Introduction
The campaign against slavery and its eventual abolition in Europe coincided with the ruin of Indian peasantry and the artisanal class, particularly weavers. The overwhelmingly redundant wage labour available in India by the first quarter of 19th century prompted the European planters to consider India, a favourable recruiting ground for their required plantation labour.

Emigration of Indian labourers into Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) started first. In the initial phase, emigration of Tamil labourers into Sri Lanka was temporary in nature. However, the impoverished conditions of Tamil peasantry forced them to seek permanent employment in the plantations of Ceylon. The waves of emigration became stronger by the beginning of the third quarter of 19th century.

Assam started employing labourers under indenture system from 1850s. Till 1863 the colonial government did not interfere in the activities of the white planters and their labour practice. But unfair labour policy pursued led to the interference of the government and passing of the Internal Emigration Act III (B.C) of 1863.

The emigration of Indians into Fiji commenced in 179. The British colonizers had established sugarcane plantations in the island. For the non-availability of the local labourers for doing the manual labour in the plantations they approached the British Indian government for availing cheap labour force. The Colonial Government of India accepted their demand and through the Act XXI of 1883 included the Fiji legally into other countries for the Indian labourers emigration.

Initially those who were recruited under indentured labour system hoped to have a dignified existence in the foreign country. But their hopes were belied when they landed ashore in the foreign country. The white planters for keeping eternally the poor Indian indentured labour force within their plantations enacted a series of repressive laws. Indentured recruitment system, however, underwent changes overtime with amendments to the original legislation. The amendments made in the first fifty years were due to the lobby of the white planters, the changes effected in the next fifty years were because of the mounting pressure from the Indian nationalists like Gokhale and Gandhi.
Review of Literature:


But a comprehensive account of the Indian labourers’ emigration, the indentured labour laws governing their services and the helpless situation in which they were caught in foreign lands from 1830 to 1930 is yet to be attempted. Particularly a comparative study of indentured labour laws in force in different colonies to my knowledge, remains an unexplored subject. This study seeks to meet this need in historical research.

Objective and Hypotheses:

The objective of the study is to evaluate the essential features brought out in the statutes and acts during the said two important phases in the history of emigration from India. It
is also intended to undertake a comparative analysis of a system prevailing in Fiji, Sri Lanka and Assam (India). While making investigation, the hypotheses to be tested are:

- British colonialism pauperized the peasantry and forced them to move out of the country.
- Those who had gone overseas under indentured labour law was forced to renew the contract and reside in the British Colony, much against their desire.
- The indentured labour law enacted and enforced in all British colonies was prejudiced in favour of planters.
- The exploitative conditions caused revolts and rebellions that were ruthlessly suppressed.
- The legislative ameliorative measures adopted did not address the issues arising out of the repressive nature of indentured labour law.
- The Indian nationalists and the press owned by the Indians played an exemplary role in exposing the brutality of the system.
- There was no uniform law applied commonly to all Empire colonies.

Method and Data:

The historical method is used for the study. The archival data has been chiefly utilized. The Madras Government and the Supreme Government’s Annual reports, statutes, acts, newspaper reports, enquiry committees’ reports, proceedings of Public Department, private reports, Annuals on Moral and Material Condition of India, pamphlets, files, records and gazettes comprise the primary sources. Manuals, gazetteers and articles in contemporary journals and the books, appended to bibliography, form the secondary sources of the study. In order to elucidate the subject lucidly and to illustrate the points clearly, tables have been compiled in appropriate places.

Chapterisation:

The thesis is structured into seven chapters, including introduction and conclusion. The First Chapter traces the history of British Colonialism in India and its impact on Indian economy. It portrays the factors that led to the destruction of indigenous industries like weaving and the ruin of agriculture with the advent of British in India. The introduction of various kinds of the land revenue systems by the Colonial Indian government and coercive method of revenue collection, which were till that time unknown to the farmers are described. The Colonial Indian
government's crucial non-intervention policy in the time of natural calamities such as droughts and famines is highlighted with its implications for the Indians.

The second chapter exploring emigration history of Sri Lanka describes the geographical features of Ceylon and the arrival of Europeans into the Island country and the territorial victory of the British over the Dutch and Portuguese and the initiation of the cash crop cultivation in Sri Lanka. The British Ceylonese Government's initial cultivation of the coffee, the Tamil indentured emigrant labourers influx into the coffee plantations and later into the tea plantations are narrated.

The laws that were enacted from time to time by the Colonial Indian Government and the Government of Sri Lanka for the regulation of the emigrant labourers in the coffee and tea plantations of Ceylon from 1837 to 1930 are enumerated first in this section 2. The treatment of the Indian Indentured emigrant labourers in the plantations of the foreign colonies enquired by committee that led to the passage of the Act XIV of 1839. The Ordinance No. 15 of 1859 and Ordinance No. II of 1865 were the most oppressive in nature. The Indian Emigration regulation Act XXI of 1883 declared that, an Indian 'emigrant' was one who went by sea under contract for hire to some country other than Ceylon and Straits Settlement. These countries exempted on account of their proximity and of the similarity of their general conditions of those India. The emigration under this Act was termed as 'Colonial Emigration.' The exploitative Kangany system and later the introduction of the Tundu system and their abolition are other focal matters of this chapter.

In the third section the untold sufferings of the emigrant Indian labourers in the Ceylon plantations and the exploitative nature of the British planters of the Sri Lanka with the aid of Indian supervisors (Kanganies) and the colonial Indian government's insensitivity to the plight of labourers in Sri Lanka resulting in low wage for their hard work, lack of basic needs such as food, water and dampened climate in the plantation labour quarters, non-availability of the good medical facilities leading to the desertion of coolies are the aspects highlighted in the section.

Third chapter on Assam is divided into three parts in which the first part traces the history of the Assam, with the thrust on its physical features. The British East India Company's take over of the Assam territory in 1826 from the Ahom Kings and the Company's commercial interests and import of British capital and introduction of private enterprise and cultivation of
cash crops in Assam, detection of the tea plant in upper part of the Brahmaputra Valley by Robert Bruce and opening of Assam Company in Sibsagar district on an experimental basis are dealt with. The introduction of indentured labourers from the Chota Nagpur and Bihar, Ganjam, Vizagapatnam, Madras, Bombay, Bengal, Northwestern Provinces into the Assam plantation initiated by the Assam Company since 1841 is dwelt on. The introduction of the Assam – Bengal railway for conveying the emigrant coolies into tea gardens in 1900 and the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee's submission of its report in 1905 are the two other issues discussed in section of the chapter.

In the second part of the chapter, the indentured labour laws that were enacted by the colonial Indian government for the regulation of the emigrant labourers in the Assam tea plantations are dwelt on. In the initial period, the emigrant labourers were recruited under "the free system" with little government control, under the Act XII of 1859. The government appointed a three member committee to enquire into the system on the basis of which the first Inland Emigration Act III (B.C) of 1863 was passed. Fixation of minimum wages for the indentured men, women and children working in the plantation by the law of 1865, resentment of the employers for passing laws against their interests, appointment of a Commission to enquire into the whole question of the indentured system in Assam, which facilitated passing of the Act II (B.C) of 1870 are elucidated. The new act in 1882 raised the indentured period from three to five years but there was no material change in regard to the treatment of emigrants in the plantation by the planters. Act XI of 1908 withdrew the penal provisions of Act I of 1882 completely from the Surma Valley and the power of private arrest was also withdrawn from the Assam Valley and the Act VIII of 1915 completely replaced the indentured system from the Assam territory by the free system of labour recruitment are other significant points analysed in this section.

Final part of this chapter depicts the abominable living condition of the emigrant indentured labourers in the Assam tea plantations. Every planter was legally allowed to behave like a perfect despot with their migrant indentured labourers. Besides, the Act of 1863 allowed the planters' right to arrest the runaway coolies from the plantation and the Act also fixed the wages very lowly as rupees five for men, four for women and three for children per month and the wage was not increased or revised till the date of the abolition of the indenture system from the Assam territory. The government till 1893 did not pass any stringent rules and regulations for
adoption. The white planters and the white overseers of the Assam tea plantation were never punished for their crimes which they committed against migrant indentured labourers on the plantation. The planters flogged, kicked and killed many Indian migrant indentured labourers because of their defiance or non-willingness for the renewal of the contract. This led in many times rebellions of the labourers against their overseers and the owners of the plantations in Assam. In sometimes the self-respected migrant labourers beat or killed the European overseers.

The fourth chapter dealing with Fiji has three sections. The first section describes Fiji’s landscape, climate and its native people; Europeans coming into the Fiji Island, initiation of the sugarcane cultivation and the Polynesian labourers’ introduction in the sugarcane plantation and their failure and the ceding of the Fiji kingdom to the British government in 1874 by the Fijian King. The emigration of Indian labourers from the port of Calcutta to Fiji Island in the initial period, the establishment of new emigration depot in Madras for the Fiji island and the direct recruitment of the Tamil labourers and shipment from the port of Madras to Fiji are the highlights of this section.

The second part of the chapter dwells on the statutes, acts and ordinances that were enacted by the British Indian government for the regulation of the Indian labourers emigrating to the Fiji. The contract terms of the indentured labourer relating to period, wage, provisions such as food grains, medical facilities and punishments for infringement are the aspects delineated here. Notwithstanding the Emigration Ordinances enacted and enforced in Fiji, the repressive features of the laws of Fiji government persisted.

The painful phase of the indentured labour system with low wages, arbitrary extension of the indentured contract by the white planters without the knowledge of the ignorant Indian labourers, which led to the obligatory stay in the plantations and forced industrial residence for five more years after the expiration of the indentured contract period of the labourers, refusal of their repatriation to India and restrictions placed for their return to India from Fiji, obnoxious food, poor accommodation and inadequate medical facilities are analysed. High death rate among the Indian indentured emigrant labourers during the time of their voyage on board due to the outbreak of epidemics such as cholera, small box and frequent accidents of the emigrant vessels and the victimization of the Indian labourers on sea because of reckless character of the European seaman. Non-implementation and frequent violation of the Indian Emigration Law and its rules as regards the safety of the emigrant labourers and the white
planters' inhumanity towards the Indian migrant labourers in the plantation and humiliation, recurrent sexual harassment of the migrant Indian women workers on the plantation by the white overseers, heavy work loads or tasks are the other issues thrashed out in this section.

The fifth chapter portrays the role of Indian nationalists Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Mahatma Gandhi, Anni Besant, C.F. Andrus and W.W. Pearson, Madhan Mohan Malaviya in getting the wretched labour system abolished. The Press prepared the ground for launching offensive against the colonial state on issues of indentured labourers in foreign colonies. The contrasting pictures emerging out of each colony of the British form the important part of the concluding chapter of the thesis.
Initiation of British Colonialism in India

Even before 1757, when the British had no territorial control over India to promote their own economic interests, the English East India Company was interested in making money at the cost of Indian labour. It wanted a monopoly of the trade with India. The Company did not want the Indian merchants to compete with it either for the purchase in India or sale abroad of Indian products. In other words, the Company wanted to sell its products at as high a price as possible and buy Indian products as cheaply as possible so that it could corner the maximum profits.

The East Indian Company had to wage prolonged wars to achieve their aim and for this purpose they had to maintain a powerful navy, since the trading areas were far away. The Company required large amounts of money for the purpose. Neither the British Government nor the East India Company possessed such large financial resources. Therefore, at least a part of money had to be raised in India. The Company did this through local taxation in its coastal fortified towns such as Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. Gradually it expanded its territories in order to levy more taxes over larger areas and to increase their financial resources. About this time Industrial Revolution in England had begun to enter its most vigorous phase of development. To develop it more and more, the British needed immense capital for investment in industries, trade and agriculture. As the resources for such investments were limited in Britain at that time, the Capitalists began to look to the plundering of foreign countries for the required capital.¹

The political condition prevailing in India turned out to be favourable to the British to accomplish their objective through treachery and conspiracy of the East India Company officials. After emerging as a territorial power it could use it political authority to acquire monopolistic control over Indian trade and production. The Indian merchants were gradually crushed out, while the weavers and other craftsmen were compelled either to sell their products at uneconomic rate or to hire themselves out to the Company at low wages.²

² Ibid., pp.6-8.
Colonialisation of Indian Economy

In the pre-British days the villages of Madras Presidency functioned under a closed economic system. The needs of the village were met by its inhabitants and rarely did they have to rely on hired labour from outside. They had their own blacksmith, weavers, agriculturists and traders. In the middle of the 18th century south Indian industry became typical example of rural economy with spinning, weaving, dyeing, and processing of agricultural commodities like sugar, vegetables oil, making of utensils and simple agricultural implements and furniture. But the situation changed after the British Colonialism. The difference of the British conquest was that it led to the emergence of a new political and economic system whose interests were rooted in a foreign soil and whose policies were guided solely by imperial interests. The gradual improvement of the means of transport by the government made it possible for the manufactured cloth and other necessary articles reaching the village market. Formerly, as a rule the peasant produced his own cloth and the village artisans met his other needs. Now, he bought most of these things from the market. This was also one of the principal causes of the decline of village artisan and other village industries. The commercialization of village agriculture together with the decay of village industries due to the influx of the manufactured and later, cheap machine-made goods of Britain and subsequently of other countries and even of Indian industries, seriously affected the balanced village economy. Lord Brentford in his speech to Parliament reflected the colonial policy vividly:

We did not conquer India for the benefit of the Indians. I know that it is said at missionary meetings that we have conquered India to raise the level of the Indians. That is cant. We conquered India as an outlet for the goods of Great Britain. We conquered India by the sword, and by the sword we shall hold it.

I am interested in missionary work in India and have done much work of that kind, but I am not such a hypocrite as to say that we hold India for the

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Indians. We hold it as the finest outlet for British goods in general, and for Lancashire goods in particular.6

Ruin of Indigenous Industries

Until the close of the eighteenth century, India had been renowned for the skill of her craftsmen and the excellence of her manufactures. Even in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Sir Thomas Munro, in his evidence before the Select Committee of 1813, stated that “in India almost every article which the natives require is made cheaper and better than in Europe. Among these are all cotton and silk manufactures, leather, paper, domestic utensils of brass and iron and implements of agriculture”. The period 1800-1850, however, witnessed changes in the fundamental nature of the indigenous industries due to the British colonialism in India.7 The Industrial Revolution that happened during this period helped the British to sell machine-made goods in India in competition with Indian handicrafts. Before the beginning of Industrial Revolution in England, the East India Company concentrated on the export of Indian manufactured goods, textiles, spices, etc., to Europe where these articles were in great demand.8

Weaving Industry

The seventeenth and the greater part of the eighteenth centuries marked the watershed period of the Indian textile industry. Cotton piecegoods formed the great chunk of export trade of the various European Companies in India. In England, calicoes and chintzes were in great demand among all sections of the people. The British woolen manufacturers were so seriously affected by the inflow of Indian textiles that they started an agitation which led to the adoption of a protectionist policy by Britain. Between 1700 and 1721, a number of laws were passed prohibiting the import of Indian goods and particularly the wearing of calicoes. From this time a series of Acts and Regulations were passed in England to protect the home industry. Then came the introduction of machinery in England, when the British manufacturer was able to throw large

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7 Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency 1800-1850 (Madras: University of Madras, 1941), pp. 146-149.
8 Datt and Sundharam, Indian Economy, p. 17.
quantities of cotton goods on the world markets at extremely low prices. These factors, combined with various other influences brought about the collapse of the Indian textile industry.9

Internal movements of goods by roads and rivers were subjected to duties for a long time. Transit duties were levied upon various articles of commerce and collected at specific stations. These duties had significant impact upon the interregional flow of goods. The traditional exchange of goods between the regions based on the kind of natural advantages of particular regions were severely affected. Those which were surplus in certain commodities suffered particularly. In other words, the network of markets as it developed over time got further fragmented. Indigenous manufacturing was affected relatively more. For instance, raw cotton was charged five percent; when made up into yarn, an extra 7.5 percent was charged; when manufactured into piecegoods, and additional 2.5 percent; and if it happened to be dyed, after a Custom-house pass had been taken out for it as white cloth, it was liable to an additional charge of 2.5 percent, adding up to 17.5 percent altogether.10

During the 18th century, the East India Company wanted to benefit from the export of Indian cotton and silk fabrics which enjoyed a world wide reputation. For this purpose, the Company made use of agents called as Gomastas. The gomastas who were Indians in the employment of the Company, would go to the village and force the artisans to sign a bond to deliver a certain quantity of goods at a price to be fixed by the gomasta. The price fixed was at least 15 percent and in extreme cases, even 40 percent lower than the market price. In case, an artisan refused to accept the advance offered by the Company's gomasta, he was punished by flogging and in certain cases, by imprisonment. In this way, through the Company's gomastas, the East India Company was able to procure cotton and silk fabrics at very low prices. Thus, the poor artisan was squeezed so that the East India Company made huge profits through the export of these fabrics.11 In order to cope with competition from private traders, the Company adopted stringent measures restricting the manufacture of cloth on private account. Weavers were forbidden to manufacture cloth for individuals till the company's goods were delivered and at one time all private work was prohibited. The Commercial Resident of South Arcot, in the

9 Debadas Banerjee, Colonialism In Action, pp. 163-179.
11 Datt and Sundharam, Indian Economy, p. 25.
excess of his zeal, announced that dyers who engaged in private business ‘shall be fined 24 pagodas, punished with 24 lashes and returned out of the bounds.’

The East India Company governed Thanjavur as a district of Madras Presidency from 1799 to 1858. In the first decade of the nineteenth century the East India Company restored the export of textiles that had been disrupted by the wars in the last decade of the 18th century. Britain’s rising industrialists had begun to exclude Indian textiles from the British market as early as 1720, but until 1812 the East India Company re-exported them to Europe. In 1813, however, the industrial clan was strong enough in parliament to remove the East India Company’s monopoly trading rights and by the use of tariffs, virtually to end its imports of Indian manufactures to Europe. Simultaneously, British industrial commodities began to invade the Indian market.

In all the districts of the Presidency weaving was carried on to a greater or lesser extent. The coarser stuffs, especially those used by the poorer classes were generally of local manufacture. Further, along the coast where the European companies had established factories, there were large groups of weaving villages. Chicacole in Ganjam was famed for its fine muslins, while Masulipatnam produced beautiful chintzes. These articles were in great demand in Europe and Persia. There were certain professional weaving castes such as the Devangas, Saliaes, Kaikolar and Patnulkar to whom weaving was generally the sole means of livelihood.

In the earlier stages of its career, the East India Company, consistent with its character of a trading organization, gave every encouragement to the cotton manufactures which were the staple export of the country. Weavers were relieved as far as possible from vexatious imposts levied by local rulers. When the Company assumed administrative authority, the encouragement was for a time continued. The Moturpha, a rather comprehensive impost of which the main item was a tax on looms was at first abolished in the Company’s territories. But it was imposed on the weavers. However, weavers who worked for the Company were exempted from it.

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14 Debadas Banerjee, Colonialism In Action, pp. 163-168.
Residents were appointed in nearly all districts to direct the industry and introduce new manufactures wherever possible.\textsuperscript{15}

The Collector of Jaghire (Chengalpattu), who had close association with weaving industry, attributed the misery of the weaver to the practice of accepting advance from the dealer. Once the weavers received advance from dealers, they became slaves to them and were not permitted to sell their goods to any others than the dealers from who they had received advance. As they were indebted to the dealers they were bound to work only for them. As they could not clear their debts owing to their poverty, they were perpetual slave of the company and its dealers.\textsuperscript{16} The cessation of the Investment resulted in extreme distress, especially in the Northern Circars of Tamilnadu and the districts of Tirunellvely, Coimbatore, Salem, North Arcot and Bellary. There was prolonged agitation by weavers of Salem who assembled in a body in 1831 and declared that they would not pay the Moturpha tax. Thus large numbers of weavers were thrown out of employment and forced to seek their livelihood either in agriculture or emigrate as coolies to Ceylon, Burma and even Bourbon and Mauritius. Abbe Dubois observed that just before his return to Europe in 1823, misery and desolation prevailed everywhere and that thousands of weavers were dying of hunger in the different districts of the Presidency.\textsuperscript{17} The weavers in almost all Tamil districts were affected by the closure of English factories in 1824, which inflicted a heavy blow on them. Abbe Dubosi in his account recorded that thousands of weavers died of hunger in different parts of the country, while many of them, out of despair and disappointment migrated to Ceylon, Burma and Mauritius.\textsuperscript{18}

The destruction of Indian handicrafts had far reaching economic consequences. It led to unemployment on a vast scale. Since textile industry was the worst sufferer in this process, the weavers were hit the most. Lord William Bentinck reported in 1834: 'the misery hardly finds a parallel in the history of commerce. The bones of cotton weavers are bleaching the plains of India.'\textsuperscript{19} The Collector of Madurai believed that 'very many families of the 5,000 weavers in

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{17} Sarada Raju, \textit{Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency}, pp.180-182.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p.223.

\textsuperscript{19} Datt and Sundharam, \textit{Indian Economy}, p. 19.
Madurai town alone have not means to take more than one meal of rice a day. At the same time private exports of cloth to Malacca, Manilla and other places which brought in large quantities of bullion annually was cut off. There was scarcity of money and consequently a fall in agricultural prices occurred. At the same time, many of the unemployed weavers had to fall back upon the land, which increased the pressure on it. Agriculturists lost valuable customers with the diminution in the income of the weaver and this contributed further to the decline in prices. In 1840, Britain supplied 42 percent of Madras’s manufactured imports. Thanjavur’s textile exports were ruined, as were the exports of steel and other manufactures from other regions of Madras. To pay for its imports, Madras gradually exported more raw materials, in the early decades, chiefly cotton, indigo, pepper and tobacco.

In 1840 the Collector of Godavari stated that most of the weavers were emigrating from the district to Burma. In the year 1863 the Vizagapatanam Collector mentioned a similar view and stated that the weaving community started their emigration from these districts to other parts of the country. The same story was related by various Collectors revealing the wretched condition of the weavers in all the parts of the Presidency. With the great decay of cottage industries and growing population, there was poverty and unemployment in the rural areas, the villagers offered to work as labourers wherever employment could be found. This resulted in the indentured labour system. Workers under this system went to several countries such as South and East Asia, Malaya, Burma, Ceylon, Fiji Island, West Indies, Mauritius and Assam.

Agriculture

The British conquest led to the disintegration of the village community partly by the introduction of the new land revenue system and partly by the process of commercialization of agriculture. The new land system and the commercial agriculture meant untold exploitation of

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21 Kathleen Gough, Rural Society in Southeast India, pp. 118-119.
23 Subramanian, Social History of Tamils, p. 225.
the Indian peasantry and the country was consequently plagued by frequent famines. At the same time, the new revenue system introduced by the British in India superseded the traditional right of the village community over the village land and created two forms of property in land; landlordism in some part of the country and individual peasant proprietorship in others. It was Lord Cornwallis who, during his term of office as Governor General introduced the concept of landlordism in India by introducing the Permanent Land Settlement for Bengal, Bihar and Orissa in 1793. These landlords were created out of the tax farmers in the provinces who had been appointed by the political predecessors of the British rulers to collect revenue from these provinces on a commission basis. The Permanent Land Settlement converted these revenue collectors into landlords. Under the terms of the Settlement, they had henceforth to make a fixed payment to the government of the East India Company. Later the British extended the settlement to other states and created zamindars there too.

The East India Company also created a group of landlords out of the petty chiefs by transforming their tribute into revenue and by taking over their political, military and administrative powers. Between of 1802 and 1805 the colonial government of India began to favour a permanent settlement with the zamindars on the Bengal model in spite of the unfavorable reports of the local authorities. In the permanent zamindari settlement, the zamindars were conferred the right to collect the land tax from the occupiers or cultivators of land and deposit those to the state after retaining ten percent of revenue. The quantum of tax on a given piece of land was fixed permanently and not the proprietary right; the right was subjected to the realisation of state revenue demand. In Madras a Permanent Zemindari Settlement was made in the Northern Circars and elsewhere between 1802 and 1805 and then there was a change in the policy of the Directors. Thomas Munro recommended a permanent Ryotwari Settlement

29 Sarada Raju, *Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency*, pp. 28-30
and the Board of Revenue recommended a Permanent Village Settlement; a Ryotwari Settlement was made, but it was not declared permanent. 31

During the Company's rule, agricultural indebtedness became general and in a few decades attained an unprecedented magnitude. Collectors of districts repeatedly stated that the peasants were deeply involved in debt and the burden became more pressing year after year. The introduction of money rents further pressed heavily on the poorer class of peasants. The difficulties of communication constituted a great obstacle to the export of produce to the most favorable market. The peasants, therefore, were obliged to borrow money at ruinous prices. When, as was the case in some parts, the revenue had to be remitted even before the crops were harvested.

By a regulation of 1802, the courts were debarred from decreeing a higher rate. By this regulation if the interest was more than the principal, the excess would be cancelled. But in reality the money-lenders had one hundred way of circumventing the regulation. Whenever the interest equaled or exceeded the principal, the old bond was cancelled and a fresh one was drawn up in which the whole amount would be put down as principal. The new regulation changed the relations between debtor and creditor. Mutual confidence and goodwill gave way to mutual distrust and dislike. The old money-lender who was a friend of the family and almost a relative became a rapacious usurer whose sole object was to get the peasants into his clutches and keep them there. The peasant was now completely in the creditor's mercy and was compelled to part with all the produce of his lands beyond what was necessary for mere subsistence. Thus he dragged on a miserable existence and if he ever showed signs of being refractory, a suit was filed against him and he would be completely ruined. By the middle of the century the grinding oppression of the peasants by the village money-lender become proverbial. 32 The moneylender exploited the economic helplessness of the peasant with the thoroughness of the traditional shlylock. The rates of interest, though varying from province, were always high. They ranged from a minimum of 12 percent to even the exorbitant figure of 200 or 300. 33

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32 Sarada Raju, Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency, pp 138-141.
33 A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism. pp. 60-61.
Another and totally different land system was evolved for large parts of Bombay and Madras known as the ryotwari settlement. According to this system, each peasant holding a plot of land was recognized as the landlord and made directly responsible to the state for the annual payment of land revenue. It should be pointed out that in both cases, the land rents fixed were excessive and both the system were instrumental in the destruction of natural village community based on custom and tradition. Daniel and Alice Thorner wrote: 'Whereas the zamindari system made the landlords masters of the village communities, the ryotwari system cut through the heart of the village communities by making separate arrangements between each peasant cultivator and the state.'

In the case of the ryotwari tenure, individual landholders dealt directly with the officers of Government and each was responsible for the rent of his own holding. Ryots could vary the amount of their revenue obligations every year by acquiring fresh land or relinquishing part of what they held. The introduction of the ryotwari system led to the disappearance of the joint village. In the ryotwari areas different kinds of tenants became merged into one class, i.e., that of tenants at will. By this system, in Thanjavur the ulcudis lost their rights of occupancy and their rents became liable to enhancement at the expiry of their term. Their interest thus ceased with the harvest and hence they had no inducement to improve the land. Between 1820 and 1827, when the ryotwari settlement was introduced into all parts of the non-zamindari areas in the Presidency. The earlier revenue demand which was pitched at half the estimated produce of the field was reduced to a third of the produce. But even the reduced demand was found to be oppressive. A third of the produce of the field represented the entire economic rent in many villages and fields.

By the 1830s, however, the new industrial middleclass in Britain, engaged in free enterprise and industry, began to seek in the mirasdars reliable allies who would uphold British rule in the villages and form a class of private landlords furnishing paddy and labourers for the export trade and a market for British manufactured goods. In 1830 Dalzell wrote that the

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36 Ibid., pp. 28-52.
37 Debadas Banerjee, *Colonialism In Action*, pp. 21-22.
condition of the poor had deteriorated everywhere except in the cotton-growing villages of Madras. Thousands of weavers were obliged to seek a living from agriculture, thus depressing the condition of the cultivating classes. The British gradually transformed land ownership into private property and established the legal bases for capitalist production relations among landlords, tenants, village servants and agricultural labourers.\textsuperscript{38}

In 1836 when there was an inquiry into the resources of the Presidency, it was found that the general poverty obliged the great body of the peasants to borrow large sums on the security of land, crops, etc., at high rates of interest. By the middle of the nineteenth century many sections of the rural population were entirely immersed in debt, whole villages and sometimes districts being involved. Generally debt was incurred for the purchase of seed and stock and productive purposes as the digging of wells and the improvement of land and quite frequently for the subsistence of the peasant and his family till the crop was harvested. And another great cause of debt was the payment of land revenue. Borrowing under these heads increased in volume during the years of flood, drought and famine. Further, the new method of administering justice which was costly, cumbersome and tedious was altogether more favourable to the creditor than to the debtor. The poor and ignorant peasant was no match for the money-lender who was up to all the tricks of the trade.\textsuperscript{39}

In fact the Madras Presidency was the most highly taxed in this respect. It had been computed that for every 100,000 of the population, the amount realized as land revenue was Rs.10,05,455 in Bengal, Rs.16,71,965 in Bombay and 23,12,465 in Madras in 1854. It is not surprising that much of the revenue was realized by torture throughout the period. The revenue was rigorously collected but there was no relief when the crop was deficient or loss, which was a frequent occurrence. \textsuperscript{40}

As against the expectation, the introduction of ryotwari system did not relieve the peasants from pain or distress as it continued uninterrupted as usual even after a quarter of century of the British rule. As a personal narrative points out, many houses were remained

\textsuperscript{38} Kathleen Gough, \textit{Rural Society in Southeast India}, p. 120.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid., pp.135-137.

\textsuperscript{40} Sarada Raju, \textit{Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency}, pp. 28-52.
unroofed. 'Bones of men and animals scattered every where.' The ryotwari system annihilated in a way, the nobility and aristocracy which patronised native skill and industries including cultivation. Over-assessment due to ryotwari tenure, oppression of the revenue officials, indifference of the government and break up of the village community totally ruined the peasantry which received nothing but kicks and curse. In 1854, a few years before the great Rebellion, they in a petition submitted clearly their pathetic plight and pleaded for the abolition of some burdensome taxes imposed on them.

Another noteworthy change in Indian agriculture was its commercialization. Commercialization of agriculture implies production of crops for sale rather than for family consumption. One of the consequences of the introduction of the system of new land relations and revenue payment in the form of fixed money payment was that the old objective of village agriculture, namely production for village use, was replaced by that for market. The production and produce were now determined by the new objective, that of sale and hence, changed their character. Under the new system, the peasant produced mainly for the market. East India Company encouraged Indigo export. Some 500 to 1000 European planters were settled in Bengal. They were given land at a very nominal price. They forced their tenants to cultivate and sell the indigo plant at a very low price. Even other zamindars were compelled to allocate a portion of their land for indigo cultivation. Once an agreement was signed with a zamindar or cultivator and paid the advance for cultivation, he had to suffer the ruthless exploitation of the indigo planters who made fabulous profits from its export. Indeed, the system of cash advances to the cash-hungry cultivators was exploited by the zamindars and other purchasers, to extend the cultivation of commercial crops like indigo, sugarcane and cotton. The cash advances were

41 Subramanian, Social History of Tamils, p.192.
42 Ibid., p. 203.
43 A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, p.43.
44 Datt and Sundharam, Indian Economy, p. 19
45 A.R. Desai, Social Background of Indian Nationalism, p.43.
usually paid at times when the cultivators needs cash most to pay the installments due to their zamindars.\textsuperscript{47}

Railways linked the interior of the country with ports and harbors, urban marketing centers and thus Indian agriculture began to produce for world markets. Large quantities of wheat from Punjab, jute from Bengal and cotton from Bombay poured in for export to England. The same railways which carried commercial crops from the various parts of the country, brought back the foreign machine-made manufactures to India. Thus, railways and link-roads connecting the hinter-land of country wither commercial and trading centers were instrumental in intensifying commercial agriculture on the one hand and sharpening competition of machine-made goods with Indian handicrafts, on the other. These factors led to the ruin of Indian industries.\textsuperscript{48}

The demand for cash crops depended on world market condition, which fluctuated widely. The American Civil war (1862-65) caused stoppage of supplies of American cotton to England. This led to increased demand for Indian cotton, of which prices rose three-fold. Cotton growing areas in India were greatly benefited by this development and the position of the cultivators improved. After the American Civil War ended and England began to import cotton from United States of America. This resulted in slump in the cotton market which adversely affected the Indian cultivators.\textsuperscript{49} The assessment of land revenue, especially in south India, had been made during the days of prosperity (1861-65), but now under changed conditions they proved burdensome and pushing the peasants into debt trap.\textsuperscript{50}

Instances of torture employed by Revenue Officers for the purpose of collecting government due were also reported at this time. A committee for the investigation of alleged cases of torture in the Madras Presidency reveals the plight of the tax payer and land holders. Though they made use of the torture generally towards the land holders who made delay or refused to pay kist, the ordinary poor people were being victimized for several reasons. Their personal violence was employed arbitrarily for the purpose of exacting revenue. Some excerpts

\textsuperscript{47} Debadas Banerjee, \textit{Colonialism In Action}, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{48} Datt and Sundharam, \textit{Indian Economy}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{49} Harishanker Srivastava, “The Indian Famine of 1876-1879”, \textit{Journal of Indian History}, Vol. 44, p. 855.

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
from the Report: ‘The Reverend C.F. Muzy, Missionary of Madurai had seen a case which he later reported to the Collector. He had also seen an instrument of torture in the hands of Revenue Peons: this instrument was composed of four or five thongs of leather, three or four feet long, and used as a whip.’ 51

The Reverend L. Vedier of Tirunelveli relates his experience as follows: ‘Flogging is used in many places, once I have myself heard it from inside my house at Callivolam (Kallikulam) in the taluk of Vulleyoure (Valliyur) and it was too severe (that) I could hardly take my dinner on account of the sensation it caused me.’ Reddy Row, a landed proprietor and retired public servant, called by the Sub-Collector of Thanjavur for his opinion revealed that he had both heard and seen many instances in which several Thasildars and other officers in that district made use of torture generally towards the land holders who made delay or refused to pay the kist.52 The statement of Subraya pillay, an inhabitant of the village Mamandy in the Taluk of the Tiruthurai Poondi in the district of Kumbkonam is illuminating in this context:

‘I cultivated land paying annually 240 Rupees to Government. In last December I owed to pay them some bribe, for this reason they insisted on my paying the balance; as the crops has been very poor I wanted to be left off. They had me placed in the sun, my head tied down in a stooping-posture; had me beaten with a whip and stone put in and pinched my thighs. I sold my ploughing bullocks and paid the money. I did not complain as it is not usual for such complaint to be listened into. The witnesses are Curejy Padach (Kurinji Padyachi) the village Taliari, and Arochala Pillay (Arunachalla Pillai) of Covilputtor (Kovil Patter).’53

A weaver’s untold misery had also been related and quoted by the Torture Commission:

‘I am a weaver, I have got 10 looms, and the assessment on them 40 rupees. In the month of Audi(July) last, the Brahmin Zilladar came to my house to demand the ‘Motarpha’-tax on the looms amount to 40 rupees for last Fasly. I said I would pay on the following day but he pulled me into the street and struck me with cane, he then spit at my face and took me to the bazaar, where he made me stand alone with about 50 other weavers in a row and detained me the whole day... after giving security that I would


52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.
pay on the following day I was released. About 20 days ago the same Brahmin Zilladar came to my house again and gave notice that I should pay the whole tax at once this year and not in installments as last year. He used threat in this way - every year. 54

The Torture Commission Report concluded that out of 496 cases of abuse which the Commission heard (thousands of people would not have reported out of fear), 314 were considered important in which torture was used. 55

With the establishment of civil courts and the decline of the village community, the moneylender began to impose more stringent terms and conditions. Earlier, the moneylender used to depend more upon personal power than official action for the recovery of his credits. However, in the 1870s, as Darling pointed out:

Suits for debts were handed over to civil courts presided over by professional judges, called munsiffs, men trained in the straitest sect of the law, for the most part born in the town, knowing little of the village and often allied to the money-lender by caste if not by actual relationship...there was little temptation to go behind the bond...cases were too often rushed through and decided on unreliable evidence.

The rigid application of the law put the illiterate peasant entirely at the mercy of his creditor. 56

The Indian Patriot portrayed the condition of peasants in Madras Presidency in the following words: 'It was given out in the Madras Legislative Council that the poor agriculturalist did not live on land alone and that they had other source of income; what are they? cottage industries? We know that a large majority of those dependent upon agriculture do not earn enough to eat, be clean, keep a decent house and hold their head higher enough to be hopeful and ambitions. They are poor, and they are incapable of realizing that they can even be wealthy by working hard. They are so deeply immense in poverty that they never hope or care to be better. Poverty, starvation and despair become part of their nature. And yet the steam-roller of resettlement and enhanced assessment descend upon these worms. The Government must need collect their due to make up its thirty-two crores of land revenue. No statement has raisen up among us to take up this land revenue problem; no Lloyd George has come to India to see that

54 Ibid., pp. 24-25.
56 Debadas Banerjee, Colonialism In Action, p. 35.
agriculture affords a living to the people. How these millions work hard, work incessantly, yet they live in miserable huts, have no lights at night, no full meals any day. How can we claim to be an advanced people under an advanced government, with our poor in such plight?' This portrayal speaks of the objective socio-economic conditions created by British Colonialism which paved the way for many a people to move out of their native soil to eke out a living in British overseas colonies.\(^57\)

Another consequence of the decline of handicrafts was the compulsory back-to-the-land movement. The British destroyed the institution of Indian handicrafts but did not care to provide an alternative source of employment in India. The unemployed craftsmen and artisans shifted to agriculture and increased the proportion of population dependent on land. This trend of the growing proportion of the working force on agriculture is described as 'progressive ruralization' or 'deindustrialization of India'. In the middle of the nineteenth century, about 55 percent of the population was dependent on agriculture, in 1901 it was about 68 percent, the proportion went up to about 72 percent in 1931. Thus the increased pressure of population on land was responsible for progressive sub-division and fragmentation of holdings. It led to an increase in land-rents charged from tenants. It meant an increase in the number of landless labourers. Thus, the crisis in handicrafts and industries seriously crippled Indian agriculture.\(^58\)

**Recurring Famines**

Famine was not a stranger to India. But its visit became chronic in British India. It has been calculated that from 1770 to 1878 more than twenty times the Indian population was affected by famines and droughts. In Madras 1781 and 1782 were the years of severe scarcity, caused mainly by the devastation of the war with Hyder Ali, but partly also due to drought.\(^59\) In 1802 the famine was acute in Bombay Presidency since there was a failure of rain. In the same year a similar failure occurred in the North-Western Provinces, which led a very serious and

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widely extended famine in 1804.\textsuperscript{60} It’s effects were so severe in Ganjam, that led many of the inhabitants to emigrate.\textsuperscript{61}

In 1806 there was a widespread failure of rain in Madras Presidency. The resultant drought was very severe. Consequently large crowds of people flocked to the town of Madras.\textsuperscript{62} During this year 15,000 people had to be fed for one month at Madras, besides large numbers in other districts. The loss of life in Madras alone amounted to 20,334. The Presidency was again visited by famine in 1807 and the distress was more widespread than before.\textsuperscript{63} The scarcity was severely felt by the districts Nellore, North and South Arcot, Madurai and Dindugal, Chengalpattu, Thanjavur and Trichirappalli. No sub-regional accounts are available of the extent of mortality, but in Madras alone, more than 17,000 perished and the loss of the cattle was also heavy. Innumerable instances of death from starvation and of people selling their children into slavery were reported. The poor looted the shops and houses and devoured the grain.\textsuperscript{64}

During 1812-13 and 1824 there were frequent outbreak of famines in Guntur. However the great famine of 1833 caused severe casualty. In Guntur district the mortality was so terrible that this was known as the Guntur famine. About five millions, within the area of about 38,000 square miles were affected severely. The severity of the calamity was not recognized by the colonial government till it sere late. It was estimated that 20,000 person died in Guntur out of a population of 5,00,000.\textsuperscript{65} Simultaneously the scarcity was felt by all northern districts. Even in the Masulipatanam the famine was very severe. The loss of cattle was very immense and the agriculturists were destitute to find a means of living. This hard condition facilitated emigration.

Sarada Raju observed:

‘Nellore, the roads were filled with corpses though 10,000 were being fed in the town. Large number swarmed into Madras in such an exhausted condition that people were dying in the streets every day. As for Guntoor, the suffering of the poor were intense. The loss of population in the district

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., p. 10.

\textsuperscript{61} Sarada Raju, \textit{Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency}, p.284.


\textsuperscript{63} Sarada Raju, \textit{Economic Conditions of Madras Presidency}, p. 291.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., pp.184-185.

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Famine Commission Report}, 1880, p. 10.
was estimated by the Collector at \( \frac{1}{2} \) to \( \frac{3}{4} \) of the total and of the cattle, nearly 2/3. The state of country at the end of the famine was deplorable and a man in perfect health was hard to be seen anywhere.\(^{66}\)

Twenty years later, the Public Works Commission declared that Guntur had not yet recovered from its effects and the total loss was estimated to be more than two crores of rupees.\(^{67}\)

In 1838, 1839 and 1840 a similar calamity affected the population of the districts of Bellary. The district population was 6,95,016 in 1830; but it decreased to 5,33,836 in 1842. The decrease was because of the death due to starvation and migration to other parts of Presidency and to other British Colonies.\(^{68}\)

The famine of 1873-74 in India was followed in 1875 first by a partial and local scarcity and then in 1876 by one of the most grievous calamities of its kind which lasted for almost three years up to 1879. In 1876-77 the Earl of Lyton, whom Disraeli described as a man of ambition, imagination, vanity and strength came to India as Viceroy and Governor General in 1876. He had to face an all India famine which started at the beginning of his Viceroyalty and continued throughout the period, though it was most widespread and severe between 1876 and 1878. The area and population affected by the famine varied from year to year, but the total area affected by it at its peak comprised 257,000 square miles and a population of 58,300,000. The affected provinces and states comprised Madras, Bombay, North Western Provinces and Oudh, Punjab, Mysore and Hyderabad. The famine of 1876-79 caused primarily by the failure of the South-West monsoon in 1876 which started in time, but was scanty and irregular in South India till August and failed altogether in September and October, thus affecting seriously the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay and the states of Hyderabad and Mysore.\(^{69}\)

The 1876-79 famine was most terrible in magnitude, intensity and duration. The distress reached its maximum intensity in the earliest month of 1877, about which Nicolas, the Acting Collector of Madurai reported to the Board of Revenue:

"Several hamlets and villages are almost deserted. Hundreds of people have nothing to eat. It was a distressing sight to see many of these people

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\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 291.


\(^{69}\) Harishankar Srivastava, "The Indian Famine of 1876-1879", pp. 853-855.
scorching the field for a few of these wretched roots, so many are digging these roots that these roots are hard to find. The local name for the root is the Indian turnip. It is very poisonous and the juice will blister one’s hand. The root is crushed and washed three or four times, the processing lasting usually two days. It is a very hard and tedious process. If it were not for these roots, the people have had absolutely nothing to eat.  

A.J. Stuart, the Acting Collector of Tirunelveli, W.S. Whiteside, the Collector of North Arcot expressed similar views in their Report to the Board of Revenue. In Salem, Coimbatore and Madurai also due to the same condition, 30 to 50 percent of the cattle died affecting the agricultural activities most. H.E. Mequhae, the Collector of Madurai in his report to the Board said: 'The streams of the people are pouring into Ceyon from South India, and especially from the Ramanad district. It is estimated that 1/3rd of the able bodied have migrated from South West Ramanad. In some cases, one member of family left leaving the women, children, in other cases the houses are shut up, and all are gone.

As the relief measures were not effective, the agriculture masses continued to consume leaves and roots at the cost of their health. Inquiring into the effects of the worst famines in India (1876-78), with special reference to cross-sea emigration, the Commissioners of the Government of Madras wrote that they 'have no reason whatever to suppose that new and distant sources were largely tapped, even under the abnormal circumstances which the year developed, and many fugitives have returned to the districts.'

Before the advent of modern means of transport, especially railways, the famines in India were localized scarcities of food in those regions where the crops had shrunk on account of bad rains. Both the construction of railways and the growth of trade after 1860 brought about a radical change in the nature of famines. Previously a famine meant extreme hunger and the population had to undergo suffering on account of lack of food because there were means of transporting the surplus of food grain even if it was available in other parts of the country. The position after 1860 was that the rapid means of transport made it possible to carry food from one

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70 Subramanian, Social History of Tamils, p. 200.
71 Ibid.
place to the other without much loss of time. But periods of famine were invariably periods of high food prices and extensive agricultural unemployment. Therefore, the mass of the poor people found impossible to purchase food. Consequently, the earlier famines were described as food famines but later ones are more appropriately described as purchasing power famines.  

Emigration from Madras

In India the age old caste system based on hereditary occupation left the masses economically and socially very much dependant on the dominant classes who controlled the land. These servile classes eked out a living by cultivation but had no right in the soil. As a result, the condition of the tenants was deteriorating due to the oppression of the land lords or due to the heavy rent, demanded by the state. As the British land revenue system demanded cash payment of rent, their condition became pathetic.  

As we have seen, the decline of manufacturing industries in India in the wake of import of British manufactures upset the whole basis of her village economy. As a result hundreds of weavers, spinners and other artisans were thrown out of employment. The openings for peasant families to supplement their meager income from land by spinning or the like were now closed. The only occupation left to the peasants or village artisans was agricultural pursuits. These agricultural labourers who swelled the ranks over the years created a ready field for colonial emigration.  

The attempts made by the Government early in the nineteenth century encouraging emigration to Ceylon were of first unsuccessful. In the year 1815, the Collector of Thanjavur when asked by the government of Madras to employ all the means in his power to send coolies and cattle to Ceylon, said that the Government of Ceylon would have to send agents and offer special inducements, since the people of his districts were averse to exodus from their native land of cheap living.  

In three years things changed. In 1818 the Assistant Commissioner – General in Ceylon, wrote to the Collector that the Government had entered directly into contract with

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76 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

maistries (labour contractors) who had agreed to find 600 labourers from South India. Labour was brought into Ceylon in 1828 by the Governor to work on his plantation, but all of them deserted and presumably returned to India, within a year. Such was the living condition in plantation.

Abolition of Slavery

The abolition of slavery by Britain in her Empire countries in 1833, led to shortage of labour for developing the plantations. There arose a great demand for a regular supply of agriculture labour. The sugar plantations of Natal, Mauritius, Fiji, West Indies and British Guiana were hit by this labour scarcity. The Plantation owners began to explore the possibilities of importing labour from outside. The adoption of abolition of slavery in India prompted the agrestic labour in south India to move out of their native soil to escape the drudgery of bondage.

The earliest emigration from South India in the British period was the Tamil exodus to the Strait settlements. This was before the beginning of the nineteenth century; these emigrants were employed abroad as domestic servants and agricultural workers. As systematic emigration to Malaya and Straits Settlements for work on the plantation started about 1833, depot for recruiting indentured labour was set up by the Government of the Straits Settlement at Nagapatanam. Similarly the development of coffee plantations in Ceylon enhanced the sustained demand for labour. A committee, appointed in 1840 reported that a general impression existed in England, in Parliament and out of it, that there was a super abundance of labour in British India. Concurring with this, the committee, however, felt that the contrary would the fact, if any decided stimulus were given to agricultural production. It particularly made a pointed reference to the late rise of prices of sugar and asserted that if stimulus were continued for sufficiently long period the impact would be widespread.

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78 Ibid.

79 Nambi Aroon, Indians in South Africa – With Special Reference to the Tamils, p.20.

80 Dharmakumar, Land and Caste in South India, pp. 131.

81 Lanka Sundaram “The International Aspects of Indian Emigration”, pp. 742-743.
The same year (1840) both the collector of Godawari and the Commissioner, Tenasserim reported a large movement of labour from the north Coromandel coast. They went to Burma mostly as domestic servants.  

In 1857, Thanjavur, Tiruchirapalli, South Arcot, Vizagapatnam, Rajamundry and Ganjam were said to be the main areas of emigration, whereas in 1860-61 the main centers of emigration to Ceylon were Madurai and Tirunelveli. Following a petition from the planters of Natal in 1859, emigration from India to South Africa began in 1860. During the first phase of immigration 5,448 Indians had arrived to Natal. By 1911 a total number of 1,42,670 had been recruited, of which two-thirds were Tamil and Telugu speaking Hindus from the Madras Presidency. After the annexation of Pegu in 1862 the Government of India took steps to encourage emigration to Burma; these became increasingly active after the opening of the Suez Canal.

It was probable that from the date of European colonization the island of Ceylon attracted labour from the south of India. The emigration was on a large scale than that Burma or Straits. Labour that was required on the coffee estates in the islands was supplied from southern India. At certain season of the year, when labour was in demand, the labouring classes of the southern districts traveled across to Ceylon and on saving some money, they returned to their native villages. The high wages offered by the planters enabled the people to save and ultimately to take the position of small farmers in their own villages, while the planters in Ceylon could always obtain as much labour as they wanted by offering sufficient inducement. It has been estimated that about 70,000 persons went over to Ceylon every year from the southern districts and of these it was estimated about 54,000 retuned to India. The others settled more or less permanently in the island. In Thanjavur the southwest of the district, where the paddy crops were traditionally poor, fared especially bad during 1845-54, when revenue charges were

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82 Dharmakumar, Land and Caste in South India, pp. 129-130.
83 Ibid., p. 138.
84 Ibid., p. 131.
85 Nambi Aroon, Indians in South Africa – With Special Reference to the Tamils, p. 28.
86 Dharmakumar, Land and Caste in South India, pp. 129-130.
forcibly collected. In 1854, Forbes, the Collector, reported that the able-bodied had fled to Mauritius or Ceylon while the aged and young were being fed at public expense.  

In the hundred years from 1830 to 1930, Thanjavur was one of the main districts supplying labour to the plantations of South India, Ceylon, Burma, Malaya, Mauritius and the West Indies. Because these labourers were paid only small pocket money in addition to their sustenance and because the money from Thanjavur's grain exports was used mainly to pay the revenue, Thanjavur was in effect raising labourers free of charge for plantations and by its exports, feeding them for little or no return. The rural commune was thus gradually broken up and tenants and village servants became contractual labourers who could be evicted. In addition to its paddy, Thanjavur exported perhaps a million people in the last century of British rule. Most went as indentured labourers to the plantations of Ceylon and Malaya. Smaller numbers went by land to plantations in the Western Ghats and Assam. Most of the indentured labourers to Fiji in later years were from northern India. The emigration tales of Ceylon, Assam and Fiji are narrated in the following chapters.

88 Kathleen Gough, *Rural Society in Southeast India*, p. 120.
89 Ibid., p. 121.
90 Ibid., pp. 122-123.
91 Ibid., pp. 130-131.