

CLASS-FORMATION AMONG PLANTATION WORKERS
IN SOUTH INDIA : A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS.

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DECLARATION

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P R E F A C E

Sociologists and Social Anthropologists have only recently evinced some interest in the study of working-classes and the processes and problems of class-formation among workers in India. The overwhelming concern, however, has been with agricultural labourers or with industrial workers. Although sociologists and social anthropologists (Jayawardena, 1963, 1968; Jain, 1970; Tinker 1974; and Jayaraman 1975) have directed their attention to the study of Indian emigrants on overseas-plantations, the study of plantation workers in India has largely been ignored. This essay is an attempt to gain a preliminary understanding of the processes and problems of class-formation among plantation workers in South India, with special reference to workers in Kerala.

Implicit in many of the studies of industrial workers in India, there is a dichotomous conception of traditional and modern social structures which share many of the basic premises of 'development economics'. Development Economics posit a dual economy model comprising a theory of underdevelopment premised on the existence within a given

national economy of two more or less autonomous sectors, a "modern" sector and a "backward" or traditional sector. It is then argued that the traditional sector (consisting primarily of peasant subsistence agriculture) presents a series of 'obstacles' to development, the impetus to which is created in the modern sector. Thus, industrial sociologists and labour-economists have argued that the institutions of the older social order seriously inhibited the emergence of a "committed" industrial labour force in India. Claims of kinship, caste and the village supposedly served as bonds keeping people on land or operated as powerful forces to bring them back.

These studies, however, appear to have failed to perceive the manner of operation of capitalist enterprises in a 'colonial situation' and the characteristic linkage between the capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors. The political Economy of Growth in the Third-World reveals that there is a symbiotic link between the modern (capitalist) sector and the traditional (pre-capitalist or non-capitalist) sector through which the progressive nature of the modern sector partly derives from the extraction of chief factors of production (land, labour, raw-materials etc.) from the traditional sector thereby maintaining its backwardness. It is these linkages that may partly account for the social content of

particular formations. Some of these issues are discussed more elaborately in Chapter I.

The present essay aims to relate the processes and problems of class-formation among plantation workers to the characteristic combination of relations of production such as the form of labour-use (which manifests the linkages between the capitalist plantation sector and the pre-capitalist rural sector). The discussion, however, is of exploratory character as it is largely based on data from such secondary sources as Official Reports and Survey results. It constitutes a preparatory step for an intensive empirical study which I intend to undertake as a part of my doctoral research.

I am greatly indebted to Dr. K.L. Sharma, Associate Professor of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, for ably guiding me in this study. My acknowledgements are due to Professor T.K. Oommen, Chairman of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, who first suggested that plantation-workers constitute an interesting subject-matter for a sociological study and, to Dr. R.K. Jain, Associate Professor of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems, for having spared a lot of his time to clarify some of the major issues involved in the study of plantation workers. My thanks are due also to

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many others who have helped me at the various stages of this study. It represents more than customary courtesy, if I make a note of the cooperation shown by my wife Mary while I was working on this essay. For the errors and shortcomings in this essay, however, I alone am to be held responsible.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM

This essay represents an attempt at a sociological understanding of the process of class-formation¹ among plantation workers in South India, with special reference to Kerala. The plantation is essentially a class-structured system of organisation² involving a clear-cut demarcation between the planter (or the company) who owns and controls the means of production and the workers who own nothing but their labour power. However, the plantation can and does employ a variety of forms of labour - use ranging from unfree slave or indentured labour through casual and seasonal migrant labour, to permanent free wage labour. In studying the process and problems of class-formation among plantation workers, attention is directed primarily to the characteristic processes stemming from the varieties and combinations of forms of labour-use, recruitment and employment practices. These represent the specific modes of exploitation of labour and express the characteristic relations of production on the plantation. The process of emergence of class and class-relation on the plantation are considered as inextricably linked to specific form of labour-use and the characteristic mode of exploitation of labour inherent in such forms of labour-use.

1. A critique on the studies of workers

The study of workers and the process of class formation among working class (industrial and agricultural) in India has been a long neglected field in social sciences, particularly in sociology. Sociologists and social anthropologists have sought for too long, to understand the structure and process of Indian society within the frame of reference provided by caste, kinship, religion etc., as embedded in Indian village communities,³ holding a model of a harmoniously integrated society, premised on the assumption of reciprocity of social relations and mutuality of interests, as suggested by structural-functionalism.⁴

In general, modernization and social change in India came to be conceptualised in terms of a hypothetically dichotomous view of "modern" and "traditional" social types as represented by Parsons' paradigmatic characterisation of traditional social structures as "particularistic", "ascriptive" etc., and of modern social structures as "universalistic", based on "achieved status"⁵ etc. The transformation from tradition to modernity is, then, suggested to follow a unilinear evolutionary process culminating in the development and spread of what is called the "evolutionary universals".⁶ The major obstacles to change, modernization and economic development are, then, adduced to inhere in the traditional institutional framework of

Indian society, its value system and normative structure⁷ or in the relative absence of a modern personality type—the achievement-oriented individual² among Indian people. Thus, in studies of social change in India, attention came to be focused primarily on cultural, normative and ideological structures, divorced from an analysis of the basic structural process deriving from the system of production. Concepts such as 'sanskritization', 'westernization'⁹ represent the basic preoccupation of sociologists and anthropologists with cultural change in India. Even one of the most systematic studies of social change in India¹⁰ has not succeeded in breaking away from this culturological bias of structural-functionism.

The structural functional model in which social structure is defined by cultural norms and juran rules which govern individual behaviour obscures the contradictions within the established social structures between interests of members of different classes that orient individual action and influence the social outcome.¹¹ Beteille observes that sociologists and social anthropologists in India, on account of their excessive concern with caste, religion, kinship etc., have developed only a "sociology ideas" while, neglecting the "material basis" of social groups and classes, they have inhibited the development of a "sociology of interests" or classes.¹² Mencher argues that a study of social structure and change in India within the framework of caste, kinship etc., does not throw any light on the way the which these have been used to mask class differences.¹³ Similarly, Alavi points out that

the functional separation of structures and analysis of primordial ties or loyalties such as caste, kinship etc., outside the matrix of the class structure vitiates the results of sociology and social anthropology.¹⁴

The notion that the village community constitutes a microcosm for the study of social and economic changes in the underdeveloped areas may not hold good today. Stavenhagen holds that the rural community has ceased to be the most appropriate focus of analysis of social and economic changes in the underdeveloped areas today. He argues that an analysis of the changes taking place in the rural areas, especially the emergence of new class relations closely linked to the class and power structures at the national level and entering into conflict with traditional community power and stratification patterns and upsetting the longstanding hierarchies, require a frame of reference which is broader than the limited optic of the community.¹⁵

A dichotomous demarcation of traditional and modern social structures is implicit in most of the studies of workers in Indian industries. Thus industrial sociologists and labour economists have argued that the institutions of the older social order seriously inhibited the creation of industrial labour force in India. Claims of kinship, caste and the village supposedly served as bonds keeping people on the land or operated as powerful forces to bring them back. The persistence with which workers retained their rural connections made for a labour force only 'partially committed' to

factory employment one characterised by indiscipline and rates of absenteeism much higher than in more advanced industrial countries.¹⁶

The 'commitment' theory appears to betray an inadequate understanding of the Indian situation, particularly the operation of capitalist enterprises in a colonial setting. Lambert's study of factory workers shows clearly that the traditional institutions of caste, religion etc., do not exercise any inhibiting influence on workers' commitment to the norms of factory work¹⁷ implying that one should look elsewhere for the causes of absenteeism, indiscipline etc. Morris has observed that the labour problems in the cotton mills of Bombay did not flow from the psychology of the workforce or from the rigid traditions and structure of the rural social order. Rather they stemmed from the character of employer policies which were determined by the economic and technical characteristics of the enterprises and the competitive nature of the markets in which they operated. Employers in Bombay seldom took steps to shorten hours and increase efficiency, to standardise wage rates, to provide the minimum facilities for food and other necessities at the place of work and consequently workers developed their own style of work.¹⁸

Similarly, it has been argued that labour force in Indian industries is recruited and structured on the basis of traditional and particularistic principles such as caste, kinship or regional loyalties. Gupta argues that the efforts at job control in Indian industries by workers through the media of caste loyalties was very much the result

of management policies for recruitment of workers through a jobber or middleman (Mainstry or Muqaddam) who tended to get people from his own native region or community.¹⁹

The dominant tendency in all these studies has been to equate the condition of India at the time of independence with the pre-capitalist or pre-industrial stage of countries which are today economically developed and the task is declared to be modernization of India following the g foot-steps of ^{the} successful examples.²⁰ However, the theory of the political economy of growth suggests that it is a fundamental historical fallacy to assume that India's underdevelopment is a remnant of the traditional pre-British past.

The theory of the political economy of growth has developed as a reaction to the 'dual economy model'²¹ which has been so pervasive in development economics. The dual economy model comprises a theory of underdevelopment premised on the existence within a given national economy, of two more or less autonomous sectors, a modern sector and a backward or traditional sector. The modernity of the former centres on industry, urban services, and/or the production of export commodities in large units, such as plantations. The backward sector consists of peasant agriculture, with a large subsistence component, a low level of technological development, underutilization of labour and archaic social organisation. It is this sector which exhibits the characteristics of the 'low-level equilibrium trap' which inhibits the formation of sufficient internal demand to stimulate the "take off" of national industry, which reproduces

"traditional value-orientations" and behaviour in sum, which presents a series of 'obstacles' to development, the impetus to which is created in the modern sector. "The political economy of growth"-theorists²² have argued that there is a symbiotic link between the two sectors through which the 'progressive' nature of the one partly derives from the extraction of chief factors of production from the other thereby maintaining its 'backwardness'. Moreover, it is a characteristic form of integration at the periphery of the global capitalist economy. The political economy of the Third World has its central historical theme, the disruption of the pre-capitalist societies of Asia, Latin America and Africa through the penetration and subsequent domination by an expanding Europe. Concepts like "Export Economy", "Enclave Economy" or "Colonial Economy" have, as their referent, the forms through which these societies were integrated into the world capitalist system.

Gunder Frank holds that the dialectic of the development of underdevelopment and economic development are the simultaneous and related products of a single integrated global capitalist system having a centre in the developed metropole and a periphery in the colonies. The metropole uses the raw materials and surplus capital taken from the periphery through mercantilism, colonialism, imperialism and neo-colonialism to permit or accelerate development in the periphery.²³

Caulfield has argued that the underlying of exploitation under colonialism and imperialism is not that of class over class, but rather of culture over culture. As

expanding capitalism with its industrial base in the home country encountered and engulfed non-industrial cultures, the dominant system developed modes for exploiting not just the labour power of these subject people, but their entire cultural patterns.²⁴ Albert Memmi has shown how colonialism introduced stereotyped notions about the colonizer and the colonized - the colonizer is someone with superior qualities, special rights and privileges; and the colonized is 'subhuman', lazy, ignorant, wicked, backward with evil and thievish instincts. These stereotyped notions about the colonizer and the colonized justifies the colonizer's policies and his legitimate severity, the exclusion of the colonized from management functions and the reservation of privileged positions and responsibilities for the colonizer.²⁵

However, the essential aspect of colonialism is economic exploitation. Bipan Chandra holds that the process and pattern of economic development and social change in India in the post-independence period depends to a considerable extent upon its inherited structure and pattern of underdevelopment, rooted in its colonial past. He argues that colonialism constitutes a distinct historical stage or period in the modern historical development of India and the colonial Indian economy and society was a part of the world capitalist system.²⁶ "Colonialism", to quote Bipan Chandra, "is a well-structured whole, a distinct social formation (system) or a sub-formation (sub-system) in which the basic control of the economy and society is in the hands of a foreign capitalist class which functions in the colony (or semi-colony) through a dependent and subservient economic, social, political and intellectual structure whose forms can vary with the changing conditions of the historical development of capitalism as a world-wide system."²⁷

The basic feature of colonial economies is what Alavi calls "the colonial mode of production".²⁸ The colonial mode of production is, according to him, a 'deformed expanded reproduction' in the sense that a substantial part of the surplus generated in the colonial agrarian economy (as well as that generated in colonial industry) enters into 'expanded reproduction' (i.e. more capital intensive methods of production) not directly within the colonial economy but rather at the imperialist centre. The surplus value extracted from the colony goes to support capital accumulation at the Centre and to raise 'the organic composition of capital' (i.e. higher capital intensity of investment) at the centre while destituting the colonial economy.²⁹ Thus the "roots of backwardness"³⁰ or "the development of under-development"³¹ and the "morphology of backwardness"³² in Third World inhere in the colonial experience and the characteristic form of integration of these societies into the global capitalist system.

The nature and effects of the colonial integration of Indian economy and society into the world capitalist system are well documented and analysed by Dutt,³³ Levkovsky,³⁴ Singh³⁵ and others. Broadly speaking, the changes could be summed up as those resulting from the introduction of new land systems (Zamindari and Ryotwari systems), heavy land-revenue demand, legal and political changes, destruction of indigenous industries without the corresponding advance of modern industries giving rise to a process called 'de-industrialisation',³⁶ commercialization of Indian economy and agriculture which, in the absence of large-scale industrialization, led to the siphoning off of resources from agriculture and the agriculturist to the developed imperial metropole. Growth of export

of agricultural raw materials and foodstuffs and of internal trade in agricultural product following the unification of Indian economy with the introduction of railways and construction of roads and the pressure on the peasant to compulsorily sell his products in order to meet his payments to the state, landlord, and moneylender provided ample opportunity for a commercial bourgeoisie to grow. The village moneylender began to occupy a dominating position in the rural economy and to expropriate the peasant-proprietors and occupancy tenants and to control the land as absentee landlord.³⁷

The result of all these was the increasing transfer and concentration of land in the hands of zamindars, moneylenders and merchants and the growing expropriation and dispossession of the peasantry. Thus, according to Surendra Patel, by 1931, 4 million (3.6% of the agrarian population) absentee landlords, living on rents, stood at the apex of the agrarian hierarchy; at the base were 42 million (37.8%) landless agricultural labourers, four-fifths (35 million or 31.5%) of whom were underemployed; closely related to them in status were 27 million (24.3%) tenants-at-will and sharecroppers who, with practically no fixity of tenure, cultivated less than five acres of land leased from landlords at exorbitant rates in kind or in cash. Patel concludes that by 1931, approximately 79 million or more than 70% of the agricultural population had no right in land.³⁸ However, the rapid dispossession of the peasantry and the concentration of their lands in the hands of a few persons did not bring about improved methods of cultivation, by an intensive exploitation "of the soil", ~~it~~ but rather, the moneylender-landlords found it more profitable to exploit the peasants "on the land".³⁹

The result was the emergence of landlords who owned most of the land and benefited at the expense of the bonded or enserfed tenants-at-will and sharecroppers. This mode of exploitation of peasants 'on the soil' in the absence of alternative avenues of employment intensified the economic dependence of the tenants on their landlord leading to the crystallization of what Alavi calls a "paternalistic mystification".⁴⁰ As Alavi notes "the specific structural features of the colonial agrarian economy are formed precisely by virtue of the fact that imperial capital disarticulates the internal economy of the colony and integrates the internally disarticulated segments of the colonial economy. Imperialism, far from the holding out a promise of bringing about a revolutionary transformation of 'feudal' relations of production in colonial agriculture creates them and reinforces them".⁴¹

On the other hand, with demographic growth, large number of destitute small-holders or what Patel calls 'dwarf-holders'⁴² and the unemployed and underemployed landless agricultural labourers, unable to meet even the bare subsistence needs of their families, provided a large reserve army of cheap migrant labour power for plantations, mines and jute industries which were the only major industries which British capitalism considered profitable to establish in India.⁴³

What emerges from the above is a case of the mode of articulation of a pre-capitalist sector with the capitalist sector in a colonial economy. This process was able to operate without transforming the structure of traditional social relations based on "primordial ties"⁴⁴ such as caste, kinship, religion, language etc., more important, without replacing pre-capitalist by capitalist relations of production. This mode of exploitation supplies cheap factors of production to capitalist enterprises, one of the bases of super-

profit being that the costs of reproducing labour are met by the pre-capitalist sector, namely family and kin group.⁴⁵ Wolpe has pointed out that such a mode of articulation of the pre-capitalist with the capitalist sector in Africa enabled capital to secure migrant labour power at a wage below its cost of reproduction, since in determining the level of wages necessary for the subsistence of the migrant worker and his family, account is taken of the fact that the family is supported to some extent, from the products of agricultural production in the pre-capitalist sector of the Reserves.⁴⁶ Such a process explains the considerable migration between the capitalist sector and the rural area as well as the very low level of wages in the capitalist sector in a colonial economy.

Further this mode of exploitation of labour does not necessarily involve a transition from the 'rural' or traditional, pre-capitalist 'folk' sector to the capitalist, industrial sector, as suggested by rural sociologists Tonnies, Redfield and others.⁴⁷

Rather, there is a continuous movement between the pre-capitalist and capitalist sectors. Mintz⁴⁸ and Wolf⁴⁹ have suggested that plantation workers who are also peasants "straddle two kinds of socio-cultural adaptation" stepping with one foot into the plantation way of life, while keeping the other foot on the peasant holding. It does not involve a transition from the one to the other rather it represents a kind of "flux equilibrium"⁵⁰.

Bernstein and Pitt illustrate the case of the Javanese plantations under Dutch colonists who, with

the aid of the coercive and manipulative means at the disposal of the colonial state and the mediation of the village headman, articulated a pre-capitalist mode of production with the global capitalist economy without transforming the traditional social structure, more important, without replacing pre-capitalist by capitalist relations of production. The extent of proletarianization of the wage earners was extremely limited, and the vast majority of the peasant still owned their means of production in the pre-capitalist sector.⁵¹ In short, this mode of employment of labour enabled the Dutch companies to secure cheap labour on the one hand, and on the other, inhibited the growth of a plantation working-class and the crystallization of class-relations on the plantation.

There has not yet been a sociological study of plantations and plantation workers in India. This essay is an attempt at a sociological understanding of plantation workers, attention being focussed on the process and problems of class-formation among them. Taking the case of plantation workers in Kerala, an attempt is made in the substantive part of this essay, to relate the process and problems of class-formation to previous modes of exploitation of labour on plantation estates. The system of recruitment and employment of seasonal migrant labourers along with their families, from the Tamil districts of the Madras presidency, through middlemen called "Kanganies"⁵² on one hand, supplied cheap factors of production for the plantations, and on the other inhibited the emergence of a "plantation proletariat".

The organisation of workers into "kangany gangs" for the purposes of performance of tasks also appears to have led to the preservation rather than disintegration of the pre-existing structure of social relations. Davis has summed up the effects of the Kangany system of recruitment of labour for overseas plantations, thus: "one effect of this method (recruitment) was to encourage the transplantation of Indian culture to the new region. In Ceylon and Malaya the South Indian coolie was enabled to live within his own community among neighbours and relatives from his home-land, without greatly disturbing his native customs ..." ⁵³

Jayaraman considers that the Kangany system of recruitment and employment contributed to the preservation of caste system among the Tamil labourers on Tea Plantations in Ceylon. ⁵⁴

The practice of employment of workers organised under 'kangany gangs' appears to have facilitated the crystallization of what may be called a 'horizontal cleavage' ⁵⁵ based not on the class-position or class interests of the labour-force, but rather, on primordial ties such as regional and linguistic loyalties. Eventually, the increasing competition from and entry of local labourers into the plantations strengthened these primordial solidarities. The advent of trade unions and political parties on the plantation scene helped to intensify rather than transform these cleavages. These seem to have failed to forge class solidarity among workers. ⁵⁶

That such processes exist among the industrial labour force is attested by Gupta. He points out that among the industrial workers craft unions, unable to break the dominance of the jobber (Maistry), had to combine with regional and communal loyalties.⁵⁷ The existence of processes such as 'casteism of politics', 'politicisation of caste'⁵⁸ and "fractional politics"⁵⁹ based on vertical cleavages which run across class-lines, and horizontal cleavages⁶⁰ based on kinship ties etc., in Indian villages, is amply reported. Alavi has suggested that the process of transformation of a class-in-itself (an economic category) into a class-for-itself (a political group) is mediated by primordial ties such as those of kinship. He notes: "primordial loyalties such as those of kinship, which precede manifestations of class solidarity do not rule out the latter; rather they mediate complex political processes through which the latter are crystallised."⁶¹ Oommen has suggested that traditional units can serve as effective foundations of mobilization if they are 'transformed' rather than 'dissolved'; in certain cases he calls for 'demobilization' or freezing of energy of certain social units or the "re-location" of their commitment.⁶² In short, he speaks of the need for the conversion of the existing "primordial collectivism" into "instrumental collectivism" using the prevalent social base as the axis of organisation.⁶³ However, in a situation where workers are divided into different groups with distinct identities anchored in their respective regional and linguistic groups, the process of 'demobilization' or 're-location' of commitments from particularistic loyalties, the transformation of primordial collectivism into instrumental collectivism and the forging of class solidarity may become problematic.

Before this chapter is concluded, it is necessary to review the available literature on plantations and plantation workers so that gaps could be identified and this study could be placed in the proper context.

2. A critique on the studies of plantation workers

(a) Plantation as a system:

The word plantation has been used in the generic sense of a "sizeable estate cultivated by resident labourers". It denotes an agro-social institution whose main production is for export rather than for subsistence or local use. As a generic term in the literature, it subsumes variations in historical and technological types from the trapiche-powered hacienda, run on semi-feudal principles to the modern "corporate central" with rationalised arrangements which has been designated as a "factory-in-the field".⁶⁴ Plantation is also sometimes described as "industrial agriculture" to denote "production on large scale with a division of labour and financial arrangement which are typical of industry rather than agriculture."⁶⁵

Definitions given by Gray(1941) and Jones(1968) are the most widely used one. Gray described the plantation as:

... a capitalistic type of agricultural organisation in which a considerable number of unfree labourers were employed under unified direction and control in the production of a staple crop....⁶⁶

The distinguishing features of a plantation according

to Gray are: (i) sharp separation of worker and employer classes; (ii) the aim of continuous commercial agriculture; (iii) monocrop specialization; and (iv) the capitalistic nature of the enterprise with the planter as businessman and not farmer.

Gray's definition refers primarily to the slave plantations⁶⁷ by virtue of his reference to the existence of 'unfree' labourers. Mintz has suggested that if we remove 'unfree' labour from Gray's definition it becomes a thoroughly applicable characterisation of modern plantations. We shall discuss the applicability of this definition to plantations in India after we see Jones' definition. Jones defines the plantation as:

... an economic unit producing agricultural commodities (field crops or horticultural products, but not livestock) for sale and employing a relatively large-number of unskilled ~~ka~~ labourers whose activities are closely supervised. Plantations usually employ a year-round labour-crew of some size and they usually specialise only in the production of only one or two marketable products. They differ from other kinds of farms in the way in which the factors of production primarily management and labour, are combined. ...⁶⁸

Like Gray, Jones' definition emphasises the sharp separation of employer and worker classes. Similarly, it points to crop-specialization. But unlike Gray, Jones emphasises the existence of permanent, free-wage workers.

Historically speaking, plantations appear to have employed first slave labour (in the Caribbean plantations), then indentured labour following the abolition of slavery, and finally the modern free wage-labourers. However, it would be incorrect to assume that there has been a clear-cut unilinear evolution of the forms of labour-use on plantations, from the employment of slave labour to the modern wage-workers. In most cases, different combinations of relations of production were employed. Thus, for instance, in India two distinct forms of labour-use appear to have developed. The indenture and penal contract system (this was used also in other regions and industries) under which relatively unfree labour was used on Assam tea plantations and the 'kangany system' through which seasonal migrant labourers were recruited and employed on South Indian plantations. At present, there are two types of labour use in practice: use of permanent resident labour and of 'outside' temporary or 'casual' labour. The point to be noted here is that it is the particular combinations of relations of production which express the relationship between the capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors and determine the subsequent processes of formation or non-formation of classes.

(b) Typology of plantations:

Closely linked to the foregoing definitions of plantations is a typology of plantations suggested by Wolf. Wolf distinguishes between two types of plantations, namely the (i) 'old' and (ii) the 'new' style plantations. Two crucial variables in his typology are: (a) the manner in

which labour supply is geared to the enterprise, and (b) the way in which the plantation disposes of its surplus.

"Old" style plantations are characterised by the employment of unfree or forced labour, such as the slave plantations and those employing indentured coolies. On the other hand, "New" style plantations employ free-wage labour. Secondly, on Old-style plantations, part of the resources of the plantation and part of the surplus produced is used to cover the subsistence needs of the labour-force and the status-consumption needs of the planter; on New-style plantation operations are governed by rational cost-accounting; labour is remunerated in wages and the surplus produced is not used to meet the subsistence needs of the labour-force nor the status-consumption needs of the owner or the manager, but rather is reinvested for increased production and therefore for increased profit.

Two derived variables in his typology are: (a) the nature of interpersonal relationships, and (b) the characteristic sub-culture of the worker communities. On old-style plantations, interpersonal relationships between the owner and the worker are personalistic, informal, face-to-face, particularistic and carrying affect (either positive or negative). On new-style plantations, relationships are impersonal and formal; worker is remunerated in wages and is barred from entering into any kind of personal relationships with the owner or the manager. Accordingly, Wolf suggests that on old-style plantations, one would find inter-personal and intra-group conflicts rather than group cohesion or group solidarity among the labour-force. The worker communities on this type would be highly differentiated into social groups that vie with each other for the stake of an improved livelihood. On new-style plantations, where the worker is remunerated in wages

and is barred from entering into any kind of personal relationship with the owner or the manager, the labour force would be a homogenised one, possessing a "proletarian sub-culture".⁶⁹

Beckford has suggested another crucial variable in distinguishing plantation types namely, the type of ownership. According to him, old-style plantations are those owned by individual proprietary planters while modern plantations are generally owned by companies.⁷⁰ (The following diagram gives the major variables suggested by Wolf and Beckford to differentiate between types of plantations).

Diagram I : Typology of Plantations

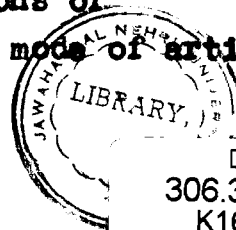
Author	Differentiating variables	Types of Plantations	
		Old Style	New Style
Wolf, E.R.	(a) Nature of labour use	Bond, forced, unfree labour, slave and indenture plantations	Free-wage labour
	(b) Manner of surplus disposal	Used for the subsistence needs of labour force and status consumption of owners	Rationalisation of production and surplus disposal
	(c) Nature of inter-personal relationships	Personalistic, informal, particularistic & carrying affect	Formal, impersonal, universalistic
	(d) Characteristic sub-culture of labour force	Non-homogenised sub-culture, inter personal & intra-group conflict and absence of group solidarity	Proletarian sub-culture and group solidarity
Beckford, G.L.	(a) Type of ownership	Individual, proprietary ownership	Corporate ownership (companies)

This typology, as in the case of all typological exercises, fails to provide a framework for the analysis of processes deriving from the employment of a variety of forms of labour such as casual and temporary labour, seasonal migrant labour etc., on modern plantations characterised by rationalization of production and surplus disposal and owned by companies. Secondly, company plantations may employ relatively 'unfree' labourers as is evidenced in the case of 'indenture' labourers during the early periods of plantation development in India, particularly on Assam tea plantations. Further, even the personalised face-to-face interpersonal relation between the planter and the workers is found on modern plantations. Benevolence and Paternalism have been a necessary part of the strategy of modern plantation owners.⁷⁴ As Bernstein and Pitt point out, in most cases different combinations of relations of production (capitalist (free-wage labour), quasi-capitalist temporary migrant labour; pre-capitalist (slavery), sharecropping etc.) are employed and it is precisely these particular combinations which express the relationship between the capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors and the characteristic forms of surplus extraction⁷² and the resultant processes of class formation. Finally, the variable suggested by Beckford to classify different types of plantations on the basis of 'ownership' of the producing unit diverts attention from the relations of production and the characteristic mode of articulation

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of different pre-capitalist modes of production with capitalist economy, local and global and the types of transition that might result.

These observations point to the need for looking into the varieties of relations of production and for specifying their particular combinations that may fall between the dichotomous classification of 'unfree' and 'free-labour' as suggested by Wolf and to the limitations involved in employing the criterion of the type of ownership of plantations, as suggested by Beckford, in the study of plantation workers.

(c) Approaches to the study of plantation systems:

There has not yet been any explicit theoretical formulation of approaches to the study of plantations and plantation workers. Nonetheless, literature on the subject may be classified into two broad groups namely, those dealing with 'plantation societies' such as the Caribbean and those dealing with the organisational(occupational) structure of a single unit of the plantation, namely of estate. These could be labelled, for lack of better terms, as 'institutional',⁷³ and 'organizational',⁷⁴ approaches respectively. The first approach implies macro-level analysis while the second involves micro-level analysis as employed by social anthropologists in the study of village communities or in the study of the organisational structure of modern factories.⁷⁵

(i) The institutional approach : Plantation Societies

The institutional approach has the plantation societies in the New-World, such as the Caribbean, as its frame of reference. This approach considers the plantation as the major socio-historical determinant⁷⁶ of contemporary structures - economic, political and social - of these societies. Thus, Thompson and Smith have pointed to the existence of a class-caste system in plantation societies, based on the differences in the racial origin of plantation workers - the negro slaves - on the one hand and, owners - the white planters - on the other; the concentration of political power in the hands of a minority, namely the planter-class and highly centralised political structures.⁷⁷ Wagely has pointed to the existence of a specific "culture sphere" in "plantation America"⁷⁸ and, recently, Beckford has attempted to point out the "persistent poverty and underdevelopment" in "plantation economies" and "sub-economies" in the Third-World. He argues that the 'modern' plantation sector entails the 'backwardness' of the peasant sector.⁷⁹

Several Caribbean intellectuals have, however, noted the specificity of the slave plantation experience to the New World.⁸⁰ Hence the approach to the generalisations based on studies of slave-plantation societies have limited applicability to broader geographical areas, such as India where plantations cannot be looked at as the major socio-historical determinant of contemporary structures. Rather, plantations developed in India

within the framework of a broader socio-economic and historical situation, and were only a part of the colonial economy and society. Therefore, as Bernstein and Pitt point out, the effect of white domination and racist ideology and the problems of underdevelopment in plantation societies are to be taken account of in terms of ^{the} wider context of the 'colonial situation' and are not to be considered as distinguishing features of societies with a plantation heritage.⁸¹

Secondly, this approach fails to throw any light on the complicated questions of the relations of production. In turn, these relate to questions about the provision by small peasant farmers and tenants of seasonal or casual labour, export crops and subsistence goods. Writing about Nevis Frucht observed that "peasant like production and Marketing in these societies (slave plantations) may be interpreted as the means by which planters reduced their costs of production by having the slaves provide for themselves, and later, under sharecropping, as the means by which plantation production was carried out in the face of cash shortage".⁸² Some studies point out that many of the New world societies, such as Jamaica, are substantially countries of the peasantry. Thus, Mintz notes that with the emancipation of 1938 (by which time Jamaican sugar plantations were already in decline) ex-slaves in Jamaica were transformed into an 'independent largely self-sufficient peasant population'.⁸³ Similarly, Laclau holds that even with the development of contemporary plantation company Jamaica is still substantially a country of the peasantry and points to the need for an investigation of the 'hidden channels of commercialisation' through which the Jamaican peasant is linked to the local and world capitalist

economy.⁸⁴ These point to the inadequacy of merely observing that plantation dominance constitutes an obstacle to the development of peasant farming, as Beckford seems to suggest.⁸⁵

(ii) The 'Organisational' Approach:

The 'organisational' approach takes a single unit of the plantation namely the estate, as a well-integrated and rationally organised system of production. The estate, conceived as a social system, has (1) a set of goals, ends or objectives namely production for export, (2) there is a complex division of labour, allocation of roles and functions such as managerial, clerical, supervisory and labouring roles; (3) performance of these roles are governed and regulated by norms and rules ensuring reciprocity of role expectations and functions; (4) adherence and conformity to these norms and rules are guaranteed through sanctions (positive and negative, rewards and punishments); and further (5) there is superordination and subordination of roles and positions on the basis of the differential degrees of authority, power, control and influence vested with these roles and positions. The manager stands at the top of the hierarchy and the labourers at the bottom, mediated by a small group of supervisory and clerical staff. Finally, all these exist within a clearly demarcated and bounded territory.⁸⁶

Jain's study of Tamil labourers on a Malaysian rubber estate takes the estate as a social field consisting of a "community subsystem" constituted by "off-work" social relationships of the members

of the estate, and an "industrial subsystem" constituted by the "on-work" social relationships or the social organisation of production of rubber on the estate. Social stratification and political processes among the Indian labourers residing on the rubber estate is, then, viewed as a part of and governed by a larger pattern of social stratification imposed by the occupational hierarchy of the estate. He considers the pattern of authority and power on the estate to be based primarily on the occupational hierarchy of the estate. Workers on the estate are seen as differentiated into economic categories of 'line entrepreneurs' who are rich and "proletariat" who are poor, standing in "creditor-debtor" relationships on account of their differential ownership of jewelry, participation in credit-organisations, their relative positions in the occupational hierarchy, and their social influence.⁸⁷

Jayaraman's study of caste system among Indian Tamil labourers on tea plantation estates in Ceylon takes the occupational or organisational structure of the estate as its basic starting-point. Jayaraman observes that the continuity of the caste system among the Tamil labourers in Ceylon was a result of several factors such as family migration, the Kanganay system of recruitment, the relative physical isolation of estate labourers from the wider Ceylonese society, formation of labour gangs under Kanganies, correspondence between the occupational hierarchy of the plantation estates and the caste-hierarchy among the workers and finally their relative economic isolation coupled with complete political isolation from the wider society.⁸⁸

These studies, by equating the social structure of the plantation estate with the occupational structure and viewing the estate as a rationally organised, well-integrated and cohesive social system, fail to perceive the essential class structure of the estate, the one based on the ownership and control of the means of production. This, in turn, has prevented them from

focusing their attention ~~an~~ more clearly on the processes deriving from the class-interests of the owning and working classes. A study of the organisational structure of the plantation estate may reveal how actual production is carried out on the estate but may tell nothing about the forces and processes stemming from the conflicting interests of mutually opposed classes. Further, a study of the caste system divorced from the basic class-structure of the estate may not reveal the manner in which the caste-loyalties of the workers ^{may be} used by the management as a mechanism to mask the class-differences between them and the workers. This calls for a reformulation of approach to the study of plantations and plantation workers.

Perhaps, the only study that has attempted at an analysis of the structure and processes on the plantation from a class perspective is that of Mintz.⁸⁹ Studying workers on a Puerto Rican plantation, Mintz has identified four interrelated factors that accounted for the emergence of class solidarity and 'class-consciousness' among them. They are: (i) intensification and rationalization of production following the consolidation of pre-existing haciendas under the control of a modern corporate company; (ii) erosion and replacement of personalised relationships that characterised the hacienda-type plantations by formal, impersonal relationships and development of rules governing such relationships; (iii) reassignment and consolidation of workers into a homogenous group, undifferentiated by personalised relationships with the owner or the management, accompanied by the growth of an awareness of class-membership; and (iv) the growth of individualization i.e. the objectification of labour and the alienation of the labourer as a result of his being torn loose from the old personal security networks of personalised relationships with the owner

which forced him to think of his fate as most comprehensible in terms of his own acts.⁹⁰ Mintz has described such a labour force as:

... landless, propertyless (in the sense of productive property), wage-earning, store-buying (the stores, in this case, being a chain owned by the corporation with competitors), corporately employed and standing in like relationship to the main source of employment. The working people not only stand in like relationship to the productive apparatus but are also interacting in reciprocal social relationships with each other and subordinate social relationships to members of higher classes (such as managers). They have common experiences and interests, their children learn class ways of behaving and they may be said to have a class-ideology, some measures of class consciousness.⁹¹

Mintz calls such a labour-force "a rural proletariat" or a "plantation proletariat" and holds that the 'rural proletarian consciousness' is of a different order from that of the industrial proletariat. He suggests that the rural proletariat very often reveals a readiness to work for reform within an existing system of power rather than question such a system.⁹²

Mintz's study has significant relevance to the problem with which this essay is concerned. He has attempted to relate the process of class-formation to previous

modes of exploitation of labour on plantation. On the old haciendas, according to him, the rural proletariat was 'concealed' under personalised ties with the plantation owner which inhibited the process of what he calls 'individualization'. Only when impersonal and formal relations replaced those particularistic ties did the worker come to think of himself on his own terms and to identify his fate with those of like-positioned men on the plantation.

However, implicit in Mintz scheme of analysis is a neat typology of old and modern plantations premised on two crucial distinguishing variables namely, rationalisation of production and formalisation of relations. As pointed out by Bernstein and Pitt, typological formulations often fail to take adequate account of the varieties and combinations of relations of production on plantations. It is these varieties and their characteristic combination that determine the process of emergence of classes and class-formation on plantations under historically specific conditions. Secondly, deriving from the above, the 'concealment' of the rural proletariat, of which Mintz speaks, may occur in situations other than those provided by 'personalised ties' of the worker with owner or the management, and may coexist within a relatively rationalised system of production, such as modern plantations. The use of the casual labour of peasants on Javanese plantations under Dutch colonists, illustrated by Bernstein and Pitt is a case in point. Turning to the India situation, the employment of

seasonal migrant labour on South Indian plantations (which would be treated in greater detail in the substantive part of this essay) is another case. A characteristic aspect of such a ~~form~~ of labour-use is that it does not involve the replacement of pre-capitalist by capitalist relations of production, nor the transformation of the traditional structure of social relations. That the kangany system of recruitment and employment tended to preserve the traditional structure of social relations and traditional ^{bases of} social differentiation among plantation workers in Ceylon and in Malaya is reported by sociologists and social anthropologists (Davis K. 1951, Jayaraman 1975, Jain R.K. 1970). The point to be noted here is that these traditional bases of social relations and differentiation, under specific conditions, may provide 'concealment' mechanisms for the workers. Workers may identify themselves with their own caste, kin and linguistic groups rather than with like-positioned men of other groups. This, in turn, might inhibit the emergence of conditions necessary for the process of what Mintz calls 'individualization' which is a pre-condition for the emergence of awareness of class-membership and the growth of class-solidarity.

Thirdly, Mintz's scheme of analysis does not give adequate attention to the importance of external forces in the process of class-formation among a predominantly rural labour-force such as the plantation workers. Hobsbawm ~~...~~ observes that a rural population such as agricultural labourers and the peasantry in general, unlike an industrial labour force, require even the most elementary class-consciousness and organisation

to be brought to them from outside. He notes that the class-consciousness of peasants is normally quite ineffective except when organised and led by non-peasants and non-peasant ideas.⁹³ In the absence of effective political organisation of workers as a class, vis-a-vis the planter-class, the 'proletarian consciousness' of which Mintz speaks may amount to nothing more than the 'ideology of equality' based on the principle of human rather than socio-economic or political equality which Jayawardena and Margolis⁹⁴ observed among workers on Guinean and Brazilian plantations. Although, Mintz notes the existence of issue-based trade-union activities among workers, he does not consider it as a necessary pre-condition (along with the other factors suggested by him) for the fuller emergence of class-solidarity and class-consciousness among them. Finally, deriving from the above is the problem of articulation and linkage of the plantation class-structure with the wider class-structure - regional and national. Mintz's scheme of analysis viewing plantation as a self-contained system, fails to take adequate account of the processes deriving from this interlinkage.

3. Some observations relevant to the present study

The plantation, (whether considered at a macro or at a micro-level), as a capitalistic agro-industrial enterprise, is essentially a class-structured system of organisation in which ownership and control of means of production is concentrated in the hands of a planter class and involves sharp separation of worker and employer classes. However, there can be a variety of ways in which the plantation can articulate

pre-capitalist structures to its needs. In attempting at a study of class-formation, it is imperative to view the plantation system against the colonial setting and to give adequate attention to the specific combination of relations of production on the plantation which are expressed in the forms of labour-use and the modes of exploitation of labour.

The literature reviewed here has the following limitations.

The institutional approach employed by both sociologists(Thompson 1939, 1940, 1959 & 1960; Smith 1967 and Wagley 1960) and economists(Beckford 1972) has, as its paradigm, the new world societies. The slave-plantations are viewed as the socio-historical determinants of the contemporary socio-economic and political structures of these societies. Generalisations based on these studies are specific to the new-world societies and have limited applicability to geographically broader areas, such as India.

Secondly, this approach, taking plantation as an institution and viewing it as the socio-historical determinant of contemporary socio-political and economic structures, fails to locate these structures within a broader historical context, namely the 'colonial situation'. The problems of white domination and racist ideology, and of economic underdevelopment in plantation societies are to be taken account of in terms of the wider context of the 'colonial situation' and are not to be considered as a distinguishing feature of societies with a plantation heritage.

Thirdly, this approach fails to throw any light on the complicated question of the relations of production, such as the varieties of forms of labour-use and the 'hidden channels of commercialisation' through which the precapitalist sector is linked to the local and world capitalist system (Laclau 1971; Bernstein and Pitt 1974; Mintz 1959 and Frucht 1967). Taking an adequate account of such specific conditions is a necessary pre-requisite for a proper study of the process and problems of ^{class} formation on plantations in India.

The organisational approach (Jain 1970; Jayaraman 1975 and Jayawardena 1963 & 1968) concentrating its attention on the organisational structure of plantation estates fails to take note of the underlying class-structure of the plantation. Further, viewing plantation as a rationally ordered and normatively integrated system of social relationships and presuming reciprocity of role relations and mutuality of interests, this approach blurs the analysis of processes deriving from the conflicting interests of mutually opposed groups and classes and directs attention away from the processes and problems of class formation.

Even those studies which take the basic class-structure of the plantation as their starting point (Wolf 1959 and Mintz 1956 & 1974) seem to imply a dichotomous conception of old and modern types of plantations and fails provide a framework for an analysis of processes under historically specific conditions. Finally, viewing plantation as a self-contained unit or system, these studies obscure the inter-relationship between the capitalist sector of the plantation and the precapitalist sector. Besides, by attempting at an analysis of process of emergence and crystallization

of classes and class-relations primarily in terms of certain technological and organisational changes within the plantation estates, these studies fail to perceive the role of external factors in such processes. Further, such a scheme of analysis does not provide a framework for understanding of the characteristic ways in which the class-structure of the plantation may be linked to the wider class-structures at the regional and national levels. The discussion in this essay would be directed along the following lines:

This discussion takes the basic class-structure of the plantation as its starting point. In studying the process of class-formation, this essay seeks to relate it to specific historical situations, namely (1) the development of plantations within the framework of colonialism, as a part of the colonial integration of Indian economy into the world capitalist system; (2) the specific forms of labour-use which manifest the manner of articulation of the pre-capitalist sector with the capitalist sector of the plantation and their inter-linkage; (3) the system of labour-recruitment and employment practices and the manner of the structuring of the labour force on the plantation; and (4) the inter-linkage through political parties, labour organisations and planters' association between the class-structure of the plantation and the wider class-structure at the regional and national levels.

The following substantive part of this essay is divided into two sections. The first part attempts

to trace the history of the development of plantations in India. Special care is taken to demarcate two distinct forms of labour-use that evolved in the course of the development of plantations in India. The evolution of these two forms of labour use has been determined by specific historical conditions and involves distinct problems.

Therefore, from a single study, it will not be possible to make generalizations relevant to both the systems of labour-use. What is needed is the separate study of each of the two systems. A comparative analysis of the two may give valuable insights. However, such a study is outside the limited scope of this essay.

The second section of the substantive part of this essay represents a preliminary attempt at a sociological understanding of the processes and problems of class-formation among the plantation workers in South India, taking the plantation workers in Kerala as a typical case.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. What is implied by the term "class-formation" is the process of transformation from a "class-in-itself" (an economic category) into a class-for-itself (a political group). This process is implicit in the two rather different senses Marx used the term class. First it could stand for those broad aggregates of people which can be classified together by an objective criterion - because they stand in a similar relationship to the means of production, more especially the groupings of exploiters and exploited. This is called a "class-in-itself". The second sense in which class is used introduces a subjective element into the concept of class viz., "class-consciousness". Class in the full sense comes into existence only at the historical moment when classes begin to acquire consciousness of themselves as such. This is called a "class-for-itself".

See, Hobsbawm E.J.; "Class Consciousness in History" in Meszaros, I (ed), Aspects of History and class-consciousness, 1971, pp. 5-21.

See, Meszaros, I; "Contingent and Necessary class-consciousness" in Meszaros (ed), op. cit. pp. 85-127.

2. According to Wolf, the plantation is essentially a class-structured system of organisation in which there is a class of planters who own the means of production and a working class which owns nothing but its labour power. The labourer produces more than he needs to satisfy his own culturally prescribed standards of consumption and is paid for the use of his labour power in the service of surplus production. He cannot sell the goods he produces nor consume the proceeds of such sales. It is the owners of the plantation who have the right to sell in a market, to reinvest the proceeds realised, and to appropriate the profits obtained for investment elsewhere, or siphon off the surplus for culturally sanctioned individual ends. This basic class-structure, differentiating between owners and workers, is supported by a complex system of political and legal sanctions.

See, Wolf E.R. - "Specific Aspects of Plantation Systems in the New World: Community sub-cultures and Social classes", in Plantation systems of the New-World, 1959, pp 136-147.

3. Some of the major works in these lines are:

Srinivasan M.N. - Caste In Modern India and other Essays, 1962; Marriot M - Caste Ranking and community Structure in Five Regions of India and Pakistan, 1960; Leach E.R(ed) - Aspects of caste in South India, Ceylon and North-west Pakistan, 1960; Karve I - Kinship Organization in India, 1953; Srinivasan M.N.(ed) - India's villages, 1966; and Marriot M,(ed) - Village India, 1955.

4. For an excellent critique of structural-Functionalism See, Godelier, Maurice, Rationality and Irrationality in Economics(translated by Brian Pearce) 1972, pp viii-xiii.

For a systematic review of literature following the structural-functional approach to problems of modernization of Indian--tradition and change in India, and in the third world in general, See, Singh, Yogendra - Modernization of Indian Tradition : A Systematic study of Social Change, 1973.

5. Parson, T - The Social System, 1951 pp 180-198

6. Parson, T - "Evolutionary Universals in Society" American Sociological Review, Vol. 29(3), 1964, pp 339-357

7. Myrdal, G - Asian Drama : An Enquiry into the poverty of Nations, (abridged edition), 1972, see particularly pp 15. 36-51

8. McClelland David, C - The Achieving Society, 1961

9. Srinivasan M.N. - op.cit; See also Srinivas' notes on the concepts of 'Sanskritization and Westernization in Srinivas M.N., Social changes in Modern India, 1966.

10. Yogendra Singh writes: "The structural approach is rather preponderant in social sciences. It seeks to analyse Modernization with the help of selected social or normative variables ... "
Singh Yogendra, op.cit. p 205.

11. Alavi, H - "Peasant classes and Primordial Loyalties", Journal of Peasant Studies Vol. 1(1), 1972, pp 49
12. Beteille, J - Studies in Agrarian Social Structure 1974, pp 35-55.

Beteille, notes: "... preoccupation with a single frame-work gives a particular slant to the description of social relations. ... Castes and not individuals or groups of any other kind are taken as the unit of interaction. Thus in regard to the system of production we are told how the landowning caste is related to the caste of landless labourers rather than how the land owners (irrespective of their caste) are related to the land-less". (p 41)

See also, Beteille J - "Peasants and Workers" in "Marxism and Sociology" in Six Essays in comparative Sociology, 1974, pp 75-110.

13. Mencher, examining some of the features of rural class structure in Tamil Nadu, observes how caste and caste loyalties provide a mechanism which can be manipulated by the higher ups to keep those with common economic needs divided.

See, Mencher, J.P. - "Problems of Analysing Rural class structure", Economic and Political Weekly Vol. IX(35), August 31, 1974 pp-1495-1503.

14. Alavi, H - op.cit, p.59
15. Steinhagen, R - "Changing Functions of the community in under-developed countries" in Bernstein H, (ed) Underdevelopment and Development: The Third world Today, 1973, pp 83-96.
16. Myres Charles, - Labour Problems in the Industrialization of India, 1958, pp-83-96.

For other studies forwarding similar arguments, See Slotkin, J - From Field to Factory, 1960 Moore W and Feldman J (eds) - Labour Commitment and Social change in Developing Societies, 1960.

17. Lambert R.D. - Workers, Factories, and Social Changes in India, 1963.
18. Morris R.D. - The Emergence of an Industrial Labour force in India: A Study of the Bombay Cotton Mills, 1854-1947, 1965, pp 198-210.

19. Gupta, P.S.; "Notes on the Origin and Structuring of Industrial Labour Force in India, 1880-1920" in Sharma, R.S. and Jha V, (eds) Indian Society : Historical probings; 1974, pp. 414-434
20. See, for example, Rostow, W.W.; "The Stages of Economic Growth : A Non-Communist Manifesto, 1960
21. The leading proponents of this model are Lewis, Ranis and Fei.

See Lewis, W.A.; "Economic Development with unlimited supplies of Labour"; The Manchester School fo Economic and Social Sciences, May 1954

The original arguments of Lewis, have been refined and extended by Ranis and Fei.

See, Ranis Gustav and Fei J.C.H; "A Theory of Economic Development", American Economic Review September, 1961, and Development of the Labour Surplus Economy : Theory and Policy, 1964 by the same authors.
22. This school of thought is represented by writers such as Paul Baran, The Political Economy Growth (1957); Frank A.G., Capitalism and Underdevelopment(1975); Myint, H; "An Interpretation of Economic Backwardness", in Agarwala, A.N., and Singh A.P. (eds) The Economics of Underdevelopment(1958); Furtado, C; Development of and underdevelopment, (1964); Levin J.V.; The Export Economies(1964).
23. Frank, A.G.; On Capitalist Underdevelopment, 1975
24. Caulfield, M.D.; "Culture and Imperialism : Proposing a New Dialectic" in Hymes, D (ed), Reinventing Anthropology, 1929, pp. 182-212.
25. Memmi, A. - The Colonizer and the Colonized, 1965, pp. 1-89
26. Chandra, Bipan; "Presidential Address" ("Colonialism and Modernization"), Indian History Congress, proceedings of the 32nd session, Nabalpur, 1970, pp. 1-31-
27. Chandra, Bipan; op. cit. p. 22
28. Alavi Hamza; "India and the colonial mode of production, Economic and Political Weekly; Vol. X(33-35) Special number 1975, pp. 1235-1262.

29. Ibid., p. 1253
30. See, Baran P., "On the Roots of Backwardness",
op. cit. pp. 265-299
31. Frank, A.G., op. cit. pp. 1-19
32. Baran, P., op. cit. pp. 300-401
33. Dutt R.P., India Today, 1947
34. Levkovsky, I., "Capitalism in India : Basic Trends
in its Development : 1966 "
35. Singh, V.B., "Indian Economy : Yesterday and
Today", 1970
36. This concept has been widely used by several
economic historians to refer to the destruction
of old handicraft industry without the compen-
sating advance of modern industry under the
impact of colonialism in India.
See, R.P. Dutt, op.cit. p. 136
Singh V.B., op.cit. p. 19
Daniel and Alice Thomer, Land and Labour
in India, 1965
37. See, Singh V.B., op. cit. pp. 16-17
Dutt R.P., op. cit. pp. 163-231
Levkovsky, op. cit. pp. 11-17, 59-66
See, also, Chandra, Bipan, "Indian Peasantry and
National Integration", Social Scientist,
Vol. 5(2), September 1976, pp. 33-39
38. Patel, J.S., Agricultural Labourers in Modern India
and Pakistan, 1957, p. 149
39. Ibid., pp. 149-150
40. Alavi, H., "Peasants and Revolution" in Gough, K.,
and Sharma H.P. (eds.), Imperialism and
Revolution in South Asia, 1973, pp. 291-337
Also see, Alavi, H., "Rural Bases of Political
Power in South Asia", Journal of Contemporary
Asia, IV(4), 1974
41. Alavi, H., op. cit. p. 1247

42. Patel distinguishes between four types of agricultural labourers: (1) Bonded or semi-free labourers; (2) dwarf-holding labourers; (3) underemployed landless labourers; and (4) full-time free wage labourers. Under dwarf-holding labourers are included artisans and petty cultivators.

See Patel, J.S.; op. cit. pp. 69-145

43. Patel J.S., op. cit. pp. 122-126
Levkovsky, op. cit. p. 57
Davis K.; "The Population of India and Pakistan"
1951, pp. 98-123

Singh notes that British investment in plantations was a device to exploit serf labour and natural resources and the diversion of the Indian surplus for investment abroad.

See Singh, V.B.; op. cit. p. 2

44. This concept was originally introduced by Edward Shils and later elaborated by Clifford Geertz and others to refer to "attachment that stems from the "givens" - or the assumed "givens" - of social existence; immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language and following particular social practices ... These conguities of blood, speech, custom and so on are seen to have an ineffable and at times overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves".

See Geertz, C.; "The Integrative Revolution : Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States" in Geertz C (ed) Old Societies and New States, 1963, p. 109.

These authors hold that the "New States" are constellation of kinship groups, castes, tribes feudalities. The assumption of a sovereign civil statehood by these societies stimulates sentiments of parochialism, communalism, racialism etc., because it introduces into society a valuable new price over which to fight, thus leading to the accentuation of disintegrative forces in these societies:

See Shils E.; "Primordial, Personal Sacred and Civil Ties", British Journal of Sociology, June, 1957, pp. 130-145.

Also, Shils, E.; "On the comparative Study of the New States", in Geertz C. (ed), op. cit. pp. 1-25

45. Meillassoux, C.; "From Reproduction to production : A Marxist Approach to Economic Anthropology" Economy and Society. Vol. 1, 1972, pp. 93-103.
46. Wolpe Harold, "Capitalism and cheap Labour Power in Africa : From Segregation to Apartheid", Economy and Society, Vol. 1, 1972, pp. 425-456
47. Tonnies, F.; "Fundamental concepts of sociology (Loomis, C.P. translated), 1940.
48. Redfield, R; The Folk culture of Yucatan, 1941.
See also, "The Folk Society", American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 52, 1947, pp. 293-308
and Sjoberg, G.; "The Rural-urban Dimension in Pre-industrial, Transitional and Industrial Societies", In Faris R.E.L. (ed) Handbook of Modern sociology, 1964, pp. 127-159.
48. Mintz, S.W.; "The Plantation as a socio-cultural Type", in plantation systems of the New World, pp. 42-53
49. Wolf, E.R.; op. cit. p. 143
50. Mintz, S.W.; op. cit. p. 43
51. Bernstein, H and Pitt M; "Plantations and Modes of Exploitation", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 1(4), July 1974, pp. 5-17-519.
See also, Geertz, Clifford, "Agricultural Involution : The Process of Ecological change in Indonesia" 1963, pp. 130-143
52. The 'Kangany' system of labour recruitment and employment will be discussed in detail in the substantive part of this essay.
53. Davis, K., op. cit. p. 108.

54. Jayaraman, R.; "Caste Continuities in Ceylon : A Study of the Social Structure of Three Tea Plantations", 1975, pp. vi, 57-64
55. Alavi, H.; op. cit.
56. Jayaraman notes with reference to workers on plantations in Ceylon that 'the establishment of trade unions in itself, by giving relative importance to one or the other numerically important caste groups in the control of trade unions creates cleavages on the basis of caste ties.'
- See Jayaraman, R.; op. cit. p. 106
57. Gupta, P.S.; op. cit. pp. 429-432
58. See Kothari Rajni, "Intorudction : Caste in Indian Politics", in Kothari, R (ed) Caste in Indian Politics, pp. 3-25

Kothari wrties: "Politics is a competitive enterprise, its purpose is the acquisition of power for the realization of certain goals and its process is one of identifying and manipulating existing and emerging allegiances in order to mobilise and consolidate positions. The important thing is organisation and articulation of support and where politics is mass-based the point is to articulate support through the organisations in which masses are to be found. It follows that where caste structure provides one of the principal organizational clusters along which the bulk of the population is found to live, politics must strive to organize through such a structure. The alleged 'casteism in politics' is thus no more and no less than politicization of caste ..." (pp. 4-5)

59. A good number of studies on factional politics in Indian villages have accumulated in recent years.

See, for example, Bailey, F.G.; "Para Political systems" in Swartz M.G. (ed) Local Level Politics, 1968, pp. 281-294.

See, Nicholas R.; "Factions : A comparative Analysis" in Banton M (ed) Political System and Distribution of Power, 1965, pp. 49-59.

Nicholas, R.; "Segmentary Factional Political Systems" in Swartz, Turner and Tuden (eds), *Political Anthropology*, 1966, pp. 49-59.

60. Alavi, H., 1973, op. cit.
61. Ibid, p. 59.
62. See Oommen, T.K.; "From Mobilization to Institutionalization : An Analysis of the Career of Agrarian Labour Movement in Kerala", in "The Tradition of Dissent, Protest and Reform in Indian Civilization" (mimeographed) Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, Sept. 1975, pp. 1-28
63. Oommen, T.K.; "Problems of Building Agrarian Organizations in Kerala", *Sociologia Ruralis*, Vol. XVI(3) 1976, pp. 177-191.
64. Rubian Vera, "Introduction" in *Plantation systems of the New World*, p. 2
65. Furnival, J.S.; "An Introduction to the Political Economy of Burma", 1931, p. 45
66. Gray, L.C.; (1941), Cited in Mintz Sidvey, W.; op. cit. p. 44.
67. Plantations employing slave labour existed chiefly in the new world societies such as the Caribbean. The plantation system of agricultural production was introduced in the new-world regions immediately after these were brought under the control of the British colonists by the end of the 17th Century.

An excellent picture of the origin, development and structure of Negro slave society in Jamaica is given by Patterson.

See, Patterson, O.; *The Sociology of Slavery : Analysis of the Origins, Development and Structure of Negro Slaves Society in Jamaica*, 1967.

For detailed description of the structure of slave plantations see particularly pp. 57-65

See also, Dunn, R.S.; "Sugar and Slaves : The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West-Indies" 1624-1713; 1973.
68. Jones, W.O., "Plantations" *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, Vol. 12, 1968, p. 154
69. Wolf, E.R.; op. cit. pp. 136-140.

70. Beckford, G.L.; "Persistent poverty : Underdevelopment in Plantation Economies of the third-world 1972, pp. 84-113
- 71 Hutchinson, H.W.; Village and Plantation Life in North-Eastern Brazil, 1957, p. 8
72. Bernstein and Pitt; op. cit. p. 519.
73. In sociology, 'institutions' refer to the regulative principles which organise most of the activities of individuals in a society into definite organisational patterns from the point of view of some of the perennial basic problems of any society or ordered social life. Major institutional spheres are family and kinship, education, economy, polity, cultural institutions such as religion, science, art etc., and stratification.

See, Eisenstadt, S.N.; "Social Institutions : The Concept", International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 14, 1968, pp. 409-421.

The 'institutional approach' to the study of plantation system considers the plantation as the determining institution which pattern other institutions and structures. The socio-economic and political problems of development and modernization in plantation societies are, then, considered as stemming from the basic institutional framework of the plantation system. However, this approach is related to a broader approach in development economics, namely the 'institutional school' of economic thought. This approach, originating from Thorstein Veblen and followed by several development economists, holds that the economic system is a part of human culture, which is a complex of many institutions. Consequently, they argue that economic development is determined by the institutional factors in all societies.

See, Gruchy Allan, G.; "Economic Thought: The Institutional School", International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, Vol. 4, pp. 462-467

An excellent application of this approach to the developmental problems of the Third World is found in Gunnar Myrdal's Asian Drama.

See, Myrdal, G.; op. cit., pp. 15; 36-51.

74. Modern organisational theory conceives of organisations as "a system of consciously co-ordinated activities of forces of two or more persons". See, Bernard, C.I., The Functions of the Executive, 1939, p. 73

Social anthropological study of plantation estates conceives of the estate as a well-integrated social system, as defined by the structural functionalists. Parsons, for example, treats organisations as natural social systems. See, Parsons, T., Structure and Processes in Modern Societies, 1960, pp. 16-96. For a critical review theories of organisations, see, Peter, M. Blau, Theories of Organisations, International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences, Vol.II, pp. 297-305. Selznick points to the need for modifying the concept of organization considered as a well-ordered and well-integrated system. See Philip Selznick, "Foundations of the Theory of Organisation" in Peter, I. Rose (ed.), The Study of Society : An Integrated Anthology, 1970. Marvin Olzen gives a lucid treatment on The Process of social Organisation, 1968. For an ecological approach to the development of social organisation, see, Duncan Otis, D., "Social Organisations and Ecosystem" in Robert, E.L. Faris (ed.), op. cit. pp. 36-82.

75. For a discussion on the organisational structure of modern factories, see,

Ganguly, H.C., "Structure and Processes of Organization", 1944.

Lambert's study of Factory Workers in Poona also gives a detailed discussion on the 'internal structure' of the factory.

See, Lambert, R.D., op. cit. pp. 105-140

See, also, Myers, C.A., and Kannappan, S., "Industrial Relations in India (second revised and enlarged edition), 1970, pp. 226-231

The organisational approach to the study of plantation systems also follows a similar line of analysis of the occupational structure of the estate. The occupational roles on modern

plantation estates are (i) Managerial, (ii) clerical and technical, (iii) supervisory and (iv) labouring roles, all of which are hierarically ordered with the manager at the top of the ladder and the labourers at the bottom. For detailed discussion on the organizational structure of plantation estates, see

Jayarardana C.; "Conflict and Solidarity in a Guianese Plantation, 1963, pp. 28-39

Jayaraman, E.; op. cit. pp. 67-74

Jain, R.K., op. cit. pp. 30-39

76. Thompson considers plantation as a type of "settlement institution". According to him it is "... one of that class of institution that pattern the relationship of people in land and largely determine how people shall live on the land and with one another ..."
(p. 30)

See Thompson, E.T.; "The Plantation Cycle and Problems of Typology" in Rubin Vera (ed), Caribbean Studies : A Symposium, 1961, pp. 29-33

See also, Thompson, E.T.; "The Plantation as a social system" in Plantation Systems of the New World, pp. 25-41.

E.T. Smith takes the plantation as a "total institution".

It is "a bureaucratically organised system in which whole blocks of people are treated as units and are marched through a set of regimentation under the surveillance of the a small supervisory staff ..."

See, Smith E.T.; "Social stratifications, Cultural Pluralism, and Integration in West Indian Societies", in Lewis, E. and Mathews, T.G. (eds) Caribbean Integration, 1967, p. 20.

77. According to Thompson, racist ideology provided legitimacy and justification for the exercise of authority and control by the white planters over the negro slave labourers on Southern plantations. Further, racial differences of the planter class and the slave labourers became the basis of social stratification in the plantation societies. See, Thompson, E.T., "The Planter in the Pattern of Race Relations in the South", Social Forces, December 1940, p. 245
- See also Thompson, E.T., "The Plantation : The Physical Basis of Traditional Race Relations" in Thompson, E.T. (ed.), Race Relations and the Race Problem, 1939, pp. 193-195
- Beckford suggests that "all plantation societies have ... a concentration of power among a small planter class and highly centralised political administrative structures ('government')". See, Beckford, G.L., op. cit. pp. 73-74
78. Wagley Charles, "Plantation America : A Culture Sphere" in Rubin Vera (ed.), op.cit. pp. 3-13
79. Beckford's study of "plantation economies" and "sub-economies" put forward the thesis that development possibilities in all countries are determined chiefly by institutional factors that ultimately influence the proximate growth variables such as resources, capital accumulations, technological change and human capital. His central concern is to establish the distinctiveness of plantation system in a typology of "rural institutional environments" other suggested types being peasant, tribal, feudal and state controlled systems. Plantation economies are defined as those "societies in which plantation production dominate the structuring of economic and social life". Plantation "sub-economies" are those in which "plantations exist only as part of the larger national economies. The influence of plantation sub-economies is as pervasive regionally as it is on the national scale in plantation economies. He then seeks to demonstrate that the 'modern' plantation sector has an 'underdevelopment bias' and entails the 'backwardness' of the peasant sector. See, Beckford, G.L., op. cit. pp. xx-xxiii, 14-15, Appendix I, "Plantations in Underdeveloped Countries", Chapters II, III, V to VII, pp. 30-83, 114-214

80. See, for example, Patterson, O.; "Outside History : Jamaica Today", New Left Review, 31, 1965, pp. 35-43.
81. Bernstein and Pitt; op . cit. p. 522
82. Frucht, R.; "Caribbean Social Type : Neither 'Peasant ' Nor 'Proletarian '"', Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 16, 1967, pp. 295-300.
83. Mintz, S.W.; "Labour and Sugar in Puerto Rico and Jamaica 1800-1850", Comparative Studies in Society and History; Vol. I, 1958-59, pp. 273-281
84. Laclau, E.; "Feudalism and capitalism in Latin America", New Left Review, 1967, 1971, pp. 19-38
85. See, Beckford, G.L.; op. cit. pp. 154-214
86. See, Loomis Charles, P. and Beegle Allan J.; "Rural Sociology : The Strategy of Change," 1957, pp. 1-7
87. Jain, R.K.; op cit. 'Preface ', pp. xvi-xviii and 159-294.
88. Jayaraman, R.; op. cit. Preface pp. vi-vii; 1-105
89. Mintz S.W.; "Canamelar : The Sub-Culture of a Rural Sugar Plantation proletariat" in Steward, J. (ed), the people of Puerto Rico University of Illinois press, Urbana, 1956 pp.314-317

See also, Mintz, S.W.; "The Rural Proletariat and the Problem of Rural Proletarian Consciousness", Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 1(13), 1974, pp. 291-325
90. Mintz, S.W.; 1974, op. cit, 307-310
91. Ibid, p. 299
92. Ibid, pp. 311-318
93. Hobsbawm, E.J.; op. cit. p. 16

94. Jayawardena studying the sugar mill workers on Guianese sugar plantations, has observed the existence of an 'ideology of equality' based on the principle of human equality rather than on social, political or economic equality. This equalitarian ideology was translated into a set of norms governing the concrete inter-personal relationships among the workers and was expressed in the notion of "Mati".

Any breach of the norm of "Mati" gave rise to interpersonal disputes and conflicts among the workers. The most frequent form of breach of the norms of Mati was expressed in terms of such as "eye-pass".

See, Jayawardena, C.; op. cit. pp. 48-72

See also, Jayawardena, C.; "Ideology and Conflict in Lower-class communities", Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol. 10(4), 1968. pp. 413-446

Maxime Margolis studying workers on a Brazilian plantation points to the existence of an ideology of equality among the workers. He observes that this ideology of equality is stressed by the workers to gloss over the existing socio-economic disparity among them.

Margolis, Maxime; "The Ideology of Equality on a Brazilian Sugar Plantation", Ethnology, Vol. XIV, No. 4, 1975, pp. 373-383.

CHAPTER II

PLANTATION LABOUR IN INDIA : FORMS OF LABOUR-USE, SYSTEMS OF RECRUITMENT AND EMPLOYMENT

The development of plantations in India is to be viewed within the framework of the colonial integration of Indian economy into the developing world capitalist system of the West. Elena Padilla notes that the plantation system of production was one of the economic, social and political instruments employed in tropical areas for the profitable production of export crops.¹ The British colonists, aided by the legislative² and administrative machinery of the colonial state, introduced the plantation system of production in India. Its development was facilitated by factors such as the availability of large tracts of land at cheap rates³, the existence of an inexhaustible reservoir of unemployed and underemployed agricultural labour force in the country-side etc. Thus the development of plantations in India was not the result of isolated and discrete events but rather was the result of a specific response to the needs of emerging capitalist industrial system of the West.

Knowles traces back the history of development of plantations in India to the period between 1833 and 1857. He writes: "The most important economic development of the period (1833-1857) was the starting of new projects of trade in jute, tea, coffee, hide, raw cotton and oil seeds".⁴ Gadgil notes that the

introduction of plantations in India marks the beginnings of European exploitation of Indian resources through modern organised industries.⁵ Similarly Levkovsky has observed that plantations, along with jute and coal industries were practically the only major industries which British capitalism considered profitable to establish in India.⁶ Tea, coffee and, to some extent, rubber plantations were among the earliest organised industries in India.

Part B

The coverage of plantations in India differs from the definition of plantations adopted by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). According to the ILO, the term 'plantation' includes any agricultural undertaking regularly employing hired workers which is situated in the tropical or sub-tropical regions and which is mainly concerned with the cultivation or production for commercial purposes of coffee, coconut, groundnuts, cotton, tobacco, fibres (sisal, jute and hemp), citrus, palm oil, cinchona or pineapple; it does not include family or small-scale holdings producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers.⁷ In India, according to the plantation Labour Act of 1951, the term "Plantation" includes only Tea, Coffee, Rubber and Cinchona, the first three being the major ones.

Coffee

Innes, in his Madras District Gazetteers, reports that the cultivation of the Coffee Plant was first introduced into Malabar at the end of the 18th century. By 1830 the first Coffee plantation estate was

established in Mysore by Messrs. Parry and Co.⁸ The cultivation of this crop spread rapidly to Coorg, the Nilgiris, the Wynad, the Shevaroy Hills and Travancore. By 1862 the industry is reported to have reached its Zenith.⁹ However, between 1893 and 1903 the acreage under coffee in Malabar district decreased from 20,096 to 5,477 due to leaf deceases, declining prices and the entry of Brazilian coffee into the World Market. It was gradually supplanted by tea in the Wynad, the Anamalais, and the Nilgiris.¹⁰ In 1929-30, the total acreage under coffee in British India was around 75,000 which was only a little over one tenth of the acreage under tea.¹¹ At present Coffee Plantations are mostly confined to hilly tracts in Mysore, Kerala and Tamil Nadu with Mysore having the largest acreage. The total employment of labour in Coffee Plantations in 1956 was around 2 lakhs (see Table I and Map 1)

Rubber

The systematic cultivation of rubber is reported to have begun as recently as 1900. During British Rule rubber was grown in certain parts of Burma and the Malabar Coast below the Western Ghats from Mangalore to Cape Comerin. In 1928, the total area under this crop amounted to 245,809 acres consisting of 2,782 estates, of which 53 per cent was in Burma, 30 per cent in Travancore and the remaining 17 per cent in Madras, Cochin, Coorg and Mysore. The total yield was about 28 million lbs of which Burma and Travancore each produced about 11 million lbs.¹² In 1944 the total employment of labour was around 0.5 lakh.¹³ At present, production

of rubber is largely confined to the state of Kerala, employing nearly 63 thousand workers. As tea is the

TABLE - I
Region-wise Distribution of Plantation-
Employment in India, 1956*

REGION/ STATE	T E A		C O F F E E		R U B B E R	
	Acre- age (000s)	Employ- ment	Acre- age (000s)	Employ- ment	Acre- age (000s)	Employ- ment
NORTH-EAST INDIA Assam, W. Bengal, Tripura.	589 (75.4%)	740,122	-	-	-	-
NORTH INDIA Bihar, Punjab, U.P., Himachal Pradesh	18 (2.3%)	11,558	-	-	-	-
SOUTH INDIA Kerala, Madras, Mysore	174 (22.3%)	186,773	250	200,770	191	63,034
ALL INDIA TOTAL	781 (100%)	938,453	250	200,770	191	63,034

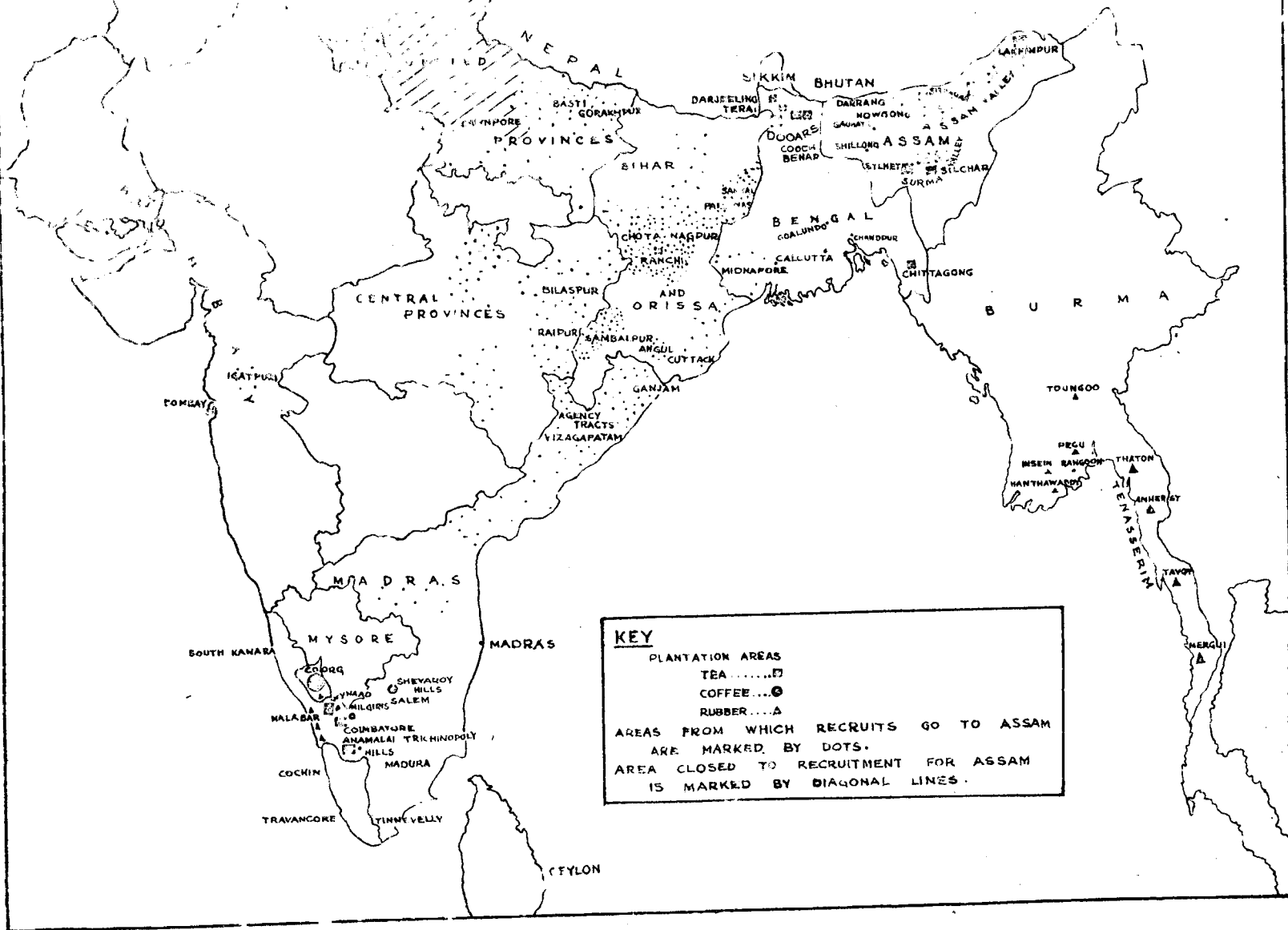
* Source : Indian Labour Year Book; 1958, p.436

largest plantation industry in terms of acreage under cultivation, in terms of production and in terms of employment¹⁴ (see Table I and the discussion in this essay will refer primarily to tea plantations and tea plantation workers.

Plantation Areas in British India

SKETCH MAP
 SHEET
 PLANTATION AREAS
 IN
 BRITISH INDIA

SCALE
 0 50 100 200 300



Map-1

- 54A -

(i) The Development of Tea Plantations and Emergence of Tea Plantation Labour in India, 1851-1961

As early as 1788 the possibility of tea cultivation in India had been suggested to the Directors of the British East India Company. However, the court of Directors turned down the proposal, as the Company enjoyed monopoly right to trade in Chinese tea. It was only when the monopoly was abolished in 1833 that the British turned their attention, in earnest, to the cultivation of tea in India on a commercial scale. In 1834, Lord William Bentick appointed a Committee to investigate the possibilities of establishing a tea industry in India. However, the real progress of tea-planting in Assam began only by 1851 and was greatly assisted by the promulgation of the Waste-Land Rules of 1854, whereby large tracts of land were leased out to prospective planters on nominal rent.¹⁶

In 1855 indigenous tea was discovered in the Cachar district and in the following year in Sylhet and European capital was directed to these quarters. The tea industry was established in Darjeeling in 1856 and in Chittagong and Chota Nagpur around 1862.¹⁷

Development of tea plantations on a large scale in the South became evident only towards the close of the 19th Century. The British Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company and the Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company in Travancore were registered in 1878 and 1897 respectively.¹⁸ Similarly in Madras, by 1897, tea plantations appear to have been established by the East India Tea Produce Company.¹⁹

There is no reliable data regarding the growth in the acreage and production of Tea during the period before 1900. The total area under cultivation at the beginning of the century (1900-1904) was around 500 thousand acres, producing about 209 million lbs. of tea.²⁰ The Report of the Royal Commission on Labour suggests that the total acreage under tea cultivation in British India during 1928-29 was around 712 thousand, producing about 372 million lbs.²¹ The plantation Enquiry Commission have estimated the total acreage under tea cultivation in India in 1954 to be around 804.8 thousand and production is reported to have risen to 644 million lbs.²² In 1960, the total area under tea cultivation was 817.2 thousand acres and the total production stood at around 707.9 million lbs. Table II indicates the steady growth in the acreage and production of Tea in India.

TABLE II
Growth of Tea Industry in India, 1900-1960

Year	Area in Acres (in 000's)	Production (in million lbs)
1900-1904	500.0	204.0
1910	533.0	249.0
1920	654.0	322.0
1929	712.00	401.0
1939	840.0	383.6
1947	771.5	560.5
1954	804.8	644.0
1960	817.3	707.9

Source : Computed from (1) Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 352
 (2) The Report of Plantation Enquiry Commission, p. 9
 (3) Upadhyay, S. op.cit. p. 22

The growth of tea plantation industry could be illustrated by the increase in investments. During the first decade of the present century the total investments in tea plantation stood at Rs.22 crores,²³ investment of companies registered in India amounted to Rs.431 lakhs and of companies registered in London Rs.18 crores. But there was a further unknown figure representing the capital of private owners who refused to furnish any information of their business, so that the total had been estimated at 20 million sterling.²⁴ In 1928 the investments in tea plantation rose to Rs.48 crores - investments of companies registered in India rose to Rs.12 crores, of companies registered in England to Rs.36 crores. In 1942, the total investments in tea plantation industry stood at Rs. 52 crores - Rs.39 crores formed the capital of companies registered in England.²⁵ According to a Reserve Bank Study, foreign investment in plantation industries amounted to Rs.87.2 crores in 1955 and Rs.103.8 crores in 1961, showing an increase of 216.6%.²⁶

A characteristic feature of the "structure" of Indian tea plantation industry is that it is largely owned and controlled by British Capitalists. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, about 90% of the plantations in North India and nearly all those in Madras were owned and controlled by European companies or Managing agencies.²⁷ The plantation Enquiry Commission observed that nearly 62.9% of the total area under tea in India in 1954 and over three quarters of tea production has been controlled by just thirteen leading agency houses in Calcutta. Out of the thirteen, five controlled as much as 36% of the production, while seven companies controlled half of the production.²⁸

This indicates the extent of British interest in Indian tea industry. This concentration of British capital in Indian tea plantation industry has far-reaching consequences on its "structure"(ownership and control) and on the characteristic pattern of surplus (profit) appropriation and its reallocation or re-investment. According to a survey Report on managing agencies in India during 1954-55, 57.8% (1609 lakhs) of the total capital(2786 lakhs) invested in Indian tea industry has come from Managing agency houses most of which were non-Indian.²⁹

Initially(between 1830-1850), however, plantations were generally owned by individual proprietary planters, who were in most cases retired civil-servants or army officials.³⁰ After the abolition of the monopoly of trade enjoyed by the East India Company in 1833, companies floated by agency houses replaced proprietary planters.

The development of the managing agency system marks a specific stage in the historical development of industrial capitalism in the west as well as a distinct stage in the colonial exploitation of Indian resources. At first, Merchant Capital operated in India through the East India Company enjoying monopoly of trade. With the Industrial Revolution in England, pressures were built up for the export of British capital from England seeking investment - outlets in the overseas market. This led to the abolition of the trading monopoly of the British East India Company and the introduction of "free trade" which granted the privilege to trade with India to every British National. This marks the second stage in the colonial

exploitation of Indian economy and resources. The third period began with the establishment of direct British rule in India. During this period began the organised exploitation of India by British capitalists. During the early period of direct rule 'free-trade' continued to operate. However, at a later stage 'free-trade' gave place to "finance capital". The individual capitalists combined together changing proprietary business into joint-stock companies and a number of companies came to be controlled by a managing agency.

Thus in India, "finance-Capital, both British and Indian, mainly operates through ... the managing agency system".³¹ The agency houses initially functioned as agents to foreign firms in importing goods from British and exporting Indian raw materials and surplus to Britain. Later, with the enormous commission and remuneration they obtained from the companies, these agency houses started their own companies with rupee capital.³² Thus, as Upadhyay notes, by the end of the 19th century, British capitalists were organised into a powerful body to carry on the exploitation of men and materials in India.³³ Levkovsky points out that the British agency houses served as one of the vehicles in transforming India into an agrarian and raw material adjunct of capitalist Britain.³⁴

The process of consolidation of tea plantations under the managing agency houses in India is observed by Buchanan. He writes: "as many of the early plantations proved too small to occupy economically the full time of a European manager and an assistant gardens began to be consolidated under the increasing control of companies, the consolidation of smaller

garden into large-scale enterprise was stimulated. ... The managing agency, in company form fulfilled in tea production about the same functions which it has fulfilled in cotton and jute manufacture and other branches of economic activity in India. ... Several producing units in the same line of industry were often under the control of one agency and it had financial resources or access to them and was continuous. With a group of gardens it ~~was~~ always had some one in India at least fairly competent to look after them. ... The companies were sometimes registered in India and more often they were British, registered in England. Much more home capital was invested in tea ... This occurred at a later period when England had more to invest."³⁵ Halayya notes that a typical unit of the industry took the shape of a sterling company registered in the U.K. owning estates in India. The management of the estates was then, entrusted with managing agency houses in India. The managing agency houses, in turn, started their own companies with rupee capital either taking over the ownership of some of the older estates or starting new ventures.³⁶

A major aspect of the large-scale British ownership and control of Indian tea plantation industry lies in the manner of extraction and appropriation of surplus (profit) and its reallocation or reinvestment. The most important point to note is that a large proportion of the profit realised from the industry is drained off from India and is not reinvested in India.

There is no systematic account of the profit realised from the tea plantation industry. According to Buchanan, the earliest English joint-stock companies produced no earnings for some thirteen years, but

showed handsome profits from then onwards.³⁷ The following table indicates the steady increase of average net-profits realised from tea production between 1939 and 1943.

TABLE III
Index Number of Average Net-Profits
in Tea Industry in India, 1939-'43.

(Base 1939 : Equal to 100)

Industry	Year	Average Net-profit
Tea	1939	100
	1940	118
	1941	214
	1942	252
	1943	392

Source : Gopal M.H., "Industrial Profits Since 1939"
 Eastern Economist, May 12,
 1944, p. 730.

A large proportion of the profits realised in the industry has been repatriated to England. Thus, the plantation Enquiry Commission observed : "The fact that a profit equal to investment was made every year and repatriated should be taken note of".³⁸ The following table shows the ratio of profits to total capital from 1946 to 1951. While, in 1953-54, 113 tea plantation companies gave Rs. 10.37 lakhs in dividend, the retained amount was only 725 lakhs. Similarly, in 1955-57, 167 tea plantation companies distributed Rs.701 lakhs

TABLE - IV
Ratio of Profit to Capital, 1946-51

Year	Number of Companies	Ratio of Profit
1946	77	17.4%
1947	77	20.5%
1948	77	11.5%
1949	77	12.5%
1950	77	17.9%
1951	77	10.4%

Source : Upadyay, S : op. cit., p. 31

as dividends but the retained profit was none. In 1960, 136 tea plantation companies distributed Rs. 2.5 crores and the retained amount was only 0.8 crores.³⁹ These figures indicate the manner in which surplus realised in the industry had been siphoned off to enrich British capitalists. It also reveals the way in which plantation production had been fitted into the broader scheme of colonial exploitation of India.

(ii) Emergence of Tea Plantation Labour

Along with the development of tea plantations, the strength of tea plantation labour force also increased. The following table indicates the growth of tea plantation labour in India between 1903 and 1960.

TABLE V

Growth of Tea Plantation
Labour in India 1903-1960

Year	No. of Workers
1903	5,72,000
1929	9,30,472
1939	9,25,237
1944	10,03,840
1954	9,08,931
1957	9,31,196
1960	8,45,166

- Source: Computed from (1) The Report of the Labour Investigation Commission, 1946, pp. 19-20
- (2) Indian Labour Year Book, 1955-56, 1959
- (3) Tea Statistics, 1965-1966, Tea Board, 1966.

Tea plantation is a labour intensive industry. It is the largest employer of organised labour in the country.⁴⁰ In 1903, the industry gave employment to 79,000 permanent and 93,000 temporary employees amounting to a total of 5,72,000 workers.⁴¹ The figure for the year 1944, of labour employed in the three major plantations, namely, tea, coffee and rubber, was in the neighbourhood of 11.5 lakhs. Tea plantations alone accounted for around 10 lakhs of workers.⁴²

At present the important tea-growing regions are situated in the monsoon-belt of Assam and Bengal in the North-East and the moist slopes and plateaus of the Western Ghats in the South - Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Nearly 80% of the total area under tea cultivation is concentrated in North India, Assam, Bengal and Tripura accounting for 75.4%. The total acreage under the cultivation in South India constitutes only 22.3% of the All-India acreage (see Table I). Similarly, tea plantations in North-India accounts for about 84% of the total production; the remainder is from the South Indian plantations. (See Map. I)

In terms of employment of labour again, tea plantations in North India employs a major proportion of the total labour-force employed on tea plantations in India. In 1931, tea plantations in Assam and Bengal employed nearly 82% of the total labour-force while workers on South Indian tea plantations constituted only 14% of the total in the same year.⁴³

The following table indicates the regional distribution of tea plantation labour in India from 1947 to 1960.

TABLE - VI
Regional Distribution of Tea Plantation
Labour in India - 1947-1960

Year	South India		North India		Total
	No. of workers	%age of the total	No. of workers	%age of the total	
1947	1,66,789	17.02	8,13,278	82.98	9,80,067
1950	1,65,979	15.75	8,67,079	84.25	10,33,058
1957	1,87,810	20.17	7,43,386	79.83	9,31,196
1960	1,75,643	20.79	6,69,523	79.21	8,45,166

Source : Indian Labour Year Book, 1947-48; 1959 Tea Statistics, 1965-66, Tea Board of India, 1966.

From the above table it becomes evident that regionally tea plantations in the north continue to employ the bulk of the total plantation labour force in India.

The most important point to be noted with regard to the regional distribution of tea plantations and tea plantation labour in India is that, besides being concentrated in two separate regions (north and south) geographically, distinct forms of labour-use and systems of labour recruitment and employment practices are associated with each of these regions. The use of bonded labour under indenture and penal contract, in the north and of seasonal migrant labour under the kangany system of recruitment and employment in the South Indian plantations are the characteristics differentiating feature of tea plantations in these two regions. An attempt is made in the following pages to describe some of the basic features of these two forms of labour-use and systems of recruitment and employment practices and their specific consequences for the process of class-formation among plantation workers.

PART - B

Forms of Labour-use, systems of Labour Recruitment and Employment practices and Socio-political Consequences on Plantations in India

Several socio-economic and historical factors seen have provided the conditions for the development of two distinct forms of labour-use and systems of labour recruitment and employment practices on plantations in India. There was a regular flow of labour to plantations in the South while those in the north were faced with the problem of labour scarcity.

Assam had to obtain labourers from outside its borders on account of the fact that the 'indigenous Assamese could not be persuaded to leave their farms and villages to work on the gardens and there were few landless labourers to be found in the province.'⁴⁴ Further, planters in the north had also to face competition for labour from the coal mines of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Jute industry of Bengal, the Cotton industry, the railways and the 'oil-fields' of Assam.

Das observed two major impediments to the free flow of labour into Assam namely, the conditions in Assam and the legislative provisions for the recruitment and employment of labour. On the one hand, the distance and isolation of Assam from the rest of the country was itself an impediment to the free movement of labour to Assam Gardens. Further, actual conditions of work in Assam - the reported unhealthiness of Assam, high rate of mortality among immigrants and long and tedious journey especially in the earlier years - made work in Assam very unpopular. On the other hand, the most important causes of labour shortage in Assam have been those connected with legislation for emigration and employment of labour. There was a sharp resentment among all classes of the people against the malpractices of free emigration existing under some of the Emigration Acts, such as the Act of 1882.⁴⁵

Under these circumstances, planters in the north sought to secure permanent settlers under the 'indenture system' of labour recruitment and employment on Assam tea plantations. On the other hand,

plantations in the south could rely on a "regular flow of labour" which "returned to its home at periodical intervals". The system of recruitment and employment ^{in the south} was the 'Kangany system'. As these two forms of labour-use (bond-labour and seasonal migrant labour) and systems of labour recruitment and employment are distinctively different their specific features are discussed separately.

(i) The indenture system and Bond-labour on North-Indian tea plantations

The origin of the indenture systems of labour recruitment and employment could be traced back to the thirties of the last century, when at the abolition of slavery, British colonists sought cheap labour supply from India, and a large number of Indians began to emigrate to overseas plantation colonies under various forms of labour contract. The Government of India undertook legislation for regulating the recruitment, transportation and employment of emigrant labour under the indenture system. Although the purpose of this legislation was to facilitate emigration to overseas plantation colonies rather than to regulate employment within the country it paved the way for the introduction of the indenture system within the country when tea gardens began to grow in Assam and the importation of labour became necessary.⁴⁶

The indenture system was a half-way stage between slavery and free-labour and was different from peonage or serfdom. It was peculiarly adapted, like slavery, to the recruitment of labour through migration. Davis notes that this system enabled

business enterprises to transfer labour to newly developing areas and yet restrain that labour from immediately taking holdings of its own, where unexploited land was abundant.⁴⁷

Indenture supposedly originated with a contract, usually written and voluntarily assumed. The system, as employed in the recruitment of labour for Assam tea plantations was founded on two distinct pieces of legislation namely, the Plantation Labour and Emigration Acts(1863, 1865), the workmen's Breach of Contract Act(1859) and sections 490 and 492 of the Indian Penal Code(1860). The contract, thus entered into bargained away the labourers personal freedom for an extended period. Under the indenture system which was nothing but a "new system of slavery"⁴⁸ the labourer was bound by the contract to serve for a specified period on the garden to which he was recruited in return for some stipulated remuneration. If he failed to work without reasonable cause or absconded, he could be punished criminally and the planter had the right of arresting an "absconder".⁴⁹

A. Recruiting Agents:

The earliest recruiting of labour under the indenture system was done by a class of contractors and professional recruiters known as "arkatis" many of whom were ready to adopt any device to secure the large prices,⁵⁰ obtainable for the supply of labourers. These "Arkatis" were regarded by the people as the "scum of the earth" and "heartless scoundrals" and were feared as much as "man-eating tigers".⁵¹

A pioneer planter described the recruitment of the early days thus: "Coolies were recruited from depots in Calcutta ... One could go to any of these depots and select the coolies. It was like buying animals and smacked a good deal like slavery in the USA. The Coolies were put under five year indentures".⁵²

W. Nassau Lees in his "Land and Labour of India" gives a graphic picture of the way in which the contractors of labour recruited workers for plantations in Assam. He wrote: "False representation, corruption and oppression of every and the worst description were used to swell the numbers of the contractor's recruits ... With some truth, it may be said that the horrors of the slave trade pale before the horrors of the coolie trade of Assam and Cachar in the years 1861-62".⁵³

Recruitment through contractors increased the disinclination of labourers to go to Assam. By 1915 labour-contractors were replaced by Garden Sardars as agents for the recruitment of labour for Assam tea gardens.⁵⁴ The garden Sardars, unlike the labour-contractors, were employees of the estates. They were send out by planters in the recruiting season. They received a bonus varying from Rs.5/- to Rs. 40/- according to custom and the class of labourers recruited. The Sardars worked under the control of the Assam Labour Board set up under the Assam Labour and Immigration (Amendment) Act VIII of 1915.⁵⁵

B. Family : The unit of recruitment:

Planters in the north have endeavoured to secure permanent settlers. Therefore, they have sought to secure families rather than single men because the latter tended to run away from the estates more often than did men with families.⁵⁶ Perhaps it would be more correct to say that family-wise recruitment of labour was considered more profitable by the planters since there was a basic differentiation of work into "light"(tea plucking, weeding etc) and "heavy" tasks(pruning, digging etc) which could absorb the labour of adults and children. Further, it also enabled the planters to fix wage rates on the basis of the number of earning members in a family and thus reduce labour-costs. Ultimately, family-wise recruitment of labour should be viewed as a mechanism employed by the planters to secure cheap factors of production on the estates.

C. Formation of work-gangs:

Workers, on their arrival at the estates, were formed into work-groups known as "gangs" under the supervision of Sardars, for the performance of various tasks on the estate. The Sardars, in addition to a fixed monthly wage, received a commission varying from half an anna to two annas in the rupee on the earnings of their gangs.⁵⁷ However, these gangs were temporary. The workers who composed the gangs and the sardars who supervised their work were continuously changed in accordance with operational needs of the

productive system of the plantation. The allocation of work to each sardar was done by the assistant manager. Similarly, the allotment of labourers to the sardar was also done by the assistant manager.⁵⁸

The practice of forming temporary work-gangs under different sardars appears to have contributed to the reassortment of the labour-force and a gradual erosion of traditional bonds that differentiated workers into various castes. Some of the effects of such a process would be discussed later.

D. Family as the unit of wage-fixation:

The unit of wage-rate fixation has been the family and not the worker. The earnings of children as well as those of men and women were entered in the wage-books. The standard of living of families depended on the earnings of all the able-bodied members of the family. The planters offered wage rates which were barely sufficient to meet the minimum requirements of the labour families at the level of subsistence. Read has observed that the standard of living among plantation workers was very low which would have been much lower without the regular wages earned by children.

The system of wage-payment was further based on piece-rate⁵⁹ rather than on time-rate. Since the completion of tasks was the condition for securing the prescribed rates of wages, many workers never earned their full contract wages. As Das observes, in practice the actual amount of wages earned by average labourers fell considerably below the standard. Further, wage rates were not revised

according to rising prices and cost of living.⁶⁰ Besides, there had been cases of withholding of wages for more than a month, especially in the case of contract labour.⁶¹

E. Land for Private cultivation:

A characteristic feature of labour employment on Assam tea plantation has been the allotment of 'Khet' land to the labourers for private cultivation. According to the Royal Commission on Labour, promise of land for private cultivation on the estate was one of the attractive bait used by the garden sardars to persuade labourers to undertake work on Assam tea plantations.⁶² Similarly, Mukherjee has also observed that small plots of land were given to the coolies for cultivation and it had been one of their great ambitions to become independent farmers like their compeers whom they left behind in their villages. Thus the coolies were petty farmers, herders and workers on the estate at the same time.⁶³ This has led the plantation Enquiry Commission(1956) to make the observation that tea gardens in Assam with their resident labour force constitute "rural communities".⁶⁴ A recent census monograph on tribal labourers in an Assam tea garden has reported that 253 out of a total of 557 labour house-holds were allotted land for private cultivation for periods ranging from 2 to 25 or more years.⁶⁵

The allotment of land for private cultivation and the family-wise fixation of wage-rates could be viewed as two aspects of a deliberate policy of the planters to reduce cost of production on the estates. This is evident from the recent Report

of a study group for plantations(tea). The Report says:

"The planters have consistently held that unlike labour in other industries, plantation labour enjoy certain amenities and opportunities which considerably reduce their minimum requirements, such as the family basis of employment, land for cultivation, fuel and grazing, cheap food-stuff and clothing, free-housing, medical attendance, and maternity benefit".⁶⁶

By providing alternative means of subsistence in the form of land for private cultivation within the estate, planters sought to keep the labour force tied to the estate at a time of labour scarcity while, at the same time, maintaining very low wage-rates and highly unsatisfactory working and living conditions.⁶⁷

Secondly, it was a mechanism to reduce cost of production on the plantation. A similar practice had been followed by planters in the Caribbean slave plantations. Writing about Nevis, Frucht has observed that peasant-like production and marketing in the slave plantations was a means by which planters reduced their costs of production by having the slaves provide for themselves.⁶⁸

The practice of allotment of land for private cultivation appear to have performed yet another function, manifest or latent. On the one hand there was no fixity of tenure in the land for cultivation. It was given and taken away at the will of the manager. In so far as land was given to "workers who pleased the manager"⁶⁹ it was oriented to create a nucleus of "loyal" workers around the planter or the manager. This appears to have created intra-group cleavages and conflicts among

the labour-force. Read notes: "The allotment and distribution of the land was on no fixed system and the irregularity was a source of grievance among the workers".⁷⁰

While the allotment of land for private cultivation represents a specific mode of exploitation of labour, it may also pose certain problems for the process of class-formation. Although workers do not enjoy ownership rights over the land allotted to them, it may have provided conditions for what Mintz has called the 'concealment' of the rural proletariat. Workers to whom land is allotted may fail to identify themselves with those to whom land is not allotted. Secondly, allotment of land to a section of the labour force, that is, to those who please the manager, is an expression of the paternalistic relationship between the manager or the planter and the workers, oriented to the creation of a nucleus of ~~loyal~~ workers. To the extent land allotment involves the differential treatment of workers, it may introduce intra-group cleavages and conflicts, and may inhibit the crystallisation of a horizontal solidarity among the labour force based on the class-position and class-interests of the workers.

However, these are based on the scanty and scattered information available to us. Nonetheless it may be suggested here that the process of class-formation among the plantation workers on Assam tea estates cannot be studied without taking a proper account of the land tenure-system followed on the estates.

F. Social Composition of the Workers:

Information regarding the social composition of the labour-force on Assam tea gardens is extremely scanty. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, estate coolies in Assam were recruited primarily from Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas in Bihar; substantial numbers were also brought from Orissa, U.P. and the Northern districts of the central provinces.⁽⁷¹⁾ The Labour Investigation Committee also observed that about 50 per cent of the total recruits to Assam was from Bihar; the areas next in importance were Orissa and the Central province.⁷² The following tables indicate the percentage distribution of tea plantation labours in North-East India during 1877-81 and in Assam in 1928-29, with special reference to area of origin:

TABLE VII

Percentage distribution of Tea Plantation Labourers in North-East India during 1877-81 with special reference to the area of origin

Labour Recruited from	Percentage of the Total Labour Force			
	1877-78	1878-79	1879-80	1880-81
Chotta Nagpur	48.58	65.35	44.47	29.62
Santal Pargana	3.87	3.18	2.94	1.78
Bengal Proper	23.08	14.56	19.75	43.81
Bihar	24.86	15.56	14.41	22.98
Orissa	0.15	0.02	0.08	1.78
North-West Provinces	0.86	0.39	0.06	--

Source : Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A Social and Economic Processes in Tea Plantation with special reference to Tribal labourers; p. 7

TABLE VIII

Distribution of Adult Labourers on Tea Gardens of Assam by place of Origin in 1928-29

Localities	Labourers	
	Number	% age of Total
U.P., Bengal, Bihar	2,20,474	36
Chota Nagpur, Santal Parganas	1,91,838	31
Central Provinces	78,558	13
Madras	61,882	10
Assam	57,498	9
Others	7,935	1
TOTAL	6,15,479	100

Source : Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A, p. 7

The above tables indicate that labourers were recruited from different regions. The labour-force thus recruited consisted of different regional and linguistic groups. The most important regions of recruitment, as the tables indicate, were Bihar, Chota Nagpur and the Santal Parganas.

A vast majority of the recruits to Assam tea plantations consisted of aboriginals. In fact the recruitment of the aboriginal population was "preferred for work on the tea gardens". The most important tribal communities from which labour was drawn were the Oraon, the munda, Santal, Kharia etc.⁷³ In terms of religious affiliation Hindus appear to have constituted the largest section of plantation labour, followed by muslims and lastly Christians.⁷⁴

Regionally, Oraon and Munda are from Chota Nagpur, Gond is from Madhya Pradesh and Santal from Bihar. Recent studies on the socio-economic conditions of these tribal communities reveal that from the middle of the last century they had been subjected to the ruthless exploitation of money-lenders, contractors and middlemen from the plains. Fuchs has shown how the Bhils, Bhilals and Korkns of Rajasthan, Madya Pradesh, Gujrat and Maharashtra have been ousted from the fertile tracts of their original habitates by the invasion and infiltration of superior agricultural peoples.⁷⁵ Similarly, S.K. Singh has pointed out how the agrarian developments in the 19th century namely the imposition of the Zamindari/Ghatwali systems of land tenure, and the introduction of cash economy among the tribal communities in Chota Nagpur led to the disintegration and disruption of these communities. He observed that the usage of a territorial and ethnic concept namely "Diku"(aliens or outsiders) among the tribals primarily referred to the categories of land-grabbers and money-lenders belonging to the Hindu and Muslim communities who came from outside the tribal area during the first and second decade of the 19th century and also to the subsequent process of alienation of land from them. The ~~base~~ of thicadars - the Keen-eyed traders and ~~merchants~~ land-grabbers and money-lenders - ~~who~~ flocked into Chota Nagpur from 1882, played havoc with tribal agrarian institutions and brought about their complete destruction. Further, as a result of the legal restrictions(between 1910-1935) on transfer of land from tribals to non-tribals, there arose a class of tribal money-lenders among the tribes and accentuated the strata differentiation in the tribal society and deepened the gulf between the intelligent and affluent sections and those who were

improvident and heavily indebted. This was followed by large-scale mortgages and transfer of land from the indebted raiyat to the money-lending better-off tribals.⁷⁶

The economic conditions of the bulk of agricultural workers belonging to the Khania, Chamar, Musalar Bhuriya and Tatwa castes in Bihar as well as the aboriginal tribes in Chota Nagpur approximated to hereditary bond-slaves, with a burden of debt usually incurred for marriages. Mukherjee has observed that it was these depressed castes and semi-hinduised aborigines who welcomed the opportunities of work and wages in the Mines, factories and plantations.⁷⁷

Thus, the tea garden workers, like the workers going to the mines and factories were "pushed" from their villages by economic necessity. It was those indebted and expropriated tribes who were easily persuaded by the sardars with promises of better prospects on the estate than they could expect at home.

G. Social life of the estate coolies:

Coolies in the estates were housed in "lines" or "colonies". Social life of the coolies appears to have been significantly affected by the demands of the Productive system of the plantation. A.K. Das and Banerjee suggest that perceptible changes have occurred in the traditional forms of social organisation of the estate coolies in north India. They have observed a tendency among the coolies ^{to change} from

joint-family type of living to nucleated living. The attitude of the workers towards family types has also significantly changed.⁷⁸ There is preference among the workers for nuclear-family type. A census monograph on tribal labourers in an Assam tea garden points out that the predominant type of residence now is the nuclear-family consisting of husband, wife and unmarried children. Out of the 30 sample households studied, 11 were of this type. Only 4 households consisted of husband, wife and children with married sons and son's wives with or without children.⁷⁹

Perhaps, one of the reasons for this trend could be found in the nature of housing facilities provided on the estates. Generally a labourer and his family was provided with a single room in the "line". Since these rooms were of very small size it is highly difficult to accommodate more than maximum of 2 or 4 persons within them. Secondly, as Das A.K., and Banerjee observed, the possibility of making independent earnings on the estate has given certain measure of economic independence to the earning members of a family, especially youngmen and women which may have generated conditions for the emergence of inter-generational conflicts.⁸⁰ This could be another reason for the growing preference for nucleated living.

Economic independence of women may also account for the high rate of divorce among the labour force. Das and Banerjee have also observed a high rate of inter-religious and inter-tribal marriages. Besides traditional norms of marriage, such as clan exogamy appear to have lost their old rigidity. Clan ties and solidarities also are seen to have considerably eroded.⁸¹

These observations, although based on the study of a ~~small~~ sample, seem to suggest that the hold of traditional clan and tribal ties over the coolies have weakened considerably. Perhaps the practice of employing the coolies in temporary work-gangs under the supervision of Sardars whose assignments frequently changed with the changing operational needs of the productive system of the plantation may have contributed to this reassortment of the work-force. Workers bound by various tribal, religious and regional ties were brought together and were forced to interact with one another irrespective of their communal or regional differences. This may have led the work-force to perceive themselves as belonging to one and the same group. The incidence of inter-religious and inter-tribal marriages may be considered as an indicator to this process of ~~the~~ disintegration of ~~the~~ traditional or primordial solidarities among the labour-force.

However, this process of reassortment and homogenisation of the labour-force may not be a sufficient condition for the ~~xxx~~ crystallisation of a horizontal solidarity based on their class-position and class-interest. As pointed out earlier, the specific mode of exploitation of labour as practiced in Assam is closely linked with the practice of allotment of land to labourers for private cultivation and the process of class-formation among the labour-force on Assam tea plantations can be understood only if we take a proper account of the land allotment practices and the land tenure-system on the estates. This, however, needs a separate study.

I. Political Organisation among the labour-force

The basic aspect of indentured labour is that it is essentially unfree. The fact that workers were placed under indenture by contracts containing penal sanctions for breach of contract ^{reducing the position of the coolie to that of} had the effect of a virtual prisoner within the estate. Further, complete restraint was placed on workers' movements. They were housed in lines under close supervision. There were almost always Chowkidars part of whose duty it was to observe the movements of the coolies to and from the lines.⁸² Moreover, planters were empowered to arrest and punish the coolies for "illegal assembly" if they attempted ~~at~~ organised activities.⁸³ Even when the indenture system was legally abolished in 1915 and the penal contract in 1923, planters deliberately allowed the old ideas of the penal contract to linger in the minds of their workers.⁸⁴ R.P. Dutt has observed the following: "... the workers with their families live on the estates under the complete control of the companies, without even the most elementary civil rights ... The labour of men, women and children is exploited at low rates and although the penal contracts have been abolished in recent years and various regulations introduced, the workers remain effectively tied to their masters for prolonged periods and even, in practice, in many cases, for life."⁸⁵

Besides, estates were considered as private property and entry of outsiders into the estate without the prior permission of the management was prohibited. The boards "trespassers will be prosecuted" had a deterrent effect on social workers and labour organisers who wanted to stand by labour.

Within this system of bondage of the coolie class, the planter-class occupied a very powerful position. In fact, from the beginning of the industry tea planters, whether companies or proprietors, were a well organised group,⁸⁶ and were aided by the colonial state. Planters associations constituted powerful lobbies in the provincial and central legislatures and have played an effective role in the policy-formulation and legislative process of the government with regard to plantation industry on the whole and plantation labour in particular.

The powerful position of the planter class, strengthened by the support of the colonial state machinery, enable them to behave tyrannically within the estates. Thus Percival observed that the rule of early planters was rough and ready and often even harsh. The planters were in many cases a law unto themselves.⁸⁷ The report on Labour Emigration into Assam for 1899 says: "The Chief Commissioner is not so sanguine as to look forward to the day when Englishmen will altogether abandon the regrettable habit of giving a cuff or even a kick or a blow with a cane to natives of the labouring classes..."⁸⁸

In contrast to the powerful position of the planters, the labourers on plantations were nothin but "incoherent and unorganised masses". The coolies had no knowledge of the place and nature of their work; nor did they understand their relationship with their employers. They had been quite unable to take organised action for promotion of their common interests.⁸⁹

Nevertheless, organised opposition and 'combination' in the form 'riots' were noticeable as early as 1884. The climax of these riots was reached in what is called the "Chargola exodus" of 1921 in which under the influence of the Nationalist leaders a large number of

coolies staged a walk-out from many of the estates demonstrating their protest against the intolerable working and living conditions on the estates and the inhuman treatment meted out to them by the management.⁹⁰

The Chargola exodus was, however, a part of the non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi in the wake of the nationalist movement in India. The non-cooperation movement was a tactic of non-violent anti-imperialist struggle advocated by the nationalist leaders. It did not involve within its ambit a programme of class-struggle. Rather it was based on a policy of "compromise" between mutually antagonistic classes, which tended to underplay the mutual contradiction of classes and to balance their conflicting interests.⁹¹ In fact, Gandhi advocated class-peace designating the propertied classes as "trustees" of the non-owning classes and workers.⁹²

An obvious result of the strikes in Assam in 1920-21, therefore, was the crystallisation of a "Ma-Bap"⁹³ (Father-Mother) relations between employers and workers instead of a polarisation of classes and articulation of class-interests. Read makes the following observations: "... the strikes in Assam in 1920-21 left a different legacy in the relations between employers and workers. Instead of crystallising the employers and workers into two groups and bringing into relief the difference in their respective interests, the strikes have emphasised the "Ma-Bap" relationship between employers and workers both on its good and on its bad side. To the good employers the effect of the disturbances in 1920-21 was to increase their sense of responsibility and encourage them to do a great deal more for the welfare of their workers. The bad employer fell back on punitive methods and on maintaining the atmosphere of forced labour".⁹⁴

Political Mobilization and organisation of workers in the post independence period has largely been achieved through unions and political parties such as the INTUC and the Indian National Congress. It is now widely recognised that these labour and political organisations follow an ideology of class-peace and compromise between classes. This, in turn, appears to have prevented them from organising the workers in terms of their class-position and class-interests and inhibited the growth of class solidarity and consciousness among them.⁹⁵

In summing up this discussion on plantation labour in North India, the following points may be noted. Plantations in North-India, particularly in Assam, relied on the use of bond labour under the indenture system. The system, as it operated in Assam, had the effect of bargaining away the freedom of the workers reducing their position to that of a prisoner for a stipulated period of time. In fact, the whole system was oriented to bind the labourer to the estate and to grant the planter a firm hold over his labour-force. In so far as the indenture system implied lack of freedom for the workers, the relations of production on plantation were basically pre-capitalist, as in the case of ^{the} use of slave-labour. Binding the labour-force under penal contracts and enjoying the right of private arrest, planters sought to maintain highly unsatisfactory conditions of work on the estate as well as to extract maximum labour from the workers at the minimum cost. Ultimately, the use of bond labour under the indenture system effectively checked the possible emergence of the labour-force as a class, vis-a-vis the planter-class.

The system of family-wise recruitment and wage-rate fixation can be understood only in terms of a deliberate policy of the planters to reduce the cost of production on the estates. A specific feature of the indenture system as it operated in Assam was the allotment of land to the coolies for private cultivation. It is a specific mode of exploitation of labour employed by the planters. It enabled the planters to reduce the cost of production by having the workers to provide for a part of their subsistence needs from their private cultivation. Besides, it also tended to be an expression of the planters' paternalistic treatment of the workers. As an expression of paternalism it had the effect of creating a nucleus of loyal workers around the planters. It is only natural for such differential treatment of the workers to generate intra-group cleavages and conflicts among the labour force. Such processes impose significant constraints on the process of emergence of class-solidarity among workers. Even when bond-labour on Assam plantations was replaced by free-labour, the practice of land allotment to the workers is continued. A study of class-formation among plantation workers in Assam, to be fruitful, has to take adequate account of the pattern of land allotment to workers on the estates.

The system of formation of temporary gangs under different sardars appears to have contributed to a certain amount of reassignment and homogenisation of the labour-force. The traditional bonds and loyalties that differentiated the work-force, into distinct caste or tribal communities have been gradually eroding. However, this may not provide a sufficient condition for the emergence of class-solidarity or class consciousness.

The nature of political mobilisation also appears to be crucial to the process. In the pre-independence period workers were largely influenced by the nationalist movement which, while leading the anti-imperialist struggle, neglected the task of organising the workers in terms of their class interests. The developments in the post-independence period in Assam seem to suggest that the INTUC unions which exercise complete control over the estate coolies emphasised the peaceful co-existence of the classes, and have failed to mobilise and organise the workers in terms of their class interests.

(ii) The Kangany System and the Seasonal Migrant Labour on South Indian Plantations:

Unlike plantations in the north, there was a 'regular' flow of labour to South Indian plantations". The system of recruitment for almost all the plantations in the South was through labour suppliers called "Kanganies" or Maistries and it is known as the Kangany system of labour recruitment and employment.⁹⁶

The word 'Kangany' is said to be an anglicised form of the Tamil "Kan-kani" meaning overseer, foreman or village headman. It is also a word used in the Tamil Bible for 'Bishop'.⁹⁷ Davis suggests that the system received its name because of the peculiarly important role of the Kangany or headman who was both recruiter and field foreman.⁹⁸

According to Davis, the Kangany system of recruitment first originated in connection with the recruitment of labourers for plantations in Ceylon, replacing the indenture system by 1910.⁹⁹ Generally, the superintendents of estates gave loans free of interest to the Kangany on condition that he supplied a fixed number of workers to the estate and supervised

the work of his recruits. The Kangany, in turn, advanced money to individual labourers or families (families were usually preferred) wishing to go to the estates. The amount of advanced varied in different districts but was estimated at an average of Rs.15/- for each labourer. This advance was debited to the labourer's account on his arrival in the estate and was recovered during the period of his employment.¹⁰⁰

In most cases whole families or neighbourhood groups were recruited as there was regular work for men, women and children on the estates. Ordinarily, those recruited were the Kangany's own 'friends, neighbours and relatives from his own village. The system was patriarchal since the Kangany was usually the senior member of a family group to which were added other families drawn from the same vicinity.¹⁰¹

A. Formation of Kangany gangs

The labour-force thus recruited was sub-divided into smaller groups called "sub-kangany gangs" each under its own sub-kangany (silara Kangany) for the performance of tasks. Usually a gang consisted of a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 80 workers the average being 30. Each gang held its own earnings in common and had joint liability for advances made to it by the head kangany. The sub-kangany of a sub-kangany-gang was held responsible for the advances paid to the workers in his gang. Generally if a worker bolted his credit or debit was transferred to his kangany's account.¹⁰²

Unlike the work-gangs under the Sardar in the north which were temporary, the sub-kangany-gangs in the south were permanent, although the tasks they performed varied with the changing needs of the productive system of the estate. Further, a sub-kangany gang consisted solely of Kinsmen, smae castemen or fellow-villagers. Thus the sub-kangany gang tended to preserve the traditional solidarities of the workers.

In return for his services the head-kangany generally received a commission of 10 to 15 per cent on the earnings of the workers in his gang and also 'head-money' at a rate of an anna or two per day for each labourer who showed up for work. In addition he was paid a fixed salary for his services as field-forman. The sub-kangany usually worked as an overseer for which he was paid a head money of 2 or 3 paise per worker per day.¹⁰³

B. Seasonal Migrant labour on south Indian Plantations:

A characteristic feature of plantation labour in the south was its migratory character. Plantations in the South are situated close to areas of labour supply. The Royal Commission have observed the following with regard to the form of labour-use on South India plantations. "The plantations of the South rely on a regular flow of labour which returns home at periodical intervals ... (It) is migratory in character and returns to its village every year for periods of from 1 to 3 months and, some areas even twice or three times in the year".¹⁰⁴ Similarly Mukherjee has also pointed out that South Indian garden coolies were migratory, going back annually to their villages for one to three months.¹⁰⁵ However, according to the Royal Commission, there was a marked tendency

among the workers to return year after year to the same estate. The percentage of workers who returned to the same estate varied from 60 to 90."¹⁰⁶

C. Sources of Labour Supply:

Labour was recruited from areas close to the plantations in South India. According to the Labour Investigation Committee, labour on South Indian Plantations came from three linguistic areas, namely Tamil, Malayalam and Kanarese. Important Tamil districts of recruitment were Tinnevely, Coimbatore, Salem, Trichnopoly and Ramanad. Plantation labour from Malayalam speaking regions belonged to Malabar, Travancore and Cochin. The Kanarese speaking labourers were mostly from the district of South Kanara and the State of Mysore.¹⁰⁷

The Royal Commission have observed that the Madras Presidency had a potential ^{labour force very much in excess of its industrial} and agricultural needs. The increasing pressure of the population on the soil has been driving large numbers to other parts of India and to such distant places as Burma, Ceylon and Malaya.¹⁰⁸

Patel studying the regional distribution and concentration of agricultural labourers in India and Pakistan, distinguishes between three regions, namely, the Southern triangle comprising Bombay, Madras and the central provinces; the north-eastern region consisting of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal and Assam; and the great north constituted by the United Provinces, the Punjab, Sind, Baluchistan, North-West Frontier Province and the state of Kashmir. He has observed certain correlations between the system of land ownership and land-tenure

patterns (the Zamindari system in the north, and the Raiyatwari system in the South) and the patterns of exploitation of agricultural labour, and the subsequent emergence and concentration of agricultural labourers. In the raiyatwari areas the peasant proprietor, when dispossessed of his land was forced to become a landless agricultural labourer, while in the Zamindari regions increasing sub-infeudation of large estates led to a continuous deterioration of the cultivators status. In the raiyatwari regions, the cultivator was expropriated from the land, in the Zamindari areas, however, he was exploited "on the land". Consequently, the Southern Triangle had the highest concentration of agricultural labourers (he calls it the "land of the landless") constituting more than two fifths of the total agricultural population in this region in 1931. Besides this region was also characterised by the heaviest concentration of unemployed and under-employed landless labourers. According to him it is from this region that large-scale migration of labour - seasonal and permanent - to plantations in India as well as overseas plantation colonies took place during the twenties.¹⁰⁸

The "Resurvey of some South Indian Villages"¹⁰⁹ conducted by Thomas and others *reveals more clearly* the socio-economic conditions existing in South Indian villages during the 1930s. Between 1916-17 when the first survey¹¹⁰ was made, and 1936-37, the major changes that occurred in these villages were: increase in population, growth in the number of families, increasing rate of sub-division and fragmentation of holdings reducing the size of holdings to less than half of what it was during the first survey; growth in the number of small-holders and landless proletariat; a growing tendency among big owners to

lease out land to tenants rather than to cultivate with their own hands or with the help of paid farm servants; a growth of competition between small-holders and the landless proletariat in the labour market; and a growth in the rate of unemployment and underemployment. Besides, there was growing indebtedness among the agricultural population. It was under these conditions ^{that} the ~~an~~ unemployed and underemployed landless agricultural labourers migrated for a season to the neighbouring or even distant tea plantations and the paddy and groundnut harvests and returned home in time for harvest and festivals. ^{lll}

Growing unemployment and underemployment coupled with low rate of wages of agricultural labour in these villages seem to have been the major factors pushing a large number of agricultural labourers out to the plantations and other centres. These workers sought to supplement their meagre earnings in the villages, through alternative employment, for a season in the plantations or other industrial centres.

D. Wage rates and system ^{of} wage payment on Plantations in the South:

As in the north, on south Indian plantations too the unit of wage-rate fixation was the family. The system of wage-payment was linked up with the system of advance (made during recruitment). On arrival at the estate the labourer was debited with the amount of advance which was outstanding against him and was credited from time to time with the wages he earned. He was given weekly advances for his maintenance,

which were also debited to his account. When the labourer returned home after completing his contract his account was closed and he was paid the balance standing to his credit.¹¹²

This system of wage payment is to be understood in the context of the planter's attempt at a reduction of labour costs. The Royal Commission has observed the following: "not only are the Weekly payments ~~an~~ small, but in some cases the workers were compelled to take further advances from their Kangany for wants which could not be met out of the weekly advance. Further, it tends both to tie the workers to a particular estate and to put an unnatural brake on that gradual adjustment of the plantation worker to a higher standard of living."¹¹³ This was made possible primarily by the availability of abundant supply of migrant labour for the plantations.

E. Social Composition of the Labour-force:

We have only limited information regarding the social composition of plantation labour in South India. On the whole majority of the labour-force belonged to three linguistic areas viz. Tamil, Malayalam and Kanarese-speaking regions. However, Tamil labourers predominated over all the rest.

Majority of the labour-force belonged more ^{to} the so-called ~~untouchable~~ and other low castes than to tribal communities as in the north. Among them, more important were the castes compositely known as Adi-Dravida, Adi-Andhra and Adi-Karnataka. Besides these groups, some castes belonging to the middle strata of the society also provided labourers for tea plantations. Among them most important were

Mudaliyar, Thiya, Nayar, Pillai, Gouda, Lingayat, Gounder, Naicker, Chettiar and Padachi Moplah Muslims and Christians converted from the so-called low-castes were also recruited in good number to the tea plantations.¹¹⁴

However, statistics relating to the relative distribution of workers under different caste-groups are totally absent. As Thomas and other have observed it was not all classes of labourers who migrated. Those that were the first to go out were the Harijans. Shepeards and others whose traditional services were less in demand were the next to follow.¹¹⁵

F. Social life among the plantation workers:

As in north India, plantation workers in the South also were housed in lines. According to a recent census monograph on tea plantation workers in a South Indian estate, workers from different regions belonging to various castes and religious communities lived side by side on the estate.

Scheduled caste like Adi-Karnataka and Adi-Dravida who are treated as untouchables in the plains were not treated as such in the plantation. But some of the traditional restrictions were found to be persisting. For example, people belonging to Mudaliar, Gowda and Gounder castes would not take food cooked by people belonging to Adi-Dravida, Adi-Karnataka and other Harijan castes.

As regards communal relations it seems that there has been no slackening of the old rigidity. There has been no case of inter-caste marriage on the estate. The monograph observes: "It seems that the people

belonging to the various communities are anxious to maintain their distinct identities. Absence of inter-caste marriage not only reflects ritual distances, but also social distances among the various communities".¹¹⁶

Further, the monograph suggests that the usual pattern of settlement was for the Kangany and the workers recruited by him to live together in the same line. They(Kanganies) were responsible to see that the persons recruited by them did not desert from the plantation before the completion of the contract period. Hence, the labourers recruited by the same Kangany were allotted houses in the same line and the Kangany also used to live along with them. Thus the Kanganies were not only the work leaders of the labourers, but also their social leaders.¹¹⁷

These observations suggest that the workers on South Indian plantations once brought to the estates, continued to live as cohesive groups preserving their traditional customs and primordial solidarities.

G. Political Organisation among Plantation Workers:

The limited data available to us suggest that prior to independence, plantation workers in South India were completely unorganised politically. Any tendency at combination among the workers was jealously watched by the superintendents who viewed with disfavour the contracting of workers by outsiders. In the large majority of estates outsiders other than friends and relatives of labourers had to take previous permission of the superintendent before they could enter the precincts of the estate, especially if such outsiders came with the purpose of organising the workers in

trade unions. There had been instances where such outsiders were severely man-handled at the instigation of the Superintendants.¹¹⁸

(iii) Form of Labour-use on Plantations in South India and problems of class-formation : Some observations

A characteristic feature of the recruitment and employment of labour on south Indian plantations was the use of seasonal migrant labour. This mode of exploitation of labour supplies cheap factors of production to the plantation. One of the bases of super-profit in such a mode of exploitation of labour is that the costs of reproduction^{of} labour power are met by the pre-capitalist or the rural sector.¹¹⁹ Wolpe has pointed out how in South Africa, the availability of an abundant supply of African migrant labour power from the pre-capitalist sector of the reserves enabled the capitalist sector to lower the cost of production by paying the worker well below the cost of his reproduction. In determining the level of wages necessary for the subsistence of the migrant worker and his family, account was taken of the fact that the family was supported to some extent from the product of agricultural production in the Reserves.

Secondly use of seasonal migrant labour power also enables the capitalist sector to operate without replacing pre-capitalist by capitalist relations of production. To the extent workers are not given permanency and fixity of employment but rather are employed only seasonally who moves between the capitalist sector and the rural sector, the crystallisation of a "working-class" may not take place. Such situations are observed by various scholars. Mintz has suggested that in Jamaica plantation workers, who work only part-time for wages and are anchored

socially in an upland village to which they regularly returned are 'straddling two kinds of socio-cultural adaptation'; they do not represent, according to him, a transitional type but rather are in a kind of "flux equilibrium".~~181~~ Wolf has pointed out that such a form of labour-use does not involve a transition from one class to another, rather it signifies an attempt by people in the same condition of life to widen the base of their opportunities. Under such conditions, preservation of the links with the pre or non-capitalist sector and the maintenance of the primordial ties of the worker is a necessity in order to survive.

Thirdly, the recruitment and employment of seasonal migrant labour—and subsequently of settled labour—under Middlemen called Kanganyies appear to have led to the preservation of the traditional structure of social relations among the labour force. Davis has observed with reference to coolie migration to Ceylon, Malaya etc., under the Kangany system that it facilitated the transplantation of Indian culture to a new region. In Ceylon and Malaya this system of ~~ex~~ recruitment and employment enabled the coolie to live within his own community, among neighbours and relations from his homeland, without greatly disturbing his native customs. Similarly Jayaraman in his study of Tamil tea plantation labourers in Ceylon argues that the Kangany system of recruitment and employment had been one of the major factors that contributed to the continuity and preservation of the traditional caste-system among the labour-force. That this has been so in the case of plantation workers in South India is evident from a monograph on plantation workers in Madras.

To the extent, this system of recruitment and employment on plantations in South India has tended to preserve the traditional structure of social relations based on primordial solidarities of the labour force, workers on the estate are likely to be divided into separate primordial groups with distinct identities. This may inhibit the emergence and crystallization of a "horizontal solidarity" based on the class-position and class interests of the workers and may hinder the process of class-formation.

In the next chapter, the case of plantation workers in Kerala is taken to highlight some of the problems of class-formation among plantation workers in South India. A distinction between plantation labour in South India and North India is considered necessary since plantations in these two regions are characterised by two distinct forms of labour-use each involving specific problems for the process of class-formation. Therefore, the process and problems of class-formation among plantation workers in these two regions are to be studied separately.

The Kerala pattern is considered as a typical case for the following reasons: First, the vast majority of the labour-force on plantations in Kerala is constituted by Tamil labourers. There is also a sufficiently large number of local labourers. Secondly, politicisation of plantation labour in Kerala is reported to have reached a high level. As the National Commission on Labour observes plantation workers "in Kerala" have been participants

workers

in the process of change as much as its beneficiaries ...
With organisation and the capacity of organised labour
to influence policies and their implementation ...
some improvements have been registered. It is also
a peculiarity of the Kerala worker that if he has to
choose between a monetary benefit and certain
concessions which according to him are a part of his
political preference he will opt for the latter ...¹²⁰
These considerations demarcates the plantation workers
in Kerala as a typical case for a sociological under-
standing of the problems of class-formation among
plantation workers in South India.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Padilla Elena, "Colonization and the Development of Plantations" in Rubin V(ed), op. cit., pp 54-63
2. Development of Plantations on any significant scale was preceded by the enactment of the permanent land settlement Act of 1793 which, introducing the European concept of private property, provided the legislative foundation for European proprietary planters and companies to establish themselves in Plantation production.
3. According to W.W. Hunter, tea planting in Assam was assisted by the promulgation of the Waste-Land Rules of 1854 whereby large tracts of land were leased out to prospective planters at very low rates. These Rules were extended to Sylhet and Cachar in 1856. Initially land was to be assessed at 3 annas an acre for 10 years and 6 annas an acre for seventy-four years.

See W.W. Hunter, The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. III, p. 56,

Government of India, Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission(1956), Appendix XI - "Terms and conditions of Land Grants for tea cultivation in different states". pp 967-968.

See also, Gait E, "A History of Assam", 1933, p. 360
4. Knowles, L.C.A., Economic Development of the Overseas Empire, Vol. I, p. 306
5. Gadgil, D.R., The Industrial Evolution of India in Recent Times, 1929, pp. 50-54
6. Levkovsky, I - op. cit. p. 57
7. International Labour Office(India Branch) Plantation Labour in India, 1960, p. ~~222~~ 1.
8. Innes, C.A.; Madras District Gazetteers; Malabar and Anjengo, Vol. I, 1908, p 228
9. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour in India, 1931, p. 351.
10. Innes, C.A., op. cit. p. 229

11. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 353.
12. Ibid, p. 353
13. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, 1946,
p. 20
14. According to the Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, tea plantations in India occupied 73.4% (804800 acres) of the total acreage(1095830 acres) covered by the three major plantations in India, in 1954. Similarly, Tea plantations is reported to be the largest employer of organised labour, employing more than a Million workers, See Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, 1956, Part I, pp 9-14.
15. See W.W. Hunter, op. cit. p. 56
Upadhyah S. Growth of Industries in India, 1970, p. 15
16. Gait, E : op. cit. p. 360
17. W.W. Hunter : op. cit. p. 56
18. Parameswaran Pillai, Report on the Scheme for the Introduction of basic land tax and the Revision of Agricultural Income Tax, 1946, para 65.
19. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A, "Social and Economic Processes in Tea Plantations with Special Reference to Tribal Labourers", p 72
20. According to Hunter's estimates the total area under tea cultivation in 1900 was 815 square miles and total production was around 197 million lbs; in 1903 the area under the tea cultivation rose to 820 square miles showing an increase in production by 12 million lbs, the total production of tea being 209 million lbs. We, however, have relied on the statistics given by the Royal Commission on Labour.

See Hunter, W.W., op. cit. p. 57
21. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour 1931, p. 352
22. Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, 1956, p. 9
23. According to Hunter's Imperial Gazetteer of India, the total investments in tea industry till 1903 amounted to not less than £ 20,000,000.

See, Hunter W.W. ; op. cit. p. 57
24. Watt G. Sir, Commercial Products of India, p. 240
25. Upadhyay S; op. cit. pp. 16-17

26. Reserve Bank of India, "India's Foreign Liabilities and Assets", 1961, p. 37
27. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, 1931, p. 349
28. The leading agency houses are: (i) Andrew Yule and Co.; (ii) McLeod and Co.; (iii) Duncan Brothers and Co.; (iv) Macneill and Co.; (v) Octavius Steel and Co.; (vi) Gillanders Arbuthnot and Co.; (vii) Shaw Wallace and Co.; (viii) Williamson Magon and Co.; (ix) Jardine Henderson Ltd., (x) Kilburn and Co.; (xi) James Finlay and Co.; (xii) James Warren and Co.; and (xiii) Balner Lawrie and Co.

Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, 1956 pp. 20-24.

See, also, Nigam R.K.; Managing Agencies in India, 1957, pp. 50-55.
29. Nigam Raj, K.; op. cit., p. 17
30. Upadhyay S; op. cit. p. 15
31. Desai, A.R.; Social background of Indian Nationalism, 1959, p. 101
32. Srivastava, C., p. etal; (eds), Organisation and Finance of Industries in India, 1957, p. 17
33. Upadhyay, S.; op. cit. p. 4
34. Levkowsky, I.; op. cit. p. 23
35. Buchanan, D.I.; "The Development of Capitalist Enterprise in India, 1966, p. 58
36. Halayya, M.; An Economic Analysis of the Indian Tea Industry and Public Policy, 1972, pp. 59-60
37. Buchanan, D.H.; op. cit. p. 68
38. Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, Part I, p. 324
39. Upadhyay; op. cit. pp. 31-32
40. Report of Plantation Enquiry Commission, 1956 p. 12

41. Hunter, W.W.; op. cit., p. 57
42. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee,
1946, pp. 19-20
43. Davis, K.; op. cit. p. 115
44. Read, Margaret; The Indian Peasant Uprooted :
A Study on the Human Machine, 1931, pp. 131-132
45. Das, R.K.; Plantation Labour in India, 1931,
pp. 64-65
46. Ibid, p. 29
47. Davis, K.; op. cit., p. 103
48. See Tinker, H.; A New System of Slavery : The
Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-1920;
1974, pp. 19; 177-208
49. Tinker argues that the indenture system was the
legacy of Negro slavery, incorporating many of
the representative features of the old system.
49. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 360
See also, Das, R.K.; op. cit.; pp. 29-30
50. The Royal Commission have observed that prior to
the War there were few periods when a labourer
could be imported at a cost of less than Rs.200/-
At times, Rs.500/- and even higher sums were paid
to secure a single labourer. In 1928-29, the cost
was estimated at a sum varying between
Rs.120/- and 200/- and was generally in the
neighbourhood of Rs.150/-.
See Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
p. 359.
51. Das, R.K.; op. cit.; p. 65
52. Cited in Read, M.; op. cit., p. 132
53. Lees Nassau, W.; The Land and Labour of India :
A Resurvey, 1867, pp. 203-205

54. In 1915, the Assam Labour and Immigration (Amendment) Act VIII was passed by which the system of recruitment by all classes of contractors was abolished and a Labour Board for the supervision of local agents and of the recruitment, engagement and emigration of labourers to tea districts was constituted,

See Das, R.K.; op. cit., p. 36

This act also abolished the indenture system of recruitment and employment of labour on plantations in India. However, the workmen's Breach of Contract Act of 1859 and those sections of the Indian Penal Code which provided for criminal penalties for breaches of contract by Workmen continued to operate, and were made use of by most of the planters in India.

In 1923, the Government of India introduced an official Bill repealing both the Acts and the Penal Code sections under which workers could be criminally punished for breach of contract.

See Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 361.

See also, Das R.K.; op. cit., pp. 40-41

55. Recruitment through Sardars had been in existence until recently. At present, however, with the increasing availability of local labourers and the permanent settlement of estate coolies in the state, recruitment from outside Assam is minimal. Workers are now recruited from among the children on the estates as they grew up.

56. In 1927-28, the Sex-ratio on Assam tea garden was 311,887 men to 273,218 women.

See, Read, M.; op. cit. p. 134.

Similarly, child labourers constituted 20% of total annual labour force of 1928-29 and 15% of the total number of workers in Assam during 1942-44.

Das, R.K.; op. cit., pp. 24-25

See also, Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, p. 20.

57. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 383
58. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A "Social and Economic Processes in Tea Plantations with Special Reference to Tribal Labourers", p. 43.
59. The system of wage-payment was known as "hazira" and "ticca" in Assam. The worker was required to complete a standard task, namely the "hazira" for getting a day's wage. He was allowed to work over-time, the payment for which was known as "ticca". The payment for the hazira varied from 4 to 6 annas for men and from 3 to 5 annas for women. The ticca was usually 4 annas for men and 3 annas for women, but the amount varied with the extent of overtime. This system has been largely replaced by the "unit system" under which payment was made for each unit of work which in the case of hoeing and pruning was based on one-anna unit and in the case of plucking on one-piece unit. Whichever system was taken into account, the consideration of wages resolved itself into piece earnings.

See Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, pp. 383-384

60. The rate of wages for labourers on Assam tea gardens fixed by the Act of 1865 showed very little change until the year 1901. The Report of Labour Immigration into Assam for 1896 observed: "During the 40 years that have elapsed since coolies were first imported from Bengal, the prices of all commodities in Assam have risen greatly, but wages are at almost the same level now as they were then ... Judged by the money wages alone, there was a drop in the wages of labour from 1895 to 1900 and even some of the concessions were withheld. Such cases show the ease with which employers, when they are so disposed, can set aside the provisions of law for the protection of labourers ..."

Cited in Das, R.K.; op. cit., p. 158

According to the Labour Investigation Committee, the cost of living during 1940s had gone up by at least 200% in north-east India as compared to the pre-war period, while the total earnings of plantation workers including the value of food and cloth concessions went up by about 80% only.

See Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, p. 258.

61. Mukhopadhyay notes that in busy seasons deferred payment of wages was employed by the planters to force the workers to do overtime work.

Mukhopadhyay, S.N.; "Hours and conditions of Work in our Tea Plantations", The Indian Journal of Social Work; Vol. IX, 1948-49; pp. 112-121

See also, Das, R.K.; op. cit., p. 144

62. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 384
63. Mukherjee, Radhakamal, The Indian Working Class, 1945, p. 17

The "land-hunger" of the estate coolie in Assam is evidenced from the fact that in 1928-29, 316,207 acres of government land in Assam valley and 48,927 acres of such land in Surma valley had been settled by ex-estate coolies. These constituted a coolie class at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the Assam society.

Davis, K., op. cit., p. 177

64. Report of the Plantation Enquiry Commission, p. 20
65. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A, p. 37
66. National Commission on Labour, Report of the Study Group for plantation(Tea), 1969, p. 25
67. The working and living conditions on Assam Plantations, under the indenture system were extremely intolerable. An official Report makes the following observation regarding the working and living conditions of the estate coolies:

"The labourers have too often been deceived by the unprincipled recruiters; they have come up expecting much higher wages and a very different kind of life from what they

found. From the time they were recruited till they reached their destination they have been guarded not unlike prisoners. They found themselves settled down in Swampy jungle far from human habitation, where they have found their fellow labourers struck down by disease and death and where themselves prostrated by sickness, have been able to earn for less than they could have done in their own homes..."

See, Parliamentary papers, Vol. III, 1874, pp. 6-7

A Commission appointed by the British trade union congress trenchantly concluded in 1928 that "in Assam tea sweat hunger and despair of a million Indians enter year by year". General council of the Trade Union Congress of Great Britain, Report on Labour conditions in India, London, 1928, p. 36.

68. Frucht, R.; op. cit. pp. 295-300
69. Read, M.; op. cit. pp. 137-138; 151.
70. Ibid, p. 151
71. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 359
72. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, p. 73
73. The Census monograph on tribal labourers in an Assam Tea estate shows that of the total(559) labour households on the estate, 141 belonged to the Oraon community, 106 munda, 32 each Gond and Santhal and 28 Tanti.

See Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A pp. 8, 34.

Similarly, A.K. Das and Banerjee, in their study of the "Impact of Tea Industry on the Life of the Tribals of West-Bengal" have observed the predominance of tribal labourers belonging to the communities such as the Oraon, the Munda, the Kharia, the Gond, the Santhal etc.

See Das, A.K., and Banerjee H.N.; Impact of Tea Industry on the Life of the Tribals of West Bengal, 1964, p. 32

74. This information based on a recent Report on a Survey of Plantation Labour in Assam conducted by the Tea Board of India in 1958. According to the survey, Hindus constituted about 97.6% of the total labour force, muslims 1.6% and Christians 0.8%.
- See, "Economic Conditions of Plantation Labour : Findings of the Tea Board Pilot Survey" Commerce, Vol. 99, July-Dec., 1959, p. 302.
75. Fuchs Stephen, "Land Scarcity and Land Hunger Among Some Aboriginal Tribes of Western-Central India", in K. Suresh Singh(ed), Tribal situation in India, 1972, pp. 367-373.
76. Singh Suresh, K.; "Agrarian Issues in Chota Nagpur", in Singh Suresh, K. (ed), op. cit. pp. 374-387.
77. Mukherjee Radhakamal, op. cit. p. 5
78. Das, A.K. and Banerjee, H.N.; op. cit., pp. 45-46
79. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, part VII-A, p. 56
80. Das, A.K. and Banerjee, H.N.; op. cit., p. 51
81. Ibid, p. 51
82. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 372
83. Das notes that in 1920-21, 167 labourers were imprisoned for "illegal assembly" and riots, in 1921-22, 96 and in 1925-26, 24 labourers were imprisoned.
- See, Das, R.K., op. cit. pp. 95-96
84. The Royal Commission have reported the following: "The bonus which was given to a labourer when he entered on a 'labour contract' (during the indenture period) continues to be paid and is referred to as the 'girmit' or agreement money; further, on many gardens the thumb impression is taken on a form which bears a marked resemblance to the form used in the days of penal contract and

there were many instances where the thumb impression was taken on the old form. The practical result is that worker believes himself still bound by a penal contract..."

See Report of the Royal Commission on Labour, p. 376

85. Dutt, R.P.; op. cit., pp. 199-200
86. The Indian Tea Association, established in 1880 had its representatives in the Bengal Legislative council and the various other commission and committees.

Das, R.K., op. cit., pp. 92-93.
87. Percival Griffiths Sir, The British Impact on India, 1952, p. 438
88. Cited in Das, R.K., op. cit., p. 99
89. Das, R.K., op. cit., p. 93
90. Ibid, p. 96
91. Chandra Bipan, op. cit. pp. 14-28
92. See Myers Charles and Kannappan, S. (eds), op. cit., pp. 151-152; 194-200.
93. "The Ma-Bap" system is where the Manager cares for his people, knows them well, attends to their wants and tries his best to keep them happily and contented.

See, Read, M.; op. cit., p. 144.
94. Read, M.; op. cit. p. 144

See also, Percival Griffiths Sir, op. cit., p. 439
95. This is implicit in the Report of the National Commission on Labour. The Commission have observed the peaceful coexistence of workers and planters in Assam plantations.

See, National Commission on Labour - Indian Workers - A Changing Profile, 1947-1967, 1968, pp. 8-10

96. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
pp. 353-355.
97. Jain, R.K., op. cit., p. 199
98. Davis, K.; op. cit.; p. 103
99. Ibid; p. 103
100. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
p. 355
101. Davis, K.; op. cit., 103
102. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, part VII-A,
p. 12
103. Ibid, pp. 12-13
See also, Davis, K., op. cit., p. 17
104. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
pp. 353-354
105. Mukherjee Radhakamal, op. cit. p. 17
106. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
p. 355.

The practice of employing seasonal migrant labour, however, was replaced by employment of permanent workers, in 1949. Nevertheless, the system of formation of Kangany-gangs continued and was not abolished until 1958 in Madras and till 1962 in Kerala.

107. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee,
p. 73
108. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
p. 353

Jayaraman observed that the most important centres of labour emigration from the Tamil speaking districts of the Madras Presidency were Tinnevely, Ramanad, Madurai, Trichnopoly, Tanjur, South and North Arcot, Chingupet, Coimbatore etc.

See Jayaraman, R.; op. cit., pp. 38-39

Similarly Tinker points out that the major Tamil districts of labour emigration to overseas plantation colonies have been, in the order of the importance, Trichinopoly, Madura, Ramnad, Salem, Tanjore, Chingupet, North and South Arcot and Tinnevelly.

See, Tinker, H.; op. cit., p. 40

108. See Patel Surendra, J.; op. cit. pp. 21-32; 119-130.
109. The villages surveyed belonged to the Tamil speaking districts of Tinnevelly, Ramnad, Tanjore, South and North Arcot, Telugu speaking district of West Godavari and the Malayalam speaking district of Malabar in the Madras Presidency and two villages in the Cochin state.

See, Thomas, P.J., and Ramakrishna, K.C.;
Some South Indian Villages : A Resurvey,
1940, pp. 1-332.
110. The First survey was made by Dr. Gilbert Slater in 1916-17.

See, Slater, G.; Some South Indian Villages, 1918
111. See, Thomas P.J., and Ramakrishnan, K.C.;
op. cit. pp. 335-351
112. Report of the Royal Commission on Labour,
p. 399.
113. Ibid, p. 401
114. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, Part VII-A,
p. 8
115. Thomas P.J. and Ramakrishnan K.C.; op. cit.
p. 348
116. Census of India, 1961; Vol. I, Part- VII-A,
p. 88

117. Ibid, p. 87
118. Ibid, p. 29
119. Plantation workers in the South did not enjoy many of the amenities provided to those in the North. Thus, while the planters in the north sought to reduce the cost of production chiefly by allotting land for private cultivation, it was by employing seasonal migrant labourers, part of whose subsistence needs were met by the rural pre-capitalist sector, that the planters in the South sought to reduce the cost of production.
120. National Commission on Labour, pp. 257-259.

CHAPTER III

CLASS-FORMATION AMONG PLANTATION WORKERS IN KERALA : THE CASE OF TEA PLANTATION WORKERS

In this chapter taking the case of tea plantation workers, an attempt is made to highlight some of the problems of class-formation among plantation workers in Kerala. In such an attempt, special care is taken to relate, in the first place, the processes and problems of class-formation to previous forms of labour-use - which represent the specific modes of exploitation of labour and the characteristic combination of relations of production - to the system of recruitment, employment and the manner of the "structuring" of labour-force on plantations; secondly, to the nature and type of political organisation and mobilization of the workers, and the manner of articulation of the class-structure of the plantation, through labour organisations, planters' associations and political parties, with wider class-structures, at the regional and national levels.

Our discussion is essentially historical. It is important to take a proper account of the specific historical conditions in which plantations had developed, if one wishes to gain a proper understanding on the nature of the socio-political processes taking place on plantation in Kerala.

I. A short History of the Development of Plantations Industry in Kerala : 1878-1961

While tracing the history of development of the plantations industry in Kerala, it is important to note that the present state of Kerala was formed in 1956 by the integration of three separate political units each of which had a separate identity during the British period. These were the Travancore state, the Cochin state and the Malabar District of the old Madras Province.¹ The state of Travancore-Cochin itself was formed earlier in 1949 by the integration of the princely states of Travancore and Cochin. Therefore, in tracing the history of the development of plantations in Kerala, special attention must be paid to the specific conditions that existed in each of these regions.

It appears that development of plantations, in each of these political units during the British period, has been very much influenced by the agrarian and industrial policies pursued by the governments of these units.

On the whole, the progressive industrial and agrarian policies of the rulers of Travancore and Cochin seem to have facilitated the development of plantations industry in these two states on a larger scale than in the district of Malabar which was part of British India.

The industrial history of Travancore and Cochin is replete with instances of Government inviting industrial entrepreneurs from British India to start new industries in the region. Being extremely anxious

to develop modern industries, the government built up the basic infra-structure of the economy and made clear its willingness to support private enterprise. This attracted many a managing agency firm to Kerala.² Similarly, the agrarian policies pursued by the rulers were geared to the acceleration of agricultural development in these states.

In Travancore, by the end of the 18th century and more specifically by 1850s about 80% of the cultivated land and the whole of the waste lands were brought under the ownership of the state or was made 'sircar' (government) land. The state, after demolishing the feudal pattern of ownership of land, began a remarkably progressive agrarian policy.³ A Royal Proclamation known as the "Pattom Proclamation" of 1865 conferred full ownership rights on the tenant cultivators of Sircar lands and also allowed unrestricted transfer of their properties. New Rules were also proposed for giving more incentives for reclamation of Sircar waste lands. In order to further accelerate agricultural development, the state enacted an Agricultural Loans Act in 1891 providing loans for needy agriculturists. At the same time, the Government offered special concessions to attract outsiders especially Europeans for starting plantations in the eastern hilly tracts of the High Range Division of the State.

The earliest registered plantation companies in the state were the British Kannan Devan Hill Tea Trading Company (1873) and the Anglo American Direct Tea Trading Company (1897). The Travancore state Manual of 1940 reports that the Government granted an area

of about 215 square miles in Devicolam Taluk to Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company in 1873.⁴ The state's demand was only a little over Rs. 30,000/- on the total occupied area of over 100,000 acres (of which the estate proper covered only 39,000 acres) or about 5 annas per acre. The remaining unoccupied area, out of the 215 square miles leased out to the company, was not assessed at all. In the case of other plantations also large tracts of land were granted on favourable terms. For tea and coffee cultivation the rate of tax fixed was Rs.1/- per acre and for rubber and cardomom the rates were Rs. 2 and Rs.3 per acre respectively.⁵

Initially, investments in plantation cultivation in Travancore came from the Europeans. However, the progressive agrarian policies of the state whereby ownership and transferability of land became possible, the advent of railways and expansion of transport facilities, the growth of indigenous credit institutions such as "Kuries" and "Chitties"⁶ and of modern joint-stock banks,⁷ the increasing demand for cash-crop products, particularly ^{for} plantation-products (such as tea) and the success of the British planters, stimulated the interest of native entrepreneurs in opening up plantations on their own and gave additional impetus to the development of plantations in Travancore.

The native planters were largely drawn from the Christian and Muslim communities. These were the two non-hindu communities traditionally engaged in occupations like trade and commerce. A good number of ~~land~~ members of these communities reclaimed large tracts of land in the "Kayal"⁸ areas of Kuttanad for rice cultivation and cleared vast areas of forest land in the high ranges for plantation cultivation with the gains from trade. This was further

accelerated by the growth of commercial joint-stock banks (which were largely organised and managed by the Christians in the agricultural centres of Travancore, such as Kottayam, Palai, Thiruvalla etc. These were also centres of the Christian population). The commercial banks offered loans to prospective planters on the basis of the security offered by land.

The extent of impact that these favourable conditions had on the development of plantations in Travancore can be gauged from the increase in the number of plantation companies in the state. The following table shows the increase in the number of plantation companies in Travancore from 1905 to 1945.

Table IX
Plantation Companies in Travancore : 1905-1945

Year	No. of registered companies incorporated and working in Travancore.	No. of Registered plantation comp. incorporated outside Travancore and working in Travancore.
1905	3	Not known
1915	10	Not known
1925	37	17
1935	38	23
1945	89	19

Source : Varghese T.C. : Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences, 1970, p. 117

From the three plantation companies incorporated in Travancore in 1905, the number rose to 89 in 1945. Similarly, there was a growth in the number of companies registered outside Travancore and working in Travancore. The largest foreign companies were the British Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company and the Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company.

Similarly, the spread of plantations can also be seen from the rapid increase in the area covered by plantation cultivation. Under the favourable conditions plantation cultivation spread into almost the whole of the eastern high-lands of Travancore. The scale of the expansion can be seen from the following table which shows the increase in the area under cultivation of the major plantation crops such as Tea, Coffee and Rubber in Travancore from 1920-21 to 1945-46.

Table X

Year	Area under plantation crops in Travancore from 1920-21 to 1945-46 (in thousand acres)		
	Rubber	Tea	Coffee
1920-21	51.0	47.1	Nil
1925-26	53.6	67.7	Nil
1930-31	60.4	73.0	Nil
1935-36	96.7	77.6	6.2
1940-41	90.7	71.8	5.9
1945-46	111.6	77.4	7.0

Source : Varghese T.C.; *ib. cit.*; p. 118

The table indicates that the development of tea plantations in Travancore reached a standstill by the 1930s. On the other hand acreage under coffee and rubber plantations appears to ^{have} been steadily increasing. From this it is possible to assume that a major ~~share~~ of the investments in plantation cultivation by native planters who appeared on the plantation scene much later than the pioneer British planters, went into the development of rubber and coffee plantations rather than to tea cultivation.

The expansion of plantation cultivation as evidenced in the increase in the acreage under plantation crops appears to have been commensurate with the increase in the total cropped area, from 1920-21 to 1945-46. On the one hand the total cropped area in Travancore increased from 19,52,000 acres in 1920-21 to 23,46,000 acres in 1946-47; and on the other, the total area under plantation crops in Travancore was 98,100 acres in 1920-21 and it rose to 1,96,000 acres in 1945-46. Plantations together with other cash crops such as pepper, coconut etc. constituted nearly 46 per cent of the total cropped area in 1946-47. Tea, coffee and rubber accounted for nearly 17.9 per cent of the total area under cash crops in 1947.⁹

Varghese has argued that development of plantation cultivation, the commercialization of the economy as well as the development of agriculture in general in ~~Travancore~~ was a function of the progressive agrarian policies and the subsequent development of a favourable land-tenure system in the state.

In Cochin too, more or less similar pattern of development is evidenced during the same period. By the end of the 19th century, about 60 per cent of the cultivated land in Cochin was owned by the Jammies; the other 40 per cent and almost the whole of the waste lands were under the state resembling the state ownership of land in Travancore. However, in Cochin ownership rights were granted to the tenant cultivators only during 1905-09. Notwithstanding these impediments, the tenurial conditions in Cochin were conducive for expansion of cultivation. The state ownership of 40 per cent of the occupied land and the ownership of the whole of the 'unassigned' waste-lands ^{in is} likely to have facilitated an increase of ^{Cultivation in Sree Lankar.} Cultivation

expanded to such an extent as even to include reclamation of back water swamps near the coastal line (called kol lands, similar to the back-water swamps of Travancore).

As regards the development of plantation, in Cochin, there was an attempt on the part of the state to lease out its most important forest tract called Nelliampathi forests to the British planters. However, the opening up of plantations in Cochin did not make headway to the same extent as in Travancore mainly due to the lack of transport facilities. In more recent times the state has taken considerable interest in developing the area. In 1947 Cochin had only about 14,000 acres under rubber, 2,000 acres under tea, and 2,000 acres under coffee (see Table XI at page 118-A). Further, the proportion of the area under cash-crops to the total cropped area (6,01,000 acres) in Cochin was only around 25 per cent (1,52,000 acres) in the same year.

The pattern of development of plantations and agricultural development in general in Malabar during the same period represents a contrasting picture. Soon after the annexation of Malabar in 1792, the British pursued an agrarian policy similar to those followed in other regions in British India. They leased out lands to the Rajas of numerous principalities in return for lumpsums of money. This had the effect of creating a class of Jannies who were recognised as the sole legal proprietors or owners of the whole land. One of the effects of this land policy was that planters had to secure land from these jannies on terms that were relatively insecure and costlier than the direct state lease that was possible in Travancore.

-: 118-A :-

Table XI

Area under cultivation and employment in Major Plantations in Kerala : 1947-61

(Acreage in thousand)

Region	Year	Major Plantation Crops in Kerala						TOTAL	
		Tea		Coffee		Rubber		Acre- age	Employ- ment
		Acre- age	Employ- ment	Acre- age	Employ- ment	Acre- age	Employ- ment		
Travancore	1947	78.0	74628	1.0	432	113.0	32191	192.0	107051
Cochin	1947	2.0	2432	2.0	2461	14.0	4312	18.0	9250
Travancore- Cochin	1950*	159.06	70054	20.2	3441	141.0	32995	320.6	106590
Travancore- Cochin	1955	84.4	83116	6.8	3616	138.6	49130	229.8	135912
Kerala	1957	99.0	97519	41.0	19907	178.0	58781	318.0	176207
Kerala	1960- 61	92.0	83445	41.5	24360	303.0	88874	438.0	196679

- Source :
- (1) Indian Labour Year Book, 1947-48; 1951-52; 1957; 1959
 - (2) Government of Kerala, Bureau of Economics & Statistics, Labour and Labour force, 1972
 - (3) Census of India, 1961, Vol VII, Kerala Part IX, pp.106-107

* These figures appear to involve some statistical errors as the figures for the preceding and following years do not tally with the figures for 1950.

Nonetheless, it may be noted that the first plantation in the whole of Kerala was opened by the British in Malabar as early as the end of the 18th Century.¹⁰

Till the beginning of the 20th century, however, all the plantations in Malabar were producing only coffee. During the period between 1893 and 1903, the acreage under coffee is reported to have decreased from 20,096 to 5477. The main reasons for the decline in coffee plantations were leaf diseases, declining prices and the entry of Brazilian coffee into the world market. Although cultivation of Coffee was gradually supplanted by tea, the main product of Malabar continued to be coffee.¹¹

Christian planters from Travancore and Tamil Planters from the adjoining areas also are said to have gone to Malabar to open up new plantations. By 1956, plantation cultivation in Malabar extended to an area of about 60,000 acres consisting of about 30,000 of coffee and the rest shared between tea and cardamon.¹²

Thus, though Malabar was part of British India and Travancore a native state, it is significant that British capital was largely attracted towards Travancore among the three political units in opening up plantations. In fact, region-wise, Travancore among the three political units had the largest acreage under plantation cultivation as well as under cash crops (46% of the total cropped area) by the end of the British period. In Malabar, the proportion of area under cash-crops including plantation crops to the total cropped area in 1946-47 was 40%; in Cochin it was 25%.

Today, the plantation industry in Kerala is a large-scale enterprise. The major plantation crops of Kerala include tea, coffee and rubber. These

together with the other cash crops such as coconuts, pepper, arecanut etc. covered as much as 40% of the gross cropped area in Kerala during 1956-57.¹³

In terms of employment of labour, the industrial category of mining, quarrying, forestry, plantations etc. accounted for 6.06%(2.64 lakhs) of the total working force(43.60 lakhs) in Kerala in 1951 and 8.66%(4.87 lakhs) of the total working population in 1961. As all the activities other than those coming under 'plantations' in this category exist only to a relatively low degree in Kerala, the vast majority of the working-population classified under this category could be considered as engaged in the plantations industry. Taking the employment figures for 1960-61, it is seen that the plantations industry alone approximately accounted for about 40.4%(1,96,679) of the total working force(4.87 lakhs) in this category(see tables XI and XII).

Table - XII
Distribution of working force in Kerala
(in lakhs)

Sl No	Category	1951		1961	
		No. of workers	Percentage	No. of workers	Percentage
1	Cultivation	10.12	23.22	11.78	20.92
2	Agricultural labour	11.15	25.57	9.78	17.38
3	Mining, quarrying, plantation etc.	2.64	6.06	4.87	8.68
4	Household industry	4.71	10.80	4.89	10.66
5	Manufacturing	4.10	9.40	5.29	9.40
6	Construction	0.58	1.33	0.71	1.26
7	Trade and Commerce	2.89	6.63	3.22	5.72
8	Transport & Communication	1.39	3.19	1.53	2.71
9	Other services	6.02	13.80	14.23	25.27
T O T A L		43.60	100.00	56.30	100.00

Source: Bureau of Economics and Statistics, Government of Kerala : Labour and Labour Force, 1972, p. 1

The relative importance of the plantations industry to the *Economy of Kerala* can be gauged from the net-value contributed by plantation products. The total value of goods exported from the ports of Kerala to other parts of the world is roughly around Rs.55 crores per annum. The three major items contributing about 75% of the total foreign exchange earnings of ^{Kerala} are tea, coconuts and coir and coir products. Tea alone accounted for about Rs. 24.3 crores or 43.6% of the total earnings in 1957-58.¹⁴

The tea plantation industry is the foremost among the major plantation crops in the state in terms of the net value contributed and in terms of employment of labour-force.¹⁵ (see table XII). Historically too, tea plantations were the earliest organised industry. Therefore, the following discussion would be with special reference to the tea plantation workers in Kerala.

District-wise, tea plantations in Kerala are concentrated in the district of Kottayam. Around 63.9% (78497.56 acres) of the total area (121225.67 acres) under tea plantations in Kerala is found in this district; further, nearly 64.1% (152 estates) of the total number of tea estates (237 estates) and about 73.9% (64557) of the total number of tea plantation workers (87362) were concentrated in this region in 1958 (see table XIII).

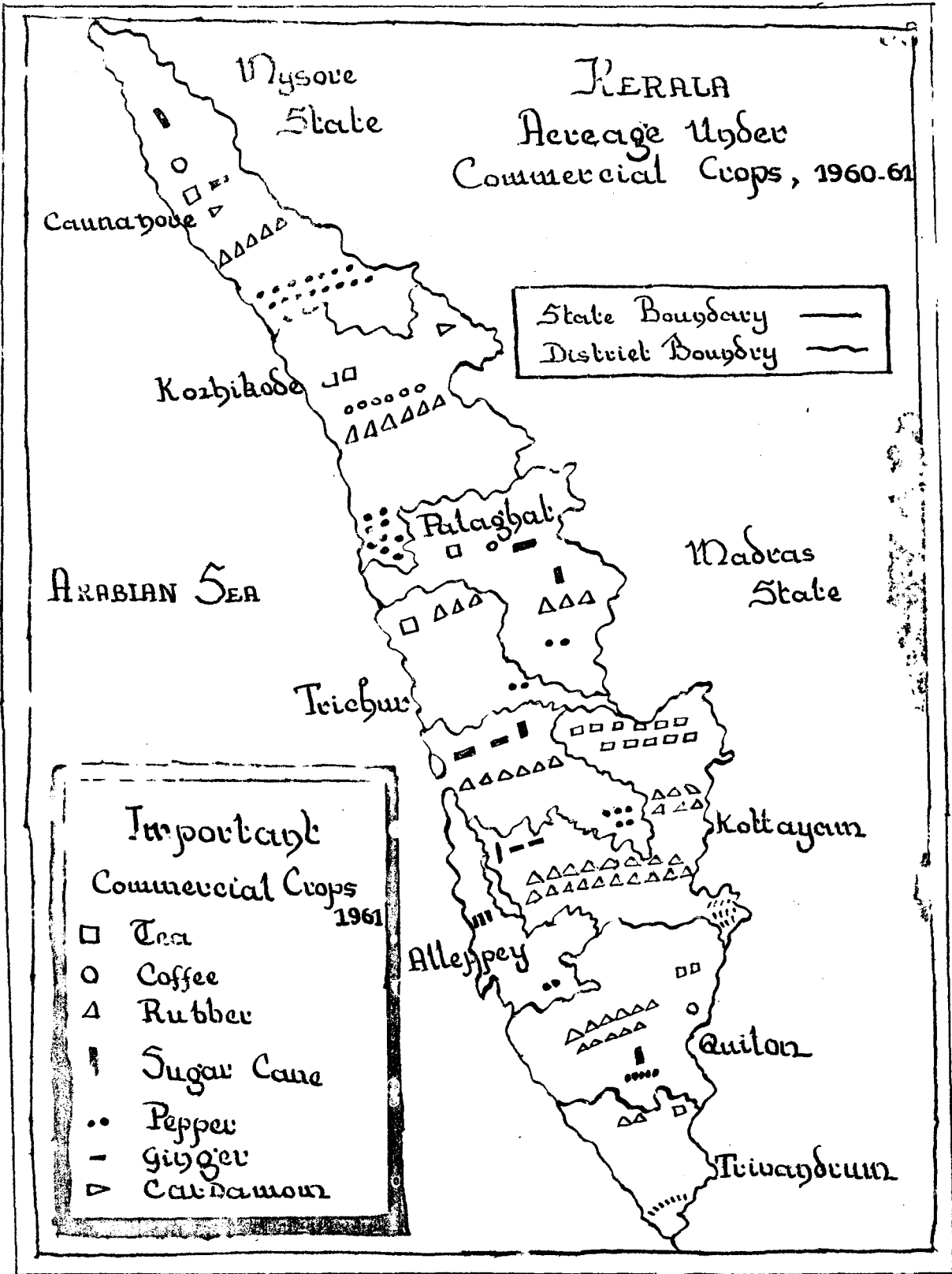
Within the district of Kottayam, the High Ranges constitute the principal area of Tea cultivation.¹⁶ (see Maps I and II). The taluks of Devicoolam, Udumbunchola and Peermade are the important centres of tea cultivation in the High Ranges. The ensuing discussion would primarily be related to the tea plantation workers in the High Ranges of Kerala.

Table - XIII

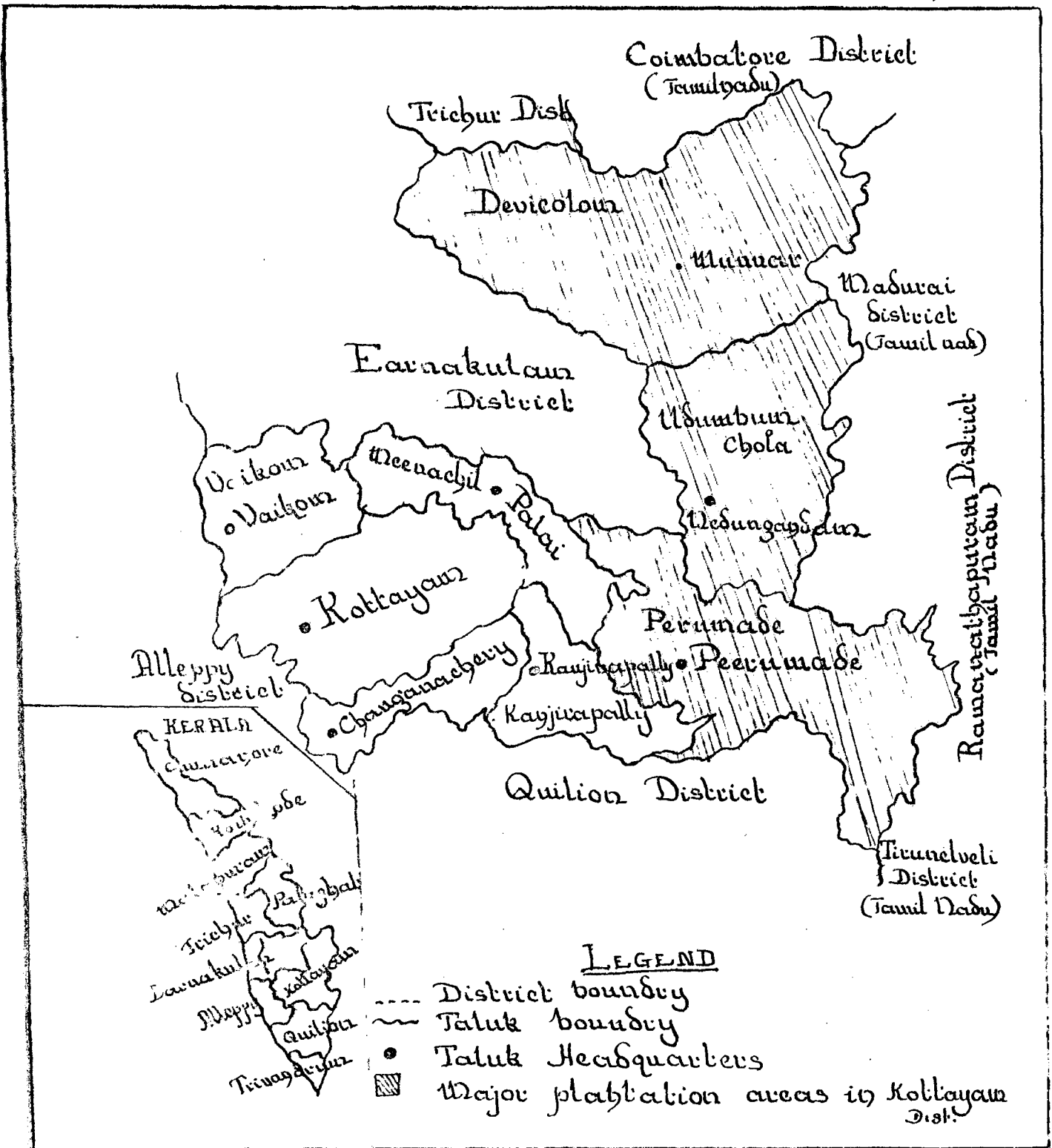
District-wise Distribution of acreage
under tea plantation estates and
& employment in Kerala in 1958

Discttict	No. of estates	Acreage	Workers employed
Trivandrum	6	3868.69	2672
Quilon	39	8143.57	4890
Alleppy	-	--	--
Kottayam	152	78497.66	64557
Eranakulam	5	333.04	118
Trichur	1	2127.66	1036
Palghat	5	2097.76	1969
Kozhikode	21	20223.34	9190
Cannanore	8	5933.95	2930
T O T A L	237	121225.67	87362

Source : Government of Kerala :
Administrative Report of the
Statistics Department, 1962-63



Regional Distribution of Commercial Crops in Kerala



The most important Plantation District in Kerala

A striking feature of tea plantation industry in Kerala is that it is largely monopolised and controlled by foreign companies. Approximately, 72% of the total area under tea (27,892 hectares) in the state is owned by nine foreign companies together accounting for a capital investment of Rs. 18.39 crores. The nine foreign companies are:

1. The Kannan Devan Hill Produce Company, Munnar. It was registered in 1878 and covers an area of 55,040 hectares of which only 8509 hectares are under tea.
2. The Anglo-American Direct Tea Trading Company, Munnar, registered in 1897 and owns 2,403 hectares under tea.
3. The Malayalam Plantations is the biggest plantation company in the whole of South India owning 34 estates in Madras and Kerala. In Kerala it has 8235 hectares under tea.
4. Travancore Tea Estates Company, Vandiperiyar covers 2103 hectares under tea.
5. Southern India Tea Estates Company, Peermade has 990 hectares under tea.
6. The Cooperative Tea Society, Calicut owns 4130 hectares under tea.
7. The Amalgamated Tea Estate Company, Munnar has 911 hectares under tea.
8. Vagamon Tea Company has 326 hectares under tea.
9. The Ponmudi Tea and Rubber Company owns 230 hectares under tea.

These companies have between them 84 estates of which seven are rubber-cum-tea estates, 18 rubber plantations and 64 tea estates.¹⁷

The historical conditions under which tea plantations developed in Kerala have greatly contributed to the large-scale ownership and control ~~of~~ of the industry

by foreign companies. As pointed out earlier, initially the rulers of Travancore invited British planters and offered them incentives and attractive concessions to open up the vast forest tracts in the region and to develop plantation cultivation there. The emergence of native planters was a later phenomenon. Besides the interests of the native planters were directed to the development of rubber plantations rather than tea estates. We find in the post-thirties (which marks the period of growing investment by native planters) a sudden spurt in the development of rubber plantations and a relative stability in the expansion of tea cultivation (see Table X, page 116). From this it may not be incorrect to assume that the pioneer British planters concentrated primarily in the development of tea plantations in the region and they seem to have preserved their monopoly of tea cultivation in the state. This is evidenced from the proportion of area under tea owned by foreign companies to the total area covered by tea plantations in the State.

For an economy characterised by almost a total dependence of export-earnings for a substantial part of its income, the effects of the large-scale ownership of one of its most important plantation industry may have drastic consequences. In the absence of adequate data, it is highly difficult to treat this aspect of the industry in any detailed manner. It suffices to note that the forms of labour use and the system of labour recruitment employed by the planters in the region were governed and determined by their ultimate objective of extraction of economic surplus through the exploitation of men and material at the lowest possible cost. What is of utmost importance here is that the specific form of labour use that has been in practice is of crucial significance to the processes of emergence of class and class-formation among workers on the estates.

II. Plantation Workers in Kerala : Form of Labour Use, System of Recruitment and Social Consequences :

(A) Tamil Migrant Labour on Plantations in Kerala:

A characteristic feature of labour on plantation in Kerala was that it was seasonal migrant labour. The Royal Commission on Labour have observed that labour on plantations in the whole of south India was migratory in character. As regards the form of labour use on Kerala plantations, the Administrative Report of the Labour Department of Travancore-Cochin for the year 1950 makes the following observations: "A large proportion of plantation labour migrate from the surrounding Tamil Districts of the State ... The employers consider the industry as seasonal in character and recruitment is done for a period of 9 to 10 months. The recruits are disbanded after this period ... In practice, the workers who were previously employed are recruited at the beginning of the following season ..." ¹⁸

Innes in his Madras District Gazetters has observed with regard to plantation labour in the district of Malabar, that nearly all the labour was imported from outside, particularly from the Tamil speaking districts of the Madras presidency. ¹⁹ According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Labour (1931) and the Labour Investigation Committee (1946), labour on South Indian plantations was recruited from areas situated close to the plantations.

The employment of seasonal migrant labour was a characteristic feature of plantation in Kerala from the beginning of the industry. Although data regarding migratory character of the labour force on plantations in Kerala are few and far between a more or less clear picture is given in Davis' accounts regarding plantation labour in the state of Travancore during the thirties. According to Davis, in 1931, Travancore had 224 tea and rubber plantations, comprising an area of about 75000 acres under tea, 62000 under rubber and 30000 under cardamom. These three crops together supported a population of 105,224 persons of whom 79,433 were immigrants from outside Travancore. The immigrants on estates constituted 59% of all immigrants to the state. Taking the High Land Division of Travancore, Davis notes that this region had, in 1931, 41.4% of its total population born outside the district of enumeration whereas the Midland and Lowland Divisions²⁰ had only 3.7% so born. His accounts also give some information regarding the seasonal character of immigration. Taking the length of time the immigrant labourers had been on the estates as an index, Davis notes that 48% of the immigrants had been on the estate for only one year or less: 29% had been on the estate between one and three years; and 23% had been there for three years or more.²¹ From this it becomes evident that vast majority of the labour force on plantations in the High Land Division of Travancore had been seasonal immigrants.

Statistics relating to immigration of Tamil labourers to Kerala as given in census reports particularly those relating to earlier periods are not adequate enough to base our analysis on them. Thus, census figures with regard to the immigration of Tamils to Kerala, give the proportion of Tamils to the total in-migrants to Kerala. However, the reports do not specify the destination of the inmigrants. In 1901, immigrant Tamils constituted 88% of the total female immigrants to Kerala and 94% of the total female immigrants. This proportion seems to have been maintained upto 1961. In 1961, in-migrants from Madras accounted for more than four-fifth of the total in-migrants. 82% of the male and 83% of the female inmigrants to Kerala in 1961 was from Madras.

The census monograph of 1961 on "the changing population of Kerala" gives some useful information regarding the destination of the immigrants. As regards rural-to-rural movement, immigrants from Madras constituted 92% of males and 89% of the females of the total immigrants from rural areas of other states in India to rural areas of Kerala. Taking the industrial composition of workers among in-migrants to Kerala in 1961, it is possible to infer that the rural-to-rural movement was dominated by the in-migration of workers to plantations in Kerala.

Table XIV

Industrial Composition of Workers
among in-migrants and general
population, Kerala : 1961

Industrial class	In-migrants		General population
	Andhra, Madras, Mysore & Maharashtra.	Others	
I. Males - Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agricultural labour	4.0	0.4	13.1
Mining Plantation	44.8	2.2	10.1
Household Industries	1.5	1.0	4.8
Manufacturing	7.8	6.0	10.1
Others	41.9	90.4	61.9
II. Females - Total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agricultural labour	5.8	8.0	27.4
Mining Plantation	72.0	4.5	5.3
Household Industries	3.0	14.2	17.8
Manufacturing	1.7	2.1	8.1
Others	17.5	71.2	41.4

Source : Krishnan Namboodiri, N.K., "The Changing Population of Kerala", Census of India, 1961, Monograph series No. 7, p. 65

Among the immigrant workers from the neighbouring states (Andhra, Maharashtra, Madras, Mysore), those engaged in industrial class III (mining, quarrying, livestock, forestry, hunting and plantations) constituted 45% among males and 72% among females (see Table XIV at page 127). The monograph concludes: "As all the activities other than those coming under 'plantations' in this category exist only to a relatively low degree in this state, the predominance of this category among the in-migrants is essentially a reflection of immigration of plantation workers from the neighbouring states, especially from Madras".²²

An important feature of the employment of seasonal migrant labour on plantations in Kerala is that a vast majority of the labour force was drawn, not from Kerala but from the adjoining Tamil districts of the old Madras Presidency (present Madras State) particularly from the districts of Madurai, Coimbatore, Tinneveli, Ramanathapuram etc. These districts lie close to the plantation regions, particularly the High Range Division of Kerala (see Map. III).

It is important here to see as to why in a region such as Kerala, characterised by the existence of a significant proportion landless agricultural labourers, plantation labour was largely drawn from the Tamil districts. Part of the reason could be located

in the difference in the socio-economic conditions prevalent in the two regions at the time of the development of plantations.

The Royal Commission on labour have observed that the Madras presidency had a potential labour force very much in excess of its industrial needs. The pressure of the population on the soil was such that large numbers of the population were driven to other parts of India and to such distant places as Burma, Ceylon, and Malaya.

Patel's study of "Agricultural" labourers in India and Pakistan" reveals that in the 'Southern Triangle' comprising the central provinces, Bombay and Madras, with the introduction of the Raiyatwari system of land-tenure and land assessment, the cultivators were increasingly expropriated from the land. In 1931, the proportion of landless agricultural labourers to the total agricultural population was more than two fifths in this region. Patel calls this region is "the land of the landless". According to him, this region is characterised by the heaviest concentration of unemployed, underemployed and bonded labourers. It was also from this region, particularly from the Tamil districts that major currents of migrations - internal as well as external - have occurred. Patel Observes

that from the Tamil speaking areas as many as a million migrated to Ceylon and British Malaya during the twenties.

The "Resurvey of some South Indian Villages" gives important information regarding the socio-economic conditions existing in some of the villages in the Tamil districts of the old Madras presidency. The major changes that occurred in these villages during the period between 1916-17 and 1936-37 were: growth of population on an unprecedented rate, growth in the number of families, increasing subdivision and fragmentation of holdings, increase in the number of small-holders and growth in the number and proportion of landless proletariat.

The resurvey also points out that during this period, there were significant changes in the land-tenure practices of the villages. The system of farm service on monthly or seasonal fixed payments has been waning and was being replaced by tenancy. There was a growing tendency among big land owners to cultivate less and less either with their own hands or with the help of paid farm servants and for more lands to be let on lease to tenants with small holdings. Besides there was a growing competition between petty holders of land and the landless agricultural labourers in the labour-market. The petty holders of land, forced to eke out supplementary income to what they get from their own holdings, were compelled to compete with the landless proletariat in the labour-market.

The increase in population coupled with the increasing rate of subdivision and fragmentation of holdings created conditions for the rapid emergence of high proportion of landless proletariat on the one hand

and for large scale unemployment and under-employment of labour on the other. As there was increase in the supply of labour much more than the demand, wages of agricultural labour were very low.²³ Low wages, unemployment and underemployment greatly contributed to the growth of indebtedness among a vast section of the agricultural population in most of the villages.

In most of the villages there was a system of bonded labour known as the "padiyal system". The padiyal was a sort of serf on the land bound to toil on it from the time he borrowed an amount from the landlord and he was tied to it until he discharged the loan.

Under such conditions, avenues of alternative employment through migration was perhaps the only effective outlet to the unemployed, underemployed and bond-labourers. The survey has noted the tendency among landless agricultural labourers and the impoverished small-holders to migrate for a season to the neighbouring or even distant plantations and other centres in search of work.²⁴

The agrarian conditions in Travancore and Cochin during the same period present a completely different picture. As early as 1800, Buchanan, during his travel through the state of Travancore observed that "the bulk of the rural population was ~~an~~ contented and prosperous".²⁵ As has been pointed out by Varghese, by the end of the 19th century, the rulers of the states of Travancore and Cochin, appear to have committed themselves to the pursuit of a progressive and welfare-oriented agrarian policy. They conferred the right of private ownership of land on the tenants and cultivators and offered incentives for bringing more and more land

under cultivation through reclamation of Sircar waste-lands. Due to these progressive policies there was considerable development of agriculture which is manifested in the phenomenal increase in the area cultivated.²⁶

By the end of the 19th century, there began large-scale reclamation of swampy areas surrounding the Vembanad backwaters in Travancore and the "Kol" lands near the coastal line in Cochin, for cultivation. This is known in the region as "Kayal" or "Kol" (i.e. backwater cultivation) cultivation of rice. Along with the development of backwater rice cultivation there took place large scale migration of agricultural labour families from the adjoining areas towards the newly cultivated tracts in addition to the seasonal flow of labourers during the time of agricultural operations.

Secondly, the development of plantations in the highlands of Travancore and in the forest tracts of Cochin, generated major currents of migration of a large number of poor peasants and small-holders from the plains to these thinly populated areas and they started occupying and cultivating the arable virgin soil in the slopes and valleys of the hilly region.

Further, the development of agriculture in the plains appears to have facilitated a gradual improvement in the wages and employment of position of agricultural labourers. Besides, in Cochin, the phenomenal development of the Cochin port and the consequent expansion of non-agricultural avenues of employment probably absorbed a considerable proportion of the increase in population.

Thus, although there has been significant increase in the general population and in the number and proportion of the agricultural labour force,²⁷ in Travancore and Cochin, between 1911 and 1951, the availability of cultivable land in plenty, the incentives offered for the reclamation and cultivation of Sircar waste-lands, the general agricultural development in the plains and in the kayal areas and the avenues for large-scale migration to and colonization of hilly and forest lands did greatly contribute to the dispersal and absorption of the growing population in general, and particularly the landless agricultural labour force.

The relatively small proportion of local labourers on plantations in Kerala could be partially accounted for by the favourable agrarian conditions that appear to have prevailed in Travancore and Cochin at the time of development of plantations in these regions. In sharp contrast to the agrarian conditions in the Tamil districts, those in Travancore and Cochin were conducive to the development of agriculture and to the welfare of the population in general. The condition of the landless agricultural labour also appear to have been one of general contentment. The growth of population in Travancore and Cochin appear to have been accompanied by an increase in the area under cultivation which greatly contributed to the absorption of the growing population without creating as much pressure of population on land as experienced in the Tamil districts. Under these circumstances, the working and living conditions existing on plantations had to be of a better standard than those actually did exist,²⁸ to attract the local labourers to the plantations.

The use of migrant labour on plantations reveals a characteristic mode of surplus extraction from colonial economies. It shows the manner in which the pre-capitalist, rural sector in a colonial setting is

linked to the capitalist sector. The rural sector is integrated into the colonial mode of production as a supplier of cheap labour power to the capitalist sector. It fulfills the need for the colonial economy to cheap reproduction of labour power.

With regard to class formation this form of labour use have had certain significant implications. On the one hand, through the use of migrant labour the capitalist sector of the plantation was able to operate without replacing pre-capitalist by capitalist relations of production and without transforming the pre-existing structure of social relations. As Mintz has pointed out, the workers in such[^] situation may be considered as merely straddling two sectors, namely the pre-capitalist ~~xxx~~ rural agrarian sector and the capitalist plantation sector, without necessarily involving a transition of the wage-earners from their previous class to a new one. As Wolf has observed, in such situations, the workers step with one foot ~~into~~ the plantation, while keeping the other foot on the peasant-holding. The alternate movement between the pre-capitalist and capitalist sectors does not mean that the workers are rising out of their class rather it signifies an attempt by people in the same condition of life to widen the base of their opportunities. Bernstein and Pitt have pointed out how the Javanese plantations under the Dutch colonists have been able to operate with such a mode of exploitation of labour without creating a plantation proletariat on the estates.

It is important to note here that there was a tendency for the labour force to settle down on the estates in the course of the development of the industry. Davis

has observed that 29% of the total immigrants to the plantation estates in the highland division of Travancore in 1931 had been on the estate between one and three years and 23% had been there for three years or more. Whether this has been a result of the explicit policy of the planters or due to the pressure from the labourers is difficult to ascertain. In Madras, the permanent settlement of labour force on plantation estates was consequent upon an agreement known as the "valparai Agreement" reached in 1949. This agreement ensured continuity of employment to plantation workers in place of their seasonal engagement every year.²⁹ We do not have any information to ascertain whether the settlement of labour-force on plantations in Kerala had been governed by any such agreement. It appears that the strength of "resident" labour-force on plantation estates in Kerala has been growing although the recruitment of seasonal migrant labourers through Manganias continued upto 1962.

The classification of plantation labour, employed by the Labour and Statistics Departments is instructive. The usual practice is to classify workers into three categories namely (1) Garden Labour(permanent), (2) outside labour(permanent), and (3) Outside labour (temporary). The category of "Garden Labour"(permanent) refers to settled labours on the estates. "Outside labour" consists of seasonal migrant labour. Here the category "outside labour"(permanent) may refer to those workers who may have been regularly employed on the estates for a stipulated number of years. Statistics relating to the relative strength of workers falling under each of these categories may reveal the proportion

of settled labour on the estates to the total labour force. The following table gives the distribution of labour force under ^{the} three categories of classification.

Table XV
Distribution of workers in terms of categories of employment of labour on tea plantation in Kerala, 1947-60

Region	Year	Plantation workers in Kerala			
		Garden Labour		Outside labour	
		Perma- nent	% of the total	Perma- nent	Tempo- rary
Travancore	1947	70,194	94.06	1,526	2,908
Cochin	1947	2,432	100.00	--	--
Travancore-Cochin	1950	65,042	92.8	3,233	1,809
Travancore-Cochin	1955	75,515	90.9	5,567	2,034
Kerala	1957	89,375	92.2	5,165	2,479
Kerala	1960	77,615	93.0	5,830	

- Sources: (1) Indian Tea Statistics, 1943-47; 1950
(2) Indian Labour Year Book, 1951-52; 1957; 1959
(3) Statistical Handbook of Kerala, 1970; pp 60-68

The above table indicates that the proportion of settled labour on Tea plantation in Kerala to the total labour force has increased at a significant rate in recent times. While in 1931 settled labour constituted 52% (29% + 23%) of the total labour force in Travancore, in 1947 the proportion has risen to 94.06%. It points to the increasing stabilization of the labour force on the estates. This position appears to have been maintained upto 1960. Welfare-oriented Labour legislation and the growth of labour organisations demanding fixity and continuity of employment for workers may have been responsible for such developments.

(B) System of Recruitment and Social consequences:

The system of recruitment for ~~the~~ and employment of labour on tea plantations in Kerala was the Kangany system. As has been pointed out earlier the unit of recruitment was generally the family. Recruitment was done by Kanganies on contract basis and the conditions of contract were governed by custom rather than by rules.

The Kangany system of recruitment and employment of labour was primarily a device employed by the planters to transfer their responsibilities to provide for the basic needs of the workers. This is evident from a statement issued by the United Planters' Association of Southern India (UPASI).

The state ^{may} is as follows:

"A number of families hailing from one village or neighbouring villages need an experienced plantation employee to guide them in their choice of estates and through all their difficulties during the journey from the village to the estate. Upon arrival on the estate, they need a man who is prepared to assist them in their petty difficulties - be they financial or matters of food, clothing and accommodation. They need a man to guide them in their work and a man to represent their requests and grievances to the proper quarters and a man to help them in sickness or distress. It is these very needs and requirements which were the foundation of the Kangany recruiting system." 30

Criticising the above note of the UPASI, the Rega Committee commented as follows: "If the above needs and requirements are the foundation of the Kangany recruiting system, then surely the foundation is insecure, for it is based on the wish of the employers to escape responsibility to provide for them..." 31

On the whole, almost all the immigrant recruits "came from the depressed classes". We have very little information regarding the social composition of the workers. The authors of "some south Indian villages : A Survey" have observed with regard to migration from the Tamil villages that it was not all classes of labourers that went out. Those that were the first to go were the Harijans. Shepherds and others whose traditional services were less in demand were the next to follow.

According to the census monograph on tea plantation labour in India, workers on South Indian plantations as a whole, belonged to the so-called untouchable and other low castes. Among them, more important were the castes compositionally known as Adi-Dravida, Adi-Andhra, and Adi-Karnataka. Besides these groups of castes, some castes belonging to the middle strata of the society also provided labourers for tea plantations. Workers drawn from castes such as the mudaliyar, Theya, Nayar, Pillai, Gouda, Lingayat, Naicker, Chettiar and Padachi were found in good numbers on most of the south Indian tea plantations. Moplah Muslims and Christians converted from the so-called low-castes were also recruited for tea plantations.³²

Perhaps a clearer picture of the social composition of the labour force on plantations in Kerala could be gained from a village survey monograph issued by the census authorities. The survey was conducted in a village consisting largely of tea and rubber plantation labourers.³³ The labour force, on the whole, consisted of two distinct groups demarcated on regional and linguistic basis. These two groups were the immigrant Tamil labourers and the local, Malayalee workers. Within

this broad division of the labour force, a number of sub-groups were identified. The vast majority of the labour force of the immigrant labourers belonged to scheduled caste-groups such as the Pallans, Parayas, Thevans, Velans etc. The group of local workers consisted of Nairs, Ezhavas, Thattans, Asaris, Veluthedan-castes among the Hindus and Latin Christians (neo-Christians), Jacobites and Marthomites among the Christians and finally the Muslims.

Community-wise, taking the labour force as a whole, Hindus constituted the largest community consisting of 70 households and 362 members; the Christians community was the second largest consisting of 58 households and 285 members and Muslims the third accounting for 16 house-holds and 96 workers.

As regards the duration of their stay in the surveyed area the monograph notes that only 13 households out of the 113 households surveyed migrated to the surveyed area two generation ago. The rest came either before one generation or in the same generation as the survey was conducted.³⁴

Although the monograph is based on a limited sample, yet its findings may not be too far from representing the social composition of plantation workers in Kerala in general. From the very inception of the industry, vast majority of the labour force ~~was~~ was drawn from the adjoining Tamil districts. Besides from the limited data relating to the in-migration of labour from other states into Kerala it may safely be assumed that the Tamils constituted the majority of the labour-force. The remaining minority was drawn from Kerala itself.

Thus tea plantation workers in Kerala consisted of two distinct groups, divided on regional and linguistic basis. The existence of two distinct groups divided on regional and linguistic bases may have important consequences for the process of class-formation among the workers. In this connection a short discussion on the social effects of the Kangany system of recruitment is essential.

A characteristic feature of the Kangany system of recruitment was that the Kanganies acting as labour suppliers, tended to recruit their own kinsmen, caste-men and neighbours from their own villages. Once brought to the estates these labourers were grouped into sub-kangany-gangs under the supervision of their own men as sub-kanganies. Generally a sub-kangany gang consisted of members of the same caste or sub-caste and were related to one another. Thus the sub-kangany-gang which in essence was an occupational group was a social group as well. An important social consequence of such a system of recruitment and employment was the structuring of the labour-force on the bases of the traditional or primordial ties that differentiated them into distinct sub-groups. Further, the preservation and continuity of these ties was further facilitated by communal living of the members of a sub-kangany-gang along with its own sub-kangany.

Such a phenomenon has been observed in all the studies of plantation workers under the kangany system of recruitment. A monograph on tea plantation workers in Madras has pointed out that the Kanganies and the gang-members whom they recruited were allotted houses in the same line and that they lived together. Further, it was also observed that people belonging to various communities or caste-groups were anxious to maintain their identities. Similarly Jayaraman, studying Indian Tamil migrant labourers on tea plantations in

Ceylon, has suggested that the large-scale family migration and the Kangany system of recruitment have been the two major factors contributing to the preservation and maintenance of the caste-system among them. Davis has observed with regard to the Kangany system of recruitment of labour for overseas plantations that **this system facilitated the transplantation of Indian culture to a new region.** It enabled the coolie to live within his own community among neighbours and relations from his homeland without disturbing his native customs.

As there is only very little secondary literature on plantation workers in Kerala, information regarding the effects of the Kangany system of recruitment employment on the labour force is almost totally absent. Nevertheless, the village survey monograph (cited above) gives some useful information. The monograph points out that the immigrants (particularly the Tamils) having come to the surveyed area continued to maintain the customs and manners which were followed by them in the Tamil districts.³⁵

When looked at in relation to the process of class-formation this phenomenon appears to involve significant problems. In so far as the work-force is divided into distinct groups or sub-groups on the basis of primordial loyalties such as caste, kingship, regional or linguistic, the conditions for the emergence of class solidarity and class-consciousness may not be crystallised. As long as the worker's identities are anchored in their primordial groups he may fail to perceive his conditions as identical with those of others who occupy similar position within the estate. In other words, primordial ties and loyalties may

operate as 'concealment' mechanisms of the plantation proletariat in so far they tend to mask the basic relation of the workers to the productive system and his position within it. Some of these problems became manifest in the political processes on plantations in Kerala.

III. Political Processes on Tea Plantations in Kerala

The political processes on tea plantation in Kerala reveal certain interesting features. Until recently political processes on plantations appear to have been conditioned by the unequal distribution of political power within the class-structure of the plantation system. This is evident from the fact that the planter class in Kerala was politically a well-organised ^{and} well-represented group while plantation workers were totally unorganised and unrepresented. More important is the fact that they were denied the right to organise and to act collectively. However, this situation seems to have changed particularly after independence.

Political developments in plantations in the post-independence period, point to the rapid growth of multiple labour organisation and trade union activities among the workers. Several political parties have sought to mobilize the workers primarily with a view to secure their votes in ^{the} elections.

A characteristic feature of the political processes on plantation is that the mobilizational and organisational efforts of trade unions and political parties were oriented primarily to activate the existing traditional bases of organisation among the labour force. The primordial loyalties of region and language appear to have

lend themselves as effective channels for the mobilization and organisation of the worker. In fact, the limited information we have suggests that there has been deliberate attempts on the part of trade unions and political parties to mobilize and organise the workers through traditional channels of organisation such as those based on regional or linguistic loyalties rather than transform these into an 'instrumental collectivism' or horizontal solidarity based on the class position and class interests of the plantation workers.

In so far as political processes on plantations in Kerala are directed to and based on the activation of primordial solidarities in terms of which plantation workers are differentiated into distinct and at times, mutually antagonistic groups the conditions for the crystallization of a "horizontal solidarity" based on the class-position and class-interests of the workers may not emerge.

(a) The Planter-class and Political Organisation:

The planter-class in Kerala consisting of big European companies and small christian planters, has been a well-organised group from the very beginning of the industry. In the erstwhile Travancore-Cochin state there were five important planting districts. They were: South Travancore, Peermade, Vandiperiyar, Mundakayam and Munnar. Each of the five districts had a District Association of its own. These were:

- 1/ The South Travancore Planters' Association
- 2/ The Central Travancore Planters' Association
- 3/ The Mundakayam Planters' Association
- 4/ The Kannan Devan Planters' Association (Munnar)
- 5/ The Neeliampathy Planters' Association. ³⁶

The associations have exercised considerable influence over the state government. It is reported that planters' interests were given adequate representation in the legislative council of Travancore from very early times. As early as 1932-33, planters' representatives were specially elected to the Travancore Legislature.³⁷

At present more than 60% of the planters are members of the 'Association of planters of Kerala' or the APK, which is affiliated to a larger organisation, namely, the 'United Planters' Association of Southern India' or the UPASI. What is important to note here is that the planter class through its associations and representatives in the state legislature has been able to wield considerable political power and influence. Planters were able to safeguard and enhance their interests through their organisation and influence. They were able to influence the formulation of labour-policies and other such vital matters connected with the industry, both at the central and at the regional levels.

Apart from planters' associations constituting powerful lobbies in the regional and central legislatures, the interests of the planter class in Kerala have also been represented through political parties. The chief spokesman of the planters was, until recently, the Congress Party.³⁸ It has been shown that the vast majority of the supporters and sympathisers of the Congress Party in Kerala is drawn from the conservative upper and middle sections of all castes and communities. Thus the congress party is seen as representing the interests of the rich land-lords, planters, merchants etc.³⁹ The ideology of the Congress Party in turn

manifests a belief in gradual reform, in the sanctity of private property and is pre-eminently oriented to status-quo maintenance. As will be seen in the following discussion, these factors have important significance for the political processes on plantations in Kerala and for the process of class-formation among plantation workers.

(c) Plantation-workers, Political Organisation and Problems of class-formation:

In contrast to the planter class, workers on plantation estates were totally unorganised. Although the Travancore Trade Unions Act was passed in 1937 and the Travancore Trade Dispute Act in 1938, plantation workers remained highly unorganised until 1950. There was only one estate labour union in Travancore in 1939.⁴⁰

The centres of trade union activities during the initial stages of the development of the labour movement in Kerala were the industrial centres of the state, namely Alleppy and Quilon.⁴¹ Although the "Congress communists" in Kerala were actively engaged in mobilizing the peasants in the agricultural centres in Malabar and Punnappra-Vayalar regions, ^{as early as 1935} little effort was made to organise plantation workers in the high-ranges.

Perhaps an important reason for the absence of organisation among workers might have been the attitude of the planters towards unionism among workers. Any tendency at combination among the workers were jealously watched by the superintendents who viewed with disfavour the contacting of their workers by outsiders. In the case of a large majority of estates, outsiders other than ~~the~~ friends and

relations of labourers had to take previous permission of the superintendents before they could enter the precincts of the estates, especially if such outsiders came with the purpose of organising the workers in trade unions. There had been instances when such outsiders were severely manhandled at the instigation of the superintendents. The attitude of the planters towards unionism is very graphically portrayed in the following official statement:

... It had been the common practice of the managements of plantations to view with jealousy and suspicion the combination of workers ... Even the slightest murmurs of protest on the part of workers were suppressed with extreme severity. Even the scanty benefits which the law provided to the plantation labour were unscrupulously denied ...⁴²

The migratory character of the labour force must also have been another important factor accounting for the absence of organisation, among them. It appears that mobilisation and organisation of the workers did not make any headway until there was a considerable number of settled labour-forces on the estates.

It was only by 1950 that the right of the workers to organise and act collectively was recognised by the planters. The Administrative Report for the year 1950 of the Labour Department of Travancore-Cochin has reported that, at the first Tripartite Conference on plantations convened by the Labour Commissioner on 20th July, 1950 "the employers recognised the inherent right of labour to organise and bargain collectively. Further the employers conceded the right of trade union workers to enter estate premises for organisational purposes".⁴³

With the recognition of Unionism among plantation workers, growth of workers organisations was steady. The following table shows the growth in the number of trade unions among plantation workers in Kerala between 1951 and 1961.

Table XVI
Growth of Trade Unions Among Plantation workers in Kerala : 1951-1961.

Year	Number of Trade Unions
1951	27
1955	49
1956	61
1957	91
1959	122
1960	130
1961	140

Source: Administrative Report of Labour Department, Govt. of Kerala, 1951-52 - 1960-61.

From the table it becomes evident that unionism among plantation workers has spread very rapidly. Although we do not have statistics relating to the extent of membership in unions, the growth in the number of unions may be considered as an index of unionisation of workers.

A note-worthy feature regarding trade unionism among plantation workers, as the case of trade unionism in other sectors, is the existence of multiple unions affiliated to the major national federations of trade unions. Thus, nearly all unions of

plantation workers are affiliated to the INTUC, AITUC, CITU, UTUC and HMS. Further, it is generally recognised that these federations namely, the Indian National Trade Union Congress(INTUC), the All Indian Trade Union Congress(AITUC), the United Trade Union Congress(UTUC), Hind Mazdoor Sabha(HMS) and the Centre of Indian Trade Union(CITU) have close links with the Congress, the Communist Party of India(CPI), the Revolutionary Socialist Party(RSP), the Socialist Party and the Communist Party(CPM). The policy pursued by the political party reflects on the policy pursued by the unions that are close to them.⁴⁴

The earliest labour organisers who went to the plantations were leaders of INTUC and AITUC unions. Mrs. Rosamma Punnoose, belonging to the AITUC(CPI) and Mr. B.K. Nair belonging to the INTUC(Congress) were the two important pioneers who took trade unionism to plantation workers in the high ranges.

Unionization of workers by the AITUC-led organisations did not make much head-way until late fifties. This was partly due to the stringent measures taken by the planters to ward off the intrusion of Communist led unions into the estates which, they feared, would play havoc on the estates.⁴⁵ Besides, unlike the INTUC, the AITUC-led unions did not enjoy the patronage of the ruling Congress party. The Communist party was not yet solidly established by that time in Kerala.⁴⁶

Further, the Communist-led unions lacked efficient hands to mobilise the Tamil speaking labourers who constituted the bulk of the labour force on the estates. The Tamil workers constituted nearly 60% of the labour force on the estates in this region. All they succeeded

In doing so was to organise the local workers who constituted only a small minority of the labour force on the estate. In fact, the Communists were so weak in the high ranges that they did not field a candidate for Devicolam constituency during the 1957 elections. It was at the time of the bye-election in 1958 in Devicolam constituency that major organisational efforts were made by the Communists and the AITUC. It is reported that on the eve of the bye-election, communists from Tamil Nadu were brought to Devicolam for electioneering purposes.

It was the INTUC leaders who succeeded in organising the bulk of the labour-force. On the one hand, the INTUC-led unions, professing an ideology of class-peace and compromise between the conflicting interests of the planter and working classes, were favoured by the planters and plantation managements. INTUC-led unions also enjoyed the patronage and support of the ruling congress party. Further INTUC leaders sought to win over the allegiance and confidence of the Kanganies who were both work-leaders and social leaders of the labourers in their gangs. It was through the instrumentality of these intermediaries that the INTUC leaders organised the workers into unions. This is evidenced from the existence of a number of grass-root-level Tamil leaders in the INTUC-unions on the estates. An invariable consequence of such organisational strategy was the transformation of Kanganey gangs - which were both work-groups and social groups at the same time - into political groups, the organisational base of which continued to be the traditional ties and loyalties of the workers in the area. Thus political organisation of plantation workers was achieved by combining trade unionism with the regional and communal loyalties of the workers.

The communal and regional sentiments of the workers appear to have been activated and effectively exploited by political parties. For example, in Devicolum, Communalism of a special type was roused by election campaigners, with the slogan of Tamils against non-Tamils. While campaigning for the Devicolum bye-election in 1958, P.T. Chacko, the then leader of the Congress opposition in the state assembly, is reported to have told a meeting at Elapara in Peermade that if communists are given the vote, the Tamil workers would be sent away and communist workers would be brought from Alleppy and Shertalai.⁴⁷

The existence of multiple unions whose membership consists largely of workers who are moreover divided on communal or regional lines, may further stimulate and activate the Primordial solidarities. In such situations processes such as 'political factions' or 'party-factions'⁴⁸ may be transformed into communal conflicts and these processes in turn may hamper the process of crystallisation of class-solidarity among the workers. An analysis of some of the characteristic features of an industry-wide strike initiated and launched by plantation workers in the high ranges reveals some of these problems.⁴⁹

The strike was started jointly by the INTUC and AITUC-led unions in Munnar plantations on October 4, 1958. The INTUC-led unions had under their leadership the "majority" of the labour force consisting largely of immigrant Tamil workers. The AITUC led unions, on the other hand consisted largely of local workers who formed only a "minority".

The striking workers' demands included higher bonus for the year 1957, holidays with pay, provident fund and gratuity. The INTUC called off the strike the next day following an agreement with the management to refer some of the disputes to adjudication. The communist-led AITUC-union, however, was opposed to such an agreement and continued the strike. As the management was resolute in its decisions not to concede to the demands of the AITUC-led unions, the strike spread throughout the Munnar estates and to other regions such as Peermade, Vandiperiyar, Mundakayam etc.

In the course of the strike the management took several measures to induce many of the INTUC-led workers who were mainly immigrant Tamils, to report for work on the estate while the AITUC-led workers struck work. These included monetary rewards and other incentives. The management also threatened the Tamils with expulsion from the estate if they failed to comply with its wishes.

Under the pressure of such inducements and intimidations a number of Tamils reported for work. It was a calculated move on the side of the management which led to inter-group fights between the "striking" and "loyal" workers. The management, and those representing its interests and the Press took up this aspect of the strike and characterised it as a struggle between a majority group of "loyal" and a minority of striking workers implying thereby that it was a conflict between two groups of workers belonging to two different regions.

It is to be remembered that this first industry-wide strike of plantation workers was launched when the first communist government was in power (1957-1959). The Communist administration of the State had some special features. In attempting to introduce profound political, economic and

social changes, its emphasis on radical legislative enactments by the legislature, launching of mass movements and the 'neutralization of the police'. The neutralization of the police meant that during direct actions, mounted by mass organisations, the police would not only refrain from giving assistance to the assailants but also deny protection to those attacked. The contested issues would be decided in an intense struggle of the owning and non-owning class in which the state apparatus would not be directly involved. Only in extreme cases of violence and disorder would the police step in.⁵⁰

It is against this background that one should look at the industry-wide strike by plantation workers in the High Ranges of Kerala. When the intensity and spread of the strike reached alarming proportions, and when the possibilities of an easy settlement appeared too dim to the planters, they and the opposition parties began raising the boggy of "law and order position in danger in Kerala". Mr. K.A. Damodara Menon, then K.P.C.C. President who went to Munnar to study the situation there told that there was a state of tension in the Munnar estate areas as a result of the tactics adopted by the communist-led labour unions. He said the workers of the INTUC-led unions who formed the majority of plantation labourers were willing to go back to work, but owing to the violent tactics of the communist party who were intimidating and assaulting the workmen, they refused to go to work. Mr Damodara Menon expressed the view that Kerala Government "were neglecting their duty in preserving the law and order in the estates and in effecting a speedy settlement of the strike through the Management had conceded some of the demands of the workers and had agreed to refer the other issues for adjudication".⁵¹

A statement issued by the United Planters' Association of South India on the wide-spread unrest in the High-Range plantations says: "...stabbing incidents by violent mobs led by outside elements was reported from several estates ... Terror tactics have created panic in the mind of workers and the High Range estates are being abandoned. Organised and calculated violence is being resorted to by the communist unions in Kannan Devan District, Central Travancore and Mundakayam valley. The police force, under the trying situation is as much an object of attack as management personnel and workers of the other unions and their leaders..."⁵²

The PSP leader Mr. Pattom Thanu Pillai said in a statement: "We see in the High Ranges the anomalous situation of the strike by the communist labour and the violence and other forms of indefensible activities connected with the strike on the one hand and the police firing on the strikers on the other. Judged in the light of experience of the communist Government all this can well be presumed to be with the approval of the ministers concerned".⁵³

Mr. EMS Namboodipad, the then Chief Minister, assured that the Government would take every step to guarantee the safety of persons but he said that if the planters and big landlords thought that "the workers could be treated as dumb cattle" they were mistaken. He said that the Government in Kerala wanted to put an end to the practice that was followed during the British rule and also to ^{Some} extent by the congress in power, of using the police in favour of the land-lord and against the workers and peasants. The Government wanted the disputes between the employer and worker to be settled by negotiation.⁵⁴

IV. The Post-Sixty Scene on Plantations : Communal Politics or Class-based Politics?

The post-sixty scene on plantation in Kerala manifests certain contradictory trends. As the National Commission on Labour have observed there has been a growing tendency for many unions to stage a united confrontation with the planter-class or plantation managements.⁵⁵ Besides plantation workers in Kerala appear to have become increasingly linked to the agricultural and industrial workers in the state. This is evidenced in the frequent occurrence of agitations launched jointly by agricultural, industrial and plantation workers. Growing incidence of "token" or "sympathetic" strikes among plantation workers⁵⁶ may be considered as an indicator to the growing awareness among the workers of their class-position and class-interests.

Within the occupational structure of the estates there has been some significant changes. Most important among these has been the legal abolition of the Kangay system of labour recruitment and employment. How far this has affected the hitherto powerful position of the Kangany is difficult to assess here. Nonetheless, it could be presumed that the legal termination of the Kangany as labour supervisor and labour-recruiter and the introduction of new systems of labour recruitment and employment on the estates are likely to have significant impact on the traditional groupings among the labour-force.

On the organisational and political side, it appears that militant and radical tendencies among plantation workers are on ascendance. From the list of trade unions operating on the plantations, obtained from the office of the Inspectors of plantations, nearly 35.3% of the total number of unions belongs to the CPI and CPM-led organisations (namely AITUC and CITU).⁵⁷

Similarly, from an analysis of the election returns from the constituencies in the major plantation areas such as Devicolam, Peermade, Udumbanchola etc. we find that there has been a consistent tendency in these constituencies for a communist candidate (CPI or CPM) to win the elections. As early as 1958, in a bye-election held in the Devicolam constituency, Mrs. Rosamma Punnose, a Communist Party candidate, was elected. Further, the mid-term election returns of 1965 show that from Devicolam, Udumbanchola and Peermade which are having the highest concentration of plantation workers in Kerala, communist candidates were returned to the state assembly. From Devicolam and Peermade CPM candidates were returned and in Udumbanchola a CPI candidate was elected. In the general elections of 1967, communist candidates were once again returned from the Udumbanchola (CPI) and Peermade (CPM) ⁵⁸ constituencies to the state assembly.

Do these radical tendencies among plantation workers, such as the growing affiliation to radical labour unions, the consistent support to radical parties, the increasing tendency among the labour force to stage united struggles and the growing linkage and identification of the plantation workers with the agricultural and industrial workers imply any changes in the social bases of politics on plantation estates in Kerala? Do these indicate that the political processes among plantation workers have become class-based? Have the workers come to identify themselves as a class-vis-a-vis their employers? Has there been the crystallization of a horizontal solidarity among the work force based on their class-position and class-interests? Finally, do these suggest that the primordial ties and loyalties that differentiated the labour-force into distinct and separate groups have eroded?

Some trends in the socio-political processes on plantations in Kerala suggest that the primordial loyalties and the traditional solidarities among the labour force are preserved and strengthened rather than dissolved. The voting pattern and election returns are not adequate ~~to~~ indices of the class-consciousness or class-solidarity among the workers.

The National Commission on Labour have observed that with abolition of the Kangany system of recruitment and employment, there has been growing tendency for planters to employ more and more casual labour and to reduce the permanent complement of the labour force. This casualization of labour ~~is~~ has been facilitated by the ready availability of local labourers in large numbers. In fact, it is reported that in recent times, there has been a growing demand from the local land-less agricultural labourers for work on plantations.

According to the Report of the Techno-Economic Survey of Kerala, between 1951 and 1957 the pressure of population on land has increased in an unprecedented manner. The average size of holdings in Kerala has dwindled down to 1.5 acres and over 60% of the land holdings in Travancore-Cochin area are less than one acre in size. Further, there has been an increase in the proportion of agricultural labourers to the total agricultural population. During 1956-57 the proportion was around 39%. Besides, the extent of

under-employment among the landless agricultural labourers has grown very high. The number of days of employment per agricultural labourer in Kerala was only 170 in 1956-57. Moreover, there has been steady deterioration in the position of the agricultural labourers as shown by the decline in the average annual income of agricultural labour households between 1951 and 1957. The average annual income of an agricultural labour household in Kerala declined from Rs. 486 in 1951 to Rs. 437 in 1956.⁵⁹ These factors appear to have contributed to the growth in demand for alternative avenues of employment and for additional sources of income. This, in turn, may be considered as one of the chief factors for the growing demand from local labourers for work on plantations.

The trend towards increasing casualisation of labour and the growing pressure from local agricultural labourers for employment on plantations appear to have intensified the tension between the immigrant Tamils and the local labourers.

Secondly, it may be incorrect to infer the emergence and development of a class-based politics on plantations in Kerala solely on the basis of the election returns which may not at all represent the party affiliations of the workers. It is important here to note that the high ranges in Kerala is also one of the regions having a large number of small peasants who have migrated from the plains and colonized the forest land and have settled there for generations. In fact, the proportion of plantation workers to the total population in this region is highly insignificant. Taking the 1971 census figures for the important plantation taluks in this region, such as Devicolar, Udumbanchola, Permadu etc. we find that plantation

workers in these Taluks constitute only a small portion of the total population. Thus Devicolam had a total population of 1,34,350 in 1971, Udumbanchola 2,64,913 and Peermadu 1,46,841.⁶⁰ On the other hand, the total number of plantations workers in all the three major plantations in the whole of Kerala was only 1,15,890 in 1970. The number is much lower for the district of Kottayam. Taking tea plantation labour-force in the district of Kottayam, the number was only 31,886 in 1969. It would be much less in the Taluks of Devicolam, Udumbanchola, Peermadu etc. This suggests that election results are highly insufficient to assess the political affiliation of the plantation workers.

On the other hand, an analysis of the election returns of the mid-term elections of 1965 from Devicolam, Udumbanchola and Peermadu indicates that candidates fielded or supported by the DMK(Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam) party secured a total number of 10,996 votes from these constituencies.⁶¹ Since the DMK party is one which originated in Tamil Nadu, and have consistently emphasised the distinctiveness of Tamil culture and makes exclusive appeals to the regional and parochial sentiments of the Tamils it may justifiably be assumed that the number of votes it secured represent the votes given by the Tamil workers on plantations in these regions. This again point to the fact that political preferences of Tamil workers have continued to be based on regional or communal loyalties.

Similarly, the lists of trade unions supplied by the inspectors of plantations in Kerala reveal that there is a growth in the number of labour organisations such as the "Dravida Plantation Labour Union" affiliated to the DMK party and its splinter group namely, ADMK(Anna Dravida Munnetta Kazhagam).

These observations seem to suggest that workers on plantations in Kerala continue to be differentiated into distinct groups based on communal or regional loyalties. The political processes on plantations reveal that the workers have not yet succeeded in forging a horizontal solidarity based on their class-position and class-interests.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. The English East India Company annexed Malabar in 1792 and it was made a part of the Bombay Presidency. Even before the annexation of Malabar, the Company had entered into treaties with Travancore in 1788 and with Cochin in 1791. At first Travancore was required to pay Rs.78,000 per annum, but it was later raised by a treaty in 1805 to Rs.800,000/- per annum. By the latter treaty, the Governor-General was also given powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Travancore. Cochin, with an area less than one-fifth of that of Travancore was required initially to pay Rs.100,000 per annum which was later raised in 1809 to 270,000 (which was one half of the estimated State revenue at that time), but many import and export duties were abolished simultaneously to throw open the Cochin harbour to British commerce. Thus, although these States were not brought under the direct rule of the British, they were in reality made subsidiary allies of the British.
2. Ramachandran Nair, K., Industrial Relations in Kerala, 1973, pp. 21-22.
3. The following discussion on the agrarian conditions in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar is largely based on Varghese T.C., Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences : Land Tenures in Kerala 1850-1960; 1970.
4. Velu Pillai, T.K.; Travancore State Manual, Vol III 1940, p. 38
5. Parameswaran Pillai, P., op. cit. para 65-70
6. Chitties and Kuries were indigenous credit institutions organised by a fixed number of members under the leadership of a promoter. The members had to remit a fixed amount periodically as their subscription. These chitties were of two types: the auction chitties and the lot chitties. In the auction chitties, the subscriber who was to be provided with the prize money (or the credit) was decided by auction, and the lowest bidder who thereby gave the highest discount on his subscription was selected. In the lot chitties, the subscriber who was to get the prize was chosen by lot.

The arrangement was such that all members would get a chance to bid or to obtain the lot. The promoter was also entitled to a handsome remuneration.

See Varghese, T.C.; op. cit., p. 111-112

7. By 1922-23 there were 38 joint-stock bank in Travancore. Their number appears to have grown phenomenally by 1932-33. The number of joint-stock banks was 784 in 1932-33.

See Varghese, T.C.; op. cit.; p. 112-115.

8. For 'Kayal' cultivation extensive areas in the back-waters had to be reclaimed by constructing enclosing bunds around the cultivation blocks. It was followed by draining of the enclosed area, levelling the ground, and construction of drainage and irrigation channels and also small bunds inside the block.
9. Varghese, T.C.; op. cit., p. 107-111.
10. Innes, C.A.; op. cit., p. 228
11. Ibid, p. 229
12. Varghese, T.C.; op. cit., p. 121
13. Techno-Economic Survey of Kerala, National Council of Applied Economic Research, 1962, p. 10.
14. Ibid, pp. 16; 44
15. Until recently Tea plantations were the biggest employer of labour in the State. In recent times however, the foremost position in terms of employment of labour is taken over by rubber plantations.
16. With the formation of the new district Iddiki in the High Range area in the district of Kottayam in 1972, the major plantation Taluks like Devicolam, Udumbanchola, Peermade, etc., are incorporated into the new district. With this, the district of Iddiki has become the most important plantation district in Kerala.

17. "White Planters" loot in Kerala", Link, 14-15, No. 12, 1972, pp. 22-23.
18. Administrative Report of Labour Department, 1950, Government of Travancore-Cochin, p. 12,
19. Innes, C.A., op. cit., p. 229
20. Geographically and topographically the State of Kerala is divided into three natural subdivisions; the highland, midland and the lowland. Western ghats which range along the eastern border of the state form the highland, The highland is thickly forested in its upper ranges, while in the lower ranges the forest are interspersed with plantations. On the western fringe of the State are the lowlands which stretch along the coastal lines. Sandwiched between the lowland and the highland is the midland. This middle region is rich in agricultural produce.

See, Techno-Economic Survey of Kerala, pp. 1-2.
21. Davis, R.K., op. cit., p. 115
22. Krishnan Namboodiri, N.K., "The Changing Population of Kerala", Census of India, 1961, monograph series, No. 7, pp. 64-66
23. The range of wages for a full working day of 8 to 10 hours was from 3 to 6 annas for men, 2 to 4 annas for women and 1½ to 2 annas for boys.
24. See, Thomas, P.J. and Ramakrishnan, K.C. (eds), op. cit., pp. 333-435
25. Buchanan, F.; "A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar, 1807, Vol. 2, p. 369
26. In Travancore the per centage of occupied area to the total available land for occupation increased from 73.7 in 1911 to 98.1 in 1951. Similarly in Cochin, as early as 1911 the percentage of the assigned area to the total available for occupation was 96.8

See Varghese, T.C., op. cit., pp. 122-125

27. In Travancore the proportion of agricultural labourers to the total population increased from 6.7% in 1911 to 19.8% in 1951 and from 18.2% in 1911 to 21.9% in 1951 in Cochin.
See, Varghese, T.C.; op. cit., pp. 126-131.
28. In 1931, the average annual income of an estate coolie in Travancore is estimated to have been Rs. 119, which works out to a daily wage of 5 annas(30 paise) while a skilled worker at Alleppy used to earn from Rs.0.75 to Rs.1.25 and an unskilled worker's wage was half a rupee or 50 paise.
Velu Pillai, T.K., Travancore State Manual, Vol. III, 1940, p. 58
29. ILO, 1960, op. cit., p. 9
30. Report of the Labour Investigation Committee, p. 122.
31. Ibid, pp. 122-123
32. Census of India, 1961, Vol. I, part VII-A, p. 8
33. There were seven plantation estates in the village accounting for about 4262 workers.
34. Census of India, 1961, Vol. VII, Kerala, Part VI-E, Village Survey Monographs : Quilon district, by M.K. Devassy, pp. 11-13.
35. Ibid, p. 13
36. Ramachandran Nair, K., op. cit., p. 162
37. Chaitanya Krishna, Kerala, 1972, pp. 23-24
38. With the split in the Kerala State Congress in 1964 and the formation of a splinter group known as the "Kerala Congress" planters have shifted their allegiance to that party. Today, the Kerala Congress represent largely the interests of the planters and big landlords. In fact many of the leaders of the party are themselves owners of plantation estates and hold vast interests in land.

39. See Gough, K.; "Political party conflict in Kerala Village" in Pradhan M.C., et. al. (eds), Anthropology and Archaeology-1969, pp. 127-141.
- See also Lieten, G.K., "Communism and Communalism in Kerala", Economic and Political Weekly, No. 3, Vol. X, June 18, 1975; pp. 71-74
40. The only union registered, as early as 1939, was the Travancore High Range Estate Labour Union, Mundakayam.
- Indian Labour Year Book, 1950-51; p. 436
41. Ramachandran Nair, K.; op. cit., p. 98
42. Kerala Gazette, No. 2, 13.1.1959
43. Administrative Report of Labour Department, Travancore-Cochin, 1950, 51; p. 13
44. For comprehensive analysis of the political involvement of trade unions in India, see Raman P.N., Political Involvement of India's Trade Unions, 1967
- See also Myres Charles A, and Kannappan, S. (eds) op. cit., pp. 133-164.
45. This was partly because of the ideology and tactic of the AITUC and the Communists. For a detailed discussion in the ideology and tactic of the AITUC see Myres Charles and Kannappan, op. cit. pp. 153-154
46. After independence, the Congress in Kerala enjoyed undisputed support and held the leadership until mid-fifties. For a comprehensive history of the political development in Kerala, see Fic, Victor, M.; Kerala Yenan of India : Rise of Communist Power, 1937-1969, 1970.
- Although political scientists trace the origin and development of the Communist movement in Kerala back to the 1930s, the Communists did

not emerge as a powerful party until 1952. There was not a single communist member in the Legislative Assembly in the State of Travancore (1948-49) and Travancore-Cochin (1949-56) from 1948 to 1951.

For a detailed discussion on the history of the development of Communist movement in Kerala, see Fic, Victor, M.; op. cit. For a critical evaluation of radical party performance in Kerala see Brass Paul, R.; "Political Parties of the Radical Left in South Asian Politics", in Brass Paul R. and Franda Marcuss, F (eds), Radical Politics in South Asia, 1973,

47. Malaviya, H.D.; Kerala : A Report to the Nation, 1958, p. 108
48. This term has been used by Gough to refer to the growing tendency for different political parties in Kerala to go counter to their avowed ideological principles and programme of action in order to gain the support of more members.

See Gough, Kathleen, op. cit., pp. 127-141.

See also, Gough Kathleen, "Village Politics in Kerala", Economic Weekly; Feb. 20 and 27, 1965.
49. This summary account of the industry-wide strike which began in October, 1958 and lasted for more than a month is based on reports in the October and November issues of the Hindu.
50. Fic, Victor, M.; op. cit.; p. 94
51. The Hindu, Oct. 15, 1958; "Labour Strike in Estates".
52. The Hindu, Oct. 23, 1958
53. The Hindu, Oct. 25, 1958
54. The Hindu, Sept. 14, 1958
55. National Commission on Labour (1928), p. 268

56. Of the 59 total strikes on plantations in Kerala in 1961, nearly 29 were "token" strikes to show the sympathy of the workers towards the state-wide Kisan agitation. Administrative Report of the Statistic Department, 1961-62, Government of Kerala, 1963, p. 37
57. The list of trade unions on plantations in Kerala was obtained from the Offices of the Inspectors of Plantations through personal correspondence.
58. See, Fic, Victor, M.; op. cit., Tables XXII and XXXII, pp. 510; 529.
59. Techno-Economic Survey of Kerala, p. 11
60. Census of India, 1971, Series 9, Kerala, Part II-C(i), Social and Cultural Tables.
61. Fic Victor, M.; op. cit.; Table XXII, p. 570

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The following points may be considered as crucial for a sociological understanding of the process and problems of class-formation among plantation workers in South India:

1. The "dual economy model" which comprises a theory of underdevelopment premised on the existence within a given national economy of two more or less autonomous sectors - a modern sector and a backward or traditional sector - fails to take an adequate account of a symbiotic link between the two sectors through which the 'progressive' nature of the one partly derives from the extraction of chief factors of production from the other, thereby maintaining its 'backwardness'. The pre-capitalist or "non-capitalist" rural-sector does not exist independently of the capitalist sector, rather is linked to the capitalist sector primarily as a supplier of raw-materials and of cheap labour power. It is these interlinkages between the rural and capitalist sectors that provide the characteristic basis of surplus-extraction in a colonial situation.

The large-scale employment of seasonal migrant Tamil labourers on plantations in Kerala indicates a specific mode of articulation of

the pre-capitalist rural sector with the capitalist-plantation sector, and its integration into the capitalist system - local and global. Such a form of labour-use represents a mode of exploitation of labour which becomes a cheap source of production in the capitalist enterprises, such as the plantation. A major source of surplus in such a form of labour-use is that the costs of reproduction of labour-power are met not by the capitalist plantation sector but by the pre-capitalist rural sector.

An analysis of the socio-economic background of the workers reveals that they were drawn largely from the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed landless agricultural proletariat as well as small-landholders. The migrant workers were often compelled to undertake wage-earning activities under the pressure of economic necessity and to meet their subsistence needs in periods of unemployment in the rural sector. However, since workers were employed and dispatched according to the changing seasonal needs of the productive system of the plantation and since the plantation system did not provide them stability of employment and other social and economic securities, they were forced to return to the village periodically. Consequently, the preservation of the relations of the wage-earners with the village and familial community has been continued.

A characteristic feature of such a form of labour-use is that it enables capitalist enterprises to operate without replacing precapitalist by capitalist relations of production and also without transforming the traditional structure of social relations. It appears that the argument of the "commitment-theorists" who have sought to explain the persistent movement of workers between the rural and industrial sectors, the absence of a "committed" labour force and the high rate of absenteeism in Indian industries, in terms of the powerful hold of traditional values and institutions over the psychology of the workforce, betray an inadequate understanding of the manner of operation of capitalist enterprises and the characteristic linkages between the capitalist and pre-capitalist sectors in a colonial situation.

The "institutional" approach which considers the plantation system as a major socio-historical determinant of contemporary socio-economic and political structures in plantation societies, fails to provide a framework for analysing the process and problems stemming from specific inter-linkages between the capitalist plantation sector and the pre-capitalist rural sector in a setting determined by the forces of colonialism.

On the other hand, a dichotomous demarcation of plantations into "old" and "new" or modern types fails to take account of the fact that the plantation system employs varieties and combinations

of relations of production which determine the social content of particular formations. These varieties and combinations of relations of production point to the types of articulation of different pre-capitalist modes of production with local and global capitalist economy and the type of transition that might result.

A characteristic feature of plantations in Kerala has been the employment of migrant labourers. Such a form of labour-use does not necessarily lead to the transition of the work-force into a plantation proletarian class, but merely the alternation of the labour-force between two sectors namely, the capitalist plantation sector and the pre-capitalist rural sector. Consequently, the plantation system has been able to operate without transforming the traditional structure of social relations into class-relations. Further, the process of gradual settlement of a significant section of the labour force on the estates has culminated in the emergence of a "core" of "settled" labourers side by side with a "peripheral" group of "casual" and "seasonal migrant" labourers. Such varieties and combinations of relations of production make the process of class-formation among plantation workers extremely complicated. Therefore, the study of the process of class-formation among plantation workers in Kerala needs a framework broader than that provided by a neat dichotomous demarcation of "old" and "new" style plantation types.

2. The Kangany system of recruitment and employment of labour appears to have had certain significant effects on the "structuring" of the labour-force on plantation estates. A characteristic effect of the system was the structuring of the labour-force on the basis of their communal and/or regional loyalties. A significant social consequence of such a process was the preservation and maintenance of the primordial solidarities of the workers. A characteristic effect of this was the crystallisation of two primordial groups namely, Tamils and local workers. The preservation and maintenance of the traditional solidarities of the workers appears to have inhibited the process of crystallization of a horizontal solidarity based on their class-position and class interests. A study of the primordial loyalties of the workers such as those of caste or kinship divorced from the class-structure of the plantation may not reveal the manner in which these loyalties are manipulated by the vested interest groups precisely to forestall the very conditions for the emergence of a consolidated labour-force on the estates.
3. The manner of politicisation of the work-force also appears to be an important factor impinging on the process of class-formation among them. On the one hand, the history of the development of trade unionism and political organisation among the plantation workers reveals that the development of even the most elementary form of political

consciousness among them was not the result of indigenous processes but rather was facilitated by external forces. In fact trade unionism had been brought to them from outside. This implies that the process of emergence of class-consciousness and class-solidarity among a predominantly rural work-force cannot be considered as merely a mechanistic result of certain technological and organisational innovations within the productive system of the plantation as Mintz seems to suggest but rather these processes are inextricably linked to and determined by socio-political processes deriving from wider class-structure.

The mobilizational and organisational activities among plantation workers seem to have been channelled through the existing traditional basis of organisation. Trade unions and political parties have emphasised the communal and regional loyalties of the workers. In attempting at a transformation of the 'primordial collectivism' among the labour-force into "instrumental collectivism" there appears to have had very little concern on the part of labour organisers to "demobilize" and to "re-locate" the commitments of the workers to primordial loyalties and to articulate their demands in terms of their class-interests. Political leaders have found it to their advantage to stimulate the primordial loyalties of the work-force, particularly on the eve of electioneering.

The growing popularity of political parties such as the DMK and ADMK and the emergence of trade unions affiliated to these parties among plantation workers has given a fillip to the process of communal politics and plantations in Kerala.

The ideology and programme of action professed by various unions and political parties also determine the process of crystallization of class-solidarity and the articulation of class-interests of the workers. The INTUC unions and the congress party pursuing a moderate policy of status-quo maintenance and gradual reform have always emphasised class-peace and compromise between the conflicting interests of mutually opposed classes. This has prevented them from mobilizing and articulating the interests of the workers on the basis of their class-position.

Radical and militant trade union activities in the form of labour protests and strikes manifested themselves only towards the end of the fifties, particularly during the period of communist rule in the State. It may be noted here that the communist Government pursued a pro-labour policy regarding industrial disputes between workers and owners through the 'neutralization of police' etc. This points to the role of the state in creating conditions for the development of class-relations. However, even during this period, the existence of multiple trade unions affiliated to different

political parties professing different ideologies and programmes of action appear to have given rise to "political factions" as evident in inter-union rivalries and conflicts.

These observations based as they are on the limited secondary data available to us, remain tentative and are to be corroborated by empirical study. Our effort in this essay has primarily been to gain a conspectus of the plantation scene. Therefore, the discussion has been of exploratory nature. It could at ~~least~~ be considered as a prologue to an intensive field study of plantation workers which I plan to undertake for my doctoral research.

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