

A Study of the Provision of Labour and Welfare by the British for the Estate Plantation Industry in the Southern Province

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Abstract

Land purchases in the upcountry, as well as the low country, increased due to the implementation of plantation and Acts introduced by the British rulers from time to time to accelerate the growth of plantations. The cultivation of commercial crops on the lands this purchased required labour as well as financial facilities. There was also a need for a road network to connect these large plots of land. Initially, lowland and upcountry labourers were used to prove the lands bought, by the planets for plantation and to build the road with the rapid development of commercial crop cultivation, the required labour was obtained from Indian labourers. However, the labour of the South Indians for plantations in the Southern Province was obtained only for large estates. In areas such as Deniyaya, where there were large estates, it was difficult to get local labour, so the focus was on Indian workers. The main reason for hiring local labourers for plantation. Most of the estate owners in the South were local administrative officers like "Mudaly Korala & Arachchi". They obtained their labour from their administrative divisions, using their official power. They did not pay the workers their due wages. They used their official power to defraud workers. Some Sinhalese workers settled in the Line Rooms. British Planters such as Winter and Bowman appreciated the Sinhalese workers. Local entrepreneurs as well as local chiefs in the Southern Province were not limited to a few crops as in the upcountry. They grew pepper, cardamom, cinnamon, and cinchona. Losses could be minimized when demand and prices of major crops in the world market fell. The cultivation of crops on the lands thus purchased required labour as well as financial facilities. There was also a need for a road network to connect these large plots of workers.

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Introduction

Although the plantation industry in the Central Province expanded rapidly under British rule, it expanded slowly in the Southern Province. At the beginning of 1860, there were only 32 estate owners in the Southern Province. Nine of them were foreigners. Among these estates, Baddegama, Waulagala, Yahalagoda, Galagoda, Hendagoda Panilkander, Breslo, Kohilawagura, etc, estates were located in the Galle District. In 1850, planters in the South paid 179 Pounds in taxes to the government for Indian labourers. In 1879, 18001 Indian workers migrated to the Southern Province for coffee cultivation. By the first quarter of the 20th century tea cultivation in the Southern Province had expanded slowly. In that case

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situation the arrival of Indian workers was minimal. However, with the growth of rubber cultivation in the Southern Province during the period of 1910-1911, there was a significant increase in the demand for labour. A high salary was paid daily. Under this background, the Southern Provincial Agent stated that local workers were more involved in the work of rubber estates. (Administration Report, 1910-1911, PI,GA,SP,P.64). During the World War of 1914-1918, there was drop in the prices of tea local workers were more involved in the work of rubber estates. (Administration Report, 1910-1911, PI,GA,SP,P.64). During the World War of 1914-1918, there was drop in the prices of tea and rubber plantation workers. They had to look for jobs outside the plantations (Administration Report, 1918, SP, GA, P.62).

Research problem and research objectives

The research problem is investigating the way of obtaining the labour for plantation by the British planters in low-country. There are two objectives of this research as 1) To study the reasons for low expansion of plantation activities in low country comparatively up country, and 2) To investigate the socio economic, and political relations practised by the Indian workers who worked with the Sinhalese villages located near the estates.

Research Methodology

This research is almost entirely based on government documents. Kachcheri documents are the official documents of the Government Agent or Assistant Government Agent who was the in charge of the administration of the territory of Sri Lanka during the British rule or the daily official document of the Kachcheri. The documents contain information on all important administrative, revenue, plantation, labour, and other activities carried out in connection with the area. The agent had to make official visits from time to time to get to know the countrymen and gain an understanding of the area. During his travels, agents were required to record in their diaries what they did and saw, the a specific places, as well as people. There is a large number of such diaries in Kachcheri.

Agents were given more powers in enforcing certain ordinances enacted by the Government. The Agent was tasked with taking action when appropriate and enforcing certain regulations necessary to enforce the ordinance. Such brief changes in the implementation of ordinances and the factors that influenced them are mentioned in the Kachcheri document. In such a study, it is essential to study the written document in the respective sections. The administrative reports of the government Agent occupy an important place among the Kachcheri documents. Kachcheri was also the administrative unit that integrated and functioned the activities of the various departments. The Divisional officers of the respective Departments were also appointed to the Departments under the supervision of the Agent. Therefore, such departmental documents were also deposited in the Kachcheri. These documents are very useful for studying related activities in various fields. In addition to the Kachcheri documents, the records of the Department of Census and Statistics were utilized. The blue books, which can be taken as the Government's annual statistics report are also very helpful in this research. The debates in the Constitutional Assembly, founded in 1833 are very helpful in such research. Many planters represented the Legislative assemble information about request made various requirements for plantation is mention in the Hansard Report.

Limitation of the study

This research was based plantation areas in current Southern province in Sri Lanka. It is difficult to identify the original names of plantation lands which is mentioned in administrative reporst and blue books. etc, similarly it is difficult to find information about the plantation lands which was nationalized under the reign of Sirimawo Bandaranayake. Some Plantationas areas are destroyed due to the modern constructions such as Citras group , Homadola plantation and Diwithura plantation.

Tamil and Sinhala Labourers

Due to the economic recession in 1918, a lot of planters had to face many difficulties. Nevertheless, paddy cultivation, vegetables and other cereals, and the fishery industry made a safe conduct towards an economy of relief. This relief eased the difficulties faced by estate labourers. (Administration report 1918, SP, GA, p.C2.) The tea plantation scheme provided jobs for women and children tooThis ratio of the Indian estate population from 1925 to 1948 is given below.

Table 01: Indian State Population 1925 -1948

Year	Male	Female	Children	Total
1925	4247	3946	3478	12166
1930	6410	5408	6671	18489
1935	7652	5642	6891	20185
1940	6385	5375	6323	18065
1945	6543	3812	4223	14578
1948	7612	4512	5612	17736

Source: Administration Report ,1925-1948.

The following table shows the number of laborers who worked in the tea and rubber estates in the Southern Province from 1935 to 1948.

Table 02: laborers who worked in the tea and rubber estates in the southern province from 1935 to 1948

Year	Tea	Rubber	Coconut
1935	22127	39921	14525
1940	23453	41973	14469
1945	29543	51497	12431
1948	29543	51497	12431

Source: Ceylon Blue Books 1935-1948.

The following list shows the estates that employed one hundred or more laborers of Indian origin by the year 1935.

Galle District

Name of Estate	Area Located
1. Bentota group	Elpitiya
2. Borakanda	Ambalamgoda
3. Citrus group	Akmeemana
4. Deviturei	Ambalamgoda
5. Ellekanda	Baddegama
6. Galinda	Talgaswella
7. Giragoda	Elpitiya
8. Hingalgoda	Hiniduma
9. Homadola	Udugama
10. Igalkanda	Elpitiya
11. Katandola	Nakiyadeniya
12. Kitulpitigala	Elpitiya
13. Kosgoda	Elpitiya
14. Lelwala group	Baddegama
15. Mapalagama	Talgaswela
16. Nagastanna	Elpitiya
17. Nakiyadeniya estate	Nakiyadeniya
18. Olympus	Galle
19. Pillagoda valley	Baddegama
20. St. Leonard on tea	Elpitiya
21. Stockland	Udugama
22. Talgaswela	Elpitiya
23. Walahanduwa	Galle
24. Walpita group	Poddala

Source: Administration Report 1935. P1, GA, SP, P.33

Matara District

Name of Estate	Area Located
1. Andaradeniya	Deniyaya
2. Anilkanda	Deniyaya
3. Beverly	Deniyaya
4. Deniyaya Group	Hulandawa
5. Diyadawa	Deniyaya
6. Enasalwatta	Deniyaya
7. Galagawa	Akuressa
8. Handeord	Deniyaya
9. Hulandawa	Akuressa
10. Kurulugalla Group	Deniyaya
11. Mawarala	Kamburupitiya
12. Rathnayaka Group	Deniyaya
13. Teennahena	Akuressa
14. Wilpita	Akuressa

Source: Administration Report 1935. P1, P33.

The number of Indian Tamil children in Galle District estates was 3265. (Fuguson's Directory 1947. P.30) It was a ratio of 18% of the entire Tamil strength presented in the Southern province. In Matara District, it was 13% for the number of 2488 children. It was 31% in the Southern Province.

Table 03: Southern province estate population of Indian Tamils at District levels.

District	Male	Female	Children	Total
Galle	3509	2869	3265	9643
Matara	-	2876	2488	5364
Hamban	-	-	-	-
Totale	3509	5745	5753	18065

Source: Fuguson's directory 1947. P.30.

Sinhalese community was inclined to seek employment in the estates' plantations along with the expansion of cultivation work in the Southern Province. The rural community who lived in adjacent villages to estates and the people who lived in coastal areas suffering from various economic hardships had arrived in estate work and domiciled in the estate line rooms etc. depicted the phenomena of changing social life.

The rural community that used to live a simple life during the Mid-20th century did not require much money. Anyhow, their lifestyle changed later on with the requirements of income. This situation directly influenced the increase of Sinhala laborers in the estates. Sinhalese affluent of the low country took steps to engage the villagers who lived around them. The majority of foreign planters of the upcountry arranged to bring in Indian origin.

In the beginning, Sinhala laborers had domiciled in the up small numbers. This situation prevailed in the low country too at first, but later on, laborers had domiciled there in large numbers (Census of Ceylon 1921, vol. p11, P 113). In addition, various nationalities of many ethnicities like upcountry Sinhalese, Ceylon Tamil, Ceylon Muslim, European, Burgher, Malay, Chinese, etc. were found domicile in estates due to being the owners or the providers of other administration services. The chart shown below gives detailed information in this regard.

In 1930, there was a decrease in the number of Sinhalese workers in the Southern Province. It decreased by 5019. The number of Sinhalese workers domiciled in the estates of the Southern Province came down to 1487 and the number of non-residents downed to 2593. (Administration Report 1930, P1, GA, SP, P41). The economic recession that began in 1929 affected the demand for tea, rubber, and coconut production. This situation severely affected the Island's plantation industries.

Table 04: Estate population in the Southern Province in 1921

Ethnicity	1911			1921		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Low country Sinhalese	2246	1107	3353	3202	2041	5243
Upcountry Sinhalese	33	08	41	34	39	73
Ceylon Tamil	13	10	23	101	13	114
Indian Tamil	3254	2584	5838	5793	5058	10851
Ceylon Muslim	10	06	16	40	28	68
Indian Muslim	32	25	57	50	44	94
European	33	04	37	67	30	97
Burgher	29	15	44	79	44	13
Malay	01	-	01	11	18	29
Total	5651	3759	9410	9377	7315	16692

Source: Census of Ceylon 1921. Vol.11, P11, P.13

Native labourers of the Southern Province too were badly affected. The Labour supply of Indian workers was not affected due to them being permanent labourers and unskilled for other jobs. The number of Indian labourers in the Southern Province in 1927 was 18583, (Administration Report 1927, P26) reduced to 18065 in 1930. (Administration Report 1930, P1, P40). Although it showed a decrease in native labour supply there remained a full supply of labourers. When taken as a whole government agents of Southern Province explain this matter saying that poverty, tradition and habits, least interest, etc, had made a higher demand for labour jobs. (Administration Report 1929, P1, GA, SP, P.C4.)

They're lived European planters who appreciated the works of Sinhalese labourers in plantation ventures. One of the superintendents of the estate said in 1937 that Sinhalese labourers reported to work regularly and were clever in work. (Dinamina, 1937. P4) Sinhala labourers who worked and were domiciled in the estates of Europeans in 1937 are shown below.

Table 05: Sinhala laborers who worked and were domiciled in the estates of Europeans in 1937

Estates	Proprietor	No of Sinhalese labour	No of line rooms
Gallinda (Talgaswalla)(684acres)	J.W. Earskin	160	12
Gonaduwa (Baddegama) (94 acres)	E.W. Bowman	82	12
Katandola (Elpitiya) (1500 acres)	M.J. Elderson	322	17
Seenigoda (Ambalamgoda) (305 acres)	M.J. Elderson	144	09
Kitulvitigala(Ambalamgoda) (610 acres)	Herbert G Boyce	118	04
Lawalhena(Baddegama)	E.A. Bowman	152	14
Kekirihena(Akmeemana) (58acres)	E.A. Bowman	16	03
Potatuwa (Deniyaya) (50acres)	W.W. Simon	04	04

Source: Administration Report 1937. P1, GA, SP, P91

Several planters in the Southern Province preferred to enroll Sinhalese labourers. Planters like Vinter and Bowman managed to live and work amicably with village people in the vicinity and obtained labour. Bowman family employed Sinhalese labourers for their plantation work. Villagers admire the Bowman household for their fluency in Sinhala language, their respect towards native traditions and customs, their generosity etc. The majority of Sinhala labourers worked in Gallinda Estate of 684 acres owned by J.W.Earskin, Baddegama estate of E.D.Bowman, and Akmeemana estate of E.L.Dryword.

New land policies introduced under the Land development Act of 1935 coincided with the rapid growth of plantation industries and paved the way for Indian workers who emigrated to Lanka in large numbers, in addition to the increase of Sinhala workers. A commission was appointed in 1938 to investigate problems that cropped up on matters relating to labourers. Although certain persons proposed to engage Sinhala workers as full-time labourers, planters did not favour the idea. Instead, the commission in its report declared that Indian labourers were rather disciplined, had a simple lifestyle, used to living within the social framework for a long time, and easily manageable. (Sessional paper iii, 1938, P. 24.) They represented only one cast whereas planters had to be flexible enough to adhere to the customs and rituals of Sinhalese workers in their native land.

Planters were therefore compelled to treat Sinhala and Tamil labourers in two ways. On the other hand, Indian labour could be obtained easily and cheaply. European planters on different occasions had pointed out the necessity of having a suitable scheme for recruiting Sinhala workers. In such a situation, the use of the Sinhala language could have been a hindrance.

By the 1930s, the most widespread language of the estates' plantation sphere was Tamil. The interest in Sinhala workers lessened with the availability of easy and cheap Indian labour. Anyway, the keen interest to obtain more and more labour in both Sinhala and Indian stocks grew due to the sheer necessity of finding labour by the year 1938. The substantial number of Sinhala and Tamil workers fulfilled the need for labour supply to counter the ever-growing tea production. Yet, it was not easy to obtain continued service from Sinhala workers reporting to work from surrounding villagers. However, they had contributed well towards the clearance of large tracts of forest land on a contract basis for cultivation purposes of coffee, tea, and rubber. (Sessional paper iii 1938. P. 34). They continued to perform agricultural work in estates and made no decisions to alter their way of life. According to the 1938 report by the labour controller, during the seven years from 1929 to 1935, there were approximately 63,000 Sinhalese labourers working on the estate plantation with their dependents (Sessional paper iii 1929. P24). Most of the Sinhalese estate workers were in Low country estates and worked on a resident or non-resident basis.

Estate owners brought down labourers from South India under a "Kangany" system. South Indian labourers had to walk, long distances on foot until they reached the estate areas here. Before the introduction of vital railways lines. Labourers came from South India to Chilaw –Madampe and then were taken to plantation districts by train and walked many miles beyond the railway station. Some men died due to sicknesses caused by various diseases. Labourers who arrived at Deniyaya and Morawaka in the Southern Province had to walk amidst many hardships. Indian workers who came to Madampe, Chilaw from South India in 1927 and were then transported by train to various railway stations in the Southern Province are shown below.

Table 06: Number of Indian workers who transported by train

Name of the railway station	No. of laborers Arrived
Aluthgama	1148
Kosgoda	225
Ambalngoda	1678
Hikkaduwa	31
Dodanduwa	75
Galle	1860
Weligama	06
Matara	1769
Total	6792

Estate owners did not take any step to settle any possible distresses wherever labourers encountered on their way to the estate. A certain amount was paid to Kanganies to bring in labourers. Kanganies were responsible for the supply of food to the labourers they bought, settling any disputes amongst them, and settling any problem on management matters between them and the estate. Superintendents later on this service rendered by Kanganies became unimportant along with the Indian labourers who opted to live on this island. Kanganies gave them, until they settled down here, necessary money and goods on loan only. As such those labourers had to live on loans at the beginning. As they got their wages at the end of the month they were compelled to obtain their food on credit from Kanganies. There were instances when the estate owner did not pay their wages regularly putting the labourers into severe difficulties. Considering this situation government with the aim of the welfare of the Indian estates' labourers enforced the 'Indian Labour Act' No. 27 of 1927.

The basic condition set down by this act was to increase wages under the cost-of-living expenses. Accordingly, the Estate Wages Board was set up. Section 8 of the Act laid down the following wages ratios as payable.

Table 07: Daily Wage Ratios Payable to Indian Estate Labourers in 1935

Plantation District	Daily wage payable to Male labourers	Daily wage payable to Female labourers	Daily wage payable to child labourers
Colombo	50 cents	40 cents	50 cents
Kalutara	50 cents	40 cents	30 cents
Kandy	54 cents	43 cents	32 cents
Matale	50 cents	43 cents	32 cents
Nuwaraeliya	54 cents	43 cents	32 cents
Galle	50 cents	40 cents	30 cents
Matara	50 cents	40 cents	30 cents
Puttalam	50 cents	40 cents	30 cents
Badulla	54 cents	43 cents	30 cents
Rathnapura	50 cents	40 cents	32 cents
Kagalle	50 cents	40 cents	30cents

Source: Ferguson's Directory 1935. P.969-974

In addition to the daily wages, a monthly acreage fee was paid to Indian estate labourers. One labourer was allotted one acre of or up to five acres of cultivated land to be looked after and so maintenance work such as weeding up, keeping trenches, etc, and was paid acreage fees monthly.

Following is the chart showing the number of estates that paid acreage fees and the acreage for the Indian labourers in the Southern Province between 1935 and 1948.

Table 08: Indian labourers in the Southern Province between 1935 and 1948

District	No. of Estates paid acreage fees		No of the Tea acres paid acreage fees		No. of Rubbers paid acreage fees	
	1935	1948	1935	1948	1935	1948
Galle	87	89	5258	6930	24631	24992
Matara	56	55	5831	6977	4490	4757
Total	143	144	11089	13900	29121	29747

Source: Administration Report 1935. P1, P17

Further, the Act enforced the working period of labourers up to a limit of nine hours. The act also stipulated those 28 measures of dry ration for Indian male labourers, 24 measures for female labourers, and child labourers each at the rate of 20 cents be given each month. (Administration Report 1927. Pi, P.18) and a widow and a child of her be given four measures free of charge per month. Although this relief was introduced many of the estates did not implement them.

Estate labourers lived a solitary life and they lived apart from other people. There was nobody to raise a voice on behalf of their grievances. As they worked and lived under the tight rule of estate superintendents, there

was no opportunity available to complain about their rights. After the implementation of the government paid attention to look into the injustice done to them by superintendents and appointed an investigation team to inspect the estate affairs.

Following are the details of the investigations carried out in the plantation areas of the Southern Province in 1935, and illegal activities of estate owners against estate workers.

Table 09: the plantation areas of the Southern Province in 1935

Illegal activities carried out on workers	Galle District Illegal activities	Matara District illegal Activities
Failure to mention the required salary documents on the notice boards	15	03
Failure to pay the due salary	05	03
Failure to pay wages on the due date	02	02
Failure to deliver food on time	02	01
Failure to maintain salary records	03	02
Failure to pay wages to workers	03	02
Handing over the wages of the workers to Kangany	07	03
Supply of rice at a higher price	07	03
Failure to supply rice at the prescribed concessionary price	08	02
Failure to issue the prescribed free food items	04	01
Failure to provide relief to pregnant mothers	03	02
Failure to pay acre fees	04	02
Failure to maintain labour records	09	01
Employing children under 10 years of age	-	-

Source: Administration Report, Government Agent, Southern Province, P.35

More than half of the period relevant to this research study, estate plantation sector too was declared as an essential service under World War II. There arose unrest in the upcountry estates with the labour movement and strikes contrary to the silent atmosphere that prevailed in the Southern Province. As a result, the dispute between the employers and workers were not that harmful. Production limitation and quota system practiced during the 20th century was abandoned. In addition, during the fourth decade, measures were taken to increase production to its highest level, and under the exchange of products agreement, potential estate owners were required to produce commodities at pre-war rates. This resulted in the inability to pay estate workers a suitable wage in keeping with the economic recession caused by the Great War. The estate owners found it very difficult to act against the grim reality caused by the recession at the end of World War II. This resulted in the emergence of various labour problems in the plantation sector.

Health Facilities

An important issue for plantation workers was their health. The death toll of workers and their children was high compared to the rest of the population. This was due to malnutrition, poor working conditions, lack of attention by estate owners on their health care, and lack of hospital facilities. In 1893, the government appointed a commission to look into the high number of deaths of plantation workers. Following the commission's report, it set up dispensaries in the plantation areas to improve the health of the workers. However, by 1920, the toll from plantation workers was a thousand. The average death rate in the country was 27 per thousand (Admin station report 1920, PL, RA, SP P. L40). According to the 1921 census, the death toll of workers on the island was 36 per thousand, and the death toll from plantation workers in the Southern Province was 50 per thousand.

Here the death toll of Sinhala workers was as low as 10 per thousand because they had been accustomed to traditional medicine from birth. Tamil workers paid less attention to the indigenous medical system because taking rest was a problem when using these medicines. However, the main problem was the lack of attention

paid by plantation managers to workers.

However, the estate managers were obliged to provide medical treatment. As a result, in addition to the medical centers they run, patients were referred to major hospitals in Galle, Matara, and Hambantota districts. By 1935, several regional hospitals had been established. Rural hospitals have been established in Elpitiya, Udugama, and Balapitiya areas in Galle District and Deniyaya and Weligama areas in Matara District. The specialty of this hospital is its proximity to the estates. In addition, 27, tourist dispensaries have been set up in estates in the Southern Province. However, by 1985, health care, in the Southern Province was still inadequate.

The number of worker deaths in 1935 was also high due to plantations regarding matters, and workers did not follow proper medical advice; and seek treatments.

Table 10: Number of deaths and births of Indian plantation workers in the Southern Province in 1935

District	Births	Deaths
Galle	312	321
Matara	264	224
Southern Province	576	545

Source: Administration Report 1935, PI, GA, SP, P. 29

Table 11: The infant mortality rate of Indian Plantation workers in the Southern Province.

District	The Year 1925	The Year 1935
Galle	225	228
Matara	242	250
Southern Province	467	478

Source: Administration Report: 1935, PI, GA, SP, P 18

Orientation to Indigenous Medical Services

Although Western medical services were introduced to cater to the health of Indian workers, some plantation authorities seemed to refer patients to local doctors in nearby villages. Treatments for snake bites in particular seems to have been obtained from a nearby village. At a time when snake medicine was not popular in Western medicine, the service was obtained from a nearby village.

Conclusion

With the spread of plantations in Southern Province, it can be described as a special kind of monopoly institution that has full power over the handling of its overall functional role. The owners of the estates were separate. Crop cultivation production activities plantation management were carried out by agencies the chairpersons of the plantation companies were the directors who represented the agencies. Plantation and plantation companies in the Southern Province were governed by agencies. Thus, there were four main agencies in the Southern Province. However, there was a big change in society, economy and technology in plantation industry in the lowland. The Southern Province residents got technical knowledge about tea and rubber cultivation and tea estates emerged as a result.

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