

Chapter II

BRITISH RULE AND THE ARRIVAL OF SOUTH INDIAN LABOURERS IN SRI LANKA

During the last quarter of 18th century, the British had emerged as a strong nation financially and politically in European Continent. The British used this to establish their dominance throughout the world. The English East India Company was used as an instrument to colonize many parts of Asia. This chapter has four sections. In the Section I, the British conquest of the Island country, then known as Ceylon, and establishment of its Raj is narrated. Section II deals with introduction of slope cultivation and establishment of coffee and tea estates with the support of capital imported from Britain. Immigration of south Indian labourers into Sri Lanka are described in Section III. Section IV dwells on different modes of recruitment adopted by the British in Sri Lanka.

I

Conquest of Sri Lanka by the British

The English East India Company was founded by Queen Elizabeth in London on December 31, 1600.¹ The Queen gave monopoly in trading rights to this company. The English East India Company was engaged initially in trade with the countries in the East but dragged into politics

¹ R. Kemal, 'The Evolution of the British Sovereigns in India' in H.S. Bhatia (ed.), *British Colonial Government in India* (Delhi: Deep & Deep Publishers Pvt Ltd, 1986), p. 119.

of South Asia soon. The first English man known to have landed on the mainland of India was Thomaste Phens. He came in 1579, Rector of the Jesuit College in Goa.² Then in 1583, the two English merchants Fitch and Newbery accompanied by Leeds, a Jeweller and a Painter, journeyed overland to India. The Portuguese arrested them at Ormuz and took them as prisoners to Goa.³

The British could not establish trade relationship with India until the Portuguese had influence with the Mughals. The British could however succeed in establishing British settlement in Surat in 1612 with the help of the Mughal emperor Jahangir. Following that, trading ports of British emerged in all directions of India, the important trade centres being in Agra, Ahamadabad, Barok, Bombay, Masoolipattanam, Calcutta, Chennai, Balasore, Harikarapuram, Kasimbazar, Patna and Gukli.⁴

The English East India Company had come to know about Sri Lanka and its trade on spices. Sri Lanka was then under the control of the Dutch. Nevertheless, the British did not like to take over Sri Lankan administration immediately, because of their friendship with the Hollanders (Dutch) in Europe. By the end of the 18th century, the Dutch had lost their influence in Sri Lanka. This prompted the British to evince interest in Sri Lanka.

² P.E. Roberts, *History of British India under the Company and the Crown* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 21.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ C.S. Kathirgamanathan, *Illangayin Varalaru (1796-1948)* (Tamil) (Jaffna: Varathar Publication, 1967), p. 10.

The main reason why Sri Lanka was captured by the British was to have hold over India.⁵ When the British fought in Bengal Bay with The French, their ships were damaged very often in the Indian Ocean.

During north east monsoon season, the safe launching of ships in eastern ports of India was so difficult. Besides, they had to take the ships to Bombay port for repairing. So, the British felt the need to have ports in the Bay of Bengal. Moreover, whenever the French ships attacked Chennai, the British could not send the defence force immediately. In this context, Trincomalee harbour which is situated in the eastern area of Sri Lanka looked to meet the British requirements. The Trincomalee as a natural harbour controlled the commercial activities in Malabar coastal areas and it was suitable to launch many ships at the same time.⁶ The British fought many wars to establish their domination in India. These wars increased the importance of Sri Lankan ports.

The Kandian Kingdom is located in the middle part of Sri Lanka. It is a beautiful mountain area. Further, for a long period, it was not captured by Portuguese and Dutch. It was an independent kingdom and reigned by Sinhala and Nayak Kings. In the middle of the 18th century, Kirti Sri Rajasinha (1747-1782) the King of Kandy,⁷ sought the help of

⁵ C.S. Kularatnam, *North Mudal Gopallawa Varai (Illangai Theevin Arasial Varalaru, 1798-1962)* (Tamil), Vol. I (Jaffna: Asirvatham Press, 1966), pp. 10-14.

⁶ S.U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence* (Colombo: The Ceylon Institution of World Affairs, 1965), p. 03.

⁷ S. Gopalakrishnan, *Nayaks of Sri Lanka, 1739-1815 (Political Relations with the British in South India)* (Madras: New Era Publications, 1988), p. 30.

the English East India Company in Chennai to drive away the Dutch from Sri Lanka's coastal areas,⁸ but was rejected by the British.⁹ Finally the British decided to support the Kandian king and sent a Mission to Sri Lanka for the purpose of capturing Trincomalee port.¹⁰

Subsequently in 1762 the English East India Company sent their first diplomatic Mission called the Pybus Mission¹¹ to Sri Lanka under John Pybus. The Kandian King requested help from them to chase away the Hollanders. In return for that help, the King gave a port and permitted the English East India Company to do cinnamon trade in Sri Lanka. However, no firm decision was taken in that negotiation.¹² During the period of the American War of Independence there were contradictions between the British and the Dutch. This prompted British to turn its attention on Sri Lanka. The Dutch controlled Nagapattinam in India was captured by the British.¹³ Following that they tried to capture Trincomalee harbour. At this time, Kandy was under the reign of the Nayak King named Rajadhi Raja Sinha (1782-1798).

⁸ Colvin. R.de. Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation, 1795-1833*, Vol. I (Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries Co.Ltd, 1953), p. 15.

⁹ K.M.de. Silva, *The Coming of the British of the Ceylon (1762 -1802)*, Vol. III (Sri Lanka: University of Ceylon, 1974), p. 02.

¹⁰ N.E. Weera Sooria, *Ceylon and her People* (Colombo: Ceylon Printers Ltd, 1971), p. 52.

¹¹ V.L.B. Mendis, *The Advent of the British to Ceylon (1762-1803)* (Colombo: Colombo Apothecaries Co. Ltd, 1971), pp. 29-51.

¹² Colvin R.de. Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation, 1795 -1833*, p. 08.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Another Mission was sent to Sri Lanka in 1782 under Hugh Boyd. Around this time Trincomalee had been captured by the British,¹⁴ but they could not retain that place for a long time. Trincomalee was recaptured by the French from the British and was handed over to the Dutch. After 12 years, the British got a chance to capture Sri Lanka. The French power had declined following the French Revolution in 1789 and the subsequent rise of Napoleon.¹⁵ The French invaded Holland 1794 and brought the country under their control. Dutch's Prince Stadtholder (William V) escaped and fled to England.¹⁶ This incident made the situation favourable to the British to capture Sri Lanka. The British sent a letter to J.G.Van Angelbeek, the Governor of Sri Lanka through their diplomatic channel.¹⁷ In that letter they had proposed to handover Sri Lanka to them. But the Governor turned down this request.

Following that, Batticaloa and Jaffna were seized in September 1795. Then Mannar was captured in October and Katpitty was taken over in February 1796. Because of these aggressions, the Dutch retreated towards Colombo. The British entered Colombo on February 16th 1796, forcing the Hollanders to move out of Colombo.¹⁸ There after Sri Lanka was ruled for 138 year by the British.

¹⁴ H.A.J. Hulugalle, *British Governors of Ceylon* (Colombo: Lake House, 1963), p. 01.

¹⁵ K.M.de. Silva, *The Coming of the British of the Ceylon (1762 -1802)*, p. 07.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 07-08.

¹⁷ Colvin R.de. Silva, *Ceylon under the British Occupation, 1795 -1833*, p. 44.

¹⁸ H.A.J. Hulugalle, *British Governors of Ceylon*, p. 01.

Fredrick North (1798-1805) was appointed as the first British Governor in Sri Lanka which became British crown colony in 1802.¹⁹ The Governor of the Sri Lanka attacked Kandy in 1803.²⁰ Governor North's invasion of Kandy did not workout according to the plan. The operation was bungled and hundreds of the invading forces were stricken by a mysterious fever. A large number of the British troops were massacred.²¹

However, during the period of the Governor Robert Browning (1812-1820), Kandy was captured in 1815,²² and the Nayak King and the last King of Kandy named Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798-1815) was arrested and sent to India by the British. Then the whole part of the Sri Lanka was brought under the control of the British. The Governor created conflicts between the king, lords, monks, and people for his own benefits. On 2nd March 1815, the British struck a pact with Kandian lords. It is called the Kandian Convention.²³ In that pact, it was agreed upon that the traditions and their established usages of the country would be respected.

¹⁹ Lanka Sundaram, *Indian Overseas; A Study of Economic Sociology* (Colombo: G.A. Natesan & Co, 1933), p. 01.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²¹ U.C. Wickremeratna, *The Conservative Nature of the British Rule of Sri Lanka with Particular Emphasis on the Period, 1796 -1802* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1996), p. 84.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²³ Chandra Richard de Silva, *Sri Lanka* (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Pvt Ltd, 1987), p. 148.

II

The Launching of Estates in Sri Lanka

The introduction of slope cultivation was one of the most important measures of the British in Sri Lanka. Though they captured the coastal areas of Sri Lanka in 1796, they did not have any thought to make changes in Sri Lankan economy. After they seized Kandy, they turned their attention on plantation. This paved the way for the recruitment of labourers from south India.

The estate was a British invention.²⁴ They cultivated coffee and tea in these estates. The resources for the British's coffee and tea cultivation like, soil, weather, and hill existed in Asian countries. Hence, the British used the resources to develop plantation economy. Furthermore, the British had the labourers at their disposal in Sri Lanka, India, Burma, and West Indies and they had the authority to take the workers to any of their empire countries.

In this background, the British capitalists were invited to invest in Sri Lanka's estates. At the cost of the local people's traditional agriculture plantation in Sri Lanka was given encouragement. Coffee

²⁴ K. Arunthavarajah, 'Ealath Tamilarkalin Arasial Samuga Varalattu Valarchiyil Eelakesarin Pankalippu' (Tamil), Master of Philosophy in History, Submitted to the University of Jaffna, Jaffna, 2003, p. 358 (unpublished).

was cultivated in estates in a big way; through it had been first introduced in Sri Lanka by the Dutch.²⁵

The British introduced the coffee plantation in Upcountry land of Kandy for the first time. During the period of Governor Edward Barnes (1824-1831), coffee was cultivated in small quantity by George Bird in Gambola.²⁶ Following that, the coffee estates were launched in Pussallava, Gambaha, Hevahatta and Ramboda.²⁷ In the early stage, the British had interest in spice trade like all other European countries. However, the suitable condition for coffee cultivation in Sri Lanka and other colonial countries prompted the British to evince interest in coffee plantation.

For a long-time, the West Indies supplied coffee to European countries. Nevertheless, coffee crops declined in West Indies suddenly. Around this time, Industrial revolution created a work force that had a liking for coffee. The number of those addicted to coffee increased. Therefore, the British desired to earn money by supplying coffee to European markets. Sri Lanka turned out to be the suitable place for cultivation of coffee. Since it had roads all over the country, it reduced the transport expenses to distribute coffee in any part of the country.

²⁵ Haraprasad Chattopathyaya, *Indian's in Sri Lanka - A Historical Study* (Calcutta: O.P.S. Publishers, 1979), p. 13.

²⁶ Siri Walgama, *History of the Trade Union Movement in the Plantations in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Centre for Society & Religion, 1979), p. 01.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.

After crushing political resistance in Kandy, the lands were provided to the British investors at a throw away price. Colebrooke Constitution (1833) favoured coffee plantation. Europeans were not allowed to buy lands in Sri Lanka in the early stage. Moreover, the new British law had changed the situation entirely. Concessions were given to the British planters and estate owners in taxes and customs duty. Subsequently, many Englishmen in administrative service and military service, like Governors, soldiers, judges, priests, officers, and the East Indian Company staff also involved themselves in coffee plantation with competitive mind.²⁸ As in India, coffee crops were affected by 'Leaf disease' and hence coffee was abandoned in many estates of Sri Lanka.²⁹

As the British could find no cure for the leaf disease, they turned their attention on tea. Tea was started in small quantity in the beginning. However, by 1890, tea had become one of the major exporting crops. In the last quarter of 19th century rubber estates were also launched in many areas of Sri Lanka.

In early stage, Africans were brought as slaves to work in the mines and estates by the British in America. However, this slavery system was abolished in the British Empire. Hence, a new system was

²⁸ K. Mohanraj, *Irupatham Noottandin Naveena Adimathanam (Malayaka Tamil Makkalin Varalaru)* (Tamil) (United Kingdom: Eelam Research Organization, 1986), p. 04.

²⁹ Mayan Viji, *Where Serfdom Thrives: The Plantation Tamils of Sri Lanka* (Madras: Tamil Information Centre, 1987), p. 01.

introduced to get the workers with low wage. That was Indentured Labour system.

III

The Arrival of South Indian Labourers Pre-British Period

The cinnamon trade gained importance in Sri Lanka. The Sinhala kings brought the rule that to peel cinnamon was a compulsory service. The Portuguese also had this law and used it for their favour and the Hollanders continued it. They got the services from *chalias*. The Dutch brought the Indians to work on cinnamon plantations but this immigration was very irregular.³⁰ Prof. S. Arasaratnam who has done extensive research related to the Hollanders in Sri Lanka has noted the presence of south Indian labourers in Sri Lanka during the Dutch period. We have information that people who had known the work of knitting baskets migrated from south India to Sri Lanka. Their arrival from south India had increased in the time of the Kandian kings which was continued ever during the Portuguese and the Dutch periods.³¹

³⁰ Urmila Phadnis, 'The 1964 Indo Ceylonese Pact and the Stateless Persons in Ceylon' in Verinder Grover (ed.), *India's Neighbours and her Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Deep & Deep Publication, 1967), pp. 700-701.

³¹ S. Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658 -1687* (New Delhi: Navrang, 1968), pp. 184-185.

Eric Meyer observed that there was a prosperous trade in agricultural produce in Sri Lanka and many labourers came from India to work in agricultural field during the Dutch era.³²

Michel Roberts added that the government appointed mat knitting workers from south India to peel the bark of cinnamon. Paddy lands were given in exchange for their works. The book *Nadattavarkal* recorded this.

*'When Dutch occupied Sri Lanka and India, first time they brought and used 10,000 Tamil labourers to cultivate cinnamon and temper it.'*³³

The Parathavas emigrated to Sri Lanka during Portuguese's period. Among them, many Parathavas settled in Negombo. They were different from estate labourers. They were called Indian Tamils. There was another group named *Nattukotai Chettiars*, who were different from other *Chettiars*.³⁴ They had trade contact with Sri Lanka's handicraft workers, who also fulfilled the needs of estate labourers. These people lived mostly in Mattala, Thangala, Apputtala and Bhadulla.³⁵

³² Eric Meyer, 'Enclave Plantation Hemmed in Villages and Dualistic Representations in Ceylon' in Balentine Daniel (ed.), *Plantations - Peasants and Proletarians in Colonial Asia* (Great Britain: Frank Cass and Company Ltd, 1992), p. 07.

³³ C.V. Vellupillai, *Nadattavarkal* (Tamil) (Sri Lanka: Nilagiri Island Charity Publication, 1987), p. 18.

³⁴ P.P. Thevaraj, *Illangayil Indüath Tamilar: Thanithuva Uruthipadum Inagalluku Idayilana Paraspara Seyatpadum* (Tamil) (Colombo: Social Science Union, 1985), p. 226.

³⁵ A.N. M. Sahajan, *Varalarum Marapukalum* (Tamil) (Puththalam: Author Publication, 1989), p. 28.

According to A. Sivarajah it is not true that the arrival of estate labourers started with the introduction of estate. Only after the arrival³⁶ of the British, there was a regular arrival in Indian labourers. The British captain Henry Bird brought 14 labourers from south India in 1823 for cultivating coffee and made a heavy profit.³⁷

This success story changed the life of Indian Tamils and the economic condition of Sri Lanka. The British used south Indian labourers for the programme of ward building, railway building, and construction of public works during their period.³⁸

Recruitment of South Indian Labourers during the British Rule

Some of the terms such as Indian Tamils, Upcountry Tamils, and Malayakam Tamils are concurrently used to identify the population of the plantation workers in the hilly mountainous regions, as being confined to the Uva, Sabaragamuwa and central province of *Illangai*. The term 'Indian Tamils' is used with some hesitation.³⁹ There is now an attempt to change the use of the term 'Indian Tamils' which was

³⁶ A. Sivarajah, 'Illangayil Malayakath Tamilarin (India Vamsavali) Varalaru Aarambam Patria Sila Kurippukkal', *Malayaga Tamil Manattu Aaivu Kadduraikal (Tamil)* (Kandy: Ministry of Hindu Religious and Education - Central Province, 1997), p. 55.

³⁷ K. Mohanraj, *Irupatham Noottandin Naveena Adimathanam (Malayaka Tamil Makkalin Varalaru)*, p. 03.

³⁸ S.U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence*, p. 06.

³⁹ S. Bastian, *Indian Tamils Emerging Issues -A draft in Lanka's* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 1990), pp. 350-357.

historically connected with the status of the population of plantations workers with prefix 'Indian' as an identity to denote the labour force from India during the colonial period. Now it is a growing demand among the people for the use of the term *Malayakam Tamils*.⁴⁰

The south Indian labourers were living in Upcountry in high density and spread in other parts of Sri Lanka. They belonged separately to north and east Sri Lankan Tamils. Hence, this emigration was permanent because India is situated near Sri Lanka. During the 19th century, the south Indian labourers avoided to settle down permanently in Sri Lanka. Due to their poverty, they accepted the lowest wage in Sri Lanka. The information about the estate and their habitation would not be given to them while they were called to the Sri Lanka. Consequently, they were trapped in Sri Lanka. Thereafter Lakhs of south Indian labourers were brought from India. Following that, a new slavery system was started by the British in Sri Lanka.⁴¹

In the beginning, the Sinhalese who were mostly interested in agriculture did not support the plantation work.⁴² Nevertheless they were not ready to give up their traditional work and accept the new life styles which were their resultant of plantation.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ K. Mohanraj, *Irupatham Noottandin Naveena Adimathanam (Malayaka Tamil Makkalin Varalaru)*, p. 04.

⁴² S. Arasaratnam, *Indians in Malaysia and Singapore* (London: Oxford University press, 1970), p. 10.

The European countries were not able to gather the African Negro slaves, as slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1834. It was favourable to gather labourers from India.⁴³ The Indian emigration continued to Fiji, the islands in the east, the West Indies in the west and Mauritius in the south.⁴⁴

As for as Britain was concerned it exploited India for its own betterment.⁴⁵ It imposed many restrictions to cripple the cottage industry and handicrafts in India.⁴⁶ Many Indian artisans who were affected by the colonial policy of Britain in order to survive moved out of their native soil.

Land revenue was increased 90% in West Bengal, above 80% in north India and 50% in Chennai.⁴⁷ These heavy taxes on agriculture hit the peasantry and forced them to sell their land.

The small and marginal farmers who were affected by the agrarian policy of the colonial state sold most of the lands to the government, since they were not able to repay their loan. Due to the colonial economical policy of the British in India, cottage industry and agriculture were ruined. As a result, the Indians who had been reduced to the state of penury tried to migrate to other countries.

⁴³ K. Arunthavarajah, 'Eelath Tamilarkalin Arasial Samuga Varalattu Valarchiyil Eelakesarin Pankalippu', p. 359.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ N.H. Wriggus, *Ceylon* (New Jersey: University Press, 1960), p. 212.

⁴⁶ Kondapi, *Indian Overseas (1939-1949)* (New Delhi: Indian Council of World Affairs, 1951), p. 03.

⁴⁷ S. Sandarasegaran, *Illangai Indiar Varalaru* (Colombo: Kumaran Publishers, 2001), p. 03.

The frequent famines that struck India in the early periods of British rule devastated the districts of Tamil Nadu. In the year of 1799, 1804, 1807, 1813-1818, 1824 there were severe famines in which many people died.⁴⁸ Every famine caused a flux of emigration to overseas countries.

Further the wretched caste system in south India denied a secure livelihood to a vast majority people.⁴⁹ All these factors were responsible for Tamils responding to the live of the European planters to work in their estate. After the abolition of slavery, West Indies had the shortage of labourers. The same condition prevailed in Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and British Guyana.

However the people who emigrated to foreign countries were affected by some factors like the land lord's tyranny, harmful weather and poor wage. The emigrants were mostly weavers, farmers and barbers.⁵⁰ Among them 1/3 were untouchables and they emigrated because of the oppression in their native land. Such labourers came to Sri Lankan estates. First, the British thought of bringing labourers from China but they gave up this idea because of huge expenditure involved.⁵¹

Many of Sinhalese were based high in the social hierarchy and so they did not like to work under the British. They wished to live some

⁴⁸ Dharmakumar, *Land and Cast in South India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), p. 188.

⁴⁹ K. Suntharam, *Thoddaththolilalarkal* (Colombo: Kugan Publishers, 1985), pp. 01-04.

⁵⁰ J. Satkurunathan, 'Malayakath Tamilarin Samuga Kaddamaippu', *Kunrin Kural* (Tamil), Petal. II (Kandy: Secretary Kandy Estates, 1992), p. 20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

what freely. Further they did not like to go far away from their family for jobs. Although the British introduced coffee, they sought for the service from local people to make the estates mainly. They rendered many helps to the British by cutting trees and cleaning the forest.⁵²

The British thought that the south Indian workers worked hard, and they were submissive and obedient to the British's rules and regulations unlike the Sinhalese workers who were aggressive and defiant. Moreover the British had the diplomacy that if they brought the labourers from other countries they would not revolt against the British as they were in a foreign land.

There is a view that the Sinhalese did not opt for estate works because they had the anti imperialistic feelings. Yet we should mind the following factors.

- * Most of the Sinhalese labourers who were in a family mode of life were convinced that life would be miserable in British controlled estates, as their only motive was to make huge profit.
- * In the beginning, Sinhalese labourers who worked in estate had to go to their hometown during harvest seasons. This inconvenienced the estate owners.
- * Sinhalese cart drivers and village farmers had relationships with

⁵² Sri Jeyasingha, *Illangai Vaal Indiyarkalin Kudiyakalvu* (Tamil) (Kandy: Malayaka People Publication, 1969), p. 11.

the coffee thieves. This was taken into consideration by the Europeans while be recruiting.⁵³

The first contract labourers were recruited from the south of India by the British planters in Sri Lanka to work on the coffee plantations in the Kandian hills cave, in 1830.⁵⁴ After 1838, labourers emigrated in proper manner under the supervision of British India Government.

IV

The Methods of Labourers Recruitment

The British Government followed many methods to recruit the labourers to plantation in Sri Lanka.

Indenture Labour System

This system was introduced by the British to gather the labourers for the colonial countries, which were far away from south India. The people who went there faced different conditions. India is situated near Sri Lanka. Due to this location, they did not have the intention to settle down in Sri Lanka permanently.

⁵³ L. SanthiKumar, 'Malayakaththin Varalarum Samuga Uruvakkamum', *Theerththakkarai* (Tamil), Karai. I, Alai. I (Kandy: Sangam, 2006 Jan-Mar), p. 29.

⁵⁴ Vincent Coetho, *A Cross the Palk Straits (India - Sri Lanka Relations)* (New Delhi: Dehradun Publishers, 1976), p. 118.

According to the Indenture Labour system, the estate owners encouraged their managers in India to gather and send the necessary labourers. The authorised person sent his workers to villages to gather the labourers. The gathered labourers signed an agreement that they would be under their control for five years. Otherwise, they were made to do the second agreement. When the labourers were gathered, their wages were also fixed.⁵⁵

The travel expenses of labourers were borne by the estate owners. After that, the expenses were deducted from the labourer's wage. The labourers were gathered in wrong ways and women were forced to do prostitution also.⁵⁶ This system was another form of slavery and due to its evil nature it was finally abolished in 1915.

Kangany System (Sardari System)

The British obtained the labourers in low wage through *Kangany* system in Sri Lankan estates.⁵⁷ *Kangany* was the supervisor and he had 25 or 30 labourers in his group. All the groups of an estate were activated under a chief *Kangany*.⁵⁸ The manager in charge of the estate was called Estate Superintendent. The chief *Kangany* was responsible

⁵⁵ S. Sandarasegaran, *Illangai Indiar Varalaru*, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁵⁷ S.U. Kodikara (ed.), *Illangai India Uravukalin Irandam Nilai* (Tamil) (Trans. N. SelvaKumaran) (Colombo: Official Research Cultural Centre, 1965), p. 129.

⁵⁸ C.S. Bhatk, Laxmi Narayan & Sadananda Sahoo, *Indian Diaspora* (New Delhi: Published in *Employment News*, 2002 Dec), pp. 21-27.

for matters relating the labourers and their wages. He got monthly salary and also brokerage from the labourers apart from salary. These *Kanganys* were selected from Indian labourers.

The *Kanganys* gathered the labourers and provided them to estates where the labourers were needed mostly. Particular amount of money was given as an advance to the *Kanganys* for labourers' travel and other immediate expenses ⁵⁹ and later it would be debited. This was one of the systems of exploitation.

The labourers selected one *Kangany* among them and joined as groups to go to Sri Lanka. In the early period of coffee plantation, the *Kanganys* were selected in democratic manner. After the period of 1850, the *Kanganys* got the status as managers of estate owners. In periods when there were labour shortages, another type of *Kanganys* emerged. They earned money through the exchange of labourers from one estate to another estate.

The permanent labourers wanted more wages after landing in the tea estates.⁶⁰ Hence the *Kanganys* asked more money to bring the labourers. For this purpose, one association was inaugurated after 1898. This association promised to provide the money after the labourers' arrival. Besides, a Coast Agency was launched in 1904 to supervise the gathering of labourers and to provide the needed money.

⁵⁹ Babu Lal Gupta, *Political and Civil Status of Indian's of Ceylon* (Agra: Gaya Prasad & Sons, 1963), pp. 11-14.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Tin Ticket System

Another system of gathering labourers was the Tin Ticket System. The system was introduced in 1902. The worker was issued a Tin Ticket (a little disc or tin punched with a letter and two numbers denoting his name and name of the estate) which he had to present to the camp superintendent in the Sri Lanka Government quarantine camp in Mandapam. They provided the labourers and undertook the responsibility of transporting them to their respective estates. In order to attract a large flow of labour the Sri Lanka Government subsidised the planters. Only 50 per cent of the cost of transport and food was recovered from the planters. Sir West Ridgeway aptly compared this system to the value payable by post (VPP) the worker being delivered like a parcel. While it ensured efficient and speedy transport of the workers to the estate their basic problem remained unsolved. The practice of debiting of the cost of recruitment and transportation of the labourers against their estate accounts continued.⁶¹

Thundu System

Closely associated with the *Kangany* institution was another civil practice known as *Thundu* system. The estate managers gave the advance to the labourers and noted it in a slip. This slip was maintained

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

by estate owners for every labourer individually. The labourers had to work in the particular estates only until they returned the advance payment. While the labourers had more expenses, they had to get the advance.

If there were excess of labourers in estates, manager asked them to return the advance payment and then released the labourers from his estate. Consequently the manager gave a slip about the labourers loan to *Kangany*, and then he went to another estate where there was labour shortage and received the advance payments in new estates and credited them in labourer's account. He also settled the loan dues to the previous estate owners. This system changed the labourers' loan area only but it did not help to reduce the labourers' burden. Due to this *Thundu* system, the *Kanganys* had been changing their estates with their labourers for ages. If the estate owners rejected the *Kangany's* loan request then they got their slips and went to another estate.⁶²

The enclave nature of labour settlement, coupled with illiteracy. Prevented the Indian labourer from taking interest in the socio-political ⁶³ life of the country of his adoption.

The *Thundu* system was abolished in 1921 by *Thundu* Prohibition Ordinance on the Recommendation of the Ceylon Labour Commission. ⁶⁴

⁶² S. Sandarasegaran, *Illangai Indiar Varalaru*, p. 22.

⁶³ Babu Lal Gupta, *Political and Civil Status of Indian's of Ceylon*, p. 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Even then the Tamil estate labourers continued to live in debts. This was mainly because the institution of *Kangany* was not abolished.

Table II.1

Annual Migration of Indian Estate Labourers.

<u>Period</u>	<u>Immigration</u>	<u>Emigration</u>	<u>Balance of Immigration</u>
1843-1850	47,028	19,693	27,335
1851-1860	57,464	31,443	26,021
1861-1870	68,415	53,185	15,230
1871-1880	102,511	82,471	20,040
1881-1890	57,856	52,752	5,105
1891-1900	121,484	85,057	36,427
1901-1910	95,324	67,975	27,349
1911-1920	87,388	47,917	39,421
1921-1930	106,080	67,043	39,037
1931-1940	51,784	54,981	3,197
1941-1950	47,252	54,994	7,742

Source: S.U. Kodikara, *Indo-Ceylon Relations since Independence* (Colombo: The Ceylon Institution of World Affairs, 1965), p. 14, ; *Administration Report of the Commissioner of Labour* (Sri Lankan: Government Publication, 1951), p. 73.

The estate labourers were brought from south India especially southern districts of Tamil Nadu, Trichiropoly, Tanjavur, Pudukotai, Madurai, Ramanathapuram, Tirunelveli, Salem, and north Arcot, south Arcot, Coimbatore, Pondichery and Madras were the native places of the

labourers.⁶⁵ The total number of Tamil labourers employed on the coffee estate in 1837 was estimated to be 10,000.⁶⁶

The labourers suffered not only in Sri Lanka but also in Mauritius and Guyana. Indian Government knew the suffering of labourers and implemented the law to block the labourer's migration from India to foreign countries in 1839. Due to this law, there was shortage of labourers in Sri Lanka. India and Sri Lanka then Negotiated. Due to that negotiation the law which blocked the labourers to migrate to Sri Lanka was cancelled.⁶⁷ The Indian Government requested Sri Lankan Government to take care of labourers' health and their well being.

In early days, individual persons only brought the labourers from south India. So the labourers were subjected to many difficulties. Even the government followed the principle of non-intervention. In the beginning labourers travelled long distances from their own villages to reach Indian yacht ports to migrate to Sri Lanka. They mainly used Mandapam-Pamban-Dhaushkodi-Talai Mannar rail cum ferry route and Tuticorin –Colombo sea route to reach Sri Lanka.⁶⁸

After they reached Sri Lanka, they had to travel around 200 miles to reach Kandy. When they travelled through forests, due to lack of food and water, many of them died on the way. The estate owners and

⁶⁵ S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *The Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Department of Information, 1976), p. 42.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ S. Sandarasegaran, *Illangai Indiar Varalaru*, p. 26.

⁶⁸ S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, *The Foreign Policy of Sri Lanka*, p. 42.

Kanganys did not take any responsibility for the well-being of the labourers. Particularly they did not provide any medical care on the way and also in the early phase of their working in estates. When the labourers reached the estates most of them were not fit to work and their health condition was also very bad. Hence, many of them had to return to their country.

Many labourers eventually became sick, affected by chicken pox, malaria, measles, and diarrhoea. Even though they managed to work with many difficulties, they did not get proper salary. Sri Lankan Government did not consider the labourers' health and had adopted many laws since 1872. Yet in practice, no law was enforced with the objective improving the living conditions of estate labourers.

Sri Lanka got freedom in 1948. After that, the arrival of Indian labourers got reduced. Further Sri Lankan Government faced unemployment problem due to economical slackness in the 1930's and 1940's. Since the days of Great Depression of 1930's the emigration to Sri Lanka had stopped and there was only repatriation of Indian labourers from Sri Lanka. Table II.2 shows the repatriation figures from 1929.

Table II.2

Repatriation figures for 10 years from 1929,

<u>Year</u>	<u>No of Workers</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>No of Workers</u>
1929	3,183	1934	2,034
1930	7,462	1935	6,252
1931	15,707	1936	5,396
1932	14,338	1937	10,322
1933	42,343	1938	3,004

Source: *Administration Report of the Commissioner of Labour* (Sri Lanka: Government Publication, 1954), p. F 99.