PEASANTS IN A CHANGING ECONOMY

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ECOLOGICAL CHANGE AMONG THE SINHALESE PEASANTS FROM 1796 A.D. TO 1909 A.D.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction

An outline of the history of the Island from 1505 - the arrival of the Portuguese and the Dutch - their activities in the Maritime Provinces - effects they had on the political economy of the island - establishment of the British power in Sri Lanka in 1796 - defining a peasant economy - organization of the factors of production - how the land was organized to obtain desired goods - how the labour was organized - the relations of productions - the role of mediators - theoretical problems - why the production system changed under the British and not under other European powers - the relationship between the changes in the economy of the Imperial Metropolis and the changes in Sri Lanka - the importance of monopolies in merchant capitalist system - the change of merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism - consequent changes in the system of production in Sri Lanka.

CHAPTER I

Political Economy of the traditional Sinhalese - King, the lord of soil - people having a service obligation to the King - various tenancy arrangement among lords and tenants - the nindagamas (service lands) given to traditional chiefs - lands granted to temples - share cropping systems - the relationship between the landowner chief and the tenant peasant - the patron-client relationship - institutionalized checks on the abuse of the power of chiefs - the Sinhalese caste system - its relationship to the system of production - the relationship between the caste and landownership - the organization of cultivation - the share (pangua) system - the wet method of cultivation - the communal character of the cultivation - the importance of the Village Council - the dry method of

cultivation - the organization of labour - various family systems - the basic struggle of the peasants - the attempts to make the ends meet- agricultural credit and the functions of slavery - the self sufficiency of the peasants.

CHAPTER II

Structural Changes in the Traditional System

The Portuguese and the Dutch maintaining the traditional system of production - Colonial office instructing the British Governor not to make drastic changes in the traditional system - Traditional system clashing with the economic interests of the Imperial Metropolis - the abolition of the service tenure system - revoking restrictions limiting the Europeans owning land in the Island - the contribution of emerging industrial capitalism in bringing about these changes - the abuse of compulsory labour system - the introduction of a generalized grain tax - the effects of the abolition of service tenure - peasants losing their land to chiefs - spread of share-cropping system - development of wage labour and landlordism - land concentration - the effects of the abuse of compulsory labour - excessive exaction of peasant labour - paddy cultivation getting severely affected - communal cultivation replaced by individualism - growing inequality of wealth among the peasants - village irrigation system and Village Council suffering badly - secondary abuses of the system - chiefs abusing their powers over the peasants - effects of the grain tax on the peasants - severe exactions by tax farmers - peasants giving up the cultivation of rice for cash crops.

CHAPTER III

Forced into Cash Crop Cultivation

State Monopoly of the foreign trade among the Sinhalese - Dutch introducing plantations of cinnamon and other commercial crops - British attempting to improve cash-crop cultivation - privileges given to cash-crop cultivation - disabilities placed on rice cultivation - grain tax - peasants turning to cash crop cultivation - development of coffee plantations - heavy involvement of peasants in coffee culture - the peasant crop for a long time, coconut turning into a commercial crop - coconut plantations of the Sinhalese chiefs - many peasants following chiefs in cultivating coconuts - abolition of the State Monopoly of cinnamon - small cinnamon plantations - chena highland, cultivation changing from a supplementary source of food to a production for the market - diversification of peasant crops in the maritime provinces - changes in social relations - the patron/client relationship between the peasant and the chief replaced by landlord/tenant relationship - no sympathy between the two parties - traditional chiefs developing into a western educated elite - no mediators between the peasants and the central authority - the emergence of a new set of mediators - the village headmen - the money lender - shopkeeper in the village - neglected peasants dying out of starvation in many provinces - new system of British judiciary throwing peasant production into utter confusion - growing intemperance among the peasants - how it affected peasant production system.

CHAPTER IV

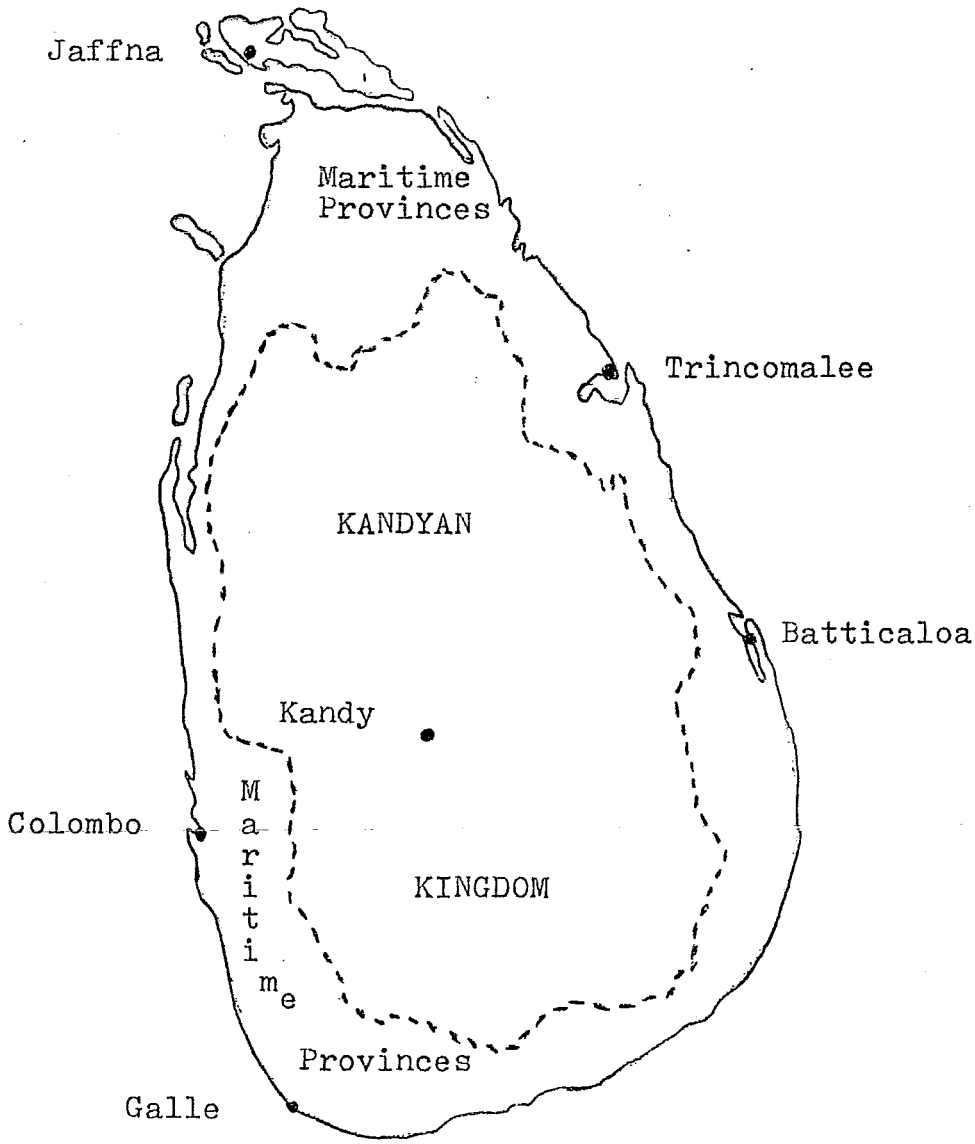
The Creation of a Landless Peasantry

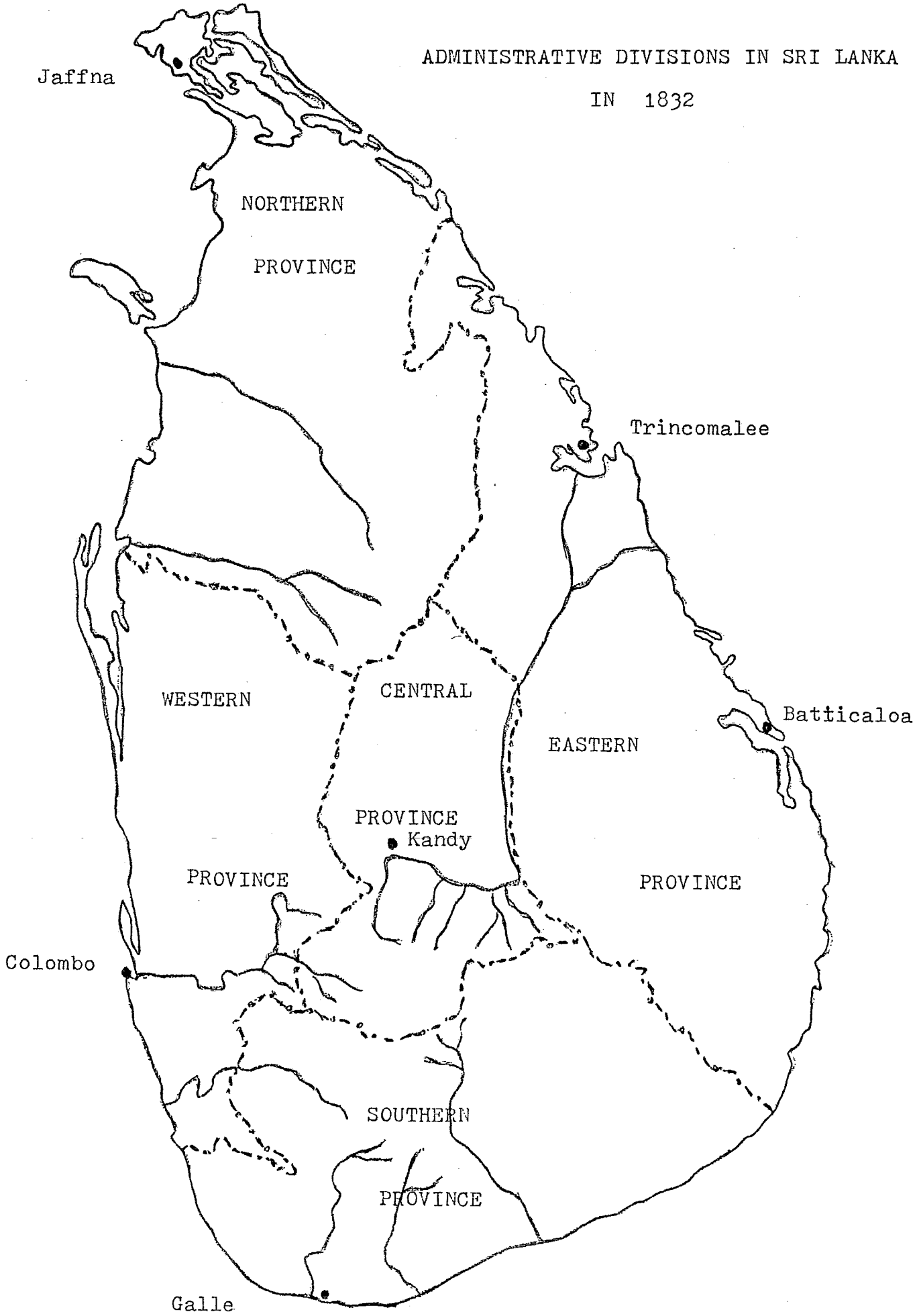
Land speculation for commercial plantations - peasants were

deprived of their traditional land holdings by the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance - peasants lost chena (highlands) to the commercial planters - further acquisition of peasant lands by Registration of the Temple Lands Ordinance and Waste Lands Ordinance - after losing high lands increasing peasants involvement in cash crop cultivations - speculators settling down among the peasants - structural changes in the production system due to the restriction of land available for cultivation - loss of irrigation works for paddy cultivation - deforestation of the interior - effects of deforestation - floods and droughts - loss of animal energy for cultivation - importing labour from South India for plantations - its effects on the peasantry - introduction of the money commutation of grain tax - peasants losing their paddy lands as a result - headmen and speculators grabbing peasant holdings - evictions of the peasants by the Government for non-payment of the tax - the development of a new power elite at the Village level - the emerging middle class - development of share -cropping and landlessness among the peasants - the Partition Ordinance and its effects on the peasants - the breakdown of the traditional village and the emergence of a new village - the functional relationship between the changes in Sri Lanka and the economic changes in the Imperial metropolis.

CONTENTS

MAP OF SRI LANKA IN 1796




ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS IN SRI LANKA
IN 1832
Jaffna
NORTHERN
PROVINCE
Trincomalee
WESTERN
CENTRAL
Batticaloa
EASTERN
PROVINCE
Kandy
PROVINCE
PROVINCE
Colombo
SOUTHERN
PROVINCE
Galle

Introduction

The present study is an attempt to examine the historical change of the peasant economy in Sri Lanka. The period of study is roughly the hundred years between 1796 and 1909. The changes that took place in the economy of Sri Lanka during this period determined the nature of the economy of the Island down to the present day. The current economy of Sri Lanka has two seperate branches; first, there is the estate plantations sector, based on wage labour, intensive application of capital and modern technology , and producing mainly for the foreign market. Secondly, there exists peasant agriculture which constitutes the occupation of nearly 80 per cent of the total adult population. We propose to examine only the changes that came over the peasant agriculture during the course of one hundred years of British rule.

In 1505 when the Portuguese found their way to the port of Colombo which was then busy with the cinnamon trade carried out by Muslims, they pioneered the European activities in the Island lasting well over four centuries. The Portuguese arrived in the Island at a time when the Sinhalese were politically and culturally decadent. The land was split into several petty kingdoms , and the

Portuguese interference in the internal politics brought about more confusion. War, massacre and religious persecution became the order of the day. At the end of a century of internal dissention there emerged a strong kingdom in the Kandyan hills with the dawn of the 17 th century. For the next two hundred years the Kandyan kingdom remained the protector of the Sinhalese independence and culture until it finally fell to the British in 1815. The downfall of the Kandyan kingdom was a result of a power struggle between the king and native chiefs on the one side and the personal ambitions of the British governor in Colombo. The conquest on Kandy was made by the governor inspite of the repeated instructions of the colonial office to the contrary.

The maritime provinces were left by the Sinhalese rulers to their own fate, once the Kandyan kingdom was established, and were ruled or plundered by the successive foreign powers, the Portuguese and the Dutch. Finally, in 1796, these fell into the hands of the British East India Company which was one of the biggest institutions representing the merchant capital of the time.

The Portuguese could exert very little authority in the Island except in a few coastal regions where they built fortresses which could resist the Sinhalese

onslaught by maintaining a constant supply of weapons and personnel from abroad. The Portuguese rule was little more than organized plunder, the military , the civilians and the clergy appropriating their share of the spoil depending upon their relative streangth.

The Dutch who came to assist the Sinhalese ruler in Kandy to redeem the country from the hated enemy- the Portuguese- established themselves securely in the maritime provinces once the war against the Portuguese was won. The Dutch East India Company which succeeded as the new masters of the maritime provinces in 1658, when the last Portuguese fortress in Colombo fell after a long siege by the combined forces of the Sinhalese and the Dutch, always kept commercial interests of the metropolis in the forefront. Their purpose was to collect as much cinnamon and other spices as possible from the Island while spending as little as possible on the administration of the colony. The easiest way to accomplish this was to maintain the traditional system of administration through native chiefs. Hence the Dutch left the local administration entirely in the hands of the native chiefs who for the most part remained loyal to them.

Long before 1796 the British had been trying to secure a foothold in the Island. Sri Lanka, particularly its natural harbour in Trincomalee, was of much strategic value to the British imperial activities in the sub-continent of India. The French who were also involved in military activities in India, were equally conscious about the strategic importance of the Island, particuarly as a base to control the Bay of Bengal during the North Eastern monsoon. Hence both the English and the French sent embassies to the court of Kandy to effect an agreement, particularly regarding a commercial and military base in Trincomalee. In fact, the British were more persuasive than the French , in this matter, and, when the maritime provinces came into their possession in 1796, as a result of the political distrubances in Holland and mano euvring on the part of the East India Company, the British were still negotiating with the king of Kandy.

The British East India Company took possession of the maritime provinces in the Island by making political manouvres in Europe when the Stateholder fled to Britain for safety. From 1796 to 1801 the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka were ruled by the Madras Government on behalf of the East India Company. During this period the East India Company attempted to recover all the e xpences involved

in capturing the Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka. The Dutch administration in the Island resisted the capitulation orders issued by the Stateholder (who was a refugee in England at the time) under the plea that their loyalties were no longer with the Stateholder but with the new government in Holland. The British East India Company wished to recover the military expenses post haste as the possibility of returning the maritime provinces of the Island to the Dutch, once the peace in Holland was established, was not entirely ruled out. After a few years of confusion, during which period the British possessions in the Island were administered , first by the Madras Government and secondly, by a dual arrangement whereby the Governor in the Island was made responsible both to the Colonial Office and the Court of Directors of the East India Company , the Island was finally made a Crown colony in 1802, to be administered by a governor in council who was solely responsible to the Colonial Office . In the same year, the Peace of Amiens settled the future of the Island in favour of the British.

The peasant economy in Sri Lanka at the commencement of the British rule was very similar, in its basic features, to any other peasant economy. Hence a cursory glance at the fundamentals of a peasant production system

would be helpful in understanding both the structure of the economy on the Island at the onset of the British rule, as well as the structural changes that took place during the course of their rule.

Even today, the conceptual difficulties that have arisen in regard to defining a peasant economy remain unresolved. This is not only because the peasant production system manifests extensive variations derived from geographical spread of various peasant communities, but also because the peasant production system both survived and was organically linked to the ever expanding system of capitalist production. What immediately follows is an attempt to outline some of the basic features of pre-capitalist or pre-indudtrial peasant production system.

We propose to look at the system of peasant production from two different angles. Firstly, the organization of the main factors of production in a peasant economy, i.e., how land and labour(for there was hardly any capital involved in the pre-industrial peasant production system) were organized in order to obtain the desired goods. Secondly, how the produce was distributed among various social classes - stated differently, what happened to the surplus produced by the peasants over and above the consumption needs of the family. This line of inquiry is broadly that followed by Eric R. Wolf. [1]

As has been stated earlier, land and labour were the two important factors of production in a peasant economy. Of these, land had been a major criterion in defining the social and economic relations in a peasant economy. The fertility and the availability, as well as the type of land - whether suitable for hydraulic or swidden cultivation - had a profound effect in moulding the social and economic relations in a peasant economy. Unrestricted availability, of land for cultivation often led to the evolution of laws of partible inheritance, thus making a close connexion between kinship relations and relations of production. Often , the unrestricted availability of land made peasants indulge in a combination of wet (rice) and dry (swidden) cultivation. This was a peasant strategy which enabled them to make a maximum exploitation of the available factors of production, land and labour. Labour intensive wet cultivation rendered more returns in terms of units of land and land intensive dry cultivation gave more returns per unit of labour. Peasants either combined these two methods or indulged in one depending upon the availability of land and labour / and also what gave them maximum returns in terms of produce. [2]

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2. Wolf, pp.23-25, 74.

Communal ownership of land, even when the family farm was a seperate unit, was a consistent feature in pre-industrial peasant communities. The degree of common ownership varied from one extreme in which the land was the property of the community with individuals having no proprietory rights and only having usufructory rights, to that of having a common pasture, or a common forest or common waste which was used for swidden cultivation and/gathering fire-wood. The important point to be stressed in this connexion is that land was not usually a saleable commodity, (even though some land was privately owned).[3]

The primary factor of production used in a peasant economy was labour. The diversity of arrangements of labour in the production process in peasant communities was as striking as the arrangements with regard to land. The family farm was one such arrangement which was very common among peasants. In this arrangement, the basic labour needed on the farm came primarily from the family members. Every member of the family, except the toddlers, provided the necessary labour on the farm. Individuals were ascribed the type of labour depending on age and sex.[4] Labour exchange was very common in peasant societies. However, one fact clearly distinguishes the labour

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3.See, Karl Polanyi. The Great Transformation, 1957, p.72.

4.Dalton, George. Tribal and Peasant Economics. pp.332 ff.

arrangements in a peasant economy from that of a capitalist system, i.e., the wage labour, the only form of labour arrangement in a capitalist system, was totally absent in a peasant economy.

When we turn our attention to the second aspect of any economic activity including those of peasants, i.e., as to what happened to the goods produced by the peasants, a few outstanding characteristics bind all the peasant communities together. The peasants produced basically to meet the consumption needs of the family and not to make profit. However, the tragedy of the peasant was that he was never able to use all that he produced, to meet the consumption needs of the family. If he ever succeeded in doing so, what he produced would have been more than enough for him to live comfortably. This never happened much to the discomfort of the peasant. Various social groups made demands on his surplus produce which the peasant was unable to resist because such groups exercised authority over him. The state and its bureaucracy, and mediators were the two groups which consistently deprived the peasantry a good part of their produce. Hence the existence of the peasant was one of constant struggle to strike a balance between the consumption needs of the family and the demands

made on his produce by outsiders. The peasant was able to strike this balance either by stepping up production or cutting down consumption. More often the latter happened. The result was a bare subsistence for the peasant and no capital accumulation among them.

The important role played by the mediators in a peasant economy did not fail to catch the attention of every researcher in the field. The functions these mediators performed in a peasant economy were critical to the system.[5] Peasants were incapable of performing these functions themselves. These mediators were the link between the wider world and the peasantry. They exacted a part of the peasant produce for the critical role they played in maintaining the system. Sometimes this took the appearence of a direct exchange of labour by two social groups, one highly skilled and the other unskilled. Very often, the peasants worked in the lands of these mediators and the latter performed judicial and administrative duties for the peasantry.

The system of peasant production in Sri Lanka, at the commencement of the British rule in 1796, was very much like the general picture depicted above. At the end of three hundred years of European

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5. Shanin, Theodore. (ed) Peasants and Peasant Societies, 1971. p.64.

political and commercial activities in the maritime provinces, the peasant production system remained virtually unchanged. A comparison of the production system among the Sinhalese peasantry of the interior of Sri Lanka, as documented by Robert Knox, who spent twenty years of captivity in the Island, during the latter part of the 17th cnetury, with those given by the early British civil servents like Bertolacci, Davy and D'Oyly, clearly establish this fact.

One of the major theoretical problems confronting the student of social history of the 19th century Sri Lanka is why the commercial activities of the Dutch failed to bring about any conspicuous changes in the system of peasant production in the maritime provinces after one hundred and fifty years of their rule, whereas one hundred years of British rule broughy about a complete change in the system of production.

In order to understand these changes it is necessary to relate them to the social and economic a conditions and changes in the imperial metropolis. During the period of Dutch rule the merchant capitalism was the dominant form of economic activity in the metropolis.[6] The merchant capital

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6.Dobb, Maurice. Studies in the Development of Capitalism. 1946.(reprint.1967) London. pp.19-20.

profited on the price differences in space and time, due to the prevailing immobility of producers and their meagre resources.[7] The price differences were maintained and even enforced by monopolies.[8]

The important role played by monopolies during the period of merchant capitalism is only too evident.[9] Economic privilege and state regulation of trade were powerful weapons resorted to by the merchant capital to extract the surplus produce from other social classes.[10] The fortunes of the commercial capitalist class depended on extraction of the surplus produce of a foreign country by such privileges. Monopoly and state regulation were the key instruments used to extract the surplus produce.[11] Because of this , the merchant capital had a purely external relationship to the mode of production , which remained independent and uncontrolled by capital. The merchant merely removed the goods produced by guilds and (or) peasants.[12] However, at a later stage when the merchant capital developed things began to change. The important changes

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7.Dobb, p.20

8.Ibid.

9.Dobb, p.25

10. Ibid.

11.Dobb, p.88

12.Dobb, p.123

were two fold; first, a section of the producers themselves accumulated capital and took to trade. Secondly, the merchant class began to take direct possession of the means of production.[13]

This was exactly what happened during the Dutch rule in Sri Lanka and the first few decades of the British rule. The Dutch left the traditional mode of production intact and they harnessed this system to the merchant capitalist system so that whatever surplus that was produced by the peasantry flowed out of the country to enrich the metropolis. The traditional service tenure system and the caste system along with the state monopolies were the main instruments used by the Dutch to extract the surplus produce from the peasantry. Because of this the mode of production among the Sinhalese peasantry remained little affected by the Dutch rule.

The first few decades of the British rule in the Island reflects the conflicts that had been taking place in the imperial metropolis; conflicts were already on foot between the merchant capitalism and the emerging industrial capital. Industrail capital had been waging a constant war on monopolies and state regulation which strangled its growth. These appeared

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13. Dobb, p.123, See also, Marx, Capital III. pp.388-396.

as checking the growth of labour power, and the availability of cheap raw materials and food stuffs needed to feed the machines and the army of labourers (in order to keep the wages low) and thus strangulating the growth of industry.

All this is represented by the vacillating policy adopted by the British regarding the service tenure system, the caste system and monopolies in the Island, during the first few decades of the 19 th century. The final abolition of service tenure system, refusal to recognize the cast system , and the abolition of the monopolies and all state concerns in trade, in 1832, at the recommendation of the Colebrooke Commission, represents, among other things, the triumph of industrial capital over merchant capital in the imperial metropolis. It is only by viewing the situation in this light that one can understand the apparent contradictions between the policy of the Colonial Office, as revealed by the instructions sent to Colombo, and the administration in Colombo.

The requirements of industrial capitalism were in complete opposition to the structural requirements of the peasant production system which prevailed in the Island. Firstly, the accumulating capital in the metropolis required opportunities of investments, and in Sri Lanka, the only opportunity for investment of capital was land.

The traditional system of service tenure severely restricted capital investments on land. Therefore it had to go. Secondly, such investments required an army of wage labourers. This could never be had unless the peasants were thrown out of their landholdings. The compulsory labour system (rajakariya) also severely restricted the opportunities of hiring labour. However, the compulsory labour system was a handy device in the hands of the administration to get the public works done without much expence or trouble. Hence until 1832, the administration in Colombo was trying to strike a balance between these conflicting interests. Indian coolie labour was tapped in order to ease the labour situation. The peasants were deprived of a part of their land by legislation to make room for investments on land available for speculators from the metropolis. The Sinhalese caste system which restricted the concentration of land and severely limited the free movement of labour was officially disowned. All these brought about a complete change in the economy , and it is these changes particularly those relevant to the peasant production system, that we propose to examine in the course of this study.

One conspicuous difference of the British Colonial policy in Sri Lanka from that of their dominions in other

parts of the world, particularly in India, was that while in the latter the British followed a policy of indirect rule through the local rulers whenever possible, until the latter part of the nineteenth century, in Sri Lanka they gave up indirect rule as early as 1818. The explanation for this differential policy in the subcontinent of India and Sri Lanka, by the British , remains mostly in local conditions; the instructions from the Colonial Office specified in no uncertain terms that the governor should refrain from any activity which would have resulted a war with the Kandyan kingdom. However , the governor in Colombo was too ambitious to allow a petty kingdom thrive only a few miles away from Colombo, when he might as well annex the same to the imperial dominions without much difficulty. Such an action was more in agreement with the economic developments that had been taking place in the imperial metropolis. The internal politics of the Kandyan kingdom also reinforced the ambitions of the governor. The king in Kandy at this time, was involved in a power struggle with a section of the Kandyan chiefs which resulted in his alienation from much of his subjects. The British in Colombo saw this as a prime opportunity to annex the Kandyan territories to the imperial possessions. The result was the British invasion of Kandy and the Kandyan Convention

of 1815 whereby the Sinhalese chiefs declared their loyalty to the British Crown and the British agreed to rule the Kandyan territories according to the laws and customs of the country. However, the independent existence for three centuries in the face of a foreign power made it very unlikely that the Sinhalese would accept foreign domination (however much they despised the cruelties of the last king of Kandy) without resistence. This in fact happened in 1817. The Kandyan rebellion which started in this year against the British power lasted a whole year. The Sinhalese resistance to the foreign ruler was equally matched by the repressive measures adopted by the British.

In 1818, the British declared the Kandyan Proclamation after the rebellion was finally put down. The declaration virtually put an end to the indirect rule through Kandyan chiefs and brought about the whole country under a centralized civil service, though a vestige of the old system was maintained. The reason given for this complete change of policy was that the Kandyan rebellion convinced the British that they could no longer trust the Sinhalese chiefs who violated the Kandyan convention. However, the Kandyan rebellion was only an excuse. The basic features of the economic structure in the Kandyan provinces were

in direct opposition to the interests of the emerging industrial capitalism of the imperial metropolis. Therefore sooner or later it had to be replaced by a system which was more in harmony with the interests of capitalism. Once the Kandyan kingdom was annexed, the sooner the traditional system destroyed , the more advantageous it was to the economic interests of the imperial metropolis. The Kandyan rebellion provided the British with a very good opportunity for which they have been waiting from the day they signed the Kandyan Convention, as a tactical necessity.

CHAPTER I

Political Economy of the Traditional Sinhalese.

The maritime porvinces of the Island which were subjected to European rule for nearly three centuries, by the time the British took possessions of the Dutch territories, were much affected by western commercialism. The Dutch East India Company, which ruled the maritime provinces for more than a century and a half, introduced commercial agriculture, and encouraged the peasants to grow commercial crops and trade it with them. [1] However, basic peasant production, even in the maritime provinces, remained primarily production for consumption.

The Portuguese and the Dutch who possessed and ruled, or misruled , the native population in the maritime provinces basically maintained the structure of native administration and practiced the same methods of exacting a part of peasant produce- and they did it more effectively than the native kings ever did or dared to - in order to meet the cost of maintaining the state machinery and to enrich the imperial metropolis. Hence it is easier to understand the political economy of the traditional Sinhalese as it was at the dawn of the British rule on the Island, by examining the system as it functioned in the interior of Sri Lanka, where the last native kingdom flourished.

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1. Bertolacci, Anthony. A view of the Agricultural, Commercial and Financial Interests of Ceylon with an appendix containing some of the principle laws and usages of Candians. London. (1817) , pp. 26-27, 155-157.

In the Kandyan kingdom, the native Sinhalese population jealously guarded their traditional institutions, which if not the only, has the main reason for the Sinhalese streangth against a vastly superior military force which was repeatedly beaten back for three centuries in their attempt to conquer them.

The corner stone of the political economy of the Sinhalese was the concept of contract between the ruler and the ruled. The king was regarded as the lord of the soil (bhupati) , but he held it in trust. Though the succession to the throne was hereditary in practice, it was still subjected to the approval of the people in principle, which was conveyed to the ruler through their chiefs. The king held the land in trust for the great service he did to the community in protecting the country from both internal and external threats. The people obtained land from the king to eke out a living and for this in turn owed him a service. Thus everyone in the country who held land had a service obligation to the ruler. On the contrary , those who did not hold any land owed no service to the king nor were they called upon to pay any dues except on rare occasions. [2]
This service obligation of the subjects to the king was known as rajakariya, commonly known on the Island as the'compulsory service.'

2.D'Oyly, John S.A Sketch of the constitution of the Kandyan kingdom(and other relevant papers) Colombo. 1929. p.44

It should be noted that regular compulsory service (rajakariya), and contributions to the royal treasury were attached only to paddy lands which were annually cultivated and not to high lands where dry grains were cultivated.[3] Anyone disatisfied with the service he may have to perform for holding land was at liberty to relieve himself of the service simply by quitting the land to which the service was attached.[4] However, no person retaining his land was permitted to change his duty without obtaining prior royal sanction. Nevertheless all hereditary lands were alienable by the proprietor, but whoever that came into possession was liable to the same service as the original holder. [5]Thus the basic principle behind the service tenure was that it was to the land that a specific service was attached and not to any person. Hence the people did not pay a rent to the king for cultivating the land which 'belonged' to him but rather entered into a contract with the ruler who held all lands in trust, the latter giving them the protection and the people giving him service in return.

Under the system of compulsory service(rajakariya) the people were liable to be employed annually in various

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3.D'Oyly, p.44.

4.Ibid.

5.Ibid.

public works and personal services of the king. The duration of such services extended from fifteen to thirty days. Such services varied from mere attendance to menial work , depending upon the caste of the person concerned.[6] The chiefs were responsible for the performance of various duties, which was the obligation of the people to discharge.[7]

A portion of the total land area in the kingdom was regarded as crown lands(gabadagam). A section of crown lands were known as 'exclusive fields' (muttettu), the whole produce of which was delivered to the treasury. These exclusive fields were cultivated by the tenents who held some other lands for their own use.[8] Usually, the tenants of such crown land held the lands which they cultivated for their own use, in hereditary tenure(paraveni). On rare occasions, exclusive fields of crown lands were cultivated by tenants on the basis of share-cropping, in which case only half the produce went to the treasury and the rest to the share-cropper.[9]

6.D'Oyly, p.44; Davy,John. An Account of the Interior of Ceylon, And of its inhabitantswith travels in that Island.Colombo. 1969. p.92

7. D'Oyly, p.45 f.; Davy, p.92.

8. Colebrooke Commission Papers.vol.I. pp.27-28,34 f.

9. CCP.I.p.34 ff.; D'Oyly, p.53.

From the original crown lands the king made various grants to chiefs for assisting him with the administration. Such grants were usually hereditary and were formerly donated with a written document [10] (sannas) and was known as nindagama or hereditary service lands given to chiefs.[11] All the inhabitants in a nindagama or hereditary service lands thus granted owed services to the chief to whom the grant was made, in addition to the services they owed to the king, i.e., the compulsory service.[12] The exclusive fields of the nindagama (also known as muttettu), were gratuitously cultivated by the tenants of the nindagama, for the benefit of the chief.[13] Such exclusive fields in a nindagama were classified into two categories, ninda muttettu and ande muttettu. The former was cultivated by the labour of the nindagama tenants entirely for the benefit of the nindagama proprietor, i.e., the chief. The latter , the ande muttettu was cultivated by anyone not necessarily a nindagama tenant) on the usual conditions of share-cropping, viz., giving half the crop to the proprietor with both parties having no further obligation to the other.[14]

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10. D'Oyly, p.54

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

The tenants of a nindagama were known as service tenants (nilakaraya) , and they held land on the condition that they cultivate the exclusive fields (muttettu) or perform some other service , or both ; these were known as service shares(nila panguwa). [15] The service tenants fall into two categories; those who held hereditary shares (paraveni pangu) and those who held shares at will. Usually all those who held lands before the nindagama was granted to the last proprietor or those who obtained service shares from the same authority who originally granted land to the family of the last proprietor , held their shares in hereditary tenure (paraveni pangu). These tenants could be punished by the proprietor of the nindagama for neglecting their duty, but could not be dispossessed of their shares. However, all those who received service shares at the hand of the last proprietor enjoyed the same at his pleasure. [16]

In some nindagamas there were tenants who held no rice fields but only gardens (goda idam) and high lands (chena). Such tenants paid the nindagama proprietor an annual share of the produce from the gardens and (or)high lands when cultivated with fine grains, and

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15. D'Oyly, p.54

16. Sawyers Digest. p.23. Quoted by D'Oyly, p.67; D'Oyly, pp.87-89; CCP.I. pp.27-28.

were generally liable to be called on to assist the proprietor on various commission, but in general, were fed and paid by the proprietor on such occasions.[17]

There could also be hereditary free holders in a nindagama. They owed compulsory service to the king for holding land but were not regarded as tenants of the nindagama proprietor and hence owed no service to him.[18] However, it was customary for such free holders to pay nominal homage to the nindagama proprietor, by paying him respect with a bunch of betel leaves, the traditional way of paying homage.

Much of the land in the interior of the Island was granted by the ancient kings to the benefit of Buddhist monasteries and in some instances to Hindu temples.[19] Just like nindagama tenants the tenants of these temporalities owed services to the religious

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17. Sawyers Digest. p.23, Quoted by D'Oyly, p.67.

18. D'Oyly, p.54

19. Davy, p.55.

20. D'Oyly, pp.77-78; CCP.I.pp.35-37.

institutions for the benefit of which the lands were granted. The king received no compulsory service from the tenants of these temporalities, such services also being granted to the benefit of the institutions.[20]

Some other lands were directly attached to various departments of administration. For instance, kuruve gama or panguwa denotes land or shares held by tenants whose compulsory service and service due to the lands were connected with the Department of Elephants. The tenants of such lands were directly under the chief who acted as the Head of of the Department concerned and their services were exacted for the department. These tenants were not liable to do any personal service to the chief of the department.[21]

Share-cropping among the Sinhalese peasants.

Quite apart from the tenancy relationship between the landed proprietor , who was also a chief holding office in the administration and a tenant who owed service both to the king and to the proprietor (chief) with whom he had a contractual relationship , i.e., land/service, there prevailed another form of contractual relationship, regarding tenancy which was quite different from what is described above. This was a straight forward landlord

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20. D'Oyly, pp.77-78; CCP.I.pp35-37

21. Sawyers Digest, p.23, quoted by D'Oyly, p.67; D'Oyly, p.54.

tenant relationship without any other ramifications of obligations on either side and lasting only the duration of a single crop. This was a formal share-cropping relationship which was mainly restricted to crown lands, although on occasion it was found on nindagamas and among tenants themselves . First, the exclusive fields of(muttettu) crown lands or in a nindagama could be held as'exclusive fields held on share-cropping', (anda muttettu). [22]The share-cropper tenant usually gave half the produce to the landlord.[23]The tenant owed no other obligation, either to the land lord or to the king, by being a share-cropper(andakaraya).[24]

Although ande is a generic term used to cover all forms of share-cropping, ande (literally meaning half) was not the only such relationship of share-cropping. A variation of share-cropping was otu which contract denoted three forms of tenant landlord relationship. First, the tenant agreed to give the landlord a portion of the crop equal to the grain used for sowing, or one and half or double the extent sown.Secondly, an agreement to give the landlord a share of one third of the crop sown on dry land (chena) with paddy. Finally, the agreement to give one large basketful of, or

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22.D'Oyly, pp.54-55

23.D'Oyly, pp.54-55, 77-78

24.D'Oyly, pp.54-55

a mans burden of, the crop to the landlord of a dryland sown with fine grain.[25]

The above discussion makes it clear that share-cropping generally operated, comparatively speaking, to the advantage of the tenant rather than the landlord. This is more evident from the description of share-cropping given by Robert Knox . Knox remarks that those who were lazy or loath to plough or were too poor to obtain seed grain, had their fields cultivated on ande 'halves', that is on the basis of share-cropping. However, when the share-cropper tenant deducted various fees chargeable for the process of cultivation, the landlord would not have received more than a third of the harvest. The share-cropper tenant claimed various shares of the produce as fees for tilling, weeding and re-planting, protecting the fields from the depradatory animals, threashing the corn and finally what was traditionally due for mendicants and beggars. The result of all these deductions made from the total harvest in favour of the share-cropper tenant, was that the landlord was not left with more than a third of the total crop as his share.[26]

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25. D'Oyly, p.55

26. Robert Knox, An Histori al Relation of Ceylon by Robert Knox. (First Edition,1681) Colombo.1956.

Speaking about the tenancy relationships of the maritime provinces, Bertolacci observed that the tenant who became a share-cropper of an already cultivated land was a share-cropper at will. However, the share-cropper who brought uncultivated land into cultivation enjoyed security of tenancy and was not liable to be ejected by the landlord at his will.[27]

The Relationship between the Landowner Chief and the Peasant:

As land was the channel through which all revenues and all labour which energised the machinery of state was derived, an examination of the relationship between the chief- the landowner- proprietor- and the tenant(who contributed revenue and labour) is essential to the proper understanding of the political economy of the Sinhalese peasant village.

Under the system of Sinhalese government all power emanated from the king. Those who exercised the power delegated by the king, the chiefs, held land from the king as a payment for maintaining his authority in the provinces. Thus the two concepts, holding power and holding land went together. Land was not

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27. Bertolacci, p.296

only the meansof paying the officers who served the king, but also the very key to the power and prestige which the chiefs secured by obtaining their office from the king.

Money and material wealth meant very little in a society where there was no investment, and the accumulation of wealth was highly restricted.[28] Robert Knox observed in the seventeenth century that 'men's pride consisted in their attendance having men bearing arms before and behind them .[29] Thus in the Sinhalese society the power holders were those who commanded sufficient numbers of retinue as the occasion demanded. The number of people a person, eg. a chief, commanded was primarily a function of the extent of land he held in the form of nindagama, which in turn basically related to the type of office he held at the court and administration.

However, in order to secure the loyalty of his tenants the chiefs had to play the role of a patron to all those who lived within the boundaries of his nindagama, whether tenants or free holders. For, if the people in a nindagama were not satisfied with the behaviour of the chief, there was every

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28. Robert Knox, pp.106,137-138,144.

29. Robert Knox, p.143.

possibility that they would leave the land, thus relieving themselves from any services due to the nindagama proprietor.[30] Moreover, the free-holders of a nindagama who owed no official service to the chief would be alienated from the chief. Thus the chief always had to act the patron to all those within his nindagama, whether they were his tenants or free-holders. Hence the relationship between the chief and the peasant was not always confined to economic relations. Besides, the nindagama chief had civil and criminal jurisdiction over all the people within the nindagama, whether tenants or free-holders. However, the chiefs position in this case is not so defined as that of his economic relations with the tenants. The nature of jurisdiction the nindagama chief held over his tenants was a function of the official position of the nindagama proprietor. If he was a chief holding high office in the court he had jurisprudence over all cases short of capital offences, and in effect he decided all disputes regarding hereditary rights over service shares (nila panguwa), besides punishing tenants for the neglect of duties, petty crimes etc.[31]

The chief who received a nindagama from the king was responsible to furnish a certain number of

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30. D'Oyly, p.44

31. Sawyer's Digest. p.23. Quoted by D'Oyly, p.67

people from among his tenants to perform public services, under compulsory service. They performed such services under the nindagama proprietor as their chief, and the type of work the tenants perform was decided by their respective caste position.[32] This left a wide margin to the power exercised by the chief over his tenants, as the kings hardly ever took any notice of the number of people employed in public works , so long as the work was carried out efficiently. Perhaps because of this great power wielded by the chief, it was customary that when a nindagama was granted to a chief for all the people in the area under his authority to appear before him with small gifts, be it just a bunch of beetle leaves- the traditional symbol of showing respect to a superior- showing their respect and loyalty to him.[33]

Thus evolved a patron client relationship between the chief and the tenant, i.e., the peasants, which was beneficial to both parties and was maintained at all times.Sinhalese peasants , according to an early nineteenth century writer, were held in strong bondage to their chiefs; their lands, their labour, and even their lives were almost dependent on his will.[34] In times of scarcity peasants obtained agricultural credit

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32.D'Oyly, p.67

33.Robert Knox.pp.79-81

34.Tennant Sir James Emerson. Ceylon. II. p.93.

from the chief.[35] Peasants hired (to give a share from the produce) or more frequently gratuitously borrowed cattle from the chief, which they owned in great numbers- one sign of their prosperity- during the season for agricultural labour.[36] It was to the chief, a peasant turned as the last resort, when reduced to an immediate threat of slavery resulting from insolvency. Chiefs usually relieved such debtors and enlisted them as their personal retainers.[37]

This patron-client relationship between the chief and the peasant was seen in its extreme form in some parts of the Island at the beginning of the British rule. The peasant in this case owed all his personal property to the chief and was looked after by him at all times, and it was he more than the kin-group or neighbours , who was the social insurance of the peasant in times of distress. The British government Agent of the Eastern Province reported not only that the peasants were contend with the arrangement, bwt that they were well fed and looked after by the chiefs.[38] The strong

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35.Tennant, II. p.461

36.Tennant, I. p.152

37.D' Oyly, p.64

38.Tennant, II pp.459-461

patron client relationship between the chiefs and the peasants even in other parts of the Island at the commencement of the British rule, was very evident to Skinner, who spent fifty years of his life in Sri Lanka, as a civil servant. In the early days of the British rule, Skinner observed that when the chiefs were torn of their office and wealth, the peasants still showed utmost loyalty to them.[39]

A corollary to this strong patron client relationship between the chief and peasant, coupled with the strong disapproval of and even institutionalised mechanisms which prevented the accumulation of wealth was that it effectively prevented the growth of status groups and power holders at the village level.[40] Chiefs attending the court delegated their powers to minor officers under them to discharge their duties. Such minor officers were appointed by the chief, and held office at his pleasure. However, the people had

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39. Skinner, p.222. Skinner was in the Ceylon Civil service from 1818-1868.

40. Partible inheritance, ceremonies connected with marriage , Annual ceremonies connected with royalty in which the wealthy were expected to spend in proportion to their wealth , were such levelling mechanisms.

privilege of asking the removal of such officers if they / were dissaaisfied with them. The chief was usually obliged to carry out the peoples wish.[41] The result of all this was that the political power groups, pressure groups and status groups all centred around the court and royalty, leaving the peasants at the village level more or less equal in power, wealth and opportunity.

Native kings realised the extreme importance of maintaining this relationship between peasants and chiefs for the greater welfare of the country even though the royalty recognized the extreme popularity of a chief was a potential threat to the throne. Hence the institutionalised royal behaviour towards the chiefs was always directed to promote this healthy relationship between the chief and the peasants. The kings avoided doing things which would have destroyed the high esteem and respect the peasant held for his chief. Even when the chiefs were punished by the king for the neglect of duty , it was done in such a way that would not destroy the prestige of the chief. The chiefs when fined were forbidden to leave the palace till the fine was paid. The institutionalised behaviour on such occasions

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41.Robert Knox. p.83

was for the chief minister to pay the fine immediately and to allow the chief to obtain his release without a loss of face, and then to settle it with the chief minister.[42] Chiefs were never confined to the central goal in Kandy, which was regarded as an extreme form of disgrace.[43] Even when capital punishment was meted out to a chief, he was simply beheaded and not impaled like commoners.[44]

The chiefs were given sufficient leeway and powers to make a show of pomp and glamour within the areas of their respective authority, and they also had power of bestowing benefits on the favoured , which secured the loyalty and admiration of the peasants toward the chief.[45]

There were also certain devices which prevented chiefs abusing the great power vested on them. The absence of any real function to the accumulation of wealth apart from meeting one's own consumption needs, was one of them. Various ceremonies, like royal marriage, had the important function of levelling the excess of wealth among the chiefs, thus restraining any desire on

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42. D'Oyly, pp.57-58

43. Ibid.,

44. Ibid.,

45. D'Oyly, pp.70-71

their part to acquire more wealth by oppressing the peasantry. On such public ceremonies, like royal marriage and annual festivals connected with the tooth relic, the chiefs had to spend on gifts to the king , or on ceremonial, according to their rank and wealth.[46] The kings of Kandy, jealous as they were of the growth of power of the chiefs, were quick to take notice and act upon when charges were made by people against prosperous chiefs. These were powerful deterrents which prevented the chiefs from exacting too much from the peasantry.

The exact relationship between the chief and the peasant was perhaps neatly expressed when Davy spelled out that,

> The man of rank is not arrogant nor the poor man servile; the one is kind and condescending the other modest and unpresuming. The friendly intercourse of different ranks is encouraged by religion and strengthened by circumstance that, on the one side there is nothing the great are so ambitious of as popularity and on the other side nothing the people are so desirous as favour.[47]

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46. Davy. pp.124-132

47. Davy. p.213.

Caste; the Regulating principle of social and economic relations.

Sinhalese caste system was the regulating principle of the whole social order including the service tenure, the basis of the Sinhalese political economy. Although based on the fundamental principle of the Indian caste system, that birth determines the social status of the individual , the Sinhalese caste system considerably differed from its Indian counterpart.[48] Sinhalese castes were status groups, hierarchically arranged according to tradition, and lived in seperate villages, i.e., a village ideally had always been occupied by a community belonging to the same caste. Castes were not only status groups, but also functional monopolies, but very few, if any, of the castes engaged in caste monopoly as their primary occupation, which for everyone was agriculture.[49] All castes held land for performing caste services, either to the king or to chiefs. The only exception, perhaps, was fishermen caste.[50]

The farmer caste (govi), which held the highest position in the caste hierarchy, obtained the services of other castes, such as the washermen caste (rada), blacksmiths (navamdanna), potters (kumbal) and paid for their services either by granting them land (as the

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48. Bryce Ryan, Caste in Modern Ceylon. The Sinhalese system in Transition. New Brunswick. 1953. pp.10-20

49. Bryce Ryan, pp.105 ff.

50. Bryce Ryan, pp.95- 105

higher sub-castes of the farmer caste, i.e., the chiefs did) or were paid in kind. The payments were determined by tradition, and the contract remained a private matter between the parties concerned within the framework of tradition. Other caste groups also exchanged goods or services, and paid among themselves in kind or in service speciality (like those of barbers or washermen) .[51] Thus the caste system represented not only status groups and functional monopolies, but also a system of exchange which regulated the flow of goods and services within the community.

The caste system could be related to the system of land tenure rather neatly with the following proposition. Only the aristocracy or chiefs who belonged to the higher sub-castes of the farmer caste owned land and derived subsistence from it without actually indulging in agricultural labour. They sometimes owed services to the king, like helping him to rule the kingdom, but when free grants were made they owed no service to anyone. All the other castes, including the lower sub-castes of the farmer caste, had proprietory rights over land so long as they performed compulsory service to the king and to the nindagama proprietor whose tenants they were. The social status of a person depended on the degree of ownership of land expressed in terms of his relationship to the land.[52]

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52. Obeyesekere examines this in detail, see, Land Tenure in Village Ceylon. pp.15 ff.

51. Davy. pp. 92-98

Thus hierarchically arranged, those who owned and derived produce from land without indulging in agricultural labour comes at the top, that is those who held nindagamas were at the top; then came those who held land and indulged in agricultural labour, but owed no service to any superior except to the king, as a result of holding land. These were hereditary free-holders . Next to them on the scale were the hereditary tenants of nindagama or viharagama (paraveni nilakaraya), who owed services both to the king and the nindagama proprietors and indulged in agricultural work. They could not be dispossessed of their land so long as they regularly performed the services attached to the land. Next to them were the nindagama tenants who held tenancy at will, i.e., at the discrimination of the proprietor chief. Below them were the share-croppers who cultivated the land of anyone, of a tenant, a proprietor or even crown lands, and owed no other service either to the proprietor or to the king except giving the agreed share to the proprietor . Finally there were outcasts like the Rodiyas (the'Gypsies'of Sri Lanka) who owned no land and indulged in no agriculture. Nor were they called upon to perform any service either to the king or to the chiefs. They were extremely low in their social position.[53]

53.Davy, pp.97-98.

Organization of cultivation: the share (pangu) system.

A more detailed examination of the share system which is mentioned earlier [54] in relation to the system of land tenure, is vital to any understanding of the precess of production in the Sinhalese peasant village . The Sinhalese word gama which is generally rendered 'villge' more properly signifies, in the context of land tenure and agriculture, a single estate or a single field, which contained various shares (pangu).[55] A share denotes a section of the total estate (gama) and, for enjoying a share (panguwa) , the tenant or proprietor has to perform various services to the nindagama proprietor and (or) the king.Thus a tenant who held a service share (nila panguwa) had to gratuitously cultivate fields of the nindagama proprietor as well as performing any other services to him or to the king.[56] Similarly, one who held a service share in an estate specifically allotted to a specific government department , eg., the Department of Royal Guards for instance, had to perform the particular service attached to the piece of land in the Department of Royal Guards, i.e., guarding the palace gate.[57]

54.See above, p

55.D'Oyly, p.53

56.D'Oyly, pp.87-89

57.Davy, pp.92-93

A share, (panguwa) however, did not indicate a specific geographical area in a field or estate. This can be rendered meaningful by examining how a new estate was established and incorporated in the system of service tenure. A new estate (gama) was established when the shares in an old estate were divided to an optimum limit. Stated differently, this means that the population land ratio of a given estate had passed its level of equilibrium, that is, the land in the estate could no longer maintain the number of people in that estate. The traditional method of resolving this problem was to eject some members out of the estate by establishing a new estate. This was carried out with the permission of the traditional authority in the land, i.e., the king. The usual practice was to mark off the required area from the forest by breaking the branches before the permission is sought from the king.[58] Traditionally, the virgin soil thus brought into cultivation was exempt from tax or any service due to the king for the first generation as an encouragement to the agricultural production.[59]

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58. Report of the Kandyan Peasantry Commission.(Ceylon Sessional Paper xviii, 1951) p.78

59. D'Oyly, p.54

A typical estate(gama) thus established had four different land areas. First, the rice fields (mada idam) which was the centre of village agricultural activity, where the staple crop of the peasant, the rice, was cultivated. Secondly, the gardens(goda idam) where the peasant residences were located and around which fruit trees, coconut and arecanut trees were grown.Thirdly, there was an area reserved for swidden cultivation which was locally known as chena cultivation. This area covered about ten times the area set apart for paddy cultivation. The reason for this extensive land area reserved for swidden cultivation (high land) was that land was required to lie fallow between seven to fifteen years depending on the fertility of the soil, before the cultivation could be repeated. Finally, a certain area of the jungle was regarded as a necessary adjunct to the newly established estate. This area furnished the estate with its fuel requirements and was also the common pasture for the village cattle. [60]

The establishment of a new estate was usually effected by a kindred group (vasagama people, a group of people having the same surname, hence a common ancestor) or perhaps by a single person. If the new estate was established by a group, in the first generation

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60. RKPC., p.18; See also Obeyesekere, pp.17-18.

itself the paddy fields of the newly cultivated area were divided into shares, and cultivated in a system known as 'alternation' (tattumaru) which is a rotation of shares in the field so that , in the long run, everyone in the group gets an equal chance of cultivating fertile and less fertile areas of the field. The system is based on the egalitarian principle of equality of right of all the members holding shares in the estate. In the second generation these shares were further divided among the descendants of the owners of the original shares. If the estate was brought into cultivation by a single person, the shares originated only in the second generation. These shares were not physically demarkated geographical units, but 'floating units' in the sense that the owners of the shares worked the whole field in rotation. With the passing generations shares became numerous due to the fact that the laws of partible inheritance prevailed in the Island, until some members were once again ejected from the estate in order to preserve the land/labour equilibrium of the estate.[61]

Thus when a service share is referred to , it was this right to cultivate a portion of a given estate which was understood and not a specific plot of land. This difference between a floating share and a specific geographical unit becomes very crucial to the study of various changes that came over the traditional system of production.

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61 Obeyesekere, pp.17 ff.

The operation of the alternation system was the key to the proper functioning of the system of shares. The cultivation under the system of shares in an estate was done in the alternationsystem. The rotation of shares to function effectively in the alternation system , the land disputes in an estate had to be settled within the estate itself, with the mutual consent of the people holding shares in the estate.[62] The people who arbitrate disputes should have a comprehensive knowledge as to the location and the fertility, of the irrigation system of the land over which they were called on to adjudicate.[63] Moreover, the alternation system has to be frozen at a point after which a further division of shares would make the cultivation in shares uneconomical. Thus to solve the problem of partible inheritance within the system of alternation system, there evolved a third system which is called 'relief' (karamaru).'Relief'operates when the publicly accepted shares of an estate were frozen, i.e., when the alternation system was frozen, and when the private arrangements were made among the heirs of the following generation outside the publicly accepted shares , so that the sibling groups cultivated the shares together

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62.Obeyesekere, pp.17 ff.

63.Ibid.

and divided the crop according to their share. On other occasions different heirs went on in a rotation of a particular share against the rotation of plots in a publicly accepted share.[64]

The creation of minute shares with every passing generation, it was assumed led to a physical subdivision of the unit of cultivation[65] thus leading to a very uneconomical cultivation of small holdings.[66] But it has already been pointed out that this was not necessarily so . In fact, peasants adopted various strategies to overcome this difficulty of extreme subdivision of shares and consequent uneconomic holdings.[67] Pooling shares was one such device; thus shares in a single subsection were pooled together by an individual or a group so that fields were not subdivided into small parcels.[68] Another method was crop-sharing, (asvanna havula) -this should not be confused with share-cropping (ande). Crop-sharing was a scheme by which a group of individuals cultivate a single field and divide the crop in proportion

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64. CCP. I. pp. 63-64; D'Oyly p. 65.

65. Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies. 1961, vol. 4 no. 1. pp. 51-70.

66. CCP. I. pp. 65-66.

67. Obeyesekere, pp. 205-298

68. CCP. I. pp. 63-65

to the shares they held in the field, thus obviating the necessity of dividing the land.[69]

Thus the share system was very important to the proper functioning of paddy cultivation as was practiced among the Sinhalese peasantry. The floating nature of the shares ensured that the fields were cultivated as economic units, at the same time maintaining the traditional laws of partible inheritance. The alternate system sometimes allowed the peasants to cultivate economically worthless small shares of absentee proprietors (of those who left the village), by nominally acknowledging their right of ownership.[70]

Organization of cultivation:wet method cultivation.

The Sinhalese peasant indulged in two methods of cultivation which were complementary to each other. On the low grounds, where water was available, either from rainfall or could be adequately conducted through artificial irrigation, they cultivated rice, the staple diet of the Sinhalese. However, the destruction of ancient irrigation system with the downfall of the Northern kingdom in the 13 th century, and the shift of the centre of the native kingdom to the central mountains during the sixteenth century, made it impo-- ssible for the peasants to obtain sufficient produce

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69.Obeyesekere, pp.63-64

70.Ibid.,

from wet rice cultivation which would last the whole year in meeting the consumption needs of the family. The inadequate supply of water due to the destruction of irrigation works as well as the irregularity and often failure of moonsoon rains prevented the peasants in the Dry Zone regions of the Sinhalese kingdom from obtaining a sufficient rice produce by the wet method. Most regions in the Wet Zone within the Sinhalese kingdom were rugged mountains which heavily taxed the labour of the rice cultivator, thus preventing a peasant family cultivating a sufficient extent of land, the produce of which alone would meet the family consumption demands. To meet the exigencies of rice shortage, the Sinhalese peasant regularly cultivated fine grain on high land (chena).

The cultivation of paddy required that the fields be prepared in such a way that they retain water till harvesting time. To make this possible hill sides were levelled in tiers , forming a series of elevations one above the other, which retained water by a small dam. The breath of such elevations, or rice fields , depended upon the steepness of the hill the sides of which were thus converted into rice fields. To irrigate these fields

water courses on hill sides were carefully studied, and water conducted with the help of various devices involving a great expense of labour, to the topmost field, and then regulated down so as to irrigate all the fields below it.[71] The fields which were not sufficiently broad enough to work with cattle drawn plough had to be tilled manually. Ploughing had to be repeated at least three times before the fields were ready for cultivation. The surface of the field bed had to be manually smoothed out with a very primitive instrument, so that the water was equally spread out all over the field, thus checking the growth of weed. During the whole period of its growth, water had to be regulated depending upon the supply- excessive rain or no rain at all- so that young plants were not destroyed either by excess or want of water. The fields had to be weeded out at least twice during the period of growth. Moreover, cultivation and harvesting had to be done during the seasons. This made family labour alone insufficient to work even a moderate piece of land which would barely help to maintain a family.[72]

This heavy requirement of labour in the cultivation of paddy gave rise to a system of communal work and a communal labour exchange among peasants.

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71. See for a description of 19th century paddy cultivation in Sri Lanka, Cave, Henry W. The Book of Ceylon. pp.385 ff. also, Baker, Sir Samuel. Eight Years Wonderings in Ceylon. pp.78 ff.

72. Ibid.,

Such labour exchange was not done in a haphazard manner but was very much institutionalized. The whole process of paddy cultivation, from the preparation of fields to the collection of harvest, turned out to be a communal effort.[73] All the peasants worked in the fields of one cultivator until the agricultural activity of the whole village was completed. This avoided the difficulties regarding regulation of water, grazing the cattle in harvested rice fields etc.[74] The exchange of labour for agricultural work was institutionalized in the system of attam labour (hand work). Attam labour is a system still operatingthough rapidly disappearing, in remote villages, by which a person was liable to work as many days in the fields of those who laboured in his during the season.[75]

Not only the work in the fields belonging to individuals carried out in this cooperative manner, but also the labour required for the construction of dams and water courses, was obtained through communal labour.[76] In fact, rice cultivation could be productively undertaken in Sri Lanka, given the level of technical attainment of the time, where it was heavily dependent

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73. Baker, pp.78 ff.

74. Robert Knox, pp.12-13

75. Robert Knox, p.14

76. Baker.p.78

on the proper maintenance of artificial irrigation only if such communal labour was available.[77] The complete dependence of rice cultivation on the availability of an adequate supply of water, and the uncertainty of such a supply owing to the destruction of ancient irrigation works made it imperative that the rice cultivation was carried out on a communal basis. The whole community of a village had to act in cooperation as to the kind of grain that was to be sown etc, depending upon the availability of water. This would enable the peasants to get the maximum out of the limited quantity of water upon which the rice cultivation of the whole village depended. Moreover, if the individual share- holders cultivated grains that would be harvested at different times, difficulties tended to arise as the harvested fields were regarded as the common grazing ground for the cattle.[78]

Even more communal and because of that more efficient and more productive, was the rice cultivation as was seen in the Eastern Province of the Island. The chiefs of the Eastern Province were regarded as the absolute owners of the land over which they exercised authority. In some cases they acknowledged the nominal

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77. Baker, p.78 ff.

78. Robert Knox ,pp.12-13.

authority of the king by paying him an annual tribute. The houses, gardens and wells of the peasants, though constructed by them, were regardéd as the property of the chief, in the sense that only the chief could dispose of them. The peasants who were the tenants of the chief owed labour to him in various capacities. These peasants also had the same liberty of leaving his services if they were so disposed. In return for the services the peasants received all their consumption needs from the chiefs. [79]

In these regions the arrival of the agricultural seasons aroused the peasant community which until then spent their time in relative idleness, to immediate action. Agricultural tools, cattle needed for the work, and seed paddy were all supplied by the chief. The whole process of cultivation, from repairing the irrigation works needed to conduct water to the fields to that of the harvesting, was carried out by the joint labour of the community. A portion of the land, generally one eighth of the total area, was cultivated to the exclusive benefit of the chief like the muttettu exclusive fields in other areas. A tithe of the remainder, a

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79. Tennant. pp. 459-460.

share for the services and labour of the cattle, the seed grain advanced with an interest of fifty percent were also set apart for the chief. The remainder of the crop was shared among the peasantry, including those who performed the professional functions of caste monopolies in the community. [80]

Various devices were adopted by the peasantry to ensure the availability of communal labour in the agricultural work, and also to compel recalcitrant members to toe the line. If a cultivator holding a paddy land avoided contributing his share of labour in the reconstruction of the irrigation system, which carried water to the whole area, the other proprietors assumed the right to withold the usual supply of water to the delinquent's land, thus causing a crop failure or compelling him to cooperate in the necessary labour.[81] In other situations where a member holding a share in a field refused to assist in common labour, such as helping or providing stakes necessary for a fence to protect the whole field from the depradations of wild animals, with excuses such as his share needed no such protection, the other proprietors persuaded him by reproof or even with blows. If he persisted in his anti-social behaviour,

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80.Tennant.II.pp.460-461

81.D'Oyly, p.84

it was reported to the chief who took measures to set the things right.[82]

However, the institution par excellence which regulated affairs of the village, particularly those relevant to production (but not exclusively) was the village council(gamsabhava). The village council was composed of the heads of all the families, or more frequently all the elders of the village irrespective of wealth or rank.[83] This rather informal body which met at a resthouse (ambalama) or in any other central place in the village like a shady tree, upon the occurrence of a matter of importance which required the attention of the village.[84] The village council settled disputes concerning land, debts, petty thefts and quarrels which were brought before it.[85] Construction and proper maintenance of village irrigation works and the proper distribution of water for agriculture was one of its primary functions. It could exact compulsory labour of the village community on such public works. The village council attempted the amiable settlement of disputes, restoration of stolen property, and to

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82.D'Oyly, p.84

83.Forbes,Major. Eveven Years in Ceylon.p.72

84.D'Oyly, p.28

85., 86., D'Oyly, p.28

compel the wrong doers to compensation, by reproof and admonition rather than punishment.[86] Appeals could be made from the village council to the District Council, which consisted of well informed delegates from each village,[87] but more often appeals were made to the chief. This traditional institution was extremely important to the proper functioning of the system of production in the village. Because it was the institution which kept in order the social relationships, of which the economic relations were a part. For instance, the proper functioning of the alternation system (tattumaru) and the share system (pangu), upon which the whole mechanism of paddy production was based, required the proper handling of a multiplicity of social relations with regard to marriage and inheritance, family and outsiders etc.

The organization of cultivation: the dry method cultivation.

With many peasants the proceeds from rice fields did not last for more than half the year, and to make up for the shortage of rice, dry grain cultivation by the chena (swidden cultivation) was extensively carried out.[88] Highland cultivation of dry grain (fine grain) has thus become an essential part of the system of production of the Sinhalese peasants. The reasons for

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86. D'Oyly, p.28

87. Forbes, p.72.

88. Robert Knox, pp.18-19.

adopting two complementary systems of cultivation is quite obvious. First, the destruction of ancient systems of irrigation made the peasants completely dependent on seasonal rainfall, which is very irregular in many provinces, for the cultivation of their staple food.[89] Secondly, many provinces where the last Sinhalese kingdom extended (Kandyan provinces) did not have sufficient flat land suitable for paddy cultivation, so that peasant holdings of paddy lands were not extensive enough to maintain a family. Another reason was that in many Kandyan hills only human labour could be harnessed in paddy cultivation, due to the steepness of hills and the consequent narrowness of paddy fields, thus shutting out animal labour which was extensively used for paddy cultivation in other parts of the Island . This made it impossible for a family to eke out a living from rice cultivation alone. Agricultural labour was quite a problem with the Kandyan peasantry, even at the time of Rober Knox who states that parents encouraged young men to come and sleep in their houses and encouraged girls to entice young men so that they could command the labour of young men in agrivultural work.[90] The high yield of highland (chena) cultivation (though the produce of course was of low quality, particularly those of grain) for a unit of labour, as against rice

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89.RKPC.p.4

90.Robert Knox, p.146.

cultivation and the availability of extensive forest lands which is a pre-requisite of highland cultivation, well fitted into the requirements of land and labour supply in the country. Because of this organic connexion between the methods of cultivation, every peasant village had an area of land set apart for dry grain cultivation .[91] Though highland cultivation was a secondary form of cultivation, and always thought of as an adjunct to the primary cultivation of rice, it helped very much in easing off the pressure on rice land.

Unlike paddy cultivation, which heavily depended on communal labour, the highland cultivation was carried out primarily with family labour. Sometimes the preliminary work, such as clearing the juncle and fencing was done on a communal basis, but afterwards the farms were strictly cultivated and harvested with family labour. This was possible because the variety of grains and other crops cultivated needed no seasonal concentration of labour, either in the preparation of the soil, seeding or harvesting.[92] On rare occasions highlands were cultivated on the basis of share-cropping. However, the proprietors share in this case was just an artifice to make the tenant aware of his tenancy, rather than to derive any material

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91. RKPC. p.146

92. Baker, pp.60-63, Yalman, Under the Bo Tree. p.47

gains on the part of proprietor, his share was no more than a basketful or a man's burden of the crop.[93]

Organization of Labour: family and marriage.

Even at present the close relationship between family and production is very obvious among the Sinhalese peasants, particularly in remote villages where primary production is for subsistence. Yalman observes that marriage among poor peasants means nothing more than 'taking a woman to chena'.[94] Speaking about the institution of marriage among the Sinhalese peasantry during the seventeenth century, Robert Knox observed that it was mainly an arrangement of convenience for labour and agricultural work.[95]Based as it was on the family farm this emphasis on labour as the guiding force in marriage contracts is readily understood. Old bachelors and old maids were a rare occurrence among the Sinhalese peasants. Young men married wives not of their own choice but of their parents. When a young man reached the age of eighteen or twenty, it was regarded his parents duty to find a bride.[96] Various ceremonies connected with the institution of marriage stressed its communal character and importance, leaving little room for love and individual choice.[97]

93.D'Oyly, p.55

94.Yalman, p.111.

95.Robert Knox, p.150

96.Davy, p.213.

97.Davy, p.213, Forbes, p.332.

There were three forms of marriage contracts, resulting in three forms of family systems, among the Sinhalese peasantry. These were the Deega marriage, the Binna marriage and Ekagei kema (polyandry), and all these three forms of marriages and the resulting different forms of family were a function of the system of peasant production. The deega marriage took place when the bride left the parental residence to live at her husbands place A bride leaving the house of her parents effecting a deega marriage abandons all claims to the ancestral property , except what was given to her as dowry on her marriage . She inherits half the share of her husbands property in case of his death. She also became his co-worker on the family farm. The bride goes out primarily to assist her husband on the family farm, and she had an equal right to the family property.[98]

The binna marriage took place when the man took his leave from the parental family in order to settle down in the property of his wife. This form of marriage was primarily intended to obtain male labour for agricultural work where it was deficient. It is this fact which should be emphasized rather than the residence of the husband.[99] The ideal condition in which

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98. Forbes, pp.326 ff. D'Oyly, p.108.

99. Sawyers Digest, p.34. Hayley, p.194; Armour, p.61

100. Ibid. , See also Forbes, pp.326 ff.

a binna marriage took place was when the husband had no land or his share from the ancestral property was insufficient to maintain a family, and the brides parents had no male issue to look after the family farm when they grew old, or, when the bride's parents had land which could not be fully cultivated due to the inadequacy of male labour. [100] Thus the decisive factor which determined the form of marriage, when such a contract was negotiated by prospective in-laws for their children, was the non-availability or the excess of labour in relation to the family farm, thus making the marriage a device of labour exchange between two families which helped to bring about a land labour equilibrium in the family estates of the contracting parties.

Another important function of the two systems of marriage, when looked at not as two separate systems but as two complementary parts of a single system of marriage, is that the two systems deega and binna operated as one system in keeping the involvement of outsiders in a family property to a minimum and to involve only the agnate relatives in the shares of the family estate. [101]

The laws of inheritence with regard to both these marriages were deviced in such a way that land accumulation through marriage contracts were kept to a minimum.

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100. Ibid, also , forbes, pp.326 ff.

101. Obeysekere, p.45.

For instance, the man who marries according to the binna marriage, as well as the woman who marries in deega marriage relinquishes his or her right to the ancestral land. In the case of a widow of a binna marriage, who remarries in deega marriage she loses all her claims to the ancestral property after the second contract unless she is the only child.[102]

Polyandry, which prevailed both among the peasants and the chiefs, the third form of marriage and family system among the Sinhalese, was much criticized by the 19th century European writers on the ground of immorality.[103] Yalman who did a field study in one of the remote villages in the interior of Sri Lanka recognized three forms of polyandric marriage contracts; first, several brothers having common porperty (land) shared a common wife, secondly, cousins or complete strangers pooled their labour as well as available land and maintained a common wife, and finally, a man whose proceeds from land was insufficient to maintain a family made a temporary arrangement with a family so that they accepted his grain produce of the year and provided him not only with a year's food requirements but also with the services of the woman.[104] However, all this did not mean promiscuity. Laws of marriage in the Sinhalese society

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102. D'Oyly, p.108

103. Tennant, I I pp.428-429; Davy, p.215.

104. Yalman, pp.108-111

were sufficiently strict to safeguard the institution of family.[105]

European writers of the nineteenth century very often quote the'excuses' given by the Sinhalese as the causes of obtaining this revolting practice';[106] These'excuses' in fact reveal the close functional fit between polyandry and peasant production. One such reason given by the Sinhalese was that unless some interested party was left to conduct the agricultural work, their rice lands would have gone to destruction while they were absent in the services of the king or a chief.[107]Another reason was that such unions prevented the extreme subdivision of the family estate and such a device would be particularly productive if the family estate was small.[108]

It has already been shown that arresting the division of estate into shares , after a specific point was absolutely necessary for the proper functioning of the share system. Polyandry was an important device which not only prevented such division, but also at times, brought already divided shares into a more economical pool of shares. Having someone who had an equal interest in the family property was extremely important in a society where landholdings were bound with a service tax, i.e., the compulsory labour.Polyandry was particularly a great

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105.,106.,107.,108.,Tennant, pp.428-429. Forbes, p.332.

relief to the peasantry when despotic rulers exacted labour far in excess of what was laid down by the tradition. In fact, had it not been for this institution, the peasantry of some areas in the Island would have been completely eliminated when the British exacted eight months of compulsory labour a year from the peasants, instead of fifteen to thirty days as was allowed by the tradition. [109]

According to contemporary writers , the Sinhalese peasant family was small. This was a function of peasant production.[110] The chena cultivation which was an integral part of the peasant production made heavy demands on female labour. [111] Usually both husband and wife had to spend time in the jungle, in a temporary hut looking after the chena from wild animals, until the crop is harvested. Even in rice cultivation, female labour was an essential part.[112] Women had specific functions, such as weeding, replanting, collection and headloading the harvested crop to the threashing floor, winnowing the threashed grain to clean and separate it from the empty seeds, all of this was regarded as female labour.[113]

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109. See above, p.

110. Davy, p.215

111. Tennant, pp.463-465; See also, Yalman. pp.47.

112. Robert Knox, pp.17-18; 113., Ibid.

Thus the division of labour between the sexes in the Sinhalese society was very rigid.[114] All this demand on female labour in the agricultural production, along with the household drudgery, kept the women too busy to be too much involved in child rearing as a full time job. In fact, peasants got rid of their unwanted offspring , by exposing them) particularly if they were numerous, and they found themselves unable to maintain them.[115] Native rulers attempted to prevent this crime, but even in the middle of the nineteenth century the British found the practice was surreptitiously continued.[116]

The basic struggle: attempt to make the ends meet.

Like any other peasant, the Sinhalese peasant had only a very thin margin of surplus. If they ever had any, which could be used as insurance against the inclemencies of whether or crop failure, or due to any other reason. He was often compelled to obtain credit in the form of grain, either to be used as seed paddy or to make up for the shortage of grain for consumption.[117] The credit thus obtained had to be paid at the next harvest in the threshing floor itself, usually with an interest of 50 per cent.[118] The interest continued to accumulate for the unpaid debt

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114. Robert Knox, p.145

115. Robert Knox, p.151

116. Forbes, II. p.98

117. Robert Knox, p.156

118. Robert Knox, pp.162-163.

only for two years, by which time the capital was doubled. This restriction of the accumulation of interest for the unpaid debt was laid down by the king to ease the burden of the poor, who were sometimes made slaves because of unpaid debt.[119] A creditor was lawfully entitled to lay hold of debtors property, his cattle or his children as slaves,[120] but not to his land. Native kings attempted to stop the exaction of a high interest of 50 per cent but were only partially successful.[121]

By the time of early British rule, peasants appeared to have been obtaining agricultural credit by mortgaging land, [122] a practice which was absent at the time of Robert Knox, but it is impossible to state with any certainty whether the practice started after the introduction of the British rule or started as a result of the Dutch administration and its influence. However, the tradition was even then very strong and public sales of property (land) under execution of debt were entirely unknown.[123] Though the creditor possessed considerable power over the debtor, such power was not normally exercised till he failed all traditional methods of persuation and solicitation.[124] A desperate

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119.,120., Robert Knox, pp.162-163.

121. D'Oyly, p.63

122. Ibid.,

123, 124., Ibid.

creditor might appeal to the chief, whose reproof usually compelled the debtor to pay the loan within reasonable time limit, and if the debtor behaved unreasonably the chief sent officers to seize the debtors property and deliver to the creditor, a pledge sufficient to satisfy his demand.[125]

It has already been stated that the king of Kandy had prohibited exacting the compound interest of 50 per cent after two years in order to prevent whole families being made slaves.[126] Slavery, as it was found among the Sinhalese peasants, was a function of agricultural credit and the exclusion of land from being regarded as security for such credit. Debtors without property , which could made answerable for the debts incurred, were sometimes delivered to the creditor by the chief, so that he can exact the labour of the debtor in any form which he thought would compensate his debt. This action was resorted to only when deliberate evasion of debt was established.[127]The important function of slavery was that this made agricultural credit freely available to the peasants, even though they did not possess substantial assets which could be made answerable in case of default. Instances were not wanting when debtors voluntarily

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125.D'Oyly, p.63

126.Robert Knox, pp.162-163

127.D'Oyly, p.63

resorted to this method of relief, considering that his was only a temporary sacrifice.[128]

Although slavery was an extreme form of social degradation , the physical conditions of slaves were far from despairing. in no part of the world is slavery in a milder form than here- creelty to a slave is scarcely known and in general they are treated more as adopted dependents of the family than menials [129]Thus the debtors had nothing to fear from becoming a slave except the loss social status (caste or rank did not prevent any one being taken as a slave for insolvency). Usually people became slaves of chiefs, who were landed proprietors who thus enhanced their prestige by having more personal retainers.[130] Slaves usually indulged in subsistence agriculture under such chiefs and, unlike in an economy in which economic activity was geared to making profit, there was no necessity for the over over-exaction of slave labour.[131]Thus slaves were seen employed as retainers, tenants in a nindagama and even minor officers under chiefs. Frequently, loyal

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128.D'Oyly, p.64

129.Extracts from Proceedings of the Board of Commissioners, 25 th July 1829. D'Oyly, pp.78-79.

130.Ibid.,

131.Ibid.,

slaves were advanced to high office in the chief's estate- however, all this the slave enjoyed at the pleasure of his master. [132] Slaves had property rights , movable and immovable, independent of the master;[133] the condition of slaves were so salutary that very often slaves gave up all hope of liberating themselves and were contended to be loyal to their masters.[134] Davy estimated in 1818 the slave population in the Kandyan provinces as around three thousand.[135] This figure is one third less than the estimated slave population in the Kandyan provinces, eleven years later, in 1829.[136] Perhaps this drastic drop in slave population was due to the acceptance of land as answerable to the debt involved, which it was not under the traditional system, thus making slavery an institution which had no function and was fast dying for that reason.

Thus the institution of slavery made available agricultural credit to the needy peasant in a society where the peasant could not furnish sufficient

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132, Extracts from the proceedings of the Board of Commissioners , 25th of July, 1829. D'Oyly, pp.78-79. also, Davy, p.138.

133. Ibid.

134. Davy. p.138

135. Ibid.,

136. Extracts from the Proceedings of the Board of of Commissioners, 25th July, 1829. . D'Oyly, p.80.

security in property due to the exclusion of land from being regarded as such. Slavery made it possible for the peasant to obtain agricultural credit without having any form of property to guarantee its safe return, while the same institution made the creditor very secure about the contract without a formal security.

Self sufficiency.

The Kandyan kings, the only independent native rulers in the Island at the turn of the 19th century, have realised that the inaccessibility of their kingdom formed one of the main barriers which checked the onslaught of the foreign conqueror for nearly three centuries. Hence as a measure of security, the building of bridges over rivers or widening the roads more than mere foot paths were not allowed.[137] Felling timber in the forests were strictly prohibited. All the major provinces were divided by thick jungle which no one dared to fell for any reason.[138] A system of provincial passports restricted the horizontal social mobility to a minimum. All this brought the commercial exchange practically to a halt. Peasant villages remained self sufficient in food.[139]

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137. Robert Knox, pp.3-5

138. Ibid.,

139. Robert Knox, p.152

In fact, the interior was more than self sufficient in food; during the first two decades of their rule in the maritime provinces, the British continued to obtain rice from the Kandyan kingdom.[140] Whatever they needed they produced on the land and exchanged among themselves.[141] The little trade in salt and dryfish was carried out by Muslims. The only commercial crop they produced was areca nuts (which they did not grow but grew on its own) in their gardens.[142] Money was extremely scarce, and paddy or arecanuts was the medium of exchange. But the exchange of commodities themselves was more common.[143] They had little wants and were niggardly in their habits.[144] This is the general picture of the interior of Sri Lanka which caught the eye of the European writers who visited the interior of the Island from Robert Knox onwards. Robert Knox wrote in the seventeenth century, ' take a ploughman from the plough and wash off his dirt and he is fit to rule a kingdom'.[145]

140.Bertolacci, p.71

141.Robert Knox, p.155

142.Robert Knox, pp.21-22.

143.Rober Knox, pp.155-157

144.Robert Knox, pp. 138-139

145.Robert Knox, p.171.

CHAPTER II

Structural Changes in the Traditional System.

The Dutch who ruled the maritime provinces from 1658 to 1796 regarded themselves as the inheritors of all the legal powers over the Island which the Sinhalese king enjoyed under the native system of government. Much of the service tenure lands (nindagama) which came into their hands the Dutch granted to the Sinhalese chiefs who helped them to rule the country. These were known as accomodassans, but unlike nindagamas the accomodassans were not granted on a hereditary principle. [1]Some other service lands (divel paraveni and wedawasam)were granted to peasants [2]on the condition that they gratuitously served the government for a period of fifteen days a year.[3] These lands were not liable to any tax.[4]

Apart from service lands thus granted both to the chiefs and peasants, much land was held by peasants as free holdings. Such free holdings were very much like private property. These lands were saleable and heritable both by males and females. The free holders generally paid a tenth of the produce of paddy lands as the government tax.[5]

Apart from these service and non service lands, some other crown lands were cultivated by peasants as

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1Bertolacci, pp.286 ff. See also , Mills. pp.19 ff.

2.Bertolacci, pp.288 ff.

3.Ibid.,

4.Ibid,,

5.Bertolacci, p.286

share-cropper tenants to the crown. They were paid between a half and one fourth of the produce to the government, depending upon the original contract with the government.[6]

It is important to notice that taxes were levied and services were required only on paddy lands, high land, when cultivated with grain, was not taxed by the Dutch.[7]

These basic tenancy arrangements were much confused during the course of the Dutch rule. Some tenants of service lands were paying a tax instead of giving service to the government. Some other service tenants were giving service not to the government but to various chiefs who in some way have managed to appropriate governmernt service lands.[8]

The Dutch introduced a new scheme of paying the Sinhalese chiefs apart from granting them service lands. This was to remit the the taxes of the private lands of chiefs in consideration for their services. This was resorted to when crown lands in an area were insufficient to make grants of accomodassans to the chiefs.[9] Similarly, the government tax, or the share of lands

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6. Bertolacci, p.286

7. Ibid,

8. Colvin R. De Silva, p.34

9. Bertolacci, p.287

which were given to share cropper tenants, were also granted to chiefs as remuneration.[10] Thus the Dutch maintained the basic principle of traditional Sinhalese administration based on service tenure. They scrupulously refrained from making innovations and violating the traditional system, for fear of popular discontent.[11] Moreover, so long as the chiefs were loyal to them and maintained order in their respective districts, they interfered little with their work. They trusted and respected the chiefs.[12]

Thus it would seem, the Dutch extracted a part of the surplus produce of the peasantry according to the mercantilist tradition, namely that of operating through the local system. Monopolies and state regulations were the chief methods of surplus extraction.[13] Hence during the whole course of Dutch rule, the relationship of imperial (Dutch) merchant capital to the native system of production was purely external,[14] and the traditional system of production remained basically unchanged. Nevertheless it depleted the country of whatever surplus it produced and there was hardly any capital accumulation in the Dutch owned territories in Sri Lanka.

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10. Bertolacci, p.287.

11. Bertolacci, pp.29-30

12. Bertolacci, p.52

13. Dobb, Maurice. Studies in the Development of Capitalism. London, 1967. p.38, also, pp.121-122.

14. See, Dobb, pp.121-123.

The British East India Company, which took possession of the maritime provinces of Ceylon in 1796 were uncertain whether the Island would be permanently annexed to the British empire or not due to the unsettled political conditions in Holland at the time. Hence the immediate consideration of the East India Company was to recover from the Island all the expenditure it incurred in capturing the Dutch possessions in Sri Lanka. Hence they brought about major changes in fiscal and administrative fields which they considered would serve this end.

The Madras government which administered the British possessions in the Island on behalf of the East India Company, completely overturned the traditional system of government in order to make more revenue from Sri Lanka. The service tenure system was abolished with immediate effect, and all accomodassans granted to the Sinhalese chiefs were resumed.[15] A general tax was levied on all other service lands and free holdings of the peasants. A new tax was imposed on all high lands grown with coconut. The collection of these taxes was carried out by revenue officers and tax farmers (renters) who came from south India. The oppression of the peasantry by the revenue officers and the tax farmers became so unbearable, that peasant riots broke out in 1797 in all parts of the British

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15. Bertolacci, p.32, See also, Lenox Mills, p.29 ff.

possessions in the Island. These could not be suppressed for a whole year, until tax farming was abandoned and the service tenure restored. [16] Soon after these incidents the Island was taken off the hands of the East India Company and was made a crown colony to be administered by a governor responsible to the Colonial Office in London.

During the early part of their rule the Colonial office had very little intentions of making profits from their settlements in Sri Lanka. Their interests in the Island were more due to its strategic importance in relation to their Indian possessions. In 1801, specific instructions were sent to the governor by the Colonial Office that no Europeans , including British subjects, should be allowed to buy land and settle in the colony.[17] The governor was further instructed not to make permanent land grants to any European settler or British subject. Even for the Europeans in the services the restriction was laid down that land grants or purchases could be made only for a period of seven years.[18] Any offender ran the risk of losing the permit

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16. Bertolacci, p.32, See also, Lenox Mills. p.20ff.
17. Revised Royal Instructions to Governor North, 18 February, 1801, (ed, CCP.II. pp.96-100)
18. Instructions from Henry Dundas , President of the Board of Control to Governor North, 3 March,1801, CGA.4,1. C.O.55,61. (ed.CCP II.pp.107-137)

for residence in the colony. Regarding land purchases that had already taken place among Europeans, the governor was to instruct them to dispose of them within a reasonable time limit.[19]

Apart from these instructions, which were designed to preserve the traditional society unimpaired, some other instructions were sent from the colonial office which, if carried out, would have greatly improved the conditions of the peasantry. The governor was asked to investigate and report on the possibilities of improving the revenue of the Island by making fresh land grants to peasants on terms which would be advantageous to both parties.[20] The Colonial Office also emphasized the necessity of restoring the service lands which were resumed by the East India Company administration and approved of only a gradual commutation system at the option of the parties concerned , and not unilateral or sudden overturning of the traditional system of service tenure.[21]

In accordance with the instructions of the Colonial Office , a proclamation issued in 1800 made provision for the peasants to obtain land for cultivation, and chiefs were directed to make recommendations of deserving cases for such land grants. [22] Such grants were

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19;, 20., 21., Instructions from Henry Dundas, President of the Board of Control to Governor North, 3 March 1801, CGA.4,1; C.0.55.61

22.Proclamationof 3 May 1800,CGA.2 B .3.1. A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government.I.p.17; (ed, CCP.II.P 316

not to exceed 24 acres of high lands and 12 acres of low lands (paddy fields), [23] which was later reduced to 16 acres of high lands and 8 acres of low lands.[24] These were to be held duty free for the first five years at the expiration of which period the uncultivated area was to be resumed by the government. The rest were to become the inalienable property of the grantee paying the usual tax of one tenth of the produce of high land and a fourth of the produce of the low lands. [25]

Thus it is clear that during the early decades of British rule it was merchant capital dominating the imperial metropolis which moulded the policy of the Colonial Office accordingly. That is why the instructions from the Colonial Office advised the governor and the council not to make any changes in the traditional system. As the merchant capital could operate without interfering with the traditional system and still extract a part (or the whole) of surplus production [26] the imperial government did not want any changes made in the system of local government.

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23. Proclamation of 3 May 1800, CGA.2.B.3.1

24. Reply of the Collector of Tangalle District, Reply of the Collector of Colombo District. CCP.II. p.315.

25. Proclamation of 3 May 1800, CGA. 2.B.3.1

26. Dobb, pp.20-22, 120-123.

The abolition of service tenure.

Inspite of the very clear instructions of the Colonial Office and the initial effort to improve rice cultivation, the governor and his advisors embarked on a policy of making drastic changes in the service tenure system. The Proclamation of 1801 issued by the governor gave the option of appropriating the service lands, by those who held them in service tenure , paying a tax of the tenth of the produce of high land and a fourth of the produce of low lands (rice fields). [26] The chiefs were given the option to return the accomodassans to the government for an alternative of a monthly remuneration or, appropriating the accomodassans and paying the regular tax and to receive a monthly remuneration.[27]

It did not take long for the British administrators to realize that neither the peasantry / nor the chiefs were keen on appropriating land as private property. Only a small section of chiefs took advantage of the option. Hence by another proclamation in 1802, service tenure in lands in the British settlements was abolished, and a general tax of one tenth of the produce of high lands and

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26. Proclamation of 3 September, 1801. A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government. I. p.57.

27. Ibid.,

and a fourth of the produce of low lands was imposed on every body. However, some of the crown lands granted to peasants on a share-cropping tenancy continued to pay a half of the produce to the government.[28]

The 1801 Proclamation also instituted compulsory service so obtained could be only on the special orders of the governor.[29]This clause was intended to stop native chiefs obtaining the gratuitous services of the peasants which the British rulers perceived as the basis of power of the Sinhalese chiefs - a power which they considered as a major threat to the consolidation of British power on the Island.[30] All service lands (accomodassans) granted to the chiefs as remuneration for their services were resumed by the government and the chiefs were put on a government pay roll. The private lands of chiefs were exempted from taxation. Further, the chiefs who were reluctant to serve under the changed terms were given the option of retirement with honours.[31] However, in 1806, the British administrators partially restored the

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28.Bertolacci, pp.286-287; Proclamation of 3 September,1803..

29.Proclamation of 3 September,1803.

30.Bertolacci, p.291, See also Lenox Mills, pp.37-39

31.Proclamation of 3 September 1801.

the service tenure, particularly in relation to individual peasant holdings. Nevertheless accomodassans were never regranted to chiefs who continued to receive a salary for their services. [32]

From the very beginning , the governor and his council tried to convince the Colonial Office of the importance of revoking the regulations laid down by the home government against Europeans owning land in Sri Lanka.[33] In the end they succeeded in convincing the Colonial Office that this was the only measure which would solve the financial problems of the colony, by bringing European speculators who would risk capital on investments in land. The proclamation of 1810 revoked all the disabilities imposed on Europeans purchasing land or the government making land grants to Europeans. An upper limit of four thousand acres was placed on such land acquisitions by Europeans; they were also exempt from any tax for ten years. At the end of ten years these lands were liable to be taxed , but an upper limit of tenth of the produce as laid down for taxation. [34]Such grants were also subjected to a condition of cultivation and improvement of the land 'depending upon the situation ' of the land.[35]

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32. Lenox Mills, p.39

33. Government Advertisement of 4 December 1810. CGG. 22 July, 1812, CCP II. pp.314-15.

34. Government Advertisement of 21 July 1812. CGG.22 July 1812. ed. CCP.II. pp.314-315.

Thus by the time the Kandyan kingdom capitulated to the British in 1815 the service tenure system had fallen into disuse in the maritime provinces. The 1818 Kandyan Proclamation which was issued after the Rebellion against the British power,[36] introduced into the interior the same reforms which were carried out in the maritime provinces. The proclamation replaced service tenure in the Kandyan provinces with a general tax of a tenth of the produce of paddy lands.[37] The tax had to be delivered either by the cultivator or the proprietor at a convenient government store house in the province. All temporalities were exempted from the tax. All lands belonging to chiefs were also exempted from the tax for the duration of their office.[38] The Kandyan chiefs were also paid a monthly remuneration.[39] The inferior native officers, like village headmen were allocated a twentieth of the grain tax which they were responsible for collecting and their lands were remitted the grain tax.[40]

Thus ended the system of service tenure which for centuries had been the driving force that

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36, The Proclamation of 21 November 1818 issued after the rebellion of 1818. CGG. 28 Nov.1818 ed. Davy, Appendix II.

37. Ibid.,

38., Ibid.

39., Ibid.

40., Ibid.

energised the state machinery in Sri Lanka under the traditional system of government .

The question arises as to why the governor and his council in Colombo brought about such drastic changes in the system of administration when they had been repeatedly instructed to the opposite by the Colonial Office from the very beginning of British rule in the Island. The obvious answer is that such differences of opinion represent the conflict between merchant capital and emergent industrial capital in the imperial metropolis.[41] The administration in Colombo was not satisfied with the Colonial Office which was then controlled by merchant capital and hence satisfied with making profits on the price differences in space and time, due to the prevailing immobility of producers and their meagre resources.[42] By this time merchant capital itself was intent on taking possession of the means of production.[43] At the same time industrial capital was looking for new avenues of investments for its accumulated capital. In Sri Lanka, the only form of investment for capital was land. Hence changes in the land tenure system were absolutely necessary in the eyes of the emerging industrial capitalist.

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41. Dobb, pp. 162-163

42. Dobb, p. 20

43. Dobb, p. 123, see also Marx, Capital III, pp. 3888-396.

The abuse of the Compulsory Labour system.

The abolition of the service tenure by the British did not mean that compulsory labour service (rajakariya) which was also a part of the service tenure system, was also abandoned. Every time a modification to the service tenure was introduced, the right of obtaining compulsory labour was reserved for the governor.[44] Moreover, a special government advertisement of 1802 upholds the right of the British government to obtain compulsory labour in whatever capacity it deemed fit.[45] The advertisement states that the people had been refusing to attend to work when summoned by the government for public works, from the opinion that they were not liable to any such work or punishment for neglecting such calls because of the abolition of service tenure.[46] The advertisement empowers the superintendents of public works to inflict 'moderate and reasonable' punishment for neglect of public duty [47]

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44. Proclamation of 3 September 1801, A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government, I.p.57. Government Advertisement of 28 April 1802. CCP.II.pp. 305-6; The Proclamation of 21 November 1818 issued after the Rebellion of 1818. Davy Appendix.II. pp.376-388.

45. Government Advertisement of 28 April 1802. CGG.3 May 1802.

46. Ibid.,

47. Ibid.,

The Kandyan Proclamation of 1818 also reserved the right of governor to exact compulsory services of the people if it was necessary.[43] A special regulation enacted in 1818 reiterated the right of the British government to exact cast labour or any other services of the people. The chiefs were made liable by this regulation to exact such services from the people on behalf of the government. [49]The regulation gave extensive powers to the chiefs in exacting compulsory labour and punishing those who refused to work or evade public services.[50] A government advertisement of 1824 gave notice to all persons who were in the Cinnamon Department to give their caste services to the department as required by the Superintendent of the Cinnamon Department .[51]

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48. The Proclamation of 21 November 1818, issued after the rebellion of 1818. CGG. 28 November 1818. Davy, Appendix II.

49. Regulation No.5 of 7 May 1818. A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government I. p.205 ; CGG. 9 May 1818, ed. CCP.II.pp.304-5.

50. Ibid.,

51. Government Advertisement of 7 January 1824. CGG.1o January, 1824. ed. CCP.II. p.305.

In 1824 the governor laid down, in minute detail the rules for calling people on gratuitous services. This was directed mainly to the Collectors of Revenue , and laid down no limitations to the powers exercised by chiefs.[52] In 1825 and 1829 the government attempted to specify the rates of payment for the people who worked on compulsory labour.[53]

Thus for three decades, compulsory labour was in full force in the country until it was finally abolished in 1832 by an Order in Council, at the recommendation of the Colebrooke commission.[54]

The Generalized Grain Tax.

The third major administrative innovation of the British rulers was the generalized grain tax. It was already stated that the abolition of service tenure coincided with the introduction of a grain tax on the

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52. Minute by the Governor of 23 August 1824. Minutes, 1824-42. CGA.2.A.202.1. p.110 ed., CCP II.pp.301-303.

53. Rates of Pay for labourers, Minute of 16 November 1825. CGA.B.204. p.123; CGA.Minutes, 1824-40. 2 A.202.1. Rates of Pay in the Kandyan Provinces. Minute of the Governor 20 Oct.1829. Minutes, 1824-40, CGA.2 A.202.1 ed., CCP.II.p.308.

54. Order in Council abolishing the Compulsory services. C.O.58, 14; CGG.29 September 1832.

peasant produce.[55] The idea of a grain tax on the peasant produce was not altogether an innovation of the British. The Dutch administrators levied such a tax on non-service lands.[56] What the British did was only a universalization of an already existing tax. However, there was this difference. Under the Dutch rule the grain tax and service tenure were mutually exclusive institutions; the lands that were taxed were not liable to any service and vice versa. But the British administrators combined compulsory labour and the grain tax, unless an exception was made. Moreover, the British continued all the other direct taxes imposed by the Dutch on the peasantry.

A tax of one fourth of the staple and one tenth on the high land produce on a peasantry engaged in subsistence production in addition to the afore mentioned compulsory labour, was hard enough. However, what played havoc among the peasantry was the manner in which the grain tax was collected.

The East India Company administration , which introduced a generalized grain tax for the first time,[57] collected the same with the help of Revenue Officers

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55. See below, p.

56. See above, p.

57. CCP. I. p. 80

and tax farmers who came from South India. Although this system was abandoned after the peasant riots in 1797, the imposition of a grain tax in 1802 witnessed a partial restoration of the tax farming system.

The best account of how the grain tax was collected comes from Bertolacci, the government accountant of the day. [58] According to Bertolacci, a part of the grain tax was collected directly by government officers. The rest was 'farmed out' to renters. The renters who bought the 'farms', i.e., the right to collect taxes for the government, had to place a substantial security for fulfilling the conditions of the contract with the government. The principal renters sub-letted the farms to sub-renters who had their securities with the principal renter. [59]

The Revenue Commissioners estimated the quantity of harvest likely to be realised from every field. The emoluments for the commissioners were also included in the estimates. Then the right of collecting the government tax was sold in public auction. [60] Some attempt was made to sell the rents of villages separately and on the spot in order to give an opportunity to the peasants themselves to redeem the tax. [61] If the bidding by

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58. Bertolacci, pp. 303-311

59. Ibid.,

60. Ibid.,

61. Ibid.,

renters or peasants was too low the government officers proceeded to collect the tax directly. Bertolacci estimated that about half the tax was collected by government officers while the other half was rented to tax farmers.[62]

An attempt was made by the government in 1812 to establish a quit rent by agreement with the landholders for a term of years.[63] The measure was intended to relieve the peasants from variable assessment and the interference of tax farmers.[64] However, the innovation was abandoned after a trial of several years because of the impracticability of the measure due to the irregularity of rainfall, which often led to crop failures that would have left the peasants starving if not for the high land (chena) produce.[65] In 1813 an attempt was made to equalize the tax which was assessed on differential rates ranging from one tenth to one half of the produce.[66] The peasants were allowed to redeem such portions of the rent which exceeded one tenth of the produce in instalments.[67] In 1829 the same changes which were carried out in the maritime provinces in 1812 were carried out in a limited area in the Kandyan

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62. Bertolacci, pp.303-311

63. CCP. I. p.80 ff.

64. Ibid,.

65. Ibid.,

66. Ibid.,

67. Ibid.,

provinces, with the same intention of relieving the peasants from the interference of tax farmers, and was later abandoned for the same reasons.[68]

The renting system was further formalised by a government ordinance in 1840.[69] The ordinance laid down the specific procedures to be adopted by the cultivator , (proprietor or tenant) the renter and the government.[70] The ordinance states that when the crop was sufficiently advanced to enable an estimate, government assessors should calculate its probable value and returns on the amount liable from every single field, made to the government Agent of the province.[71] The right of collecting the tax for every district was then sold in public auction.[72] The cultivator had to give five days notice to the renter of his intended date of harvesting. If it were to be postponed for any reason the renter should be given five days notice. If the crop was not immediately threashed the renter was to be given two days further notice.[73] For any ommission or irregularity on the part of the cultivator , he could be sued in the District court by the renter.[74]

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68. CCP. I. pp. 80 ff.,

69. Ordinance No. 14 of 1840 , For securing the Due Collection of the duties or Tax upon Paddy and Dry Grain.

70. Ibid.,

71, A detailed description of how the tax was collected under the Ordinance No. 14 of 1840 was given by Tennant, Report of the Finances and Commerce of Ceylon. 1848. p. 68 ff. , also given as a foot note in Tennant, Ceylon. p. 170

72., 73, 74., Ibid.,

The effects of Structural changes on the peasant production.

The effects of the abolition of service tenure.

The abolition of service tenure could be regarded as the starting point of land concentration on the Island Although private property in land was possible even under the traditional system, the possibility of land concentration in the hands of a few was extremely rare, because there were some built in checks which prevented such phenomena. The relationship between caste occupational monopolies and land holdings [75] severely restricted land transfers from one family to another. Such transfers were possible only among members of the same caste. More important was the fact the higher castes which enjoyed political power could never use it to appropriate the lands of the lower castes, for such an action would necessarily have involved them with socially degrading services, which were attached to the lands of lower castes. However, once the caste service/s were seperated from land holdings, the major obstacle to land concentration was removed. [76] Even by 1830, during which period the British administrators did not officially disowned caste system, and if fact, officially enforced it in various departments, the effects of separation of caste and service from land

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75. See above, p.

76. D'Oyly, pp.87-89.

holdings was felt. D'Oyly reports that some of the villages which were exclusively cultivated by people of lower castes have fallen into the hands of higher castes.[77]

The low country chiefs,* who were subjected to European influence for nearly three centuries, were the first to take advantage of this opportunity of appropriating land without a loss to one's social status. When option was given in 1801 to register service lands for a grain tax and appropriating them as private property[78] some of the low country chiefs appropriated accomodassans, by registering them to pay the grain tax. Sometimes these extended to some several hundreds of acres. During the early British period some low country chiefs even owned thousands of acres.[79]

This change of ownership of service lands from the crown to chiefs (as private property) adversely affected the tenurial rights of the peasants who cultivated them.

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77. D'Oyly, pp.87-89

78. Proclamation of 3 September 1801. A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government. I. p.57, also ed., CCP.II. pp .277-278.

79. CCP.I. p.65, See also, Colvin R.De Silva, p.359.

* The maritime provinces are usually referred to as the low country as against the up country or the Kandyan regions of the Island. In fact the term Kandy is a corruption of the Sinhalese word Kanda meaning 'hill'

Most of these tenants held their plots in such service lands on hereditary tenancy and apart from giving a certain number of labour days usually working in the exclusive fields of the chief.[80] These tenants had unchallenged rights to cultivate the land, to inherit to/their descendants and appropriate the whole produce of their land.[81] Once service lands become the private property of the chiefs who registered them for the payment of the grain tax the once proprietor chief became the landlord-- a concept which was non existent in the Island, thus transforming the hereditary tenants to tenants at will, holding their plots at the landlord's pleasure.

Even though the British retained the local administration with the help of native chiefs, following the Dutch, the British did not have the same faith on their loyalty as the Dutch did.[82] The power and influence the chiefs exercised over the peasantry was always regarded by the British as a threat to the consolidation of their power.[83] Hence they made a clear distinction between the super-imposed British civil service and the infra structure of native administration headed by Sinhalese chiefs.[84]

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80. See above, pp.

81. See above.

82. Bertolacci, pp.52-54

83. Lenox Mills, pp.39,52

84. Colvin R. De Silva, p.396

Various regulations and proclamations the British enacted during the first few decades of their rule clearly indicates that their intention was not to deprive the government from obtaining unpaid services of the people but to prevent chiefs from doing so . The British administrators saw service tenure and compulsory labour as the key to the power and influence exercised by the chiefs over the peasantry. Hence the regulations regarding service tenure and compulsory labour were enacted in such a way that while they gave the governor and the civil service a free hand in exacting the labour of the peasants they prevented chiefs obtaining any unpaid labour from the peasants.

This coincided with chiefs obtaining vast tracts of land as private property. They were faced with the immediate problem of obtaining labour for cultivating such land. These chiefs resorted to the same practice the government had resorted to in cultivating service lands which were resumed when service tenure was abolished, that is, share-cropping.[85] Thus the former tenants of service lands, who had hereditary rights to cultivate them and obtain the whole produce by giving(rajakariya) compulsory labour (for two weeks) and a specific number of labour days for the chiefs, lost both their hereditary rights and half the grain produce to the chiefs.

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85. D'Oyly, pp.87-89

In Kandyan provinces the effects of the abolition of service tenure were lightly different than in the low country, although the spread of share-cropping was one of the major consequences of it. Unlike in the low country the nindagamas (service lands) were granted on a hereditary basis to the chiefs by the king, and the British could not revoke these as they were bound by the Kandyan Convention of 1815 to protect the laws of the country.[86] Hence when the service tenure was abolished both the peasants and chiefs were left with an equal opportunity of appropriating the land by paying the grain tax. The peasants argued that if they had to pay the grain tax they were the real owners of the property and if the chiefs wanted the ownership of the nindagamas of which they were the proprietors it was the chiefs who should pay the tax.[87] Although the 1818 Kandyan Proclamation did not abolish service tenure in the nindagamas that is, the Proclamation did not interfere with the service tenancy arrangements between the nindagama proprietors and the peasants, the peasants, once they were called on to pay the grain tax, refused to give any service to the chiefs. They held that the land

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86. The Kandyan Convention. Proclamation of 2 March 1815, CGG.6 March 1815. Davy, Appendix. I.

87. Remarks from the Revenue Commissioner, on Mr.Turnour's Report. D'Oyly, pp.77-78.

belonged to them by their paying a tax to the government and they owed no service to the proprietor of the nindagama.[89]

The Kandyan chiefs who were exposed to European influence only after 1815, did not have the means of paying the grain tax, either in money or in kind, unlike the chiefs of the low country, who had acquired sufficient wealth by involvement in commercial agriculture during the Dutch rule.[90] That many Kandyan chiefs who held vast tracts of lands as nindagamas found it extremely difficult to pay the grain tax is evident from the fact that within a year after the Kandyan Proclamation which abolished the service tenure, the government had to issue a special proclamation in 1819 , to stop Kandyan chiefs donating their lands to temples in order to avoid paying the grain tax.[91] Hence the chiefs could not prevent peasants paying grain tax and thereby gaining proprietory rights over the land which they cultivated. For many Kandyan chiefs the only land which was left for them were the exclusive fields (muttettu). Further as the tenants who paid the grain tax refused to work gratuitously on the exclusive fields of the chiefs. The government readily acquiesced to this as a golden opportunity to break the bond between the chiefs and the

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89. Remarks from the Revenue Commissioner on Mr. Turnour's Report. D'Oyly, pp.77-78.

90. Bertolacci, pp.26-27, 32, 243, 250.

91. Proclamation of 18 September, , 1819. CGG. 25, September, 1819. ed. CCP.II. pp.319-320.

peasants. Hence the only way the chiefs could get their lands cultivated was by resorting to share-cropping.

Apart from such instances when the peasants themselves refused to contribute free labour to the cultivation of the muttettu fields after paying the grain tax, the government itself prohibited either the peasant service tenants (nilakarayas) from giving such gratuitous labour or chiefs from obtaining such labour. Such were the instructions issued regarding the service lands which were confiscated during the Kandyan rebellion in 1818 and regranted to the peasants after the order was established. [93]These peasants were taxed a tenth of the produce and the chiefs, the proprietors of such lands were compelled the exclusive fields (muttettu) on the basis of share cropping. [94]

Thus even though the abolition of service tenure worked out more to the advantage of the peasants in the case of Kandyan Provinces, at least so far as the land ownership was concerned, still it led to the development of share-cropping.

Quite apart from its indirect contribution to the development of share-cropping in the Island by the abolition

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93. D'Oyly, pp.87-88

94. Ibid.

of service tenure, the government also had a direct involvement in share-cropping system. The British rulers owned vast tracts of lands in the maritime provinces, which belonged to the Dutch East India Company, and these were further increased when service lands (accomodassans) were resumed in 1802. [95] When the Kandyan kingdom capitulated in 1815 all the crown lands devolved on the British rulers as the legal successors to the Sinhalese crown.[96] Under the traditional system the exclusive fields of crown lands were cultivated by service tenants.[97] But the British administrators found it more profitable to tax the land of service tenants (nilakarayas) and get the exclusive fields cultivated on the basis of ande, share-cropping.[98] This again led to the spread of the share-cropping system.

It is hardly possible to conceive that the British administrators in Colombo were unaware of the possible outcome of the changes they made in the land tenure system. The British already had the experience of the different effects of the differential land policy on social formations in the North American colonies.

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95. See above, p.

96. The Kandyan Convention. Proclamation of 2 March 1815. CGG. 6 March 1815 ; Davy Appendix I. pp. 369-375.

97. See above , pp.

98. D'Oyly, pp. 87-89

In New England, where land grants were made to settlers in small lots at a nominal price developed a society of small holders little inclined to work for wages. However, in Virginia, where land was sold in large extents , there emerged a society of landowning proprietors and a class of propertyless labourers. The class division in Virginia was thus sharp and wage labour was available in plenty.[99] Hence the administrators in Colombo who were inclined to reproduce capitalist relations of production in the new colony would have clearly understood that the foundation stone of their endeavour remained in the restriction of land ownership in the Island to a minority to the exclusion of the majority.[100] The only way to accomplish this in the colony was the abolition service tenure thus creating land speculation. This attitude of the administrators become quite blatant in the mid nineteenth century.

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99. Dobb, pp.221-222

100. Dobb, pp.221-222

The effects of the abuse of compulsory labour on the peasantry.

The abolition of the service tenure in 1801 was considered by the peasants in the maritime provinces as a liberation from any claims by the government, except on a voluntary basis, of their labour.[101] However, the peasants were soon to realize their mistake for the government took immediate measures to punish the peasants who refused to contribute labour when required by the government. [102] Hence from 1802 onwards, the British government was exacting both a grain tax and compulsory labour from the peasants.

This exaction of compulsory labour on a very non-traditional way(for there was no relationship between the compulsory labour and landholdings) had a profound effect on the peasant production . The British administration claimed their right to the compulsory labour as derived from the ancient custom of rajakariya which entitled the king a right to exact unpaid labour of his subjects for the general welfare of the society.[103] However, the government was exacting a share of the peasant production for the same reason and the claim

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101.Government advertisement of 28 April 1802. CGG. 3 May 1802. ed.CCP.II.p.305

102. Ibid.

103.CCP.I.pp.34-35

for compulsory labour was based on a false presumption. It was a violation of the traditional law. Though the peasants in the temple lands were excempted from the grain tax, they were also made liable to give compulsory labour when required by the government.[104]

Under the new system, compulsory labour was exacted from peasants either gratuitously or at fixed rates of pay, as decided by the governor or his delegate.[105] The duty of calling the number required for such work and pressing them for work, devolved upon the chiefs[106] who, because of the substantial leeway given to them regarding this matter, exerted far more power on the peasantry than they ever were capable of under the traditional system.[107] The peasants knew exactly the amount and the nature of labour they owed both the king and the nindagama proprietor under the traditional system, for they were determined by caste regulations. No one not even the king himself, dared to violate tradition on such matters. The new system, however, set no limits to either the extent or the nature of labour that could be exacted from peasants. Both the governor, in claiming the labour and chiefs, in exacting it, had a free hand in the matter.[108] No fixed rule was followed, either in regard

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104.CCP.I.pp.34-35.
105.CCP.II.pp.40-41
106.CCP.II.pp.40-41
107.Regulation No.5 of 7 May 1818. CGG.9 May 1818.ed., CCP.II.pp.304-305.
108.CCP.I.pp.40-41

to duration or the description of labour which was exacted gratuitously or on wages when wages were paid at all.[109]

In the Kandyan Provinces, however, some connection was maintained between landholdings and compulsory labour,[110] although the service tenure was abolished by the Kandyan Proclamation.[111] Because of this there was less irregularity in the mode of distribution of compulsory labour among peasants in the Kandyan Provinces than in the low country. Because it was not completely left to the whims and fancies of the chiefs in charge of the work.[112] The holders of shares were required to serve in rotation.[113] However, this system of allocating labour on the basis of share ownership had its own shortcomings, which could be as serious as when it was left to the whims and fancies of the chiefs. For there was no relationship between the extent of land held in a share and the number of days a person was required to work for the government. Thus a person holding one acre as his share would be working

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109. CCP. I. pp. 40-41

110. CCP. I. pp. 43-44.

111. Proclamation of the 21 November issued after the Kandyan Rebellion of 1818, CGG. 28 November, 1818. Davy, Appendix II.

112. CCP. I. pp. 43-44

113. Ibid.,

the same number of days as a person holding a share of 1/100 of an acre, which was not a very uncommon situation in the Kandyan landholding system. [114]

The type of work the peasants were called on to perform under the scheme of compulsory labour varied considerably. The most laborious and extensive were the services related to the construction of roads and bridges, which also involved logging timber and dragging them out of the forest, collecting salt in the salt-pans, catching and attending as well as collecting fodder for elephants.[115] People of the fishermen caste were required to furnish boats, and also to attend during the season at the pearl fisheries and on any other occasion when the government required their services .[116] Government officers on circuit obtained coolie labour from peasants, to carry their baggage or palanquins. The labour of the washermen caste was exacted to furnish white cloaths required at resthouses when government officers on circuit took lodgings. [117] Sometimes peasants werecompelled to build temporary lodgings for such officers, (when there were no resthouses) and they had to carry torches from village to village when government servants travelled at night.[118]

114.See Obeyesekere, pp.13 ff.
115.CCP.I.pp.40 ff.
116.Ibid.,
117.Ibid.,
118.Ibid.,

Europeans, their descendents and high caste natives (chiefs) were the only people who were exempt from compulsory labour.[119]

The extent to which peasant labour was exacted for public works is very difficult to determine. On very rare occasions, chiefs in the maritime provinces, in their diaries, kept records of the number of labourers employed in public works.[120] Somewhat accurate figures regarding compulsory labour were available for the Colombo District for the eleven years, 1820-30. According to these figures the Colombo District had an average of more than 93,000 day labourers annually employed on compulsory public labour.[121] The worst affected were the peasants in the areas through which public highways were constructed.[122] In such areas the peasants were continuously employed for several years, and were relieved only for short intervals to cultivate their lands.[123] In some districts such leave did not extend beyond a few weeks a year, which was all the time the peasants could devote to subsistence agriculture which maintained them and their families for a whole year.[124]

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119. CCP. I. pp. 40ff.

120. Ibid.,

121., Ibid,

122. CCP. I. pp. 43-44.

123. Ibid.

124. Ibid.,

The traditional rajakariya permitted the employment of peasants only in their respective districts of residence. However, the new system exacted their labour in places far removed from their homes. The travelling to and from their work places alone sometime involved, peasants spending weeks on the way, for which period they were not paid even a subsistence wage even at times when compulsory labour was paid a minimal wage.[125] In 1829, more than three decades after the British occupied the Island peasants refused to submit to this injustice and order was established only after the 'ring leaders' were severely punished for refusing to work, and troops were alerted to quell any disturbances that would have occurred. To avoid public scandal, the government remitted the grain tax of these peasants once the order was established.[126]

The amount of labour exacted from the peasants by the government is well illustrated by Turnour, the Revenue Commissioner, who stated,

> the value of the produce of the land of the people employed on the roads in the Four Korales amounts to £ 5300. The road party are exempt from work for four months in the year. For the eight months they are employed if they were paid at the rate of voluntary labour which may be reckoned at six pence per day the cost would be £ 2400, nearly half the value of the produce of their lands. From the remainder they have to subsist themselves during the four months that they are exempted from the roads and during which period they are required to occupy themselves

125. CCP. I. pp. 190-195
126. Ibid.,

in cultivating their lands to supply themselves with the means of recommencing the road service.[127]

Because of these labour extortions, resulting in long periods of absence of peasants from their homes and fields, the peasant production system was thrown into confusion. In areas where peasants worked in road constructions, the leave of absence from work had to be obtained from the governor himself.[128] Usually peasants were allowed to return to their villages at two intervals, for cultivation and harvesting.[129] But very often it so happened that when the peasants were released for cultivation the season had passed for rice cultivation. This resulted in not having their paddy lands cultivated at all for the year. Hence many peasants had to resort to high land cultivation for their subsistence which could be carried out any time during the year.[130]

It has already been shown that , among the Sinhalese peasants, the system of primary agriculture was carried out very much on a communal basis.[131] For the traditional system to operate effectively and efficiently all the cultivators in a given estate(gama) should cooperate in the whole process of production. In fact, the system of shares(pangu) and alternation

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127., 128.,129., 130., CCP.I. pp.191-197

131. See above, p.

Hence these services could not be easily evaded. The tenants of temple lands were summoned for temple services by the authority of the government. Therefore, the full amount of labour due from these tenants was always exacted unlike in many nindagamas.[135]

The growing inequality of wealth among peasants due to the accelerated circulation of money with the introduction of wage labour[136] and the development of cash-crop cultivation among the peasantry,[137] led to an unequal distribution of services among the peasant cultivators of temple lands. The richer and more influential land holders were allowed to pay a composition to make up for the services due from them, which in turn caused heavier demands on the rest of the tenants in the temporalities.[138] However, temple service was still less demanding and irksome to the peasants than the compulsory services rendered to the government.[139] But the liability of the tenants of temple lands to compulsory service,

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135. The Proclamation of 21 November issued after the rebellion of 1818, CGG. 28 November 1818. Davy, Appendix. II. pp. 376-88 also, CCP. pp. 35-37

136. Rates of Pay for labourers . Minute of 16 November 1825. CGA. B. 204, p. 123. Minute of the Governor 20 October 1829. Minutes, 1824-40. CGA. 2, A. 202. 1. (ed. CCP. II, pp. 306-308)

137. See below, p.

138. CCP. I. pp. 35-37; RKPC., p. 109

139. CCP. I. pp. 35-37

in addition to the services rendered to the temple , made their position even worse than those of the nindagama peasants, who were relieved of the services to the chiefs by paying the tax.

The village irrigation system, upon which the paddy cultivation completely depended, went into ruin during this period. Although some interest in the irrigation schemes was shown by the British administrators during the first decade of their rule, once the policy of road construction got under way that was completely and conveniently abandoned.[140]

The village council (gamsabha) which traditionally used the compulsory labour of the peasants in constructing and maintaining the irrigation system, now had no authority to exact compulsory labour in order to compel peasants to perform these public works. Neither the chiefs had any power nor intention of compelling the peasants to attend to irrigation works. This inability of the traditional institution, the village council , to attend to village irrigation works had more adverse effects on the peasant production, as the first thirty years of the British rule saw a several embittered entanglements of British troops with the Sinhalese of the interior, in the course of which the irrigation system of peasant villages were wantonly

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140. Minute of the Board of Commissioners. CGA. , Board Proceedings, 1829; 27 October. 21,30. ed. CCP II.pp.280-4

141. See above ,

destroyed by British troops as a military strategy (which in fact had the desired effect) to subjugate peasants by starvation.[142] The more serious of such destruction of irrigation schemes took place in Kandyan provinces during the Kandyan rebellion of 1818. In this bitter and long struggle, which lasted over a year, the irrigation schemes in two provinces, Uva and Sabaragamuwa, were devastated, which resulted in a widespread starvation.[143] The peasants who escaped starvation and death in these two provinces eked out a subsistence only by high land cultivation, which remained their primary cultivation in some areas nearly a century.[144]

Apart from the adverse effects of the compulsory labour on peasant production, the abuse of the system- which of course was a secondary abuse, for the compulsory labour as it was operating under the British was itself an abuse of traditional rajakariya - both by the Sinhalese chiefs and Europeans, caused serious damage to peasant production.

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142. Bailey, Ceylon. p.86; Marshall, H. Ceylon. A description of the Island and its Inhabitants . London, 1846. pp.121,123,146.

143. "Wellassa" or 'hundred thousand rice fields' , one of the most prosperous rice producing areas in the Kandyan kingdom before 1815 was nothing but an area of " miserable cultivation", when Tennent visited the area in 1857.

It has already been shown that the abolition of compulsory labour was carefully designed to deprive the native chiefs of obtaining gratuitous labour from the peasants in order to weaken their power.[145] However, under the new system, the task of exacting labour from the peasants for the government devolved upon the native chiefs.[146] The chiefs, deprived of their traditional source of gratuitous labour, unscrupulously grabbed every opportunity afforded to them under the new scheme to appropriate compulsory labour for their private use.[147] The vagueness of the terms of reference, or the non-existence of any,[148] which governed the behaviour of chiefs in pressing labour for public works, gave them ample opportunity to appropriate peasant labour for private work.[149] Not only were such irregularities difficult to detect but the peasants readily acquisced to them as labouring for a chief was less rigorous and irksome than working for the government, particularly on the road service.[150] The chiefs usually utilized such misappropriated labour in cultivating

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146.,See above, p.

146.,CCP.I.pp.40-41

147.,CCP.I.pp.43-44.

148.,CCP.I.pp.40-41

149.,CCP.I.pp.43-44.

150. Ibid.,

the extensive tracts of land they had been able to acquire as private property since the beginning of the British administration.[151]

The chiefs were sometimes able to convert the public labour in road service to a considerable emolument in conniving at those who could pay for the indulgence. Moreover, the friends and relations of chiefs were excused from compulsory labour.[152] All this meant an added burden on the peasants who worked for the government.

Peasants as well as responsible chiefs were sometimes fined for the peasants' failure to attend to compulsory service. A chief who found himself thus fined usually recovered the loss and also made a profit by forcibly appropriating whatever property that belonged to the peasants who neglected the duty. The act was justified under the plea that he suffered because of their fault.[153]

Not only the native chiefs but also European service personnel , both civil and military, greatly abused compulsory labour. Under the Sinhalese government only the king and chiefs could use palanquins and their use was extremely rare. During the early British period even the lowest civilian and military officers used the unpaid services of the peasants for this mode of transport.

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152. CCP.I.pp.195,198-199

153. CCP.I.p.197

151. CCP.I. pp.43-44

Such labour was exacted not only for official purposes but also for pleasure trips , hunting expeditions, etc[154] This type of unauthorised and petty exactions by Europeans took such proportions that even the British government could no longer tolerate it. Hence in 1814 a government advertisement was published prohibiting Europeans from making such unauthorised labour exactions from the peasants.[155] Complaints were made to the governor by the police chief in Kandy about unpaid labour exactions from the peasants by European planters even after the abolition of compulsory labour.[156] There is corroborative evidence that such corrupt practices continued unabated right down to the middle of the 19th century.[157]

The effects of Grain Tax on peasant production.

The generalized grain tax , though mentioned here last, was not the innovation which affected the peasantry the least. Within a few years after this innovation , British administrators realized the extreme harm done to the peasant production by this measure. But strangely enough they took only what they thought to be corrective measures to remedy the situation, [158] which never went very far in that direction, but never thought of giving

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154. Forbes, p.347
155. Government Advertisement of March 1814, CGA. 2 A.201, 1. ed, CCP II. pp.310-312
156. Quoted by Ludowyk, p.66
157. Forbes, p.347
158. Objections of Sir Edward Barnes to the Commission of of Enquiry. , C.O. 54, 89. Barnes to Bathurst. 2 October 1825. CCP. II.pp.30-38

up the grain tax altogether or replacing it with a general land tax (not a tax on grain produce alone). Many civil servants of the day suggested the replacement of the grain tax with a general land tax specially pointing out that the grain tax contributed only a six percent of the revenue of the Island.[159] The administration obviously rejected the idea of a general land tax which would have seriously affected the interests of speculation on land- an interest which clearly represented the emerging industrial capitalist interests of the imperial metropolis and hence received priority over everything else.

The government accountant, Bertolacci, was highly critical of the tax farming system as early as 1817 .. The young and inexperienced civil servants, according to Bertolacci, (the civil servants sent to Ceylon from Britain in those days were between 14-17 years of age) acting as revenue commissioners harassed cultivators. [160] The renters who paid a high price for the 'farms' extorted the peasantry. A favourite technique of extortion practiced by renters was to evade cultivators when harvesting drew close. The peasants, unable to remove the crops from the threashing floor without paying the government's share had to bribe them to be present at harvesting time.[161]

159.CCP.I.pp.78-79
160.Bertolacci, pp.303-311
161.Ibid.,

The amount of confusion the tax farming would have created among the peasants could be judged by the great number of law-suits relating to tax farming which came up every year. For the years 1810,1811, and 1812 there was an average number of eight hundred law suits in Colombo District alone, involving the government, renter, sub-renters and proprietors (or tenants). [162]

Emerson Tennent of the Ceylon Civil Service, who was appointed to head a committee which inquired into the grain tax, was so shocked at the entire system that he proposed an abolition of the tax. The adverse effects of the grain tax on the peasant production cannot be better explained than it was done by Tennat, according to whom

> It would be difficult to device a system more pregnant with oppression, extortion and demoralization than the one here detailed. The cultivator is handed over to two successive sets of inquisitorial officers, the assessors and the renters; whose acts are so uncontrolled that abuses are inevitable.... they in return resort to the most inquisitorial and vexatious interference, either to protect the interests of the government , or privately to further their own. Between these demoralizing influences the character and industry of the rural

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162. Bertolacci, pp.303-311

> populations are deteriorated and destroyed. The extension of cultivation by reclaiming a portion of waste land only exposes the harassed proprietor to fresh visits from headmen, and a new valuation by the government assessor...
>
> But no sooner has the cultivator got rid of the assessor than he falls into the hands of the renter, who, under the authority with which the law invests him, finds himself possessed of unusual powers of vexation and annoyance. He may be designedly out of the way when the cultivator sends notice of his intention to cut; and if the latter, to save his harvest from perishing on the stalk, ventures to reap it in his absence, the penalties of the law are instantly enforced against him. Under the pressure of this formidable control the agricultural proprietor, rather than lose his time or crop, in dancing attendance on renter, or submitting to the multiform annoyance of his subordinates is driven to purchase forbearence by additional payments; and it is generally understood that the share of the tax which eventually reaches the treasury does not form one half of the amount which is thus extorted by oppressive devices from the helpless proprietors. [163]

Where the tax was not rented out and collected directly by government officers, the peasants were obliged to deliver

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163. Tennant, Report.... p. 68, also, Ceylon., p.170

it at a government store house, which was in the division.[164] As there were not many store houses, and with a primitive communication system the peasants had to headload their produce great distances.

The assessors of the grain tax under the new scheme were the Sinhalese chiefs who reliedon the information supplied by village headmen. An important fact, which was overlooked by the British administrators , was that these headmen received a twentieth of the grain tax which they helped in collecting, as a part of their remuneration,[165] in addition to the fact that the lands of these very same officials were exempt from the grain tax.[166] This inevitably led to a gross over assessment of the tax due from the peasantry.[167] Kandyan chiefs, who gave evidence before the Colebrooke Commission, informed the commissioners that the rents (tax) the peasants paid a year were as large as the contributions to the Sinhalese government they made in ten years.[168]

All this harassment of peasants who indulged in rice cultivation, and the extreme extortion of peasant labour under the compulsory labour system led to a drastic drop in the rice cultivation Before the British occupied

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164. The Proclamation of 21 November, 1818, issued after the Rebellion of 1818. CGG. 28 November, 1818, Davy, Appendix. II.

165., 166., Ibid.

167. See below,

168. CCP. I. p. 196

Kandyan territories the Kandyans produced more rice than they could consume. The British obtained large quantities of rice from the Kandyan kingdom to supplement the production of the maritime provinces.[169] A comparison of the rice imports to the Island during the last phase of the Dutch rule with that of the rice imports three decades after the British took possession of the Island illustrates the heavy drop in rice production. The Dutch imported about 320,000 parahs of rice in the last phase of their administration and in 1828 the British imported 1058,000 parahs or three times as much.[170] Even when the population increase during these three decades is taken into account this would still leave a wide margin which could only be explained as due to a drastic drop in rice production in the country.[171] In fact, the peasants switched over from rice cultivation to some other crops during this period. Peasants in both maritime provinces and Kandyan regions increasingly took to commercial cultivations.[172]

Thus the several structural changes the British brought about in the peasant production system of the Island affected the basic factors of production , the land and labour, and how these two factors were organized

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169. Bertolacci, p.71
170. CCP.I.p.85
171. It appears that the collectors of revenue, who acted as majistrates and justices of peace, had to dismiss village headmen and fine the cultivaters for neglecting the cultivation of rice. CCP.I.p.81
172. See below, pp.

in the production process. The innovations of the British changed the relations of production; many peasants lost their hereditary rights to the land; some of them lost it completely and became share-croppers to the chiefs, at whose will and pleasure they held land. They also lost claim to much of their own labour, which was forcibly utilized by the government for its own purposes. Finally, the peasants were also alienated from the greater part of their produce to the government and the chiefs. Much of these changes affected only the peasants who indulged in rice cultivation.

The nature and extent of these changes become clear only when compared with the situation under the traditional system. The peasants who obtained the whole produce by serving the government two weeks and, perhaps, specific number of days on the land of a chief, now lost half to one fourth of the produce to the government if he cultivated his own land, and again a half to the land owner if he cultivated on the basis of share cropping, which made his share only a fourth of the total produce. To obtain this even he had to dance attendance on the renter. Moreover, he was forced to give free labour to the government months on end. It is no wander than that the peasants would have lost all interest in cultivation

and would 'sit down and starve out the year under the shade of two or three coconut trees' rather than making any effort at improving his lot. Hence thereis little surprise that more and more peasants gave up rice cultivation in preference to a commercial crop which were exempted from all disabilities by special legislation.

These changes provided the basis for the establishment of capitalist relations of production in the Island. In fact the changes in Sri Lanka represent the necessary changes in the system of production in relation to the changes that had been taking place in the imperial metropolis. The changes that had been taking place in the imperial metropolis during the latter part of the 18th and the earlier part of the 19th centuries resulted a rapid shift of the imperial economy from mercantile capitalism to that of industrial capitalism. Such changes in the metropolis required opportunities for investment for capital which was fast accumulating. The imperial capitalists naturally regarded colonies as good places for such investment. In Sri Lanka, the only form of investment for capital was land; and commercial farming also required cheap labour. The changes brought about in the system of production were essentially geared to meet these requirements.

CHAPTER III

Forced into Cash-crop Cultivation.

Even before the Portuguese visited the Island in 1505 cinnamon trade, which was the major cash-crop of Sri Lanka, was a state monopoly. In the Kandyan kingdom, arecanuts, the commercial crop of any importance besides cinnamon, was collected by king's officers , though Muslim traders sometimes bartered goods for arecanuts. However, export trade was always a state monopoly among the Sinhalese.

Cinnamon, the valued spice of the West, during 15th through 18th centuries, grew wild in the Island, attracted the Portuguese, who ravaged the countryside for one hundred and fifty years in their insatiable greed for the spice. When the Dutch established their authority in the maritime provinces, they found that the best cinnamon grew in the territories of the Kandyan kings. The Hollander, being well aware of the expense of a war with the Sinhalese king, obtained the right of collecting cinnamon from the king's territories by peaceful means. So long as they followed this policy, it was always profitable to the company, and whenever a deviation occurred it invited disaster. However, many Dutch governors in the Island found the terms and conditions laid down by the kings of Kandy extremely humiliating though economically profitable. The ascendancy of the Nayakkar dynasty of

the Malabar coast to the Sinhalese throne in the 18th century made the situation worse. The Nayakkar rulers had contacts with other European nations and were well aware of the profits the Hollander was making from the cinnamon trade.

The above considerations led the Dutch administrators in Sri Lanka to introduce commercial plantations in the provinces which were under their jurisdiction, rather than obtaining them from the king's territories . Initially, they experimented with cinnamon,[1] and later extended to coffee, cardamom and pepper.[2] By the end of their rule, the Dutch were successful in obtaining all their need of cinnamon from these plantations.[3] They also encouraged the peasants to cultivate coffee and other cash crops and sell them to the company.[4] The Dutch later abandoned their coffee and other minor cash crop plantations as uneconomical,[5] but peasants in the maritime provinces continued to grow coffee on a very minor scale and bartered it with Muslim traders.[6] Apart from the above crops, coconut grew extensively in the Dutch territories; and even though the company owned a large extent of coconut land , it was never considered an important cash crop. Until the beginning of

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1. Bertolacci, pp.27-29, 242-243
2. Bertolacci, pp.27-29
3. Ibid.,
4. Bertolacci, pp.27-29, 242-243
5. Tennant, p.227
6. Ibid.,

the British rule coconut remained a peasant crop which supplemented their consumption needs and helped them in various other ways.[7] Thus, when the British East India Company took possession of the Dutch territories in the Island, they inherited extensive cinnamon plantations and a large extent of land where coconut was grown. Coffee, pepper and arecanuts remained rather unimportant peasant cash crops.

The Dutch economic activities thus remained for the most part external to the mode of production in the Island. However, the Dutch geared the local institutions, like the service tenure system and the caste system to exact the surplus production from the peasantry. It was at a latter part of their acitivities that the Dutch started taking possession of the means of production, i.e., the direct involvement in plantations. This again represents developments taking place in merchant capitalism.[7b]

It was the avowed policy of the early British administrators to improve cash crop cultivation in order to boost up the revenue of the colony.[8] They made strong representations to the Colonial Office that land speculation and commercial cultivation was the only way to resolve the financial solvency of the Island, although

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7b. See Dobb, pp.121-123; also Marx. Capital III, pp.388-396

8. See above,

the Colonial Office held different views regarding this matter. However, the relentless efforts of the governor and his advisors brought about the desired effect, and in 1810 all disabilities imposed on Europeans in owning land in the Island were finally removed. [9]This was a turning point in the economic history of the Island . The entire civil service soon became land speculators.

Under such conditions it is no wonder that special regulations were enacted by the government bestowing various privileges on speculators . A special regulation enacted in 1824 exempted all commercial crops from government taxation of one tenth of the produce.[10] The regulation was further elaborated in 1829; this was intended to alleviate fears that speculatory agriculture would come under government taxation.[11]No part or portion of any produce of coffee, cotton, sugar, indigo, opium or silk, runs the regulation of 1829, would be subjected to tax for a period of twelve years.[12] Further, the regulation abolished all customs duties for the above articles which were produced in Sri Lanka. [13] The total effect of these two regulations was to make rice, the peasant staple, the only agricultural produce subjected to government taxation.

9.Government Advertisement of21 July 1812. CGG. 22 July.1812. ed, CCP.II.pp. 314.
10.Regulation No.9 of 1825. Regulation N.4 of 21 Sep.1829. C.O.58.11, ed.,CCP.II.pp.279-280.
11,, 12., 13., Ibid.,

The regulation of 1829 also attempted to support commercial agriculture by exempting all workers who were engaged in sugar, cotton, indigo, opium or silk plantation from the compulsory service.[14] A certificate from the proprietor or the superintendent or agent of such a plantation was considered sufficient for such exemption. However, this portion of the regulation was not approved by the Board of Commissioners, not because they did not approve of it in principle, but because they expected technical difficulties which would have arisen had this been implemented.[15]

A government regulation of 1830 was designed to compel the peasants, particularly those in the Kandyan provinces, to cultivate arecanuts in their gardens. The regulation subjected the peasant gardens to a tax of one tenth of the produce unless they were grown with areca tree to the proportion of one hundred trees for every acre.[16]

The recommendations of the Colebrooke Commission which were immediately effected by the Colonial Office, by a series of regulations, Orders in Council and instructions to the governor in Colombo, between 1832-33,

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14., 15,. Ibid., see also the minute of the Board of Commissioners. ed., CCP.II.pp.280-284.

16., Proclamation of 20 December, 1830. CGG.1 January, 1831. C.0.58.13. ed.CCP.II.pp.284-285.,See also Letter from WMG.Colebrooke. 25 th August, 1831. C.0.54.121. ed., CCP.II.pp.285-6

gave further encouragement to the cultivation of commercial crops in the Island.[17] The Commissioners, influenced as they were by the ideas of free enterprise propounded by Adam Smith, recommended immediate abolition of government monopolies like cinnamon [18] trade, and the disposal of government owned plantations.[19] The Commission also recommended the liquidation of government establishments concerned with commercial activities. [20] Colebrooke thoroughly disapproved of the discrimination made with reference to land alienation to the native population and recommended the abolition of such discriminatory legislation. Land grants, Colebrooke recommended, should be regulated with reference to the means of the applicant and not on the basis of racial prejudice.[21]

The Colebrooke recommendataion regarding land and labour in the Island, which were immediately effected by the colonial Office represent the final victory

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17. Colebrooke recommendations were effected by the Colonial Office by a series of Orders in Council and dispatches instructing the Governor to carry them out. C.O.54. 74; C.O.54.75, also ed, CCP.II.pp.250-75
18. C.O.55.No.114., Dispatches from the Secretary of State. 1833, CGA.4/18.
19., 20., C.O.55.74
21. Dispatch from Viscount Goderich to R.W.Horton, Governor, 14 September.1832. C.O.55.74. ;Dispatches from the Secretary of State.1832. CGA. 4/17 No.79.

of the interests of industrial capitalism over merchant capitalism. Monopolies and state regulations, privileges given to chartered companies were all abolished immediately. All restrictions to the accumulation of landed property both among natives and foreigners were lifted thus allowing capital formation. The abolition of compulsory labour was intended to make wage labour available for capitalist agriculture. Thus the changes brought about by the Colebrooke Commission could be regarded as a crucial watershed between the old mode of production and the new. The age when the surplus was drained out of the country by means of monopolies and state regulations was over. A more direct and a more extreme form of exploitation was about to begin. These changes were in perfect harmony with the changes that had been taking place in the imperial metropolis.[21b]

Thus the official policy of encouraging commercial agriculture coupled with the disabilities placed on the rice cultivation readily turned the peasants toward cash crops. The experience of the Dutch[22] shows that the spread of commercial crops among the peasantry was due more to the disabilities placed on the peasant subsistence agriculture rather than

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21b.See Dobb, pp.162-163

22. Tennant. p.227

to the official policy of encouraging commercial crops. However, the official policy of encouraging speculation should have had its share in promoting the speculatory agriculture in the maritime provinces. Bertolacci, the government accountant, observes that the first few years of British rule witnessed the native population of the maritime provinces collecting considerable amounts of money through speculation.[23] Nevertheless, Bertolacci is not specific as to the native population; he only distinguishes them from the Dutch Burghers. Perhaps those who benefitted were more the moorish traders and the chiefs who owned a vast extent of land cultivated with marketable crops rather than the peasantry.

Coffee:

Coffee was the first of such commercial crops which made a great headway among the peasantry. When the Dutch abandoned coffee plantations, the peasantry continued to grow it very sparingly as a supplementary source of income. However, the capitulation of the Kandyan kingdom brought about a complete change in the industry. Kandyan hills were best suited to the coffee culture. The peasants harassed as they were by the tax farmers, immediately

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23. Bertolacci, p.57

took to growing coffee in their gardens.[24] Apart from the various concessions given to the coffee and other commercial crops grown in the colony, the remission of one half of import duty on coffee to England[25] greatly benefitted the coffee culture in Sri Lanka. The abolition of slave labour in many coffee growing countries like Jamaica and Guiana also helped the peasant coffee cultivator.[26] In 1827 the coffee exported from the Island amounted to 1,792,448 pounds, which was entirely a peasant crop. In 1857, 160,000 cwt. of coffee produced by peasants was exported.[27] It was estimated that an acre of coffee yielded about 5.5 cwt. of coffee a year. Calculating on this basis gives an extent of 50,000 acres of coffee cultivated by peasants in 1857.[28] The true significance of this comes to light only when it is taken into account that there was only about 130,000 acres yielding coffee (including capitalist) plantations during that year.[29] Thus within a few decades peasant coffee cultivation reflects an increase of about ten fold.[30] Although this growth was later dwarfed by the rapid extension of

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24. . Tennant, pp.183-184
25. Tennant, pp.228-9
26. Ibid.,
27. Tennant, p.235
28. Ibid.,
29. Ibid.,
30. See Snodgrass, Ceylon, An export Economy in Transition. pp.20 ff.

capitalist coffee plantations, even at the height of coffee prosperity about a fourth of the coffee exported came from peasant cultivators [31]

Fifty thousand acres under peasant coffee cultivation was only about 5 percent of the total land area under peasant cultivation.[32] The coffee culture was , however, mainly confined to Kandyan areas. Hence the percentage of land area involved in the peasant cultivation in Kandyan regions was very much more than five percent. [33] More important is the percentage of peasants involved in coffee culture.As two labourers were required to attend one acre of coffee , about 100,000 or more Kandyan peasants took part in coffee cultivation. The census taken in 1835 eatimates the population in the Kandyan provinces at 375,000,[34]This makes an involvement of about 25 percent of the total population in the Kandyan areas in coffee industry. Therefore, it could be safely assumed that nearly half of the adult population in the Kandyan areas were involved in cultivating coffee as a supplementary source of income before the first half of the nineteenth century had passed.

31.Snodgrass, pp,20ff.
32.Snodgrass, p.29
33.Ibid.,
34.Census of Ceylon, 1835.

Coconut:

Bertolacci, the government accountant, estimated that a single district in the maritime provinces contained more than ten million coconut trees when the British took over the Dutch possessions in Colombo.[35] The Madras government , which administrated the British possessions in Ceylon on behalf of the East India Company, imposed a tax on coconut trees.[36] This innovation of the Madras Government was very much resented by the peasants and contributed much to peasant riots in 1797.[37] The reason for this resentment was that the tree was never regarded by the peasants as a commercial crop, and even the Dutch did not tax it.[38] It was in fact ' the tree of life' of the Sinhalese peasantry. The coconut tree contributed to the food, drink, clothing,shelter, domestic untesils, transport, mddicine , merry-making and even ritual and religion of the Sinhalese peasant in hundred different ways. [39]In fact, one writer remarks that the coconut tree directly and literally served the Sinhalese peasant from his cradle to the grave.[40]

35.Bertolacci, p.324
36.Bertolacci, p.32
37.Ibid.,
38.Ibid.,
39.Cave., pp.220-221
40.Ibid.,

Though the Dutch did not levy a direct tax on coconut trees, they took a keen interest in various coconut products. Coir trade which was a Dutch monopoly brought them much profit.[41] From the very beginning of their rule, the customs duties levied on various coconut products such as coir, arrack and jaggary formed an important source of revenue for the British rulers in Ceylon.[42] The commercial products of the coconut tree were as numerous as the subsistence needs it provided for the peasants.[43] Coconut oil, jaggary, toddy(the sap) , arrack (the alcoholic spirit) coir, ropes made out the fibre, all these found a ready market in the slowly developing urban areas.[44] Arrack, the alcoholic spirit made out of its sugary sap, had a growing demand in South India. [45]Between the years 1806-13, the average amount of arrack exported amounted to 780,000 gallons per year.[46] This was one of the prime exporters of the colony. Between the years 1827-29 duties levied on various coconut products earned the government an average of £ 35,000 a year. [47]Colebrooke recommended a reduction of the duty on coconut products so that there would be an increase in the cultivation of this important commodity.[48]

41.Bertolacci, pp.177-179
42.Bertolacci, p.141
43.CCP.II.p86
44.Ibid.,
45.Bertolacci, pp.149 ff.
46.Bertolacci, pp.141,149
47.CCP.II.p.86
48.CCP.II.p.112

Bertolacci's account shows that coconut was not extensively grown in the districts north of Colombo.[49] However, within a few decades, the cultivation of coconut spread in areas where the tree was hardly known at the beginning of the 19 th century. [50]The Ceylon Observer of 25th December 1858, summarises the extent of coconut cultivation in the Island as follows,

> In the quinquinial period ending 1841 the average export of coconut oil did not greatly exceed 400,000 gallons, the value being twenty six thousand pounds. in 1857 exports rose to the enormous figure 1,767,413 gallons valued £ 212,184 ... the above export represents no fewer than 70,696,520 coconuts. We should think that at least as much oil is consumed in the colony as is sent out. [51]

In fact the export of coconut oil quadrupled within the three years, 1850-53. In 1853, 2380 tons of coir were exported from Sri Lanka. [52]Export trade of coconut produce kept the Galle harbour busy by the 1850's.[53]

It is interesting to examine why this peasant 'tree of life turned into a major export crop within such a short period, especially when the tree was known and grown for centuries in the Island and still

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49. Bertolacci, p.183
50. Cave, p.516.
51, Quoted by Tennant, p.124 foot note, 3
52. Baker, pp.235,237
53. Tennant. II. p.199

remained a peasant crop right down to the British occupation. This is more intrigueing as the Dutch never missed an opportunity which would have increased their profit. However, as we have already seen right throughout the Dutch period the tree remained essentially a peasant crop. Nor were the European planters ever attracted to make plantations of coconut , because of the long period of ten to fifteen years the tree took before it gave any return to the cultivator.[54]

Perhaps the explanation lies in the dissolution of the traditional system of social and economic relations as the British administrators meddled with the service tenure system. The Dutch, however much they were bent on making profit , scrupulously safeguarded native institutions through fear of discontent among the peasantry. They followed the sagacious policy of extracting the surplus production of the natives through the native institutions themselves. Peasant riots in 1797 amply proved the efficacy and the sagaciousness of the Dutch policy.[55] It had already been shown how the abolition of service tenure helped the chiefs of the maritime provinces to acquire vast tracts of land as private property.[56]

54.Tennant, II.p.109
55.Bertolacci, pp.29-30
56.See above, p.

Bertolacci observed that the coconut plantations were mainly owned by the vellala (farmer) caste.[57] The chiefs were mainly drawn from the higher sub-castes of the above caste . Hence it is clear that it was the families of chiefs which owned much of the coconut plantations. Much of the land the chiefs appropriated as private property was high land(in the maritime provinces high land was simply the land which was not converted into paddy fields, and does not convey the idea of hills as in Kandyan provinces). The conversion of these into paddy fields required an enormous expense of labour, the very commodity of which the chiefs were deprived by the new government.[58] Not only was the exaction of free labour by the chiefs discontinued, but also labour was in short supply as the government exacted too much of it on public works, i.e., road construction.[59]

Introduction of wage labour, encouragement of private speculation by the government, occasional payment of wages to those who were in the compulsory service, growth of wage labour due to the eviction of peasants

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57.Bertolacci, p.32
58.See above,
59.See above,

from their traditional land, or, more properly, due to the insufficient returns from land and finally the growing urban areas due to speculatory trade, all of these created a demand for a variety of coconut products, like fresh nuts, oil, juggary and toddy which were a part of the day to day consumption needs of the Sinhalese peasantry. It was this local demand coupled with the demand for export which turned the peasant tree of life into a commercial crop.

It was the chiefs of the maritime provinces who were best prepared to respond to this demand for coconut products. They owned land and they gained capital by speculation during the early years of British rule. Moreover, they had a steady income from the government for their services. Thus the chiefs were in a position to buy labour necessary for coconut plantations, and, occasionally they could also misappropriate compulsory labour for the same purpose. Because coconut produce was not taxed like the subsistence produce, the temptation was high to convert high land into coconut plantations. This also eliminated the visits of the tax farmers, even when they ceased to hold government office. Finally, under the new rulers, the social and economic relations were changing fast.

Unlike in the traditional society, wealth had acquired a function . The life style of the chiefs of the maritime provinces was changing fast. [60] Money has become a means by which one could obtain social status and keep untarnished the social status one already had. It is no wonder that within a few decades the Sinhalese chiefs of the maritime provinces had turned into coconut planters. Some of them had thousands of acres grown with coconut. [61]

Many peasants followed their masters. Cheap, imported rice was readily available to them in the market, if they had money to buy it. [62]Cultivating coconut kept away the offensive assessor and tax farmer from his land. Once the coconut tree is planted, it needs little attention unlike any other crop, subsistence or commercial. Cattle provided the necessary manure, and the only labour needed was to clear the out growth once in several years, and, perhaps to pick the nuts. Hence the crop ideally suited the labour situation of the Island during the first few decades of the nineteenth century, when the peasantry had hardly any time left even to engage in subsistence agriculture, because of the excessive claims made by the government on their labour. Very soon the produce exceeded the needs of the local consumption and so became a

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60.Forbes, p.134.Tennant, vol.II.p.161
61.Forbes, p.131,Tennant, vol.II.p.144, CCP.II.pp.65-66
62.White, p.69

major export commodity.[63] This was how and why much of the land which was earlier under dry grain cultivation was brought under coconut plantations.

The growth of coconut cultivation had another effect on the peasant production. Making various commercial produce from coconut gave rise to small cottage industries, which absorbed a sizable amount of peasant labour in the maritime provinces. Extracting oil from the coconut by a very simple and indigenous pressing device (sekku) was very popular in the villages.[64] Coir industry and manufacrure of ropes , toddy tapping, preparation of jaggary, distillation of arrack, all of these absorbed a considerable amount of peasant labour.[65] Apart from these, coconut plantations offered opportunity of casual wage labour to the peasants. Thus the coconut industry, though it displaced some of the peasants from their lands, at the same time offered them alternative employment in various fields connected with coconut industry. Besides , much of the the peasants were turning into small holders of coconut plantations instead of cultivating rice.

Cinnamon:

Cinnamon, which remained a state monopoly under the Sinhalese kings and the Portuguese, was jealously guarded by the Dutch with a set of sanguinary legislation.

Destruction of the shrub or selling more than ten pounds of cinnamon entailed capital punishment. [66] The British not only inherited and maintained the cinnamon monopoly but also kept alive much of the cinnamon legislation.[67] Even in 1817, Bertolacci points out the harshness of cinnamon laws and how they harassed the peasantry.[68] Very often, peasant land was rendered useless by the appearence of the shrub; as the destruction of the plant entailed punishment. Such peasants had to abandon their land. Maintaining cattle, which was absolutely necessary for rice cultivation, was also made extremely difficult if cinnamon plantations were situated nearby. [69] Because of the above considerations the Colonial Office pointed out to the governor the necessity of limiting cinnamon plantations very early in their rule.[70] However, much of the cinnamon laws and the monopoly of cinnamon remained until state monopolies were abolished at the recommendation of the Colebrooke Commission.[71]

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66. Bertolacci, p.241
67. Bertolacci, p.130
68. Ibid.,
69. Bertolacci, pp.248-249
70. Instructions from President Dundas to Governor North. 13 March 1801. CGA. 4,1; C.O.55,61; CCP.II. II.pp.107-137
71. Dispatches from the Secretary of State .C.O.55,74.no.114

However, the government followed a different policy regarding cinnamon in the Kandyan provinces. After the Kandyan kings abandoned the cinnamon monopoly (when the Dutch no longer wanted cinnamon from Kandyan territories) some of the chiefs and chalia people (the caste which was employed in the collection and pealing of cinnamon) formed cinnamon plantations of their own and delivered the produce to the British government, for cash payments. With the downfall of the Kandyan kingdom, these cinnamon plantations remained as private property, inspite of the cinnamon monopoly operating in the maritime provinces, and the produce was sold to the British. [72]

The abolition of cinnamon monopoly in 1833 and the sale of government owned cinnamon plantations to private speculators gave rise to private cinnamon plantations in the maritime provinces. Peasant small holdings of cinnamon became very common especially in coastal areas. However, as the time passed , much of these were bought by the Sinhalese chiefs.[73]

Chena(high land) cultivation.

Chena cultivation was indulged by Sinhalese peasants as a supplementary source of income, particularly during the lean years to augment the insufficient grain

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72.CCP.II.p.91
73.Dispatches from the Secretary of State . C.O. 55.74. No.114

produce from their rice fields.[74] However, the first half of the nineteenth century saw a complete transformation of chena cultivation. First , the purpose of chena cultivation underwent a complete chenge. By the middle of the 19th century, chena cultivation was practiced not for subsistence, but for the market.[75] In many areas chena cultivation was indulged in by a group of speculators under the licance from the Government Agent of the District.[76] Apart from dry grain and tubers, which were traditionally grown in the chena method, many market crops such as chillies, sugar cane, sweet potatoes various kinds of vegetables, plantains and cotton were grown in the chena method.[77]

It is interesting to examine how and why the traditional peasant no longer showed any interest in the chena cultivation, and how speculators came to dominate this method of traditional cultivation. Because of the rapid monetization of the economy, and the availability of alternative employment in the maritime provinces,[78] many peasnats in these areas completely gave up chena cultiva-- tion, which was a major source of food for the peasants at the beginning of the British power.[79] The visits of

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74. See above, p
75. Tennant, pp. 463-465
76. Tennant. II. pp.463-465
77. Tennant. II.pp.463-465
78. See above, p.
79. Colvin R.De Silva, p.356

assessors and tax farmers was another reason which drove the peasants away from the chena cultivation Much of the chena land in the maritime provinces was being steadily taken over by coconut plantations. [80]

In the Kandyan areas a different process was set in motion. The coffee industry offered the peasant a very pleasant alternative to make a supplementary income from their gardens, rather than resorting to forests, for chena cultivation. However, very soon they were reduced to a position where they did not have much of a choice in the matter. The Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840, took away their chena land, [81] and even those peasants who loved the traditional way were prevented from indulging in chena cultivation as they were denied the access to the chena land. It is interesting to note in this connexion, that when the crown laid claims on peasant land in 1840, many Kandyan peaaants objected to the legislation because they wanted to sell their chena lands to private speculators.[82] The final result of all this change was to put an end to chena cultivation as a supplementary source of produce for consumption needs, except in areas where plantations did not spread and where there was insufficient rainfall for the rice cultivation.

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80. See below,
81. Ordinance No.12 of 1840. To Prevent Encroachment upon Crown Lands.
82. Ludowyk, p.65

Not only the purpose , but also the method of chena cultivation changed considerably. Instead of peasants who cultivated a specific area earmarked for chena cultivation, which always lay quite close to the village, displaced peasants and speculators, particularly from the maritime provinces resorted to forests in great numbers, with a licence from the Government Agent of the area for chena cultivation.[83] They collectively cleared the jungle, built huts, reared poultry, made the necessary earthen ware and cultivated cash crops. These speculatory cultivators left the site of cultivation after the first crop was completely gathered, never to return to the place again.[84]

Thus the chena cultivation changed over these few decades from individual farms, being accessories to the peasant holdings which made good the deficiencies in paddy cultivation to communal farms which produced for a market. These speculators who roamed about the countryside without having any permanent interest in the land they cultivated were a unique example of the disorganization of the traditional society. This was the only form of chena cultivation which was left uninterrupted after the enactment of the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of

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83. Tennant, II. pp. 464-465
84. Tennat, II. pp. 462-465

1840, except in areas where uncultivated land was unsuitable for market crops like coffee and later tea of which European speculators took any interest, and where the rainfall was insufficient for the cultivation of rice.

Diversification of peasant crops in the maritime provinces.

The changes in the peasant production system were more rapid and more diversified in the maritime provinces than in the interior. Apart from the main market crops described above, which were grown rather extensively, a considerable number of peaaants were engaged in cultivating some other cash crops which were purely for local consumption. Thus cultivation of betel leaves spread extensively, along the coastal belt, though it was not confined to coastal areas alone.[85] The arrival of South Indian coolie labour to work in the European owned plantations, and the demand for betel leaves created by this group, should have been one of the reasons, apart from the growth of urban proletariat, why a big market market demand was created for this commodity, which was grown by the peasantry as a part of their consumption needs as far back as the time of Robert Knox, but did not become a market crop.[86] Arecanuts , which grew profusely in the Kandyan kingdom and was one of the big money spinners of the Dutch were grown extensively in the maritime provinces.[87] Pepper, plantains, vegetables and

85. Cave, p.89
86. Cave, pp.89,125,185,190.
87. Bertolacci, pp. 189-160

various fruits have become popular market crops among the peasantry.[88] Hence peasants relied more on these cash crops and occasional wage labour to supplement their deficiencies in food production, rather than on the chena cultivation.

Changes in Social Relations.

Production in a peasant society is not only a result of economic activity, but also is organically linked to a multitude of other social relations. Hence the changes forcefully brought about in the relations of production necessarily resulted in changes in social relations, which further reinforced the changes in the relations of production. This, to a certain degree explains the rapidity of the changes that came over the production system among the Sinhalese peasantry during the first half of the 19th century. The institutionalized patron/client relationship which existed between the chiefs and the peasantry, particularly in the interior of the Island, was an integral part of the relations of production and worked alike, to the best interests of both parties.[89] The chiefs commanded the loyalty, attendance and labour of the peasants so as to give them power social status and prestige which could be used to the protection of the country from external threats and natural adversities

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88. Cave, pp.138,175, 185
89. See above, pp. also, Cave. p.217

The same institutionalized behaviour prevented the chiefs from using that power for their personal gain and the oppression of the peasantry.[90]

However, three centuries of European domination has considerably changed the relationship between the chiefs and the peasants in the maritime provinces. These chiefs known as Mudaliyars were no longer interested in the welfare of the peasantry. They were alienated from the peasants a long time ago, when they took office under the European master. When they took office under the Portuguese, they not only changed their religion but also added Christian names to their surnames.[91] The operation was repeated under the Dutch when they changed their faith and became Protestants in order to preserve their offices under the Dutch regime. Indeed their greed for government office was too strong to be guided by any considerations of religion or conscience, and for a third time within three centuries the chiefs changed their loyalty to the Church of England when the Island passed into the hands of the British.[92] Many of the functions that the chiefs

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90. See above, pp
91. Bertolacci, p.24
92. Forbes, pp.63-65. Ironically enough the wave of nationalism, which apparently gave the political leadership to those who avowed Buddhism, brought many of the descendants of the families of these chiefs- who by then formed the power elite of the Island- back to Buddhism (which for many of them beca the vihicle for political power), thus completing a full circle.

performed in the Kandyan areas, such as extending agricultural credit, offering assistence in times of adversity and the general responsibility for the welfare of the peasants , were no longer matters of any interests to these chiefs.[93] Bertolacci, the government accountant, was quite positive that the chiefs of the maritime provinces would not welcome any measures which would have improved the general welfare of the peasantry.[94] The chiefs were not inclined to bring more rice fields into cultivation as it would adversely affect the profits they made by the high price of grain. The chiefs who monopolized the public employment made themselves oppulent by the administration of public revenue. In contrast to the traditional chiefs of the Kandyan provinces their power depended on their wealth and landed property. [95] As a modern social historian succinctly puts it 'they were as isolated as their white masters from the people whose language they spoke and whom they represented.'[96]

The chiefs of the maritime provinces acquired during the Dutch period an enormous power over the peasantry, even though there existed no bondage between

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93. Bertolacci, pp.310-311
94. Ibid.,
95. Ibid.,
96. Ludowyk. p.82.

the two classes like the one that prevailed between the Kandyan chiefs and the peasantry in the Kandyan regions.[97] The chiefs were practically the masters of the peasants so long as they remained loyal to the Dutch. The Dutch trusted and respected the chiefs who were loyal to them.[98] The British administrators , on the other hand were suspicious of the chiefs and viewed with no kindness the power they held over the peasants.[99] They made a sustained effort to reduce the power held by the chiefs. The abolition of service tenure was intended, among other things, to accomplish this task.[100] The British administrators were quick to understand the close relationship between the landholdings, the power to acquire the free labour of the peasants and the power and influence held by chiefs.[101] Hence, prior to the acquisition of Kandyan territories, the policy of the British administrators was governed by the principle of'liberating'the peasants from the chiefs.[103] Such a policy of liberating the peasants from the chiefs, i.e., pushing them into a free labour market was in perfect agreement with the economic interests of the imperial metropolis. To achieve this end they even

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97. Bertolacci, pp.52,57,287-289, 291,311,
98. Bertolacci, p.52
99. Bertolacci, pp. 52-54
100. Proclamation of 3 September, 1801. A collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government.I. p.57 (Colombo. 1853) also ed., CCP.II. pp. 277-278; Maitland's Instructions to Heads of Departments. CGA.3/A 199.C.O. 54. 28. Maitland to Castlereigh, 17 th August 1808. ed, CCP.II. pp.244-274.

started 'currying favour' with the peasantry.[103] The civil service adopted an attitude of paternalism toward the peasants. Civil servants interfered in the exercise of authority of the chiefs, even at times when chiefs were empowered to exercise authority,[104] and took the side of peasants when disputes arose between chiefs and peasants.[105]

Legislation was carefully enacted during this early period to exclude the chiefs from exercising power over the peasants. In 1801, judicial powers were taken out of the hands of chiefs and vested into the British civil servants.[106] In 1805, the power of superior chiefs were very much reduced when the rule was laid down that all superior chiefs were to be appointed by the governor himself and the inferior chiefs by collectors of revenue.[107] Later the power of appointing inferior chiefs was vested on the Commissioner of Revenue.[108] Except in very rare instances, all perquisites enjoyed by chiefs were disallowed.[109] In order to reduce the prestige and power of the chiefs their

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103. Cave, p.250
104. CCP.II.p.162
105. Cave. p.250
106. CCP.II.p.31
107. Maitland's Instructions to Heads of Departments. CGA.3/A 199.1
108. Ibid.,
109. CCP.I.p.48

positions were often given to families who never enjoyed such high office; at times caste regulations were also disregarded in giving government appointments. An attempt was also made to give government positions only to those chiefs who had acquired a knowledge of English.[110]

All the above changes, the abolition of service tenure, and the changes in the administration, considerably affected the power structure of the Sinhalese society in the maritime provinces. The chiefs were losing much of the power and influence they held over the peasantry. The result was an immediate reaction on the part of the chiefs to preserve the privileged position they enjoyed in the traditional society. Commanding people, their labour, their loyalty, these were the symbols of the power and prestige of the traditional society.[111] All these came by one's ability to command land. The abolition of service tenure severely restricted this.

The chiefs realised that the acquisition of land as private property was the surest way of overcoming this difficulty. Only a section of the chiefs took the opportunity of appropriating service land when the option was

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110. CCP. I. p.48
111. See above, p.

given in 1801.[112] Nor did the chiefs have the opportunity of buying crown lands as extensively as did the European speculators. The discriminatory policy of land alienation to the native population which limited the land that could be alienated to the natives as 24 acres of high land and 12 acres of low land (which was further reduced to 16 and 8 respectively) left the chiefs only with the alternative of turning toward the peasant holdings in their bid to preserve their social status by acquiring land.[113] Colebrooke found that the land alienated to the native population, when compared to with those of European speculators, was very limited and varied from ten to one hundred acres [114] and recommended the immediate abolition of the discriminatory policy of crown land alienation. Therefore, the Sinhalese chiefs of the maritime provinces missed no opportunity of adding the peasant holdings to their own.

The abolition of service tenure in 1802 helped the chiefs in acquiring the property of the lower classes. Under the traditional service tenure system the the service tenure lands could not be sold or made

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112. Proclamation of 3 September. 1801. A Collection of Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government. I. p.57. also, ed, CCP.II.pp.277-278.
113. Reply of the Collector of Tangalle District, REply of the collector of Colombo District. CCP.II.315. C.O. 416.3 Proclamation of 3 May 1800. CGA. 2.B.3.1 . Ed. CCP.II p.316.
114. CCP.I. pp.45-46

liable to seizure in default of a payment of debt.[115] When service tenure was abolished and the service tenants became the proprietors of such lands by paying a rent to the government (in the form of grain tax) these lands became disposable by the occupants and also became liable to be siezed upon in default of payment of debt.[116] Very often, the peasants in their poverty mortgaged these lands which were later seized by the creditors on court order.[117] The creditors were no other than the chiefs or the speculators from south India. The problem became so acute, that early years in their rule the British had no other alternative but to partially re-instate the service tenure system.[118]

Thus the chiefs in the low country went on adding to their landed property at the expense of the small peasant holdings and these were transformed over a few decades into impressive coconut plantations. While the land was being thus converted from peasant holdings to coconut plantations, the chiefs themselves were undergoing transformation no less conspicuous than what was happening on land. Earlier the chiefs derived their power simply by their being the servants of the European masters. Now they have become landed proprietors.

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115. Bertolacci, p.288
116. Bertolacci, pp,288-293
117. Ibid.,
118. Bertolacci, p.293-294

Now they had a power of their own by being the proprietors of vast tracts of land where hundreds of peasants lived as share croppers or simply as wage labourers.

The life style of the chiefs was also changing rapidly. During the rule of the two earlier European powers, the chiefs though became wealthy and powerful and even alienated from the greater part of the peasantry by their religious affiliations there was not much of a difference between the life they lived and those of the peasantry. Under the British rule all speculators, both alien and native, were left with much lattitude, both to the acquisition and consumption of wealth. [119]Not only the chiefs were able to acquire money through speculation but the newly acquired wealth had a function in the society.[120]The chiefs rapidly began immitating the new master, and they did it only too well. Many chiefs in the urban areas of the maritime provinces were rapidly acquiring the language of the master [121]The British rulers were also quick to realise the advantage of having a class of people, who could community in their language and follow their culture, among the local community, and they gave every encouragement to it. The ability to

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119.Regulation no.4 of 21 September 1829. Bertolacci, pp.57,311
120.Bertolacci, pp.304,311
121.CCR.I.p.48

communicate in the language of the master was soon made a compulsory requirement for those who desired to hold government office. [122] Colebrooke gave only the final touches to this when he recommended that members of the native population who had acquied an English education should become eligible for the appointment to the lower ranks of government service.[123]

As early as 1810, chiefs started sending their children to London for higher education. Various missioneries started opening schools for English education. Those who benefitted most from these were the chiefs. A new class was born, they were the elite. The chiefs started building houses which befit their social position; their houses very much resembled mediaval European manor houses. One European writer describing the house of a low country chief writes,

> At Veyangoda, twenty miles from Colombo, the residence of Don Solomon Dias Bandaranayake, , one of the Mudaliyars of the Governors Gate, affords the most agreeable example of the dwelling of a low country (chief) headmen with its broad varandahs, spacious rooms and extensive offices shaded by palm groves and fruit trees.[124]

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122. CCP. I. p. 48
123. Dispatch from the Secretary of State 1833, CGA. 4/18 .C.O.55.74 No,114
124. Cave adds, ' Sir Solomon Dias Bandaranayake ... the grandson... has added to the attractions of the ancestral property at Veyangoda by the addition of a horse breeding establishment, a deer run, and modern arrangements for the breeding of high class stock. , Cave, p.217

These'manorial houses' were surrounded by coconut plantations extending hundreds of thousands of acres.

alienated from the peasants, they were living in a world of their own. The life style of the Europeans in Colombo set the pace for them. A European civil servant vividly describes a dinner party at which he was received by a Sinhalese low country chief, ' the repast besides pastry and desert consisted upwards of forty dishes'[125] In effect the chiefs were able to preserve and consolidate their power social status and prestige by these methods.[126] Though the class underwent change and emerged as an English educated elite during the latter part of the nineteenth century.

The changes that took place among the Kandyan chiefs were, though it took the same direction in the long run, somewhat different. The British administrators were quick to perceive the strong personal bond betwee the Kandyan chiefs and the peasants,[27] and took the first opportunity to enact legislation to break this personal bond, which they viewed as a major threat to the consolidation of the British power in the Kandyan provinces. The 1818 Kandyan Proclamation, intended, among other things to break this personal bond between

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125.Tennant, II.p.161
126.Cumming p.179
127.Skinner, p.229

the traditional chiefs and the peasants.[128] Moreover, the indiacriminate arrests,[129] excution and deportation[130] of Kandyan chiefs, and the confiscation of their property after the 1818 rebellion , made a physical reduction of the number of chiefs in the Kandyan provinces. A comparison of the number of chiefs in the Kandyan, maritime and northern provinces in 1824, clearly illustrates this point.[131]

After 1832 it was the policy of the government to reduce, as a means of economy, the number of chiefs occupied in the government service. The Colonial Office sent specific instructions to the governor in the Island regarding this matter. [132]

The numbers given in the table tells only half the story. The geographical area which comes under Kandyan provinces comprise nearly two thirds of the Island. Hence about 88 per cent of the chiefs employed by the government were dispersed in one third of the country whereas two thirds of the Island had less than 12 per cent. This would have made it impossible for the Kandyan chiefs, after

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128. The Proclamation of 21 November. 1818 issued After the Rebellion of 1818. CGG 28 November.1818. ed. Davy, Appendix, II.
129. Forbes, pp. 328-229
130. Forbes, p.53
131. See page,
132. Dispatches from the Secretary of State. C.O.55.74.no,114

The Dispersion of Native Chiefs in relation to Population and Province in 1824.

The Province.	Number of chiefs.	Number of Population.	Per cent of Chiefs.	Percent of Population.	Number of people for a chief.
Kandyan Provinces	47	256,835	11.69	30.14	5464
Maritime Provinces.	243	399,408	60.47	46.88	1643
Northern Province.	112	195,697	27.85	22.97	1747
Total	402	851,940	100.00	100.00	-

Source, Prepared from the information from Colebrookes Report on Administration, CCP.I.pp.24,50.

1818, to keep any personal relationship with the peasants, even if some of them wanted to. One fact which remains to be added, and which was very much overlooked, is that it was their best chiefs, those who were brave, intelligent, patriotic and above all, those who cared for their country and people to the extent of risking their lives- and in fact lost their lives fighting the foreigner or were captured and beheaded or deported - that the Kandyan peasants lost during the 1818 rebellion.[134] The upshot was that the chiefs who were left after the Kandyan rebellion were those who had little sympathy for the peasants and remained loyal to the British in order to preserve their property and social status. The British gracefully exempted from the Grain Tax, the property of these chiefs who remained loyal to them during the 1818 rebellion.[135] After this the

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134. Forbes, p.53

135. All lands of the fifteen Dissavas (chiefs) who sided with the British during the Kandyan rebellion for independence were exempted from taxation of their lands during their lives and those of their heirs. They were,
1. Mollegodde Maha Nilame.
2. Mollegodde Nilame.
3. Ratwatte Nilame.
4. Kadugamoone Nilame.
5. Dehigamme Nilame.
6. Mullegamme Nilame.
7. Ekneligodde Nilame.
8. Mahawallatenne Nilame.
9. Doloswalle Nilame.
10. Eheyeeyagodde Nilame.
11. Katugaha the Elder.
12. Katugaha the Younger.
13. Dambulane Nilame.
14. Godegedara Nilame.
15. Gonegodde Nilame., Davy, Appendix.II. p.

Kandyan chiefs were reduced to the same statutary insignificance as the chiefs of the maritime provinces.[136] The few chiefs who cared for the welfare of the peasants, and who tried to bring relief to them, were severely punished for their impudence.[137]

The clauses of the 1818 Proclamation which reduced the power of the Kandyan chiefs [138] and converted them to a set of second class government servants, failed to satisfy the apprehensions and qualms of the British administrators about the loyalty and good faith of the Kandyan chiefs to the British Crown. Often charges were made against them of disloyalty and conspiracy. Some such charges led to open trial in courts, where the chiefs were humiliated in the eyes of the peasants. These culminated in 1835 when a number of chiefs of the hieghest rank were tried for high treason .[139] The supreme court aquitted them all. Major Skinner, who spent over fifty years in the Island as a civil servant, considered the whole episode as a frame up by interested parties to bring discredit upon the chiefs.[140] Of course those who appeared more loyal to the British Crown than the British civil servants

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136.Davy, p.248
137.CCP.I.p.191
138.Proclamation of 21 November 1818. issued After the Rebellion of 1818.CGG.28 November, 1818. , Davy, App.II.

139 Forbes, pp.60-61
140.Skinner, pp.190, 218

themselves, by hatching up a conspiracy against their own kind, were well rewarded by the British government, Mahawelatenne, the chief informant, obtained the highest position among the chiefs, the position of chief Adigar, in the Kandyan Provinces as his reward .[141]

The judicial reforms of Cameron liquidated what little power and authority the Kandyan chiefs exercised over the peasantry. Cameron recommended the establishment of a uniform judiciary through out the whole Island, and abolishing all the minor judicial powers exercised by the Kandyan chiefs.[142] These recommendations were carried out by the special Charter of Justice in 1833.[143] The Charter vested exclusive jurisdiction over all cases, civil and criminal, in the original courts of justice. Very soon the Kandyan chiefs were drifting in the same direction as their brethren in the maritime provinces. They adopted the same life style as the low country chiefs, and were moving away from the peasantry.[144] The houses of Kandyan chiefs in the 1830's, as described by Major Forbes, were quite

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141. Skinner, pp.190, 218; Forbes II. p.157.
142. CCP.I.pp.164 ff.
143. Ceylon Charter of Justice. 1833. House of Commons Accounts and Papers, 1833, No.332.vol.xxvi p.357, C.O.55.74. also ed, CCP.I. pp.320-349
144. Forbes. II.p.156

different from what they were under the Kandyan kings.[145]

It is the consequences of these changes, rather than the changes themselves, which needs closer examination in relation to the peasant production. A brief capitulation of the functions the chiefs performed in the traditional system of production would be quite helpful in this connexion. They performed several important functions in relation to the peasant production. Firstly, they were the mediators between the central government represented by the king and court, and all aspects of relationships between the two parties, political, economic and social were channelled through them. Secondly, the very important function of advancing agricultural credit to the peasantry was very often carried out by the chiefs. Thirdly, they regulated peasant production by enforcing the authority of the village elders through the village council Finally, the judicial powers they held and the method of summary justice kept in order the production relations in the peasant community. The proper performance of these functions gave the chiefs, not so much economic or material benefits, but social benefits ; having more followers , more retinue, more social status and prestige, etc.[146]

The British administration, when they systematically, and deliberately, destroyed the traditional

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145. Forbes, II. p.156
146. See above, pp.

institution , i.e., the system of chiefs, which kept the peasant society, its social relations(including those of economic relations) in order, brought about a complete disorganization and confusion in the peasant society. The British failed to replace the traditional institution with something as efficient and as effective in carrying out the functions of the traditional system, however much their civil service was efficient in other respects. The British civil service, the Government Agents, Assistant Agents, Collectors of Revenue, and Magistrates , the administration expected to play the role of mediators between the central government and the peasantry.[146b] This new class of officers even attempted to surround themselves with all the traditional ceremony of the highest native chiefs. [147] However, such attempts only proved more oppressive to the peasants. The civil service, composed as it was of Europeans who did not share the language, religion[148] or traditions of the peasants, scarcely elicited their faith. Katcheries, or the

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146. See for instance the reasons given by Cameron for his recommendations of Judicial Reforms. CCP.I.pp.172 ff.
147. Cave, p.428
148. The Colonial Office instructed the governor as early as 1801 to induce young civil servants to learn the native languages(Sinhalese and Tamil) and early governors enacted regulations time and again to achieve this end. However, Colebrooke found in 1831 that this was a very rare accomplishment among Civil servants. He had to recommend that civil appointments in the provinces should be given only to those who were proficient in native languages. CCP.II.pp.107-137 Dispatches from the Secretary of state 1833. C.G.A. 4/18, C.O 55, 74 No. 114. CCP I p. 275.

provincial centres of British administration , turned out to be centres of oppression and exaction in the eyes of the peasants. The Katcheries were only interested in exacting the taxes from the peasants.[149] These, situated in the provincial capitals, were far removed from the habitations of peasants, which were sometimes 40 to 50 miles away from the Katcheri.[150] Hence the civil service could hardly perform the functions of mediating between the peasants and the central government, as was intended. (Only the provinces which were suited to the commercial plantations of European speculators attracted the interests of the British civil servants during the first half of the 19th century) Europeans who visited the Island during / even the last quarter of the 19th century deplored the gross neglegence of the provinces where no commercial cultivation took place, and where hundreds of thousands of peasands lived in a state of semi-starvation.[151]

Two groups of people gradually filled this vacuum created by the destruction of the traditional system of chiefs. They could be categorised as official and

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149.RKPC. p.14
150.Ibid.,
151.By the time the British realized the importance of the traditional system of government through native chiefs for the very survival of the peasants, and attempted to revive it, the time was too late. The restoration did more harm than any good.See Cave, pp.216-217; The Province of Uva which was completely neglected by the British had about 800 villages inhabited by a peasant population of 180,000 . Cumming, p.330.

unofficial. The official mediators were the village headmen, first appointed by the Collectors of Revenue, and later by the Commissioner of Revenue, or the Government Agent at a later date.[152] The inferior headmen were earlier appointed by the chiefs, and their tenure was annually renewed by the chiefs.[153] This checked the inappropriate behaviour of these minor headmen, and they had to be responsible to the chiefs for their behaviour. However, once they received their situations from the collectors or the Government Agents, and held office at their pleasure, the behaviour of the minor headmen towar/the peasants changed rapidly. The Collectors or the Government Agents lived in their provincial capitals and had very little knowledge of what was taking place in the remote villages where the headmen started behaving as small tyrants.[154] More often, these minor headmen were appointed from lower castes which the British thought would reduce the power and influence of the traditional chiefs.[155] These people of traditionally low origin did not command the loyalty or respect of the peasantry, and their non-traditional behaviour made

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152. Maitland's Instructions to Heads of Departments, CGA. 3/A 199.1; C.O.54, 28. 17 August 1808. ed. CCP.II. pp.244-274.
153. Ibid.,
154. Forbes, I. pp.52-56
155. CCP.I.pp.48-49

things worse. However, once in official positions these people were determined to obtain social status. And they were well aware that one way of doing this was to obtain land. Thus in every village there emerged a few families who were bent on adding inches to their land at the expense of the peasantry.

The attempt of the British administrators to resuscitate the village council in the latter half of the 19th century, aggravated this situation. The new village council was composed of government appointed officers,[156] who also joined hands with village headmen in their bid to acquire social status by appropriating peasant holdings.[157] Colebrooke was not satisfied with the manner in which the village headmen were appointed, and he suggested the appointment of village headmen on the wishes of the majority of the inhabitants of the village.[158] However, there is no evidence that this suggestion was ever carried out, and the Government Agents continued to make the appointments on their own prejudices, rather than on the wishes of the people.

Another ubiquitous government employee was the village school teacher, who also acted as the

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156. Cave. p.405
157. See below,
158. CCP. I. pp.69-71

registrar of marriages and deaths. Though he did not become as obnoxious as the village headmen, and commanded the respect of the peasant as the instructor of the young in the village, the social prestige attached to the land, particularly the rice fields, made him just another official who had the means of buying and he covetedly awaited the opportunity to buy peasant holdings.[159]

The unofficial group was a corrollary to the development of cash crop cultivation, market economy, accelerated circulation of money, in short a result of the monetization of the economy. We have already seen that about 50 per cent of the Kandyan peasants were directly involved in the coffee culture [160] as a supplementary source of income. In the maritime provinces the involvement of peasants in cash economy was even greater. Almost every peasant was involved either in wage labour or in cash crop cultivation, and sometimes in both ,[161] Sometimes whole villages completely gave up cultivation as their primary occupation.[162] Those who were thrown out of land due to the expansion of plantations, found a ready labour market in the growing urban areas or in coconut plantations themselves.

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159. Yalman, pp.40 ff.
160. See above,
161. Cave, pp.89, 113,118,125,133,134,138,142,146,148,149, 150,154.
162. Cave. p.125

All this market activity necessitated the services of a group of people who functioned as the middlemen to the peasantry, to collect their cash crops, to transport them to the market, to bring consumer goods (including rice, the staple diet of the peasantry) and to advance credit on occasion. These positions were filled by Muslims who were carrying on internal trade for centuries,[163] and many other south Indian groups flocked to the Island for the purpose.[164] Some of the Sinhalese from the maritime provinces who had been in contact with the Europeans for centuries also took to trade and speculation. The latter mainly infested the Kandyan areas.[165]

Speculation was rampant, and wholeheartedly encouraged by the British in the maritime provinces from the very beginning of their rule. In fact, private speculation started when the Dutch abandoned the monopoly of certain goods at a latter date of their rule.[166] The first few years of of the British rule witnessed some

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163. Before the advent of the Portuguese Muslims known as moors carried out both internal and external trade of of the Island. When the Portuguese and later the Dutch dominated the Eastern seas moors carried out the internal trade of the Kandyan kingdom and'smuggled out'goods to south India.

164. A modern economic historian writes, " During the nineteenth century Indian merchants, money-lenders and labourers began to cross Palk Straits to take advantage of the opportunities appearing in the colony run by Indias own masters. The merchants, heirs to a commercial tradition that few Ceylonese shared, became dominent in certain areas of retail trade; the maney- lenders specialized in small loans to villagers and low income debtors.Oliver, Economic Policy and Opinion in Ceylon. p.8

165. Tennant, II.pp.222-223

166. Bertolacci, p.26, 56-57

of the native population of the maritime provinces collecting a considerable amount of money through speculation.[167] Dutch coins and currency (paper) were in regular use in the maritime provinces and the British maintained the same for some time, with certain modifications.[168] According to Bertolacci speculation was very high during this period.[169] Many of the Sinhalese speculators from the maritime provinces were those who were thrown out of land due to the expansion of coconut plantations.

In the traditional society credit was needed by the peasantry for two main reasons; for seed grain or for consumption.[170] The security for credit advanced was the institution of slavery.[171] But with the development of cash-crop cultivation and market economy, credit was needed for more reasons. In short, the peasant was subjected to the vagaries of the market.

From the very beginning of the British colonial rule in Sri Lanka, the fast changing economy of the maritime provinces made it necessary that the government advance agricultural credit to the peasants. Therefore, as early as 1806 the governor instructed the Heads of Departmnts to advance credit to the peasantry

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167. Bertolacci, p.57
168. Bertolacci, pp.77-89
169. Ibid.,
170. See above, p.
171. See above, p.

at the rate of 30 per cent interest rate, which was also adopted by the Dutch.[173] After considering the report of the Colebrooke Commission on this matter, the Colonial Office instructed the governor to reduce the interest rate to 10 per cent but not to advance credit in money under any circumstance.[174] This was a very unfortunate step so far as the peasantry was concerned because it deprived the peasantry engaged in cash crop cultivation of a very generous source of credit, which would have greatly improved their bargaining position as against the speculators. But such a policy would surely have adversely affected the capitalist interests by limiting the growth of a labour force(willing to hire their labour) and blocking the opportunities of local capital formation. (which again would have limited the demand for British manufactured goods)

The coffee slump of 1848 caused untold hardships among the Kandyan peasants, as the imported goods from Britain have become day to day necessities of the peasantry. According to a European civil servant, by 1835 every conceivable article produced in British factories was available

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173. Maitland's Instructions to Heads of Deaprtments. CGA. 3/A.199. 1; C.O. 54.28. Maitland to Castlereigh,17 th August. 1808. ed.CCP.II.pp.244-274.
174. Dispatches from the Secretary of State. 1833.CGA. 4/18

even in the remotest peasant villages where a decade back the peasantry hardly recognized a common pin.[174b] Very soon these imported articles were to become 'wants' of the peasants. The result was that not only a crop failure but the slightest change in the market situation sent the peasant into seious debt.

The Judiciary.

No single institution introduced by the British contributed so much to the disadvantage of the peasantry than the newly established British Judiciary. In 1801, the British introduced a new judicial system in the maritime provinces. The Dutch civil courts of law, the landraads were abolished and provincial judges were appointed from the British civil service. Collectors were charged with the power of majistrates.[175] Time and again, the civil servants and visitors to the Island pointed out to the rulers and even to the Colonial Office, the unsuitability of the system of courts to the conditions in Sri Lanka, but they took no heed. Because, the judiciary was one of the major money spinners to the

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174b. Forbes II. pp.16-17

175. The Charter of Justice. 1801. C.O.55.61; The Charter of Justice. 1810.C.O.54.31; The Charter of Justice 1811. C.O.55.62. , ed., A Collection of the Legislative Acts of the Ceylon Government. I. pp.33, 124, 136

government.[175b] According to the new judicial system a peasant expecting redress from the courts (this in many cases to preserve his hereditary rights over land) had to pay a stamp duty all the way to the Bench .[176] These prohibitive stamp duties were highly criticized by Cameron, the special commissioner appointed to investigate the judiciary in the Island.[177] Cameron recommended the immediate abolition of the stamp duties which, however, did not prevail upon the Colonial Office. [178] The stamp duty was maintained for the highly doubtful purpose of 'breaking the litigant spirit of the Sinhalese.[179]

175b. Vicount Goderich to Sir R.W.Horton. Dispatches from the Secretary of State.1833. C.O.55. 74.No.114. CGA. 4/18. ed., CCP.I.pp.257-284

176. Proclamation of 25 March 1824. C.O.58.6 ed.,CCP.II. pp.396-397

177. CCP.I. pp.152-153

178. Viscount Goderich to R.W.Horton. C.O.55.74. No.114. Dispatches from the Secratary of State,1833..CGA. 4/18. ed., CCP.I.pp.257-284

179. Proclamation of 25 March 1824. CGG.27 March 1824. C.O.58.6. ed. CCP.II.pp.396-7

Not only the stamp duties per se, but the procrastination of litigation for years[180] caused economic hardships among the peasantry.[181] Skinner mentions cases which dragged on for more than ten years.[182] It was not a very rare incident that the money spent on litigation far exceeded the value of the property on which the litigation was instituted.[183] The tale does not end here. The courts were situated only in the provincial capitals Peasants were journeying to and from courts of law, spending their time in litigation instead of cultivation.[184] This was more aggravated by the traditional system of land ownership. Because of the share-system of ownership and cultivation, a law-suit which involved the property rights of a single share in an estate involved a whole village in a court case whether they liked it or not.[185] Thus whole villages spent weary days crowding around courts of law or journeying up and down from the vellages to the courts thus wasting their time which was badly needed for production purposes,[186] in the vain expectation that the courts will one day dole out justice to them.

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180. CCP. I. p.173
181. Skinner, p.221
182. Ibid.
183. Skinner, p.222
184. CCP. I. p.175
185. Ibid.,
186. Ibid, also, pp.106-107

Cameron saw the 'monstrously abusive practice of 'summoning multitides of immaterial witnesses for the purpose of delaying the litigation at a later stage. However, the learned lawyer found himself incapable of recommending any remedy to prevent it.[187]

The only people who were benefitted from the judicial system, writes Skinner, were the government which benefitted from the revenue collected through stamp fees, the new class of western educated lawyers,[188] who either belonged to the families of chiefs(now fast becoming a westernized elite) or the Dutch Burghers(the remnants of Dutch citizens who remained in the Island after the East India Company lost possession of it); the latter dominated the profession till the end of the century.[189] Apart from the official lawyers, there emerged a class of 'unofficial lawyers' , the 'outdoor lawyers' as they were called, (the peasants disdainfully called them goda perakadoruwa) who started their career as clerks and peons to the lawyers and later'appeared' on behalf of their clients, the gullible peasants, in the law courts. This group instigated and involved the peasants more and more in litigation

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187.CCP.p.175, also, pp.106-107
188.Skinner, pp.221-222.
189.Tennant. p.156

perhaps , not without the tacit connivance of their more professional brethren, the professional lawyers.[190] Cameron observed in 1832 that the courts of law have become machinery for oppression rather than places where justice was distributed.[191] This remained so even after the much thought out Charter of Justice which was enacted by the Colonial Office at the recommendations of the Colebrooke Commission.[192] Skinner observed in the latter part of the 19th century, that ' lawsuit was too frequently the corrupt instrument of revenge in the hands of the rich and the powerful'.[193] This remained so even at the end of the 19th cnetury. The new system of justice was an essential pre-requisite for the establishment and maintenance of capitalist relations of production. Hence it is quite understandable that the British administration was so much concerned about establishing rule of law in the Island rather than doing justice to the peasants.

Intemperance

Kings of Kandy severely restricted the use of alcohol and gambling in Kandyan territories. Hence intemperance was hardly known among the Kandyan peasants from the time of Robert Knox right down to the British occupation.[194]

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190. Obeysekere, p.137
191. CCP. I.pp.126-127, 149
192. Ceylon Charter of Justice 1833. House of Commons Accounts and Papers. 1833. No.332. vol.xxvi; C.O.55.74 .
193. Skinner, p.221
194. Robert Knox., p.105

Things started changing rapidly as renting liquor licences gradually started to form a major revenue for the government.[195] Spread of coconut plantations boosted up the industry, the distillation of spirits. In many coastal districts coconut was planted mainly for toddy tapping and distillation of arrack.[196] Very soon speculators started invading peasant villages where the commodity was hardly known. As early as the 1830's Major Forbes expressed his fears about the growth of intemperance in peasant villages due to the low price of arrack. By that time taverns were established and generally frequented in areas where, according to Forbes, the manufacture or sale of spirits was prohibited, and where five years before that date consumption of liquor was totally unknown.[197]

The government happily encouraged the situation by introducing a system of renting liquor licences to speculators, in public auction.[198] These speculators subletted the licences to the highest bidder which resulted in opening up taverns even in the remotest villages.[199] Intemperance, crime and litigation

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195.CCP.I. pp.104-105
196.Cave, pp.141-142
197.Forbes, pp.168
198.CCP.I. p.104-105; Skinner, pp.219-220
199.Skinner, p.220

started mounting up leading to misery and indebtedness among the peasantry. British civil servants , especially Government Agents staged a protest against the policy of indiscriminate liquor lincencing.[200] However, their voices fell on deaf ears. One civil servant wrote in desperation, " I have known districts where some years ago not one in a hundred could be induced to taste spirits... (however within two decades) villagers have been known to pawn the crops upon the ground to tavern keepers for arrack. "[201]

All the above changes in the peasant production system and the consequential changes in the social formations among the Sinhalese, contributed toward one goal, i.e., pauperization of the peasantry. No other change could have better served the interests of the capitalists of the metropolis. For this meant the availability of cheap wage labour which was absolutely necessary for the growth of industrial capitalism.[202] The growth of internal trade and buying power among a section of the native population created a market for the British manufactured goods. Thus all in all the changes were in perfect agreement with the changes that had been taking place in the system of production

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200.Cumming, pp.437-
201. Skinner, p.220
202. Dobb, pp. 221-222

in the imperial metropolis, i.e., the shift from merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism. Hence it is no wonder that the administration in Colombo and even the Colonial Office truned a blind eye to the steady deterioration of the conditions of the peasantry in spite of the repeated attempts of some enlightened civil servants to arrest the situation from further deterioration.

CHAPTER IV

The Creation of a Landless Peasantry.

The British administrators, we have already noted, brought about conspicous changes in the peasant production system, both as a result of direct legislation and through indirect methods, and such changes affected the whole Island. However, until the middle of the 19 th century, peasants had sufficient land to carry on whatever form of cultivation they cared to indulge in. It is true that some peasants lost traditional rights over the land-holdings which traditionally belonged to them, and turned them to share-croppers. Moreover, some peasants had to switch cultivation for the market instead of cultivating for consumption, either motivated by profits or in order to avoid the never ending harassment from the offensive assessor and tax farmer. But the fact remains that the peasant was notdenied access to land in any part of the Island , and had a choice-depending upon his ability and place of residence- to indulge in some form of cultivation.

The spread of European owned plantations, particularly in the Kandyan provinces, on the other hand, brought to a close this unrestricted access to the land, which the peasantry had enjoyed as a birthright through out centuries under the traditional government. Between 1837 and 1845, 349,870 acres were sold to European speculators, by the government,

in order to open commercial plantations of coffee.[1] Much of the land sold by the government was bought on speculation rather than for immediate cultivation.[2] In 1857 there were 400 European owned plantations comprising about 80,000 acres of coffee.[3] The cultivated coffee plantations were thus less than one fourth of the total land sold by the government fourteen years back, in 1845. Even when the abandonment of some of the coffee plantations during the coffee slump in 1848 is taken into consideration, this still leaves a wide margin between the land bought and land immediately cultivated.

Thus land was bought on speculation and indeed the speculation was very high. The government sold land at very advantageous terms to the speculators, i.e., at an upset (reserve) price of five shillings an acre, the government paying for the cost of surveying.

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1. The extent of land sold during the years 1837-45 was,
   1837- 3661 acres,
   1838- 10401 "
   1839- 9571 "
   1840- 42841 "
   1841- 78685 "
   1842- 48533 "
   1843- 58336 "
   1844- 20415 "
   1845- 19062 " Tennant, p.230 foot note.1
2. Tennant, p.230
3. Tennant, p.235

The speculator paid only a tenth of the value at the time of purchase, and entered into a contract with the government to settle the remainder within a period of one year. [4] A contemporary writer describes the way that land was appropriated by the speculators, who were for the most part none other than the administrators themselves.

> The Governor and the Council, the military, the judges, the clergy, and one half the civil servants penetrated the hills, and became purchasers of crown lands. The East India Company's officers crowded to Ceylon to invest their savings, and Capitalists from England arrived in every packet.... Five million sterling are said to have been sunk within less than as many years. The rush for land was only parallelled by the movement toward the mines of California and Australia.[5]

The more important point is the source of all this land which the government sold to the speculators. Obviously they were crown lands. But all the 'crown' lands were not suitable for coffee cultivation. In fact, before 1840 the government sold only a little over 20,000 acres to the speculators. However, the years following 1840 saw a complete change. In 1841 the government sold more than 78,000 acres to speculators.[6] Obviously the government tapped another source

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4. Ludowyk p.59
5. Tennant. p.231
6. See above, p.

which enabled it to sell more than 300,000 acres which were suitable for coffee cultivation within the course of six years. [7]

This in fact was the case. The Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance, which was passed by the government in 1840 deprived the peasantry of their chena (high lands) lands which was their undisputed property under the traditional system of ownership.[8] The Ordinance made the crown and not the peasants the owners of all the chena and forest reserves of the villages. The Ordinance was carefully phrased so as to deprive the peasants of any claims to lands except those which were regularly cultivated with paddy. [9] All forests, waste, and unoccupied and uncultivated land was declared the property of the crown unless the opposite was proved. All the chena lands, which were cultivated after the interval of several years and were situated within the Kandyan provinces, were declared as belonging to the crown and not to any individual, unless the opposite was proved with the help of a grant or sannas (a royal grant) and with satisfactory evidence as to the boundaries of such a property.[10] The payment of government taxes or dues, or rendering a particular

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7. See above, p.
8. Ordinance No.20 of 1840. To Prevent Encroachment upon Crown Lands.
9. Ibid.,

service to the government for occupying such land either in the Kandyan provinces or in the maritime provinces, was regarded as sufficient proof of ownership of such property. An amended order in the council of 1841 empowered District courts to evict persons encroaching on crown lands.[11]

The provisions made in the Ordinance of 1840 for the proof of ownership by the peasantry of chena lands were more apparent than real. Firstly, in the Kandyan provinces it was not the custom to grant chena lands with sannas (royal decree) Land grants were made under the native administration, taking the village as the unit. The village, however, contained a specific area set apart for chena cultivation, which was usually the/common property of the village.. A person who cultivated a chena with the permission of the traditional authority of the village, was regarded as having the right to cultivate the same place after several years (during which period the land remained fallow) if he so desired. D'Oyly writing about the ownership of chena lands[12] states

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11.Amended Order in Council 1841.
12.D'Oyly, p.45

> No specific term of years constitutes prescriptive titile of land notwithstanding a vulgar saying which attaches validity to 30 years. But an undisturbed possession of many years is considered in all cases a strong presumptive proof in favour of the possessor. [12b]

In fact the government accepted the principle of undisturbed possession of ten years as sufficient proof of ownership. [13] In 1830 , Colebrooke refers to the accepted policy of regarding chena lands as private property. [14] Moreover, chena lands never had boundaries which served no practical purpose. The only boundary was the extent of land that a family could cultivate with the available labour. Customarily, in Kandyan areas , chena land was never subjected to a tax or service. [15] It was the paddy fields which were regarded as having the obligation of rendering service to the king or to any overlord. [16] Even the 1818 Kandyan Proclamation subjected only the paddy fields of the Kandyan Provinces to the grain tax of one tenth of the produce. [17]

12b. D'Oyly, p.45
13. CGG. 25 September 1819. C.O.58.2.
14. CCP. I.pp.26-27
15. See above, p
16. CCP. I.pp.26-27
17. Kandyan Proclamation, Davy, Appendix II.

In the maritime provinces, the conditions were somewhat different . Though the Dutch never taxed the produce of the chena lands, the British administrators imposed a tax of one tenth of the produce of the chena lands.[18] Hence some of the peasants in the maritime provinces could prove their title to the chena lands. Nor were the British administrators immediately interested in obtaining the high lands of the maritime provinces because these were not suitable for coffee cultivation. However, in the long run, the villages of the maritime provinces also lost all the land set apart for the common use of the village. [19]

Therefore, the long run effect of the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840, both with regard to the peasantry of the Kandyan provinces as well as those of the maritime provinces, was equal. The Ordinance practically limited the expansion of the villages through population growth. The traditional village, which consisted of four areas, viz., the paddy fields, the residence areas (the gardens), the chena (highlands) and forests, was now confined to only the paddy fields and residence area, the latter too a much smaller in extent than what it was.

18.See above, pp.
19. See Obeyesekere, p.101.

Obeyesekere points out that the village where he made a field study had contracted from about 700 acres to about 100 acres as a result of losing land to the crown under the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance.[20]

However, it was not only the chena lands that the peasants lost as a result of the implementation of the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance which was intended to make land available for commercial plantations. Instances were not wanting when entire villages were moved to make room for plantations.[21] Land was not always surveyed by the government when sold to European speculators.[22] This resulted in long litigation in law courts, at the end of which peasants not only lost their lands but also fell into serious debt.[23] Considering that the speculators were for the most part the rulers of the Island [24] and those judged law suits,[25] one could hardly expect that justice would have been done to the peasants.

Further additions were made to the crown lands by the Registration of the Temple lands Ordinance No.10 of 1856.[26] The purpose of this ordinance was the preparation of of the Register of Temple lands. Under the Ordinance the cost of land surveys done for the purpose was

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20. See Obeysekere, p.104
21. Snodgrass, p.28
22. Snodgrass, p.23
23. Snodgrass, p.23
24. See above,
25. See above,
26. Registration of Temple Lands Ordinance of 1856

to be shared by the temples and the government. Some of the temples which owned large extent of land were compelled, in order to escape heavy survey charges, to abandon claims to a large portion of their temporalities which were vested on the crown under the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840.[27]

The Waste Lands Ordinance No. I of 1897[28] further weakened the position of the peasant regarding the ownership of landed property. Under this ordinance, 'whenever it so appeared to the Government Agent of the District, that any land within his province or district is forest, chena waste or unoccupied' he was empowered to compel any claimant by issue of notice, to appear before him and prove his title to the land. The default on the part of a claimant vested on the crown the ownership of such property. The Ordinance further provided that all chenas and other lands which could only be cultivated after the intervals of years should be presumed to be the property of the crown unless the opposite was proved.[29]

All the above ordinances were passed, and the peasants were deprived of their traditional land in order to allow the accumulating capital of the metropolis chances of further investment. The above

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27. Registration of Temple Lands Ordinance of 1856
28. Waste Lands Ordinance No.1 of 1897
29. Ibid,

facts substantiate the thesis that the growth of capitalism and the capitalist class was not so much due to thrift and abstinence as some economists have assumed but by the dispossession of others through economic and (or) political advantage no matter whether the victims were foreign or local.[30] The above legislation, it should be pointed out served the double purpose of giving the opportunity of investment for foreign capital in the form of commercial plantations, and started a process of proletarianization of the peasantry so that cheap wage labour was available plantations and related commercial activities.[31]

The effects of the above ordinances on peasant production, particularly on those of the Kandyan provinces, were serious and manifold. First, the acquisition and sale of the chena and forest reserves of the villages to the European speculators completely hemmed in the villages, and left them with no quarters for further expansion as did the traditional system. Soon afterwards the lands thus acquired and sold to the speculators were converted into coffee plantations.The rapidity of the elimination of the coffee plantations due to the coffee disease

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30. See Dobb, p.222

31. The proletarianization of the Sinhalese peasantry was not rapid enough to cope with the labour demands of the European owned commercial plantations. But the slowly growing wage labour very much helped the development of coconut plantations and the related commercial activities.

was only parallelled by the growth of the tea industry.[32] The more serious effects of so abruptly and so completely restricting the expansion of villages was to come only with the passage of time. We have already seen that the traditional system worked to maintain the land/labour ratio in equilibrium at the best level of production. However, the elimination of chena lands and forest reserves threw the whole system out of balance, and to accomodate the growing population the peasants adopted the only alternative available to them, i.e., that of applying more intensive labour on the available paddy lands. This at least accomodated the growing peasant population till the turn of the century, and kept the production growing,[33] though at the same time it also contributed to the growth of the peasant population.[34]

The peasants did not feel a great loss at the time they lost chena lands, because they had started growing a very profitable cash crop in their gardens; coffee earned them a sufficient additional income, which filled the gap between their grain produce and the consumption needs of the year.[35] This made the chena cultivation less important to many peasants in the areas where coffee

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32. Snodgrass, pp.29-38
33. Snodgrass, p.24
34. see below.
35. See above

or any other major cash crop could be grown. The growing demand for coffee and other cash crops , eg. coconut, would have turned the the peasants more and more toward them, rather than toward the traditional chena cultivation. In the maritime provinces, the imposition of a tax on chena produce and the consequent visitations of assessors and tax farmers would have further discouraged the chena cultivation wherever cash crops could replace them.[36] Moreover, cheap imported rice was available all over the Island- trucked even in the remotest villages.[37] The Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance left the peasants with no choice in the matter but to grow coffee or some other cash crop in their gardens to make good the deficiencies in rice produce[38] and (or) selling their excess labour for whatever price they can obtain for it.

Even in instances when the peasants could prove their ownership of the chena, they were more keen to sell their lands and get whatever money they could, rather than to keep them. In 1859, European planters, Kandyan chieftains, Burghers (esp. lawyers), Sinhalese of the maritime provinces and Kandyan peasants all met in

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36. See above,
37. White, p. 69. See for the expansion of petty traders in the interior. Forbes, II. pp. 16-17.
38. White, p. 69.

public in common interest to protest against the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840, as it deprived the peasants of their right to sell the land they traditionally owned.[39] The British Governor in the Island pointed out this 'unusual combination' between the two races the native element representing the venders which coincided with the interests of the Europeans eculator.[40] But this is only a half truth. The native element did not represent only venders, both the Sinhalese from the maritime provinces(and the Burghers) the latter mainly from the law profession, represented speculators, those who were eager to buy the land of the peasantry. The problem viewed from the angle of the peasants , exhibited a very reasonable attitude. The strong presumption in favour of the crown regarding the ownership of all land except those which were regularly cultivated with paddy made the peasants very insecure about the title to their chena lands.[41] Moreover, the growing demand for cash crops, and the peasants ability to cultivate and exchange these for foodstuffs, made the cultivation of chena dispensible for many peasants. Hence there is little surprise that the peasantry in the Kandyan provinces viewed the immediate prospect of selling whatever chena land they owned as more advantageous rather than the long run security (which of course was uncertain) of having

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39. Ludowyk. p.65
40. Ibid.
41. RKPC. p.73

them for cultivation , in case of crop failure of the paddy lands.[42] The result was that much of the chena lands which were saved from being appropriated by the government under the Crown Lands Encroachments Ordinance of 1840, were sold by the peasants themselves to the speculators.[43] Speculators sided with the peasants in order to buy their lands for two reasons; firstly, it was easier for these gentry to cheat the gullible peasants rather than the government regarding the value and extent of land; secondly, by this time the government had raised the price of land, and it was possible to buy it cheaper from the peasants.

The result of all this was the settlement of hordes of speculators among the peasants , or owning land in peasant villages, both of which were equally harmful to the interests of the peasants. While the low country Sinhalese and moors settled down among the peasants , Indian merchants and Burghers, the latter mostly lawyers, owned land in peasant villages.[44] The activities of these two groups seriously affected the life, especially the production of the peasantry. The Sinhalese of the low country, (maritime provinces) and the moors became the mediators between the peasantry and the wider world,

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42.RKPC. p.73
43.RKPC. p.73
44.RKPC. pp.59-61

especially in the form of small shop keepers who collected the peasant produce for the market and distributed the consumption goods needed by the peasants. Very often the mediators kept a running account and exchanged goods for goods, the peasantry always receiving less for his produce and paying more for what he buys than in an open market. The net result of all this, in the long run , was the serious indebtedness among the peasantry. The professionals who lived in the urban areas did not spare a single opportunity to appropriate peasant lands, when the latter were compelled to mortgage their property in order to keep them away from starvation in times of distress. In the following years courts of law were flooded with law-suits involving title to land, and deeds were produced in courts-which were dominated by Burgher lawyers- under which whole villages chenas, and forests were claimed (and obtained) on the basis of having been bought from villagers [45]

The availability of fresh land for the establishment of new villages was a structural pre-requisite for the traditional system of cultivation to operate effectively. [6] The system of shares, and the

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45. RKPC. p.73
46. Obeysekere, p.100

system of alternation (tattumaru), the basic form of traditional cultivation could not be maintained for a long time without having fresh land to absorb the excess of labour which would be thrown out of the village as a necessary function of maintaining the land/labour equilibrium.[47] Once this pre-requisite was removed the whole system was thrown out of balance. The fractioning of land into minute units continued beyond the limit at which the cultivation of small shares became practically impossible, and also economically not very feasible.[48] Excess labour became a problem in many peasant villages. For about a generation or two cash crops absorbed this labour. Apart from coffee, the peasants heavily indulged in cultivating European vegetables and minor cash crops.[49]

Another consequence of the spread of commercial plantations which did not attract much attention was the loss of irrigation facilities to many villages in the Kandyan provinces. The system of irrigation in the Kandyan highlands differed considerably from other areas. Usually the Kandyan villages, had paddy fields and residential area at the bottom of a hill, the chena lands and forest reserve of the village spreading at higher elevations. The paddy fields at the bottom of hills were irrigatedby water which was stored up in an artificial reservoir which was always situated at a higher elevation on the hill, usually in the forest area.[50] Very often

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49. White. p.70
50. RKPC. p.4

the cultivation of all the paddy fields in a village depended entirely on the supply of water which was thus stored up. Hundreds of such'tanks' were lost to villagers when the forests and wastes were sold to the speculators and were converted into plantations.[51] Because of this the rice cultivation in Kandyan areas heavily suffered when the rainfall was insufficient for cultivation. Peasants had to expend much labour in devicing new ways of conducting water from long distances for their paddy fields. [52] For a generation or two this absorbed much of the labour of the Kandyan peasantry.

Deforestation of Kandyan hills also had disastrous effects on rice cultivation, not only in the Kandyan provinces but also in other parts of the Island as well. All accounts regarding the Kandyan kingdom from the time of Robert Knox, make reference to the dense forests[53] which covered much of the interior of the Island. These jungles were fostered and carefully protected by native rulers as a defensive strategy against the European invaders. [55] Not only the border between the Kandyan kingdom and the maritime provinces but also the administrative divisions within the Kandyan kingdom itself were covered with impassable jungles. [56] Much of

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52.Baker, pp.79-80
53.Robert Knox, p.3
54.Forbes, II. p.66
55 Bertolacci, p.8
56.Robert Knox, p.3

these virgin forests were felled with ruthless rapidity to make way for the coffee plantations. [57]The removal of regulations which restricted the felling of timber, at the recommendation of the Colebrooke Commission , greatly facilitated the deforestation of the Island by the speculators.[58]

The European speculators were not the only cause which paved the way for the deforestation of the Island. Speculative chena cultivation had much to do with it. Traditional chena cultivation was allowed only in the forest reserves of villages and not everywhere. In regions which were not suitable for coffee cultivation and later tea plantations , due to the climatic and soil conditions, speculatory chena cultivation spread like wild fire. In 1883, it was found that in the Central Province out of about 2 1/2 million acres of 'waste' land good forests existed in no more than 30,000 acres.[59]In the Badulla District reports a civil servant , the largest in the Island with 2,119,000 acres of uncultivated land, he was not able hear of more than one hundred acre patches (of forest) on rocky knolls.[60]

Peasants themselves contributed their share to the deforestation , when some of them resorted

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57. Bailey, p.124
58. Despatches from the Secretary of State, 4th May 1832. Goderich to Horton. C.O.54.74
59. White. p.73
60. Ibid.,

to chena cultivation as the primary production instead of resorting to it to obtain a supplementary food supply. A committee appointed in 1866 to inquire into and report on irrigation works and agriculture in the Uva province , reported that vast tracts of land in this province were abandoned by the peasants due to the non-availability of water(as the irrigation works were destroyed during the 1818 rebellion and never reconstructed). For about a half a century the peasants in these areas were abandoning their rice fields, [62] and the only way they earned a living was by growing commercial crops and bartering them for rice.[63] Wherever the land was suitable for coffee they cultivated it, and in other areasthey grew in their gardens all kinds of European vegetables for the market.[64] Many peasants in these areas resorted to chena cultivation as their primary occupation and the produce, depending upon its nature, was either directly used for consumption or bartered for grain.[65]

Thus the combined efforts of these three groups the European speculators, the Sinhalese speculators mainly from the maritime provinces and the peasants who had to

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62. White, pp.69-71
63. Ibid.,
64. Ibid.,
65. Ibid.,

give up rice cultivation, devastated the forest reserves of the Island within a few decades.

The deforestation affected the peasant production in various ways. The torrential tropical rains falling on the bare earth washed away the fertile top soil in no time, making the land barren.[66] The deforestation also affected the climatology of the Island, alternative periods of severe droughts and floods have started pestering the land from the end of the 19 th century.[67] Floods affected the peasantry of the maritime provinces more than the Kandyan peasants. The five main rivers which started from the hill country devastated the paddy fields of the maritime provinces during torrential rains. The damage caused to the life and property by earthslips during rainy weather was also considerable.[68]

Humans were not the only source of energy used in the agricultural production among the Sinhalese peasantry. Cattle formed a very important source of energy, particularly used in paddy cultivation.[69] They were harnessed to a plough which prepared the soil for the seed paddy; this was a very primitive instrument, but was very suitable to the geographical and soil conditions of the country. The richness of the cattle and pasture of the province of

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66.Forbes, II.pp.28-29
67.Bailey, p.124
68.Bailey, p.124; Forbes, II.pp.29-30
69.Tennant. I.p.152; Robert Knox, p.8

Uva, mentioned by Robert Knox, remained so until the beginning of the British rule. Visitors to the Kandyan Kingdom,as well as the early British civil servants, often refer to the richness of the Kandyan provinces in cattle and milk.[70]

The use of cattle in agricultural production saved an excessive amount of labour, which would otherwise have been spent in the preparation of paddy fields for cultivation. [71]The animal was also used in threshing the corn. It was only by using animal energy that the peasantry was successful in obtaining a sufficient produce, even in prosperous years to last the whole year. Not only were cattle a source of energy, they were the only source of fertilizer among thepeasants.[72] Thus the cattle were so important for the production that their preservation was safeguarded with heavy punishment for their destruction.[73]

However, the picture changed very rapidly within the course of a few decades. Firstly, the 1818 rebellion took a terrible toll on the cattle, particularly in the Uva and Sabaragamuwa provinces. [74]As a part of

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70.Tennant.Ip. 152; Forbes, II.p.30
71.Tennant. I. p.152
72.Baker, pp.60-61
73.D'Oyly, p.56
74.Forbes, II. p.126; D'Oyly, p.77

the military strategy to starve the population into submission cattle were wantonly destroyed.[75] However, this was not all. The spread of plantations eliminated the pasture in many Kandyan provinces, thus forcing the peasantry to get rid of their cattle.[76] During the period of transition, it was not an unusual sight in the Kandyan provinces to see the cattle being driven in hundreds to pastures, sometimes twenty to thirty miles away , during the off agricultural seasons.[77] Coffee planters also started buying the cattle of the peasants , who were forced to sell them because of the non-availability of pasture.The cattle bought by planters were herded into estates to obtain manure,[78] thus depriving the peasants of the animal energy and fertilizer needed for cultivation.

In the maritime provinces severe cinnamon laws which punished the peasants if their cattle strayed in cinnamon plantations restricted cattle rearing even before the coming of the British.[79] The chalia people (the caste engaged in cinnamon pealing) also drove unattended cattle into cinnamon plantations in order to forcefully seize them,[80] as they were entitled to under the cinnamon laws. This very limited availability of animal

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75.Tennant. p.92
76.Forbes, II.pp.13-14; Snodgrass, pp.47-8
77.Forbes,II.pp.197-8
78.Cumming. pp.370-371
79.Bertolacci, pp.248-249
80.Ibid.

energy should have been one of the reasons which contributed to the inadequate produce of grain in the maritime provinces, insp te of the efforts made by the Dutch to improve agriculture while the Kandyan kingdom had an excess grain produce right down to the British occupation.[81]

Another fact which severely restricted the availability of animal energy in production, was the use of cattle more for transportation than for agricultural work. Until the railway line was opened up during the last quarter of the century, the only mode of transporting agricultural produce from the plantations and of course the peasant produce, either to Colombo or Galle harbour, and the transporting consumption goods needed in the estates and also by the peasantry, was done in bullock carts.[82] It is reported that more than twenty thousand animals were used for transport on the Colombo Kandy road alone.[83] One can only imagine the number of cattle used in transport along all the highways and also locally. Also in the maritime provinces cattle were used as a source of energy in an indigenous pressing device to make coconut oil.[84]

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81. Bertolacci, p.71
82. Tennant II. p.452; Forbes II.p.142;D'Oyly, p.77
83. Tennant. I.p.180
84. Cave. pp.322-223

This severe tax on animal energy diverted to areas other than agricultural production, coupled with the fact that the number of animal were greatly reduced in many provinces due to the rebellion of 1818 and the non-availability of pasture in many other areas , made them available only very sparingly in agricultural work. This resulted in the necessity of applying more human labour to maintain even the earlier level of production.

The Sinhalese peasants of the Kandyan provinces were blamed throughout the British period for their laziness and reluctance to work for wage. Indeed their laziness has become proverbial. [85]One result of the rapid growth of plantations was the appearence of a new problem for the administrators of the Island, the problem of obtaining sufficient labour for the work on plantations. As the peasants hesitated to work in plantations, the result of course was the transportation of south Indian labourers.

The Sinhalese peasants , it was said, were reluctant to work hard and avoided going for work in the plantations thus forcing the planters to look elsewhere for labour.[86]However, the facts were not

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85.Ludowyk, p.67
86.Tennant, II.pp.233-234
87.Ibid.

so simple as this. The peasants in fact went for wage labour at the initial stages of the opening up of plantations, even though many castes considered wage labour (not labour per se) socially degrading,[87] even though agricultural labour was extremely honoured.[88] The peasants e pected the planters, who were for the most part their new rulers(the civil servants) , to behave the same way the traditional chiefs generally behaved toward them, i.e., with honour and fairness, especially with little regard for pecuniary benefits.[89] However, experience soon taught the peasants something quite different. The Superintendent of Police (a European) in Kandy complained to the Governor that the peasants who went work in plantations were not paid at the end of their work, and at times were beaten and punished in various other ways for their impunity in asking for the wages.[90]

This behaviour of the planters (and of course the rulers) was only one of the reasons which prevented thepeasants seeking employment in the plantations. Nearly fifty percent of the peasantry in the coffee growing areas were themselves engaged in coffee cultivation.[91] Hence they were unable to give

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87.Tennant, II. pp.233-234
88.See above, p
89.See above, p.
90.Ludowyk, p.
91.?See above,

the plantations the necessary labour even if they wanted to because during the period when intensive labour was required in the plantations, that of picking coffee berry, the peasants themselves were engaged in the same activity. Moreover, the loss of animal energy, [92] the destruction of irrigation works [93] and the loss of reservoirs to the plantations [94] made heavier demands on labour for paddy cultivation . Finally, there was no necessity for the peasants to extend the drudgery of labour by working in the plantations. Because, used as they were to a very simple way of life, [95] the returns from their paddy fields supplemented with the cash crops produced from their gardens were sufficient to meet their consumption needs . Chayanov has rightly pointed out that peasants extend the drudgery of labour only to the extent of meeting the consumption needs of the family. [96]

The result was the inflow of thousands of south Indian labourers to obtain work in the estates. In the middle of the 19th century, about 130,000 labourers from south India were employed in the estates. [97] They were a kind of migratory labour, without having any permanent interest in the Island. And every year between 50,000 to 100,000 labourers travelled in both ways. [98] The effects of this

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92. See above. p.
93. See above, p.
94. See above, p.
95. Robert Knox. p.
96. Chayanov. A.V. On Theory of Peasant Economy. ed. Daniel Thorner, Basile Kerblay, R.E.F,Smith. 1966. Illinois.
97. Tennant. pp.233-234
98. Ibid; also, Ludowyk. pp.69 ff.

migratory labour were two fold. There were some immediate effects which did not receive the attention they deserve . These labourers crossed the Palk Straits with primitive devices and trekked all the way from the north of Sri Lanka to the estate regions , walking nearly 200 miles.[99] For a long period no proper measures were taken by the government to see that they did not bring disease into the Island.[100] The consequences were disastrous. They brought deadly diseases , cholera and small-pox, devastating the countryside which lay along their route.[101] Few European travellers who visited the North Central Province through which the 'high way' of these labourers lay, point out the tragedy which overtook these regions; year after year peasant villages fell victim to these deadly diseases and thousands of villagers were carried away, the villages being later claimed by the advancing forests. [102]

The long standing effects of bringing Indian labourwere even more serious. When the estates started expanding, the peasants had no compelling reasons to go for wage labour. Moreover, the low wages and the hard working conditions would not induce the

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99.See Ludowyk, pp.69 ff.
100 .Baker, pp.76-78
101.Ibid.
102.Ibid.

Kandyan peasants to have any permanent interest in estate work, particularly when they were used to a fairly comfortable life under the traditional system of production.[103] However, with the passage of time the problem took a different turn. Population among the peasantry witnessed a sharp rise, but the extent of land available for cultivation remained static; the traditional system of maintaining land/labour equilibrium in peasant villages was thrown out of balance by the loss of waste and forest reserves to the estates, the peasant villages were confronted with the problem of excess of labour.[104] The consequence was the mounting pressure on land; the extreme sub-division of landed property, and endless litigation on proprietory rights over shares (pangu), all these threw the peasant production system into utter confusion.

The maritime provinces were capable of absorbing the excess of labour in peasant villages due to the growth of urban areas. Shipping, transport, trade, building and construction, government service (due to the spread of English education), coconut plantations and the related industries like making coconut oil and distillation of arrack, all these

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103. Robert Knox. pp.137-143
104. See above, p.

continued to absorb the excess labour from peasant villages.[105] Hence there was no serious pressure on land in the maritime provinces till the turn of the century.

Even at this stage, i.e., in mid 19th century, the peasants were still left with a plot of land which they could cultivate as a living, though the returns from the land, due to the smallness of the plot , was no longer sufficient to keep their body and soul together. However, very soon the government was to pass a few Ordinances, which resulted in turning about one third of the peasantry into a class of landless peasants(it is difficult to designate these people as a rural proletarial because they continued to eke out a living by working on the land of others not on wage but often on a basis of share-cropping) by the end of nineteenth century. These were the Ordinance No. 29 of 1865, entitled 'An Ordinance to amend the Ordinance No.10 of 1840'[106] ; Ordinance No.5 of 1866, 'An Ordinance to facilitate the collection of the moneys due as commutation of the paddy tax and the performance of labour'[107] ; the Ordinance No,11 of 1878, 'An Ordinance to make provision for the better

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105. Cave, pp.113-118 ;125-133;141-150;222-223; Cumming, pp.434-438; Tennant, p.124, foot note.3
106. Ordinance no.29 of 1865. An Ordinance to Amend the Ordinance No.14 of 1840.
107. Ordinance no.5 of 1866. An Ordinance to facilitate the Recovery of Moneys Due as Commutation of the Paddy Tax and the Performance of Labour.

collection of the tax, Duty or share due to the government upon grain grown on this Island,[108] and the Partition Ordinance of 1863 .[109] The main difference between the effects of these ordinances and the changes brought about in the first half of the 19th century, was that unlike in the former instances the above Ordinances deprived the peasantry of their basic form of livelyhood by directly and indirectly contributing to throw them out of their paddy fields.

The two ordinances, those of 1865 and 1866 were enacted with a view to allowing the peasantry to make a long term agreement with the government at a fixed rate to pay the grain tax, thus getting rid of the obnoxious tax farmer. However, the catch in this innovation was that once a peasant committed himself to the system of voluntary commutation, it was final - there was no getting out of it if he was unable to pay the regular rate.[110] The tragedy was that the peasants who were better acquainted with the cash economy, i.e.,

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108. Ordinance No.11 of 1878. An Ordinance to make Provision for the Better Collection of the Tax Duty or Share due to the Government Upon Grain Grown in this Island.

109. Ordinance No.10 of 1863. An Ordinance to Provide for the Partition or Sale of Lands Held in Common.

110. Ordinance No . 29 of 1865, Ordinance. No. 5 of 1866

those in the maritime provinces , refrained from entering into this hazardous venture.[111] Only those peasants in the interior, who had less involvement in a monetary system, took the chance.[112] The results were disastrous with the first crop failure peasants fell into serious debt: their property was siezed and sold, either by private creditors who lent money to peasants on mortgage of their property, or by the government itself.

After considering a report of a commission appointed by the government in 1877 to inquire into the workings of the grain tax, [113] it was decided by the government to introduce compulsory money commutation throughout the whole Island. The Ordinance of 1878 was passed to effect this.[114] The Ordinance was implemented except in the Northern, North Western and North Central Provinces where the ren ting system and optional commutation were maintained.[115] Under the compulsory money commu ation two forms of procedure were adopted; the first was a fixed annual money payment to the to the government, whether the field yields a crop or not. The second, which was called the crop commutation was a system whereby peasants paid the tax to the

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111. Administrative Report of the Government Agent, Western Province, 1868. p.10
112. See Obeysekere , p.112
113. Sessional Paper xvi. of 1877
114. Ordinance No.11 of 1878
115. See below, p.

government only when a crop was produced. Peasants had a choice of deciding which procedure to follow but the crop commutation involved paying a higher rate.[116]

Some provisions made in the Ordinance of 1878, it was asserted were designed to make the new system of taxation less oppressive to the peasants; namely, land was exempted from the tax in the event of a failure to realize at least three fold of the grain sown.[117] However, it was found through experience that the peasants were taxed whether there was a good crop, a bad crop or no crop at all.[118]

The procedure as to how the tax was collected under the compulsory commutation is also important when the consequences of the system are considered. The regular administrative procedure was to obtain the advice of the revenue officer, the Sinhalese chief, who virtually depended for the information on the advice of the village headmen. In effect, under the system the village headmen became the virtual assessor of the government rent on paddy lands. This was true both about Kandyan provinces and the maritime provinces.[119]

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116. Ordinance No.11 of 1878.
117. Ibid.,
118. Sessional Paper. III. 1892. 6
119. Sessional Paper. III. 1892. 3- 4

This whole system worked in perfect harmony to the utmost disadvantage of the peasants. The de facto assessors of the government rent, i.e.,the village headmen, had a vested interest in the matter. Firstly, the 1818 Kandyan Proclamation exempted the land of these headmen from grain tax as a part of their remuneration.[120] Secondly, they received a twentieth of the tax which they helped in collection.[121] In effect, the village headmen turned out to be an indirect kind of renter.[122] The result was the gross over-assessment of the rent due from the peasant holdings.[123] The advantages of over assessment, so far as these petty officials were concerned were two fold. Firstly, besides the fact that they shined in the eye of the civil servant, the Government Agent or the Assistant Agent, who was responsible for the revenue of the province, a bigger collection in favour of the government always meant a bigger share for themselves. Secondly, the allegation is made and, there is also good proof, that when the peasant holdings were siezed and sold in default of the payment of grain tax, it was the headmen who often bought them,[124] or,

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120. The Proclamation of 21 November 1818 issued after the Rebellion of 1818. CGG.28. November, 1818. ed., Davy, Appendix. II.
121. Ibid.,
122. Obeyesekere, p.155
123. Sessional Paper III. 1892. p.95
124. Administrative Report of the Government Agent, Uva Province. 1874 - 214 A

as it happened some other times, by some others on behalf of these headmen . These headmen belonged to the new power group emerging at the village level a new phenomena which started around the middle of of the nineteenth century.[125] Land they realized, was the most effective means of obtaining power and prestige. Land, they also saw, was in short supply. So they ruthlessly took this opportunity to appropriate peasant holdings.

However, the headmen were not the only people who contributed to the gross over-assessment of government rent. Every Grain Commissioner followed his own scheme of assessment , guided by his own assessors and without having any specific data regarding the extent of land. They also failed to take into account, or follow a uniform rule regarding the differential fertility of the land or the price of grain in different parts of the country. Frequently, assessment was made on incorrect information which resulted in excessive overassessment.[126] Overassessment

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125. See Obeyesekere, for a valuable study of the formation of a power group (pelantiya) at the village level. pp. 231 ff.

126. Administrative Report of the Government Agent , Uva Province.1818. 3.12.A. Sessional Paper.II. 1892.3 Administrative Report , Western Province, 1889. 5.B.

also resulted from the ignorance of inexperienced European civil servants as to the nature of measurements in the Island.[127] A glaring instance of such a miscalculation on the part of a Government Agent was pointed out by his successor according to whom his predecessor had taxed a district for 44,000 acres of paddy land in which over 38,000 acres were taxed either at a fourth or a half the produce, whereas in reality there was only 15,000 acres of land under cultivation , in which only less than half the area was taxed at one fourth the produce and only 396 acres was taxed at half the produce.[128] It is only left to one's imagination the privations caused among the peasants by such miscalculations.

Under such circumstances many peasants failed to pay the tax demanded by the government.[129] The consequence of all this was peasants losing their land, either as a result of direct action on the part of the government, viz; the seizure of the land holdings of the peasants in default of the payment of government tax, as happened in many cases, or, peasants getting into serious debt and losing their land as a result of

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127. Sessional Paper, III. 1881. 21
128. Sessional Paper, IV. 1891. 5-12
129. Manual of Uva, p.163

their attempt to pay the tax. In both cases the end result was the same. The government auctioned the land siezed for the recovery of the tax or the private moneylenders grabbed the land of peasants under court order.

In some areas government evictions of peasants from their land holdings were very high. In the worst affected areas about 20 per cent of the total cultivated land was sold by the government in default of the payment of the tax. [131] In one administrative division , more than a thousand peasants died out of sheer starvation as they were forcefully turned out of their land and could not find any other means of livelihood.[132] Overall in the Island , except in the three provinces which did not come under compulsory commutation, between the years 1880-1890, about 20 per cent of the peasants lost their only means of subsistence as a result of the compulsory money commutation.[133] This is according to the official statics of the government, i.e., about the peasants who lost their land as a result of government evictions; perhaps many more lost all or part of their property due to private prosecutions for recovery of debt; of these there are no statics. The litigant spirit of the Sinhalese, which was a thorn in the neck of the

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131. Sessional Paper. xxix. 1889. 2-6; Administrative Report Central Province, 1886.
132. Ibid.,
133. Sessional Paper. III. 1892. 113-115

British administrators, was a direct result of the confusion they ,i.e., the British, brought about in the traditional society; it was more evident during this period than at any other time. About 90 per cent of the litigation during this period was regarding title to immovable property.[134]

There are two important questions which deserve close attention when this unfortunate episode of depriving the peasantry of its traditional land holdings is considered. The first is concerned with the people who bought peasant holdings in public auction when the government resorted to it, or , appropriated them by a more devious method, i.e., by lending money to the peasantry holding their property in mortgage and ultimately acquiring them by court action. [135]The notorious contribution of village headmen, in this respect, has already been pointed out. The field studies conducted both by Yalman,[136] and Obeyesekere[137] bears this out. But headmen would not complete the list. The speculators, that is traders and middlemen who infested every corner

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134.RKPC. pp.217-218; Jayawardend, A.St.V. The Law Relating
135.to the Registration of Deeds. 1919, Colombo.

135.Lawries Gazetteer. Vol.I. 1898
136.Yalman, pp.49-51
137.Obeyesekere, p.97

of the Island, played a prominent role in this connexion.[138] In one of the notorious cases of peasant evictions by the government in order to recover the government tax, of the 2889 peasant holdings which were sold in public auction , 1001 were bought by Kandyan residents, 1260 were bought by low country Sinhalese and moors,(both were speculators) , and the rest were bought by the crown itself.[139] Among the people who bought such land were the newly emerging social class- the middle class of a future date- the money earning government servant, the school teacher, the clerical servant etc[140] who coveted the land esp.,the paddy land of the peasantry because holding paddy land gave prestige and social status which[141] this emerging moneyed class badly lacked in the traditional society.[142]

Secondly, the alienation of peasant holdings to outsiders and even to the more fortunate among the peasants themselves, finalized the growing inequality of status among the residents within a village. The traditional village, as we have seen, was

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138.RKPC. pp.59-61;142-143.; Tennant.pp.222-223
139.Administrative Report, Central Province, 1886, ; Sessional Paper xxix. 1889 2-6
140.RKPC.p.143; Jennings, pp.11-12
141.RKPC.pp.84-85
142.Ibid., also Ludowyk. p.127

composed of a kin group holding more or less equal economic and social status.[143] From the beginning of the British rule the newly created village headmen started playing a leading role in the village politics, and the importance of village elders and the village council dwindled into insignificance. By the middle of the century the headmen and his relatives had become a definite power group within the village. They developed by the end of the nineteenth century into a definite social class, the pelantiya (lineage) people as they were called.[144] Thus in every village there emerged a few families which did not indulge in agricultural labour. They commanded the attendance of a number of peasants who were obliged to attend on them by their being the tenants of their land cultivating on ande (share-cropping) tenure.[145] In addition to these many of them were receiving a regular salary from the government.[146] Thus they fitted in well with the traditional ideas of social status, i.e., having land and not indulging in agricultural labour, having the attendance of the peasantry. Moreover, many of them by their occupying minor positions in the administration and by being able to communicate

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143. See above, p.

144. Obeyesekere, p.231 ff.

145. Ibid., pp.231 ff; RKPC. p.110

146. Ludowyk. p.127

in the language of the ruler, became a kind of unofficial link between the peasant and the central authority. Many of such families were also closely related by ties of kinship and affinity.[147] There was frequently rivalry among two or more of such families in a village for power in village politics.[148]

The last but not the least of important questions is the position of the peasants who lost their traditional land. In extreme cases, as we have seen they simply died of starvation.[149] In other instances they migrated to growing urban areas , looking for employment which was precisely what the British administrators wanted them to do. This was the beginning of the urban slums. In fact , in the maritime provinces much of this was absorbed by the growing urban areas.[150] The Indian labour effectively blocked the Kandyan peasants being absorbed into the estates, though the growth of the tea industry started around this time. Unemployed or rather under-employed mass of Kandyan peasants whose labour could be bought for any price, was effectively used by the European speculators to keep the wages of the Indian labourers in the plantations at a starvation level.

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147. Yalman, pp.39-40
148. Obeyesekere, pp.231 ff.
149. See above, pp.
150. Cave, pp.113 ff.

The majority of peasants turned out to be share-croppers to the new petty landowners in the village.[151] However, the relative position of the share-cropper declined considerably over the years. Because of the scarcity of land, rent was steadily rising. Apart from half the produce , the landlord was exacting an annual pre-payment (madaran) before renewing of the share-cropping contract.[152] The compition among the peasantry for the limited extent of land made the position of the landlord increasingly stronger in regard to the peasant. Every year the landlord increased the pre-payment. In addition the landlord was getting a share for advancing the seed paddy, for lending his cattle for cultivation , etc. [153] The peasant was also called to perform various kinds of duties quite unconnected with paddy fields or cultivation, for which he was not payed. [154] Such unwarrented extortions on the part of the landlord(who did not perform the corresponding duties of protection , security and help in times of need which the traditional chief perfo rmed was tolerated by the peasant for fear of losing the tenure of land. Thus the peasant tenant became not only a slave of the landlord but he also lost nearly two thirds of the produce to the landlord. The landlor ds

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151.Obeyesekere, pp.231 ff.
152.RKPC. p 110
153.Ibid.,
154.Ibid.,

simply a part of the market mechanism, and having no other responsibility toward the tenant was only interested in upgrading his social status by joining the elite through education or affinity.

The attitude of the administrators both in Colombo and in the Colonial Office , toward the Grain Tax was quite inexplicable when the amount of financial gain to the government is compared with the enormous amount of damage done to the peasantry. However, all this becomes very clear when these are related to the developments in the imperial metropolis. Capital was pouring into the Island during the latter part of the 19th century in various forms, i.e., plantations, capital goods for plantations (unlike coffee , tea plantations which replaced the former during the last few decades of the nineteenth century , needed machinery for processing tea) , pre-cast iron bridges, and above all rails and locomotives for the newly opened railways. These developments were directly related to the growth of industrial capitalism in theimperial metropolis. From 1830-1850 iron production in England had increased from a million tons a year in 1835, to sixty five millions by the middle of 1850's.[155] Building of railways and bridges became the prime economic activity during the mid nineteenth century England as well as in the colonies.[156]This enormously

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155.Dobb., p.295
156.Dobb., p.296

capital absorbing activity, i.e., railway construction became the primary concern of the administrators in Colombo during '60s through 80's . However, all this economic activity entailed the employment of a vast labour force which could only be had in Sri Landka by turning a part of the peasantry out of land. Labour was in short supply even for the existing plantations and the Indian labour which the British imported was even insufficient for plantations. The Indian labour, moreover, had to be employed for a long period of time, whereas casual labour was more to the advantage of the capitalist economic activity in Sri Lanka out side plantations. The best way to achieve all this was to take deliberate measures which would turn the peasants into a wage earning proletariat. Even as early as 1807 the author of the Gloucestershire Survey records rather blatantly that the greatest of evils to agriculture (capitalist) would be to place labourer in a state of independence i.e., by allowing him to have land.[157] Another writer of the same period stressess the importance of farmers having a constant supply of labourers who have no other means of support[158] than their daily labour- men whom they can depend upon. These ideas were soon extended to other fields of capital investment. Hence the British administrators who were serving capitalist interests of the imperial metropolis had no scruples in using the Grain Tax as a powerful weapon to proletarianize the peasantry.

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157. Dobb. p.222
158. Ibid.,

The Partition Ordinance No. 10 of 1863 was only second in importance to the 1878 Ordinance among the causes which led to the alienation of the traditional landholdings[158b] of the peasantry. Under the traditional system land was held in undivided shares, andthe system of cultivation was structured so as to accomodate undivided shares in a single estate.[159] The efficient functioning of the share system and cultivation in alternation (tattumaru) presupposed the existence of a number of structural pre-requisites. First, there should be an unrestricted supply of fresh land for the establishment of new villages, excess labour cast out of an estate (gama) was thus absorbed,[159b] maintaining land labour equilibrium. Secondly, land has to be held in co-ownership (undivided ownership) as a single estate for the system to operate efficiently. It is this latter pre-requisite which was badly affected by the Partition Ordinance of 1863. The fundamental innovation of the Partition Ordinance was that it enabled any co-owner to compel a partition of sale of property held in co-ownership, irrespective of the wishes of the other owners.[160] The cost of such a partition was distributed among the

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158b.See above, p
159.See above, p
159b. See above, p
160.Pereira. J.C.W.The Laws of Ceylon. pp.206-213

co-owners according to the pro portion of land they held in an estate. Once the partition case was decided in the courts, a Commissioner was appointed by the court to put the property on sale. The sale was first put among the co-owners at the appraised value , and if no sale was forthcoming from the owners the property was put to public auction. [160b] The commissioners remuneration was recovered from the co-owners of the property pro rata. Unless it was proved that the court proceedings were grossly irregular, court decrees , once entered were regarded as final and any party whose rights were disregarded could only sue the co-owners for damages.[161]

The Partition Law evoked serious repercussions among the peasantry. The law sounded the death knell of both the common ownership (share-ownership) and cultivation of undivided shares in the alternate system. Under the traditional system, the consolidation of scattered shares and their representation in a single cultivable area was not possible. The partition law did exactly the opposite; all the scattered shares of an individual were added up and he was given a particular land holding corresponding in extent to the number of

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160b. Pereira , J.C.W. pp.206-213
161. Ibid.,

shares he owned in the estate.[162] The net result was the emergence of a completely new village within a few decades. village was new in the sense that the peasants held individual land holdings with demarcated boundaries instead of a single estate cultivated by those who held undivided shares, which was the traditional village.

Obeyesekere observed a very interesting development taking place in the traditional village during the corresponding period, which he calls the development of 'share market'and'share speculation.'[163] These developments were a function, first, of the scarcity of cultivable land and, secondly, of the development of a class of people who owned shares in their villages (place of birth) , but due to other reasons were living outside the village and had lost any economic interest in owning shares in the village.[164] One may also add that the development of a class of people who wanted to buy shares in villages, the speculators who owned money but not land which carried status, also contributed to the development of a share market.[165] The Partition Ordinance of 1863 facilitated the activities of the share

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162. Obeyesekere, pp.181-182
163. Obeyesekere, pp.165-166
164. Ibid.
165. Obeyesekere, pp.165-166

market to a very great extent. It was not very unusual for speculators to hunt for people who owned shares in villages and were living somewhere else, and instigate them to institute partition action in order to buy the land owned by the peasants.[16] The ultimate result of the share speculation in the share market was to deprive the peasantry of much of their traditional land. It is a very unfortunate coincidence (or is it a coincidence at all that the Partition Ordinance coincided with the interests of those who were represented in the legislative council) that the Partition Ordinance and the Compulsory Money Commutation of Grain Tax reinforced each other in driving the peasantry out of their traditional lands. The two pieces of legislation acted in harmony , one giving the opportunity to the peasantry and the outsiders to institute partition suits and deprive the peasantry of their traditional land holdings, and the other throwing the peasants into debt, thus making room for the sale of peasants land for the payment of debt. To repeat, these changes were in perfect agreement with the economic interests of the metropolitan capitalists. For they provided the capitalists with cheap labour for his invetments in the colony, and created a class of people

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166. Obeyesekere, pp.165-166 ; see also Yalman, pp.52-54

whose accumulated capital created a demand for manufactured goods from the metropolis.

At the end of all this the village that emerged was totally different from that of the traditional village of the Sinhalese peasant, which remained intact until the beginning of the British occupation of the Island. First, the unequal distribution of landed property within the village was very conspicuous. In the traditional village, although the landed property was not equally distributed, the differences were minimal, the basic fact remained that everybody had access to a sufficient extent of land which enabled him to make a comfortable living if he was prepared to labour for it. This was no longer true at the end of the nineteenth century. Secondly, there emerged a class of landless peasants who had a very precarious existence, as share-croppers, or engaging in casual labour wherever it could be found. Some of these joined the vagabond group of speculators and tried to eke out a living by chena cultivation. Thirdly, every single traditional village lost a considerable proportion of its paddy lands to outsiders apart from what was lost to the estates dring

the first half of the 19th century. These outsiders played a dominent role in village politics; the traditional village elders lost their control of the affairs of the village. This new power group went on adding to their landed property at the expense of the peasant thus making the pressure on land worse. Fourthly, the establishment of separate individual landholdings , together with the laws of partible inheritance prevailing among the Sinhalese divided the landed property into extreme subdivisions which became economically very unproductive to cultivate. Thus by the end of the century, about 82 per cent of the peasant holdings came below one acre in extent and a third of the peasantry were without any land of their own. Considering that in Sri Lanka a peasant needs at least 2 acres of paddy and 3 acres of high land to earn a very moderate living, one can imagine the depth the peasant sank within the course of one hundred years.

Epilogue

Our detailed examination of the peasant production system in Sri Lanka during the first one hundred years of the British rule in the Island reveals the conspicuous changes that came over the rural economy. When the British took possession of the Dutch territories of the maritime provinces in 1796, the village in Sri Lanka was a self sufficient economic unit, little affected by the commercial activities of the Europeans which have been going on in the Island for nearly three centuries. The rural economy at the time was basically organized around the family farm. The primary factors of production were land and labour, there being little capital accumulation or application in the production process.

The Sinhalese service tenure system was the basic principle which regulated and organized the peasant production system. It was also the mechanism which extracted a part of the peasant produce , either in kind or in the form of labour, for the maintenance of the state machinery.

The caste system among the Sinhalese was an essential part of the production system as much as the social system. It regulated the division of labour, ownership of land, functioned as a medium

of exchange, checked the abuse of power held by the state officers, in short, it was these two systems, the service tenure system and the caste system which organized both production and the distribution of goods and services within the community.

In a peasant economy, social relations were an important aspect of the relations of production. One of the most important of such social relations which existed in the traditional Sinhalese society was the vertical relationship between the peasant and the traditional chief. According to contemporary European writers, the cordial relationship between these two sections of the society was a unique feature of the peasant economy. The cause of such a healthy relationship was not so much the intrinsic qualities of the Sinhalese chief, but the strongly established institutionalized checks which prevented the abuse of power held by the chiefs. At the worst, the chief could be a tyrant taking personal revenge from the peasants for the gratification of his personal hatred, but he was never able to make economic gains from the power he held. The service tenure system and the caste system along with the strongly institutionalized checks on the accumulation of wealth ruled out any such behaviour

The political as well as the economic activities of the Portuguese and the Dutch little affected the system of peasant production. The former never went beyond organized plundering of whatever wealth they could lay their hands on. The Dutch operated in the classical merchant capitalist tradition; they simply operated through the traditional system and deprived the peasantry of all the surplus they produced. Monopolies, state regulation of trade, the Sinhalese service tenure system and the caste system, all these were utilized by the Dutch to their maximum capacity in the extraction of surplus produced by the peasantry.

By the time the British came into possession of the maritime provinces of the Island rapid changes had been taking place in the system of production in the imperial metropolis. The dominant form of economic activity in England during the 16 th through 18th centuries, i.e., the merchant capitalism had been giving way to that of the emerging industrial capitalism. As could be expected the former was not prepared to accept the change without a fight. The contention between the two sides revolved around the important issues such monopolies, free wage labour

free enterprize, individual liberties etcetera. These conflicts were directly reflected in the activities of the early British administrators in the Island. The vacillating policy of the British toward service tenure system, monopolies, state regulation of trade, during the first three decades of their rule reflects the conflicts and the uncertainty that reigned in the imperial metropolis among the policy makers regarding the above matters.

The first thirty years of the British rule saw the replacement of the service tenure system by private property in land. A tax on the subsistence produce of the peasantry was introduced in order to cover the cost of maining the ever expanding state machinery. The consequences of the abolition of service tenure system were numerous. The more important among them were the concentration of land among a few, the development of a parasitic landlordism and a share-cropping system, and of course , because of the new system of taxation of the subsistence crop, the gradual shift of the peasantry toward growing cash crops.

The confusion brought about by the British administrators in the caste system both unconsciously and deliberately, to suit their purposes , reinforced the above changes. More than anything else , the

severance of the relationship between caste occupations and the landholdings broke down the barrier which effectively prevented the higher castes from acquiring the land of the lower castes.

The expansion of the central government in the form of a bureaucracy brought about a complete change in the institution of native chiefs. The British followed a deliberate policy of gradual liquidation of the administration through native chiefs though this was never openly avowed and was contrary to the Kandyan Convention. The chiefs on the other hand realized that they were fast losing the social status they held in the traditional society because of the shift of power to the civil service. The chiefs were quick to understand that the only way to preserve their social status- which in the traditional society was manifested in the form of ones ability to command retinue- remained in their ability to control land and labour. This was the beginning of the land concentration in the hands of these chiefs and the consequent transformation of the peasant free holders into share-croppers. Untrammelled by the institutionalized mechanisms which prevented the abuse of their power, the chiefs launched on a programme of squeezing out every ounce of surplus produced by the peasants. The activities of the chiefs were reinforced by the changed attitude

toward wealth, its acquisition and consumption, on the part of the new rulers. Acting in harmony with the ideas of free enterprise , the British set no limits either to the acquisition of the consumption of wealth. In fact, the new rulers set the pace for the sumptuous consumption which added to the social prestige of those who indulged init.

These changes that had been taking place among the native chiefs, viz, the accumulation of capital, indulgence in speculation, the new life-style which involved luxurious consumption, were all in consonance with the capitalist interests of the metropolis. For the accumulation of wealth, particularly the landed property among the chiefs and speculation led to the proletarianization of a part of the peasantry thus enriching the pool of cheap wage labour which the capitalist economic activities, i.e., plantations ,road and rail-road construction etc , badly needed at the time. Moreover, the new life style of the emerging elite also meant a new market to the British manufactured consumer goods. The new elite, western educated, alienated from the peasants, by language,religion and culture, became a class of 'collaborators' who had little in common with the peasantry and who oppressed the peasants with little sympathy.

The monetization of the economy, i.e., the plantations, the minor cash crops, the growth of small industries, the wage labour, the development of internal and external trade, all these led to the growth of another class at the village level and in urban areas. In this group , the village headmen, the money-lender, the boutique-keeper, the tax or liquour licence renter, and the minor government servant could be incorporated. All these were social climbers whose sole aim in life was to join the elite either through education or affiliation; money was the key to both avenues. They hardly missed an opportunity to grab the land of the peasant as a first step toward joining the elite.

Thus apart from the harm done to the peasantry and the destruction of the traditional system of production , by the direct legislation of the government, for instance, the Crown Lands Encroachment Ordinance of 1840 and the Partition Ordinance of 1863, and the institution of compulsory money commutation in 1878, the activities of the above two social groups, viz, the elite and the up coming middle class, were equally powerful determinants of the direction in which the peasant production took during the course of the 19th century.

To make a brief recapitulation , the traditional Sinhalese village was economically self sufficient and was held by a kin group who were economically more or less equal in status.The state interfered lit tle with activities of the village except that it commanded a portion of the produce, (very often in the form of the labour of the peasantry) for the maintenance of the state machinery. The average peasant was little concerned and little affected by what happend at the court , unless it was general disaster like war. However, at the end of one hundred years of British rule the Sinhalese peasant village was completely transformed The production was no longer for consumption alone. Many peasants had to grow cash crops in order to make good the deficiencies of the staple. Some others were compelled to take casual wage labour for the same purpose. The villages were no longer self sufficient. A considerable amount of their consumption needs came from foreign market. The system of undivided ownership of village land was replaced by individual holdings of very unequal sizes A considerable proportion of the village land slipped away from the hands of the peasants to outsiders who in many cases lived in urban centres as absentee landlords. Many villages also lost

much of their originized land to foreign plantations. The villages were no longer capable of functioning as independent economic units, and the slightest change in the market situation sent its reverberations to the very door
/step of the peasant. The villages were no longer capable of expanding with the growth of p pulation and this created a serious problem of landlessness in peasant vill ages . Every passing generation made the situation worse. Overall, this still remains the picture of rural economy in Sri Lanka. This is a direct result of the expansion of industrial capitalism of the imperial metropolis which necessarily brought about a restructuring of the relations of production in the Island so that it fitted into the well intergrated world capitalist system.

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