS as a catechist and a teacher. In 1844, or shortly after that, he emigrated to Ceylon, where he served several planters as Kangany and was eventually employed in a large estate drawing a salary of Rs.100 per month. In view of this salary, Mateer may be right in suggesting that Devasagayam had risen to the post of manager. In 1859, he returned to Travancore and invested, his savings in land. He asked the Dewan for permission to buy 60 acres of forest land in the Ashambu hills, which was granted in 1861, and started his own Victoria Estate, later followed by Joaja Estate with 40 acres under cultivation and Lower Victoria (10 acres).

Devasagayam invested his earnings also in paddy lands and in a magnificent house in his native place Nagercoil. This two storeyed building proudly challenged the old restrictions imposed on shanar and similar castes, and after completing the house Devasagayam had to set an armed guard round the premises for about six months, as the high castes had threatened to set it on fire.  

Emigration to Ceylon from Tamilnadu substantially increased since 1843. Between 1843 and 1867 there were 1,446,407 emigrants from Madras to Ceylon, of whom 839,897 returned. From official records it is known that an average of 70,000 Tamils emigrated to Ceylon every year between 1861 and 1871. In the famine year of 1877 there were nearly 200,000 emigrants to the island. According to a study made by Chidambaram Pillai, the condition of labourers in Ceylon till
1882 was satisfactory. Labourers in Ceylon were employed at the same rate of wages for a long time. A family consisting of a man, woman and a small child earned in 1882 Rs. 175. The family expenditure for the year 1882 was Rs. 110.80. So the labourer was able to save Rs. 64.20. Kanganies and Bankers in subsequent years forced them to fall into a debt trap.  

We get a different account from official sources. From the Proceedings of the Public Department dated 8-1-1914 it is known that "Earlier emigrants did not return any richer for example emigrants who returned in 1883 carried just Rs. 16 along with gold and silver." The savings of south Indians increased considerably in 1893, when they brought back Rs. 140 per head. Not all of them declared the actual amount which they carried with them. Some of them remitted money through money orders. The number of emigrants sending money order was 1623 and they remitted Rs. 1,19,914 Which on an average worked out to Rs. 73 [sic] per head. This amount could buy them each an acre of wet or dry land in Madras Presidency.

South Indians emigrated in large numbers to Burma since 1876 when Government took steps to appoint recruiting agents. Though a bulk of emigrants to Burma were from the Telugu country, Tamils did constitute a considerable number among emigrants to Burma. A large number of emigrants went to Straits Settlements.

Coolies in the estates owned by Europeans were grossly illtreated. For example the 'Penag Guardian' reported (13 Dec 1873) a bad treatment of Madras
Coolies on two local estates. From Alma estate, Province Wellesley, five Indians were sent to the Government hospital, Butterworth, and four died on arrival. At Malakoff, hundred were reported sick, and of these seven died. An enquiry by a Police officer and doctors uncovered sinister activities on the estate. When they ordered the body of one old man, Ramasamy to be exhumed, he was found to have died of beating. The manager of Malakoff was convicted of using 'criminal force' against the workers, and sentenced to three months imprisonment, his European assistant was given 4 months' imprisonment. While emigration to Ceylon, Burma and Malaya was free emigration to other parts of British empire was regulated by ordinances of the Government.

The abolition of slavery in 1833 created labour shortage in the British colonies. Hence, the planters in these colonies appeared to the 'Indian Government to help them to meet the crisis. It was against this back ground that the Indian Government passed regulations to govern the flow of Coolies to British colonies. For example, planters in Natal were permitted by their Government to import labourers from India by the immigration ordinance No. 14 of 1859. Act No XXXIII of 1860 passed by Government of India provided for immigration of Indian labourers to Natal. The first batch of Indian labourers from Madras reached port Natal on 17th Nov, 1860. Under the indenture system labourers were made to sign a 'Contract for full time labour obeying all the conditions set out in the contract, for a stipulated period of five years.' Labourers were not expected to have any special skill. Hard work under
very poor conditions was what was demanded from the labourers. The indenture system as P.S. Joshi says, "was an invention of the British brain to substitute for forced labour and slavery and indentured coolies were halfslaves bound over body and soul by a hundred and one inhuman regulations".  

The labourers in Natal found themselves highly exploited by their masters. Indiscriminate wage cuts, cut on rations and punishments for minor faults were the order of the day. Complaints about ill treatment of Indian labourers were looked into by the Indian Government. Results of enquiries confirmed that there was truth in the complaints. Hence the Indian Government discontinued further emigration of Indian coolies to Natal after 1866. Due to want of coolies planters in Natal were put to great hardships. Natal Government set up a "Coolies Commission" to go into the whole question of Indian immigration. The Commission Report revealed many instances of ill-treatment, the withholding of wages, flogging, lack of medical attention etc. Complying with the recommendation of the commission, Law 12 was passed exempting Indian labourers from corporal punishment. Indian emigration to Natal was resumed in 1874. The flow of emigration continued unabated till 1911 when it was stopped by the Government of India.

Indian coolies in Natal were treated worse than slaves. A British capitalist having business interests in India, calling himself Indicus, visited South Africa to see for himself the condition of coolies there. He stated that 'Indian coolies employed on gardens ... are slaves and nothing more'. For a miserable wage they
were bound for 5 years. The masters could lend them out to other masters. He further says that "Some are well treated and some very much the reverse. The masters can in point of fact inflict any punishment they think fit, short of murder and the coolies are practically helpless. A lot of them, men and women were driven along like a pack of sheep by a native with a stick on the road". Indian labourers in South Africa "looked dirty and without sticking to their native custom put on European clothes without reference to the comfort or views of their neighbours." English men themselves accepted that Indians were responsible for the prosperity of Natal and they were greatly underpaid.

There was a Protector of immigrants representing the Indian Government but he was not serious about his business. His attitude towards the coolies is described by Indicus as follows: "The protector of immigrants has rather a nice office, but does not appear to be in a hurry, to see the persons for whose benefit his services are retained, at least I saw thirty or forty coolies men and women, at the door of the officer awaiting the leisure of this official who was busy reading the newspaper." Indians who became free to settle in Natal after completing the period of indenture found that they were deprived of many civil rights.

Tamils were taken to Mauritius by the Dutch during their occupation of Mauritius between 1638 and 1704. The French under whose control it remained until 1810 brought a large number of slaves from India. The flow of slaves to Mauritius continued even under British who took over it in 1810. Thus by 1st Feb,
1835 when slavery was abolished, there were about 28,000 ex-slaves upon the sugar
estates and about 39,000 in domestic service and bound to merchants and others. As
many as one seventh of these people were from South India. Writing about this
period, an observer said of the ex-slaves," for the least act of negligence they were
tied hand and foot to a ladder when the overseer flogged them on the back with a
long whip". Immediately after the abolition of slavery in Mauritius in 1835 planters
turned to India for cheap labour. An emigration office was set up at Madras in 1840.
Captain Christopher Bidon, the protector of Madras reported that the landless
labourers from the overpopulated Tamil districts emigrated to Mauritius and the
majority of the emigrants came from the districts of Tanjore, Trichinopoly and South
Arcot. In 1838 nearly 10,000 people emigrated to Mauritius, from Madras. Census
reports, Material Progress reports and Administrative reports of the Madras Presi-
dency reveal that emigration to Mauritius was continuous and considerable.

Government of India entered into covenants with France and Holland in 1861
and 1868 respectively for the purpose of permitting Indians to emigrate to colonies
held by these powers. However, French and Dutch colonies did not receive many
emigrants from India. The numbers of emigrants to British Guyana from Madras was
less when compared to that of Calcutta. While only 14,036 went to Guyana from
Madras, Calcutta accounted for 156,995 between 1838 and 1890.

Prejudice against Madrasis, was the reason for entertaining less number of
coolies from Tamil Nadu.
### Table I

**Migration of Madras population to and from Ceylon**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>To Ceylon</th>
<th>From Ceylon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>68,896</td>
<td>41,915</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>70,718</td>
<td>61,765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>81,809</td>
<td>62,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>89,597</td>
<td>64,539</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>82,528</td>
<td>49,229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>42,769</td>
<td>45,996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>57,033</td>
<td>37,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>58,689</td>
<td>54,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>65,114</td>
<td>55,082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>89,529</td>
<td>68,310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>706673</td>
<td>540519</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean 10 years</td>
<td>70667.3</td>
<td>54051.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Emigration to Mauritius, Bourbon and West Indies.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>From Madras</th>
<th>Returned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>6,804</td>
<td>542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>5,118</td>
<td>614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>5,229</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>7,1337</td>
<td>1261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>7,317</td>
<td>1192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>12,339</td>
<td>851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>1,426</td>
<td>768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>3,084</td>
<td>1696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>3,816</td>
<td>667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>3,308</td>
<td>1293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55,574</td>
<td>8884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean 10 years</td>
<td>5557.4</td>
<td>888.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Census Report for 1871

Plantations were not heavens for the labourers. In the early period when plantations were taking shape in Ceylon, indentured labourers had to confront difficult situations. Labourers had to walk about 150 miles from the coast to plantations. Their journey was dangerous. They had to pass through pathless jungles infested with fearsome animals and snakes. Estates were sometimes situated in places which were breeding grounds for epidemics. Coolies were not given adequate wages. Even what little was promised was not paid in time. Flogging was not uncommon.
## Emigration

### Table 2

Emigration from Madras Presidency, 1873-4 to 1888

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ceylon</th>
<th>Burma</th>
<th>Straits Settlements</th>
<th>Natal</th>
<th>Mauritius and Reunion</th>
<th>British West Indies</th>
<th>Total to outside India</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1873-4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874-5</td>
<td>99,282</td>
<td>-82,114</td>
<td></td>
<td>1,186</td>
<td>-1,231</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>132,692</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875-6</td>
<td>87,509</td>
<td>3,118</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>-1,247</td>
<td>98,258</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-7</td>
<td>99,146</td>
<td></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>-1,253</td>
<td>197,979</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-8</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td>4,018</td>
<td>23,901</td>
<td>2,572</td>
<td>132,692</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-9</td>
<td>99,146</td>
<td>7,337</td>
<td>3,697</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>117,148</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>63,344</td>
<td>10,377</td>
<td>6,548</td>
<td>3,147</td>
<td>88,389</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-1</td>
<td>43,292</td>
<td>6,682</td>
<td>1,074</td>
<td>3,192</td>
<td>2,733</td>
<td>61,183</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-2</td>
<td>46,594</td>
<td>8,020</td>
<td>1,759</td>
<td>1,763</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>59,945</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882-3</td>
<td>45,045</td>
<td>22,188</td>
<td>1,358</td>
<td>2,598</td>
<td>796</td>
<td>75,250</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-4</td>
<td>35,292</td>
<td>12,659</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>54,347</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-5</td>
<td>41,751</td>
<td>5,993</td>
<td>20,625</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>84,815</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-17,432</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-54,335</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>129,650</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>143,045</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Negative figures relate to returning migrants.

Sources: Dharmakumar Land and Caste in South India.
Condition of labourers, however, improved gradually. Measures were introduced aiming at improving not only the working conditions but also the wages of the coolies. Emigration was regulated by two Indian Acts of 1857 and 1880 which had laid down rules for passenger ships plying from Indian Ports. The act XIV of 1872 had provisions to safeguard the interests of the immigrant coolies proceeding to the Straits Settlement.

Act V of 1877, a special enactment applicable only to Madras Presidency, and an ordinance of the colony No 107 of 1876 regulated emigrants to the Straits Settlement. By this ordinance, Straits Government agreed to keep the coolies under observation during the whole period of their contract and to reconvey them to India when they became incapacitated for further labour. Emigration Act of 1883 insisted upon the Ceylon Government to see that" the coolies are properly housed, fed and provided with medical treatment." Better facilities naturally attracted more workers to plantations.

Emigration brought about improvement in the lives of a considerable section among the labouring classes. The greatest benefit that an immigrant derived was that he was completely free from the wretched caste system. It was a great leveller. A British officer reported about an incident that took place at Nagapatnam. He reported that 'At Nagapatnam, a Brahman chided a Paraiah who barged in to him on the quay. To which the Paraiah said, 'I have taken off my caste and left it with the port officer. I won't put it again till I come back'.

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An immigrant labourer who returned said, "A man can eat anything on board ship. A ship is like the temple of Jagannath where there are no caste restrictions." This was the greatest impact of emigration on labourers according to G. A. Grierson. There were adverse effects also arising out of emigration. The higher wages and bad working conditions in Ceylon had led many workers in to habits of drinking and they came back "greatly corrupted" Christian missionaries thought that emigration while elevating the labourers economically definitely made them poor on the spiritual plane.

Plantations in India took shape in the 1820s. Coffee growing, started in South India in the 1820s, had been developing in the belt running from south of Travancore to the north of Mysore. In these plantations a large number of labourers found employment. In the late 19th century, Tamilnadu was also entering into an era of industrialization. The House of Binny established its Buckingham and Carnatic Mill in Madras in 1876. European mill companies were to follow between 1883 and 1889 at Papanasam and Tuticorin in Tinnevelly District and at Madura and Coimbatore.

Agricultural Capitalism and Industrial Capitalism provided jobs to poor sections of the society. As plantations grew in number within the country, labourers employed in them were gradually placed under severe restrictions. An Act of 1837 legalized the contract of indentured labour system. The workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 effectively stopped all possibility of escape once the labourers
became aware of the prevailing conditions on the tea estates. The Act of 1863 allowed planters to have the right to arrest runaway coolies and the Act of 1865 fixed wages at five, four and three rupees per month for men, women and children respectively for nine hours of daily toil. These wages were about one third of that paid to the coolies indentured for overseas colonies and even these were not regularly paid. Some land was given to labourers for self-cultivation for which rent had to be paid out of the meagre wages, and over which their tenancy rights depended solely on the planter's whims. The stringent inland immigration act of 1882 allowed uncontrolled recruitment without licence and further tightened the planter's control over labour.\textsuperscript{95}

One important effect of emigration was that the ex-slaves in the second half of the 19th century who had availed of the opportunity to move away from their villages in search of employment in overseas plantations found themselves in a better condition economically than their fellowmen who preferred the life of a padiyal. Reports of collectors allude to the good economic effects of emigration on the lives of the depressed classes. Walter Elliot reported that "In the district of Trichinopoly, one month's pay in Ceylon was equal to two years income at home. In Trichinopoly their earnings amounted to 4 to 6 annas per month while in Ceylon they were paid nine rupees. Further their work in Ceylon was less arduous than the agrestic slavery to which they had been accustomed. After 18 or 20 months they would return with a considerable amount of Rs 80 to 150 which would enable them to buy pieces of lands and they became petty land owners".\textsuperscript{96} Reports from the
collectors of Salem, Madura and South Arcot testify that immigrants returned with considerable savings with which they became small peasants.

Another effect of emigration was that it created labour shortage within Tamilnadu. According to the settlement report of Trichinopoly district "the facility of emigration, and high wages paid to coolies by the Railway company, have much reduced the number of agricultural labourers in the neighbourhood of Trichy and the meerasidars now complain that they have not hands enough to get their wet crops off the ground before they are very ripe and grain becomes loosened in ear". Labourers demanded higher wages. The Manual of Tinnevelly district noted that "the spirit of independence has reached the labourer who carries his labour into the best market and does not scruple to leave his master if he thinks he can better himself".  

The problem of labour shortage came to the notice of the Government which ordered the collectors for a general enquiry on this question. The collector of South Arcot reported that though only a small number of labourers emigrated it did have an effect on the wage structure. In his district he noted that there was an increase of wages by 30 Percent. Collector of Madura reported that land lords occasionally suffered as a consequence of emigration of poor labourers to Ceylon. Tanjore Collector stated that many complaints had been received from the landlords about the desertion of labourers. Both irrigation works and cultivation suffered because of the shortage of labour.

This situation should have improved the wage rates of padiyals within the
country. Clerk, who made special enquiries into the condition of the labouring classes wrote that ‘their position has improved during the last forty years and at the present times they are as independent of the mirasidars and the purakudis. It is beyond doubt that wages have considerably risen during the recent years. For transplanting and harvesting, wages are double what they were twenty years ago and there has been an increase in the price paid for cooly labour of every description.” According to Srinivasa Ragava Iyengar, the remuneration of the ploughman in Tinnevelly District was Rs 30 in addition to his food. In the Districts of Coimbatore and North Arcot as per official reports labourers were getting wages above subsistence level. The condition of Padiyals was stated to be better than what had been before. But in fact the above reports did not reflect the real situation in Tamilnadu. This is known from a few official reports themselves.

Srinivasa Ragava Iyengar himself admitted that padiyals in some districts like Chingleput and South Arcot were not as well off as in Tanjore. Brandt, the sub-collector of Tinnevely in 1872 reported that a Pallan and his wife received Rs 42 per annum and inferred that it was not sufficient for a full meal for a considerable part of the year. Wedderburn, the collector of Coimbatore stated that the wages paid to the labourers were not commensurate with their real needs. In villages they had to earn their subsistence by cutting grass, weeding fields etc. Therefore we can safely conclude that the situation emerging out of emigration of a large section of labourers to plantations abroad did not lead to a general wage rise to Padiyals within the country. Padiyals in several areas were still working for mere subsistence wages.
Another good effect of emigration was that many labourers returning from overseas plantations became petty land owners in the districts of South Arcot, Trichinopoly and Madura. But land acquisition by the depressed classes in Tanjore and Chingleput was not easy.

Socio-economic pressures given by the high caste land owners in these districts prevented the depressed classes from gaining an easy access to land. The pro-landlord policy followed by the Government also obstructed the landless labourers from purchasing lands. In Chingleput and Tanjore rights over wasteland were enjoyed by the mirasidars. Colonial rulers recognized the right of the landlords. As a result, a priority of claim to the arable waste was conceded to them, against the traders, the labourers, and other such residents in the village'.

Even in other, districts where the mirasidar 's right over waste land was not recognized, those pattadars already owning land were allowed priority of claim to arable waste land. No land was given to any applicant until the pattadars had been given first claim. Thus the government policy of giving mirasidars and pattadars, who already owned land, priority over waste land had virtually made it impossible for landless lower caste labourers and tenants to acquire new land.

Tremenheere exposed the unjust attitude adopted by the Government in his 'Note on Paraiah of Chingleput'. Commenting on the reported statement of the secretary of state that" there is no bar of law or practice to low caste people obtaining and cultivating waste lands on the same terms as high caste people,
he stated that" it is doubtful what meaning should be attached to the word practice. If the statement means that a Paraiah can infact obtain waste land as freely as other classes, it is incorrect. He may apply for it, but he has to run the gauntlet of first the mirasidars and secondly the non-mirasi pattadars, both of which classes abhor the thought of acquiring land, and one of which cannot get enough land for itself". 106

Prejudice against the Paraiahs was a stumbling block on their way to becoming land owners. Paraiahs as a rule were rigidly excluded, because of "Prejudice ... The wretch cut off from the land bound frequently by iniquitous contracts and holding his very hut at the mercy of his masters, is obedient as a dog, and works for a rack rent or for starvation wages." 107

The Collector of Tanjore also indicated that the mirasidars, wanting to maintain the labour force, opposed any attempt to improve the condition of the depressed classes."They naturally do not desire to have labour free and their attitude though a selfish one is intelligible" 108. The mirasidars used all kinds of tricks to prevent the Paraiahs from becoming owners of land.

Tremenheere describes the methods followed by the mirasidars to keep the Paraiahs under subjection. The mirasidars he stated (a) bring false cases in the village courts or in the criminal courts (b) obtain on application from the Government waste lands buying all round the paracherri, so as to impound the Paraiah's cattle or obstruct their way to the temple (c) have mirasi names fraudulently entered in the Government account against paracherri (d) pull down huts and destroy the growth
in the backyards (e) deny occupancy rights in immemorial sub tenancies (f) forcibly cut paraiah's crops and on being resisted charge them with theft and rioting (g) under misrepresentation get them execute documents by which they are afterwards ruined (i) without legal notice have the property of the subtenants attached for the landlord's arrears of revenue.  

Board of Revenue in 1892 in its minutes stated that mirasidars in Chingleput and Tanjore districts frequently used their powers to prevent the attempt of the Paraiahs from obtaining land of their own. Oddie observes that "so long as the mirasidars controlled the land, house sites and means of employment and could manipulate the legal system to their advantage they had almost unlimited means of harassing and keeping them in subjection." Goudie from his own experience observed that mirasidars "made all attempts to prevent the Paraiahs to acquire and cultivate land in their own name. Every effort was taken to keep the Paraiahs landless". In Chingleput for instance the Paraiahs held only 14,500 acres out of 6,17,000 held on patta. That is to say 25 percent of the population had only 2 percent of the land. Most of these lands were located in non-mirasasi villages. This is an indication of the strong influence exercised by mirasidars.

Inspite of obstacles many persons belonging to the depressed castes succeeded in becoming land owners. This is known from the Census report of 1881. A special tabulation was made to ascertain the extent to which land was held by the Paraiahs and pallas in the districts of Tanjore, South Arcot and Chingleput.
district out of a total number of 310, 565 Paraihas 38,891 were in possession of
land. It represented only 6 % of the Paraiah population. In South Arcot out of a
total population of 582,974 agricultural labourers 196,621 or 33 percent of them
became land holders. In the case of Tanjore the number of Paraiahs and pallas as
per the special tabulation was 567,721. Out of this number 35,479 or 12 percent of
them became landholders.¹¹³ Data for other districts are not available. We can safely
conclude that in non-mirasi areas a considerable number of the depressed classes
would have become land holders.

Yet a vast majority among them continued to suffer great hardship as pannai-
yals and padiyals. This was mainly due to the exploiting nature of the social
order and the diluted policy of the Colonial Government.

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**Notes and References**

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a) சூர்யகதை செய்யகை - கந்த செய்யகை
அலி சங்கா புகழ்பெற்றது - கோருப்பு புகழ்பெற்றது
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செய்யகை மன்னருக்குண்டு - கந்த மன்னருக்குண்டு
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