

A Study on the Process of Declining the Extent of Tea Lands in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka.

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ABSTRACT

When Sri Lanka gained independence the plantation industry, especially 'Tea plantation' occupied an important place in the socio-economic and political setting of the Country. Combination of several factors contributed the development of plantation or estate sector in Sri Lanka (Ceylon) from the second half of the nineteenth century. Today, in the year of 2000 export earnings from tea is 40% of the export value. Tea plantation also provided direct employment for about 700,000 workers.

Tea industry in Sri Lanka at present is faced with several problems, which provided a scope for the present study. On the one hand, it is concerned with the economic aspect, i.e. decline of the extent of cultivated land in the main plantation area, and also ownership and the management of estates are now changed resulting a decline of production and productivity etc., on the other.

The present study is mainly dealt with the decline of the extent of Tea and its impact on the total production and export earnings. 10 estates from the upcountry have been selected for an in-depth study and some information collected through a postal questionnaire. Observations provided another sources of information.

The final report of the research is still being in the process of preparation. Some conclusions however, are presented here for a discussion.

All the estates were 'nationalized' in 1972 under the Land Reform Law and then privatized again resulting a decline of production, extent of cultivation etc. The main contributing factor to this state of affairs is low level of re-investment in the cultivation. Well-organized management system existed from the colonial time are of the crisis at present. Laborers who worked in estates are not provided with regular employment, therefore pulled away from estates and now looking for outside jobs. Most of them have now become domestic servants, shop laborers elsewhere in the country. Those who fortunate enough to have some kind of education migrated to the Middle-East countries. As a rule young people in estates have not adequate education, training or vocational skills.

Estate residents also play an important political role of the country provide another scope of further research.