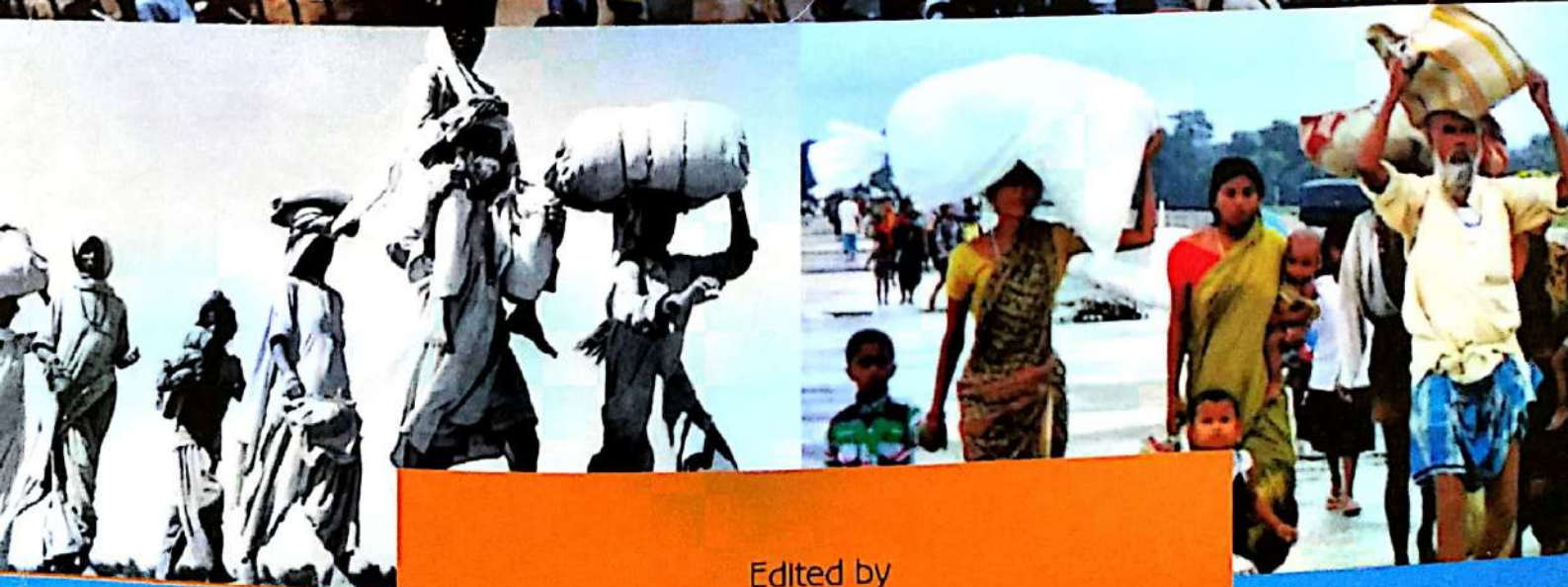


VERGAL PUBLICATION PRESENTS

MIGRATION IN INDIA: ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES



Edited by
Dr. C. MUNIYANDI

COLONIAL MANIPULATION AND INTRODUCTION OF TAMIL COOLIES IN DIASPORA, 1830-1920

Dr. J. Shunmugaraja

Assistant Professor in Modern History, School of Historical Studies, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai

Abstract

The campaign against slavery and its eventual abolition in Europe coincided with the ruin of Indian peasantry and the artisanal class, particularly weavers. The overwhelmingly redundant wage labour available in India by the first quarter of 19th century prompted the European planters to consider India, a favourable recruiting ground for their required plantation labour. Emigration of Indian labourers into Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) started first. In the initial phase, emigration of Tamil labourers into Sri Lanka was temporary in nature. However, the impoverished conditions of Tamil peasantry forced them to seek permanent employment in the plantations of Ceylon. The waves of emigration became stronger by the beginning of the third quarter of 19th century. The objective of the paper is to trace the history of Tamil indentured laborers' migration into various crown colonies of British.

Introduction

The campaign against slavery and its eventual abolition in Europe coincided with the ruin of Indian peasantry and the artisanal class, particularly weavers. The overwhelmingly redundant wage labour available in India by the first quarter of 19th century prompted the European planters to consider India, a favourable recruiting ground for their required plantation labour. Emigration of Indian labourers into Ceylon (later Sri Lanka) started first. In the initial phase, emigration of Tamil labourers into Sri Lanka was temporary in nature. However, the impoverished conditions of Tamil peasantry forced them to seek permanent employment in the plantations of Ceylon. The waves of emigration became stronger by the beginning of the third quarter of 19th century.

Assam started employing labourers under indentured system from 1850s. Till 1863 the colonial government did not interfere in the activities of the white planters and their labour practice. But unfair labour policy pursued led to the interference of the government and passing of the Internal Emigration Act III (B.C) of 1863. The emigration of Indians into Fiji commenced in 1879. The British colonizers had established sugarcane plantations in the island. For the non-availability of the local labourers for doing the manual labour in the plantations they approached the British Indian government for availing cheap labour force. The Colonial Government of India accepted their demand and through the Act XXI of 1883 included the Fiji legally into other countries for the Indian labourer's emigration.

Initially those who were recruited under indentured labour system hoped to have a dignified existence in the foreign country. But their hopes were belied when they landed ashore in the foreign country. The white planters for keeping eternally the poor Indian indentured labour force within their plantations enacted a series of repressive laws. Indentured recruitment system, however, underwent changes overtime with amendments to the original legislation. The amendments made in the first fifty years were due to the lobby of the white planters, the changes effected in the next fifty years were because of the mounting pressure from the Indian nationalists like Gokhale and Gandhi.

Initiation of Indentured Labour Emigration: Tamils In Empire Colonies

The primordial caste system of India, which had built on conventional vocation of the populace, left the downtrodden masses to lurch economically and in public infinitely by relying on the Caste Hindus because who actually controlled the land. These proletarian classes economized on a livelihood by means of farming, however, which had no right in the land. So, the condition of the lodgers was aggravated in consequence of the tyranny of the land lords or because of the heavy rent demanded by the state.

When the British land revenue system insisted cash payment of rent from the cultivators, just then their condition became wretched. The decline of manufacturing firms in India subsequent to import of British products flustered the complete basis of her village affluence. Consequently hundreds of weavers, spinners and other artisans were thrown out of their profession. The probabilities for peasant families to adjunct their skimpy earnings from land by spinning or akin to