Chapter II

Emigration From India To Sri Lanka
About Sri Lanka

The total area of Sri Lanka is 25,352 square miles.\(^1\) The island has two distinct types of climate; one is activated by the rain-winds that bring ‘monsoons’ from May to September. The south-west monsoon that sweeps in from the Indian Ocean renders most of the harbour unusable. While drenching and nourishing the green coastal plains, it hits the central hills discharging its much of its moisture, in consequence of which there is little left for the jungle lands beyond.\(^2\) It is believed that Ceylon is but an extension of the West Coast of India, viz, Malabar. The raw materials produced in Malabar and Sri Lanka has many similarities that adds strength to this view. Coconut, rubber and tea which are staple product of Ceylon are also the chief articles of raw materials produced by Malabar.\(^3\)

The Singhalese language is believed to have so much in common with Sanskrit, Pali, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and Marathi languages and it is believed that the great Sanskrit poet, Kalidas, who is recognized as the ‘Shakespeare of the East’ once lived in Ceylon.\(^4\) The theory of Alfred Wagner that once India and Ceylon formed a single landmass, Ceylon having been part and parcel of the Deccan Plateau is supported by historians like Wilhe Geiger, K. K. Pillay, C. W. Nicholas and S. Paranavitana and others.

If the Vedas, Nagas and Yaklahas are looked upon as the Pre-Aryan settlers in Ceylon, the Sinhalese and Tamils are regarded as the Post-Aryan migrants into the island. Both the Sinhalese and the Tamils are migrants from India but they belong to different racial stocks.\(^5\) The first Aryan settlements on the island is believed to have begun with the landing of the Indian Prince, Vijaya Singha, who is honoured as the legendary ancestor of the Sinhalese race, according to tradition record in the two earliest Chronicles of Ceylon,

4 Ibid., p.10.
the Dipavamsa and the Mahavamsa. India is looked upon by Ceylon as the land that gave her present religion. Buddhism went from India and the disciples of Lord Buddha spread his great religion in Ceylon, which is considered to be the most enduring tie of all.

Between the 2nd century B.C and 11th century A.D when the Cholas annexed Ceylon to their South Indian empire, there were several Tamil invasions on the island, most of which resulted in short periods of rule by the Tamil adventurers. Commercial interests, political adventures and prospects of military employment prompted the Tamils to come over to Ceylon in the early centuries of the island’s history. Some of the Tamil settlements of the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries in the North – Central Province originated as mercenary settlements in and after the 7th century. By about the 10th century, permanent Tamil settlements were not extensive. After the 10th century, Tamil settlements grew gradually but steadily until the present northern and eastern provinces were transformed into Tamil speaking areas. The invasion of one Magha in the first half of the 13th century resulted in the permanent dislodgement of Sinhalese power from northern Ceylon. The growth of Tamil settlements in Ceylon gave a great impetus to the migration of Tamils.

The Chola king Rajaraja (985 – 1016 A.D) acquired sovereignty over northern Ceylon and founded a new capital at Polonnaruva to the south-east of Anuradhapura. Rajaraja’s son and successor, Rajendra Chola conquered the most of Ceylon in 1077 A.D. Thus Ceylon ceased being an independent kingdom and was reduced to a mere province. Among the Ceylonese ruler who ruled Ceylon after its emancipation from the Chola imperialism (1017 – 70 A.D), Parakram Bahu the Great (1153 – 86 A.D) stood out distinctly. But he had no son to succeed him.

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6 Ibid., p. 2.
7 Waiz, Indians Abroad Directory, p. 11.
8 Ibid., p. 6.
The British gained control of the island in 1815 and transformed it from subsistence agriculture to plantation economy.¹⁰ When the British sought to hire labour to build roads and public works and to cut cinnamon, the Sinhalese refused to become wage labourers. Coffee was grown in many tropical countries notably in Java and Brazil, but its production in British territories was encouraged by a preferential duty. Coffee growing began in the 1820’s in Ceylon, with the first crop being produced in 1823. But it was developed well only during the following decade, when much land was cleared and estates were opened up by individual planters backed by investment of capital.¹¹

The persons first to open up plantations in Ceylon were private individuals and English Government officials serving in Ceylon. The East India Company’s officers rushed to Ceylon to invest their capital from England. The Governor and his Council, the Military, the Judges, the Clergy and the half of the Civil Servants were amongst the purchasers of coffee plantations. The original sources of foreign capital in Ceylon were the savings of British officials and capital brought by private capitalists from England. Another source of capital in the later years of the coffee industry was the savings of the British public at large which were mobilized through the medium of limited joint stock companies.¹²

On the one hand there was the resident proprietor who managed his own plantation; on the other there was the absentee owner or company which entrusted its property to a firm of agents in Colombo. These agencies supervised estate managers by means of experienced visiting agents.¹³ It appears that the first coffee plantations come up on lands granted by Sir Edward Barnes, the Governor of Ceylon, at Sinhapitiya and Weyanawatte near Gampola. Colonel George Bird was the planter. Barnes himself developed plantation at Gangruwa near Peradeniya and at Wariopola near Matale. A few


¹³ Ibid., p.65.
more coffee plantations were opened up during the early 1830’s in the Kundasale locality, along the left bank of the Mahaveli in the Dumbara Valley and near the village of Matale.

The attempts made by the Government early in the nineteenth century to encourage emigration to Ceylon to work on coffee plantations were at first unsuccessful. In 1815 the Collector of Thanjavur, when asked by the Government of Madras to send coolies to Ceylon, said that the Government of Ceylon would have to send agents with offer of special incentives, since the people his district would not like to move out of their native land of cheap living. In 1818 the Assistant Commissioner General, Ceylon, however, wrote to the Thanjavur Collector that the Government had entered directly into a contract with masteries (labour contractors) who had agreed to find good labourers for them. The first batch of 150 indentured labourers from South India reached Ceylon in 1828 to work on the Governor’s plantation. But, curiously all the labourers deserted and presumably returned to India within a year.

In the initial stages, due to the proximity of India, work was generally of a temporary nature and workers migrated for a season and returned to their homes when the period was over. Moreover, the districts from where the people migrated were often famine-stricken and the workers drawn were from the lowest classes and castes. Coffee planters of Ceylon turned to this source of labour and were able to offer sufficient monetary incentives for workers to migrate to the coffee plantations. Tamil labourers from South India, driven out by poverty and drought in their homeland, began to migrate to Sri Lanka seeking work. At times of economic crisis in south India, individuals and families had often sought work and livelihood in Ceylon. Periodic drought, the exactions of British colonial rule and the destruction of the old trade patterns had devastated the region.


In 1837, the immigrant Tamil labourers employed in Ceylon coffee industry were estimated at 10,000. Systematic recruitment to Ceylon started in 1839 when 2,432 indentured labourers were brought in and two years later an ordinance was passed enabling planters to take criminal action against the labourers who broke his contract and deserted. But desertion was difficult to check when the homeland was so near, so that the indentured system had to be abandoned for the Kangany system of labour contractors.

By 1839 word had spread among the Tamil labourers of South India that relatively well paid employment was available in Ceylon and the exodus began from the drought prone districts. Arrivals swelled from about 3,000 in 1839 to 77,000 in 1844. Throughout the 1840’s and 1850’s the inflow averaged over 50,000 persons a year with the return flow to India standing at about half that amount.

Although Ceylon was not on the official list of territories to which Indian labour emigration was permitted until 1847, the then Colonial Government of India chose to ignore recruitment of labourers to Ceylon. In 1839, when large scale and systematic recruitment was attempted, the Government of India by Act 14 of 1839 banned emigration to Ceylon. Since this affected the labour supply for coffee plantation, the then Ceylon Government negotiated with the Indian Government to lift the ban. On the initiative of the Indian Government, the Government of Ceylon passed an ordinance in 1847 prohibiting Indian workers to be sent beyond the shores of the island. Indian Government in response lifted the ban on emigration to Ceylon by an Act in 1847.

The new labourer was cheap, but at first the men rarely brought their wives and children and the resulting separation from normal family life provided a stimulus for a quick return to India. Despite a remarkable expansion of immigration in the 1840’s,

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22 Ibid., p. 12.
there continued to be a shortage of labour in Ceylon up to the end of the decade. Then, with the island's first Depression setting in, immigration fell off precipitously and many of the workers who had taken up residence in Ceylon returned to their homeland.  

In 1844 the duty on foreign coffee was reduced to 6 d. while that on colonial imports remained the same. The consumption of coffee in Britain increased considerably, from 23.7 million pounds in 1846 to 28.8 million pounds in 1850. New comers were attracted into coffee planting, by 1848, there were 295 estates in Ceylon and about 60,000 acres had been brought under cultivation. Table II. 1 gives the breakdown of numbers year-wise.

Table II. 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Emigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>13,935</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>31,201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>71,173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>67,278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


In 1845, 67,278 immigrant labourers were available for the cultivation of coffee but, in 1846, their number dropped to 34,971, with the result that the planters experienced an acute shortage of labour in the year. Tennent (Governor of Ceylon), ascribed this shortage to such causes as a highly encouraging season for the cultivation of rice in South India, heavy rains and tempestuous weather interfering with the short passage from the Indian coast to Tallaimannar and above all the planters 'failure' to show any regard for the personal feelings of the labourers and lack of punctuality in the

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payment of their ‘wages’. Tennet, in fact, emphasized the planters’ ill treatment and habitual neglect of the labourers as the fundamental reason of the labour shortage in 1846. He, however, ignored the impact of cholera which broke out in a epidemic form in Sri Lanka in 1845 that took a heavy toll of the labour – force on estates. Scared and panic stricken labourers, hurried back to their villages.27

The year 1847 saw some improvement in the supply of labour. In that year 46,140 labourers arrived and 5,897 departed the excess of arrivals over those who departed being, therefore, 40,243 as against 28,484 in the previous year.28 In 1848 arrivals totaled only 32,000. In the early fifties the Ceylon Government, in an attempt to increase the supply of labour to the estates, began to take some responsibility for immigrant labour. Medical services and amenities at ports and major planting centers were set up and this along with the revival of prosperity, again swelled the tide of immigrants.29

By the early 1840’s the whole of the British administration in Sri Lanka, ‘the former Governor, the Council, the Military, the Judges, the Clergy and half the Civil Servants’ were coffee planters.30 Although emigration was now prohibited, a trickle continued to reach Ceylon. The illegal export of coolies was mainly carried on through Pondicherry. An investigation by the collector of South Arcot disclosed traffic to Ceylon. T. W. Baynes, a judge, wrote on behalf of his brother, a coffee planter near Colombo to Charles Dickens, a trader of Cuddalore, 10 February 1841 that:- ‘Labour here is somewhat scarce and high in price and not to be depended on. My brother therefore, is very anxious to have over some coolies from the coast... They will be hutted and get a small piece of ground for a garden... The Singalese coolies are very idle, and owing to the scarcity of their numbers they give themselves great airs. Their coolly – hire is in general nine rupees per mensem.’ Dickens was able to arrange for thirty one labourers to be sent to Colombo in a local craft, paying twelve annas passage money. When

28 Ibid.
30 Jean Grossholtz, *Forging Capitalist Patriarch*, p. 69.
challenged, he asserted that he knew nothing of the ban on emigration. Table II. 2 provides the names of European planters in Ceylon.

Table II. 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl: No:</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Identity/Designation</th>
<th>No: of estates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>G. B. Leechman</td>
<td>Chairman of Colombo Chamber of Commerce</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>George Wall</td>
<td>A Colombo Merchant</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>William Bowden Smith</td>
<td>A Colombo Merchant</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M. H. Thomas</td>
<td>A Colombo Merchant</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>W. D. Gibbon</td>
<td>A Merchant of Candy</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A. S. Burnet</td>
<td>Manager of Uva Coffee Company of Colombo</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Charles Shand</td>
<td>A Colombo Merchant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>William Sabonadier</td>
<td>Of Pussilava, a planter with twenty years experience in coffee cultivation</td>
<td>(N.A)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Initially, emigration into Sri Lanka was free from Government control, no permission from the Government of India being required for the recruitment of Indian labourers for the Sri Lanka. Similarly the Indian labourer willing to immigrate into the island was not under an obligation to obtain a passport. Though till 1847 Sri Lanka was not officially on the list of territories to which immigration was allowed, the Government of India did not mind the immigration of Indian labourers into Sri Lanka on account of India’s proximity to and the facilities of communication with the island.32

During the 1850’s an inadequate supply of labour led coffee planting circles to lobby energetically for government aid in the recruitment of South Indian labour. The various departments of administration were generally attentive to the problem but did not undertake as much responsibility as the planters wanted. The aid anticipated took two

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forms: annual recruitment and conveyance of labour and protection of the labourers during their long trek from Mannar to the highlands. Laissez – Faire policy pursued by the Government prevented it from acting on the prayers of the planters until 1858.\textsuperscript{33}

A Ceylon doctor W. G. Van Dort asserted that during 1843 – 67, of the 14, 46,407 immigrants from India, 89,897 had returned to India. He estimated that about 2,50,000 had settled in Ceylon, leaving approximately 3,50,000 unaccounted for.\textsuperscript{34} Table II. 3 details the figures for immigration to and repatriation from Ceylon during 1839 – 1930.

The full impact of emigration cannot be judged in relation to the population of the whole Presidency, since emigration was always confined to a few districts. But district figures for emigration are only rarely available. Moreover, the centers of emigration, so to speak, themselves changed in response to such factors as famines. In 1857 Thanjavur, Trichirapally, South Arcot, Vizagapatnam, Rajahmundry and Ganjam were said to be the main areas of emigration, whereas in 1860 –61 and 1861 –62 the main centers of emigration to Ceylon were Madurai and Tirunelvely.\textsuperscript{35}

From the port of Madras about 1,50,000 labourers proceeded to Ceylon in 1874.\textsuperscript{36} The report prepared for the parliament portraying the ‘Moral and Material Condition of India’, for the year 1874-75 observed: ‘The greater part of the labour required on the coffee estates of Ceylon is furnished from Southern India. The number of coolies proceeding to Ceylon every year averages 70, 660 and about 54,000 returns annually. The arrangements works very advantageously on both sides; the planters can always obtain as much labour as they want; while the high wages received by the coolies enable them to save, and ultimately to take the position of small farmers in their own villages. The Ceylon Government undertakes to see that while they remain in the island they are properly housed, fed and provided with medical attention’.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{34} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, p. 113. This they feared was because of large scale deaths in the island.

\textsuperscript{35} Dharmakumar, \textit{Land and Caste in South India}, p. 138.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Report on Moral and Material Condition of India, 1874-1875}, p. 71.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Arrivals of Indian Labourers in Ceylon</th>
<th>Departures of Indian Labourers from Ceylon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1839</td>
<td>2,432</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>3,326</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1841</td>
<td>4,523</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1842</td>
<td>9,025</td>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>35,195</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>74,840</td>
<td>957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>72,526</td>
<td>698</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>41,862</td>
<td>330</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1847</td>
<td>44,085</td>
<td>1,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1848</td>
<td>29,936</td>
<td>1,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1849</td>
<td>22,171</td>
<td>1,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1850</td>
<td>37,155</td>
<td>1,818</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1851</td>
<td>28,224</td>
<td>1,003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1852</td>
<td>50,843</td>
<td>2,226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1853</td>
<td>36,583</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1854</td>
<td>54,014</td>
<td>9,006</td>
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<td>1855</td>
<td>55,976</td>
<td>5,018</td>
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<td>1856</td>
<td>59,263</td>
<td>6,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1857</td>
<td>60,048</td>
<td>6,974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1858</td>
<td>75,172</td>
<td>16,172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1859</td>
<td>32,377</td>
<td>5,797</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>41,906</td>
<td>8,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1861</td>
<td>43,147</td>
<td>8,175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1862</td>
<td>51,859</td>
<td>12,503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1863</td>
<td>53,828</td>
<td>11,858</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1864</td>
<td>63,087</td>
<td>14,214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1865</td>
<td>66,007</td>
<td>16,831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1866</td>
<td>58,488</td>
<td>23,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>31,688</td>
<td>8,836</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>41,499</td>
<td>11,540</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>43,998</td>
<td>11,150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>51,644</td>
<td>10,835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13,76,730</td>
<td>2,03,841</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Immigration into Ceylon has picked up from the year of abolition of slavery in India (1843). There has been decline in the number until 1851. Since 1853 there has been again spurt especially during the "Mutiny Phase." Women accompanying men has started in great numbers from 1858. However the number of departures from Ceylon has been on the ascending order ever since the process of emigration had begun pronouncedly from India.

These words are representing the fact that the two governments were very supportive to the coolie emigration from India to Ceylon, without any regulation and they were very conscious to keep the Indian labour force within the island by any means. 38 The Indian famine of 1876-77 led to an abnormal amount of emigration into Ceylon 39 and during that year 3,80,000 Indian labourers emigrated to Ceylon. 40

The virtual annihilation of coffee cultivation was caused by the coffee leaf fungus known as "Hemileia Vastatrix". It made its appearance around 1869 and extended itself erratically but widely. Small holder of the coffee production was severely affected in the 1870's and the export of native coffee began to decline. In fact, the severity of the danger was not grasped by the majority of the planters and officials till about the year 1880. 41 In 1878, coffee reached its zenith in Ceylon and 2,75,000 acres were occupied by the coffee plantation, while tea occupied only 4,700 acres. From that year coffee cultivation severely began to decline. This was reflected in the emigration figures of the year which shows a steady increase of departures from Ceylon. 42

From 1881, the coffee cultivation decline was rapid. 43 When Hemileia Vastatrix attacked the coffee plants the planters adopted a fatalistic attitude, hoping that by replanting they could fight the disease. The Governor, Sir William Gregory and the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens at Peradeniya, Dr. Thwaites, both recognized

38 Ibid., p. 71.
40 Ravichandran, The Problems of the Immigrant Tamils, p. 3.
41 De Silva, History of Ceylon, p. 102.
43 De Silva, History of Ceylon, p. 102.
that the only way to counter the spread of the disease was to provide an alternative crop; tea was the answer that Gregory and Thwaites urged upon the Ceylon planters to try.\textsuperscript{44}

By the 1880's the accumulation of Indian estate labourer and their families permanently settled in Ceylon amounted to about 2,00,000.\textsuperscript{45} Owing to the good season of 1878-79 in the Madras Presidency and to the limited demand for labour in the Ceylon Plantation caused by the heavy influx of Madras labourers during the famine year, there was a decrease of 51,941 in 1878 – 79, as compared with the previous year. However, the number 1,17,148 was still larger than that of 98,258 for the year before the famine.\textsuperscript{46} In 1879 – 80, 88,836 labourers left Madras port for Ceylon. Madurai and Tirunelveli districts in the Madras Presidency had contributed the largest number of emigrants. Table II. 4 gives the figures for emigrants from Madras Presidency to Ceylon from 1875 - 76 to 1900.

In 1874 Thwaites reported that tea was being grown ‘most rapidly’ in several districts of the Ceylon island. By 1877 he found that forests were being cleared for tea at varying elevations. In 1879 the acreage cultivated with tea was about five thousands. The bulk of this was situated in the central province. By 1880 in this province alone over six thousand acres had been brought into tea cultivation. The acreage for the entire island exceeded fourteen thousand.\textsuperscript{47} In its statistical summaries of the rise of the Ceylon Tea Industry, the Ceylon Directory had ever since the 1890’s given the following figures for the parallel expansion of acreage under tea (Table II. 5).\textsuperscript{48}

The pattern of labour utilization on the coffee plantation was entirely different from that on tea and rubber plantation. On the coffee estates the demand for labour was seasonal, the peak being reached during the coffee harvest usually the months of August to November so the migration pattern was also seasonal. In contrast, labour requirement on tea plantations were more exacting and continuous throughout the year, requiring the

\textsuperscript{44} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{45} Donald. R. Snodgrass, \textit{Ceylon: An Export Economy}, p. 25.

\textsuperscript{46} \textit{Report on Moral and Material condition of India, 1878 – 1879}, p. 94.

\textsuperscript{47} De Silva, \textit{History of Ceylon}, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{48} Forrest, \textit{A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea}, p. 94.
maintenance of a permanent supply of labour. Thus there was heavy emigration of Indian labourers started into Ceylon.\textsuperscript{49} Tea was grown in the wet zone comprising the west coast and central highlands. The principal tea growing districts were Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Badulla. The market value of tea and its popularity as a drink induced the planters, mostly European, to bring increasing areas under its plantation.\textsuperscript{50}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1875-76</td>
<td>87,509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876-77</td>
<td>99,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877-78</td>
<td>1,50,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878-79</td>
<td>99,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879-80</td>
<td>63,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880-81</td>
<td>43,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881-82</td>
<td>46,594</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882-83</td>
<td>45,045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883-84</td>
<td>35,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884-85</td>
<td>41,751</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885-86</td>
<td>36,025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>87,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1,23,975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>N.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1,19912</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>1,42,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>76,662</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>1,97,270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textbf{Sources:} Dharmakumar, \textit{Land and Caste in South India}, p. 135; Report on Moral and Material condition of India for the years 1885 – 1900, p. 98.

As a rule, the traffic was through the ports of Tuticorin, Tondi, Pamben and Colombo. By far the greater number of the emigrants returned after the season of outdoor work was closed. In the ten years under review, out of 5,80,709 that were registered as having left the Presidency for Ceylon, only 46,738 were not found on the list of the Ceylon emigration accounts.\textsuperscript{51} As recorded by Ridgeway, during the period between 1896 and 1902 5,49,387 estate labourers arrived at Sri Lanka and 6,85,025 left for

\textsuperscript{49} De Silva, \textit{History of Ceylon}, p. 289.

\textsuperscript{50} Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, \textit{Indians in Sri Lanka}, p. 15.

India. In 1895 emigration to Ceylon was chiefly confined to the Madurai and Tirunelveli districts. Table II. 6 provides information of the South Indian coolie emigration into Ceylon district by district.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Acreage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>N.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>N.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1875</td>
<td>1,080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>1,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>2,720</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>4,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>6,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>9,274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>13,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>28,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>32,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The area under tea cultivation was 1,02,000 acres in 1885; which increased to 3,05,000 acres in 1895, from this reached into 3,84,000 acres in 1900. By 1905, only 3,500 acres remained under coffee, but Ceylon had become the third largest producer of tea in the world, with 3,84,000 acres under cultivation in the same year. In 1910 the total area of tea cultivation in Ceylon was 4,26,000 acre. During this period coffee had gradually disappeared from Ceylon plantation. But rubber was initiated to cultivate about

750 acres in 1898 which increased very rapidly from 40,000 acres in 1905 to 1,84,000 acres in 1909.\textsuperscript{56}

Table II. 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of labourers embarked during 1901 for Ceylon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vizagapatnam</td>
<td>624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madras</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Arcot</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thanjavur</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagapatinam</td>
<td>15,344</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ammapatanam</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madurai</td>
<td>13,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tirunelveli</td>
<td>87,801</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Canara</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malabar</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1,17,992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Emigrations to Ceylon were mainly from the lowest castes, including the agricultural labour castes. The collector of Salem wrote that the emigrants were not “fixed cultivating ryots but failed labourers who are in the habit of moving from district to district”. The Collector of Thanjavur also observed that most of the emigrants were agriculture labourers or tenants.\textsuperscript{57} The emigration from Madras did not again reach the record total of the year 1900-01. Though the annual embarkations remained high. In 1906, 1,45,571 labourers left India for Ceylon. The 1911 census figures recorded that 42,493 Paraiyans had gone to Ceylon along with 28,596 Pallans, 15,759 Kallans and over 40,000 Tamils of the agricultural castes.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{56} Marjoribanks & Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, 1917, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{57} Quoted in Dharmakumar, Land and Caste in South India, p. 139.

\textsuperscript{58} Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, p. 59.
The Ceylon Census Report of March 1911 reported that there were 1,833 plantations existed, in which 3,58,040 Indian immigrants were working of whom 3,55,459 were from the Madras Presidency. The total Indian labour force employed in Ceylon in 1911 put at 4,48,149 of which 2,39,111 were males and 2,09,038 females. The total Tamil labour force was 4,40,302 of whom 2,34,594 were males and 2,05,708 females. In 1915, the Registrar General of Sri Lanka estimated that 6,28,300 Tamil immigrant population living in Ceylon. Table II. 7 gives figures on plantation crops, coolie population for the eleven administrative districts of Ceylon that comprised the greater part of the planting area. The excess of labourer in the plantations than the required number, as of 1911 is also provided.

Three labourers were taken as necessary for every four acres of tea and one labourer for every three acres of rubber. With the coming of tea cultivation and the employment of labour thereon all the year round, changes gradually came about. Instead of temporary settlement and a renewal of advances, advances tended more and more to run on year after year and an increasingly larger proportion of labourers began to settle in Ceylon.

In the Madras Presidency, for the shipment of emigrants for Ceylon, Mandapam in Ramnad district and Tataparai in Tuticorin were used as a port of embarkation. The camp at Tataparai was not a quarantine camp but it was intended to provide a halting place outside Tuticorin, pending shipment to Colombo, for those coming from Tirunelveli district and other places to which Tuticorin was nearer than Mandapam. From Mandapam, after the quarantine period, the labourers were taken via Dhanushkodi and Talaimanar in charge of special peons to the railway stations nearest to the respective estates. From the Tuticorin the immigrants from Tataparai camp were sent by steamer to Colombo, from where the emigrants were shifted to the quarantine camp of

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60 Ibid., p. 3.
61 Ibid., p. 4.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., p. 6.
Ragama a short distance from Colombo. Thereafter they were sent to the railway stations nearest to the estates in which they had to work.\(^6^4\) During the year 1916, a great number of the labourers who emigrated to Ceylon were quarantined at the Ceylon Government camp at Mandapam. The quarantine period was for six days, during which all were vaccinated and cases of contagious diseases were identified and prohibited from proceeding to Ceylon.\(^6^5\)

Table II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Area under Cultivation in Ceylon Plantation</th>
<th>Estimated adult labour population required in the plantation</th>
<th>Indian immigrant population on estates in 1911</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tea Acres</td>
<td>Rubber Acres</td>
<td>Total in Acres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kandy</td>
<td>1,04,634</td>
<td>15,765</td>
<td>1,20,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matale</td>
<td>19,600</td>
<td>30,500</td>
<td>50,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuwara Eliya</td>
<td>1,29,353</td>
<td>No plantation</td>
<td>1,29,353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Badulla</td>
<td>65,255</td>
<td>10,873</td>
<td>76,128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranapura</td>
<td>29,500</td>
<td>27,000</td>
<td>56,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kegalla</td>
<td>40,201</td>
<td>46,781</td>
<td>86,982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombo</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>7,523</td>
<td>8,272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalutara</td>
<td>15,676</td>
<td>53,521</td>
<td>69,197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galle</td>
<td>13,565</td>
<td>No plantation</td>
<td>13,565</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matara</td>
<td>7,368</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>8,408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurunegala</td>
<td>915</td>
<td>5,460</td>
<td>6,378</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The expansion of the Ceylon tea industry continued and by 1917 the total area under tea had reached 4,26,000 acres. The labour force in nearly 2,000 tea gardens amounted to 3,58,000 immigrants from India.\(^6^6\) The prospect of getting higher wages was the motivating factor for Tamil labourers to move to Sri Lanka to do estate work. In 1860’s wages in Sri Lanka rose to 7 d and 9 d. a day, from 4 d. a day at the

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\(^6^4\) Ibid., p. 7.

\(^6^5\) Ibid.

\(^6^6\) Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, p. 32.
commencement of immigration. In the Madras Presidency the wage was 3 d. a day in 1860's. Sir H. G. R. Robinson, Governor of Sri Lanka, confirmed in his letter of 6 March 1867, addressed to the Secretary of State for colonies, the rate of wages for an adult male varying from 7 d. to 9 d. a day. Robinson also stated in the same communication the rate of wages to which female and child labourers were then entitled, which worked to 4 ½ d. to 7 d. a day. The working days per week were five. During the year of 1917, according to the Marjoribanks and Marakayar's Report, on an average males worked from 23 to 19 days, females, from 19 to 15 days and children, from 21 to 17 days a month. There was no increase in the wages of the emigrant labourers from 1860 to till 1920. At the same time the cost of living which was exalting was much higher in Ceylon than in India.

As there was no statistical record of the non-estate Indian emigration kept before 1921, it is difficult to say when non-estate Indian emigration started. For instance, trade and commerce attracted the Chettiars of the Tamil districts of South India. Similarly, skilled jobs, drew artisans belonging to Thattan (Goldsmith), Kosavan (Potter), Kollan (Blacksmith), Vannan (Washerman) and Pariyari (Barber) castes of the Tamil country. This was in contrast with the situation in the estates where persons belonging to Pallan, Paraiyan, Chakkiliyan, Vellalan, Kallan and other agriculture castes of Tamilnadu were drawn.

Between 1919 and 1921 nearly 1,60,000 labourers were dispatched to Ceylon. The figures of the population of Indian origin in the colony also bear testimony to the dependence of the island on Indian labour. By far the largest number of the Indian estate labourers were employed on the tea and rubber estates, those engaged on the tea estates being, however, more numerous than those employed on the rubber estates. In

67 Haraprasad Chattopadhyya, Indians in Sri Lanka, p. 57. A male labourer's average wage in Indian currency was from Rs. 10.18 to Rs. 8.40, female labourers from Rs.6.24 to Rs.4.34 and a child's from Rs.5.69 to 3.96 a month.
68 Ibid.
1921, for instance, there were 2,92,403 Indian labourers on the tea estates as against 77,619 on the rubber estates.\textsuperscript{71}

The census report of 1911 gave some attention to the caste representation of emigrants to estates. According to this report during the year 1905 to 1909 there were 42,493 Paraiyans, 28,596 Pallans, 15,759 Kallans, 13,738 Vellalas, 18,066 Ambalakkarans, 9,753 Agamudaiyans and 5 Brahmins among the emigrants to Ceylon. While discussing the emigration of Indians to Ceylon during the period between 1911 and 1921, the census of India, 1921 observes that the majority of the emigrants were drawn from the castes of Paraiyan, Kallan, Vellalar and Pallar. They together numbered to 6,19,000 out of 7,44,500 who had emigrated during the decade.\textsuperscript{72} Table II. 8 denotes the count of depressed class labourers amongst the total number of emigrant labourers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>The Depressed class emigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>25,344</td>
<td>8,568</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>78,106</td>
<td>29,921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>90,289</td>
<td>35,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1,53,989</td>
<td>71,441</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>1,25,585</td>
<td>52,400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>1,01,360</td>
<td>41,089</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>1,61,027</td>
<td>64,969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>1,33,712</td>
<td>51,593</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>1,05,095</td>
<td>42,177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>91,422</td>
<td>34,710</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 10,66,429  4,32,184


\textsuperscript{71} Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, \textit{Indians in Sri Lanka}, p. 124.

\textsuperscript{72} Jeyaraman, R. "Indian Emigration to Ceylon", p. 337.
Emigration from India to Ceylon receded from the Great Depression of 1929. As a matter of fact there was return of Indian labourers from Ceylon to their mother country during the Depression years.  

II

Indentured Labour Laws in Sri Lanka

As we have seen during the first thirty years of the Indian Emigration period, coffee was the chief and practically the planter's only staple product. Emigration from India to Ceylon was more or less spontaneous and the workers largely were male, going over there for the harvesting period which peaked in November and returned home in a few months.

Lord Auckland, the Prime Minister of England, questioned the propriety of allowing Indians to go to such distant colonies as the West Indian settlements. On 11th July 1839, the Governments of Bombay, Madras and Bengal were directed to withhold permits and vessels carrying emigrants to the West Indies and a committee was appointed to consider the whole question of emigration, its abuses and suggest the remedies. On receipt of the directive, a draft Act was prepared and communication made to the colonies, requesting its co-operation in carrying into effect the views of the Home authorities. The new enactment repealed Acts V and XXXII of 1837 and declared that any person contracting with a resident of India for labour in any British or foreign colony outside the territories of the East India Company or knowingly aiding or abetting an Indian in emigrating from such territories for the purpose of being employed as a labourers, shall be liable to fine not exceeding 200 rupees. In default of payment of fine he was made liable to imprisonment not exceeding three months. Thus the Act XIV of

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1839, that prohibited overseas emigration for manual labour applied to all places outside
the subcontinent, except for British dependencies like Burma and Straits Settlements. The
emigration was then prohibited to Mauritius, Demerara, Reunion and Ceylon.

Despite the ban imposed by the Act XIV of 1839 upon emigration from India
to British colonies, emigration to Ceylon, continued. The number of immigrants swelled
from about 3,000 in 1839 to 77,000 in 1844.78 The illegal export of labour was mainly
carried on through Pondicherry.79 Until 1847 Sri Lanka was not officially on the list of
territories to which emigration was allowed. The Government of India did not mind the
emigration of Indian labourers into Sri Lanka on account of India’s proximity and the
facilities of communication with the island country.80

The first attempts at labour legislation in Ceylon were made under Governor
Mackenzie during the height of the Civil Servants rush to enter the coffee plantation
business. The legislation essentially duplicated British master and servant legislation and
regulated contract labour along those lines. It provided for criminal penalties and a
criminal justice system to punish violations of the labour regulations, while applied to
workers. The first draft of this legislation was rejected by the Colonial Office on the
grounds that they were too blatantly pro-employer. The new law enacted in 1841
provided for fines on employers who failed to honour agreements. In case of default, the
employer was subject to imprisonment for three months. Despite this provision, the law
worked almost exclusively in favour of the employer. The criminal courts punished
violation of provision by the labourer. But when employers failed to pay wages, which
they often did, there was no legal remedy and if such a remedy was available, it was
never made known to the workers.81

The labourer-planter relation was decided by the Ordinance No. 5 of 1841.
According to this Ordinance every verbal or unwritten contract or agreement of a

77 Ibid.
79 Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, p. 70.
80 Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, Indians in Sri Lanka, p. 36.
81 Jean Grossholtz, Forging Capitalist Patriarch, p. 72.
labourer would be deemed as an engagement for period not longer than one month. His contract of service would be terminated by a week’s previous notice or warning, given by either party to the other, that he or she had no intention to renew the contract. The wages for such service should be payable on a monthly basis. The employer would be entitled to discharge his labourers without previous notice, if he settled labourer wages for the period of time he had already served, in addition to 15 day’s wages from the day of such discharge. Any contract for service could also be terminated by the misconduct in their relation as Master and Servant. Written contracts could be entered into for the maximum period of one year and needed a month’s notice for its termination. If a labourer refused to work, deserted or otherwise misbehaved himself, the District Court would freeze all this wages then due. This should not exceed one month’s wage. In addition he can be imprisoned for a maximum period of three months and subjected to hard labour. The Ordinance also provided for penalty on employers’ compliance to the provision of the contract. The guilty employers would be charged with the payment of all arrear wages and in addition, would be liable to a fine not exceeding ten pounds or in default, to imprisonment for a maximum period of three months.  

Commenting on this Ordinance, Tennet, observed that: ‘labourer unaware of its existence, ignorant of his own rights or apprehensive of still further annoyance, failed, in almost any an instance, to appeal to it for protection or to call on the local Magistrate for assistance and a labourer’s habit and disposition were to suffer in silence and that when at last hopeless of redress, he went back to his own country in disappointment, without making any complaint, being determined, however, that he would return no more to Ceylon and would also warn his countrymen against seeking employment on estates in Ceylon.’

The planters in Ceylon were not happy with the Ordinance No. 5 of 1841. Their complaints were that it was not sufficiently comprehensive and that, while it gave the labourer the privilege of claiming the entire month’s wage, if he chose to work for the whole month, it was inadequate to provide protection to the labourer from his employer

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83 Ibid., p. 86.
who might terminate his services at a week's notice. The planters, therefore, considered it desirable that both the employer should give each other one month's notice before the termination of the verbal contract. They further demanded that the written contract should cover a period of three years. It was not until 1859 that the Government gave any serious thought to this demand of the planters.\(^{84}\)

In 1847, the attention of the Government of India was drawn to an Ordinance proposed by the Ceylon Colonial Government for the protection of Indian coolies in the island. A letter was therefore addressed, on 6\(^{th}\) February 1847, to the Colonial Secretary pointing out that as per the Indian law, it was illegal to abet emigration of labourers from India, except to Mauritius, Jamaica, British Guiana and Trinidia. However, it hastened to add that the Government of India was willing to enter into negotiation on the question of permitting emigration to Ceylon under proper regulations, on condition that the Government of that Island would undertake "to give native labourers of India the same protection against emigration from Ceylon as the Legislature of India and the Governments of the respective Presidencies had provided for them in their own country."\(^{85}\)

The Colonial Government of India accepted the conditions, explaining that the emigration to Ceylon was spontaneous and free from any of the evils to which emigration to more distant places were liable.\(^{86}\)

On 5\(^{th}\) November 1847 the Government of India received a copy of Ceylon Ordinance No. 3 of that year, "to prohibit natives of India from entering into the island for labour to be performed in any British or foreign colony beyond the limits of this island and without the territories of the East India Company, or from emigrating from this island to any such colony for the purpose of employment as labourers".\(^{87}\) It was notified that on 13\(^{th}\) November 1847 that Act VIII of 1847 had become law in which emigration


\(^{85}\) Geoghegan's Report, p. 16.

\(^{86}\) Ibid., p. 17.

\(^{87}\) Ibid.
from India to Ceylon was again legally resumed.\(^8\) If the Indian labourers’ immigration into the island had been, informally or by convention, free from any restrictions before 1847 it came to be declared free with the sanction of law from 1847.\(^9\)

In January 1859 the Government of Ceylon reported certain measures, which had been taken to “regulate and promote emigrant labour”. In consideration of the difficulties and risks to which immigrants by the Mannar route were exposed to, the government desired to encourage the use of steamers. In pursuance of this desire the Government wanted that tonnage rule might be relaxed. The Government of Madras was consulted. It was reported that it had already taken action to the effect that each steamer was to be licensed under Sections 21 & 22 of Act XXI of 1858. A minimum of four superficial feet of space per passenger was insisted. The duty of making inspections every six months and in the issue of certificates was entrusted to the master attendant at Madras, Tuticorin and Cochin”. The Government of India tacitly accepted this arrangement.\(^9\)

Ordinance No. 5 of 1851 proposed to recruit labourers from remote districts such as the Northern Circars of the Madras Presidency on the basis of a contract for three years. The Ordinance was not, however, implemented. It was therefore, followed by a new Ordinance No. 20 of 1861, by which owners of estates were enabled to enter into contracts for the hire and service of persons to be employed in agricultural labour for any period exceeding one month but not exceeding three years. The Ordinance of 1861 was succeeded by Ordinance No. 11 of 1865, also called the Master – Servant law of 1865.\(^9\)

The penal laws applicable to the estate labourers were applied in Ceylon to all servants, a ‘servant’ being defined to extend and include menial, domestic and other servants, Kanganies and labourers employed in agricultural, road, railway or other similar work. The main penal provisions of the Ordinance No.11 of 1865 were as follows. Section 11 stated that a servant refused to work without any reason or guilty of

\(^8\) Ibid.


\(^9\) Geoghegan’s Report, p. 17.

\(^9\) Ibid., p. 87.
drunkenness, willful disobedience of orders, insolence or gross neglect of duty or who quit his employers’ service without prescribed month’s notice was liable for imprisonment for a term, extendable to three months, or with fine not exceeding Rs.50 or with both. Under sections 16 and 17, if a servant made a false statement as to his former employer or on his former employment, he should be punished with a fine of Rs.30 or with imprisonment, with or without hard labour for a period not more than three months. Section 22 declared that Kanganies fraudulently disposed of advances given them to recruit labourers were to be banished for a term not exceeding seven years or with imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years with hard labour.

According to Sections 14 and 19, an employer who refused, without assigning any reason, to pay wage due to a servant was liable to a fine of Rs.50 or to imprisonment not exceeding three months. An employer who conceals the servants of another estate was liable to a fine of Rs.50 in respect of each servant or to imprisonment not exceeding three months.92 This Ordinance declared that an employer had no power to arrest in respect to a servant who abstained from the plantation.93

This Ordinance of 1865 invalidated verbal contracts of service if they were beyond one month.94 Verbal contract of one month’s duration would be renewable from month to month unless one month’s previous notice was given by either party to the other of his or her intention to terminate the contract.95 Written contracts were allowed to have its validity for three years, but the contracts should be entered into in the presence of a Police Magistrate or Justice of the place. Certain officers of the Island Government were, however, empowered to make contracts for five years and the contracts made in India were also declared valid in Ceylon.96 In the event of a labourer becoming incapacitated

93 Ibid.
94 Geoghegan’s Report, p. 141.
95 Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, Indians in Sri Lanka, p. 87.
96 Geoghegan’s Report, p. 141.
due to sickness in the plantation he or she was entitled to receive lodging, food and medicare at the expense of the employer during the time of incapacity.  

The contract should be executed in triplicate, one copy meant for the employer and one for the labourer. The remaining one was for the Police Magistrate of the district under whose presence the contract had been executed. No written contract was possible before the elapse of the period specified in the contract. All wages were to be paid by the estate on which the labourer was employed. All arrears of wages for a period limited to three months were to be paid within a grace period of three months.  

The Ordinance of 1865, it would appear from its provisions, was more in the interests of the employer than in that of the labourer. But in reality, under the Ordinance of 1841, a labourer could terminate his verbal contract by giving only one week’s previous notice. But in contrast under the Ordinance of 1865 the labourer was required to serve one month’s previous notice about his intention of termination of the contract. This meant that, if a labourer, under the former Ordinance, could obtain his release from an undesirable employer within a week of the date of his serving notice for the termination of his verbal contract, under the latter the labourer had to wait for a month from the date of his notice for being released from his employer. Again, in terms of the Ordinance of 1841, a written contract could be determined by giving only one month previous notice but the Ordinance 1865, required that a written contract should not be determined before the expiry of the period of contract specified in the Ordinance. Again, under the Ordinance of 1865, an employer could be penalized for violating a contract ‘without cause’ but, in practice, he would never be in want of excuses for such violation and therefore, the question of his being penalized would be beside the point. But a labourer accused of any offence could be very easily punished.

In 1869 Dr. Van Dort, Assistant Colonial Surgeon, had the privilege of submitting a report upon the Gampola Civil Hospital, of which he was in charge. He

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97 Ibid.
98 Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, Indians in Sri Lanka, pp. 87-88.
100 Ibid., p. 89.
quoted from the Ceylon Directory the following figures for the period from 1843 to 1864 to highlight the mortality rate in Ceylon plantations.\footnote{Geoghegan’s Report, p. 141.}

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants arrived into Ceylon</td>
<td>14,46,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants returned to India</td>
<td>8,39,897</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balance to be accounted for</td>
<td>6,06,510</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assuming that the number of those who had settled in the island at one quarter of a million, there remained a balance of about 3,50,000 due to mortality.\footnote{Ibid.} Dr. Van Dort attributed mortality to the uncleanly and immoral habits of the Tamil emigrant labourers. His report was together with the remarks of the Emigration Board upon it was circulated by the Ceylon Government to the district officers concerned.\footnote{Ibid.} The points especially noticed were: (1) The possibility of improved arrangements along the routes followed by emigrants so as to prevent sickness and mortality during the journey; (2) The possibility of introducing a system of rationing by employers on estates, to check the alleged foul feeding habits of the emigrant labourers. The officers concerned refused to accept his suggestion and further contended that Dr. Van Dort’s figures were authentic.\footnote{Ibid.} The planter’s association was addressed and views from the Association and several individual planters were elicited. They all indignantly rejected Dr. Van Dort’s findings.\footnote{Ibid., p. 142.}

In 1871, the Planters’ Association requested the Government of Sri Lanka to adopt a system of outdoor medical relief for labourers at different Government Civil Hospitals, which were 24 in number in 1882. The Principal Civil Medical Officer could not entertain the request on the ground that the duty of rendering medical aid to labourers rested with the planters, not with the Government.\footnote{Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, Indians in Sri Lanka, p. 73.} Government at this stage proposed state control of estate medical work. The proposal was opposed by the planters who
demanded, instead, that the required medical help be provided on a voluntary basis. Finally, in the teeth of opposition of Leake, Planters’ representative in the Ceylon Legislative Council, Medical Aid Ordinance No. 14 of 1872, the first of its kind, was passed. This Ordinance was meant for the coffee and chincona estates and provided for the creation of Medical Districts. The estates in the district were to be assessed to raise funds required for meeting the estate labourers’ Medical requirement. The work in each medical district was to be controlled by elected District Committees, each under its own chairman, who was authorised to frame legal binding rules.\textsuperscript{107}

During 1877 a detailed report on medical needs made it clear that humanity required some sort of response to the conditions existing in the plantation area. Finally in 1881 the Legislative Council passed an Ordinance that required that medical care be provided for all workers on the estates and that the cost would be partially assessed against the planters. The Government had made a policy statement of some importance by this move. The planters’ responsibility for the welfare of their workers and the direct assessment of the estates to meet this responsibility was fixed. But the legislation was only partially applied and medical care remained inadequate.\textsuperscript{108}

Next in importance to the Ceylon Ordinance No. 11 of 1865, was Ordinance No. 13 of 1889. This Ordinance related to the employment of emigrant Indian labourers on the Ceylon plantations. Section 6 of this Ordinance said, an employer on conviction was liable to fine and in some cases, to imprisonment, if he failed to pay his labourer within one month from the expiry of the month during which the wages had been earned by the labourer.\textsuperscript{109}

Sections 21 to 28 required an employer to make a declaration that wages had been paid and keep the prescribed registers of labourers. In the event of his failure to issue a discharge ticket to a labourer after his termination from the work or knowingly issued a false discharge ticket to a labourer or kept a false labourer in the register, the

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid., p. 74.

\textsuperscript{108} Jean Grosshottz, \textit{Forging Capitalist Patriarch}, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{109} Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayars' Report, 1917, p. 13.
employer could be prosecuted, after getting permission from the Colonial Secretary for
the aforesaid offences under sections of 21, 22, 24 and 28 of the Act.\textsuperscript{110}

This Ordinance also required the superintendent of every estate to send returns
once a quarter to the Government Agent or other officer appointed for the purpose. The
returns should furnish, (1) the number of labourers employed on his estate during the
previous quarter (2) the number of births that occurred and (3) the number of deaths with
dates and probable cause thereof.\textsuperscript{111}

According to this Ordinance of 1889, no contract of service, entered into with
a labourer (for a period longer than one month) should be valid law, unless it was a
written one. Wages of whatever amount, due to any labourer might be collected
individually or jointly in a Court of Requests and no Kangany, subordinate Kangany or
labour would be liable to arrest in execution of a decree for money. Any employer
refused to issue a discharge certificate to any labourer would be guilty of an offence and
be liable, on conviction, to a fine up to one hundred rupees and to a further fine not
exceeding five rupees for every day of default. And each married couple, housed in the
plantation quarters, should be provided with a separate room to live in.\textsuperscript{112}

The next Ordinance passed in 1912 attempted to check the evil of
indebtedness. This Ordinance was passed in consequence of the report of the Ceylon
Labour Commission of 1908. The Ordinance provided that wages earned by the labourers
should be paid monthly into each labourer’s hand and that each superintendent should
certify to that effect. The Government Agent was under obligation to monitor, failing
which penalty was levied. The Act further directed that no employer should employ any
labourer other than a boy or girl who had been born in Ceylon and had not previously
been employed on an estate unless he had received a discharge ticket, which was a
document giving particulars of the labourers and of his last employment and also his

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p. 18. During the Sabaragamuva Commission’s investigation in the Ceylon plantation it was found
that the quarterly returns of same estates, tactically omitted deaths occurred among their labourers in the
Government hospitals

\textsuperscript{112} Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, \textit{Indians in Sri Lanka}, pp. 89-90.
indebtedness to his last employer. In the case of newly-imported labourer, a certificate issued by the Government Quarantine authorities at Mandapam or Ragama or a certificate issued by a Police Magistrate was to be accepted. This last certificate was meant for labourers not employed on an estate for three years previous to the date.  

Under the Medical Wants Ordinance No. 9 of 1912, a share of the expenditure in Government hospitals and dispensaries in estate medical districts, proportionate to the number of days spent in hospital or of visiting paid to the dispensary, by immigrant labourers and in addition, the cost of construction of hospitals or dispensaries declared to be intended primarily for use of immigrant labourers, was charged to a fund credited by the levy of a duty on the export of plantation produce.  

The cost of feeding a labourer in hospital was charged to the estate at 30 cents a day. The fee of the Government Medical Officer for visiting a sick labourer or labourers on an estate was fixed as Rs.2.5 per visit and was payable by the estate. An estate superintendent was bound to inform case of sickness on his estate. The District Medical Officer was required to send labourers afflicted with serious illness or injured by accident to hospital. The Ordinance stipulated that it was the duty of the District Medical Officer to visit the estates in his district and to inspect the sanitary condition of the estate also. The Medical Officer should examine the labourers on such estates for the purpose of ascertaining their conditions in health and to make sure whether they were vaccinated and to draw the attention of the superintendent to any defect in the sanitary conditions of his estate. The estate superintendent was allowed to supply drugs, free of cost, from the Government Department for the medical treatment of his labourers to the value of not exceeding 50 cents per head.  

The Ordinance declared that it was also be the duty of the superintendent to look after the every female labourers after their delivery, by providing her, at the cost of the estate, with board and loading for one month after her child birth. It was his responsibility to ensure that she should not be required to work on the estate for one month, unless the District Medical Officer should report that she was fit

114 Ibid., p. 16.
115 Ibid., pp. 15-17.
to work sooner than the fixed period. The superintendent was also directed to look after all children below one year, resident on the estate by ensuring proper care and nourishment.\textsuperscript{116}

The Ordinance No. 10 of 1912 was passed in the Ceylon legislature to prevent the spread of communicable disease among the labourers of an estate. When any superintendent had any reason to apprehend that a disease was prevailed among the resident labourers of his estate, he should write to the District Medical Officer giving him suggestion for the treatment and arrest of the disease. Power was given to the Government to condemn the lines and order the construction of fresh lines if necessary.\textsuperscript{117}

A Medical Wants Ordinance was passed in 1914. This amended the earlier version by giving back to the government responsibility for the medical needs of all labourers on the estates.\textsuperscript{118} The spread of news about the extreme mortality among the Indian emigrant labourers in Ceylon plantation and the Indian political leaders pressure on the subject of coolie emigration led the Government of Madras to form a committee consisting of two members, Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar, to investigate the coolie emigration into Ceylon and their condition in the Ceylon plantation. The committee submitted its report but the Government of India was sitting on the remarks of the Madras Government upon the enquiry by Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar, which had been sent to Simla on 24 April 1917.\textsuperscript{119} The Madras Government while acknowledging the weight of Indian opinion, it recommended a much more careful supervision of Kangani recruitment, an investigation of debt situation of the estate workers in Ceylon and a mechanism for writing off old debts and preventing the accumulation of new ones.

The Colonial Office responded by asking the Ceylon Government whether the penal provisions in their labour legislation were adhered to. It was replied that 6,00,000 Indians were working on the estates; of these 4,409 had been charged with labour

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid., p. 18.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{118} Jean Grosshottz, \textit{Forging Capitalist Patriarch}, p. 74.

\textsuperscript{119} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, p. 357.
offences in 1916 and of them 1,500 were convicted. The Government of India at last forwarded the Madras Government’s view to London on 28 December 1917, stating that emigration to Ceylon had been allowed to continue owing to imperial considerations. 120

On 20 January 1921, one year after Indian indentured emigration had legally been abolished, the Viceroy telegraphed the Secretary of State to acquaint him with the terms of the proposed bill. It was designed, not only to apply to the sugar colonies, but to lay down a general policy for emigration everywhere, including Ceylon 121. The underlying principle was that where Indians were denied equal rights, their emigration would be prohibited. The emigrants would be protected by the government of India, which would appoint his own agents overseas. 122

The Indian emigration bill was introduced into the legislative assembly by Sir George Barnes on 21 March 1921. The government of Indian through this legislation prohibited the emigration of all unskilled workers, except to such countries and on such terms as the governor-General in council may specify. The Bill took sometime to pass through both houses of the legislature and received the viceroy’s assent. It became act XII of 1922. 123

Ceylon responded to the revelations of the debt bondage of the estate labourers by new laws. From 1920, any debt contracts between the recruit and his Kangani in India was irrecoverable at law, so that new recruits could not commence work in debt. 124

The Ceylon legislature passed the Ordinance No. XLIII of 1921. Section 5 of the Ordinance abolished the “tundu” system. Along with this the Ceylon recruiting agency was adjusted to an assisted emigration policy which introduced the issue of licenses to authorized recruiting agents. This Ordinance brought into existence a

120 Ibid.
121 Ibid., p. 367.
123 Ibid.
124 Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, p. 369.
government controlled agency to control immigration.\textsuperscript{125} Indian emigration into Sri Lanka remained free from any interference by the Government of India until the passing of the Indian Emigration Act VII of 1922.

A joint standing committee of both houses of the Indian Legislature was constituted in May 1922 to frame rules under the 1922 Act to regulate emigration to Ceylon. These rules were later ratified by the Indian legislature. According to these rules, the emigrants must be 18 years of age, or over, unless proceeding as dependent with a parent or guardian. Perhaps most important was rule 23 which laid down that unaccompanied males must not exceed one in five of the emigrants; thus, two out of every three male emigrants must be accompanied by wives. An agent of the Government of India was appointed in Ceylon to ensure that the rules were properly applied.\textsuperscript{126}

Section 24 of the Indian Emigration Act of 1922 required the appointment of an emigration staff composed of an Emigration Commissioner, an assistant emigration commissioner and of migration agents. The Emigration Commissioner was to be appointed by the government of the country to which emigration would be lawful. The Government of Sri Lanka according to the above mentioned special rules was required to appoint an Emigration Commissioner through whom and under whose authority the recruitment of Indian labour for the estates in Sri Lanka was to be carried out under license.\textsuperscript{127} The Emigration Commissioner was empowered to appoint as many persons as he might consider necessary for the purpose of for assisting labourers to immigrate into Ceylon. Such persons would be called Emigration Agents who should be in possession of valid licenses issued by the Emigration Commissioner.

The Government of Sri Lanka was required to provide facilities for the appointment of an Indian Agent in Sri Lanka, would furnish periodical reports and returns as might be called for from time to time by the Government of India in respect of the welfare of the persons immigrating into the island. The Special Rules imposed some restrictions on the recruitment of labourers by the Emigration Agents. Recruitment in

\textsuperscript{125} Jeyaraman, "Indian Emigration to Ceylon," p. 329.

\textsuperscript{126} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, p. 369.

\textsuperscript{127} Haraprasad Chattopadhyaya, \textit{Indians in Sri Lanka}, p. 278.
pilgrim centers or at places where festivals were in progress or any other place notified by the Indian Government was prohibited.128

The Government of India set up at this stage a standing Emigration Committee, consisting of 12 members of both houses of the Indian Legislature, to advice on all questions concerning emigration. The committee recommended the adoption of the following: (1) Contracts, whether oral or written, executed for service in Sri Lanka for a period exceeding one month should be prohibited by law, (2) The entire cost of recruitment, subsistence and transport to the estate of destination should be met out of a common fund, managed by the Central Government and no part of such cost should be recoverable from the immigrants, (3) Payments made by recruiters to the labourers recruiters to the labourers recruited in India to enable them to pay off their debt, should not be recovered from labour-recruits either in Sri Lanka or in India. The Standing Emigration Committee also made suggestions towards securing the labourers in the following three benefits: (a) a basic wage which would enable them and their families to lead a tolerably comfortable life according to their standard of living and also to have some savings for old age; (b) repatriation, free of cost, of any assisted emigrant on reasonable grounds such as ill-health, unsuitability of work or ill-treatment, within one year of his arrival in Sri Lanka; and (c) the appointment, by the Government of India, of an Agent to safeguard the labourers' interests.129

The Government of India forwarded the Committee's recommendations to the Government of Ceylon for its opinion and at the same time, invited Ceylonese representatives to India to discuss the recommendation with the Standing Emigration Committee. The Ceylonese Government accordingly sent out a deputation which met the committee towards the end of August 1922. A sequel to this was the Ceylon Labour Ordinance No. 1 of 1925. This was promulgated by the Government of Sri Lanka in April 1923.130

128 Ibid., p. 279.
129 Ibid., p. 280.
130 Ibid.
Through this Ordinance the written contracts of service which could extend to three years under the Ordinance of 1865, were now declared void if they were made for more than one month. It was further provided that no payment, made in India by recruiter to enable an emigrant to pay off his debts before emigration should be recoverable in any court in Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{131}

In view of the labourers' discontent and on the request of the Government of India, the Colonial Secretary in May 1923, appointed a Commission under the Chairmanship of Sri Lanka's Assistant Director of Statistics, R. Jones Bateman, to enquire into and report on, the relation between laborers' wages and their cost of living in Ceylon.\textsuperscript{132} He submitted the Report on 3 August of the year. It was made known that the labourers were paid at a fixed rate per day, the rates being different for male, female and child workers in the plantation. Bateman next stated a labourer's gross and net earnings and also the items of domestic expenditure met out of his net wages. If a labourer's gross wages amounted to 15 rupees a month, he would receive in cash a sum of 8.65 only after a deduction of Rs.6.35. Rs.6 was deducted for a bushel of rice supplied to him, 10 cents were payable to the barber and 25 cents for washing charge, from his gross wages besides from the remaining money had to spent for the food which amounted to Rs.4.88. After spending on the above items, a labourer would have with him a balance of amount to Rs.3.77. which of course he could not think of saving because of many unforeseen items of expenditure pressing on this paltry balance.\textsuperscript{133}

At this time, T. Reid took over as the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, in 1925. It came to his notice that taking advantage the liberal supply of Indian labour some estates had been underpaying their labourers. This induced Reid to favour the principle of standard wages for Indian labourers, employed on estates. During this year yet another Committee was formed. It comprised the Controller of Indian Immigrant Labour, the Director of Statistics, the Agent to the Government of India and the representatives of the members of the planting community. The committee was named as

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., p. 31.


\textsuperscript{133} Haraprasad Chattopadhyya, \textit{Indians in Sri Lanka}, pp. 57-59.
Wait Committee which formally recommended the adoption of standard wages in its Report.\textsuperscript{134} The recommendation of standard wages by the Wait Committee and the Government of India’s insistence on the adoption of the same ultimately led to the introduction by the Ceylonese Government of the Minimum Wages Ordinance No. 27 of 1927, which fixed the minimum wages of the estate labourers according to the cost of living prevailing in various parts of Ceylon.\textsuperscript{135} The Minimum Wages Ordinance came into force on 1 January 1929. The minimum daily wages fixed for Indian estate labour were:

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Place} & \textbf{Men} & \textbf{Women} & \textbf{Children} \\
\hline
Low Country Estates & 50 & 40 & 30 \\
Mid Country Estates & 52 & 41 & 31 \\
Up Country Estates & 54 & 43 & 32 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Minimum Wages for Labourers, 1929}
\end{table}


A free meal a day was also prescribed for all non-working children and the price of rice per bushel was controlled. Boys above 16 and girls above 15 were reckoned as men and women as per this Ordinance respectively.\textsuperscript{136}

\section*{III}
\textbf{Plight of Indian Emigrant Labourers in Ceylon Plantations}

\textbf{Supervisory System and Its Oppression}

\textbf{Kangani System:}

The technique initially adopted for the recruitment of Indian labourers for the Ceylon plantations was based upon the principle of indentured contract. But recurrent

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., p. 60.

\textsuperscript{135} Ravichandran, \textit{The Problems of the Immigrant Tamils}, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{136} Waiz, \textit{Indians Abroad Directory}, p.25.
desertion of the Indian immigrant labourers from the estate and proximity of Ceylon Island to Tamilnadu made the indentured system of labour recruitment unworkable. This led to the adoption of the Kangani system of labour recruitment. The superintendent was the original head responsible for the plantation efficiency and management. He was usually a European aided by assistants. Under him the office staff whom were Tamils with some western education. Below them came the head-Kangani, the sub-Kanganies and the workers themselves. The head Kangani was the direct controller of labour and this control was maintained in no measure because the fact that he came from a higher caste.

During the coffee period, group of labourers from the South India had gone to Ceylon under their Kanganies in search of work in the coffee plantations and every year after the coffee season most of them came back to India for doing harvest work in their own villages. Their initial expenditures and traveling charges for visiting the Ceylon Island met from the advance money that they received from the Kangani before their departure from India. After their hard toil in the estates for the months, they were given rice and paltry amount of cash to meet their expenditure. The immigrant labourers only at the end of work in the plantation were paid a balance of their salary.

The Kangani System was patriarchal in nature. Majority of the Kanganies who kept a immigrant labour gang under him was a senior member of a family, the group mostly composed of his personal relatives and some time other families of the same village in India from where he hailed.

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137 Dharma Kumar, *Land and Caste in South India*, p. 129.
138 Ibid.
140 Subramanian, *Social History of Tamils*, p. 200.
141 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tannib Marakkayar’s Report, p. 6.
labourers and under him there were sub-Kanganies in charge of gangs. The British planters gave encouragement to the Kangani system which favoured the alignment of labourers on the basis of family and caste. The Kangani System, in fact, decided which castes or group of castes migrated to Ceylon. Generally a Kangani favoured members of his own caste. The Head-Kangani recruited many of the so called higher caste labourers belonged to Vella community and other non-Brahmans from his village or adjoining villages. He also brought along with him labourers of untouchable caste groups such as Pallars, Paraiyans and Chakkiliyans. In this, the sub-Kangani system gave different castes and families a certain amount of independence and exclusiveness for they could form separate sub-Kangani gangs under a head-Kangani.

The labour gang was usually varied from 25 to 100. Each of the group was under a head-Kangani, himself an Indian immigrant labour in the plantation. On small estates there might be only one Kangani. But in large plantations labourers worked under several sub-Kanganies, who were responsible for one or more head-Kanganies. The Kangany's duty in the plantation was to supervise the labour of his gang in the field. The Kangani himself had to work in the field as other labourers in addition to his supervisory work. Thus he played a dual role simultaneously in the plantation.

However, the Kangani system of labour recruitment ensured a regular supply of labourers from South India. Therefore, in the early years, inducement of emigration and the control was essentially in the hands of the individual European planters who encouraged the Indian labourers to move into the Ceylon plantations for work, with assistance of the Kanganies (whom they appointed for that purpose). The Kanganies were paid a sum of Rs.5 to Rs.10 as a bonus for every labourer's recruitment for the

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estate. Besides quite number of other estates paid certain amount of money in advance to the Kanganies for the recruitment of labourers in addition to the bonus.  

In the last decade of the nineteenth century with the appearance of tea and later rubber, the demand for labour increased in a very short period of time. Whenever there was a need for labour, the plantation superintendents habitually would send the Kanganies to South India with some money called ‘coast money’ to pay as advance to the recruits. The Kangani required to provide some money as advance to the intending emigrant to settle his old debt in village and to meet his traveling expenditure and for food till the emigrant labour reached the destination in Ceylon. But in reality the Kanganies paid a fraction of small amount as advance to the intending emigrants from the ‘coast advance’ that he received from the European planter and major portion of the money received from the employer was kept in his packet. This amount of the advance that he made to the intending emigrants, usually entered into the estate account book as the debt of the immigrant labourers.

Thus every new Indian immigrant labourers in the plantation had to initiate their life in debt. Hugh Tinker observed: ‘A little feast would be given in the village before departure; money advance would be paid to relatives; the cost of journey, and food throughout would be supplied. All this constituted a debt which the coolie must repay from his wages — with interest. In practice, the coolie seldom ever did repay the debt, which constituted the bond which the Kangani held over him.’ This debt was an everlasting burden which was transmitted from generation to generation and reduced the immigrant labourers as the bondsman of the Kanganis.

Whether the Kangani paid the advance money or not to the intending emigrant labourers, demanded large sum of money from the estate-owners as ‘coast advances.’

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147 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 5
149 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, pp. 5-6.
150 Quoted in Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, p. 133.
This led to the formation of Ceylon Planters Association in 1904 by the estate proprietors to control the steady increase of the ‘coast advances’ demanded by the Kanganis.152

The head-Kanganies almost controlled all the domestic affairs of his gang of labourers. He settled their disputes and dealt with all other minor complaints and grievances. For the payment of wages to the labourers belonging to the respective Kangany’s group, was the mediator between the superintendent of the estate and the labourers. The head-Kangani was paid at a higher rate besides his monthly salary received 2 cents for every labourer that he turned out to work and a bonus of Rs.15 for every recruit brought by him.153

The sub-Kangany usually worked on the fields as a worker or an overseer. For this task he was paid a day’s pay which called as ‘pence money’, a sum for each worker of his gang who turned out for work. His communications with the management were generally through the head-Kangani, though in some cases, he also owed money directly to the estate. He was the sole creditor to the individual workers who composed his gang. Every sub-Kangani group was relatively homogenous in terms of caste and was often composed of people related to one another.154

The patriarchal nature of the Kangany system had been changed in the later period. For the want of labourers, the European planters paid large advance to the Kanganies to the recruitment of labourers from India. This induced the Kanganies to recruit anyone from India to work on the Ceylon plantations either through his endeavours or by employing professional recruiters. In reality many of the Ceylon European planters engaged the persons in India as a recruiter who had no connection with their plantations. This led to the misrepresentation of immigrant labourers about the working place and the nature of work which caused for the fraudulent recruitment. This stimulated the labourers to desert from the estate and sometimes caused for their demise in the estate sooner or later.155 The Kangani also controlled the labour force under him in

153 Rushbrook, India of Today: Indian Emigration By “Emigrant”, p. 43.
154 Rachel Kurian, Women Workers in the Sri Lankan Plantation Sector, p. 15.
155 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 6.
other ways too. In most cases it was the Kangani who ran the estate shop. There ‘the workers were the victims of all the evils... including high prices and indebtedness to the shopkeeper who provided loans at high rates of interest.’

In 1909, Father J. Dequide, a Catholic priest in Arni, in his letter to the Chief Secretary of Madras Government intimated the cruel situation of the living condition of the Indian emigrants in the Ceylon plantations and he demanded the Government of India to survey the method of labour recruitment adopted for the emigration into Ceylon and to protect them. Father J. Dequide, had attached a translated letter for testimony, which was written by coolies named Ayyakannu of Chetpat (Madras) and Polur Savariappan who were working in the Ceylon Veylon Plantation, to the priest of Polur, North Arcot. The letter read:

‘We the undersigned beg to state that Marisonce of Polur has sold us to one named Yesudasan who had come from Ceylon for Rs.100. The sufferings we are undergoing here in Ceylon are visible only to the Almighty. As soon as we reached here our Kangani Yesudasan had taken a promissory-note for Rs. 50/- from each of us, calculating at the rate of 10 for a rupee. It will take more than five years to clear out this debt. The head of the garden has ordered the Kangani to give 7 measures of rice to a male and 3 ½ to a female. But the wretched man gives only 6 measures to a male and 3 to a female. Moreover his measure also is a small one. If we clean this rice after reaching our sheds, we find only 2 ½ measures instead of six. We have to eat this food and work for seven days. We are allowed by the gardener to be free without work on Sundays, but the wretched man (Kangani) forces us to work even on that day. If anybody fails to attend work any Sunday, he deducts one measure from each man’s share. So we have to starve and work the whole week. We are in total 150 people that come from Polur. Nearly one-fourth of the number are reduced to mere skeleton for want of food. Our dress is also very miserable. It is more pitiable to look at the condition of our females. They are wearing only cloth with which they left Polur. After working in the whole day in the rain, they have to dry up their cloths at the fire place during the night time and be prepared to go to work again in the following morning. They have no other cloth to change. Even

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for a simple thing he (Kangani) beats us, tying our hairs and hands to the pillar.\textsuperscript{158}

The Kangani is not satisfied to leave us with this; he forces our females to be his concubines. If anybody refuses to fulfill his wish, he beats her just like a beast. We males cannot help, but simply look at his cruelty.... Here there is none who could pity of us except a contractor who is a Catholic and who helps us when necessary. He gives us some rice, when we are very hungry. It is by the help of this good man we are on here up to date.

Now the Kangani has determined to sell us to another gardener for Rs. 3,000. He will do this within 30 days or so. If we are sold to another man, our debts will be increased and will never be able to clear out all, but we have to work and die here alone. Such is our miserable condition in Ceylon. All the above said facts are true. If you wish you may ascertain from those who have come over there are some employees who will approve the facts to be true. So kindly represent the matter with recommendation to the Indian Government, so that they may judge and consult with the Ceylon Government and take necessary steps to relieve our burden.

We cannot get out of Ceylon, unless our debt is reduced according to justice. We are nearly 150 persons including Christians and Hindus, that have come from Polur; each of has got Rs.14 debt. But the Kangani has calculated at the rate of Rs.50 per head; and so he has imposed Rs.2,000 on all of us. Please do the needful, if you find our statement to be reasonable. Please do not address our letters to our names, because they will be caught in the hands of the Kangani who will tease us more; but they may be sent to the following address: Ramasawami Kanaka pillay, Trijuru Collay, Aranayakkai Post, Ceylon.\textsuperscript{159}

The Chief Secretary of the Government of Madras forwarded the letter to the Colonial Secretary to Colombo on 16 March 1909, who ordered for an enquiry about the harsh treatment of the coolies in Veylon Plantation. But the Ceylon Government informed the Chief Secretary of Madras that, ‘... the representations made in India to Rev. Father Dequide appear to be either entirely false or to had been greatly exaggerated, very probably owing to the spite of individuals and to bad feeling towards the Kangany,

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., pp. 184-185.

\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., pp. 186-187.
whose treatment of the coolies was made the subject of the complaint.' This explanation was accepted by the Government of India without any further question.\textsuperscript{160}

\textbf{Tundu System:}

In Ceylon plantations another evil practiced was known as 'Tundu System'. Initially in order to aid the labourers under Kangani to change their employer, 'tundu' system had developed. A 'tundu' means an undertaking in writing to discharge the labourers on receipt of the amount what he or they owed to the respective plantation as advances or debt.\textsuperscript{161} Thus all the payments made to the labourer on the estate was entered in a 'tundu' or paper, which became a record of all financial transaction between the labourers and the Kangani. The Kangani stood guarantee for all advance and loans paid to the labourers and he was held responsible for settlement of these debts.\textsuperscript{162} Besides the Kangani made his hold very strong over the immigrant labourers through the increasing popularity of the 'tundu' system of advance.\textsuperscript{163}

The report entitled \textit{Report on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates} prepared by the chairman of Sanderson Committee, in 1910, provides the meaning of the word 'tundu': 'The more usual method whereby coolies quit one estate for another is that which is known as making application for a \textit{Tundu}: being a statement in writing by an employer that he is prepared to discharge one or more labourers on payment of his or their liabilities, the amount of which is duly noted in the document. On the \textit{Tundu} being presented to and accepted by another employer of labour, and the debt named therein being discharged, with or without an additional cash payment to the Kang any in charge of the gang, the latter is transferred from the one estate to the other.'\textsuperscript{164}

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., p. 187.


\textsuperscript{162} Vedavalli, \textit{Socio-Economic Profile of Sri Lankan Repatriates in Kotagiri}, p.15.

\textsuperscript{163} Jeyaraman, "Indian Emigration to Ceylon: Some Aspects of the Historical and Social Background of the Emigrants," p. 329.

\textsuperscript{164} Quoted in \textit{Report on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates}, 1910, p.28.
In practice the Kangany with this letter or ‘tundu’ had to find employment for his gang on any other estate it might be short of labour. But before that the Kangany should settle all the old debts account of his gang that they owed to the first estate prior to their departure from there to the new one.\textsuperscript{165}

When the shortage of labour for the plantation work placed the employer more or less at the mercy of the Kangani, he demanded excessive advances from the superintendents for keeping his labour gang in the plantation. If the Kangany’s demand was not met by the employer, immediately he demanded a ‘tundu’ for himself and to his gang to seek employment at a higher advance on another estate.\textsuperscript{166} The Kangani would hawk round the estates with the ‘tundu’ until some one was found willing to engage him and his gang at the price of the old debts and with fresh advance. In all these shifts, prompted by the desire for higher advances, it was the labourers who had to bear the full burden of repaying the advances. In other words, their debts just transferred from one estate to another.\textsuperscript{167}

But it did not benefit the immigrant labourer for hardly any portion of the advance ever found its way into his pocket. The bulk of it was appropriated by the Kangani himself. The ‘tundu’ thus became an instrument of industrial blackmail.\textsuperscript{168}

Furthermore, the ‘tundu’ system provided the freedom to the immigrant labourers to claim his discharge at the end of a month, increased the enticement of coolies from one estate to another at that time when shortage of labour occurred.\textsuperscript{169}

In 1908, Ceylon Labour Commission Report observed: ‘The Kanganies successfully induced the labourers to accept responsibility for the whole part, though they actually received only a small part there of. Thus the labourer’s debt increased. It was further and largely increased by an increasing resort to the system of transfer by

\textsuperscript{165} Marforibanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{166} Jeyaraman, “Indian Emigration to Ceylon: Some Aspects of the Historical and Social Background of the Emigrants,” p. 329.
\textsuperscript{167} Rushbrook, \textit{India of Today: Indian Emigration by "Emigrant"}, p. 41.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Report on Emigration from India to the Crown Colonies and Protectorates}, 1910, p. 29.
This forced the Ceylon planters to intervene to curb the exploitative use of the ‘tundu’ system. This they did by ruling that an estate-owner or superintendent issuing a ‘tundu’ should specify the actual registered debt in his account and no more and the member estates taking labourers were prohibited from paying more than the amount entered on the ‘tundu’. Though the ruling did not succeed because of the non-co-operation of member estates, it paved the way for the Government of Ceylon to take stern action against the evil effects of the ‘tundu’ system.¹⁷¹

The ‘tundu’ system was finally abolished by the Ordinance No. 43 of 1921. Section 5 of this Ordinance declared that: ‘Not only was the issue of a ‘Tundu’ made illegal, but any person who enters into or takes part in any transaction for the transfer of any indebtedness heretofore effected by means of a ‘Tundu’ was made liable to imprisonment up to two years and a fine of Rs.20,000.’¹⁷² Along with this the Ceylon recruiting agency was adjusted to an assisted emigration policy which introduced the issue of licenses to authorised recruiting agents. This Ordinance brought into existence a competent and government controlled agency to control immigration.¹⁷³

Tin-Ticket System:

Ellis, Agent to the Government of Sri Lanka at the Western Province suggested a solution for the difficulty, which confronted the Ceylon planters and their excessive dependence of the Kanganis for the recruitment of labourers from India by introducing the ‘tin-ticket’ system. The labourer had many financial obligations to meet before leaving for estates. And yet the advance money they got from the Kanganies could not cover all their needs. To increase the ‘coast advance’ meant putting more money into the Kangany’s pocket, without the certainty of an increased return in the recruitment of

¹⁷⁰ Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 6.


labourer. Again, the prolonged detention of a large number of labourers at the Mandapam camp for want of their requisite funds to meet the cost of their journey caused by overcrowding at the camp.\textsuperscript{174} In 1901, the Ceylon Government introduced the ‘tin-ticket’ system. These tickets were little discs of tin punched with a letter and two numbers. The letter denoted the district, the first number was the number of the estate in the official register of estates and the second number was a serial one that denoted the particular labourer for whom it was used. These tickets could be purchased at any Government office in Ceylon by an estate superintendent for Rs.2.50 per hundred. The superintendent should give these tickets to his recruiting Kangani or send the ticket to the Ceylon Labour Commissioner at Tiruchirapally. The Kangany or the Labour Commissioner had to issue the tickets to every one of the recruits who proceeded to the particular estate. And on the arrival of the labourers at the Ceylon quarantine camp at Mandapam or the Ceylon government camp at Tataparai, the labourer returned his tick to the camp superintendent and he was thereupon entered in a register. Here the labourer or the Kangani had to make any further payment in cash for either food or transit charges to the estate.\textsuperscript{175} All these charges were borne in the first instance by the Ceylon government at concession rates, subsequently recovered from the estate. This included railway and steamer fares at concession rates and half the cost of food, the other half being borne by the estate that later on realized the same from the labourers themselves. The system, therefore led to the labourers indebtedness to the estates.\textsuperscript{176}

In order to limit expenses and to avoid the necessity of providing money in the Kangani’s hand before they leave for India for recruiting and to watch and control the Kangani, the Planters’ Association of Ceylon was established in 1904 with the office of Ceylon Labour Commission at Tiruchirapally. It was managed in India by a Commissioner, who was himself a Ceylon planter and who had a number of European and Indian assistants. In 1917 the Commission had 29 agencies in South India in four circles as shown in Table II. 10.

\textsuperscript{174} Haraprasad Chattopadhyya, *Indians in Sri Lanka*, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{175} Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{176} Haraprasad Chattopadhyya, *Indians in Sri Lanka*, p. 47.
Table II. 10

Circle Officers of Ceylon Labour Commission

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head-quarter Circle</th>
<th>Salem Circle</th>
<th>Madurai Circle</th>
<th>Arcot Circle</th>
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<tr>
<td>Tiruchirappally</td>
<td>Salem</td>
<td>Tataparai</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manaparai</td>
<td>Musiri</td>
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<td>Madurai</td>
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<td>Perumudurai</td>
<td>Namakkal</td>
<td>Mandapam</td>
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<td>Thanjavour</td>
<td>Attur</td>
<td>Dindigul</td>
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<td>Aranthangi</td>
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<td>Palakadu</td>
<td>Nanjangode</td>
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Source: Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 7.

The Commission conducted magic-lantern shows for snaring the labourers for working in the Ceylon estates and the Commission was also used for capturing the Kanganyis and the labourers who were deserted from the estates to India without settling their debts. By this new method the recruiting Kangany from a Ceylon plantation required to bring a printed order duly filled by the superintendent of the estate and to submit the same to the Labour Commission at Tiruchirappally. The estate superintendent simultaneously had to send the Commissioner the form printed and duly filled in. After receiving this order, the Commission would offer an advance to the Kanganyis and pay him further sum for every adult recruited by him. The preliminary advance was at once paid to the Kangany who was afforded a recruiting certificate in Tamil in which particulars as to wages and terms of employment were filled. Then the Kangany proceeded to recruit and when he got recruits he had to bring them to the nearest agency of the commission. Boys under 14 and girls under 16 not accepted unless accompanied by their natural guardians or written consent of such guardians certified by the village munisif. Thus every intending emigrant labourer required to produce before the village munisif, who had to certify them for their willingness to proceed to Ceylon.

The whole sum advanced to a Kangany was treated as remuneration for recruiting. The intending emigrant labourers had to provide a promissory note to the Labour Commission for the amount that they received from the Kanganyis as advance and

177 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, pp. 7-8.
178 Ibid.
the cost incurred in railway fares and food for him by the Commission also debited in the immigrant labourers’ account of the estate book. Thus indebtedness was chronic and became a way to control labour. So long as a worker was in debt and unable to pay that debt, he had little chance of leaving the island.\textsuperscript{179}

Privations during Journey

Through the years, three routes had been evolved from the South Indian recruiting areas to central Ceylon. First Pamben to Mannar in Government vessels at a cost variously stated as ‘6 d.’ and ‘Re. 1.’ per head. Thence on foot by the North road to Matale, 131 miles, where the gangs continued walking to their destined estates. Secondly Thuthukudi (Tuticorin) to Colombo by sea. This cost Rs.3 or 4 per head and was obviously too expensive for most emigrants. Thirdly Ammapataam or Tondi to Colombo by sea a shorter and cheaper route; buy very irregular in the early days.\textsuperscript{180} The longer voyage to Colombo lasted twenty four to thirty hours and was undertaken in a schooner or brig of 40 – 120 tons of load: a 40 toner could take a complete gang on board. The first attempt to introduce a steamer service between Tuticorin and Colombo in 1859 proved unable to compete with the local craft.\textsuperscript{181}

The great and terrifying problem of all these routes was diseases. Labourers arriving at Colombo went to a depot at Kelania, but there were not availed adequate quarantine arrangements and unless sickness had actually occurred on board ship men were allowed to proceed up-country unhindered. The labour gangs arrived at Mannar, often with cholera in their midst.\textsuperscript{182}

The first phase of emigration to Ceylon final stage of the journey was also the most difficult of all. This was before a highway was made out of the jungle in 1850 as the Mannar – Madavachari road. A Ceylon planter wrote the privation of the labourers thus:

\textsuperscript{179} Jean Grossholtz, \textit{Forging Capitalist Patriarch: The Economic and Social Transformation of Feudal Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Women}, p. 76.

\textsuperscript{180} Forrest, \textit{A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea 1867-1967}, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{181} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, p. 143.

\textsuperscript{182} Forrest, \textit{A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea 1867-1967}, p. 109.
'The hardship these Malabar coolies undergo in traveling on foot through the jungles of Southern India and those of Northern Ceylon are but little known.... They must arrive within a certain limited period in the plantation district for their supply of food is small, otherwise they would perish in the forest, hence accidents of a comparatively trivial kind are often death to them, for their comrades cannot wait; the race is for life, and they must sacrifice one or run risk of being all destroyed. Hence the disabled member of the gang is necessarily abandoned, and deep in the recesses of the forests amid wild beasts and serpents, the poor sufferers are left with a handful of rice and a shell of water to meet death, all alone... stretched perhaps beneath a tree by the side of that seldom-trodden path in that cheerless waste.'\textsuperscript{183}

A Ceylon official W. C. Twynam, observed in the 1840s as follows: 'Miserable gangs of coolies of 1843 and 1845, with one or two women to fifty or a hundred men, strangers in a strange land, ill-fed, ill-clothed, eating any garbage they came across... traveling over jungle paths, sometimes with scarcely a drop of water to be found anywhere near them for miles and at other times knee deep; the greater part of the way in water, with the country all round a swamp, working on estates just reclaimed from jungle or on jungles about to be converted into estates, badly housed and little understood by their employers.'\textsuperscript{184}

The disastrous famine which prevailed in the Madras Presidency during the years 1876 and 1877 caused great influx of Tamil labourers' emigration into Ceylon Island, altogether out of proportion to the requirements of the labour market. The average number of arrivals of Tamil labourers in Ceylon during the decade prior to 1876 was 90,661, but a figure which exceeded in 1876 by 83,655 and in 1877 by 1,00,054. The condition in which a large proportion of immigrant labourers arrived in Ceylon told many sad tale of the privations to which they had already been exposed and many succumbed to the fatigues of the journey up to the north road from Mannar, while many others wandered around the coffee estates in search of employment where they were often identified as physically unfit. Many of the labourers attached themselves with their

\textsuperscript{183} Hugh Tinker, \textit{A New System of Slavery}, pp. 172-173.

\textsuperscript{184} Ibid., p. 93.
‘Kangany’. On the other hand the Kanganies carelessly abandoned the labourers to their fate. Many who were unable to keep up with the gangs, died on their way before reaching of their working place.\(^{185}\)

**Poor Wages: Inability to Pay Court & Legal Fee and the Fallout**

The plantations organized on rational economic lines generally called for a regular and disciplined labour force to prepare the land for crop to nurture it and to gather it. For this purpose the bulk of the regular labour force on the coffee plantations was drawn from the Tamil Districts of Southern part of India, mainly Madurai, Tirunelveli, and Thanjavour. This process was assisted by the relative proximity and the conditions of poverty prevailed in many parts of South India. Poverty, various forms of agrestic servitude which had engendered an agricultural labouring class, low wages and near famine conditions combined to induce segments of South Indian population to accept employment on the plantations in Ceylon. \(^{186}\) At the same time the planters in Ceylon offered inducements through wages that were as if higher than those in south India. \(^{187}\)

The immigrant labourers were at the bottom of the whole hierarchical order. In the first two decades of the Ceylon plantation enterprise the immigrant labourers were paid 4 d. to 9 d. as their daily wage. For receiving this money he had to work continuously for 10 to 11 hours on estate. In 1860’s the wage was raised into 10 d. for a working day. \(^{188}\)

For men, pruning the tea leaves, tapping rubber latex, factory work, weeding, clearing of drains, digging pits and maintaining estates roads were the works usually allocated. For women plucking tea leaves, collecting rubber latex, sorting leaf in the factory and other light work task were provided. Weeding and earth work generally was done on contracts usually taken up by the Kanganies. For the weeding work in one acre


of the estate, Re.1 offered as a wage for a labour. But the rate for weeding varied from plantation to plantation. Tea leaves plucking, pruning and tapping latex were paid by the task work system.

A man could receive 35 to 40 cents as a wage for tapping 250 trees as a day’s work. A woman was paid 35 cents for a name of task. In tapping, the day’s work begun at 6 a.m. and was over by noon by that time the latex should be into the factory. The tea pruners were paid 40 to 45 cents for a task, which varied from 150 to 300 bushes. Pluckers were paid 25 to 30 cents for a task, which consist of plucking 25 pounds of leaf. Children were paid 12 ½ cents to 15 cents for a task. Factory labourers got 50 cents to 50 cents for a day if they completed their task what they had been allocated to them the day in.

In many respects the life of the tea plucker was the most severe. In Ceylon the official working hour of a day was eight hours for an agricultural labour, though which was varied in practice according to the nature of the task. The daily life of the tea plucker started well before sunrise. The labourers should mustered at 6 a.m. and work ceased at 4 p.m. Thus they had to work in the field ten continuous hours of work a day. This did not include the time that spent in traveling to and from work and the time on the field. The labourers paid their wages once in two months; for instance, pay due for January and February was issued in March or it may be even in April. One month wage was deducted as due for repayment of debt, which the coolies owed to the Kanganies. One month salary was handed to them. The cost of rice was also deducted from the wage.

Karumuttu Thigaraja Chettiar observed: ‘In fact the tasks were not hard in themselves. But the Supervisors, sub-Kanganies, Head-Kanganies made them really hard. The Superintendents were responsible for this as they were said to be too prone and

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189 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 11.
190 Ibid.
192 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 28.
anxious to hear complaints against the labourers for their ‘bad work’... it was frequently complained that the calling horn on many estates was sharp and quick while the horn closing the day’s work was lazy and slow, for instance it may be extended to 5.10 p.m. 193

A considerable number of Indian immigrant labourers, about 5 percent, was employed in factories, Superintendent’s bungalows and sweepers in the lines who were paid 40 cents for a day’s work. For this pay they should complete certain amount of work and more or less than this they would reward or fined respectively. For Sunday, on which the work was optional, the men paid 40 cents and the women 30 cents in ready cash on Monday morning. 194

In 1916 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tabmi Marrakkayar in their report calculated that the average debt of a Indian immigrant labourer in Ceylon plantation as owed to their estate management ranged between Rs.19 to over Rs.50. In individual cases the figure was much higher. The Enquiry Commissioners made a statement in their report that, ‘We have seen Tundus where the dept per labourers averaged over Rs.200.’ 195 The increase on transfer of immigrant labourers from one estate to other by tundu, this also led to the large augmentation of a labourer’s debts in account. Besides the immigrant labourer who had died or deserted from the plantation, amount of their debts being added into the account of the surviving members of the family or even of the gang whom he or she belonged. 196

The Indian emigrant labourers had many disadvantages in the Ceylon plantations. In many times they did not have even means to pay for legal advice, to purchase medical certificates to prove they had been assaulted either by the Superintendent or Kanganies of the plantation. For proving the assault, the only witness

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194 Ibid., p. 7.
195 Quoted in Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tabmi Marrakkayar’s Report, 1917, p. 10.
196 Ibid.
they could call were their fellow workers who were usually unwilling to speak against of their masters due to the apprehension of the consequence if they did so.\textsuperscript{197}

An immigrant labour could earn Rs.10 ½ in a month if he worked for 26 days continuously without any break, while many could make only Rs.8 ½. Women in the same way could make Rs.6 ½ and boys and girls between Rs.4 and Rs.5. The above figures would not represent the actual average income of the labourers if cuts made on account of illness and the time when women were out of doors.\textsuperscript{198} Ceylon Government Agent of Sabaragamuva, R. N. Thaine reported: ‘As regards the complaint that the coolies never had enough money or wages to enable them to purchases sundries, it is a fact that in the majority of cases coolies only receive as their wages at the end of the month a small sums varying between 75 cents and Rs.3.’\textsuperscript{199}

Rice was always supplied to the estate labourers by their estate management. Price of rice varied from Rs.4. 2/3 to Rs.5 ¼ a bushel. Majority of the estates supplied extremely bad and deleterious rice. The immigrant labourers were forced to purchase these. The quantity of rice was given per week was: Men ¼ bushel, women ½ and 1/8 bushel each on alternate weeks and young working boys and girls 1/8 of a bushel each.\textsuperscript{200}

It should be remembered that rice was provided in part of payment of wages earned by the immigrant labourers. If a labourer did not work for the required number of days in a week, the allowance of rice was reduced and often stopped. Whenever labourers fell in ill they were not allowed to access their rice. But the Ordinance of 1865, Section 27 required every estate administration to provide a ‘sick rice’ when the labourers were sick, but this was rarely executed. In Ceylon a labourer needed at least Rs.8 ½ for a month to meet their day to day expenditure, while in India Rs.6 was enough. The average price of a bushel rice in Ceylon was 5 rupees, while it was only 3 ½ in India. Many of the

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 15.

\textsuperscript{198} Karumuttu Thigaraja Chettiar’s Report on Indian Emigration on Ceylon Estates, 1917, p 8.


\textsuperscript{200} Karumuttu Thigaraja Chettiar’s Report on Indian Emigration on Ceylon Estates, 1917, pp. 3-4.
immigrant labourers even did not earn this amount (Rs.8 ½) in Ceylon. While wages remained the same the cost of living rose.\textsuperscript{201}

The continuous complaints and reports regarding the alleged ill-treatment of Indian immigrant coolies in the plantations made by Boone, District Judge of Ratanapura, Dr. Lunn, Inspecting Medical Officer and Crossman Police Magistrate of Ratnapura led Ceylon government to appoint a Commission in 1916, to inquire into the living conditions of Indians in the Sabaragamuva Province.\textsuperscript{202} A. L. Crossman, Police Magistrate of Ratnapura, gave evidence to the commission and stated that in his own investigation he found that a coolie ordinarily required a little over Rs.4 in addition to the rice allowance which amounts to about Rs.5 which made the total more than 9 rupees a month.\textsuperscript{203}

The \textit{Ceylon Morning Leader} criticized the Sabaragamuva Commission as a White-Washing Commission and observed: ‘White Washing Commission was appointed to inquire into complaints made by the Ceylon Government officials of the Ratnapura district who made statements suggestive of ill-treatment of coolies in Sabaragamuva…. Take one instance of the Commissioner’s attitude against Crossman. The Labour Ordinance authorizes any Magistrate, ‘if he is satisfied by affidavit,’ that a labourer has not worked on any estate for three years or has left his last estate on reasonable cause, to grant a certificate to that effect. This enable the coolly to obtain employment elsewhere. Crossman, who saw numerous half starved and ill coolies in court, issued several such certificates. This of course, annoyed the planters very much. How do the Commissioner speak of the Magistrate? They complain that he issues such certificates without any inquiry whether the affidavit was true or whether the cause of leaving was in fact reasonable; that the ‘indiscriminate’ issue of such certificates encourages coolies to abscond; that in such cases, we contend, the late employer should be given the

\textsuperscript{201} Jean Grossholtz, \textit{Forging Capitalist Patriarch: The Economic and Social Transformation of Feudal Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Women}, p. 75.


\textsuperscript{203} Karumuttu Thiagaraja Chettiar, \textit{Indian Emigrant on Ceylon Estates: A White-Washing Commission A Criticism}, p. 5.
opportunity of refusing the statements of the coolly. The general impression of all this that Crossman was 'bad Magistrate'.

The newspaper continues its blast as: 'Then the Commissioners contend that a smart cooly can earn anything between Rs.15 and Rs.30 a month. In an actual case tried by the Magistrate, however, they admit that they coolly was paid Rs.1. 10 in January and 5/8th of a bushel of rice; Rs.2 in February and 7/8th of a bushel of rice; and 6/8th of a bushel of rice in March, when the labourer bolted before being paid. The Commissioners suggest that 6/8th of a bushel of rice was sufficient for the man and as to the sufficiency of his wages, they avoid the point by saying that the man did not work and therefore could not expect anything more.

But the contrast between the Rs.30, which colours their visions of what a cooly can earn and the sum of Rs.1. 10 and Rs.2, which this particular cooly got, does not escape the reader. But mark the Commissioners’ conclusion that, 'it is matter for regret that the Magistrate failed to investigate the allegations of the coolies more deeply.'

On 11 May, 1916 the Ceylon Morning Leader wrote: 'Let us examine the point of wage to-day, in the report of the Sabaragamuva Labour Commission. After all, it is the wages that bring the cooly to Ceylon. What does the cooly expect to get? What does the Commission expect him to get? And what in fact, does he get?.... The Commission to probe the grievance of the coolies, the Commissioners only examined 10 coolies, while they heard not less than 35 Europeans, nearly all planters.... Wherefore, those whom the Government appointed to inquire into the grievances of the coolies avoided questioning coolies and preferred instead, to question those against whom the coolies’ complaints were directed.

Tukaram Lachiman was getting Rs.12 to Rs.13 a month in India as a weaver. He was induced to come to Ceylon on the promise that he would easily earn Rs.12 a month. He actually got no more than Rs.1. 50 or Rs.2 a month. Parvathi, a woman, whose


205 Ibid.

husband was a European’s butler in India and earned Rs.25 a month, was told that she would be a Kangani over women and earn about Rs.13 a month. In point of fact, as she disclosed, ‘sometimes I get Rs.1 a month, and some times 50 cents.’ Her husband was in jail on the day she testified.

Asana, whose father earned anything between Rs.500 to Rs.1,000 a month and employed 150 men in India, was enticed to move to Ceylon on promise of Rs.16 to Rs.20 a month with food, mutton, fowls and etc. So he stole Rs.300 from his father’s hoard and left with the Kangany, who plundered him of his cash. His actual wages are Rs.1 to Rs.1-50 a month. Tuka Ram Balian earned between Rs.10 to Rs.20 a month in India, as a weaver. He was also tempted to go to Ceylon on promises of regular wages of Rs.25 to Rs.30 a month with work only till noon. He actually earned only Rs.1-50 to Rs.1-75 as monthly wage. He never got more than Rs.2 a month. Laksiman was promised Rs.30 a month, with work only till noon. He longed to be free from the estate and one day he bolted. He then had no more than Rs.2 with him, although he was a Kangany with 16 men under him. Of course, it must be remembered that every man got some rice in addition, the rice being part of the wages, and counted as such.207

Harassment and Assaults

The estate labourers could not easily go to courts against their employers. If the labourers were found going out the estate for such purposes without the leave of the superintendents, they were prosecuted as bolters. Naturally, labourers did not ask leave of from the superintendent of the plantation to go to courts against them. And at the same time, plantation administrations never allowed outsiders or strangers to meet and talk to labourers who were working in the estates.208

Nearly in every plantation immigrant labourers were often fined half a day’s or a day’s wages for bad work or non-fulfillment of the task that allocated to them by the supervisor of the plantation. Canning and thrashing also prevailed for bad or neglected work or for disobedience. Whenever deserted coolies caught without warrants were not

207 Ibid.

sent to courts for justice, but were punished by the Superintendent himself, despite this was an offence according to the Master and Servant Ordinance of 1865. When coolies insisted on receiving tundus and the estate could not afford to spare them, they were punished, caned and kicked by the plantation administration. Commonly the relations between employers and labourers were bad. Much brutally, the labourers could be dismissed from the estate without any compensation. When they became unfit for work due to permanent incapacity of his continuous hard work in the plantation, they were left in the lurch for the rest of their life.209

In 1895, the newspaper Dravida Bhanu demanded the Indian Government's intervention to mitigate the plight of the Indian immigrant labourers in Ceylon plantations: 'The cooly emigrants working in the tea-gardens of Ceylon, meet with very severe and almost inhuman treatment at the hands of their employers and that it is very desirable that the Government of India as well as that of Ceylon should co-operate in forming measures for mitigating their sufferings'.210

In 1903, Swadesamitran wrote: 'We do not see why the Indian coolies should be as slaves by the Anglo-Indian planters, seeing that the English people are boasting that wherever the British rule prevails slavery will never be permitted. But both the Anglo-Indians and the English people at home turn a deaf ear to all our cries about the condition of the Indian coolies and deny the very existence of such a state of things.'211

In 1914, the Ratanapura district Judge reported to the Government Agent of Ceylon the plightful living condition of the immigrant labourers in the plantations:

'Sir, I went to Niwitigala estate for a murder inquiry at Watupitiya estate. After inquiries Dr. Perera and I started to walk back to the broken bridge, where some 40 coolies started prostrating themselves in front of us and saying that they were starving and had not been given rice. The plaints seemed to be that they worked 6 days, but were only marked for 3, or that they worked 6 days but that if they did not work on Sundays as well they were not given rice, or that they were given rice, but their Kangani took half. At any rate, there were complaints of this description. The coolies

209 Ibid., p. 15.
were obviously being starved. Many of them were fit in my opinion only for hospital and I am sure the doctor would support me in this. He, too, told me that from all sides he was hearing similar reports; that 75 per cent of his hospital deaths were coolies from this Niwitigala group.

On my way to Watupitiya I found one cooly lying on his back on the roadside within Niwitigala estate, so weak that he could only walk with difficulty. I do not know what estate he belonged to, but he was obviously dying of starvation. I also understand that it is the practice in the district to get watchers, so that coolies cannot bolt or even come to court to lay their complaints. The result is that their only remedy in case like the above is stopped. I was also told that 4 deaths had occurred on the estate from starvation. As a temporary measure, I suggest that the doctor be sent to Niwitigala group of estates and asked to send all coolies whom he considers ill to hospital, as under Section 13 Ordinance No. 17 of 1880, it is the duty of the Superintendent to send such coolies to hospitals and it is an offence if he does not, but I do not think that the matter should stop there.  

The *Swadesamitran* published an article concerning the predicament of the emigrant labourers and ill-treatment of Indian coolies in Ceylon plantations in 1915: 'The treatment of Indian coolies, which is worse than that of a beast by some of European planters who come to the Eastern Countries and recruit these labourers for service under them, in person and through agents, has often been noticed in the papers. These planters, instead of considering these coolies, who are working under them, as coolies engaged for labour under agreement, have been considering them to be slaves, and doing very cruel injuries to them. Some times they also killed the coolies. The coolies are suffering in distant places where they have gone to earn their livelihood, without any means of saving themselves from the cruel acts done to them by the planters. The unjust acts of Ceylon planters now come to light... But as we learn frequently that the planters drag these Indian coolies from India to their gardens, by tempting them with sweet words, and subject them to many sufferings. It is necessary that the Government of this Presidency

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should write to the Ceylon Government to inquire into the unjust treatment of the Indian
coolies in the Ceylon plantations. 213

In 1916, May 13, the Ceylon Morning Leader criticized the Sabaragamuva
Labour Commission and the Commissioners who testified the coolies in the plantation
about their wish to go back to India. The paper contrasted the optimism of the
Commissioners with the expression of despair by the coolly. ‘Do you want to go back
again to India? The Chairman of the Sabaragamuva Labour Commissioner asked Asana,
a coolly on Palugampola Estate. ‘If I am sent, I will go; if you wish me to die here I will
die’ said Asana. ‘The coolly is absolutely free to go wherever he wishes,’ say the
Commissioners of their Report.214

Purtrengan who was a Kangany wanted to go back to India. The
Commissioners asked him why? ‘Where are you going?’ they then asked, ‘Any where,’
was the reply. ‘Are you going to pay your debt to the estate? I have no money to pay,’ he
said. ‘Why do you go away then?’ ‘I know nothing about the debt,’ was the answer, ‘Did
you ask the dorai about the debt?.’ ‘No’ he said. ‘Have you given a pro-note for the
debt?’ ‘I did not give a note.’ The Superintendent asked him to sign which he did. How
much pay do you expect to get? asked the Commissioners, ‘I do not care about pay. I
want to go home.’ ‘Do you want to go back to India?’ ‘He said, I am four years here. I
have my parents and other friends in India and I do not want to stay here and die.’ 215

W.G. Berry, Superintendent of Pinkande Estate, had one Abdul Khan as a
Kangany. Why was Abdul Khan as such an objectionable man?, the Commissioners
asked. He did all sorts of terrible things to the coolies, was the reply. Every coolly of his
gang had to go to work. He frightened the sick coolies to say that there was nothing
wrong with them. However, it was a fact that a great many of the coolies were ill. Could
not they absent themselves from work? asked the Chairman. The Kangany influenced

214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
them so much, said Berry. When you went round the estate, did none of these coolies complain to you? ‘No’ was the answer.\textsuperscript{216}

The writer of the article observed: ‘The legal position of the Indian coolly, as stated by the Commission, is interesting. He can leave the estate by giving notice or on reasonable cause, they remind us. Whether the contract is terminated by reasonable cause or by giving a month’s notice, the coolly is absolutely free to go wherever he likes. Can he leave the estate at all? How is the coolly free, if there are watchers to prevent him? But how is this coolly to begin his prosecution against the offender for wrongful restraint and confinement, if he cannot leave the estate? That is the legal position and the Commissioners are discreetly silent upon that.’\textsuperscript{217}

The \textit{Swadeshabhimani} carried a report on the ill-treatment of Indian indentured labourers in Ceylon: ‘Although the report of the representatives sent by the Madras Government to enquire into the condition of the indentured coolies in Ceylon has not been published as yet, as the representatives were the guests of the planters for several days; Indian popular leaders are not likely to attach much importance to their report.’\textsuperscript{218} The \textit{Sampa Abhyndaya} remarked a pitiable case occurred in Ceylon in which an immigrant labour Sange Pillai, was tied to a tree and flogged for ‘the bad work’ done in the plantation.\textsuperscript{219}

\textit{The Hindu} commented on the Report on the Indian Labour Emigration to Ceylon and Malaya prepared by Marjoribanks and Ahmad Thambi Marakkayar: ‘For all that we know, the greater portion of the compilation which has been dignified into a report, might have been written by the Committee without leaving the city of Madras.…. There is a clear evidence that matters are very grave and even in the report there are certain facts mentioned which lend support of this view. We must ask the Madras

\textsuperscript{216} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{219} \textit{Sampa Abhyndaya, Report on Native News Papers}, February 27, 1917, p. 542.
Government, and the Government of India not to rely very much on the compilation which has now been published.220 On 2 February 1919, the Swadesamitran remarked:

'The hardships suffered by the Indian coolies in Ceylon are due not solely to the Kanganes, as suggested by the planters, but to those planters themselves and their Superintendents are too responsible and adds that the wage of the coolies are not sufficient for their monthly expenditure and so they cannot but borrow either from the Kanganes or from bazaarmen. So unless the coolies are given additional wages in consideration of the heavy prices food-stuffs prevailing there now, no reforms will be of any use to them...All of the planters are of course aware of this; but they are determined not to increase the wages. The next point to be noted is the hours of work. Though it is given out that the coolies work only from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. there is practically no limit at all for their working hours and they suffer indescribable hardships thereby...As regards the education of the children of the labourers, it was with great difficulty that a law was passed that there should be a school in each plantation. But even the few schools that were opened as a result as it are now sleeping. So this also an important matter to be considered... It is no doubt good to free the coolies from their debt. But by the stopping the Tundu System, they will be subjected to many hardships in the plantations and compelled to be almost slaves. That is the only privilege these coolies have now; their condition will become hopeless if even this is taken away.'221

Convictions and Punishments

The award of punishment of a summary nature was arrogated to the planters as their right, derived from the days of slavery. Beating or flogging occurred as a regular routine element in Ceylon plantations.222 Labourers who left the estate were hunted down or jailed. Severe penalties were levied on workers who ran away if they were owed no more than three months' wages. May Stwart, wife of a Cocoa planter in the early twentieth century, noted that 'a runaway coolie can always be arrested if less than sixty


222 Hugh Tinker, A New System of Slavery, pp. 191-192.
pay is due. Knighton, in his book, *Forest Life in Ceylon*, writing of Ceylon in the 1850s, quotes a causal comment made by his fellow coffee planter: 'Every man is a magistrate on his own estate, you know, and therefore a long as the man is working for you, you have a right to do what you like with him – that is short of killing.' In 1875, a kidnapping case of two young boys under the age of twelve for service in Ceylon was reported, which led to a conviction of a collie named Ramasamy by the Magistrate of the Coimbatore, who reported the conviction to the Madras Government.

In 1915, in Ceylon 4,409 Indian immigrant labourers were charge sheeted. Of them 1,500 were convicted and about 1,003 jailed. The main offence was the absence from work and refusal to work and habitual idleness. But there were only 23 cases registered against employers, of which 5 only convicted, among them one employer was convicted to undergo one month imprisonment. The remaining four were fined.

On 16 August 1916, *The Hindunesan* observed: 'In every country, the English planters are treating the coolies on their estates worse than slaves and the main cause for this is the special privileges granted to the planters by the Government of the country. The laws connected with the coolies in plantations are all in favour of the planters. When these laws permit a coolly, who refuses to work in a plantation as agreed by him, being punished with rigorous imprisonment, it goes without saying that they are treated worse than slaves. We understand that this barbarous habit of inflicting rigorous imprisonment on recalcitrant coolies was in vogue in British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica, the Fiji Islands and Ceylon, till recently that it has now been abolished in the Fiji Islands and that is being given up gradually in Jamaica, Trinidad and British Guiana, under instructions from the Secretary of State for the Colonies.

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When this cruel custom is being given up in every other colony, we are surprised that the Government of a crown colony like Ceylon should be disinclined to abolish it. In reply to a representation made by the local Social Service League that the women and children coolies who are now undergoing rigorous imprisonment under this law should be released and that the custom of inflicting rigorous imprisonment on coolies in plantation should be abolished, the Ceylon Government seems to have declined to grant their request and said that, if women coolies are exempted from the operation of this law, there would be much confusion in these plantation. We cannot understand what confusion will result by such exemption. It is the worst injustice against that women and children should be subjected to this punishment. It is possible to put a stop to this barbarous custom in other colonies, how can it be impossible in Ceylon?\textsuperscript{228}

The rich and influential employer took the law into his own hands and had the means to escape the punishment of the court. One incident occurred in 30\textsuperscript{th} January 1917, in a well known Ceylon plantation in which the existence of law became questionable in Ceylon. According to Muniyamma an eye witness, an estate watchman came to the coolie lines with a gun and asked a woman among others, why she was not at work. The woman replied that she would go to work the next day. Immediately the accused shot her dead and ran off. But he was soon secured by some coolies and handed over to the authorities. Muniyamma, Karupai, Soccala Naran and Mariamma all of them witnessed the killing. But the judge declared a verdict as the watchman was not guilty of the murder, instead guilty of reckless and remiss act. The jury imposed a fine of one hundred rupees for that crime what he committed and set him free.\textsuperscript{229}

In the same year, February 16\textsuperscript{th} a case was reported in which the owner of the plantation was accused as who caused grievous hurt to an immigrant labour who worked in his plantation. That was a very serious offence to the law. But the Magistrate as a conviction imposed a penalty of ten rupees for that crime, besides detained the employer

\textsuperscript{228} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{229} Karumuttu Thiagaraja Chettiar, \textit{Indian Emigrant on Ceylon Estates: A White-Washing Commission A Criticism}, pp. 11-12.
at the Bar till the end of the court of the day by this verdict the existence of Ceylon Master Servant Law’s ridiculed.\textsuperscript{230}

The law declared that an employer had no power to arrest a deserted labour or an offender of the plantation. But in contrary to the law the plantation owners employed watchmen and supplied them with arms to prevent labourers from leaving the estates. Even in practice, many of the estate proprietors advertised offering rewards for the arrest of deserted labourers of the plantation. Indian immigrant male and female labourers were arrested without any court warrants by private individuals.\textsuperscript{231}

Wretchedness of Women

In the early years of colonial rule, colonists, whether planters or administrators, had no particular interest in women workers. Initially women were, however, imported to provide sexual service to men. These women had no such control over their lives. Often they were widows or unmarried daughters of poor family who had no hope in South India. In other cases they were the wives of workers who had sold them to their fellow workers. In some cases who were migrating married them in India and brought them along as a supplemental income scheme. Often they were young women brought over by force to service the men in the lines. Most of them were no more than children.\textsuperscript{232}

Sickness, Cholera, Malaria and Mortality, both Infant and Adult

The health of the immigrant labourers who were working in the plantation, turn into worse aftermaths of their coming into the estate as a result of the hard labour and inabsence of the good medical facilities in the plantation. The immigrant labourers were often infected by the Malarial fever and Anchylostomiasis. An Inspecting Medical Officer of Ratnapura plantations, Dr. Lunn wrote in his report: ‘Not a single person in these lines (labour quarters) was free from anchylostomiasis and some had malaria in

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{231} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{232} Jean Grossholtz, \textit{Forging Capitalist Patriarch: The Economic and Social Transformation of Feudal Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Women}, p. 118.
addition.' For the medical aide of the immigrant labourers in the Ceylon plantations, the law required the plantation doctors to visit the labour quarters in alternate days but in practice this was not followed, but had done only once a week irregularly. As Karumuttu Thiagarajar observed 'in this circumstances, if a coolie falls ill he must die unless there were no near relatives to take care of him or her.'

Table II. 11 shows the births and deaths among the Indian labourers who were employed in the Ceylon plantations from 1911 to 1915.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Births</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>16,023</td>
<td>18,901</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>15,994</td>
<td>19,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>17,256</td>
<td>18,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>18,946</td>
<td>21,049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>18,479</td>
<td>15,863</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar's Report, p. 3.

The death rate among the estates labourers on some Ceylon plantations, in certain years, was remarkable. In 1913, 227 out of 950 immigrant labourers on Niwitigala estate alone died. The infant mortality among the immigrant estate labour population was also higher. The infant mortality per 1,000 births registered on estates was 246 in 1913, 247 in 1914 and 212 in 1915. Of the deaths on estates in 1915, 29 percent were caused by weakness of infants less than six months of age, convulsions of infants and premature birth. This was chiefly due to the non-availability of well trained midwives in the hospitals which led to the heavy mortality among the infants at the time of their birth and after.

On the high death-rate among the Indian immigrant labourers in the Ceylon plantations the Ceylon Morning Leader wrote: ‘The death-rate on Niwitigala Group was

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234 Ibid., p. 3.
235 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar's Report, p. 21.
at one time 10.5 per hundred coolies and in spite of Dr. Langley Hunt’s visit and warnings, it rose to 15.6 per hundred coolies. What do the Sabaragamuva Commissioners say to this? The number of death, though apparently large, was not really abnormal. Not abnormal? The death-rate for Colombo in 1914 was 27.4 per thousand. Here was a death-rate of 105 per thousand in 1912 and 156 per thousand in 1913; yet the Commissioners do not think it abnormal! Was this not a White-Washing Commission?236

In 1916, it was reported that a large number of deaths occurred among the immigrant Indian estate labourers in Ceylon, which was primarily caused by diarrhea, dysentery and other bowel-complaints, as well as those directly assigned to Anychylostomiasis.237

In India information about the high mortality of the immigrant estate population in Ceylon prevailed and also the conditions under which Indian labourers worked in Ceylon estates, which eventually led the Viceroy to request the Government of Madras to take steps to obtain reliable information about the matter. In November 1916, the Government of Madras formed a two members committee consist of Marjoribanks, one of the leading judicial officials of the Presidency and Tambi Marrakkayar, a native member of the local council, for made a joint enquiry regarding the living condition of the Indian immigrant estate labourers in the Ceylon plantations. The result was embodied in their report a few months later to the Government of Madras and this was passed on to the Viceroy.238

Table II. 12 exhibits the number of suicides among the estate Tamil labourers in the Ceylon plantains from 1911 to 1915.

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237 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar's Report, p. 18.
Table II. 12
Suicides in the Ceylon Estates, 1911-1915.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Victims</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 2.

Referring to the report that submitted by the Sabaragamuva Committee the Swadesamitran wrote: ‘Nothing is said in the report of the Committee as to what was stated by the coolies; but the statements made by the Europeans are described in detail, many of the later are the Superintendents of plantations. How can they be expected to admit the existence of defects in their managements? The causes of the high rate of mortality among these coolies are stated to be want of sanitation and hunger. It is the same hope, that of making money, that is attracting both the Europeans and the Indians to Ceylon. The former succeed in their object, while the latter fail. The planter cannot carry on their work without the coolies. Cannot the coolies eke out a livelihood without the planters? If they will not bestow any thought on this subject, our Government (Indian) should interfere and make them do so.’

Lack of Health Care and Its Repercussions

In 1815 Ceylon came under the British rule. In the beginning when deforestation was undertaken to clear the hill area to make it suitable for the cultivation of coffee the Tamil labourers were asked to do all and sundry works in the forest. It a tedious job and the labourers were subjected to unto difficulties. But the European planters were keen on getting their jobs done and did not care for the welfare of the labourers. During this time there were no roads, transport and no proper accommodation and no adequate food. Yet the Indians strove hard to please their Europeans masters.

Many died due to climate change, hardship experienced in clearing forests and lack of proper medical care. When the Indian labourers hesitated to enter into dangerous forest, the European planters employed a trick to induce them. They used to throw gold coins into the thick forests and asked the labourers to take them. Whoever took the coil could keep it for himself. In an attempt to seize the gold coins the labourers worked with the spirit of competition and dared any hardship and many lost their lives in this.240

The acreage of plantation property devoted to coffee in 1847 was approximately 50,000 acres; in 1871-2, 1, 96,000 acres; in 1878, 2,73,00 acres; and in 1881 2,56,000 acres.241 The nineteenth century plantation in Ceylon could range from a small unit covering little more than twenty to thirty acres to large properties of over 1,000 acres.242

Another illustration of the lack of concern for the welfare of the labourers was the utter failure to provide health care. The *Colombo Observer* in 1849 reported that in the period 1841 – 1849 one-fourth of the Indian immigrant labourers had died in Ceylon of various causes. Until the end of the nineteenth century even the most simple medical facilities were not accessible by the immigrant labour force in Ceylon plantations and then only sporadically. If workers got sick, they were thrown off the estates.243

The hospital of the Kandy Friend in Need Society was founded in 1838 for the benefit of the poor and the sick in Kandy, had by 1840 become exclusively a hospital for immigrant labourers. Though the contribution of Government to the funds of the Society towards meeting the medical expenses of the sick estate labourers was not significant and still it not spent small sums annually through the public treasury in aid of them. In fact, as it appears from Tennent’s despatch to Grey (see Table II: 13), the Government of Sri Lanka spent, for medical aid to labourers sums ‘so considerable as to be entirely disproportionate to the revenue at our command for the more urgent use of the Colony.’


242 Ibid., p. 93.

Table II. 13


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Amount Spent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1843</td>
<td>£186 – 10 – 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1844</td>
<td>£264 – 5 – 0 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1845</td>
<td>£811 – 1 – 8 ½</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>£1,590 – 0 – 3 ½</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Statistics of the Ceylon hospitals showed the total number of sick treated in General Hospital of the Colony in 1876, when the effects of the heavy influx had scarcely made into Ceylon, was 17,005. In 1877 the number rose to 22,356 and in 1878 to 25,172, while in the special Immigrant Hospitals the numbers rose from 1,428 in 1876 which rose into 5,089 in 1877 and 7,733 in 1878. And in the most majority of cases referred to the sickness for which the labourers were treated was ascribed more or less directly privation. Heavy sickness and mortality occurred among the labourers along the north road between Mannar and Matale. Both en-route to the estates and after their arrival there, the labourers frequently suffered from fever, dysentery, smallpox and other ailments for which they required medical care but this was absent in Ceylon plantation.245

The situation did not change even at the turn of the century. Sir West Ridgeway, Governor of Ceylon (1893 – 1903) wrote: ‘It would seem at first sight as if under these circumstances the chances were remote than a small remnant of a gang of fifty or sixty persons would reach Matale, but heavy as the mortality was, the great bulk of the coolies did reach their destination and each of them as a rule free from disease. The sick were abandoned either on the road or at some of the established halting places.’246

An American doctor, Victor Heiser, who had worked in the Philippians, came to Sri Lanka to work on the eradication of hookworm in 1915. He was told that the planters would not allow anything to be done to the immigrant estate labourers about the


problem. In fact, one planter told him: ‘we are not going to have a lot of health fellows crashing into our affairs. Look at what happened last year. There was a plague scare just when our best harvest was due. It amounted to nothing but these health inspectors came along threatening to inoculate the labourers, and almost before we could turn around thousands of them were on their way back to India. It nearly ruined us. If we ever let the Health Service get started on hookworm, all our labourers would run away, we couldn’t harvest our tea and rubber. No health business for us.’ He in additionally told, Tamil labour women tended to be sterilized because of anemia from hookworm. The maternal and infant mortality rates were incredibly high during the nineteenth century and continued so until the 1930’s.

The unjust acts of a Ceylon planter had come to light on 28 October 1914. A. L. Crossman, the Magistrate provided a judgment in favour of the Pingandi Estate coolies at Ranapuram, who were accused in the case. Berry, the Superintendent of the estate, charged before the Magistrate 70 or 80 coolies who were working in that estate, for leaving the work and going away in violation of their agreement. The Police Magistrate who inquired into the left off the collies, saying that they were right in trying to run away from the work under Berry, as he treated them very harshly and that no offence was made out against them. One third of the coolies who were working in that estate were very sick. Berry made no arrangements to cure them of their disease. Seeing their sufferings, all the other coolies were frightened, thinking that their fate would also be like this.

Periya Nagappan, who was one of the coolies charged by Berry besides having multiple ulcers in legs, eczema, anemia and general weakness and was suffering from some other diseases. His body too was much weakened. He was unable to walk. A Doctor examined his and gave a medical certificate that he should be under treatment in a hospital for at least two weeks. While a Doctor’s certificate had thus been granted to his,

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247 Quoted in Jean Grossholtz, Forging Capitalist Patriarch: The Economic and Social Transformation of Feudal Sri Lanka and Its Impact on Women, p. 74.

248 Ibid.

Berry said in the court that Periya Nagappa was malingering and he had no disease at all.  

Whenever the coolies working under Berry suffered from disease, who was bound to make the necessary arrangements for the medical treatment of the coolies and forget this duty, Berry told the Magistrate that Periya Nagappan, who was unable to walk with sores on both of his legs and was suffering from lack of energy in his body, was malingering.  

The Magistrate being unable to tolerate the statement made by Berry, provided a judgment as follows: ‘Periya Nagappan who was in a very pitiable state was malingering. It was undoubtedly clear that Berry never attended to the health and comfort of his coolies and that he was neglecting them. Ever since the present war began, Berry has been paying only half salary to the coolies working in his plantation, which are ordinarily irrecoverable. So that in effect this equivalent to putting coolies on half pay. Based on this reasons I hold that the members of this gang had reasonable cause to quit the Berry’s employ and I acquit and discharge them.’  

In 1916 there were only 46 Government hospitals and 115 Government dispensaries existed in the estate medical districts and every one of 2,382 estates was scheduled to a Government hospital and dispensary by Government notification. Of these just 17 hospitals and dispensaries had been notified as primarily intended for immigrant labourers of the island. In the same year Dr. Snodgrass, informed the labour Enquiry Committee that the hookworm was the most dangerous and prevalent disease in Ceylon. Of 5,050 immigrant estate labourers examined by him 4,991 were found to be infected by the hookworm.  

The lack of medical facilities offered for the immigrant labourers in the Ceylon plantations was summed up by the Swadesamitran: ‘...Then come the medial aid.'

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253 Marjoribanks and Ahmad Tambi Marakkayar’s Report, p. 16.  
254 Ibid., p. 18.
At present there are dispensaries in some plantations in charge of failed medicos or those who have not studied medicine at all. So it is preferable to have passed doctors at least one for every four or five plantations. The sanitation of the rooms occupied by the coolies is not satisfactory, as they are overcrowded and ill-ventilated.\textsuperscript{255} 

\textsuperscript{255} Swadesamitran, Report on Native News Papers, September 2, 1919, p. 1360.