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**DEVELOPMENT OF PLANTATION INDUSTRY
IN THE GALLE DISTRICT. (1880 -1948)**

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ABSTRACT.

Development of Plantation Industry in the Galle district. 1880-1948

All researches hitherto conducted on plantation industry of Sri Lanka have been focused on Kandyan hills. No one seems to have looked into the role played by the Southern Province in the experimental cultivation of cash crops introduced to Sri Lanka and the propagation of cash crop culture in Sri Lanka. Coffee, sugar cane and cardamoms introduced from abroad were cultivated in villages of the Southern Province systematically with the use of *rajakariya* or free labour in experimental plots through the headman system by the Dutch. Cinnamon grew freely in homesteads and in *chanas*. Coconut was planted as a supplement to their daily needs in homesteads and newly cultivated *chanas*. During the first few decades of the British rule some of the harsh legislation on economy enforced by the Dutch were lifted and the headman families who held excessive land in the area and also got used to market trends cultivated them with cinnamon, coconut and coffee. In due course coffee prospered and practically all the homesteads were soon made into small coffee plots. The profit thus raised was invested in opening up with new plots. When the coffee blight destroyed the crops in the Kandyan hills and elsewhere it did not affect the southerners severely in the same manner, as they had alternative cash crops in their estates such as cinnamon and coconut. Thus the plantations though small in allotments went unabated in the Galle district during the coffee crises.

A section of the emerging local entrepreneurial class who prospered through Galle harbour took to plantation industry around eighteen seventies and eighties in the outskirts of the cultivated area with the shifting of bulk port activities to Colombo with the construction of the breakwater. They started cultivating coconut, tea and rubber in large estates by using the managerial skills of western planters but using local labour. By the 20th century plantation activities of this local entrepreneurial group extended beyond Galle Wallaboda pattu, Walallaviti korale, Talpe pattu and reached Hinidum pattu. With the enforcement of the provisions of the Land Development Ordinance of 1935, the middle class allotments put to sale were purchased by the local moneyed class and converted them into small rubber and tea plantations. The owners themselves using the local labour managed these plantations.

In between these small allotments stood the larger estates run by a few European planters manned partly by South Indian labourers and partly by the village labourers.

The development of transportation and the infrastructure depended heavily on the mechanism provided by the Road Ordinance. Construction of Alutgama-Matara railway accelerated the transportation. The Low Country Products Association and the planters of the area joined the Planters Association. Thus the managerial expertise of European planters were shared with the low country planters in managing the plantation industry. Thus the interior of the Galle district became a plantation area mostly owned by the Sri Lankan entrepreneurial class with its own separate identity, but having close links with the European planters.