CHAPTER-V

AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND AGRESTIC SLAVERY

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AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND AGRESTIC SLAVERY

INTRODUCTION

The connection between agrarian-relationship and the origin and development of the hired labour market extends far beyond the formation of the agrarian proletariat. British colonisers often used methods of extra-economic coercion to bind the agricultural labourers. This played a tremendously important role in the emergence of a wage force in India which did not accompany any commodity production. Karl Marx rightly stated "These methods depend in part on brute force, for example, the colonial systems" (1). Supported by administrative machinery, the colonial settlers forced the labourers to work in plantations, in irrigation works, in public works, etc. A great variety of methods of extra-economic coercion was used in exploiting the labourers by European investors like the planters, the landlords, etc. M.H. Ely in his studies of Africa wrote thus: "... a complete history of this aspect of labour development would comprise slavery - direct statutory compulsion, pressure through the imposition of personal tax, the curtailment of native lands, assistance given by administrative officials to the efforts of private recruiters and the use of chiefs to recruit their people as labourers" (2). This explanation holds good for Indian circumstances also. In India, plantation owners always had encouraged recruit agents to recruit labourers (3). In the plantations of Assam, the system of indentured labourer was widely practised. Lala Lajapat Rai wrote on this occasion "Tea and coffee industries are in the hands of Europeans and have been the source of untold misery to the people of India for the reason that in the interest of European capital, the Government of India has been lending..."
itself to make special legislative provisions for the supply of indentured labourers for the estates in Assam" (4). When they found in the late 1850s that there was inefficient local labour to develop the tea gardens in Assam, the plantation owners turned to recruitment of labourer through indenture system (5).

In the late 19th and early 20th century, the appropriation of labour was not forced, but bond or slave labour (6). Karl Marx long ago, drew the attention to this feature when he wrote "... and if the plantation owners in America are capitalists not only in name, but also in fact, it is only because they exist as an anomaly of the world market based on free labour" (7). But whatever capital the European investor had invested was intended to serve only capitalist production of Great Britain and it never mattered if such a production was based on hired or forced labour. Besides, slavery played an essentially subordinated role during the colonial period. The slavery existed in India in many forms before, called by names such as "bitti", beggar, "carvee", "jeeta", etc. Earlier, local and petty tribal chiefs who controlled the land forced the peasant to work on their farms and carry out work for their community. When the colonial rule was established firmly, the plots of land on which the peasants had based their subsistence economy became the property of the British Masters, who became the sole proprietors of the soil. This radical change in land tenure relations greatly affected the peasant’s obligations towards land. Therefore, feudal forms of exploitation associated with the peasants' subsistence production became an important factor in the accumulation of capital and this was the main reason for the survival of the bond-forced labour even during colonial rule in India.
These changes also greatly influenced the nature of the services of the labourer towards his superior. Earlier the rent paid to the feudal master or landlord was mainly of a consumer nature and was very restricted and limited. After the colonial regime was established, the unrestricted pursuit for profit resulted in unlimited exploitation of labourers. A labourer was made to pay a number of taxes, besides contributing his labour at a meagre wage. For instance, the "Mohatarfa" tax levied on the cooly lines in Mysore plantations was not only oppressive but also exacting (8). In maidan parts also, though division of labour was not based on occupational skills, the ryot was made to pay graze tax, shop tax, house tax, loom tax, etc.

EMERGENCE OF A CASUAL LABOUR MARKET IN MYSORE

The colonial factor in the making of a rural proletariat from the middle of the 19th century represented a qualitatively new phase in the advent of capitalism in Mysore, because this phase involved the opening up of land for plantation enterprises and expansion of infrastructural works. Attested by intensification of commercial crop cultivation by peasantry and linking up of small scale production to the colonial trade helped in creating a structure of rural proletariat. The merchant capital came to dominate the household production on a large scale. This colonial extraction of surplus gave rise to a labour force whose composition and character were different and wide ranged. The economics of colonialism played a very crucial role here. The expansion of wealth in Britain necessitated its reinvestment and the opening up of Suez Canal brought about a revolution in finding markets. With the railways system and production of machinery for further manufacture
and the consequent economic impetus was used by the colonial system to cater to the demands of the expanding markets in colonies. The impact of this colonial economics was found an immediate outlet in princely Mysore in the form of opening up of the economy for plantations. But, throughout the 19th century this process of transformation through commercial cultivation was slow in bringing about an emergence of a new labour force of any great quantity. The dawn of 20th century thus witnessed a real impact reinforced by the world wars.

Even though this process did not bring about an uniform creation of labour force, the proliterianisation was conditioned by the mechanism that capital employed for control of labour and extraction of surplus which, in turn, depended upon the labour supply, availability of local capital and existing form of production organisation.

In Mysore, there was no large-scale capitalist production with marginally superior technical skill. Plantations was the only major enterprise consuming labour. Indigenous labourer was unwilling to work in Malnad areas initially. Besides, Malnad had sparse population due to malarial climate. This necessitated immigration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Volume</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1910-11</td>
<td>105-752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911-21</td>
<td>104-282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921-31</td>
<td>134-133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-41</td>
<td>168-201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-51</td>
<td>441-359</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessing the reasons for heavy migration census report of 1941 stated that the most important economic force operating in the state is the phenomenal rise in the capital expenditure that characterised the last decade and the terrific demand for labourer that it created. War and post-war years saw an unprecedented expansion of capital investment both private and public. A great deal of it was absorbed by industrial establishments largely concentrated in and around Bangalore. The remarkable rise in the industrial units is shown below: (8):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Number of Factories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1911-41</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-51</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>579</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Industries such as Hindustan Aeronautics and Indian Telephone Industries were the main intakers of labourers. Bhadravati Iron Works was expanded and Mahatma Gandhi Hydroelectric Works was opened.

Besides, as an important military training and supply base, Mysore state witnessed a lot of military activity in the first half of 1940s. During this period, public construction was mainly limited to buildings with military help. The maintenance of roads, railways and other transport works called for large expenditure during these years. After the war, there was a spurt in building activity everywhere. As the military demand for building materials became less, house construction leaped up. Work on the construction and renovation of irrigation tanks and urban water supply systems became greatly accelerated during 1941-51. With the
increasing importance attached by Government to "grow more food" activities and to urban sanitation, electric works and the Bhadra project at Lakkavalli absorbed enormous sums of Government money. Thus, capital investment, although in a restricted quantity, increased employment. The excess agricultural population was absorbed in these occupations. During slack seasons, agricultural labourers worked for wages in other pursuits such as factories, public works, etc.

EMERGENCE OF MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM IN MYSORE

The importance of migration in freeing agricultural labourers who, by custom were made bond slaves, cannot be exaggerated. The outstanding feature of migration in South India, in general, was the periodic or seasonal flow of labourers from the low income, poor villages to high income, irrigated tracts (9). In Mysore, the labour-intensive coffee plantation depended on labourer from Madras Presidency. A very small extent of local labour from the adjoining villages was also employed. They came to work on estates each day (11). But, labourer from beyond Mysore boundaries was conspicuous (12). The Committee on Plantation Labour in its enquiry found that "many of the canarese labourers from Mysore are small land holders, who seek to work to relieve the pressure on their heavily encumbered properties (13). But this was not wholly true, for most of the estate labourers were drawn from the landless agricultural working classes (14). This brought out the issue of peasant landlessness. Why did a peasant become an agricultural labourer and how?

When British laws made the settlement of Europeans legal, great many parts of good lands were immediately
occupied by these settlers. Nearly three-fourth of the Malnad was owned by European settlers in 1881 (15). Some 'favoured' persons even procured land upto 10,000 acres (16). This heavy expropriation of land from local people by planters prevented the local people from acquiring lands (17). Besides, western Mysore witnessed a heavy penetration of European capital into agriculture in the form of cultivation of cash crops (18). This also created an artificial scarcity for land for local people, who were made to seek work in the European plantations for their subsistence. Sometimes forcible alienation of lands in favour of Europeans also accelerated the process of dispossession of local people from their lands (19) because all the good lands were in the hands of European settlers.

Besides, the introduction of the monetary taxes such as shoptax, "mohatarfa", house tax, loom tax, graze tax, etc, which had gradually replaced the taxes in kind, destroyed the peasant's subsistence economy. This also forced him to enter into commodity-money relationships imposed by the colonial Government. This was a chief form of indirect, extra economic governmental coercion, which gradually disposessed the local peasant from his parcel of lands (20). The very issue of collecting tax in money was exacting, because in a traditional subsistence-oriented economy like that of Mysore, agriculture was the main stay to the people. But in course of time, the exaction of money in the name of taxes increased and peasant became increasingly indebted. In majority of cases, his lender was a wealthy land lord and peasant was indirectly coerced to work under him for wages to pay off his debts (21). When pressures of this type scaled high, peasants' migration to places of better income became anything but essential (22). Thus, he was left with two
options, one to produce commodities which fetched him better profits like his European counterpart, and the other to work in European or local lord owned parcel of land as a bond labourer.

The feudal and the capitalist methods of exploitation were closely combined together in the tracts of commercial agriculture. Here, the agricultural labourer was tied to subsistence economy since ages and colonial methods of exploitation of them were carried still further by extra economic coercion, with the help of capital, because these fertile tracts witnessed heavy investment of capital by European settlers.

The influx of cheap manual labour from Madras and Bombay Presidencies to Mysore, kept the cost of production low. Hence, commercial agriculture was highly profitable to investors and cash crop thrived well. The British masters deliberately tied a part of Mysore to its traditional past of subsistence oriented economy, which they knew was a 'colonial necessity'. The existence of predominant subsistence peasantry, prevented the uniform development of commodity-money relations. This also obstructed the emergence of wage labour. This was a main reason why the wages in maidan always as a rule remained lower than in Malnad where migrant labour was extensively employed.

Migration caused a large fluctuation of labour and required the involvement of wage labour in a considerable number. The local labour who hesitated to work in plantations earlier, began to seek employment in estates which was near to their homes. This led to the increase in the number of persons seeking employment in plantations.
Sometimes, it exceeded the required number. This brought down the wage scale. This was the cause for the considerable decrease in the number of migrants into Mysore during 1901-1921 (22a).

Another important feature of the migrants was the almost complete absence of skilled labour which greatly narrowed the development possibilities of the Mysorean economy. For an European employer, the employment of migrant labour was more profitable than the regular wage labour, because, a migrant labourer connected with subsistence farming, hired on a temporary basis by the employer was not yet a worker in the real sense of the word.

Migrants entailed heavy difficulties before they reached the place of work. Lacking in money and resources, the migrants had to earn their livelihood along the new environs of the plantations with an inclement and inhospitable climate. The migrant had to struggle for his existence in the estate without proper food, shelter and sanitary conditions. Besides, he had to undergo brutal exploitation under his master. As an illustration, a Mysore paper wrote about the highhandedness of coffee planters in Mysore in treating the labourers, thus "... coolies are shot down without reason; of course accidentally, like wild beasts" (23). The living standards of the labour did not ensure better living as the climate was Malarial, the mortality rate being very high (24). The labour enquiry committee exposed the pitiable conditions under which labourers were housed (25). A majority of them lived in single plots with walls of thin sheets or of grass or bamboo plastered over with mud (26) along with a family of 10-11 members. The investigations showed that nearly 70% of them
were under fed, 50 percent of the children were either forced by parents or employers to work on plantations at a very early age (27). Subsequently, poverty, squalor and ill-health claimed a heavy toll in these areas.

Thus, the migrant labourer soon found himself in debt. His main creditor was the "Kangany" or recruiting agent (28). He lent money to labourers without any security. This revealed the permanent bondage in which the peasant migrant found himself in relation to his agent. The "Kangany" was the immediate creditor for the labourers. "Kanganis" often made labourers depend upon them for sundry borrowings. At the time of annual settlement of wages, every labourer owed money to the "Kangany". For labourers the "Kangany" was 'essential' because without him, they could not obtain cash advances which was so essential to meet their expenses and sometimes their unforeseen expenses also. The very fact that all planters wanted to retain the "kanganis", itself revealed the vicious debt commitment of the capitalist exploitation. These weak ties of the labourer were reinforced by the ties of being in debt which became stronger gradually.

The system of migrant labour not only proved profitable to European planters, but to local planters as well, because for them, it was a source of cheap labour. Most of the "Wargadars", "Inamdars" and landlords in Malnad area began to employ migrant labour which was available in plenty.

Historically, bulk of the migrants to Mysore came from rural areas i.e., areas of low cash income (29). The local labour from maidan, found it profitable working in plantations because it offered them comparatively better wages (30). The migrant labour from Bombay Konkan and Madras Presidency had a better living in Mysore, where the cost of living was cheap (31).
CONTRACT LABOUR AND PLANTATION SLAVERY

When European investors started plantation industries in Mysore, they needed a large number of labourers to work on plantations and they went deep into the village in search of willing labourers to work in plantations. This necessitated crimping and enticing of some of the labourers working under local gowdas and landlords on a contract basis. The planters paid off the debts thus incurred by the labourer under a local landlord and brought him to Malnad. But this large scale enticing raised many eyebrows and gowdas and sowcars of Malnad complained to Chief Commissioner, Mr Bowring against European planters taking away their serfs, thereby crippling their traditional pursuit (35). In a way, establishment of plantations in Mysore contributed to the breakdown of the system of agrestic slavery and large-scale emancipation of serfs, but it resulted in bondage of a different kind (36), because of the transfer of labourers' debt from the hereditary landlord to the new planter, calling for a protective legislation against the breach of such contracts.

This breach of contract act was of great significance in the avenue of capitalist development in Malnad area. This Act legalised contract labour, while it was abolished in the India Act of 1843 where Law Courts had ceased to enforce any contract arising out of slavery. But, the breach of contract Act of 1859, gave vannotn power to police and magistrate to look into breaches of contract and punish the breacher. Some planters personally went to the villages and collected gangs of willing labour to work in their estates (37). But some planters relied on getting someone to recruit for them, thus a class of professional recruiters came into being (38). The labour being acute, the problem of supplying steady labour
force was a serious question. As planter often failed to get them, recruiting agents sprang up and later they became universal (39). They often advanced money to bring labour. These advances were debited to the labourers' account and were recovered during the period of their employment (40). Such kind of contract labour had always a preference over other labour since it lessened supervision and anxiety (41). A planter was forced to take all the labour what the contractor brought. Besides, the promise of residential accommodation for which the labour were induced with cash advances was most potent (42). This soon grew to be an 'unmitigated evil' (43). Sometimes, planter was to provide with food supplies also. But 'Kangany' as the professional recruiting agent was called in South India, disappeared from scene after dumping the labourers. This contract system became a necessary evil later and they got the epithet that 'these gentry are a curse to a planter' (44). Thus, a "Kangany" became the king-pin of plantation labour world (45), and an indispensable factor in the plantation affairs (46).

The most striking disadvantage of the "Kangany" system was the system of paying commissions (47). Generally, the commission ranged from 10-15% of the check-rool earnings of the labourers. The higher commission was given for increased attendance of the workers. Sometimes, a higher commission was given to a "Kangany" for bringing at least 80% of the workers he had agreed to. The commission received by the "Kangany" was an unearned income and was not only obnoxious on economic and moral principles but amounted to the cheating of the labourer out of his legitimate dues (48). Though the commission was not paid from the wages of the labourers, ultimately the amount of commission was debited under the general head 'labour'. The Act of 1929 put a stop to
advancing of large sums of money as pre-employment advances (49). The effect of the pre-employment advances upon plantation wage rate was remarkable. Once the advance has been accepted by a labourer, he had to work his way out of debt whatever the wage rate on estates (50). Both the Whitley Commission and Rege Committee on plantation labour did not attempt to study the effects of this advance system on wage structure at large.

The pre-employment advances were meant to bind the labourers to their owner permanently. "Kangany" advanced money only to secure a hold over the worker after his employment. In Madras Presidency, a deduction of 4 annas per week was made towards the recovery of advances (51). The Whitley Commission severely condemned the practice of giving advances because it bound him to serve an employer under hard conditions (52). But, it did not recommend any measures to prevent the system. This system was abolished only in 1929.

Compared with the general labour, contract labour worked for longer hours, while the general labour was paid directly by the employer and contract labour was paid through contractor. This resulted in the taking of commissions with regard to provision of housing, etc. Contract labourers were shown a step motherly attitude. The organisation of contract labour itself was on the ability and facility of the contractors to screw the maximum income out of the wages of the workers. The payment of commission to the contractors for his labourers' attendance had a squeezing effect on the workers. Giving way to competition among contractors and uncalled for interference in the labourers' life and in such restricted atmosphere, the labourers were prone to accept low rates and this ultimately reduced the labourers' overall wage
rate. Contract system was nothing but a vestige of feudalism in plantation sector. It encouraged servitude and chained the labour to the estate. The formal abolition of slavery Act V of 1843 made little difference. The horrors of plantation slavery, which was unique to Indian subcontinent was none the less staggering. In Mysore, even caste associations took up the question of agrestic slavery through contract seriously. Panchama, Holeya and Madiga caste associations demanded a repeal of the 1859 Act, as it made them slaves to capitalists. This form of recruitment led to ideological decommoditisation of the wage form itself. Labour was separated legally from the value it produced. In a sense, contract labour worked to pay off a debt rather than for a wage.

During later 1920s, the migration of labourers to Mysore decreased. The primary reason for this was slump in the coffee prices. The commercial agriculture in Mysore till the First World War was mainly export-oriented. The fluctuations of world prices directly affected the area under cash crops. This was a permanent and steady phenomena till 1947-48 (53). The mounting competition between other coffee producing states and Mysore in the world market, had a negative effect on the export of coffee and coffee acreage (54). Coffee once a lucrative trade lost its lustre and labourers began to seek employment elsewhere (55). This necessitated the planters to look for local labour to work in plantations in place of migrant labourers.

There were some practical difficulties with hired labour. The primary thing was that it was seasonal. Hiring of seasonal labour was more expensive, because the labourer had to be paid daily. At the harvesting time and coffee
picking, the need for hired labour became more conspicuous and land owners and planters had to try every method to woo the labourers to work in their lands. This curtailed the extensive use of hired labour in cash crop areas. An important indicator of the limited use of hired labour in regions of commercial agriculture was provided by the fact that permanent hired workers in peasant households were largely migrants from other regions. L. Mayer in his studies showed that in agricultural societies where wage labour was a new development, it was unusual for the people to work for wages in their own homes. The labour employed for wages was drawn largely from areas outside the village where they are employed (56).

A specific feature of the form of labour services here was that the land owner and planter did not force the peasantry to produce the means of livelihood on his own land and instead gave the labourer the means of subsistence in kind. One of the major conditions for the survival of labour services in return for food was the low level of development of commodity-money-relationships. This was the genesis of a band of workers dependent upon the owner for food, shelter, etc, called domestic serfs. For two bowls of ragi, they worked 24 hrs a day. This labourer was offering his services for a meagre subsistence, eventhough he knew that he was waging a losing battle.

A major hurdle in the road to formation of a local labour corps was the competition from recruiting agencies, recruiting labour for Ceylon, Malaya, Fiji, Mauritius, etc (57). This created a scarcity of native labour (58). Boys of tender age were sent to Ceylon under the leadership of a maistry, through the Ceylon Labour Commission functioning
from Bangalore. Raising this issue in the Representative Assembly, Mr Piklington of Mysore Planters Association stated "Coolies are enticed away from their homes to distant countries by false promises by unscrupulous recruiters" (59). He demanded that such acts should be decided by magistrates. The tragedy was that generally the simple, ignorant, illiterate, resourceless people, belonging to the poorest classes were induced to enter into agreement by the unscrupulous representatives of wily professional recruiters (60). Commenting on the working of the system, Mr G.K.Gokhale stated "... no fair minded man will, I think, hesitate to say that the system is a monstrous system, inequitable in itself based on fraud, and maintained by force, a system, wholly opposed to modern sentiments of justice and humanity is a grave blot on the civilisation of any country that tolerates it" (61). But, it was conspicuous to all that such a system existed only because the government supported it (62). Eventhough such a system reduced labourers to the condition of serfs, brutalised the employer and demoralised the employed and it perpetrated the worst form of slavery in the guise of legal contract. Besides it was bad in its inception, inhuman in its working and mischievous in its results and was ought to be abolished without delay (63). But government lent a deaf ear.

The coolies were put to unrestricted butchery in these places. When they expressed a desire to return to their houses, they were forced to discharge a debt of Rs 50/- contracted on their account. Besides, the agents of the Labour Commission in Bangalore, who were known to the villagers as 'writers' conspired with the recruiters in inducing these people to leave their houses and they paid frequent visits to villages to pick coolies (64). Government
of Mysore did not take any quick decision regarding this simply stated "some check should be placed on the operations of indigenous recruiters whose methods cannot be scrutinised by Labour Commission" (65) because the responsibility of devising a remedy for the situation, according to Government of Mysore rested chiefly with the Ceylon Government (66). Though tales of enticing and forced recruitment were heard from all quarters of the state, only civil and military stations, Bangalore got a privilege of prosecuting the recruiter. Mysore Durbar even contemplated free emigration to Ceylon (67). When the issue caused an uproar in the Assembly, Government mildly answered that the matter would be given due consideration (68).

The waning of the importance for migrant labour after 1920s and the establishment of a hardcore local labour class was thus not due to any demographic or geographic changes, such as increase in population or change in soil fertility but due to some economic factors such as an exodus increase in the number of landless peasantry, heavy unemployment among urban people which reoriented them towards land, absence of subsidiary occupations which could consume these extra mouths and slow development of modern industries which needed skilled labour and factors such as these led to the formation of a local proletariat group.

GROWTH OF AGRICULTURAL WORK FORCE IN MYSORE

Agricultural labourers formed the single most important segment of the rural proletariat. Till the end of 19th century, lowest caste people were treated as slaves whom the owners could buy or sell (69). Such labourers were called by names such as "jeetalu", "kondalu", "maneyalu", "mamnulu",
etc. The change in their status came in the later part of 19th century when there was the introduction of commercial agriculture, expansion of trade arteries, education, etc (70). This expansionary phase resulted in stimulating a change in the life styles of lower castes such as "panchamas", "voddars", "Holeyas", etc. Most of the tenant cultivators in the plain region hired labourers in the harvesting and sowing seasons. These labourers were termed as annual farm servants and they were paid daily wages and one meal. These servants were available only seasonally and even for an area of acre, peasant hired labourers during this period. The number of attached labourers was numerically small compared to labourers in the casual labourers category. Paddy cultivation was wholly dependent upon farm servants (71). The introduction of cash crops such as sugarcane, cotton, oilseeds, mulberry, etc, broadened the scope for accumulation and the development of wage labour relations by developing markets for land credit and labour (72). When the croppage of food crops shrunk giving way to cash crops, Government had to think of reintroducing certain varieties of food crops. Agricultural experiment stations were established. This led to the funding of certain agro-processing industries which required large number of labourers (73).

The internal markets expanded along with the extension of cultivation. The trading of coconuts, copra, mulberry, areca, bananas, toddy, tobacco, etc, became widespread. The carrying industry expanded (74). Cart-making became an important rural industry. With the expansion of cotton, the cotton processing industry started. Besides, mulberry growing, tobacco growing, rice, toddy tapping, oil pressing, coffee husking, etc, needed a large number of labourers and this gradually gave rise to a band of agricultural labourers.
Besides, the expansion of roadways and railways called for a large number of workers at the work station. Most of these labourers were agricultural labourers and in slack seasons, they worked at construction sites and returned to agricultural work later. Public works, plantations and growth of cash crops drew a large number of rural workers into the casual labour market. The opening up of the country through roads and rails introduced a large number of low castes into the wage market (75). The coconut retting and plucking and marketing it internally boosted up cultivation in dry districts, and the area under coconut swelled. The Government forest policy introduced a large number of workers to market (76). The "kans" and "soppinbettas" which were the adjoined lands, were given out for cultivation only to low castes. The Hinkal and Hadya lands in the Malnad were also cultivated by special labour force introduced by Government. They worked in these lands even through they had no proprietary rights but only enjoyed a small part of the produce (77). This land settlement policy had a vital link in the agrarian economy of Mysore, because the labourers here had no substantial ground to claim proprietorship and were bracketed as agricultural labourers. The Government control over forest also called for a special class of agricultural workers engaged in looking after forest work like felling trees, raising honey produce, rearing up betel leaves, timber producing, collecting forest produce, etc.

All these agro-based avocations called for a formation of a class of workers. Though the formation process was minimal, the gradual penetration of local capital into these village industries helped the agricultural workers to make a livelihood.
Another significant factor attached to the growth of agricultural labourers was that all those who were classified as agricultural labourers were not free wage workers (78). There were amongst them bonded labourers called "jeetalu", who were attached to their masters and were bought and sold as a commodity they were also called as "Huttalu" and there were tenants at will called "Mannolu", and there were hired labourers called "Kondalu" who worked on daily wages.

**Debt Bondage as a Form of Agrastic Slavery**

Labour scarcity area such as Malnad had an uniqueness in labour matters (79). Here labourer soon after entering into a contract with owner lost all his freedom of mobility. Freedom here meant that he was prevented from entering the labour market in person because his labour power was sold by someone else for instance, the "wargadar" and the planter (80). Debt bondage operated where cash or kind loans advanced by a landlord, a merchant, a labour contractor were repaid in the form of labour service by the debtor personally or by the members of his family. Like slavery, this relationship entailed the loss on the part of a debtor and his family of the right to sell their labour power in the market during the period of bondage or contract. Unlike slavery where the person of the slave was itself the subject of an economic transaction, in the case of a bonded labourer it was the latter's labour power which was bought and sold and contracted without latter's consent. Hence, the frequent confront of bonded labour with free wage labour not withstanding the fact which a free wage labourer may personally dispose of his own labour power neither a slave nor a bonded labourer possessed this right. By advancing the labourer his payment or wage in a lumpsum before the contract
began, the employer made it sure that in some point during his contract, labourer will no longer be able to purchase subsistence items, thereby necessitating his labourers to depend on him for further loans. The fact that the labourer received his wage only at the end of the contract served to emphasise the fact that this dependence on the employer was deliberately motivated. Thus, debt bondage could be regarded as a form of unfreedom associated with serfdom, an involuntary servitude arising from the attachment of an individual to land through debt (81). Very frequently, debt bondage increasingly involved the bonding of landless labour and this was, in total, a modern form of slavery. The labourer was tied to his farm under the control of his planter, landlord creditor and employer. He was often a migrant to these places, along with his family and was made to serve his employer through labour services to clear off his debts, under as low wages as possible.

Thus, an agricultural landless labourer residing inside the social and political domain of the creditor-employer, was forced by economic coercions to clear off his debt obligations by selling his labour. The primary method followed for enforcing debt bondage was the formal method of persuasion. When this failed, the employer resorted to violent methods. The agricultural labourer with more than 200% of the capital debt loan to the employer was made to serve his master to whom he was contracted and had to oblige other creditors in his off-season by working for them. Eric Wolf referred to this as "double lives" one foot in the plantation way of life, while keeping the other foot in the peasant holdings" (82).

The first Agricultural Labour Enquiry Committee described the conditions and characteristics of labour
attachment in the following uncompromising manner: "Attached workers are engaged either for a year or a month, but in frequent cases of life long and even hereditary employment driven into debts by their poverty, the agricultural workers have to render life long service to their creditors when they cannot repay otherwise. The agricultural labourer is not infrequently compelled in times of stress to mortgage his personal liberty. In return, for a small sum of money he may happen to need at the moment, he agrees to serve the man from whom he has borrowed. The money is not repaid nor is it intended to be repaid, but the borrower remains a life long bond slave of his creditor. Thus, involuntary employment is a characteristic feature of agricultural economy" (83).

The landless labourer became naturally indebted to his master because there was no land to own and the debt that a labourer owes was a debt of slavery (84). There was no security of employment and the contractual obligations deprived them often of their freedom. The "naratana", the landlord and the planter lent money to the workers to bind them to the work place. The master had full control over such labour. The second Agricultural Enquiry Committee also stressed this point. This phenomenon was not confined to Mysore alone. Debt bondage binded a debtor for life (85). A review of the cooperative societies in Mysore revealed that total indebtedness had increased by 5.5 lakhs since they joined the societies and still they owed Rs. 7 lakhs to their money lenders (86).

In his studies about landless agricultural untouchables, Mr A.C. Nagaraja showed "the chances of an average untouchable family being free from debt was very little. Considering the social status, the almost
unbelievable poverty, their illiteracy and their age long habits of expenditure, their involvement in debt is no wonder (87). According to him, the causes of indebtedness among the untouchables differed in several respects from those of an average landless peasantry. Seventy nine percent of the untouchable families of Mysore were in debt. This money lent on personal security carried a high rate of interest ranging from 12 to 75%. The author’s findings showed that 66% of the debts incurred was due to marriage, funeral, etc (88).

Thus, share cropping system was encouraged in maidan parts because it was advantageous and more profitable, and because the landlords could always enhance the produce of their porportion (89). With the growing acute shortage of land and ever growing pressure of population on land, landlords could always bind the agricultural labourers in self-dictated contracts (90). This was also the socio-economic basis for widespread growth of absentee landlordism, because they controlled the lever of political power and possessed substantial monetary resources and landlords were able to channel their money to money-lending where returns were frequently larger than in agriculture (91). Some of them joined the governing bodies such as local boards, and taluk boards (92). In a gradual course of time, they had diversified themselves to difficult fields because, land represented just one of the many sources of income to them. All this contributed to the concentration of capital in the hands of the landlord capitalists and strengthened his economic position and political power. In this way, colonial rule helped not only to preserve but also to expand feudal state relations and colonial forms of peasant exploitation which contributed to conserving the closed nature of ethnic and community relations (93).
The development of commercial agriculture in a tract where non-agricultural sources of livelihood were limited, enhanced the dependence of labour on these landlords and planters, and it was anything but inevitable. This dependence did not get destroyed by the migrant labour system because agricultural migrants often returned to their villages weekly or annually after working for a stipulated period on contract system.

The incorporation of the institution of landlord nobility into the system of colonial administration following the establishment of colonial rule was not a sudden phenomenon, combining legislative, executive and judicial authority all in one, the colonialists held the local people into submission. The gradual introduction of taxes in cash instead in kind, enhanced the taxing power of the state because such taxes became the main source of monetary resources for the state. Even though official bans and controls on semi-feudal landlords were heard, they did not have any effect on society. This eliminated the basis for the development of large landed estates on communal property system.

**WAGE STRUCTURE**

Wages of labourers both in Malnad and maidan did not attract any great attention because agricultural labourers were always dismissed as a subordinate composition of masses, unorganised illiterate and docile (94). There was no increase in the wages any time, even though there was a rise on the prices of all food articles. The fact that labourer was paid in kind rather than in coin, also acted as an obstacle in the raising of wage structure. It remained
realisation of the need for increase by employers. This also explains why the industrial wage labour in Mysore and Bangalore cities got the immediate hike in their wages, and not the agricultural wage labour in remote villages. This was solely because Mysore and Bangalore had a rising Trade Union Movement under the socialist and communist banners during 1930s. The success of the workers' movement was in many respects predetermined by the general upswing of the national liberation movement politically and organisationally wage earning labour were not ready for assuming leadership in the struggle against colonialists. Thus, their cause was taken up by National Congress leaders at all India level.

But in Mysore, even after the dissolution of migrant labour system, the emergence of a hard core proletariat, did not affect the economy greatly because such a process applied only to large-scale enterprises which employed bulk of the registered wage earners and not to small industries and enterprises where migrant labour continued to play a prominent role along with wage earning a hired labour. But the emergence of a small army of local proletariat on the basis of hired labour was of tremendous historical importance. It reflected not only the elimination of the archaic social structure which Mysore inherited through the colonial rule but also marked a steady growth in the working classes. They began to be considered as the most revolutionary elements after 1930s and were deemed capable of consistent and decisive struggle for the political, social and economic liberation. They could thus join hands with the nation wide agitation for freedom. This was also a prime time when national leaders along with trade union and peasant leaders began to demand radical agrarian reforms, such as the elimination of patriarchal and semi-feudal control, improvement in the life of the agricultural wage earners, amendment in usury laws, etc.
almost stationary (95). The wages of a coolie in a taluk headquarters was four annas per man and at the village level it was 2 annas. When paid in kind, a man got from 6-8 seers grain per week. In the areca and pepper gardens, coolies from below "ghats" were recruited seasonally with a wage of 4.5 annas per man. With the expansion of public and construction works, the agricultural labourer was introduced to the urban works. This led to the categorisation of skilled and unskilled labourers. Skilled labourers in gardens such as pickers, lifters, tappers, suckers, gatherers, etc, claimed a high wage rate compared to harvesting willowers and sowers where there was no need for specialisation (96). The daily wage rate varied from 8 annas to Re 1/- plus ration. Peasant labourers received wages annually. But seasonal labourers if recruited received only 4 to 8 annas per day (97). The wage rate for a woman was even lesser, being just 2 annas per day (96). With the influx of women huskers and weeders in the villages, the wages of agricultural work which was earmarked for only men, began to be shared by women also. Besides, the inclusion of child labour was also no less.

The Labour Enquiry Committee recommended increase in wages of labourers as a chief factor for retention of labour on land (98). But the crux of the problem was that wages did not rise till 1920s, which was mainly due to growth of working class consciousness in India. The political agitations launched by Indian National Congress in 1920s also alarmingly warned the British masters that the time had come for the wage increase. Besides, wage increase measures were undertaken to quieten the agitative elements among working class joining hands with the freedom fighters. Therefore, wage increase was more due to political pressure, than due to
SUMMING UP

Thus, the emergence of a local labour proletariat in Princely Mysore was attached to the domination of village economy over subsistence economy. It introduced a corps of labourers into a cash nexus market through paying cash wages which was a rare phenomenon. The migration of labourers helped in the decay of and in setting free the peasants from the traditional ties of semi-feudal bondage and helped them to improve economically. It assisted in increasing the wages of all kinds of labourers substantially. The division of labour was made possible by importing labourers which led to specialisation of occupation on a limited scale.

Under the impact of this proletarianisation, caste lost its earlier significance. The traditional occupational ties began to break down. The simultaneous existence of subordinate categories within the rural proletariat was another feature of this process. The lower caste people still had problems with their caste to take up mobility. Besides, women labourers never were considered a part of strong work force. Despite their effective participation in agricultural work, their status remained subordinated. The complete absence of radical nationalists who used social protest movement to emphasise the exploitation of labourers further stalled their progress. The spread of education in this regard had little impact because its spread was uneven. Besides, the absence of an urban industrial proletariat helped the rural proletariat to remain to village epicentres. The economic depression of the 30s which hit hard the rural masses who were already suffering social stagnation and caste oppression gave way to nationalism and its ideals of protest movements.
FOOT NOTES


5. Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Gopal Krishna Gokhale were among the prominent Indians who vociferously condemned the system of indentured labour. The details are contained in (a) Resolutions of Pandit Malaviya regarding the abolition of Indian Indentured Labour System, Home Legislative, A, 1911, April Nos. 55-57, NAI, New Delhi; (b) Resolutions of Mr Gokhale regarding Indentured System in Assam, Legislative A, 1912, April Nos 5-7, NAI, New Delhi; (c) Inland Emigration Act, 1982, Home Legislative, A, Jan-1882, No. 214-314, NAI, New Delhi

6. Buchanan, "A journey through the countries of Canara, Madras and Mysore", op. cit. p. 17

7. Karl arx as quoted by Y.M.Inonav, op.cit. p. 13

8. The levy of mohatarfa tax on coolies of coffee estates. 56, Sl.No.1-13, 1883, L.R., KSA, (B)

10. The Mysore population study - Series No. 34, New York, 1961, p. 175

11. "In some piaes in South Mysore, there are large bodies of local labourers who are living in the vicinity of the plantation attended work occasionally and returned to their own homes daily or weekly". Representations of the South Mysore Planters Association (SMPA), 1901, file no. 21 of 1905, Sl.No. 1-14, KSA, (B)

12. "There is employed on coffee and cardamom estates in Mysore a large number of floating population from south Canara, Coorg". Revenue Survey Settlement of Manjarabad, file No. 29, Sl.No.1-13, LS, 1923, KSA (B)

13. Report of the Committee on plantation labour, 1944, p. 129


15. By 1870, 289 European coffee planters were having around 35,000 lakh coffee acreage while, as many as 22,000 local planters owned only 78,000 coffee acres. Acreage of coffee in Mysore file No. 283, sl.No. 22-24, LR, 1906, KSA (B)

16. Coffee estates held by major Taylor and captain Renton, foreign Revenue A, Jan, 1864, Nos. 1-9, NAI, New Delhi
17. Contemporary studies of Africa and South America have proved this factor. See for details Economics of Colonialisation, by R.D.Wolf, Yale Press, London, 1974

18. This included Areca, rubber, cinchona, sisal hemp, etc

19. The laws legalised military officers to hold land in princely State of Mysore


21. M.N.Srinivas. "Social system of Mysore villages". in "Village India", (Ed.) Mackim Marriot, p. 27,


22a. Census of Mysore Report, 1921, p. 21

23. Nadagannadi dated 12-3-1901 wrote ".. it is right that the English people are pulling down slavery everywhere, but how are coolies on coffee estates better off than bond men?" NNPR, Madras, 1901

24. R.H.Elliot. "Experiences of a coffee planter in the jungles of Mysore", op. cit. p. 72

25. "They are housed worse than the cattle". The Report, 1944, p. 158

27. George Hamilton wrote on this subject thus "... the treatment of the coolies is not altogether satisfactory". H.E.Right Honourable the Governor General of India, VIII of 1878, June 1899, No. 73-78, Foreign and Internal B, NAI, New Delhi.


29. Mysore population study series, op. cit, pp. 5-6.

30. "This in contrast to their earlier notion regarding working in Malnad as being Malarial, besides claiming that food was cheaper in maidan" "The Labour", by S.G.Speer (Ed.)

31. "The immigration from Bombay Konkan was attributed to the manumission of Malnad slaves which released a large number of "huttalus" to casual labour market". Census Report of Mysore, 1941, Part II, p. 112.

32. "If the attraction on plantations are increased by wage hike naturally workers will come". PECR p. 11.

33. Buchacnan, op. cit. p. 22.

34. M.N.Srinivas, op. cit. p. 28.

35. Mr Middleton’s Coffee holdings in Mysore, Foreign revenue, A. 1864, July 1864, NAI, New Delhi.

36. Ibid, and also R.H.Elliot. op. cit. p. 98.
37. An interesting account is given in a Canarese book by K.H.Nage Gowda, "Bettadinda Battalige"


40. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India. 1931, p. 355

41. Hull.E.C.P. "Coffee Planting in Southern India". p. 61

42. R.Unwin, op. cit. p. 162

43. Ibid

44. Ibid


46. Ibid, p. 23

47. R.Unwin, op. cit, p. 163

48. UPASI Year book for 1949, p. 333

49. The Planters Acts of 1903 had introduced penal contract as a protection for the planter against the loss of advances made to his workers and this was also repealed in 1929

51. PECR, 1944, p. 126

52. PECR, 1931, p. 237

53. See table on p. 10

54. In 1930-31 the export of coffee was 293 thousand and it fell to 141 thousand on 1934-35. The principal markets were United Kingdom and France

55. "The decrease of Bombay immigrants to Mysore is because coffee industry is not so paying as it was a decade ago". Census of India. Mysore, 1891, Vol. XXV, Part-I, p. 110


57. UPASI Year Book, 1942, p. 113

58. Question of permitting the emigration to Ceylon of coolies from Mysore. Foreign General B. 1911, No. 222, NAI, New Delhi


60. Ibid, p. 169

61. Resolutions of G.K. Gokhale regarding the prohibition of recruitment of Indian Labourers to British colonies, Simla Records, Legislative A, 1912, April, Sl.No., 5-7, NAI, New Delhi
"It is obvious that the system would not be in existence but for the support of the Government". Pandit Malaviya's statement. Extracts from the Proceedings of the Governor General's Council assembled to make laws and regulations, 1912, Legislative Dept, A, 1912, Sl.No. 5-7, NAI, New Delhi.

Ibid, para 16, p.5

Questing of permitting emigration to Ceylon op. cit. p.12

Resident, Mysore, in a letter to Secretary to the Govt. of India, dated 24/8-1911, ibid, page 14

Ibid, p. 14

PMRA June, 1911, p. 211

"This delay and neglect was deliberate because the stoppage by India for political reasons of the free migration between two countries precipitated strikes on an unprecedented scale". Eric. Meyer, "Plantation System and Village Structure in British Ceylon, Curzon Press, London, 1983, p. 42


73. K.P.Kannan, op. cit. p. 54


75. The low castes included bedas, bestas, madigas, panchamas, halepikas, etc

76. Government had declared all forests as state property. Public had no accession, felling of trees or collecting timber, etc was severely punished

77. Revision settlement of Shimoga, Sagar and Theerthahalli taluks, 1909, 1910, 1914, respectively

78. S.J.Patel, op. cit. p. 11

79. "Thus the system of bonded labour is prevalent precisely in those regions where due to much larger proportion of landless labourers, opportunities of securing a livelihood are more scarce". R.K.Mukerjee, "Land problems in India". Oxford Press, London, 1933, p. 226

81. "In the context of Indian agriculture, the term attached labourers had a cannotation for unfreedom". Daniel Thorner - "Land and Labour in India". Allied Publishers, London, 1962, p. 177


83. The first Agricultural Committee Report, 1952, p. 122

84. P. Sitaramaiah, 2nd Agricultural Commission, SJE, V. III, No.5, May 1940, pp. 289-294

85. Tom Brass. "Class struggle and deproletarianisation of agricultural labour in India". JPS, Vol. 18, No.2 October 1990, pp. 36-68

86. According to Sir M. Vishweshwariah, the agricultural population had a debt estimated at between 800 and 1,200 crores and per capita Rs 50/-; and above. The Report of the Cooperative Societies, 1941, Mysore, p. 112


88. Even M.N. Srinivas also streses this point. op. cit. p. 117
89. "There was no much difference between a landless labourer of Malnad region and a tenant at will of inam region, and dwarf holding share cropper of maidan region". Census report of 1901 rightly stated ".. here the petty cultivator is a tenant, a farm servant and a field labourer all rolled into one", Vol. XX, Part-I, p. 205

90. The Census Report revealed that in the coffee producing regions of Mysore, 2% of the families in the late 1950s were large farmers, 29% represented wealthy peasants, 27% were middle peasants, 32% were poor peasants, and 20% were landless labourers, economic differentiation was more pronounced here than in Maidan, 1951, p. 280


92. James Manor, op. cit. p. 91

93. "The large number of Anglo-Indian and Eurasian traders, merchants and planters with the British Government to back them up are exercising irresponsible power and they constitute a conflicting factor and always claims a counter share of the sympathies of the Government. In the Economic elevation of the people as well as in their political advancement, the growing class of foreign settlers represents interests hostile to those of the people and this is a foundation evil which brings in commercial and capitalistic exploitation. Madras Standard, Madras, May 28, 1901, NNPR, 1901, TNSA, Madras

95. "Very few pay their labourers in coin, Many pay only in kind". PMRC, Ibid, 334


97. See the statement appended

98. "The wages that a labourer gets in Mysore are not in proportion to the hours of work and Government is sympathetic only to the employers", Chandrashekariah, PMLC, October 1930, p. 118