



Open Access, Refereed Biannual Journal of the Center for Indigenous Knowledge and Community Studies, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Submit your academic papers to director@cikcs.sab.ac.lk

Follow this and additional works at: www.sab.ac.lk

e-mail: director@cikcs.sab.ac.lk

A Study on the Relationship between Southern Province Estate Plantations and the Rural Economy: A Comprehensive Research Analysis

Chandrasiri Vithanage, Department of History and Archaeology, University of Ruhuna, mvchandrasiri99@gmail.com

Received: 07 August 2023 / Revised: 25 September 2023 / Accepted: 09 October 2023

Abstract

This research investigates the impact of British colonial plantation expansion on the rural economy of the southern province. It examines the role of European entrepreneurs and local leaders, in large-scale plantation activities and their effects on the economy. The study employs a comprehensive methodology, utilizing primary sources such as government documents, including Kachcheri (District Secretariat) records, diaries of government agents, administrative reports, and departmental documents. Additionally, data from the Department of Census and Statistics, blue books, and Constituent Assembly debates are incorporated. The findings demonstrate substantial improvements in paddy cultivation by 1948, attributed to local representation in the State Council. Paddy cultivation remained intricately linked to the livelihoods of farmers and labours, with labours who had been working on estate plantations during the day and engaging in field work on their own lands afterward. This mutually beneficial relationship facilitated a smooth continuation of paddy cultivation. Furthermore, estate workers played a vital role in advancing

small-scale tea and rubber plantations in rural areas by sharing their expertise with local planters. The collaboration improved estate workers' living conditions, increased villagers' income through commercial crop cultivation, and highlighted the positive impact of British-era plantation expansion on the rural economy.

Keywords: British Rule, Paddy Cultivation, Plantation Expansion, Rural Economy

Introduction

The impact of Western socio-economic traditions on societal norms and behaviors had been both profound and enduring. Of note is the discernible inclination towards adopting British economic methodologies, which has not only influenced commercial structures by blending novel production methods with established economic practices but has also had far-reaching implications for the socio-economic landscape. Amidst this overarching backdrop, a significant facet of socio-economic evolution emerges: the rise of native officials, commonly referred to as Mudaliars, who have amassed extensive land holdings spanning the coastal regions of the southern province as well as the hinterlands.

The emergence of these Mudaliar landowners is intricately interwoven with their strategic alignment with British colonial governance. By strategically navigating the landscape of various land Acts implemented over time, these astute officials have skillfully expanded their land ownership. This expansion has not only solidified their economic prowess but had also elevated their social standing within the community. Their audacious participation in land auctions, often competing against foreign counterparts, further underscores their economic and social consolidation. However, this close alliance with the colonial powers had concurrently fostered a growing detachment from their compatriots, as their associations are increasingly centered around the ruling elite. At the heart of this transformation lies the reconceptualization of land as a form of capitalist property. This shift has instigated significant changes in social dynamics, giving rise to new categories of landowners, farmers, and agricultural laborers. These native officials, now substantial

landholders, had drawn upon the local Sinhalese population to fulfil the labor requirements for agricultural activities. This stands in contrast to upcountry planters, who often relied on Indian laborers. Yet, it is crucial to acknowledge the limited provision of basic amenities and welfare measures for these laborers within this specific framework.

Within this context, the present research aims to dissect the intricate dynamics and profound consequences that arose from the enduring influence of Western socio-economic traditions, particularly the adoption of British economic practices. This investigation places a deliberate focus on the central role played by native officials, the Mudaliars, in amassing land, fortifying their economic dominance, and securing an elevated social status through their alignment with the British colonial administration. Moreover, this study delves into the transformation of land into a capitalist commodity, delineating the emergence of fresh social strata and the intricate web of labor dynamics specific to the coastal and interior regions. Through shedding light on these multifaceted dimensions, the research endeavours to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complex socio-economic terrain shaped by these historical currents.

The urgency of this exploration arises from the necessity to decode the subtleties of this socio-economic metamorphosis driven by external influences. Unravelling the motivations, strategies, and implications of the Mudaliars' pursuit of economic ascension under British colonial rule not only offers insight into their historical context but also serves as a window into the broader socio-economic landscape of the time. This study thus addresses a critical void in historical scholarship, yielding invaluable insights into the intricate interplay between Western economic paradigms, native agency, and the restructuring of socio-economic norms.

Literature Review

The establishment of estate plantations in the southern province of Sri Lanka during the late 19th century had a significant impact on the region's rural economy and the

livelihoods of its inhabitants (Bertolacchi, 1817; De Silva, 1981). This literature review aimed to provide a detailed analysis of the historical context, socio-economic transformations, patterns of land ownership, and the emergence of trading groups in the area. During this period, a considerable number of landowners, including notable individuals such as Earnest de Silva, G. Robert de Soysa, and James A. Peires, actively participated in the plantation industry (Bertolacchi, 1817). The accumulation of land resources under the leadership of native planters resulted in the public owning small portions of land, while many individuals became laborers on these plantations (De Silva, 1981). Farmers had soon realised that their land portions were insufficient to provide a sustainable income, prompting some to seek alternative employment as laborers (De Silva, 1981; Hettiarachchy, 1982).

The coastal areas of the southern province, particularly the Galle district, witnessed the establishment of large-scale commercial coconut plantations owned by officials such as Mudaliars and Mohandirams (De Silva, 1981). The limited income generated from small land portions pushed farmers to work as laborers for these new planters, which then resulted in significant economic setbacks for the farming community in the coastal belt (De Silva, 1981).

The division of lands through practices like "thattu" and "katti" transfers further aggravated the economic challenges faced by farmers (De Silva, 1981). Land fragmentation and the unsuitability of certain plots for commercial crops led to mortgages and agreements, resulting in the acquisition of these lands by village headmen and affluent individuals (De Silva, 1981; Hettiarachchy, 1982). This loss of land and the subsequent increase in poverty forced farmers into direct labor roles, as their agricultural harvests were insufficient to sustain their livelihoods (De Silva, 1981; Hettiarachchy, 1982). Reports on the economic affairs of the coastal provinces during the period of 1937-1944 shed light on the villagers' lack of interest in improving their lands or utilizing them productively (Report on the Economic Survey, 1937; Administration Reports, 1868-1948). In the Galle district, joint land ownership and land divisions resulted in reduced agricultural productivity (Report

on the Economic Survey, 1937). The partitioning of lands by village chiefs and their subsequent acquisition by wealthier individuals further exacerbated rural inequality through the concentration of land ownership among a privileged few (Administration Reports, 1868-1948).

The spread of estate plantations in up-country areas also led to the displacement of farmers who found themselves surrounded by these plantations (De Silva, 1981). These farmers were forced to abandon their homes and properties, with limited avenues for legal recourse or compensation (De Silva, 1981). Disputes over land boundaries and grazing rights arose, often favoring the interests of the planters in the resolution process (De Silva, 1981). Consequently, farmers resorted to acts of violence and mischief as they felt marginalized and denied justice within the legal system (De Silva, 1981). In addition to the plantation industry, the growth of trading and commercial ventures played a pivotal role in driving significant socio-economic changes in the region (De Silva, 1981). People from coastal areas migrated to up-country regions to engage in trading and supplying enterprises (De Silva, 1981). Sinhalese and Muslim businesspeople, alongside craftsmen and workers from various districts, were able to establish businesses, transported goods, and made substantial contributions to the local economy (De Silva, 1981).

The literature also points out the socio-economic changes brought about by the growth of trading and commercial ventures in the region. People from coastal areas migrated to up-country regions to engage in trading and supplying enterprises, contributing to the development of a dynamic business environment (De Silva, 1981). Sinhalese and Muslim businesspeople, alongside craftsmen and workers from various districts, played crucial roles in these ventures, significantly influencing the local economy (De Silva, 1981). To conclude, the reviewed literature provides valuable insights into the historical context and dynamics that characterized the relationship between estate plantations and the rural economy in the southern province of Sri Lanka. The establishment of estate plantations brought about significant changes in land ownership, rural livelihoods, and trading activities,

shaping the socio-economic landscape of the region (Bertolacchi, 1817; De Silva, 1981; Hettiarachchy, 1982). The findings contributed to a better understanding of the transformative effects of estate plantations on the rural economy of Southern Province.

Research Objectives

This research endeavors to address a significant research problem, focusing on the profound consequences stemming from the expansion of plantations during the era of British colonial rule. The study aims to delve into the intricate web of outcomes that emerged because of this expansion, considering both the collaborative efforts of European entrepreneurs and local leaders. By analyzing the multifaceted effects of plantation activities, the research seeks to unveil the nuanced ways in which these undertakings have shaped the economic landscape of the region. A particular emphasis would be placed on the implications of plantation expansion for the rural economy of the southern province, shedding light on the transformative dynamics that have impacted local communities in diverse ways. The expansion of plantations during this period had significant implications for the economic landscape of the region, and it is essential to understand the multifaceted effects resulting from the involvement of both European entrepreneurs and local leaders in large-scale plantation activities. By conducting an in-depth investigation, this study seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the economic effects stemming from plantation expansion in the southern province during the colonial period. Furthermore, the study recognizes the comparability of this situation with the upcountry, which refers to the rural areas outside the southern province. This raises important questions regarding the similarities and differences in the impact of plantation activities on the rural economies of these two distinct areas. By examining the economic dynamics and outcomes in both the southern province and the upcountry, the study aims to shed light on the variations in the effects of plantation expansion and identify the factors that account for these similarities and differences.

To address this research problem, the study highlights the following key objectives:

1. Investigate how the expansion of plantations under British rule influenced the rural economy of the southern province. This objective involves examining the specific economic consequences and transformations resulting from the expansion of plantations during the colonial period and understanding their impact on the rural economy.
2. Analyze the specific economic consequences and transformations resulting from the involvement of European entrepreneurs in large-scale plantation activities within the region. This objective aims to assess the economic effects brought about by the participation of European entrepreneurs in plantation activities and their influences on the rural economy.

By addressing these research objectives, the study aims to enhance the understanding of the intricate relationship between plantation expansion and the rural economy in the southern province during the colonial era. It aims to provide valuable insights into the economic effects of plantation activities, contributing to academic knowledge, informing policy making, and guiding future research endeavors related to the economic legacies of plantation expansion in similar contexts.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed in this research is characterized by a carefully orchestrated progression that encompasses data collection, meticulous examination, and in-depth interpretation. The heart of this approach resides in the comprehensive scrutiny of government documents, with a particular emphasis placed on Kachcheri documents. These meticulously preserved records, dating back to the British colonial era in Sri Lanka, served as an invaluable repository of historical data. Their scope spans a diverse array of subjects, including administration, revenue, plantation management, labor affairs, and a spectrum of activities within the geographical

context under investigation. At the core of the data collection process lies an intricate analysis of the information encapsulated within the Kachcheri documents. These documents yield insights of substantial significance, shedding light on the enforcement of British Government ordinance and the intricate factors that influenced their practical execution. The methodical and systematic examination of written materials from relevant sections were taken on pivotal importance, as it unveils the multi-faceted dynamics that underpin the historical context.

This methodological framework gains additional strength through the inclusion of administrative reports meticulously curated by the Government Agent. Given the pivotal role of the Kachcheri as a central administrative hub orchestrating activity across diverse departments, documents originating from these sectors offer indispensable insights into the various dimensions of socio-economic activities within the region. To further enrich the analysis, the study incorporates records sourced from the Department of Census and Statistics, with a particular emphasis on the annual "blue books" containing comprehensive government statistics reports. Moreover, insights distilled from debates held within the Constituent Assembly, established in 1833, contribute a layer of depth to the understanding of discussions and considerations during the colonial period.

In essence, the data analysis strategy undertaken embarks on a journey of comprehensive and exhaustive exploration of a variety of government documents. This encompasses an array of sources, such as Kachcheri records, administrative reports, "blue books," and debates from the Constituent Assembly. This methodological stance is underpinned by a balanced blend of qualitative analysis and historical interpretation. Through this approach, a nuanced comprehension of historical events, socio-economic dynamics, and the intricate implications associated with the expansion of plantations during the British colonial rule is facilitated. The diversity in the range of document types harnessed from diverse administrative sources forms a robust foundation, fostering the derivation of meaningful

conclusions and contributing to a deeper academic understanding of the complex historical and socio-economic context under exploration.

Results and Discussion

Spread of Estate Plantation and the Accumulation of Lands

By the end of the 19th century, a significant number of landowners were involved in the plantation industry in the southern province. Among the native planters who owned vast amounts of land in this province were notable individuals such as Earnest de Silva, G. Robert de Soysa, David Wanigasekara, James A. Pierise, Gate Mudliyar Tudor Rajapaksa, Henry de Silva, S.N. Baba Cassim, Amin Dula Panden, Omar Lebbe Cassim, Baba Hakeem Muthalif, and Thomas Amarasuriya. The accumulation of land resources under the leadership of native landowners resulted in the general public owning small portions of land, while those without land became laborers. Farmers realised that their land holdings were insufficient to provide the necessary income for survival. Some individuals attempted to enter other sectors of the economy as laborers, while others became "Anda" farmers. Many farmers discovered that their current fields were inadequate to divide among their children or heirs in accordance with new property laws. This situation encouraged the cultivation of paddy under "Thattu" transfer and "Katti" transfer, which emerged in certain areas of the southern province.

Coastal areas of the southern province transformed into vast plantations of commercial coconut crops, which were accumulated by officials like Mudaliyars and Mohandirams. Farmers in these areas could find employment as laborers due to the meager income generated from their small plots of lands. Consequently, farmers in the coastal belt's economy suffered severe setbacks. Those who became newly wealthy had taken the advantage of the poor economic conditions of humble farmers and acquired small plots of land from them. As a result, many farmers were forced to work directly as laborers, and the harvest produced by the farming community was insufficient to sustain their needs. Under these circumstances, villagers were

reluctant to improve their lands due to changes in ownership or utilized them to produce abundant harvests. This situation was revealed by various government-appointed inspection boards examining the economic affairs of the coastal provinces from 1937 to 1944. In the Galle district, the productivity of land owned by villagers was unsatisfactory. Joint ownership of lands resulted in reduced interest in agricultural work. This situation could be exemplified by the division of lands through "thattu" change and hereditary claims, as observed in the lands of the "Pahala Made Gama " family in Hinidum Pattu of the Galle district. The land owned by Upa Appuwe, who was considered as the second foremost forefather of the clan, was divided among his four sons and several daughters, resulting in many small and unproductive plots. Some of these plots were not suitable for commercial crops and were eventually acquired by village headmen and wealthy individuals who established plantations on them. It was common for many acres obtained through partitioning to end up in the possession of village headmen. The general public was unable to afford court fees, lawyer charges, and survey costs, were compelled to lose more plots of land and become even poorer. Those who acquired these lands eventually became the new owners of them.

For instance, there was a case in the Galle district involving a village headman who claimed two acres of land from a total of three acres known as Liyanagewatta in Gangabada Pattu during 1937. The remaining portion of the land was divided among 58 other claimants. In the same year, a similar partition case occurred concerning five acres of land called Hettigewatta of which three acres were acquired. Another partition case resulted in the acquisition of four out of six acres of land known as Mahagamagewatta. These examples clearly illustrate how the land was partitioned and various schemes were employed to acquire large portions for themselves. Another notable village headman was Vinifed Ariyaratna, a shrewd police Vidane who worked in Gangabada Pattu of the Galle district. He accumulated numerous plots of land, almost half of the village called Talawa, which was surrounded by the vast Nakiyadeniya Group. Ariyaratna was found guilty of fraud against a Chettiyar

in Galle and was forced to pay a significant fine. This setback compelled him to sell off the majority of his land, which was subsequently purchased by a wealthy family known as the "Kanapaddala Gamage" household. The accumulation of land among several families in a village was a consequence of the expansion of estate plantations.

This situation severely impacted the villagers' way of life. Small plots of land scattered among family members hindered the income they could generate, leading to the selling and mortgaging of these plots. The fate of the Pahala Madegamege clan serves as an example of the changes they faced. P.M.G. Adiriyana sold his land ownership to Kariyawasam Godage Adiriyana from Mawanana for Rs. 80/-. Several years later, Adiriyana's second son repurchased the land from P.M.G. Adiriyana. Additionally, 1/16th of the land owned by P.M.G. Jamis was mortgaged to P.M.G. Semaris residing in Miyugunatenna in 1906. This property, along with other possessions, was subsequently mortgaged to Don James Rubasin Gunawardena residing in Lelwala, Hiniduma, on November 15, 1922. P. James mortgaged a part of his inherited land to Dasilage Pincaris Senanayake in Mawanana for Rs. 40/- on the day of 23, 1923. This mortgage was settled by P.M.G. Games in 1944. When James passed away at the age of 72 in 1954, the 1/16th share of his inherited land was finally divided among his seven children (Obeysekara, 1967: 250). This demonstrates how the land owned by villagers continued to be divided through generations, passing into the hands of a few wealthy individuals. Subsequently, these lands were used for commercial crops.

The importation of commercial crops and the popularity of currency transactions led villagers to leave their homes in search of money. Most workers in the villages had received their fees in kind, as cash payments were rare, a phenomenon that persisted even in the 1930s (Report on the Economic Survey, 1938: 2). Socioeconomic changes accompanied the rapid development of estate plantations. People left their homes in the hope of finding alternative sources of income and wealth in the coastal areas. Some of these enterprising individuals left the southern province by 1865 to seek their fortunes in plantation and mercantile enterprises. Examples of such individuals

include John Abeysinha Mudaliar, A.E. Rajapaksa Mudaliar, H.E. Wickramasinghe Mudaliar, J.A. Wickramasinghe Mudaliar, J.P. Abeydeera Mudaliar, Fred Abeysundara, J.E. Alles, A.E. de Silva, and Dr. K.J. de Silva (Administration Report, 1865: PI, 675).

As a result of the large-scale sale of up-country lands to European estate plantations, many farmers who were living in valleys and dales found themselves encircled by these plantations and were forced to abandon their homes and properties. If they resisted, they were forcibly removed. However, they were unaware of how to file complaints to assert their legal rights or seek compensation through the judicial system. Although the native landowners domiciled in the villages surrounded by lands purchased by planters could have claimed their lawful rights to the property, they were ignored. Villagers lost their right to use free lands set aside for grazing cows due to new land acts, which prohibited cattle from feeding on such grasslands. At times, cattle were shot dead.

Disputes arose between farmers and planters regarding land boundaries and unauthorized grazing by cows. Civil officers, who tended to favor the planters, resolved these disputes, and the judiciary delivered verdicts based on land property laws. Consequently, farmers who sought to assert their traditional ownership rights were denied the justice they expected. In the up-country region, farmers turned to chena cultivation to find means of sustenance. However, they faced the unbearable loss of their chena lands. The spread of coffee plantations dealt a final blow, severely impacting these farmers. Villagers' lands were sometimes taken over for road construction projects (Vandendreson, 1.M. 1963: 134). Over time, villagers began expressing their dissatisfaction through various acts of mischief, including cutting down coffee bushes, chopping tree barks, and starting fires. In response to these disorderly incidents, Ordinance number 06 of 1846 was enforced. Villagers resorted to violence as they had no other recourse against the new threats that undermined their traditional livelihoods. Unfortunately, they found little relief before the law and the judiciary.

This phenomenon was not as prevalent in the southern province because foreigners did not engage in large-scale land purchases there. During the expansion of estate plantations in the up-country region, large tracts of primeval forests were available, and there were few individuals to lay claim to these extensive lands. Government officials found themselves unable to address this problem and became agents of a process that uprooted the traditional structure through capitalist development. At the time, Emerson Tennant expressed his views, stating, "We have nothing to do with these grievances. They have arisen due to legal factors. We are incapable of controlling such incidents or preventing the establishment of coffee plantations." A planter even mentioned that when he had attempted to allocate land to the encircled villagers, other planters had objected, as they too anticipated similar problems. This dilemma compelled them to adopt a common policy, resulting in the villagers being treated equally. According to A.C. Laura, this land acquisition process led many villagers in the up-country region to become landless (Pieris, 1958: P.I, 88-89).

The government strictly implemented its land policy in areas suitable for coffee cultivation, taking steps to completely evict villagers from these regions while not enforcing harsh laws in other areas. With the expansion of plantations, the foundation was laid for the ongoing crisis of up-country lands. A category of landless farmers emerged, attracting Kandyan farmers to commercial plantations as laborers. In contrast, the southern province did not witness the creation of a similar class of landless farmers. Instead, a sort of landless population emerged due to the sale and mortgaging of uneconomical lands as a result of continuous division among family members.

Creation of Trading Groups in Business Ventures

During this period, the Kandyan society was not only disrupted by plantation activities but also by a large-scale movement of people from coastal areas to the upcountry regions in search of wealth through trade and commercial ventures from 1840 to 1845. As estate plantations developed, the native society became aware of

commercial crops and monetary transactions. Previously imported items such as rice, textiles, various foods, and kerosene, which were sought after by the natives, were now replaced by the constant need for items like timber, firewood, furniture, and building materials in the estate plantations. Indian labor groups relied heavily on external supplies, including food and clothing. Wooden barrels were used for packaging coffee for exportation.

These requirements and activities led Sri Lankans to participate in business ventures and commercial trading groups. Natives from coastal areas began actively joining large-scale supplying and trading enterprises, especially those skilled in business activities such as the Karawe and Salagama communities. Many individuals had been relocated from coastal areas to different regions to sell grocery items, textiles, and arrack, as well as to provide relevant goods and beverages to estate plantations. This phenomenon brought significant changes to the Kandyan provinces. In 1867, a government agent reported an increasing number of Sinhalese and Muslim business people in the Haldummulla and Madolsima areas, necessitating the establishment of two police stations there. The Administration Reports of the Matale district in 1872 indicate that many court cases arose from Sinhalese traders who had arrived from Galle, Matara, and Panadura areas (Administration Report, 1872: 72).

Furthermore, these immigrants were involved in the construction of estate houses and line homes. They were skilled craftsmen who produced most of the furniture required for estate offices and stores. Many individuals from the Galle District, including carpenters, masons, carters, contractors, and traders, moved to regions such as Kandy, Badulla, Rathnapura, and the central and Uva provinces, particularly in the early 20th century (Census of Ceylon, 1912: 82). The growth of estate plantations in the southern province coincided with the simultaneous development of various trades, as shown below according to ethnic factors by 1891.

Table 1: Improvement Obtained in Various Sections of Traders in Southern

Trade	Sinhalese	Tamil
Professional Jobs	2.8	3.4
Domestic	1.9	5.3
Business	4	4.8
Agricultural	60.8	57.8
Industrial	28.5	19.7
Others	2	9

Source: Census of Ceylon, 1891: 56

The data provided indicates the distribution of employment in the agricultural and industrial sectors among different ethnic groups. In the agricultural sector, most of the Sinhalese population, comprising 68.8%, were engaged in agricultural activities. The Tamil population had a slightly lower percentage, with 57.8% involved in agricultural work. Muslims, on the other hand, represented 15.5% of the workforce in the agricultural sector. This suggests that agriculture was a significant source of employment for the local population, particularly the Sinhalese and Tamils. In the industrial sector, the distribution of employment varied among ethnic groups. Sinhalese individuals accounted for 28.5% of the workforce in the industrial sector, indicating their participation in industrial activities. Muslims, however, had a higher representation, with 44.2% of their population employed in the industrial sector. Tamils had contributed 19.7% to the industrial workforce. These figures imply that Muslims had a greater presence in industrial activities compared to other ethnic groups.

Emerson Tennant's observation regarding the considerable number of carts traveling on the Kandy-Colombo route during the mid-19th century highlights the importance of cart transportation during that period. The southern province had a large number of characters involved in transporting goods. Even prior to the arrival of Western

colonizers, carts served as a vital mode of transportation in the region, facilitating the movement of commodities from the interior areas to the sea ports. As the plantation industry expanded, cart services experienced rapid improvements. Wealthy individuals were often associated with owning a substantial number of carts, indicating their involvement in the transportation sector. The efficient cart service played a crucial role in supporting international trade and enabling the transportation of local and foreign goods to the interior areas. This had a significant impact on rural livelihood patterns, leading to changes in economic activities and trading practices.

However, with the advent of lorry transport services, the significance of cart transportation had been gradually diminished. The table provided would highlight the declining trend of cart services in the southern province. This shifted from carts to lorries as a preferred mode of transportation reflected the changing needs and advancements in transportation technology during the particular time.

Table 2: Decrease of the Cart Services in the Southern Province

District	1850	1851	1852	1853	1854	1855
Galle	370	376	326	315	358	289
Matara	143	144	156	150	158	187
Hambantota	85	104	130	97	78	13
Total	598	624	612	562	590	607

Source: Ceylon Government Gazettes, Feb. 9: 104

In 1867, the number of carts registered in the Galle district was recorded as fourteen. The total number of registered carts in the southern province for the year 1868 was seven hundred, with 463 carts in the Galle District, 151 carts in the Matara District,

and eighty-six carts in the Hambantota District. These carts were owned by a total of forty-one individuals.

Table 3: List of Cart Owners in the Southern Province in 1868

Owners Names	Village	No of carts
Andawattage Kaitan Appu	Kumbalwella	27
Lokuge Adirian Hami	Hikkaduwa	32
Polwattage Singho Appu	Kumbalwella	46
Sini Kanduru Sinnathambe	Tallapitiya	25
Meepe Gamage Eliyas Appu	Kaluwalla	32
Amma Cassim Markar	Ethiligoda	32
Hikkaduwa Liyanapatabendige Baba Appu	Gintota	23
Walegodage Nandires de Silva	Welitara	24
Ethiligodage Juan Appu	Kumbalwella	30
Subasinha Arachchige Singho Appu	Ambalangoda	21
Meena lebbe Marikkar	Katugoda	20
Wannapalla Arachchige Louis	Unawatuna	23
Palma Lebbe Marrikkar	Galle Fort	29
Pedige Adiriyen Appu de Silva	Kosgoda	27
Kandana Andrayas de Silva	Kosgoda	30
Randa Kankanamge David Appu	Bentota	32
Hantota Vidanage Damoris	Weligama	12
Delwa diyage Don Aranolis	Kumbalwella	10
Walage Simon de Silva	Hambantota	11
Gunasekera Aranolis	Dodanduwa	12
Darmakeerthi Andrayas de Soysa	Kosgoda	07
Don Hendrick de Silva	Kumbalwella	08
Warahandu Eliyas	Rajgama	06

Harukandegge Eliyas Appu	Kumbalwella	04
Halallage Don Koranelise	Wataraka	06
Pakeer Tambi Saise Dora	Kumbalwella	04
Abadeera Arachchige Teberis	Weligama	05
K. Marakalage Wattuhami	Dodanduwa	04
Meepe Gamege Eliyas	Galle	05
Hewage Teberis	Unawatuna	06
Don Johanis Silva Weerasekara	Pamburana	10
Manikka Bada Guruge Bastiyan	Ahangama	11
Gintota waduge Janis	Weligama	05
Deva Pelarige Rodrigo	Madige	06
Heva Javan Kankanamge Andiras	Dikwella	09
Muhamdiramge Andia	Pamburana	10
Meena Lebbe Makar Somnase	Hambantota	35
Ambala Kodituwakkuge Siyadorise	Hambantota	22
Andara Bara Arachchige Wattuhami	Hambantota	29

Source: C.G.G. 1868, 29. August: 29-41

Furthermore, a large number of carts were utilized in the southern coastal transport service. Numerous carters and their helpers were employed along the coastal roads, serving various professions such as traders, carters, hotel and shop owners, rest house operators, food suppliers, managers, domestic servants, tavern keepers, ferry and arrack renters, masons, and many more others. By the end of the 19th century, these professions and services had become prevalent within the native society. The census conducted in 1881 provided valuable information on these traders and individuals who had been engaged in diverse occupations.

The impact of estate plantations in the southern province had a profound influence on the day-to-day lives of rural communities. Villagers found themselves confined to

small plots of land, which were further divided among their offspring. Consequently, the inevitable outcome was that the village population sought daily wages by becoming laborers employed on the neighboring estates. Those who no longer owned lands settled in the estate line rooms, were transitioning into permanent laborers. The following schedule elucidates the pattern of Sinhalese villagers in the southern province who resided within the estates by 1891 (Census of Ceylon 1891: 42).

Table 4: Sinhalese Villagers in Southern Province Who Domiciled Inside the Estates

District	Male	Female
Galle	2168	500
Matara	495	235
Hambantota	10	-
	2673	735

Source: The Census of Ceylon, 1891: 42

Indian laborers who were in the low country estates formed connections with nearby villages, assisting villagers with agricultural work and vice versa. This cultural exchange led to the adoption of South Indian food alongside local staples like rice and yams. Chena cultivation, including crops like manioc and sweet potatoes, also became popular. Concurrently, the Sinhalese business class had emerged near the estates as plantation schemes developed. These traders supplied essential goods to estate laborers, offering credit for items such as food and beverages, and clothing. On salary days, traders were gathered at the estate offices to collect their dues. This gave rise to a middle-class merchant group, operating trading stalls, shops, and kadais.

The following are details of some Sinhalese shops from that time:

Table 5: Sinhalese Trade Stalls Located Near to the Estates in the Southern Province

Distract	Estate	No. of Shope
Galle	Ellakande	02
	Monrovia	04
	Castlehill	01
	Katandola	02
	Nakiyadeniya	10
	Panilkande	05
	Diganahena	02
	Manomaniya	02
	Talgaswalla	06
	Pillagoda	04
	Aralakande	02
	Atukoralakanda	04
	Borakada	04
	Aberoke	03
	Andaradeniya	02
	Beverly	04
	Campdam	04
	Enasalwatta	06
	Etamagahayaya	02
	Heyas	04
Hulandawa	03	
Wilpita	04	

Source: Field Inspection Formulation of Humanitarian Regulations and Socialistic Thinking, 2022

Labor Conditions and Trade Union Activities in the Plantation Sector

Indian laborers who had migrated to the island initially had the desire to accumulate earnings, return to India, purchase small plots of land, and live peacefully. Consequently, those who employed in the plantation sector were reluctant to assimilate into the native social systems and instead chose to lead solitary lives. Furthermore, certain estate authorities even restricted their movement into other areas, deploying watchers to apprehend those attempting to leave their abodes. Penalties were imposed for such attempts, and disciplinary actions were taken against to ensure laborers' obedience, even resorting to physical violence in some instances.

In 1914, a commission appointed to address the issue of immigrant laborers found that estate workers were subjected to various forms of punishment, making it challenging for them to organize trade unions. Although the British rulers followed a mild policy on labor laws in the estate industry, the development of humanitarian opinions in England influenced the enforcement of rules and regulations to control the laborer community. Recognizing the difficulties faced by these men, the government introduced suitable rules and regulations, including laws enacted in 1841 and 1856 (Labor Commission Report, 1914: 84). These laws emphasized the importance of fair agreements between employers and employees and the provision of necessary medical facilities and regulated wages.

The introduction of humanitarian laws coincided with the Indian government's influence on the immigration of Indian laborers to the island. Acts passed in 1920 made it compulsory for children of laborers to receive education, while an Act passed in 1927 established minimum allocated wages for them (Administration Report, 1927: 26). Trade unions were formed by estate laborers with the assistance of local and Indian politicians who were inspired by the national movement in India.

During a time when there was no organised labor movement, certain laborers who wanted to voice their grievances and seek justice found ways to submit petitions for

redress. Petitioning was a common practice, with the British government receiving around 5,000 petitions in 1908. Governor Sir Henry Macallom acknowledged the efficacy of submitting petitions as a means of addressing problems. Competent individuals proficient in writing petitions openly and critically prepared these documents. Some laborers had disputes with their supervisors or estate owners due to the difficult working conditions, but they did not leave their places of work for fear of punishment. Kanganis often attempted to transfer these troublesome workers to more challenging areas. However, the culture of petitioning grievances was not as prevalent in the southern province. Estate labor was supervised by Kangani, the head laborer or labor supervisor. Kanganis brought their whole families from South India to work in the estates, and under the "Chit" system, Tamil families were employed in the same estate where the Kangani worked. Wages were not paid directly to the laborers but to the Kangani, who then distributed them among the families. This payment system was discontinued in 1921 as it was deemed unsuitable (Labour Act, 1927: No 27).

The first trade union in the country, the "Ceylon Workers Congress," was established on 10 October 1922. Subsequently, the "All Island Indian Estate Workers Congress" and the "Ceylon Indian Workers Congress" came into existence. However, these unions had little influence in the southern province.

In the 1930s to 1940s, a group of Ceylonese youth who had studied in Europe and were influenced by Marxist ideology returned to Sri Lanka and engaged in various social welfare activities. They recognized the absence of a powerful political movement capable of rallying the people and studied the society and politics of the country. The existing National Congress, led by the traditional middle class, had become divided and weakened. The capitalist leadership represented by the National Congress had failed to connect with the public due to a lack of necessary guidance and leadership knowledge required for a national movement. This leadership vacuum left society without proper direction. The youth leaders of the trade unions realized the need for a powerful political forum to achieve political, social, and

economic freedom. With this aim, the senior leaders founded the "Sama Samaja Party" on 18 December 1935, with the vision of establishing a socialist society. The party focused on the production, distribution, and exchange of commodities according to socialist principles, achieving full independence, and eliminating differences in politics, economics, ethnicity, and religion. The party aimed to transcend sectarian policies based on caste or social class, although these policies were advantageous to the plantation industries. Dr. Colvin R. de Silva became the first leader of the party, supported by the secretaries Advocates Vernon Gunasekara and M.G. Mendis. Enthusiastic youth such as Dr. N. M. Perera, Phillip Gunawardana, Dr. S. A. Wickramasinghe, Leslie Gunawardana, Edmund Samarakkody, Robert Gunawardana, Terence N. de Silva, and B. T. Fernando was included in the selected committee, some of whom represented the southern province (Sama Samajaya on July 16, 1936).

The party's task was to educate farmers and workers about socialism and raising the awareness among workers through trade unions at their workplaces. While some parts of these programmes had affected the plantation sector, farmers benefited from the abolition of water tax, provision of interest-free seed paddy, and amendments to forest laws that enabled them to obtain timber for their houses. Attention was also given to limiting the working hours to eight and ensuring sufficient wages for a satisfactory life for the laborers. Local councils had formed the basic units of the party, established in working locations and offices in villages and small towns. However, the establishment of local councils required the consent and adherence to regulations set by the central committee or other local councils. The activities of the party was gradually spread to the estates, although the influence of local councils in the southern province on the estate sector was limited.

The Sama Samaja Party played a crucial role in introducing political theories, strategies, and regulations to the Sri Lankan people. Its establishment provided a solid theoretical foundation, enabling leftist leaders to rally the people against imperialistic practices with greater confidence and enthusiasm. The estate workers'

Congress was a significant part of this movement. On July 16, 1936, the leftist leaders began publishing a weekly newspaper called "Sama Samajaya," with B.J. Fernando as the editor. It was later printed in Tamil as "Samadharmon" and in English as "Sama Samajist." The newspaper fiercely criticised the imperial government, Sri Lankan leaders were participating in their arbitrary rule, government officials, and the police for their irregularities and injustices (Sama Samajaya on July 16, 1936). The newspaper's primary purpose was to awaken the nation and enlighten them with the necessary wisdom to achieve freedom and independence. Worker associations were also utilised as platforms to disseminate knowledge.

The Sama Samaja Party also focused on empowering estate laborers through radical slogans and agitation. British rulers had brought Indian laborers to Sri Lanka as part of the estate plantation economy, where they lived in conditions akin to slavery, receiving meager wages and limited human rights. The Sama Samajists entered the estates and organized workers to fight for their rights. The Ceylon Indian Congress had already been established based on ethnicity by estate workers, some of whom harbored anti-Indian sentiments. The Sama Samajist leaders considered this a barrier to the intended "United Trade Union Movement" within the plantation sector. To overcome this, they formed the "All Island Estate Workers Association" to unite trade unions and fight for the rights of estate workers. This marked a direct attempt by estate workers to organize themselves into a socialist front. These actions were taken by the Sama Samajists alarmed European estate owners, who took steps to discourage trade union activities in the plantation sector. However, the Sama Samajist leaders continued to encourage estate workers, advising them on their rights and preparing them for protests and demands for their dues. Throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s, numerous strikes had occurred across the plantation sector. Although these strikes were not coordinated, they demonstrated a common unrest among estate workers that drove them towards agitation. Their demands had included higher salaries, the right to join trade unions, and an end to suppression. The major trade unions who were leading these struggles were the trade union

bodies of the Ceylon Indian Association and the "All Island Estate Workers Union," headed by the Sama Samajist party.

The impact of these agitations were also felt to some extent in the southern province. In the latter half of the 19th century, foundations were laid for trade union movements in the province. Mr. Neil Hewawitharana, elected for the Udugama electorate in the estate council in 1932, raised awareness about the authoritative power of estate superintendents. However, he was unable to establish a substantial trade union. Mr. Neal de Alwis, the chief disciple of Neil Hewawitharana, claimed credit for introducing trade unions in the southern province. He succeeded his mentor in the Udugama electorate and played a crucial role in establishing trade unions in the Nakiyadeniya Group, educating workers in every division about their rights. Most workers of large estates were Tamil laborers. Dr. S. A. Wickramasinghe, who played a significant role in initiating the birth of the "Lanka Sama Samaja Party," acted on behalf of estate laborers in the southern province. His relationship with estate workers led to his election to the Morawaka seat of the state council in 1931. He also promoted labor rights through the establishment of agricultural societies.

The bold steps taken by the Sama Samajists further emboldened trade union activities in the plantation sector. Estate workers, who had previously been afraid of their superiors, now demanded their rights, often leading to clashes. Leaflets and articles were distributed in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, urging people to rise against the merciless treatment by planters and business tycoons and prepare for the final struggle for vital national freedom (Sama Samajaya on July 16, 1936). Another area where Sama Samajist leaders had focused their attention was agriculture. Mr. Phillip Gunawardana emphasized the need for radical reconstruction in this sector, advocating for major land areas to be used for agriculture. He urged the Minister of Agriculture to establish farms and conduct agricultural experiments on a commercial scale using modern machinery. Dr. N. M. Perera cited the example of modern Japan, which had achieved significant advancements in agriculture using modern technology (Hansard 1938: 2317).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the efforts made by the local representation of the State council resulted in significant improvement in paddy cultivation by the year 1948. Estate superintendents implemented new methods to grow paddy in low lying fields, thereby maintaining a scale of paddy cultivation in relation to commercial crops. Paddy cultivation continued to thrive in rural areas, with villagers in the southern province actively engaging in both farming and labor activities. The laborers, who worked on estate plantations during the day, dedicated their time to field work on their own lands. This seamless collaboration allowed for the smooth operation of paddy cultivation in both village and estate fields. To support their paddy cultivation, estate laborers earned the necessary funds by providing services to the estates. In return, the laborers received payment in kind, such as rice, coconuts, vegetables, and other food items, instead of monetary compensation. During the harvesting period, estate laborers preferred payment in paddy, which enabled them to gather enough to sustain themselves for several months. Consequently, the dietary patterns of estate laborers in the southern province became distinct from those in other parts of the country.

Moreover, estate workers played a vital role in improving small-scale tea and rubber plantations in the rural areas. Their expertise in cultivating tea and rubber, including planting young plants or seeds, plucking tea leaves, applying fertilizers, pruning mature bushes, weeding, controlling drainage, and protecting the soil, proved invaluable to the rural planters who lacked knowledge in these areas. This symbiotic relationship between the estates and adjacent villagers enhanced the living conditions of estate workers in the southern province, while also contributing to the income of villagers through the cultivation of commercial crops in rural areas.

In summary, the collaboration between estate laborers and local representation of the State council brought about significant advancements in paddy cultivation, leading to improved living conditions for estate workers and increased income for

villagers who had engaged in commercial crop cultivation. The exchange of services and expertise not only facilitated the growth of paddy, tea, and rubber crops but also fostered a mutually beneficial relationship between the estates and the surrounding rural communities in the southern province.

References

Administration Reports of the Assistant Government Agent of Hambantota., (1868–1948). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Administration Reports of the Assistant Government Agent of Matara., (1868–1948). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Administration Reports of the Assistant Government Agent of the Southern Province., (1868–1948). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Administration Reports of the Director of Public Works., (1935–1948). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Administration Reports of the Land Commissioner., (1959–1960). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Bandarage, A., (1950). Colonialism in Sri Lanka. Colombo: Lake House.

Bertolacchi, A., (1817). *A View of the Agricultural Commercial & Financial Interests of Ceylon*. London: Black Parburu & Allen.

Ceylon Administration Reports of the Rubber Controller., (1923–1927). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Ceylon Blue Book., (1821–1937). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Ceylon Government Gazettes., (1830–1937). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.

Department of Census and Statistics., (1871–1948). *Report of the Census of Agriculture*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.

Department of Census and Statistics., (1871–1947). *Report of the Census of Population and Housing*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.

Department of Census and Statistics., (n.d.). *Report on Socio-economic Surveys*. Colombo: Department of Census and Statistics.

- De Silva, C. R., (1942). *Ceylon under the British Occupation 1795 – 1833, Vol 2*. Colombo: The Colombo Apothecaries' Co. Ltd.
- De Silva, K. M., (1981). *History of Sri Lanka*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Economic and Social Development of Ceylon 1926–1954., (1955). Colombo: Ministry of Finance.
- Ferguson's Ceylon Directory., (1875–1947). Colombo: Ceylon Observer Press.
- Gooneratne, W., & Wesumperuma, D., (1984). *Plantation Agriculture in Sri Lanka -Issues in Employment and Development*. Bangkok: ILO/ARTEP.
- Gnanamuttu, G. A., (1977). *Education and the Indian plantation worker in Sri Lanka*. Colombo: Author Publication.
- Hettiarachchy, T., (1982). *The Sinhala Peasant*. Colombo: Lake House Investment Ltd.
- Kurian, R., (1981). *The Position of Women Workers in the Plantation Sector in Sri Lanka*. Geneva: ILO. WEP, working paper.
- Report on the Economic Survey of Five Villages in Galle District., (1937). Bulletin No. 11. Colombo: Ministry of Labour, Industry & Commerce.
- Rajarathnam, S., (1961). *Plantation Labour in Ceylon*. Colombo: Young Socialist.
- Samasamajaya., (1936–1948). Colombo: The Lanka Sama Samaja Party.
- Sessional Papers., (1934–1937). Colombo: Government Publication Bureau.
- The Ceylon Daily News., (1935–1948). Colombo: Lake House.
- The Times of Ceylon., (1917–1948). Colombo: Lake House.
- Wikramarathna, L. A., (1973). Economic Development in the Plantation Sector 1900 to 1947. *History of Ceylon. Vol. 3*. Colombo: University of Ceylon.
- Wesumperuma, D., (n.d.). *Indian Immigrant Plantation workers in Sri Lanka*. Sri Lanka: National Library Service Board.