

SOCIO-ECONOMIC TRENDS IN HISTORY

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EMIGRATION TO MAURITIUS: A STUDY ON MADRAS PRESIDENCY 1833-1893

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British Colonialism had its negative impact on agrarian conditions and the handloom sector. The weavers who were hitherto leading an independent existence were reduced to the status of mere wage earners. Similarly the small and marginal land-holders, in the context of ruinous land tax, had lost their land to money lenders and become landless labourers. There was a huge surplus labour thus available in India by the end of the first quarter of nineteenth century. In 1833 slavery had been abolished and a new indentured system was in place in Empire countries. The emancipated blacks in the context of Mauritius refused to opt for the new system and hence the White planters there had to look for labour elsewhere.

The weaving and agricultural population constituting the cheap labour force of India drew the attention of the sugar planters of Mauritius,¹ who urged the British Government to send coolies from India under the indentured labour system. Madras Presidency's contribution to the supply of coolie labour to Mauritius in the subsequent decades was substantial. The objective of this paper is to study the emigration of labour from Madras Presidency to Mauritius in the 19th century.