

BRITISH CAPITAL, CEYLONESE LAND, INDIAN LABOUR: THE IMPERIALISM AND COLONIALISM OF EVOLUTION OF TEA PLANTATIONS IN SRI LANKA

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This paper attempts to provide understanding about the cultural and socio-economic character of the Sri Lankan tea plantations system and its historical evolution to assess the impact of colonial hegemony within its broader socio-cultural and political context in Sri Lanka. The paper also explores historical roots and their interrelationships which shape the present day strategically important issues in the Sri Lankan tea plantations. The main focus of the paper is on how the specific socio-economic changes emerged and their consequences of these with an emphasis specifically labour relations. It emphasises that the Sri Lankan tea plantation developed historically within feudalistic and peasantry modes of production systems. The paper also deals with (1) the specific patterns of strategy-control relationships within capital in terms of agency relationships and (2) how different social strata emerged within Ceylonese social formation during the period of colonisation.

This discussion explores a series of interrelated issues: how land was acquired for plantations; the problem of an indigenous labour supply; how Indian Tamils became attached to the British Ceylonese plantations through what is known as an 'internal contract system'; how British mercantile capital dominated the productive capital in the British Ceylonese plantations and the articulation of non-plantation agricultural modes of production in plantation capitalism. Therefore, the paper provides an overview of how historical factors helped to shape present day socio-cultural and politico-economic structure of the Sri Lankan tea industry especially tea plantations.