CHAPTER V
LABOUR EMIGRATION FROM ORISSA AS AN ASPECT OF COMMERCIALISATION

The petty peasants cultivate their home farms with family labour. On the other hand, the large holdings are either leased out on 'crop-sharing arrangements or cultivated by hired labour. However, the number of labourers working per acre in the farms belonging to the small peasants is higher than the number of labourers employed per acre in large farms cultivated with hired labour. This is mainly due to the fact that, in face of the limited employment opportunities in the wage labour market, the working members of a small peasant household try their best to eke out a living from the home farm even though all of them may not be fully employed.¹

The implication of this difference between the labour-land ratios in the two types of farms is that any redistribution of land in favour of the large farms cultivated by hired labour, ceteris paribus, adversely affects the

¹ For the same reason, application of labour per unit of land in a share-cropped farm is also higher than that in a farm cultivated by hired labour. See A.K. Bagchi, "Some implications of unemployment in rural areas", Economic and Political Weekly, Special Number, August 1973, pp.1501-10.
employment opportunities in agriculture. Consequently, a section (small or large, depending upon the size of land transfer) of the workers belonging to the petty peasant families may be thrown out of employment. Further, a process of transfer of land from the small farms to the large farms is likely to result in a continuous reduction in the size of the agricultural work force.

In Orissa, the process of land transfer led to a concentration of land with the large farms. A sizeable section of the total land belonging to these farms was actually cultivated with hired labour, casual or attached. Thus, there could have been a decline in the employment opportunities for workers belonging to the petty peasant households in the agricultural sector.

However, the general advancement of communication, trade and industry threw open new avenues of employment for

2. It is difficult to provide an accurate estimate of the proportion of the total area of the large farms under hired labour cultivation. However, it must have been large in view of the large share of agricultural labourers and general labourers in the total agricultural work force in the 4 districts. During 1901-31, the proportions of agricultural and general labourers in the total agricultural work force in Cuttack and Puri were more than 25% in Balasore between 10% to 15%. In Sambalpur, during 1911-31, 37% to 51% of the total agricultural work force were agricultural and general labourers.
those who found it hard to earn their living in the village.\(^3\)

In fact, as we will see later in this chapter, a large number of people born in Orissa were employed in various occupations outside Orissa, particularly in the 4 metropolitan districts of Bengal and in Assam. Here, we attempt to relate the process of migration to the mechanism of forced commerce which completely or partially ruined a very large section of the peasantry. It may be worth mentioning here that, this relationship has not so far received due attention in the studies relating to the problems of labour migration in India.\(^4\)

The decennial Census Reports provide data on birthplace of the population. Up to 1921, the census enumerators

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3. For example, in the jute industry of Bengal, the premier factory industry in Eastern India, the average number of mill operatives employed increased from 113,493 in 1901 to 280,321 in 1921. See Ranajit Dasgupta, "Factory Labour in Eastern India: Sources of Supply, 1885-1946, Some Preliminary Findings", The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. XIII, no. 3, p. 261.

4. For instance, Lalita Chakravarty while stating the scope of her paper as "the pattern of emigration", focusses on "the typical agrarian proletarian who was not a land-holding peasant". Besides, she treats the mechanism of surplus extraction in agriculture as a factor which had only "shock" effects. See Lalita Chakravarty, "Emergence of an Industrial Labour Force in a Dual Economy—Britain India, 1880-1920", Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. XV, no. 3, especially p. 258.
were required to report the district and province of birth of every individual; in 1931 only the province of birth was ascertained. Hence, what we obtain from the census statistics are migration figures for districts in 1901, 1911 and 1921, and for province in 1931. But, in 1905, at the time of its transfer from the Central Provinces to Bengal, certain parts of Sambalpur district were detached from it and left in the former.\(^5\) This boundary change could have led to inaccuracies in the emigration data for Sambalpur. Some persons born in and emigrating before 1905 from that part of the district which remained in the Central Provinces might not have been aware of the boundary change and could have reported Sambalpur as their birth-place in the subsequent censuses. This renders the emigration data somewhat incomparable for Sambalpur. However, the Census birth-place statistics despite their various limitations have been accepted as fairly accurate by scholars.\(^6\)

The number of people born in each of the 3 coastal

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5. See the Appendix to Ch. III, p. 122 above.

districts but enumerated outside, whether in contiguous districts or in distant places, monotonically increased between 1901 and 1921.\(^7\) Emigrants as a proportion of the district population also increased. In 1901, for every hundred persons enumerated in Cuttack, 5.7 persons born in the district were enumerated outside, for Balasore the percentage was 4.8 and for Puri 2.9\(^8\). By 1921, the corresponding percentages had risen to 12.4, 8.5 and 6 respectively.\(^9\) However, for Sambalpur during 1911-21, the number of people born in the district and enumerated outside, decreased in absolute as well as relative terms. While in 1911, for every hundred persons enumerated in the district, 23 were enumerated outside, the percentage fell to 11.7 in 1921.\(^10\)

Emigration from the 3 coastal districts to contiguous parts showed very little variation over the censuses; for Sambalpur it showed a significant fall between 1911 and 1921. Furthermore, the preponderance of females among the emigrants suggests that a large number of women moved to

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7. See Statistical Appendix, Table 9.
contiguous districts through marriages. However, emigration to the Orissa Feudatory States is of particular interest.\textsuperscript{11}

In 1921, the superintendent of census operations in Bihar and Orissa observed: "Apart from a few upcountry traders these immigrants are generally agriculturists. In most of these states the pressure of population is extremely light; in seven of them there are not even 100 persons to the square mile. Vast areas still await reclamation and, rents being generally low, it is natural that immigrants should be attracted from other parts...where the pressure of population is greater".\textsuperscript{12}

Emigration to distant places was far more important than emigration to contiguous places. For the 3 coastal districts it increased sharply between 1901 and 1921, but decreased in case of Sambalpur between 1911 and 1921. Again, in contrast with emigration to contiguous parts, males vastly outnumbered females among the emigrants to non-contiguous parts with the exception of Sambalpur. In 1921 the proportion of males to females among such emigrants was 3:1 for Cuttack, 7:1 for Balasore, roughly 6:1 for Puri

\textsuperscript{11.} See Statistical Appendix, Table 10.

and 1:1 for Sambalpur. 13

The most important stream of long distance migration from Orissa was directed towards Bengal. Table 5.1 shows the number of persons born in each of the 4 districts of Orissa and enumerated in Bengal and her metropolitan districts during 1901-1921.

The total number of emigrants from Orissa (excluding Sambalpur) increased by 145% between 1901 and 1921. In 1921, the emigrants to Bengal constituted 57% of the total number of emigrants from Cuttack to all non-contiguous places; the corresponding percentages for Balasore, Puri and Sambalpur were 82, 56 and 3.4 respectively. 14 There was a concentration of emigrants in the 4 metropolitan districts.

13. These figures are calculated from Statistical Appendix, Table 9.

Part of the explanation of the high proportion of women among the emigrants from Sambalpur lies in the fact that a large section of the long distance emigrants from that districts went to Assam, in families (see below). Besides, in general the rate of participation of women in agricultural work, small trading activity etc., was very high in Sambalpur district, compared to coastal Orissa.

14. These percentages are calculated from Table 5.1 and Statistical Appendix, Table 9.

In 1921, Cuttack sent the largest number of long distant migrants to the 4 metropolitan districts. See Census of India, 1921, vol.V, pt.1, p.142.
Table 5.1

Emigration from Orissa to Bengal and her 4 Metropolitan Districts, 1901-1921

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Born in</th>
<th>Enumerated in Bengal</th>
<th>The 4 metropolitan distts. of Calcutta, 24 parganas, Howrah &amp; Hooghly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1911</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuttack</td>
<td>49,224</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balasore</td>
<td>17,159*</td>
<td>30,414*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puri</td>
<td>2,705</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sambalpur</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>N.A.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Excludes emigrants from Balasore to Mianapore because Midnapore was a contiguous district of Balasore.


The emigrants from Orissa were mostly single male workers. In 1901, there were only 61 females per 1,000 male emigrants from Orissa to Bengal. Both in 1911 and 1921, for every 1,000 male emigrants from Cuttack and Balasore to Calcutta and its suburbs, females numbered 63; every

15. Census of India, 1901, vol. VI, pt. II, Table XI.
1,000 workers were accompanied by only 79 dependents. Of the male migrants from Cuttack and Balasore in Calcutta and its suburbs, 70% in 1911 and 73% in 1921 were in the age group of 15 to 40 years — workers at the prime of life.¹⁶

Most of the migrant workers from Orissa were unskilled labourers. The Census Commissioner of 1901 noted that the emigrants served as "palanquin bearers, door-keepers and day-labourers" in the metropolitan districts and worked as "cooks and domestic servants throughout Bengal".¹⁷ In 1905, B. Foley, who enquired into the problems of labour shortage in various industries of Bengal found Oriyas employed in handling of goods in Calcutta, Sara Ghat and Goalundo.¹⁸ They were also employed in the factories. In the jute mills, a fair number of workers from Orissa were employed. But "they mostly did the rougher work".¹⁹ In the jute presses of Calcutta, Narainganj and Chandpur, the majority of press

¹⁶. *Census of India, 1911*, vol. VI, pt. II, Appendix A to Table XI; and *Census of India, 1921*, vol. VI, pt. II, Appendix to Table-XI. The total number of emigrants from Cuttack and Balasore to Calcutta and its suburbs was 33,705 in 1911 and 61,140 in 1921.


All the 9 cotton mills visited by Mr. Foley had a fairly large number of workers from Orissa. Two of the 3 paper mills visited by him employed workers from Orissa. A substantial number of workers from Orissa were also employed in the engineering workshops.

In 1911, of the 31,237 workers from Cuttack and Balasore enumerated in Calcutta and its suburbs, 27.89% were day-labourers and coolies, 25.13% were employed in domestic service, 3.36% worked in docks and ships, 5.93% were employed in mills and factories, 7% were traders, 5.73% were cobblers, washermen, milkmen and barbers, 19.15% were not classified.

The Industrial Census of 1921 for Bengal gave the birthplace distribution of skilled and unskilled workers in each industry in the province. In all the industries taken

20. Ibid., pp.24, 26 and 27.
22. Ibid., Appendix, pp.31-32.
23. Ibid., Appendix, pp.33-34.
24. Census of India, 1911, vol.VI, pt.II, Appendix A to Table IX.
together, there were 12,524 skilled workmen from Orissa forming 6.88% of the total skilled labour force. But unskilled labourers from Orissa were more numerous: 51,766, constituting 8.8% of the total unskilled labour force. The total number of workers from Orissa employed in the industries of Bengal constituted 37.8% of the total number of persons from Orissa enumerated in Bengal. The largest number of Oriyas were employed in the jute industry: 31,980 or 11.43% of the total work force, skilled and unskilled. The cotton industry employed 3,912 persons from Orissa, who accounted for 29.2% of the total work force of the industry. In the machinery and engineering works, 2,525 workers from Orissa were employed, constituting 14.53% of the total labour force. Day-labourers and coolies from Orissa numbered 18,366 constituting 18.76% of the total. Besides, 11,823 persons from Cuttack and Balasore were employed as domestic servants and 3,781 were traders in Calcutta and its suburbs. Thus, the emigrants from Orissa generally worked as unskilled labourers, either in the factories or outside.

26. Census of India, 1921, vol. VI, pt. II, Appendix to Table XI. The occupational distribution of workers from Cuttack and Balasore in Calcutta and its suburbs in 1921 was very similar to that of 1911; the day-labourers, coolies, domestic servants and workers in docks, ships, mills and factories formed 62.31% of the total in 1911 and 61.39% in 1921.
outside.

There was a stagnant trend in real wages in Bengal in face of increasing emigration. “In the jute textile industry (in and around Calcutta), real wages declined slightly (by about 11.5%) between 1900 and 1914, declined further upto 1920...”

In the early days of the organised industry, labour was primarily obtained through sardars, who were workers in the mills. When more labour was required, they were sent to their villages to fetch new labourers, paying their fares and expenses to the city. The sardars were paid commission on recruitment. But gradually workers came on their own to seek employment in the cities. All the same, they had to approach the jobber for employment; the actual recruitment continued to be through sardars in the textile industries and through contractors in ship building yards, structural engineering works and jute presses etc. Having obtained the job, the labourers was placed under the direct supervision of the jobber, on whom depended the security

of his job. The jobbers exploited the situation to exact bribes from the labourers in the form of fees at the time of engagement, or of re-employment after a period of absence, and as regular payments from monthly wages. Furthermore, the employment conditions in the urban centres were such that the vast majority of industrial workers were in debt.

What made the people leave their village homes for the metropolitan districts of Bengal, in spite of the stagnant wage rate, the exploitation by the jobbers and the appalling living conditions? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to know the occupational background of the emigrants from Orissa. But we do not have any direct information pertaining to this. Instead, we get their caste distribution at two points of time with varying sample size. To what extent caste can provide any idea about the occupation, particularly when the agrarian society was undergoing significant qualitative as well as quantitative changes is uncertain. However, being the only information available

31. RCLI, Report, p.24. For an account of the exploitation of migrant labour in India, see Lalita Chakravarty, op. cit., pp.276-84.

32. RCLI, Report, p.224; and Evidence, vol.V, pt.I, Memorandum by J.M. Mitra, p.49. 75 to 90% of labourers in the jute mills of Bengal were in debt.
regarding the background of the emigrants, these must be studied carefully.

The Report of the Labour Enquiry Commission of 1895 (Bengal) provided the caste composition of 465 workers drawn from Cuttack and Balasore, working in the Dunbar Cotton Mill, Shamnagar. For our purpose, the castes have been divided into 3 broad categories according to their ties with agriculture or land in Orissa. Group-I consists of the castes which depended entirely or almost entirely on agriculture for livelihood. Group-II is made up of the castes whose involvement in agriculture was substantial. Group-III comprises those which participated only marginally in agricultural activities.

33. Report of the Labour Enquiry Commission 1895, (Bengal), (Calcutta, 1896), Appendix P.

34. In order to classify castes, the occupational distributions of actual workers belonging to selected castes, as provided in the Census Reports of 1901 and 1911 have been used. To measure the involvement of particular castes in agriculture we have considered only the number of landholders and cultivators belonging to each caste, but not the agricultural labourers, as the latter's ties with land were rather weak. Group-I consists of those castes, more than two-thirds of whose actual workers were landholders and cultivators; Group-II of those about half of the actual workers belonging to which were landholders and cultivators. Group-III consists of the rest. See Census of India, 1901, vol.VI, pt.II, Table-XVI, pt.A and Census of India, 1911, vol.V, pt.III, Table XVI.

For those castes, the occupational distribution of whose actual workers are not provided in the censuses, Ranajit Dasgupta's occupational classification of castes has been used, with the difference that we have made 3 groups instead of 8. See Ranajit Dasgupta, op. cit., p.313, footnote 97.
Following our classification, it is found that workers belonging to Group-I, that is Brahman, Kayastha, Khandait and Chattri Castes, constituted 72.47% of the sample. Group-II consisting of Baishnab, Goala and Teli castes accounted for 3.87%. Group-III consisting of artisan, labouring and trading castes provided 16.13%. Among them the artisan castes of Tanti, Jogi, Kamar, Kumbhar, Maira and Sankra were the most numerous, making 9.25% of the sample. The labouring castes of Bagdi, Dosadh, Kaibarth, Mallah, Mochi and Napi formed 5.15% of the sample. Those who could not be put in any of these 3 groups formed 7.53%, including Musalmans who constituted 1.29% of the sample.

Thus it is clear that a vast majority of emigrant workers belonged to castes which were traditionally agriculturists or strongly attached to land. Furthermore, the castes such as Mochi, Kewat, Mallah, Bagdi and Dosadh, considered lowest in the social hierarchy, formed only 4.52% of the sample.

The 1911 census of Calcutta provided the caste distribution for a much larger sample, covering the entire emigrant population from Cuttack and Balasore in the city and its suburbs. Table 5.2 shows the shares of various castes as well as the 3 groups in the sample. Group-I provided the
bulk of the emigrants. The Khandait caste, traditional landholder and cultivator caste of Orissa was the single largest among the emigrants. Each of the three principal constituencies of Group-I showed a greater tendency to migrate. Group-II formed about one-fourth of the sample, the single most numerous caste in the group being Goala, who also showed a greater tendency to migrate. As in 1895, the most downtrodden castes of the agrarian society (the untouchables) had a rather small share, in any case less than 10%, in this sample of emigrants as compared to their share in the total population of the home districts, that is 19.2%. Thus, these statistics strengthen the impression obtained from the 1895 data. Furthermore, it is evident from the 1921 Industrial Census of Bengal, although it did not provide separate caste distribution of workers from Orissa, that the Khandait, an exclusively Oriya caste, formed about one-fourth of the total number of emigrant industrial workers from Orissa.

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35. The tendency of migration of any caste can be estimated by comparing its percentage shares among the emigrants and the population in the home districts. For the share of various castes in the population of Orissa, see Census of India, 1901, vol.VI, pt.I, p.459.


37. See Census of India, 1921, vol.V, pt.II, Table XXII, pts.IV and V.
Table 5.2
Caste Distribution of Emigrants from Cuttack and Balasore to Calcutta and its Suburbs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Castes</th>
<th>Percentage share of various castes among emigrants</th>
<th>from Cuttack in</th>
<th>from Balasore in</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Calcutta Suburbs</td>
<td>Calcutta Suburbs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group-I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brahman</td>
<td>17.36</td>
<td>18.68</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayastha (Karan)</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>11.19</td>
<td>14.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khandait</td>
<td>27.15</td>
<td>43.64</td>
<td>26.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajput</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>59.22</td>
<td>54.83</td>
<td>59.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group-II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baishnab</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chasi Kaibarta</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goela (Gauda)</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>16.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teli</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26.47</td>
<td>11.33</td>
<td>23.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group-III</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhobi</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>2.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napit (Bhandari)</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanti</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8.63</td>
<td>7.55</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathan</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unclassified</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>26.29</td>
<td>9.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.68</td>
<td>26.29</td>
<td>9.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The actual number of emigrants from Cuttack were 21,370 in Calcutta and 2,940 in the Suburbs, and from Balasore were 8,674 in Calcutta and 721 in the Suburbs.

Source: Census of India, 1911, vol.VI, pt.II, Appendix-A to Table-XI.
If the caste distributions are any indication, one should not hesitate to identify the emigrants as members of the peasant families which were ruined through the process of forced commerce. It is interesting to compare our findings with those of Ranajit Dasgupta. He found that during the early decades of this century, the majority of jute mill operatives belonged to castes other than the land-holding and cultivating castes; moreover, "the most downtrodden" and "the lowest in the social hierarchy and the untouchables" constituted one-fourth of the jute labour force.

Almost all the emigrant workers had left their families in their village homes, whom they visited regularly, once in every one, two or three years. This, however, does not tell us anything about the precise nature and strength of the ties retained by the emigrants with agriculture at home.

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38. It may be argued that the emigrants belonging to the landholding castes could have belonged to land-gaining families rather than land-losing families. But our contention is that the vast majority of them should not have belonged to the land-gaining families simply because it is difficult to imagine land-gaining peasants seeking employment at such low wages.


Information in this regard are indirect, scanty and sometimes contradictory. Evidences relating to the Metal and Steel Factory, Ishapore, the Rifle Factory, Ishapore, the Howrah Iron Works of Messrs. Burn and Company, Ltd., and the Angus Jute Works, Calcutta showed that the workers returned to their village homes during the peak seasons of agricultural activity, to assist their families. On the contrary, the RCLI pointed out that "the holiday exodus from the Bengal jute mills is at its height during a slack season for agriculture in the workers' villages". Therefore, all that can be concluded is that some of the emigrant workers, but not many, might have had direct interest in agriculture at home, by way of participation. However, many emigrants had an indirect interest in agriculture. Their family members remained in the villages and continued to cultivate the family holdings. But, the family holdings were too small to absorb them and they did not have alternative employment in the village either.

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The emigrants' contacts with home did not remain confined to the periodic visits. The emigrant worker regularly remitted a part of his income to his village home by money order.44 The Oriyas were supposed to have sent "a very high proportion of their earnings to their homes", being "thrifty people".45 Emigrant workers from village Baroda, in the district of Cuttack, sent Rs.10 each, every month.46 M. Dalmiya, Secy. and General Manager, Kesoram Cotton Mills, Ltd., was of the opinion that his "workers usually remit a third of their earning to their village homes".47 J.M. Mitra, Registrar of the Co-operative Societies, Bengal, observed that the emigrant jute workers, "annually remit several lakhs of rupees to their homes...mostly for the maintenance of their relations, to meet cultivation expenses of the fields in their native villages and sometimes for purchases of land".48 The IJMA expressed similar views:

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46. From this village, "about one man from each household" had emigrated to Calcutta. Report of the Bihar and Orissa PBEC, vol.III, Note of a village enquiry held at Kajjang on the 28th Aug., 1929, village Chanduli, p.34.
"By working in the mills they are frequently able to add to their property; and in any case, the standard of living is improved." 49

Given the low wages and the indebtedness of the workers, their remittances must have been small. 50 However, by supplementing the income of the peasant families, it could have raised their level of consumption, at least marginally. 51 Besides, these remittances might have made many small agricultural holdings less prone from being transferred to the money-lender. In fact, the raiyats of Kamar-pada village in Cuttack district told the Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee that the families of emigrants to Calcutta

50. The "great majority of the emigrants work in less exalted capacities and are not in a position to make heavy remittances to their homes". Census of India, 1921, vol.VII, pt.I, p.113.
51. Given the unavailability of direct data on consumption of rice, both total and its distribution over the different strata of the population, we used availability as a proxy for consumption. Availability of rice in any period is the output minus net exports minus (plus) the increase (decrease) in stocks. In view of the absence of data on stocks we assumed no change in stocks between any two periods. Our calculations show that there was a moderate increase in per-capita availability of rice in Orissa during 1906-07 to 1921-22: Per-capita availability during 1917-18 to 1921-22 was higher than that during 1906-07 to 1910-11 by 4%. See Statistical Appendix, Table 2, Col.9.
did not require loans for cultivation purposes (i.e., short-term consumption loans).\textsuperscript{52} A peasant family with the earnings of one of its members in Calcutta or other centres could tide over a year of poor harvest unlike an ordinary agriculturist who entirely relied on farm income.\textsuperscript{53} Thus, remittances by the emigrants could be a possible contributing factor to the decline in mortgage transactions and sales of land during 1921-30.\textsuperscript{54}

The other important stream of long distance migration from Orissa was directed to Assam. Table 5.3 shows the number of persons born in Orissa and enumerated in Assam in 1901, 1911 and 1921, and the percentage of females among them in 1901.

In 1921, of the total number of emigrants from Cuttack, Balasore, Puri and Sambalpur to all con- contiguous places, 34\%, 12\%, 20\% and 72\% respectively were enumerated in Assam. Emigration to Assam increased significantly over the 20 years from 1901; the decade 1911-1921 witnessed the heaviest


\textsuperscript{54} See Ch.IV, pp.179 and 183.
Exodus. However, in contrast with emigration to Bengal, there was a large number of females among the emigrants to Assam.

The bulk of the emigrants went to the tea-gardens as tea-coolies. In 1901, 75% of the emigrants from Cuttack, 85% of the emigrants from Balasore and 90% of the emigrants from Sambalpur were working as labourers in the tea-gardens. The censuses of 1911 and 1921 do not provide similar figures for Puri due to the absence of data.

55. These percentages are calculated from the statistics given in Census of India, 1901, vol.III, pt.II, Imperial Table-XI and Provincial Table-III. Figures for Puri are not available.
information. However, the proportion of tea-garden labourers among the Oriya speaking population, about two-thirds of whom had migrated from these 4 districts, can be obtained from these censuses. In 1911, 85% of the Oriya speaking population was enumerated in the tea-gardens.\(^56\) In 1921, the corresponding percentage was 83.\(^57\) Of the rest, many were ex-tea-garden coolies settled as cultivators and some were railway and steamer coolies, cattlemen, cobblers, domestic servants, carters, petty shop-keepers, hawkers and Nuniya earth-workers.\(^58\)

Females were relatively more numerous among the tea-garden labourers than in case of all emigrants. In 1901, women constituted 37%, 59% and 59.5% respectively of the tea-garden labourers from Cuttack, Balasore and Sambalpur.\(^59\)

The censuses of 1911 and 1921 do not provide similar statistics. However, the sex ratio among the Oriya speaking population enumerated in the tea-gardens in both 1911 and

\(^{56}\) Census of India, 1911, vol.III, pt.II, Imperial Table-X and Provincial Table-III.

\(^{57}\) Census of India, 1921, vol.III, pt.II, Imperial Table-X and Provincial Table-VIII.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., pt.I, pp.36 and 121.

\(^{59}\) Census of India, 1901, vol.III, pt.II, Provincial Table-III.
1921 was roughly 1:1.  Generally speaking, almost all the tea-garden labourers were accompanied by their families to the gardens. Single men formed a small section of migrants.

The percentage of emigrants who returned home for good was rather small. In fact, an emigrant had little chance of returning home without the assistance of his employer. Those who returned home were usually the single male migrants, who came under the short term recruitment system and spent about a year each in Assam. The emigrant families usually spent a number of years on the tea-estates and then moved to the adjoining villages where they permanently settled down.


63. RCLI, Report, p.360.

to cultivate Government land as tenants of the Government. 65
Thus, in contrast with emigration to Bengal, the emigrants
to Assam generally left their ancestral village homes for
ever and spent the rest of their lives in that province. 66

Recruitment of tea-garden labour was made on an indentu-
re system: the labourer was bound by a contract to serve for
a specified period on the garden to which he was recruited.
The indenture system was sustained by a series of legislations
passed by the Government of India. These laws contained
penal provisions for breaches of contract by the labourers.
Initially, the planter had the right of private arrest of
the labourers, and the latter were liable to be punished
with imprisonment for breach of contract. 67

The tea labourer had no freedom of movement. Chowkidars, who guarded the
'coolie lines' could prevent 'outsiders' from coming in and
could stop any worker from leaving without permission. The
tea plantations neither allowed any labourer to leave one

65. Ibid., pt. I, Govt. of Assam, p. 4, and Indian Tea Asso-
ciation, p. 68. In 1929, the RCLI observed that, more
than 600,000 ex-teagarden labourers were settled on
Govt. land. See RCLI, Report, p. 361.


67. See R.K. Das, Plantation Labour in India, (Calcutta,
1931), Chapters II-IV, and S.K. Bose, Capital and
Labour in the Indian Tea Industry, (Bombay, 1954),
Chapters VIII-X.
planted and join another, nor employed any labourer who was suspected of having left another tea plantation in Assam. Thus an emigrant labourer had to surrender his liberty for a period of years.

The wages in the tea plantations were very low. During the period from 1900 to 1912 the real wages remained stagnant. They declined between 1913 and 1920. The evidences recorded by the Assam Labour Enquiry Committee in 1906 showed that the wages of unskilled labourers in the interior of Orissa were at least as high as the wages of labourers in Assam tea-gardens. Further, unlike in the tea-gardens, the real wages in Orissa remained more or less constant during 1900-24. "The rise (in money wages) since the

68. RCLI, Report, pp.376-8.
69. A.K. Bajchi, Private Investment..., p.123, Table 5.2.
Provincial Settlement (of 1900) was roughly in the same proportion as the rise in prices. Thus, if a labourer could get regular employment at home, he had actually nothing to gain from emigration. Hence, it was unlikely that the families which emigrated had regular employment at home.

Tea-garden labour came from an essentially agricultural background. The migration to the plantation does not involve a radical change of occupation. The plantation worker is drawn from agriculture and in agriculture, though of a different type, he remains. On the basis of the available qualitative evidence it can be suggested that the emigrants to Assam were agriculturists who lost their holdings due to indebtedness. "Almost the only person who goes (to Assam) is the man who is broken down and must clear out." "The ordinary sardari coolie is a man who has lost

74. RCLI, Report, p.350.
75. Indebtedness is supposed to have contributed greatly to emigration. See RCLI, Evidence, vol.VI, pt.I, F.C. King, p.49.
76. PALEC (1906), No.47, H.C. Liddell, p.35.
his all here (at home) and is more or less broken". 77 Often, cultivators and agricultural labourers ran away to Assam without clearing their debts. 78 Coming from an agricultural background, the emigrants "look forward to the time when they will be in a position to acquire a holding of their own inside or outside the garden". 79 If the data on the settlement of ex-tea-garden labourers on Government land 80 are any indication, many of the emigrants realised their dreams to some extent. Thus, the emigrants were the landless families who could not get regular employment in their native places.

Emigration from any area to Assam varied inversely with the local harvest conditions. 81 There was "not much prospect of increased emigration to the tea gardens except in years of scarcity". 82 Famine was "the great and chief

77. Ibid., No.48, J.M. Cassey, p.38.


79. RALEC 1921-22, p.32. Also see RCLI, Evidence, vol.VI, pt.I, Govt. of Assam, p.20 and Indian Tea Association, p.75.

80. See footnote 65 above.


82. RALEC, (1906), No.111, M.A. Salam, p.86.
incentive to emigration" to Assam.\textsuperscript{83} Between 1901 and 1906, there was a marked decline in the number of tea-garden labourers recruited from Sambalpur, due "primarily to good crops" in the district.\textsuperscript{84} In 1918-19, a year of extremely low output, emigration from Orissa to Assam was at its peak and was quite high in the following year, compared to normal times.\textsuperscript{85} However, the distress, under which the labouring families emigrated, was not temporary, for in that case the emigration would have been of a temporary nature. Our analysis showed that land transfers had an inverse relationship with output.\textsuperscript{86} Considering the fact that permanent emigration received a strong boost in years of low output, it can be suggested that loss of land through the process of forced commerce and the emigration of landless families on a permanent basis were related phenomena: the former led to the latter.

Thus, a very large number of persons migrated from Orissa during the period from 1901 to 1921,\textsuperscript{87} mainly to

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{83} Ibid., No.51, A.H. Tietkins, p.42.
\item \textsuperscript{84} Ibid., No.48, J.M. Cassey, p.37.
\item \textsuperscript{86} See Ch.IV, pp.183-185.
\item \textsuperscript{87} Since we do not have data for 1931 we cannot say whether there was a net out-migration from Orissa during 1921-31.
\end{enumerate}
Bengal and Assam. Those who migrated to Bengal were single male workers mostly belonging to the traditional landholder and cultivator castes. Emigrants to Assam were families of landless labourers. There is nothing to suggest that their wages were higher in their new destinations than what they would have earned if they had regular employment at home.\(^88\) Again, it was not that employment opportunities in these districts were limited while there was an increase in population pressure. In fact, the size of population in the 4 districts of Orissa remained more or less stagnant during 1901-1921.\(^69\) Thus, it was the process of commercialisation of agriculture which deprived a large section of the agricultural population of its traditional source of livelihood and compelled them to emigrate to distant places in search of employment.\(^90\)

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88. In so far as the emigrants to Bengal are concerned, their wages were higher than the wages of agricultural labourers in Orissa. But it is not appropriate to compare the two wages since the emigrant to Bengal belonged to the family of an owner-cultivator. Before emigration his income was the average product of the family farm.

89. See Statistical Appendix, Table 3.

90. However, we are unable to explain the decline in emigration from Sambalpur during 1911-1921.