Recruitment of labourers from outside the province in the beginning was confined to the hill districts of Chotanagpur and as far south of Midnapur. The Assam Company recruited labourers through their own agents from these areas and also maintained labour establishments one at Topchanchee in Bihar and the other at Govindapur in Bengal. In addition to the recruiting agency, the Company also collected men through their own labourers when the latter visited home after certain intervals. Such visiting labourers were instructed to procure some of their countrymen at the time of their return. But the Tea Companies established during the later period had no organised agency of their own and, therefore, they had to depend for the supply of labour on the private recruiters. The latter collected labourers occasionally and without any particular order or regularity. The terms on which they usually supplied labourers did not vary to a greater extent but were, more or less, uniform. They either took orders direct from the planters of Assam for the number required or in certain cases they after collecting certain labourers without orders through their own men reported it to the parties interested


2. Ibid.
in employing labourers. Generally, the Secretary of Tea Company in Calcutta or his deputed men examined these labourers with regard to their suitability to work in the gardens. In case the labourers were found suitable for plantation work, an agreement had to be concluded with the private contractor and on the strength of which the contractors received a lump sum amount, usually Rs.5/-, for each person landed safely in the tea garden of the particular company. Such payments were made even for those labourers who died on the way. But no payment was made at all for those who deserted while on voyage towards the province.

The defects of such recruiting were too many. The private recruiters never recruited systematically and also did not maintain any permanent establishments to transact the business. Many of them recruited, occasionally, and then disappeared for sometime. Naturally, it was not possible to have any contact with them, even if they made any mischief or irregularity in their supply of labour until again they appeared with certain labourers.

Although, recruitment of labourers from the areas mentioned above began much earlier than the year 1860, the extent to which such recruitments took place is not traceable

* This amount was generally called head-money.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.
from any source. Recruitment before 1860, of course, was of smaller scale. It appears from a letter of 30 December, 1861, of W.F. Fergusson, Secretary, Land Holders and Commercial Association of British India, addressed to the Government of Bengal that from 1 September, 1859, to 31 August, 1860, as many as two thousand forty-nine labourers were recruited for "Assam proper and Cachar. In the same letter it was further stated that no less than three thousand and eighty-one persons were recruited during the same period of 1860-61. This figure shows an increase in the number of recruitment from the previous year. Inspite of such an increase, it is stated that the supply of labour was far below the average requirement of the province.

With the gradual increase in recruitment, the care and supervision on the part of the private recruiters began to diminish with consequent deterioration in the quality of the labourers supplied. Their primary object was to supply as many labourers as they could with scant regard to their quality. The cases began to multiply when greedy and mischievous private contractors supplied labourers majority of whom were found unfit for doing any strenuous job. The private contractors had of course some reasons for doing so. In fact, there was comparatively a great unwillingness among the

labourers to become the recruits for an unknown country like Assam. There had been a strong belief among them that people who went to Assam never came back. This virtually frightened a considerable number of labourers who were otherwise willing to serve anywhere. Therefore, it became difficult on the part of the private contractors and recruiters to transact their business smoothly and to avoid this, they had recourse to much falsehood to entice away many ignorant labourers. The labourers were not given any chance to understand that they were being recruited for Assam and when these ignorant ones were handed over to the party for whom they were enlisted there was hardly any possibility of remedying the evils. All the more because the labourers had to be sent to Assam either by the country boats or by the private steamers, many of them could not even stand the exertions of river voyage, and a good number of them died on the way before reaching the province. Mortality in a few cases even reached upto fifty percent.

TOWARDS REGULATION.

The attention of the Government of Bengal was drawn to this state of affairs by persons connected with the tea industry of Assam even before 1860. But no action could be

6. Ante. P.9, 44.

taken against those private recruiters in the absence of proper rules and regulations. It was, thus, from 1860 that the Government of Bengal made attempts to evolve a plan with a view to get a better class of labourers for the plantations, to reduce mortality in the voyage and also to stop malpractices in recruitment that had caused much misunderstanding in the earlier days among the parties involved in such recruitments. Much progress was made towards this direction when Jenkins, the Commissioner of Assam, directed his District Officers by his letter of 29 February, 1860, to submit reports in consultation with the principal tea planters of the province as to the feasibility of making improvements in the system of recruitment and immigration of labourers for the province. The reports and resolutions of various tea planters' Associations, submitted to the Commissioner in between May and September 1860, also expressed among other things the immediate need for an efficient system of recruitment.

In July 1861, the Government of Bengal appointed a Three Man Commission with a view to find out, among other things, the defects of the system of private recruiting and

8. B.G.P.E., January 1861, No. 375, Thompson to Agent Governor-General, NEF, 17 January, 1861.

9. A.S.Vol. No. 23 of 1860 (January-December), No. 79, Agent to the Governor-General, NEF to Secretary Government of Bengal, 31 May, 1860.
contract. When the said Commission was investigating things, a plan for better recruitment system already came to the Government of Bengal from W.F. Fergusson, Secretary, Land Holders and Commercial Association of British India. Fergusson suggested that firstly a recruiter of labour should be granted a licence by the Government with necessary details as to for which station he was to recruit. Secondly, the recruiter, on arrival with such certificate at the recruiting district, should report to the officer in-charge of the district, who would then notice the heads of all the villages and tell them of the destination of the proposed recruits so that labourers could be given atleast an opportunity either to accept or to reject the offer. Fergusson also suggested that recruiter should make a return to the Government Officer of the recruiting district before leaving with the labourers with the certificate that he had explained everything of the contracts to them. The suggestion of Fergusson was intended to remove evils in recruitment by bringing the private recruiters under official control and also to trace them out in future in case of any irregularity made in the nature of recruitment. The Government of Bengal, in its letter of 10 January 1862, highly appreciated such an idea.

11. B.G.P.B., January 1861, No. 6, Fergusson to Lushington, 30 December, 1861.
of regulating recruitment and approving of the plan, even before submission of the Three M*  *p Commission's Report, decided to remove the evils. The Government of Bengal further expressed that in introducing such a measure if legislative action was considered to be essential, the matter would be placed even before the Legislative Council. Apart from the systematization of the recruitment organs, the Government of Bengal also decided to find out several sources of procuring labour, where it was redundant. Accordingly, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal asked in a separate letter of the same date to all the Divisional Commissioners under him to furnish details of such sources for the advantageous distribution and recruitment of labour.

On the other hand, in July 1862, the said Commission submitted its report to the Government of Bengal. As a matter of fact, the Commission, inspite of several suggestions made by various persons, both official and non-official, simply


* There were many suggestions in the hands of the Commission which they received in course of their tour in the Tea Districts of Assam. It is not possible to accommodate here all the suggestions made. Of these, suggestion of C.B. Stewart, Commissioner of Dacca Division, was that the proportion of sexes should be at least fifty percent. Like Fergusson it was also suggested by T.Seymour, Secretary to the Cachar and Equitable Tea Company, that every contractor should be compelled to take out a license and none but regular licensed contractors should be allowed by the Government to recruit labour (Ibid, vide Appendix 3).
put the defects of the private recruiting and did not mention any remedy whatever. However, the report convinced the Government of the immediate necessity of referring the case to the Legislative Department with ultimate intention to frame a law. The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, thus, expressed a desire in his letter of 29 September, 1862, that licenses should be granted to contractors and actual recruiters and a general rule was to be framed for the guidance of these professional persons. Incorporating the wishes of the Lieutenant-Governor along with the other suggestions so far made, the Government of Bengal asked its Legislative Department to introduce a bill for enactment for the proper regulation of labour recruitment.

On the advent of such a regulation, the professional persons engaged in the recruitment became quite down-hearted when they found that penalties were imposed in cases of fraud.

* The Commission disclosed the great mortality of labour and many subsequent evils that arose mainly attributing to the bad system of recruitment and contract. The Commission observed that there was no uniformity on the system of recruitment and that there was no specific system of engagement or contract between employer and labourer. In such a state of things there had been enough scope of giving false statement and exaggerating on the part of the private recruiters. One important defect of the system of recruitment by private contractors, according to the said Commission, was the proportion of women to men (generally found as five to fifteen percent) and as a result of this industrial peace was frequently disturbed.

14. A.S. File No. 44(a) of 1869-63 (P.W.D), No. 2272, Secretary, Govt. of Bengal to Secretary Govt. of India, 29 September, 1862.
and mischief. On the other hand, the planting community also believed that if the bill be passed into law, it would be tantamount to a prohibition of importing labour; the provisions being so stringent that the contractors would scarcely be found to engage in the undertaking and those that would be at all found would be forced to fix their charges at too high a rate to allow the planters employing them. Moreover, reviewing the said bill in February 1863, Major W. Agnew, officiating Commissioner of Assam also expressed a great reluctance in accepting the provisions and fully shared the views of the planting community. It is not understood as to how the Commissioner ignored the interest of the labourers when pecuniary interest of the employers was involved. Such an inclination towards the management, as will also be seen later, was no less responsible in aggravating the situation.

In spite of this, considering the continued succession of disastrous mortality due to recruitment of weak, incapable and diseased-ridden labourers, need for imposing immediate restriction on the activities of the recruiters became imperative. The Government of Bengal took much initiative in the matter and the bill in question became an act as the


* Commissioner Hopkinson (1861-74) was on leave at that time.
Act III (B.C) of 1863. By virtue of the above act, no person without a license was to be engaged to recruit labourers. Either a penalty of rupees not exceeding one thousand or an imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months was prescribed for any violation of the proviso. Every contractor of labour was to keep up a private depot to receive and maintain labourers therein. Not only that, the contractors were also made liable to give any information, which the Superintendent of Labour might require from time to time. Any anomaly in recruitment, therefore, was made possible to be explained by the recruiters. Further, to distinguish a recruiter from others he was also to wear a badge. All the labourers that would be recruited, even in the mofussil areas, were required to appear before the Magistrate for examination and registration. On the labourer's side also, they were required to sign a written contract for five years. Every batch of recruitment must contain some women and proportion should not be less than one female to every four males. Such were the remedies suggested for better recruitment in the said act. But with regard to a batch of labourers, consisting of not more than ten and agreeing among themselves to go out from their homes to any tea garden, it enacted that the act should not apply. It was considered

that such parties would accompany some returning labour who would give them fuller information as to the prospect before them. Although the Assam Company very advantageously employed many labourers under such an arrangement, the supervision and care that a particular management afforded were less likely for the Government to provide and, therefore, incorporation of such an article left loophole for further malpractices. The Government of Bengal, moreover, did not make any provision for vigilant officers to watch the rigid observance of the formalities of the act. The Governor-General while giving assent to the bill remarked that the measures adopted were, more or less, tentative and experimental and he expected that respective Governments would watch its operation and report evils for further amendment. But a mere watch without an inspectorate was meaningless. Superficially it may appear that the measures adopted, if given effect to, would be sufficient to remove the evils. But, in fact, by providing no inspectorate enough scope was left for the continuance of the evils, which it was originally intended to put a stop to.

DEPRESSION IN TEA AND IN QUEST OF CHEAP AND QUALITY LABOUR.

The first four or five years of sixties were a period of wild excitement and wild speculation in tea in Assam because of the great successes of the Assam and Jorehaut

17. A.S. Vol. 44(b) of 1869-63 (P.W.D.), No.2399, Wyllic to Macpherson, 10 April, 1863.
Tea Companies. New gardens were started with all the haste imaginable and large clearances were made without any adequate provision for labour to keep them cultivated. Old gardens similarly had made tremendous extension disproportionate to their original size and new companies were a matter of daily formation in Calcutta and shares rose to an absurd premium. A perfect mania prevailed for squandering capital in new concern. In fact, the speculators never looked forward to obtaining their returns from the produce of their tea cultivation. Everyone looked forward to becoming suddenly and immensely rich by getting a piece of land, planting it out with tea, and then selling it for vastly greater sum than he had expended on it. Inevitably, there was a mad race for opening new gardens and consequently recruitment of labour had to be made in a very extended scale.

In the days of such a boom in tea industry, the contractors could not keep pace with their short supply of labour. Moreover, there was a pressing competition in the field of recruitment of labour in India. A considerable number of the Indian labouring Class of a better quality was also being recruited by contractors to supply the requisitions of the British, French and Danish colonies and for


19. Ibid.
which they received a good sum. Demands for labour also came from various parts of India in the coal, jute, coffee and other allied industries, which had also developed in the meantime. Consequently, not the quality but quantity of labour became the recruiters’ only objective as they could earn more money only if they could supply more labourers. Thus, under the circumstances, not only the quality of the labourers deteriorated, but also the cost of labour rose abnormally. It is stated in the annual tea report of the Jorehaut Tea Company for the year 1866 that with the increased demand for labour the cost of acquiring labour rose by that time to a very high degree. During 1860 to 1865 the Company recruited 1780 adults for an outlay of £9662 i.e. an average of Rs.55/- per head. That head-money, which was previously only Rs.5/- per individual; then rose to Rs.16/- owing to competitive demand of labour for colonies. As such, the cost of labour, fit or unfit to work, as it appears from official source shot up from Rs.50/- to Rs.60/- and towards the close of 1865 even reached up to Rs.70/- per head. By the first part of 1866,

* Head-money was a bonus paid to the recruiters for each labourer they supplied.
23. B.G.P.E., December 1865, No. 11.
as the Commissioner of Assam reports 'The cost of importing coolies into Assam amounts now to something like hundred rupees a head'. A vast sum was, naturally, expended by the hasty speculators for labour. The planters also had to sustain huge losses for large labour mortality. It caused no less than three hundred deaths per thousand persons, details of which will be given in the later chapters.

A crash, therefore, came in tea industry in 1866 and continued up to 1868. During the period, many tea gardens were closed and those that could stick also underwent a severe economy in expenditure. The harrowing accounts of tea collapse became a daily feature of Indian Press during the period of depression. It is stated that pay was grievously in arrears and even many employers had no means of livelihood. Many managed to get out of the province and a large number who could not afford to come back, practically starved and received poor meals from the charity of hotel keepers. The employers were in position worse than that of the labourers. Many employers practically set the labourers free from their contract on account of arrears. But such an adverse situation became a favourable time for Public Works Department and other allied projects to employ the tea labourers,

who were so discharged. 'Now is the time for public works
department' writes Hindoo Patriot of 7 February, 1867*. ... to open out the old Rajas road and tempt labour into the
province by natural means'. Obviously, there could be no
problem with the labourers discharged in the province during
the trade depression as they could procure sufficient employment elsewhere. But further recruitment in large numbers
from outside the state was, more or less, discontinued. This
also adversely affected the fortunes of the labour contract-
ors and recruiters, who previously could earn a lot out of
the supply of labour. A situation of this nature could not
but create ground for the incorporation of further devices
in the statute to cope with the need, although some new
measures under Act VI had already been adopted in 1865 to
improve the condition of labourers.

The Government and the persons interested in tea
industry were seriously thinking as to how the industry could
be saved from such a depression. Financial condition of the
Tea Companies deteriorated to such an extent that it was
hardly possible for them to employ costly labourers. Many,
of whom the Governor-General of India Sir John Lawrence (1864-
1869) was prominent, were of opinion that the system of
recruitment was faulty and financial position of many

27. Ibid.
Companies would not have been so worse if they had not to incur extra expenses for such a high cost of labour and also subsequent losses sustained by large labour mortality. Others severely criticised, prominent of whom was Buckland, the Commissioner of Dacca Division, that Government interference by imposing unnecessary restriction in the procedure of recruitment and importation of labour could not at all check the evils in recruitment. In his letter of 21 November, 1865, Buckland denounced recruiting regulations as a stigma on Government. He remarked.

"If it is supposed that tens or hundreds of men could be brought away for hundreds of miles from their homes into Calcutta, which deems itself an enlightened and civilised capital, by a system of fraud and delusion or of violence, let natives go and come as they please subject to the ordinary law".

Although, Buckland wanted to procure cheap labour without much Government interference and to regulate employment by ordinary law of demand and supply, under the present position of labour and the evils that arose, such a sweeping measure was impracticable. This would have relapsed the situation that arose during the days of unregulated recruitment, because need and greed of recruiters reached to such

29. Ibid.

30. Ibid. Also A.S. Vol. No. 34 of 1867, No. 70, Hookinson to Govt. of Bengal, 21 March, 1867.

31. Ibid.
a height that nothing was considered immoral or impossible by them for money. And a sudden repeal of all laws would have created far worse a situation. But a most sensible opinion on the subject, that came from the official and non-official sources, was to be found in the suggestions of Morice, an experienced planter, which appeared in the columns of Friend of India on 21 March, 1867. Morice wanted a radical change in the system of recruitment to save the industry from such a ruin. He stated that as the depression in tea industry had already reduced the volume of recruitment of labour and any active demand for labour practically ceased, the time was favourable for a change in the system of recruitment. He suggested that to derive suitable labourers, recruiting should be confined only to the districts inhabited by aboriginal tribes, and to avoid mortality the recruitment should not be done from February to April as during that period labourers generally die of cholera in large numbers. He further wanted that the planters should themselves recruit or supervise the unscrupulous recruiters and only the doctor and not the Magistrate should pass the recruits. Had the suggestions of this nature been adopted by the Government of Bengal, probably, much of the complicated issues would have been avoided. But in practice, the Government of Bengal, possibly for the official prejudice,

could not admit of the faults and shortcomings of the provisions and was determined to give a trial to the measures already adopted and suggestion of Morice, therefore, had no effect on the Government's labour policy.

**EVILS OF REGULATED RECRUITMENT.**

The Government of Bengal, however, expected that with the enforcement of the Act III (B.C) of 1863 and Act VI of 1865 the recruiting business would be fully under official control and the malpractices would die a natural death. Inspite of fair intention of the Government, some new malpractices were reported along with the cases of evasion of laws both by the recruiters and the employers. One of such malpractices was the misuse of the recruiter's badge. This will be revealed from the court proceedings of a case, in which the Queen was the plaintiff and defendants were a few contractors and recruiters. The latter confessed in the court that they had enticed away the immigrants showing them their chan-rass (printed badge) and telling the labourers that they (recruiters) were sent by Sarkar (Government) to procure as many labourers as they could. This badge was, usually, shown to the ignorant labourers to convince them of the fact that they were working for the Government and to whom it was shown had, thus, left with little chance to avoid the trap of recruiters.

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33. B.G.P.E., December, 1868, Nos. 33-35.
Dalton, Commissioner of Chotanagpur, in his letter of 7 December, 1868, to the Government of Bengal, also referred to this and expressed a similar sentiment that the labourers were practically deluded into the belief that they were recruited on Government account and in many cases they had less opportunity to refuse the offer for fear of subsequent harassment. And with the help of similar other ways the labourers were brought to Assam. Further, occasions were there when the weavers, goldsmiths and even the school-going children were also sent to Assam as labour being deluded by the professional recruiters.

Another serious evasion of law was that in several cases the labourers were not at all registered as per provision of the act. This was confirmed in the court case above referred to. On examination of the defendants, C.W. Hawes, E.A.C, in whose court the case was tried, found that Burnt, a planter, directed the recruiter to take all the labourers straight away to Calcutta without registering them at the district of recruitment. This was illegal. While giving judgment of the case the E.A.C. admitted that:

"The punishments I have inflicted are......severe, but not so worse that the case demands. Large gangs of this

34. Ibid.
35. Ibid. Nos.27-32. Also A.S.Vol.34 of 1867, No. 128, Hopkinson to Bengal Government, 6 May, 1867.
ignorant coolies are being taken away without registration, and I have not the slightest doubt but that the fraud and misrepresentation is used and is admitted to have been used by defendants. I think it is absolutely necessary that an example should be made of the defendants in this case.

The Commissioner of Assam also added in his letter in May 1867, that the consent of the labourers was not obtained to their contracts for service in Assam in majority cases. The labourer, when he discovered the deceit that had been practised upon him, thought that he had a right to avoid it. Moreover, another defect in the system of recruitment was that all the contracts were made outside Assam. The employers and labourers never came face to face together until they met in Assam. As a matter of fact, the chief employers of the imported labourers in Assam were the great English Tea Companies, who employed labourers through their managers in Assam; and the latter, again, ordered for labourers through agents in Calcutta. It is but natural, the qualities brought under such a system of recruitment were not up to the mark.

The Protector of Labourers, Upper Assam, while writing to the Commissioner of Assam in March 1867, also stated that labourers supplied were not only sickly and capable of rendering little service but in some cases even quite unfit for work.

37. A.S. Vol. 34 of 1867, No. 128, Hookinson to the Government of Bengal, 6 May, 1867.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
EFFORTS TO REMOVE FRAUDULENT RECRUITMENT.

To remove these anomalies, the Commissioner, in his letter of 6 May, 1867, suggested to the Government of Bengal that all the contracts were to be executed in Assam. There is reason to appreciate the sentiment of the Commissioner, but it was impracticable due to the reason that if after coming from a distance of thousand miles if they failed to get selection of employers and to execute contracts in Assam the question remained as to how they would bear the expenses of their return journey. Further, the Commissioner believed that the private labour depots were the breeding places of cholera and as such he suggested that the Government must take the management of the private labour depots into their own hands and receive the labourers from the recruiters and despatch them to the planters through their own officers only. However, the above view of the Commissioner with regard to the abolition of private depots and replacement of these by Government controlled depots seems to be reasonable as in that case a check would have been provided under Government.

Meanwhile, the Government of Bengal was compelled, as will be seen later, to appoint a Labour Enquiry Commission during November 1867 to suggest remedies to save the tea industry from depression. One of the primary objects of the

40. Ibid.
41. B.G.P.E. February, 1867, No.22, Eden to Secretary Government of Bengal, 21 February, 1867.
Commission was to consider the system of recruiting and working of the measures adopted since 1863 as they affected both the labourers and employers of labour; how far provisions of act had tendency to increase the cost of labour and how far increased cost of labour was the result of competition and not of the provisions of the act.

The said Commission submitted its report to the Government of Bengal towards the close of 1868 and for the improvement of the recruitment system they did not alter the idea of initial registration and suggested that the labourers collected by the recruiters, as usual, were to be registered by a registering officer in the district in which they would be recruited. The recruits would then be conveyed to a central depot, which all contractors were to be compelled to use. The above central depot, being an innovation, was to be established somewhere outside Calcutta.

The Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal, in his letter of 28 December, 1868, opposed these measures on the ground that the existing system of private depots would be sufficient to serve the purpose. The reason, assigned by the Government of Bengal against the establishment of a central depot outside Calcutta, was that the agents of Tea Companies

42. Ibid.

43. B.C.P.File No.303 of 1869-1873. No.5999, Eden to Secretary Government of Bengal, 28 December, 1868.

44. Ibid.
in Calcutta would face much inconveniences in the supervision and selection of their labourers, and at the same time the local Government would also be unable to check crime, deluding and other evils if they were massed to one depot outside Calcutta. As a matter of economy also, the Government wanted that the existing depots should be retained. Economy in money was considered to be more valuable by the Lieutenant-Governor than any attempt to reduce fraud and mischief by expending a considerable amount for the cause of labourers.

It is needless to criticise other shortcomings.

The Government of India without even examining the evils, finally, approved the recommendations of the Government of Bengal and asked to introduce a Bill embodying the measures, which the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal had already approved. Thus, came the Act II of 1870 and the following provisions were incorporated therein.

(1) Garden Sirdars were permitted to recruit labour unto twenty for any particular garden with the help of a license similar to that of the contractors. They were also allowed to recruit more than twenty labourers subject to the same rules applicable to other agencies.

(2) No person excepting bonafide licence holder was to be engaged for the purpose and evasion was to be punished by fine or imprisonment for three months.

(3) Contractors were to keep their private depots as usual.

45. B.G.P.File No. 303 of 1869-73, No.3999, Eden to Secretary Government of India, 28 December, 1865.

46. The Calcutta Gazette, 23 March, 1870, P.587.
(4) In case of parties of labourers consisting of twenty heads they might proceed to the tea districts without coming under the provisions of the above act, provided they did so without the intervention of a recruiter, contractor or garden Sirdar.

These measures, excepting the first, were, more or less, the replica of the previous system. What more improvement could be expected in future from such measures, which in the past years had already proved faulty. The introduction of the agency of garden Sirdars was the only innovation in the above act which was, of course, likely to bring cheaper and better labour in the near future.

INCREASED DEMAND FOR LABOUR ON EXPANSION OF TEA INDUSTRY.

Since 1869 the affairs of the Tea Companies gradually changed and took a favourable turn. It was found that properly managed gardens could run at a satisfactory profit. Many of the mushroom Companies of 1860-65 were bought for small prices after the great crash and began to run well under careful managements. Gradually the area under cultivation and the outturn had alike increased, the cost of production and the price, obtained, had steadily diminished. Thus, at the beginning of the incorporation of the new measures for better recruitment the condition of tea industry took favourable turn under careful managements with cautious


48. A.S. Vol. No. 42 of 1870-71, No.2667, Hopkinson to Secretary, Govt. of Bengal, 3 May, 1871.
and calculated expenditures. This had its natural effect on the recruitment of labourers. The following table, prepared from labour returns of corresponding years, will indicate that there was a steady increase in the recruitment since the Act II of 1870 came into force.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number recruited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>2,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>9,342</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1872</td>
<td>14,411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>25,811</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Possibly one main reason for the gradual increase in recruitment was the famine of 1868-69 that affected Orissa, the whole of Rajputana, part of the North-Western Provinces including other regions. As long as a family was thriving and doing well in its native village, the members of it certainly never thought of immigrating to the tea districts knowing their ultimate consequences. It was when they were starving for want of food and when scanty living for a long time had done its work, that professional recruiters found their offers acceptable. Inevitably, the sources of recruitment of labour were found in many places of distressed areas and the network of professional contractors was extended to places like North-Western Provinces, Madras and similar other famine-affected places.

49. Ibid.
51. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 3 September, 1901.
As a matter of fact, actual recruitment in the province during the period would be much higher if employment that was made within the province be counted. Considerable number of labourers were also recruited even within the province during that period from amongst the local labourers on expiry of their original contracts. These time-expired labourers had to be re-engaged for the same of period 3 years subject to all provisions of Act II of 1870. It appears from a letter of 3 May, 1871, of the Commissioner that as many as 13,700 persons were recruited in the 260 tea gardens of the province in 1870. This included both time-expired labourers and local Assamese labourers. The latter were generally engaged for one year under the ordinary law of labour (Act IX of 1859). The reason how it was possible to employ a good number of local Assamese labourers, although not explained in the official records, is not very difficult to trace. It might be due to enhancement of revenue and a state of scarcity in food grains that prevailed in Assam during that period. Nevertheless, this new phase of recruitment within the province should not be confused with the fact that any active

52. A.S.Vol. No. 42 of 1870-71, No.2665, Hopkinson to Secretary Govt. of Bengal, 3 May, 1871.

* Under this Act a local contract could be entered into for a period of one year outside the special Plantation labour law. The employers had only minimum obligations to do under this law and, therefore, it was advantageous to them.

53. B.G.P.File No.123 of 1870-72, No.8727, Hopkinson to Secretary Govt. of Bengal, 13 July, 1872.
demand for imported labourers ceased. In fact, due to gradual industrial expansion in the province after 1870 the demand for imported labour had increased rapidly in the tea growing districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur.

IMPROPER WORKING OF THE SYSTEM OF RECRUITMENT.

The most significant innovation in the measures, suggested in 1870 for better recruitment, was the agency of garden Sirdars. It appears from the letter of the Commissioner of 3 May, 1872, based on the reports of his District Officers, addressed to the Government of Bengal, that the agency was not advantageously employed by the employers in general even within the two years of its enforcement. Even in the districts of Sibsagar and Lakhimpur where imported labourers were largely recruited, the agency was not employed properly. While Major Campbell, D.C. Sibsagar, was asked by the Commissioner to furnish his opinion as to the suitability of the agency of garden sirdar, the former, in his letter of 13 March, 1872, expressed inability to offer any opinion as the agency was not largely employed. One main reason for not taking the advantage of recruiting through the garden sirdars might be the availability of local labourers. Inspite of this, Campbell referred to the

54. Ibid.

55. A.S. Vol. No. 46 of 1872, No. 45, Hopkinson to Secretary Govt. of Bengal, 3 May, 1872.

56. Ibid.
common notion of the employers on the system. To quote his own language 'I have heard opinions......some sirdars obtain a better class of coolies than the ordinary contractors.'

The Commissioner had, however, doubts as to the proper working of the system. Reason, assigned by him for such a sentiment, was that the employers had to take a great risk in sending down sirdars with a large sum to procure labour. He might not return and in that case the employers would incur loss of a considerable amount and, moreover, they would be deprived of the services of an experienced sirdar, whom they maintained for a pretty long time. Although, no case of such a nature appears to have even been reported by any District Officer before, there is reason to believe that the Commissioner proved his far-sightedness, as will be seen later, in anticipating such an evil. Since the agency was not fully employed in the recruitment it was not possible for the Government to form any idea with regard to the suitability of the agency.

Some improvements, however, seem to have been made in the recruits of professional recruiters. Positive fraud and coercion previously found in their recruitment were also to some extent diminished. But there is reason to believe that dishonesty in the recruitment and delusion could not be removed by the Government measures altogether. Deputy Commissioner

57. Ibid.
of Sibsagar, in his letter of 14 November, 1870, brought to the notice of the Commissioner that in a batch of recruits a considerable number of women were found suffering from syphilis. Further, in several cases he found some of the women recruited by the contractors were prostitutes. Instances were also not rare when the contractors supplied even blind women and sixty years aged man as labourer to the plantations. This might have been the effect of poverty and scarcity of food grains in the recruiting districts. Although, these were the worst samples of their recruits, it is really strange as to how such qualities were allowed by the registering and medical officers before shipment. Nevertheless, their ultimate detection in the plantation shows that contractors and recruiters just to earn head-money somehow might have arranged shipment direct without presenting the labourers to the medical and registering officers at all. Naturally, it is difficult to agree wholly with the remark of the


* In this connection the view of Lieutenant Boyd, Assistant Commissioner, Mangaldai, is worth mentioning "I have no hesitation in saying that this system is preferable to that of recruiting through licensed contractors in so far as it offers greater facilities for obtaining a more willing and healthy class of labourers. I doubt very much whether any garden Sirdar wants to incur the risk of dismissal from his employers service by recruiting such poor specimens of humanity as are not unfrequently enlisted by licensed contractors" (vide A.S.Vol. No. 46 of 1872, No. 45, 3 May, 1872).
Commissioner, which he made in his letter of 6 June, 1872, that it was mainly due to the lack of care on the part of the registering officers. Without much difficulty it was possible for the recruiters to induce large number of labourers under delusion from districts of Arrah, Gazipur and Lucknow. The labourers from these areas, however, were not preferred by the employers because the latter said that they were susceptible to disease.

Evidently, the previous evils in the recruitment of contractors and recruiters, which the last measures wanted to put a stop to, virtually failed to subside. Inspite of checks provided, recruiters were not brought under sufficient control. The intention of the remedial measures was evaded by the removal of immigrants from the district in which they were recruited without registration and execution of any contract.

TOWARDS FREE RECRUITMENT AND EMIGRATION.

On the basis of the evils that were brought to light and the suggestions that were previously made, Sir George Campbell, the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1871-74), wanted early in 1873 to make some amendment in the statute. But there was strong opinion amongst a section of influential

60. A.S.Vol. No. 46 of 1872, No. 436 Y, Hopkinson to Secretary, Government of Bengal, 6 June, 1872.

61. B.G.P.No. 648 of 1866-73, No. 411, M/S. Begg Dunlop to Government of Bengal, 11 May, 1872, also M/S. Schoene Kilburn to C. Bernard, 29 May, 1872.
officials, to which the Hindoo Patriot of 14 April, 1873, alluded that no further change in the existing measures was necessary so soon. It is difficult to understand as to why such a change was opposed where question of life and liberty was involved. As a matter of fact, legislation involving human interest should always be tentative and subject to revision to cope with the realities of situation; and to ignore this truth due to official prejudice means to welcome a worse situation than already experienced. Sir George Campbell in deciding to change the measures inspite of undercurrent opposition proved his far-sightedness and real desire to protect the interests of the employers and employed.

The Government of Bengal under Campbell wanted to facilitate 'free recruitment' without interference of any law. Free recruitment, intended to induce labourers to immigrate, furnishing them with the means of doing so, to be carried on by or on behalf of employers without any supervision and control on the part of the Government officer. Campbell also desired to encourage "free emigration" which meant spontaneous and unsolicited immigration of the Indian labourers from various parts of India to the labour districts of Assam. If this was encouraged, both recruitment and immigration would be easier according to Campbell.

The Act VII of 1873 eventually established 'free recruitment and emigration'. Free recruitment was subjected to the restrictions that such immigrants could only enter into contracts under the ordinary law and no contract to labour for more than one year was binding upon them. A native of India who had gone to the labour districts without being under any engagement was free to contract under the ordinary law. On the other hand 'free emigrants' could enter into contracts to labour for a term upto one year in the recruiting districts outside the plantation act. The above act also made provision that recruitment under licensed contractors and recruiters was to be continued as usual. Further, agency of garden Sirdar, with less restrictions and obligations, was also allowed to continue. Another important change in the above law enabled the time-expired labourers to enter into a contract without bringing themselves under labour law. And lastly, the use of recruiting badges by contractors was forbidden to avoid malice.

THE RECRUITING AGENCIES; THEIR ACTIVITIES.

Recruitment under the provisions of the Act VII of 1873 started from January 1874 and continued up to the end of 1881. During the period of eight years a large number of

* See foot note Ante P-7§
64. B.G.P.No.303 of 1869-73, 25 August, 1873.
TABLE NO. I
(Showing recruitment made during) 1874-1881

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruitment Made</th>
<th>1874</th>
<th>1875</th>
<th>1876</th>
<th>1877</th>
<th>1878</th>
<th>1879</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1881</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under Act VII of 1873</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By garden sirdars</td>
<td>19394</td>
<td>21253</td>
<td>12309</td>
<td>14382</td>
<td>19972</td>
<td>11161</td>
<td>7414</td>
<td>6630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By contractors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7506</td>
<td>8286</td>
<td>7390</td>
<td>4458</td>
<td>3381</td>
<td>5543</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non Act free Labourers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adults</td>
<td>2894</td>
<td>4374</td>
<td>7562</td>
<td>3095</td>
<td>4827</td>
<td>2667</td>
<td>2046</td>
<td>2375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td></td>
<td>2746</td>
<td>4349</td>
<td>4760</td>
<td>8299</td>
<td>4541</td>
<td>2229</td>
<td>1981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infants</td>
<td></td>
<td>1278</td>
<td>2559</td>
<td>1374</td>
<td>2573</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>843</td>
<td>587</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22288</td>
<td>29651</td>
<td>34283</td>
<td>31897</td>
<td>43061</td>
<td>24712</td>
<td>15913</td>
<td>17116</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The table is compiled on the basis of Assam Immigration Report for the years 1874-1881.*
labourers were imported and employed in the province. The table No. I will exhibit the extent to which two agencies of recruitment and the scheme of 'free recruitment and emigration' were successful during the period under review. These agencies were created with a view to supply better recruits in the tea gardens of Assam. Before a critical review of the achievements of these agencies, it is necessary to note that there were many other important factors that not only facilitated but also at times retarded the flow of smooth recruitment outside the province of Assam. And unless these are explained, it will be difficult to assess correctly the proper workings of said agencies. By 1874, tea industry no longer remained a losing concern as it had been a few years ago. Further, a great scarcity prevailed all over Northern India and as such, it is reasonable to think, a considerable number of immigrants voluntarily came to Assam in search of employment. The gradual increase in recruitment from 1875 to 1878, with little exception in 1877, was greatly facilitated by the great famine of 1876-77 that broke out in Madras, Bombay and later in North-West Provinces, Oudh and Punjab. Scarcity in Bombay was so great in 1877 that even a considerable number of poor people

67. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 3 September, 1901.

* And as such decrease in recruitment as shown in the Table No. I might be due to wrong submission of labour returns. Occasions were there in the past years when labour returns were found incorrect (A.S.Vol.No.42 of 1870-71, No. 2666, 3 May, 1871).
(about 50% of total recruitment in Bombay) were compelled to immigrate into Assam. Of the women, who also accompanied them, 37.50% was perished. Driven by hunger (about 47%) came even from Madras and about 46.95% of them died enroute. The history of large immigration during 1874-78 is the history of hunger and delusion as will be seen later.

On the other hand, during 1879-1880 the gradual decline in the number of immigration had some connection with the cultivation of tea. A mania prevailed among the speculators in 1878 to bring more lands under their estates and un-planted area increased abnormally. Such a state of affair had brought depression and crash in 1866 and in 1879 the history repeated itself when a crash came again. The employers reduced their number of recruitment. Moreover, good harvest in the recruiting districts also made the labourers reluctant to immigrate. With the revival of prosperity in the tea estates, the recruitment gradually increased after 1880. Thus, increase and decrease in recruitment of labour varied due to multiple factors. It is to be remembered that from 1874 to 1878 natural calamities favoured abnormal influx of labour and from 1879 to 1880 the industry

68. Assam Immigration Report, 1877, Para 3.
69. Ibid.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage of recruitment among</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sirdars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1878</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>72.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>71.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1881</td>
<td>..</td>
<td>54.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
for its adverse financial position could not afford keeping
more labourers. The achievements of the recruiting agencies
are to be judged in the light of the above factors.

One of the intentions of the Act VII of 1873 was to
encourage recruitment by garden sirdars and tacitly to dis-
courage recruitment by professional recruiters. It will
appear from table No. I that the majority of the total rec­
ruitment was made through the agency of sirdars. Of the
act labourers imported since 1875 (about 108,430 persons),
almost exactly two thirds (or 71,868 persons) were recruited
by garden sirdars and the remaining one third (or 36,562
persons) by contractors. And as such, it may appear that the
agency of garden sirdar was successful, as expected by the
framers of the act. But from the table No. II it will appear
that the object of the Act VII of 1873, in fact, was not
fulfilled in respect of recruitment by garden sirdars.
Although at the initial stage it was a grand success, since
1879 there was a gradual fall in the recruitment by sirdars.
Similarly, intention of the framers of law was also frust­
rated in respect of professional recruiters. The object of
the law was achieved only upto 1878 and after that it was
a failure. The law practically failed to discourage profe­
ssional recruiters. The decline of garden sirdar's agency

72. Administrative Report of Assam, 1879-80, Also Hindoo
Patriot, Editorial, 28 February, 1881, p.103.
73. Assam Immigration Report, 1874, P-1.
### TABLE NO. III.

(Compiled on the basis of Assam Immigration Report of the corresponding year)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Districts</th>
<th>Through the garden Sirdars</th>
<th>Through the Contractors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kamrup</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Darrang</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Nowgong</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Sylhet</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>32.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Sibsagar</td>
<td>52.7</td>
<td>47.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Cachar.</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Lakhimpur</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>56.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
since 1879 might be due to depression in tea as the employers at the hours of dire financial crisis, as will be seen later, did not like to shoulder the risk of sending sirdars with a considerable sum to procure labour. This paved the way to the success of professional recruiters, as the employers considered it safe to procure labour through contractors without any risk. This was how the decrease in recruitment through the agency of Sirdars was replaced by the increase in the professional recruits and in this respect the object of the law was totally frustrated.

Further, one main argument that the employers and the Government put forward behind encouraging recruitment through garden sirdars was the economy in expenditure. The table No. III, prepared on the basis of the Immigration Report for the year 1881 will throw some light in this regard. The last named three districts in the above table, being the remoter districts of Assam, depended to a considerable extent on the contractors and the first named four districts, being closer to Bengal, mainly imported labourers by garden sirdars. This shows that remoter districts could not afford to despatch garden sirdars. If it was a question of economy, why the remoter districts did not employ their sirdars for the purpose of procuring labour and also why

75. Ibid. Para 27.
knowing fully well the evils of professional agencies they encouraged the latter? This might be due to the fact that virtually there was no distinction between garden sirdars and professional recruiters as the employers practically failed to exert any influence upon their own sirdars when already despatched to procure labour. The sirdars ignored their employers entirely and decided, in some cases, to remain where they liked. They also sometimes disappeared altogether with the advances made to them or frittered the money away and then declared their inability to move until they got further supplies. Moreover, occasions were there when sirdars were tempted by the contractor's men to make over to them for a considerable amount the labourers recruited at their employer's expense, either filling up their places with worthless substitutes or declaring that the labourers absconded after taking the advances from the 76 Sirdars. They generally became mere recruiters with free licences who collected immigrants for the contractors, rather than for their employers, receiving a commission on every man they brought in. That is why even in the days of employers' utter financial ruin they had to depend upon the contractors knowing fully well of their deep-rooted malpractices. Under the circumstances, sending of sirdars was not only very risky but it was also a costly affair. And

76. Ibid.
77. Ibid. Para 7.
as such, economy in expenditure in the recruitment of labour through the agency of garden sirdars could not be effected as expected by the framers of the law.

Further, beyond the expectation of the law-makers sirdars were also degenerated and adopted the same practice which the professional contractors adopted in enlisting their recruits. Both of these two classes on arrival in the recruiting districts instituted themselves into the good grace of some influential villagers and tried to enlist their influence on their side and with their aid they held out a rosy picture of the tea gardens of Assam and induced poor and ignorant persons to come in. Sometimes they posed themselves as guides of pilgrims and induced men and women to proceed on pilgrimage. Sometimes, to find out missing members of a poor man's family they took some able-bodied among them to proceed with the former in search of them. They carefully instructed their "yeomen" to answer "Yes" to every question put to them and, thus, managed to pick off their "chattles". Such were the fraudulent practices which the last measures failed to check. An efficient machinery and a strong vigilance only could diminish such abuses.

In fact, there was a general complaint against the quality of the labourers supplied, no matter whether

78. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 12 December, 1881, p.579.
79. Ibid.
supplied by garden sirdars or contractors. When the famine
broke out in 1876-77, both the sirdars and professional con­
tractors started recruiting in a very delusive manner. The
Chief Commissioner of Assam in his Immigration Report for
the year 1879 clearly admitted that the labourers supplied
by these two agencies were of very bad quality. Specially,
the sirdars created a terror in the recruiting districts, and
ignorant poverty-striken wretches were enticed from their
homes under false promises. And such labourers were generally
found weak, incapable and unfit for any hard job. Malpracti­
ces were so deep-rooted in the recruiting districts that even
the Government of Madras strictly prohibited sirdars from
recruiting any more labourer in the Madras presidency during
famine. Insolite of prohibition when the recruiting business
continued secretly, the Government of Madras in a letter of
23 March, 1880, had drawn the attention of the Commissioner
of Assam and requested to take effective measure against the
80 sirdars.

Evidently, the expectations of the framers of the
Act VII of 1873 was not realised with regard to the agency of
contractors and also in respect of agency of garden sirdars.

Again, with a view to make agency of garden sirdar
a popular one the framers of the law wanted to remove most
restrictions previously imposed upon the sirdars. But, in

fact, the circumstances made smooth working of the said agency impossible. The law compelled them to present themselves at the Magistrate's court of the district where they proposed to work to get their licenses countersigned, a requirement which at once brought them to dubious relations with the Cutchery Aslahs (court officials). Their certificates were only allowed to run for six months. They were not permitted to travel in company with another sirdar, if the total number of their united bands of immigrants exceeded twenty. If they recruited more than twenty, the sirdars were required to take them to a contractor's depot. Thus, to all intents and purposes they were Contractor's recruiters. The local Magistrate in the recruiting district had done little to help and in some instances by refusing to countersign their certificates did much to hinder the work of even bonafide garden sirdars. The Sirdars were kept hanging about the courts while enquiries were made by the police in regard to their recruits while the Magistrate was absent from the station or engaged in other work. They had to face underlings to assist them in getting registration effected. They found smooth recruitment often impossible because of these delays and "hustling" and to keep together the immigrants they had collected with pains. Garden sirdars were,

81. Ibid.
82. Ibid.
thus, regarded with suspicion by the law, by the Magistrates of the recruiting districts and also by the employers. And as such, the agency of garden sirdars did not become a popular one.

FREE EMIGRATION, A PARTIAL SUCCESS.

Another innovation of the Act VII of 1873 was the "free recruitment and emigration". This was also not successful, although it is stated in the Immigration Report of 1879 that free labourers were much cheaper and more satisfactory to the employers than those procured by the garden Sirdars and contractors. It is evident from the table No. I that "free emigration" was not a successful one. Only in 1878, a large number of such immigrants came in the province and after that there was a gradual decline in accordance with the rise and fall of recruitment through contractors and garden Sirdars respectively. One main reason for such a decline was that the labourers from various parts of India

* Free immigrants, as shown in the table No. I, consisted partly of the dependants of those, who immigrated under act, and partly of persons, who came to labour without a contract. Most of the adults were of latter class though a few might have been aged relatives of the act labourers. Most of the children and infants were of the former class. On the basis of the statistics of the period under review it seems that large number of women were found in the recruits of Sirdars. In 1880, of the Sirdari labourers 42.8% was women while it was 39.8% in 1881. But of the contractors labourers it was only 36% in 1880 and 32.3% in 1881. The women labourers supplied by the contractors seldom had children with them, while those brought by the Sirdars more frequently came with families. Therefore, the number of free immigrants varied with the increase and decrease of act recruitment through the said two agencies.
had a natural dread of proceeding to a distant unknown country like Assam and that it was practically impossible for a labourer to transfer himself and his family without substantial financial assistance. Although, means of communication was much improved from the previous years, without financial aid to defray the expenses of immigration it was hardly possible for a poor labourer to immigrate. Moreover, under such a system, a private employer did not incur the risk of making advances to the free immigrants as he was not assured against the loss in the act. Naturally, "free emigration" scheme proved to be a partial success, and on the whole, there arose a dissatisfaction against the provisions under the Act VII of 1873.

LABOUR COMMISSION, 1880.

For the depression of tea that followed after 1878, the Indian Tea District Association of London launched an agitation early in 1880 for the revision of the Act as a remedy. One main point of their demand was the extension of contract period from three to five years just to compensate employers for their enhanced expenditure towards the cost of importation. Although it was after all an unilateral demand and detrimental to the interest of the labourers, the agitation in London practically made a ground for revision

83. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 7 March, 1881, P. 112.
of Law in the Government level. The Chief Commissioner of Assam in a circular of 17 May, 1880, directed his District Officers to report on the subject and some of them also expressed necessity of such a revision. But majority of the District Officers wanted such a revision with a view to checking the continued evils in recruitment. The planting community in Assam also was not satisfied with Act VII of 1873 which they believed was the cause of depression in tea. W.H. Aitchison of Daloo garden (in Cachar) in his letter of 17 September, 1880, addressed to the editor *Indian Agriculturist* remarked "Coolie act is a mistake and if I had my will I would throw it into the fire and make an end of it at once". This clearly indicates how deep was the grievance of the planting community. At a meeting of planters held at Chandpur (now in East Pakistan) on 6 September, 1880, they also expressed their grievances and suggested that recruitment by garden sirdars should be entirely unrestricted and in conjunction with London agitation they demanded enforcement of five years contract. No doubt, they advocated their own cause most selfishly wholly ignoring the interest of the labourers. Out of such a necessity the Government of Bengal appointed a Labour Commission on 13 December, 1880, to review

85. *Compilations of Circulars and General Orders of the Chief Commissioner of Assam (1874-84)* P.149.


87. Ibid, Para 3.
the whole question of immigration. The Commission, embodying its recommendations, submitted draft of a bill by the close of 1881 to which the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal gave an unqualified support.

The Commission reasonably observed that the existing law imposed unnecessary restrictions upon the Sirdars. But, in fact, instead of attempting to remove the restrictions, the Commission brought into play another new agency of recruitment namely the local agent. Thus, in total three agencies were to be employed in the recruitment. The powers and privileges of the three seem to be the same. But there was some check imposed upon the contractors' and his recruiter, less check upon garden Sirdar and still less check upon the local agent, though all of them were empowered to engage as many labourers as they could. It is surprising to note that according to the provisions of the draft bill the labourers engaged by a contractors' recruiters were to be subjected to two medical examinations whereas there would be no medical examination at all for the labourers engaged by the garden Sirdar. The local agent, who might be especially licensed to engage labourers on behalf of employers, would be subjected to privileges granted to the Sirdars. Further, the Commission observed that the existing law also did not afford sufficient encouragement to "free emigration" and the bill

88. Ibid.
89. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 12 December, 1881, P.579.
It is not understood as to how the Commission advocated the encouragement of "free emigration". The existence of a special law since 1863 and the introduction of the present bill afforded proof positive that immigration of labourers into Assam could not be left to the ordinary law of land. This also indicated that the situation of Assam was not favourable for "free emigration" and there was really necessity of special restrictive regulations. If so, the very meaning of "free emigration" was rather misleading. If situation of Assam was favourable for free immigration, the necessity of abolishing all special restrictive regulations arose. It is, therefore, confusing as to why the Commission suggested for encouraging free immigration and at the same time put restriction. The idea is as opposite as dark and light. There is reason, no doubt, that the so-called restrictions in the law would come to nothing. Firstly, there would be "free emigration", which means no restriction. Secondly, recruiting by contractors would be expensive and would, therefore, be not much resorted to. Thirdly, by engaging sirdars which, being less restricted, would be, naturally, more availed of. And lastly, by engaging local agents, with still less restrictions, which would gradually supersede all other agencies. These were the practical defects in the

90. Ibid.
suggested amendment of the Act VII of 1873.

Nevertheless, the bill with little alterations received the assent of the Governor-General on 5 January, 1882, and became Act I of 1882. Under this act, garden Sirdars could recruit any number of labourers, but it insisted on the local registration of recruits and execution of their contracts in the district of recruitment before a Government Officer. Moreover, the act permitted employment of local agents by employers to supervise the operations of garden Sirdars as well as to recruit it independently, if necessary, under a special licence. All connection between garden Sirdars and contractors' depots had been severed. Certainly, this was definitely an improvement. Under the new act a labourer might proceed to the labour districts as a free immigrant, and on arrival he might take work on an ordinary contract not under the act. Secondly, having gone to the labour districts as "free emigrant" he might on arrival enter into a contract under the act. Thirdly, he might go to the labour district as an immigrant recruited and registered under the act having executed a contract to labour before arrival in the labour districts. In the first case, he was in no way subjected to the act. In the second case, he was subjected only to such of its provisions as refer to the carrying out of the labour contract. And in the third case, he was completely under the act before the date of his recruitment until the expiration of his engagement. The act also extended the term of contract

to five years. The practical defects of the act in its bill stage have been elicited and with its subsequent enactment almost in toto it may be stated that the entire measure in respect of recruitment was an unilateral one. Nothing was incorporated in the act to protect the labourers from the fraud, delusion and coercion of the professional recruiters for which the object of the change in the labour law was sure to be frustrated.

INCREASE IN RECRUITMENT.

Under the provisions of the Act I of 1882 large number of labourers were imported and recruited in the province for long twenty years which is exhibited in the table No. IV. The increased (31.80%) importation in 1882 points to the continued prosperity of tea industry after the depression of 1879. An abnormal influx in 1884 might be due rather than to supply than to demand. High prices in recruiting district and consequent distress resulted in willingness to immigrate and the employers took the full advantage of it. There was a sudden fall in 1885. It is stated in the Government of India's resolution on the Assam Immigration Report of 1885 that the decrease was for want of funds on the part of the tea proprietors and over supply of labour.

92. E.I.B.P., July 1885, Nos 1-3.
in the previous year. Further, after 1885 there was a steady increase in importation and that continued unto 1889. Importation in 1890 decreased to 35.1$ less and this was the consequence of the reckless expenditure in the previous years which resulted in depression. Expenditure for the importation of labour had to be curtailed. However, the industry was saved from depression and with renewed vigor large extension was made which resulted in spectacular increase in the importation during 1891 and 1892. Immediately after, there was again fall in 1893. It might be due to the fact that the old gardens had nearly all the labourers they wanted. Kala-Azar was prevalent as an epidemic and death rate in 1892 rolled to 41.9$, which heavily taxed the financial position of the tea estates in 1893 and 1894, when importation was decreased to a greater extent. But the total importation and immigration ought to have increased in 1894 because the coal mines in Upper Assam along with the saw mills under the Assam Railway and Trading Company, which in the meantime developed, also began to import labourers. As a matter of fact, the importation was much larger than the figures shown in the table No. IV, which is based on the official records. The above figure did not include the immigrants who entered the

94. E.I.B.P., October, 1894, Nos. 89-92.
province each year for employment in the Public Works Department. A large number of importation was also made from 1893 for the construction of Assam Bengal Railway in Assam. No statistics were kept by the government for these casual labourers who usually came to the province for the working season only and then with the advent of rain used to return to their homes. This decreased (-8.17%) figure in the official record, as D.C. Cachar remarks in the Immigration Report of 1894, "was largely due to available emigrants of labouring classes being drawn off by contractors for the Assam Bengal Railway, the Sirdars and professional contractors for tea gardens being beaten off in the competition".

Naturally, due to increased recruitment for railway construction in Assam more labourers became essential in 1895 for tea. But the increase was 56.54% and such an increase might be due to some exceptional reasons. It is stated in the Immigration Report of 1895 that several gardens wanted to keep proportionately larger labour than was formerly the custom. A more comfortable and less laborious means of livelihood in the gardens than those that the labourers enjoyed in their

95. Ibid, November 1895, No. 5R Nos. 1-4.

* The labourers for Railway construction were employed by the P.W.D's Railway Branch. Railway branch of P.W.D. was separated only after 1906.

96. Ibid, Para 2.

own country was another reason assigned to in the said report for this increased volume of importation. It is difficult to agree, as will be seen later, to such an opinion in the absence of any positive evidence that life in the gardens, although with exception, was really comfortable and this could draw such a large number of immigrants. There is reason to think that an acute scarcity in the recruiting districts was responsible for such a great influx of poor people in the province to earn their livelihood. As a matter of fact, there was a great famine since 1896 to 1897 which only made it possible to draw such an influx during the period. But in spite of the emergence of a fresh demand for labour from Oil Refinery at Margharita, which was started in the meanwhile, importation during 1898 and 1899 decreased. This decrease was mainly due to the reaction consequent on the excessive importation of the three previous years, when advantage was taken of the cheapness of labour supply due to famine. Moreover, specially in the Surma Valley, these were bad years for tea, and managers were consequently compelled to restrict cultivation and import fewer labourers. And similarly, good harvest in 1898 also gave a less incentive to immigration. For the above reason it was difficult to induce labourers to immigrate in 1899.

98. The Hindoo Patriot, Editorial, 13 September, 1901. Also E.I.B.P., September 1899, File 5R Nos. 47-48

99. Ibid.
TABLE NO. V
(Compiled on the basis of Assam Immigration Report)
of the corresponding year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Area under Tea cultivation</th>
<th>Total Adult labour force (Annual mean)</th>
<th>Number of Adult per 100 Acres of Tea</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>178825</td>
<td>131405</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>189453</td>
<td>153739</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>196552</td>
<td>177922</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>197510</td>
<td>182962</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>203093</td>
<td>192076</td>
<td>94</td>
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<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>211095</td>
<td>203083</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>216676</td>
<td>219851</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>227249</td>
<td>246297</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>231038</td>
<td>250113</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>241283</td>
<td>263315</td>
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<td>1892</td>
<td>247192</td>
<td>263819</td>
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<td>1893</td>
<td>254126</td>
<td>302588</td>
<td>119</td>
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<td>1894</td>
<td>259769</td>
<td>310707</td>
<td>118</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>276014</td>
<td>334256</td>
<td>121</td>
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<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>291909</td>
<td>364450</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>310980</td>
<td>402208</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Depression of tea in the Surma Valley to some extent was recovered by the close of 1899 when the influence of famine had made itself felt and a great stimulus had been offered to recruiting. On the appearance of a famine, a large number of Sirdars were sent down. The increased importation in 1900, although not a marked one in comparison with the previous famine years, was the effect of that measure. But the decrease in 1901 was not due to return of prosperity in the recruiting districts like Central Provinces and hill tracts of Bengal. Depression in tea industry might have discouraged the importation of fresh labourer. The low prices obtained for tea in the preceding five years, for over production, had necessitated economy in the importation of labourers as well as in other direction. Thus, it will appear that after 1882 there arose some exceptional natural calamities which favoured importation and immigration in the province and a large extension of tea was made possible which is exhibited in the table No.V. It is difficult to assess how far this large importation and immigration was the achievement of the Act I of 1882 and how far it was the inevitable consequence of scarcity and famine in the recruiting districts.

FREE RECRUITMENT; ITS CONSEQUENCES.

It will appear from the table No. IV that under the

100. Assam Immigration Report, 1899, para 2.
101. Ibid.
Act I of 1882 as many as 217,871 persons were imported by garden sirdars and 241,481 persons by professional contractors. But the bulk of labourers i.e. about 491,213 persons were the non-act immigrants. The law intended that recruitment by contractors and sirdars should be under careful restrictions, and that "free emigration" should be encouraged. It will appear from the figures that "free emigration" was a success; but "free emigration" under Act VII of 1873 as has already been mentioned only partially succeeded for want of necessary financial assistance to the intending labourers to immigrate into Assam. What were the factors that did such a miracle? Did they all come voluntarily due to famine or for some other unknown reason? Was it really a natural influx as the framers of the law had expected?

It is surprising to note that not a single contractor's labour was brought into the Brahmaputra Valley during 1883. However, this gives a clue to the discovery of hidden mystery of free emigration. In fact, the contractors and even the bonafide garden sirdars took advantage of the term 'free emigrants'. All the labourers collected by them in the recruiting districts were imported nominally as free labourers into Assam and were put under local contract either at Dhubri or in the districts of destination. The contractors and sirdars all along kept themselves in the background and

102. Assam Immigration Report, 1883.
brought their recruits tactfully in Assam as free labourers. The contractors and sirdars found this method of bringing their recruits easier than to comply with the formalities of the law in respect of recruitment and registration in the district of origin. The avoidance of these restrictions of law made immigration both simpler and cheaper. At the same time the income of the contractors was also not affected. Thus, the above newly sprung up system under the name of 'free emigration' was not originally intended by the framers of the law. As a matter of fact, both the sirdars and contractors adopted this practice in most of the cases during the period under review. And as such the scheme of 'free emigration' even under the Act I of 1882 totally frustrated, although apparently it seemed to be successful.

On the other hand, the Act wanted to put both the agencies of sirdar and contractor under careful restriction. It was the expectation of the framers of law that agency of garden sirdars would be largely employed and naturally the malpractices would be comparatively less. For the above reason, the law put less restriction upon sirdars in comparison with the contractors. Inspite of this it is evident from the table No. IV that the agency of contractors flourished and the sirdars could not keep pace with it. It might be due to the

fact that although there was more restrictions, the contractors had a pecuniary interest in the business. But the sirdars, on the other hand, had no such personal interest in it and as such were reluctant to shoulder trouble of attending Cutcherry (Court) to countersign their certificates or to examine recruits by Magistrates. The idea that their counterpart was earning a lot for their own purse out of the same business discouraged them to take any trouble. It was less remunerative and more embarrassing to them and, thus, became unpopular. It is remarkable in this connection that owing to this reason sirdars avoided going to cutcherry and brought their recruits, as has already been stated, straightaway to Assam as free emigrants. Act I of 1882 was, thus, also frustrated in respect of the agencies of garden sirdars and contractors.

Further, the law also could not reduce the cost of labour as expected by the framers of the act. It appears from the Immigration Report of 1900 that average cost per labour under the agency of garden sirdar reached Rs. 75/- and under contractors it was Rs. 100/-. But, as has been mentioned, sirdars had less incentive in the business and their recruits were, therefore, much smaller in number. Naturally, the employers had to depend on the contractors though the rate was much higher. This inevitably taxed the purse of the employers. In fact, the cost of labour in the tea plantations would have

been much higher had the contractors and Sirdars strictly followed the formalities of the act. The contractors avoided the costly formalities of the act and made an economy in their incidental expenditure. Evidently, the contractors could supply labour at a rate not much higher than the previous years. Thus, while it was a gain to the contractors equally it was cheap to the employers.

In fact, labour supplying profession became a profitable business during the period under review and many people in the hope of lucrative income engaged themselves as contractors and recruiters.

**EVILS IN THE NATURE OF RECRUITMENT.**

Malpractices in recruitments considerably increased after 1882 for the engagement of unlicensed persons in the labour supplying profession. The Commissioner of Chotanagour writing, in August 1883, reported to the Government of Bengal that numerous complaints against the persons engaged in the recruiting business had been made to him even by European Missionaries and many others and he found it extremely difficult to trace out the offenders to punish with the *The cost of importation in the province had never been uniform because of competitive market. With a view to facilitate supply of labour at a moderate and uniform rate and taking over the various recruiting agencies and to form one organisation to supervise works of Garden Sirdars and also to supply additional labours that would be required from contractors, Tea District Labour Supply Association was formed in 1892 which was the origin of the Indian Tea Association of today.*
existing law. District Officers in Assam also recorded similar sentiments in their periodical reports. D.C.Goaldoara in his Immigration Report of 1883 clearly stated that due to serious enticement, abduction and kidnapping much domestic unhappiness and misery were caused in the recruiting districts. The Commissioner of Assam Valley Districts also endorsed these views in his yearly report. G.M.Barton, Secretary, Indian Tea Association, addressing a letter to the Government of Bengal, in October 1883, stated that minors, both boys and girls, in numerous cases had been enticed away from the protection of their parents and guardians and sent off to the gardens. Moreover, opportunities had been given to the married women and young girls to elope from their husbands and fathers without leaving any reasonable hope of their subsequent rescue. The nature of such cases occurred in between 1882-1893 is exhibited in the Appendix A. This tabulated instances were only those which were mentioned in the official and press reports during the period under review.

The Government of India was not disposed to make any amendment in the statute even after the five years of the enforcement of Act I of 1882. The Government of Bengal instead of admitting the abuses and defects of the act gave a new interpretation of the relevant section in 1884 which

108. Ibid.
tacitly meant that abuse would die a natural death in the long run and a careful watch would be sufficient. Even in the reports and resolutions, which were submitted from time to time to the Government of India on the working of the said Act, the Government of Bengal repeatedly reported that time had not come for any addition and alteration in the statute. Their rigid adherence to continue the same system of recruitment was an official obstinacy; and undoubtedly an evidence of lacking administrative farsightedness. Under the circumstances, it is not unreasonable to think that the Government of Bengal had the primary responsibility in bringing untold misery and discontent to a considerable section of Indian labouring class. Thus, the so-called "free emigration" during 1882-1893, was in fact, the saddest history of the human misery and degradation and undoubtedly one of the, hitherto, unknown and darkest chapters of the British rule in India.

PUBLIC AGITATION AND PROTECTIVE MEASURES.

The Bengalee, thus, writing in its editorial of 28 November, 1885, states "the coolie act must be repealed, for the sake of coolies of Assam and for good name of British Government". This was followed by a vehement protest both from the press and the public. During 1886-1887, an agitation was started in Bengal. Mass meetings were held at Faridpur, Shanga, Goalundo, Midnapur and several other places.

109. Ibid.
with a view to inducing Government to appoint a Commission to enquire into the condition of the labourers. Telegrams pitying the labourers degraded condition poured in the newspaper offices from all over India. The meetings were even followed in certain places by processions with enthusiastic political songs and marches with flags. This shows how the problem, which the Government of India ignored, took a political shape beyond their knowledge. The Hindoo Patriot on 20 December, 1886, termed it a question of national importance and wanted that the matter should be discussed in the National Congress in Calcutta. But the matter was neither included in the Calcutta agenda of the National Congress of 1886 nor was it discussed in the Committee. Surendra Nath Banerjee, leader of the progressive people of Bengal, however, made a representation to the Governor-General of India on 12 April, 1888, on behalf of the Indian Association. Though belatedly

110. Bengalee, News Item, 5 February, 1887, P.63.
111. Ibid, 22 January, 1887, P.42.

* Indian Association was founded by Sir Surendra Nath Banerjee, Ananda Mohon Bose and others in the year 1876. As the members of the British Indian Association (see P.130) which was founded in the year 1843 consisted mainly of persons of rank and position the organisation was found not suitable to cater to the needs of the
the Government of Bengal also realised their mistake. Sentiment of Sir Steuart Bayley, Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal (1887-1890), is available in the Bengal Government letter of 14 July, 1888. In his opinion some changes in the law were imperatively demanded and that the object of the law was entirely frustrated. The working of the "free emigration" was emphatically condemned by all the Government Officers in the recruiting districts. Mr. Tucker, a Special Officer of Police, was, therefore, deputed by the Government of Bengal during 1888 to 1890 to investigate into the causes. Tucker submitted his report on 26 March, 1890, which was a revelation of the abuses connected with the immigration. To quote Tucker's own language "free emigration at present, if properly looked at, is nothing but a sort of slave trade." This resulted in immediate appointment of R.N.W. Pritchard, Assistant Superintendent of Police, Midnapur, as the Special Officer on duty to travel up and down in the Bengal and Nagpur lines at unexpected times to detect fraud and kidnapping. Undoubtedly, such an appointment would help to diminish enticement. Tucker already proved his worth as a Detective Officer.

average people of India. To achieve this end Indian Association was formed which since then became the only organisation to look into the matters relating to India's Social, Political, Economical and other problems before the birth of Indian National Congress in 1885.

115. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
and it will be seen later that Pritchard too ably stepped into his shoes. But for an European Officer it was, of course, difficult to conceal his identity and also difficult to follow the language of the labourers. In view of this difficulty appointment of a trustworthy Indian Detective Officer would have been more suitable for the purpose.

It was four years after that the Government of India reluctantly introduced a bill in 1892 to amend the Act I of 1882 for preventing and remedying the abuses in the recruitment. The bill amended the Act I of 1882 in 1893 but there was nothing new in the measures introduced. Earl of Kimberley, Secretary of State for India, was surprised to see the measures adopted by the said amendment to check the evils of a very serious nature which were extremely inadequate. As a matter of fact, enticement and fraudulent activities in recruitment got only a temporary check due to strong vigilance on the part of the police and other Government Officials since the amendment of the act in 1893. But gradually these sprung up when vigilance was relaxed and police degenerated. Early in July 1894, Maharaja of Keonjhar protested against fraudulent activities of the unlicensed contractors in his state and he wanted an immediate withdrawal of further recruitment business atleast from his own state. The Government of Bengal had to comply with the request of the Maharaja. This shows the allegations

118. B.C.P.E., January 1895, Nos. 10-11.
119. B.C.P.E., July 1896, Nos. 11-12.
of Moharaja were not altogether baseless. It appears from a note dated, 21 January, 1895, from the personal diary of Pritchard that nearly every contractor and recruiter paid the police and railway staff sums of money regularly to make them overlook any abuse they might see connected with the immigration. Even the two Lieutenant-Governors of Bengal, Sir Stewart Bayley and Sir Charls Elliot, said to have agreed in the later times in a meeting in London held on 14 May, 1896, "that a systematic recourse to fraudulent recruiting and even to kidnapping became common... sufficiently common to be felt as a discredit to the administration". A.M. Bose, a member of the Viceregal Council, had drawn the attention of the Government of India, on 8 August, 1896, to the many cases reported in the Bankura Darpan and several other papers showing the gross evils resulting from the present system of recruiting.

Meanwhile, the Bengal Chamber of Commerce in their letter of 16 October, 1895, to the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal suggested for the appointment of a Labour Commission to consider labour situation of Bengal Coal Mines and Tea Industry in Assam. Among other things, one of the main objects of the proposed Commission, they said, was to find out ways to reduce the excessive cost of importation of labour to Assam.

120A. The Statesman, News Item, 2 July, 1896.
122. B.G.P.E., December, 1896, No. 42.
caused mainly by artificial barriers which the existing system of recruitment placed in the way of supply and also to find out remedies for the prevention or stoppage of offences and fraudulent recruitment and similar other abuses. Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal acceded to the representation of the Chamber of Commerce, and a Commission was, accordingly, appointed on 2 November, 1895, which submitted its report on 13 April, 1896. The report was a sad disclosure of fact which again affirmed the utter failure of law and administration in removing the evils in recruitment. The report brought to light that the difficulties arising in prosecuting the offenders were disappearance of the victims, the difficulty, delay and expense in getting witnesses from Assam and elsewhere along with the free expenditure of money to buy of evidences. It also revealed that the abuses of recruiting through the women arkatis being one of the main grievances of the labouring population. Kumar Dakshineswar Malia, a member of the Commission, observed that recruiters employed female arkatis who owing to their sex obtained easy access into good families and ultimately brought ruin there. According to the Commission recruitment was a sale of labourers. The recruiters hawk them round to the highest bidder. The Commission realised that making of labour contract in the

123. Ibid.
124. Ibid. Nos. 18-25.
125. Ibid. para 67.
recruiting district was wise and doing the same business by the free immigrants at Dhubri under the existing rule was faulty. The Commission specifically pointed out that once an ignorant villager, who had never before in the whole life of his existence heard of railways or steamers when arrived at Dhubri (in Assam) got utterly perplexed and so helpless in the hands of the men in-charge of him as unable to offer any protest to what might be suggested to him. The law was found defective as much as counting it no offence to remove a wife from her husband as an immigrant without his consent and in allowing a free trade in females over sixteen years of age. The Commission also learnt that illegal offices in Calcutta distributed printed recruiting license on payment and armed with these pieces of false papers many city loafers became recruiters and free recruiting appeared before the Commission a licensed abduction and a form of slave trade. Some of the peculiar cases that came to the notice of the Commission is exhibited in the Appendix B. The Commission observed that such a high cost of labour was due to presence of various middlemen and extermination of all of them would reduce the cost of labour. The Commission also greatly felt the inadequacy of vigilance to detect offences connected with the recruitment.

The findings of the Commission were really praiseworthy and on the basis of their recommendation Act VI of 1901 was eventually passed. The act attempted to bring unlicensed professional recruiters of any kind under complete official control. All recruitment were subjected to the...
provisions of the act. Labourers were required to be registered in their home district. All the restrictions imposed upon the sirdars were abolished. Severe restrictions were imposed upon professional contractors to discourage their agency altogether. It also made stringent measures to punish offenders.

Thus, the new Act was designed not only to minimise the cost of importing tea garden labour into Assam but also to provide necessary safeguards to protect them from fraudulent or oppressive recruitment. Although there is reason to believe that without proper supervision and vigilance malpractices would not diminish, and evils might also arise even in the recruitments through the sirdars as it was freed from all restrictions, the act was the first endeavour of the Government to provide some degree of protection to the labourers to save them from the evils of recruitment. Naturally, therefore, the measures had the promise of better recruitment which no previous acts could ensure.

126. Bengalee, Editorial, 7 February, 1900.