

THE SOUTH INDIAN IMMIGRANT'S TREK TO CEYLON (SRI LANKA) IN THE MID NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The profitable enterprise of coffee cultivation increased in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the late 1830's,¹ and plantations developed rapidly in the central highlands. Initially local labour was used for clearing forest lands, but later, cheaper labour, amply available in South India, began to be employed on the coffee plantations.² The influx of Indian labour proliferated with a rapid opening of coffee estates. The labourers returned to India after the coffee picking season and came in again for the next year's crop.³ They trekked hundreds of miles to the plantations, almost starving themselves, and carried back paltry savings to their homes. Walking, mostly through North Ceylon jungles, immigrant labourers endured immense hardships, after having landed usually at Mannar for their long inward journey.⁴

The immigrants had to reach the plantation districts quickly for the supply of food they carried was paltry, or else they surely perished through hunger in the forests.⁵ Hence, even trivial accidents often spelt death for them for their comrades could not tarry. It was a race for life and the able, sacrificed the injured or the sick or else they too faced a fatal risk. The disabled member of a gang was inevitably abandoned in the jungle usually with a little rice and water; his fate was death either from illness, accidents, starvation or from attacks by predatory animals.⁶ Cholera and small pox ravaged these gangs of "coolies."⁷ In September 1846 alone, several perished of cholera in the

1. de Silva, K. M., (ed.) *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon, Vol. 3* (Colombo 1973), p. 94; Bastiampillai, B., *The Administration of Sir William Gregory-1872-1877*, (Dehiwela, 1978), pp. 1-17 for an account of the growth of coffee plantations.
2. de Silva, K. M., (ed.) *op. cit.* pp. 98-99; Pippet, G. K., *History of the Ceylon Police (1795-1870)*, (Colombo, 1938), p. 156-the influx of Indian labour commenced in 1839 with 2,400 entrants; An Officer, late of the Ceylon, Rifles, *Ceylon, A General Description of the Island, Historical Physical, Statistical Vol. 3* (London, 1876), p. 309, for an account of the initial use of Sinhalese labour and statistics of Indian arrivals from 1841 to 1848.
3. de Silva, K. M., (ed.) *op. cit.* pp. 99-100; Pippet, G. K., *op. cit.*
4. Knighton, W., *Forest Life in Ceylon*, Vol. 1 (London, 1854) pp. 170-173, 283.
5. Knighton, W., *op. cit.*
6. *Ibid.* see pp. 170-173, for a moving picture of a "Coolie" abandoned on the wayside; also see An Officer, Late of the Ceylon Rifles, Vol. II *op. cit.* pp. 309-310, for an account of the difficulties and demise among immigrant labour.
7. "Coolie" meant a labourer; it has been used in no pejorative sense, but as a descriptive term then in common parlance.

Northern province.⁸ Another danger to which these unfortunate folk were prone came from fugitive criminals, who waylaid immigrant labour gangs to rob them of their pittances.⁹

But the plantations depended on the toil of these labourers and the country's economy depended on the coffee industry. Hence it became incumbent on the government to initiate some measures of relief and provide some facilities to alleviate the immigrant's hardships,¹⁰ and to ensure the unchecked inflow of labour.

The Governor of Ceylon entrusted to the Government Agent of North Ceylon the responsibility for introducing many of these measures since the most frequented path of the immigrants lay in the area under his jurisdiction.¹¹ Moreover, they also landed on the coastline in the Northern province, and it devolved upon Percival Acland Dyke, the Government Agent, to execute various schemes and initiate various steps to alleviate the hardships that the immigrants confronted on their arrival and their trek through the desolate jungle paths of the north to the central highlands.

Although labourers from South India entered, sometimes *via* other points, their principal landing place from the sea was at Mannar. Hence, one of the first measures taken to better the mode of travel consisted in providing transport to Talaimannar, the coastal point of Mannar, from Rameswaram in South India where the immigrants embarked. The Government Agent, North Ceylon, was required to arrange a link by boat between these points of departure and arrival. The Colonial Secretary of Ceylon also informed the Chief Secretary to the Government of Fort St. George in Madras that the Ceylon Government was anxious to establish a regular ferry boat service for passengers, initially even gratuitously.¹² The Madras Government instructed

8. Rasanayagam, C., *The British Period of the History of Jaffna*, (Colombo, 1934), p. 156; after 1842, cholera was introduced often by labourers for the coffee estates; Ievers, R. W., *Manual of the North Central Province*, (Colombo, 1899), p. 104; Pippet, G. K., *op. cit.*, pp. 165-166 and Ward, H. G., *Speeches and Minutes of the late Sir Henry Ward, 1855-1860*, all certify to the introduction of disease by immigrants, quoted by Bala-singham, S. V., *The Administration of Sir Henry Ward, 1855-1860*, p. 51.
9. Pippet, G. E., *op. cit.* p. 156.
10. de Silva, K. M., (ed.) *op. cit.* pp. 99-105; Cumming Gordon, C. F., *Two Happy Years in Ceylon*, Vol. I (London, MIDCCCXCII), p. 303, for a view of Ceylon's dependence on immigrant labour.
11. For example, see SLNA (Sri Lanka National Archives) 20/681-228, Chief Secretary to Collector 21 December 1832, (no number), also de Silva, K. M., *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon, (1840-1855)* (London 1965), pp. 237, 243-244 also see Rasanayagam, C., *op. cit.* about the route taken by labourers.
12. SLNA - 20/421-239 - Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 6 October 1858 (no number) and enclosure, Copy of letter to Chief Secretary to Government, October 6, 1838; also see Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 17 September 1838 (no number) - this service was to meet needs of normal travel too; also see SLNA - 6/1421 - Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1838 from Mannar, and enclosure Colonial Secretary to Chief Secretary to the Government at Fort St. George (no date or number).

the Principal Collector, Madura, in November 1838, to cooperate with the Government Agent, North Ceylon, by assisting him in removing any obstacles that hindered the provision of such a sea travel service between the two countries.¹³ The Ceylon government was anxious to ensure a supply of labour for the plantations while the Madras government was keen on providing employment opportunities for the impoverished inhabitants of South India.

Owing to eagerness displayed by both countries work was discharged expeditiously; and by 1839, in one month alone, a ferry service plied seven times to and from Talaimannar and South India.¹⁴ The ferry boat service was officially established in April; but even before it, labourers arrived. Men, women and a few children used this service and the Government Agent provided statistics of travellers to the Ceylon Government.¹⁵ The Government Agent and his assistants provided regular returns thereafter of labourers passing through the Northern province to the central hills, and also to India.

In June 1841 facilities for immigrant travel were extended. "If you consider another ferry boat necessary you are quite at liberty to take proper steps for establishing one for it is of great importance that the influx of labourers should be facilitated by every possible means", urged the government. "Passengers are brought over in the government boat gratis and it is probably right to continue this exemption, but as the government has no object in facilitating the return of passengers and as almost every person on his return from Ceylon carries with him ample means the Governor wishes you to consider whether return passengers should not pay some money in order to meet in some degree the expenses of the Establishment".¹⁶ This directive to Dyke clearly revealed the objectives of the Government; an inflow of labour alone was encouraged, but not its efflux.

There was a keen interest in providing inducements to attract labour. In early 1841, while asking for an appraisal of the success of the ferry service, the Government Agent was also urged to suggest any further means of facilitating

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13. SLNA-20/412-239-Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 23 November 1838, (no number), also enclosure, copy of letter from Chief Secretary to Government of Fort St. George, 2 November 1838, which contains instructions issued to Principal Collector, Madura.
 14. SLNA - 8/116 - Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 7 March 1839 (no number) the trips were in February 1839.
 15. SLNA - 8/116 - Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 8 April 1839, (no number), in March 1839 a total of 807 passengers had been conveyed in 12 trips between South India and Talaimannar in Ceylon; SLNA 8/116 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 3 May 1839 - in April, 642 passengers were carried in 12 trips; also SLNA-7/545 - No. 244 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent 24 August 1842; which required the Government Agent and assistants to provide monthly returns of labourers travelling to and fro.
 16. SLNA - 7/545 - No. 160 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent - 2 July 1841; also see Government Agent to Colonial Secretary - earlier letter No. 233 of June 1841.

the arrival of Indian labourers in Ceylon.¹⁷ Furthermore, the Government reiterated in August, that "... it is of the greatest importance to the colony to encourage by every possible means the influx of labourers".¹⁸ No extra charge was levied and the imposition of any charge for the transport facilities provided was prohibited.¹⁹ Not only was the government anxious to provide incentives for procuring labourers, it was also clear that planters were pressuring the government to do so. In 1842, the Ceylon Agricultural Society urged that facilities should be furnished for procuring labourers: and the Government Agent was asked to comply with this request.²⁰

The government and the planters again demonstrated an urgent interest in coaxing the Government Agent to make every endeavour to provide attractions for inducing a flow of labour. There was a lurking suspicion that the Government Agent was not doing enough.²¹ This provoked Government Agent Dyke to explain fully the measures introduced to facilitate the provision of labourers through various improvements effected by him for making travel easier and more comfortable.²²

In addition to the labourers "passing between India and Mannar in the official vessel considerable numbers also arrived and departed in other vessels." All immigrant arrivals disembarked at Talaimannar, the Western extremity of the island of Mannar, or at Pesalai between Talaimannar and Mannar, or at Mannar, which was the regular point of entry.²³

To counter other complaints, Government Agent Dyke pointed out that he had already recommended the erection of shelters along the immigrants' route from the coast especially at Talaimannar and Mannar.²⁴ But his efforts had been futile because the government had disallowed the necessary costs for constructing sheds in the annual estimates.²⁵ In 1842, however, provision was made for a survey of the pathway from Mannar to Talaimannar for clearing jungle and for making other partial improvements and for improving the path.

17. SLNA - 7/545 - No. 63 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, - 22 March 1841.

18. SLNA - 7/545 - No. 204 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent - 7 August 1841; also Government Agent to Colonial Secretary No. 281-27 July 1841.

19. *ibid.*

20. SLNA - 8/119 - No. 153 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary - 25 June 1842. Dyke furnished a lengthy and detailed observation in response to the application from the Ceylon Agricultural Society, also see No. 178 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary - 15 May 1841, on the same subject.

21. SLNA - 8/119 - No. 153 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary - 25 June 1842, Dyke furnishes a detailed observation in response to the application from the Ceylon Agricultural Society; also see No. 178 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary - 15 May 1841, on the same subject.

22. *ibid.*

23. *ibid.* see also Pippet, G. K., *op. cit.* pp. 263-264, about the use of the port, Pesalai, in Mannar; and De Silva, K. M., *op. cit.* p. 237 about the arrivals through Talaimannar.

24. *ibid.*

25. *ibid.*

Unfortunately these measures could not be executed owing to the want of a trained superintendent. Therefore, if enough improvement had not been effected to make travel conditions easier for the labourers the fault was not that of the Government Agent.

The province did not extend southward beyond the Marichicottai river ; and the worst section of the route lay between Marichicottai and Puttalam.²⁶ The jungle around had never been cleared and travellers had regularly complained of discomfort and peril. However, since it was difficult to improve the route between Marichicottai and Puttalam because of constant floods the Government Agent suggested that a better path be laid from Mannar directly to meet the route leading from Jaffna to Anuradhapura and thence to Kurunagala. The labourers could then use this alternative route.²⁷

In July 1841, the government emphasised again that every facility should be given to encourage the inflow of immigrants from India and expressed readiness to sanction expenditure for erecting buildings for accomodating labourers as proposed by the Government Agent.²⁸ Furthermore, provision of similar accomodation along the road between Puttalam and Kurunagala was already sanctioned. Thus some measures to ameliorate the immigrant's lot were taken.²⁹

The Government's appeals for bettering conditions for immigrant labour grew more importunate yearly. In 1843, making a trifling outlay, the government wanted sufficient shelter for sick labourers passing through Anuradhapura to be provided at reasonable distances.³⁰ These unfortunate labourers were almost destitute when travelling *via* Anuradhapura and the Government Agent was asked to help them.³¹ The duty of looking after ailing immigrants was entrusted to the headmen and they "will be held responsible that proper attention is paid to the sick",³² added the Colonial Secretary. Yet cholera was endemic in South India in 1844. Many lay sick and destitute in the Mannar district particularly along the road to Anuradhapura.³³ These

26. *ibid.*

27. *ibid.*

28. SLNA - 7/545 - No. 169 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 7 July 1841.

29. *ibid.* also see reference to Government Agent's despatch No. 178 to Colonial Secretary, 15 May 1841.

30. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 45 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, II February 1843 ; also see reference to No. 36, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 30 January 1843.

31. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 46 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, II, February 1843 ; also reference to Dyke's letter, No. 28 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 28 January 1843.

32. *ibid.*

33. SLNA - 7/754 - No. 132 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 22 June 1844 ; also see Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, Western Province, No. 342, of 21 June 1844 on the same subject.

illiterate immigrants were also exploited; undue charges were exacted by toll-keepers and even by others masquerading as toll-keepers. Therefore, police personnel to protect them from extortion were to be appointed.³⁴

The Government Agent visited Mannar in 1844 and reviewed the provisions made for the benefit of immigrant arrivals and departures. The Agent and some of his colleagues had not been pleased about the government undertaking so many measures to make travel and life easier on the route for these immigrant workers.³⁵ They felt that the interests of those indigenous to the country instead needed more attention, rather than providing welfare and protection for the sick and other immigrant workers. Local opinion was that the Government ought to be impartial, and; therefore, the immigrants had no special claim for such favourable treatment. This view ran counter to the state undertaking to afford facilities to immigrant labourers.³⁶ Nevertheless, in practice, the Government Agent continued conscientiously to provide for the wellbeing of immigrant labour although he voiced the local sentiment against such solicitude.³⁷

The Government Agent arranged for the maintenance of temporary rest-houses at Talaimannar, Pesalai and Mannar.³⁸ The general character of the measures taken by the Government were to be similar to those elsewhere in the British Empire governing the emigration of labourers by sea. Therefore, the government had to assume, even to a limited degree, the office of the protector of immigrants.³⁹ But the Government Agent's measures indicated that he meant to do more. An effective medical establishment at Mannar was considered essential if plans to provide for the well-being of the immigrant labourers were to be executed efficiently.⁴⁰ A quarantine, both in the boat and ashore occasionally, and sanitary measures for the benefit of the immigrants and local residents had to be enforced legally.⁴¹ A causeway from the island of Mannar to the mainland was imperative since the improvement of communication with India through Mannar was salient.⁴²

34. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 153 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 12 July 1844.

35. SLNA - 7/754 - No. 184 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 23 August 1844; also see references to Government Agents, Western and Central provinces.

36. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 219 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 13 August 1844; also see Dyke to Colonial Secretary from Mullaitivu - 22 September 1844 (no number); Stewart, J., *Notes on Ceylon and its Affairs* (London, 1862), pp. 8-12 gives the opposition to the State favouring the planting community at the cost of the local inhabitants.

37. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 184 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 23 August 1844; also see Dyke to Colonial Secretary from Mullaitivu 22 September 1844 (no number);

38. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 219 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 13 August 1844; also see Ievers, R. W., *Manual of the North Central Province* (Colombo, 1899), p. 104.

39. *ibid.*

40. *ibid.*

41. *ibid.*

42. *Governors' Addresses*: (Colombo, 1876), Vol. I, pp. 99-100.

The government too was quite concerned of the welfare of the immigrant labourers. Shelter, relief to the sick, and protection against extortion were to be provided.⁴³ Government Agents of the Western and Central provinces too were required to grant similar facilities.⁴⁴ The government did not pay heed to local objections⁴⁵ to the grant of relief and protection to the immigrants and to the maintenance of an establishment for this purpose.

Later on, the government provided even better conditions. The assistant agent at Mannar undertook the provision of shelter which was a large enterprise.⁴⁶ However, the accommodation and protection provided for the immigrants were useless without a superior authority because such measures were not executed efficiently in districts so remote from effective supervision by headmen⁴⁷.

The road from Mannar to Talaimannar was completed in 1843.⁴⁸ Trees were planted alongside to form a shady avenue and wells were dug at different points for providing water. At Mannar, permanent buildings were planned for accommodating about a thousand coolies while at Talaimannar housing for 1,500 to 2,000 was to be provided.⁴⁹ At an intermediate point between these two places housing for a minimum of five hundred labourers was to be furnished.

The Government Agent gave the statistics of arrivals and departures, in 1843 and 1844, of those who travelled in the government vessel to and from Ceylon.⁵⁰ The fee for travel to Talaimannar from the South Indian shores varied from six to nine pence. This was minimal and there was no worthwhile object, he felt, that could be attained by providing free travel. The original objectives in giving free passages were to help persons too poor to pay anything and to discourage extortionate rates being levied by private boat owners and to provide for persons to come even if there was a want of transport. But now as it was undesirable to assist the arrival of anyone utterly destitute the maintenance of government vessels for free travel was to be terminated.⁵¹

43. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 184 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 23 August 1844.

44. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 184 Colonial Secretary to Government, 23 August 1844, see specially the reference to the other Government Agents.

(b) SLNA - 8/133 - No. 218 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 8 October 1844; also see Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 22 September 1844 (no number).

45. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 184 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 23 August 1844 for references to view of assistant agent, Mannar.

46. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 234 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 21 August 1844.

47. SLNA - 8/133 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 22 September 1844 (no number).

48. *ibid.*

49. *ibid.*

50. *ibid.*

51. *ibid.*

The Government continued to encourage the planting of trees along the roadway taken by the labourers and the provision of wells.⁵² Temporary buildings were designed as resthouses because they were less expensive. Also, a road was to be constructed from Mannar to Anuradhapura, and a causeway to connect Mannar to the mainland.⁵³ Such a causeway had been needed for long but could not be built owing to the want of technical assistance. Now the Government, bent on facilitating the entry of labourers, authorised the Government Agent to use the services of the Chief Engineer⁵⁴ for building it.

The improvement of the route to Anuradhapura was recommended on a report from the assistant agent.⁵⁵ The number of "coolies" passing through Anuradhapura to Kandy had been increasing yearly while those returning through that district to the Mannar coast were even more.⁵⁶

On their onward journey to the interior, immigrants preferred to travel along the coastline Chilaw road.⁵⁷ Provisions were readily procurable and cheaper, and up to Chilaw the labourers moved through an area where residents spoke their own language, and whose manners and customs were similar to their own. If sick or in sudden difficulty, the immigrant labourers could readily find solace among such a Tamil speaking population. Then on entering the Kandyan Kurunegala district the immigrant labourers were among a people who, because of difficulties of intercourse with the different people of the maritime provinces, were relatively unsophisticated. These Kandyan peasants were more friendly towards the "strangers" than the maritime inhabitants.⁵⁸

The labourers also usually avoided the Anuradhapura road owing to want of accommodation along the route from Arippu to Dambulla and the difficulty of procuring provisions among a people "naturally conservative and little disposed to look favourably on strangers".⁵⁹ Further it was not easy to obtain aid in case of sickness and a ready supply of water throughout the journey of about ninety miles lasting five to six days.

52. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 218 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 8 October 1844.

53. SLNA - 7/574 - No. 218 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 8 October 1844; Rasanayagam, C., *op. cit.* p. 160; a request for the causeway was made by Dyke. Unfortunately, it was never quite satisfactorily executed - see Boake, W. J. S. *Mannar - A Monograph* (Colombo, 1888), pp. 59-60.

54. *ibid.*

55. SLNA - 8/133 - No. 125 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 6 July 1842; see enclosure, letter from assistant agent, Anuradhapura (no date or number).

56. *ibid.*

57. *ibid.*

58. *ibid.*

59. *ibid.*

On their return, however, labourers travelled *via* Anuradhapura.⁶⁰ They had spent sometime in the island and gained a better knowledge of the character and disposition of the village folk. Having acquired some knowledge of Sinhalese they could now make themselves understood. Moreover, as they had saved some money this gave them a sense of confidence and independence.⁶¹ These observations of the assistant agent, and the Government Agent's previous recommendation to have the route from Mannar to Anuradhapura constructed, positively influenced the government and there were changes for the better.

Margosa and Banyan trees were planted on roadsides from Talaimannar to Mannar, emulating a practice prevalent in India.⁶² In 1845, a hospital for immigrants was established at Chilavathurai, a health officer was assigned to Talaimannar, and attendants were employed at a temporary hospital at Anuradhapura to look after indisposed labourers.⁶³ Yet, the immigrants continued to be harassed by unscrupulous elements. The ferrymen at Aruviaru demanded payment from immigrant labourers although they were paid by the state and explicitly forbidden to charge fees.⁶⁴ Meanwhile the energetic assistant Government Agent at Mannar had provided accommodation for the immigrants and also arranged for treating the sick in resthouses.⁶⁵

Reporting on roads needed in the Northern province the Government Agent pressed for a link between Mannar and the Central road from Jaffna to Anuradhapura.⁶⁶ The immigrants were now using the route through Arippu which was inconvenient since they had to cross a river and traverse through an uninhabited area, illprovided with water. The new road would be shorter and run *via* an easily bridgeable tributary and villages well provided with water.⁶⁷

The Government wanted the Commissioner of Roads to attend to these proposals speedily.⁶⁸ Special action was to be taken in regard to the serious and frequent complaints about detention of and extortion from coolies at ferries. The Commissioner of Roads, Thomas Skinner was to improve

60. *ibid.*

61. *ibid.*

62. SLNA - 7/638 - No. 4 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 3 January 1845; also see SLNA - 8/133 - No. 344 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 9 December 1844.

63. SLNA - 7/638 - No. 249 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 16 October 1845; also see enclosures No. 257 of 24 October 1845 and No. 263 of 30 October 1845 authorising these measures advised by Colonial Secretary to Government Agent.

64. SLNA - 6/1835 - No. 280 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 18 September 1846.

65. SLNA - 6/1833 - No. 258 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 18 August 1845.

66. SLNA - 6/1917^B Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 21 October 1847 from Colombo - Dyke's report on the letter from the Commissioner of Roads dated 2 October 1847 on roads from Nuwarakalaviya and the Vanni to the coast.

67. *ibid.*

68. *ibid.* also see annexure No. 66 of 13 April 1847 - Copy of letter from Colonial Secretary to Commissioner of Roads.

the roads leading from Mannar to the interior.⁶⁹ Because of the insecurity of the route and since labourers were exposed to the vagaries of the weather while travelling to and from the coffee districts he was also asked to improve the conditions for travel. Rivers *en-route* were impassable and hazardous; water was scarce and unwholesome; and rest-sheds and other accommodation so far provided were still deficient or in a ruined state. The Government wanted this sad state of affairs remedied early.

More was still to be done for the protection and convenience of the Indian immigrant labourers. Therefore, Thomas Skinner, the Commissioner of Roads, was required to survey immediately the roads from Kandy to Talaimannar *via* Kurunegala and Puttalam, and the route through Arippe, Anuradhapura and Dambulla. He was to report on the state of the roads and the ferries, on the supply of water and repairs needed to improve the "rest-sheds", and on hospitals, and the sufficiency of them. He had to suggest means to supply greater comfort and security to the immigrant labourers and to estimate the cost of rendering the roads safe and convenient for use.⁷⁰ The Government Agent was to assist Skinner. Obviously, what had been done upto now was hardly enough. Furthermore, the police were asked to procure information through post offices about immigrant labourers who were found dead along roadsides and also of those who had deserted the coffee estates and were fugitives.

In August 1847, Governor Viscount Torrington, enunciated the policy to be pursued in regard to immigrant labour.⁷¹ The immigration of Indian labourers were to be placed upon a healthy and satisfactory footing and they were to be given protection and encouragement. The Council, composed of planting interests and others sympathetic to them, agreed with the Governor as they wanted a regular supply of labour.⁷² Since the Governor and the Council saw eye-to-eye they naturally wanted to pursue even more generously the schemes for facilitating a steady influx of labourers. Immigrant labourers discharged from hospital were even paid allowances to induce them to return.⁷³

69. For an account of Skinner and his work, Skinner, Thomas, *Fifty Years in Ceylon*, ed. by A. Skinner (London, 1891).

70. SLNA - 20/316 - No. 111 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 13 April 1847, see enclosure copy of letter to the Commissioner of Roads, No. 66 of 13 April 1847, from Colonial Secretary.

71. *Governors' Addresses*, Vol. 1, 30 August 1847, Viscount, Torrington's Address to the Legislative Council.

72. *ibid.* see *Addresses* - Reply by the Council, 2 September 1847.

73. SLNA - 20/964 - 257 - No. 315 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 11 December 1847.

Yet, in spite of this avowed intention to give encouragement and assistance for facilitating the inflow of labourers, the rebellion of 1848⁷⁴ upset these plans.⁷⁵ By August the planting community entertained serious apprehensions about the arrival of Indian immigrants. Labourers were deterred from arriving by exaggerated rumours about the disturbances which aroused fears about their safety. Therefore, the Madras government and the authorities on the Indian coast were assured that peace had been restored. They were requested to make every exertion to prevent coolies from being unnecessarily alarmed as they might otherwise abandon the intention of immigrating. However, this step alone was considered insufficient to induce the inflow of labourers.

Prompt measures were hence taken by the Government Agent and his assistants to have persons patrolling roads frequented by immigrant labourers and to station others at points of disembarkation. These officials were to ensure the safe journey of immigrant labourers and also, more importantly, to dispel among immigrants the effect of rumours. They were to assure immigrants that there was peace in the coffee districts⁷⁶ so that they could proceed to their destinations confident that they would be safe and protected. Clearly, the Indian immigrant labourer was essential to Ceylon's economy.

But the fears of the planting community that the influx of Indian immigrant labourers would decrease proved to be wrong. Immigrant labourers continued to arrive;⁷⁷ conditions in India were so indigent and although there was much to be desired in the conditions under which they laboured here still they were better. The immigrants continued to come in and the government continued to take measures to attract them. A tank reservoir in Mannar district was deepened for providing water for their use,⁷⁸ and the Government Agent submitted monthly statistics of arrivals to the Colonial Secretary.⁷⁹

In 1851 more sheds to house labourers on their way to estates were erected on the central road from Jaffna to Anuradhapura.⁸⁰ This road had now been built and was increasingly used by immigrants. In the next year, the new

74. See for a discussion on the anticipated effects of the rebellion on the inflow of labour, Stuart J., *Observations on Colonial Forbes' Pamphlet on the Recent Rebellion in Ceylon, in a letter addressed to a Friend* (Colombo, 1850), pp. 5-7; for an account of the rebellion see de Silva, K. M. (ed.), *op. cit.* pp. 252-258.

75. SLNA - 20/854 - 259 - No. 183 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 2 August 1844.

76. *ibid.*

77. SLNA - 20/854 - 259 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, Circular of 16, August 1848.

78. SLNA - 6/1940a - No. 176 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 3 June 1848.

79. SLNA - 6/2070a - No. 191 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 11 May 1850; also see SLNA - 6/2097 - No. 262 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 13 October 1851.

80. SLNA - 6/2096 - Part II - No. 158 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 16 June 1851.

road from Mannar to meet the Central road at Madawachchiya which came to be used by the immigrant workers on their way to the coffee plantations was also provided with resthouses.⁸¹

Again, both in 1853 and 1854, expenditure on the establishment maintained for affording assistance to immigrants was increased.⁸² The pressure to provide more and better facilities grew greater and the government succumbed to it. Permanent sheds to replace temporary types were erected in 1855 at Talaimannar, Mannar and other points on the way to the plantations. Adequate accommodation, recommended by the Government Agent, was provided.⁸³ Furthermore, Governor Henry Ward⁸⁴ took special interest in enhancing facilities as he clearly recognised the misery of the immigrant. Hospitals were improved and *kanganies* or supervisors, and patrols were provided at places like Maradankadawela to ensure the well-being of the travelling labourer.⁸⁵

However, a new problem arose now. The French in India had begun to crimp for labourers, and their activities extended even to Ceylon.⁸⁶ The Chief Secretary to the Fort St. George Government informed Ceylon's Colonial Secretary having heard from a magistrate in South Arcot, that French agents watch out for labourers proceeding from South India to the plantations in Ceylon. Then those immigrant labourers are taken for transport ultimately to Bourbon through the French port at Karaikal in South India.⁸⁷ The Government Agent of North Ceylon was warned to be vigilant and to prevent any enticement of coolies from his province. But this warning proved futile for there was no attempt to take away the immigrant labourers by the French during this period.

Meanwhile the Planters Association at Kandy appealed to the Governor requesting that accommodation for immigrants be further improved along the road through Anuradhapura to Kandy. Moreover, shed-keepers were

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81. SLNA - 20/920 - 266 - No. 16 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 21 January 1852.
 82. SLNA - 6/2238b - Part I Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 10 July 1854; also see SLNA - 20/549 - 270 - No. 204, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent 23 September 1854.
 83. See for general description of this, Ward, H. G., *Speeches and Minutes of the late Sir Henry Ward, 1855-1860*, (Colombo, 1864); and Balasingham, S. V., *The Administration of Sir Henry Ward, 1855-1860* (Dehiwala, 1968) pp. 51-61.
 84. Sir Henry Ward, Governor of Ceylon, 1855-1860 - for an account of his career, see Ward, H. G., *op. cit.* and Balasingham, S. V., *op. cit.*
 85. *ibid.*
 86. SLNA - 20/999 - 267 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent - Circular 21 October 1852.
 87. SLNA - *ibid.* see enclosures - No. 865 Chief Secretary Fort St. George to Colonial Secretary, Colombo, 14 September 1852 and Extract from a letter from Magistrate of South Arcot, 21 August 1852.

warned strictly that no fee should be levied from labourers for occupying the rest-sheds.⁸⁸ But as abuses prevailed still, more improved accommodation was ordered to be provided soon and assistant government agents of districts were required to supervise the management of rest-sheds for preventing mal-practices of keepers.⁸⁹ The Government strongly acknowledged that a smooth and steady supply of labour to the coffee districts was indispensable and since the colony's revenue was buoyant it was possible to expedite the improvements.⁹⁰ Permanent buildings to replace temporary housing for labourers were constructed at Talaimannar, Mannar and other points at a cost of £ 300.⁹¹ New sheds were erected at some places, and some sheds at certain places were set apart to serve as hospitals. Altogether, a sum of £ 1,150 was spent on these improvements following the demands of planters. Governor Ward was particularly enthusiastic and energetic, and many measures to enhance existing facilities and to supply deficiencies were initiated thereby providing more comfort to the unfortunate immigrants.

Minor roads leading from main roads to resting-sheds, and then to wells or rivers were further cleared of jungle growth.⁹² Sheds were erected at new points, and more patrols were provided for protecting immigrants. *Kanganies* were renting out visiting bungalows to travellers for a consideration; this practice was prohibited and such abodes were kept to house only immigrant labourers. After providing proper accommodation which was a primary need, immigrants were also furnished with useful information and assistance so that they could reach the coffee districts with minimum difficulty. A sum of £ 1,550 was spent on implementing these proposals.⁹³

Planters' pressure on the government, however, was mounting. They even urged that any state expenditure should only be for furthering their interest, one of which was the provision of inducements to attract immigrant labourers by furnishing them with greater comfort and convenience. The Governor too in turn was deferential and declared that, "In this readiness to meet their wishes the Governor hopes that the planters" will see a proof of his conviction, that the best interests of the community are identified with the success of the enterprize in which they are embarked, and that no-efforts will be spared to ensure to them the most beneficial application of that portion

88. SLNA - 20/272 - No. 94 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 4 May 1855.

89. *ibid.*

90. *ibid.*

91. *ibid.*

92. *ibid.* also see Ievers, R. W., *op. cit.* p. 216 for an account of road construction in Anuradhapura and Lewis, J. P., *Manual of the Vanni Districts* (Colombo, 1895), pp. 213-222 provides an account of roadmaking in the Vanni.

93. *ibid.*

of the general revenue which can equitably be appropriated to their wants."⁹⁴ But the planter's were really asking far too much; an advancement of only their interests and attention to their wants alone. Hence, the Governor explained that there were others advancing similar claims and he wanted to do all that could be done to divide fairly the means at his disposal among the different groups in the island.⁹⁵

Governor Ward's measures naturally increased expenditure on establishments maintained or provided for the welfare of the immigrants. Spurred by the Governor's interests, the officials in provinces and districts too paid greater attention to the immigrants' welfare. In May 1857, the Government Agent and his assistant at Anuradhapura wanted more money⁹⁶ spent on hospitals, food and medicines for sick labourers. It was warned that, "It is probable that proposals for further increases as for medical attendance in particular will continue for some time to be brought forward."⁹⁷ Increased funds were therefore granted by the Government.⁹⁸

The assistant agent at Mannar wanted to construct a bridge on the road leading to Kandy, which was used by a large number of labourers, because a ferry there proved unsatisfactory. The assistant at Anuradhapura wanted to build a hospital for immigrants, and to employ *kanganies* and patrols⁹⁹ along the road. The expenditure on facilities for immigrant labour really escalated and during the time of Governor Ward, the government also provided a steamer to the Cooly Transport Company, a mercantile establishment that transported immigrants to and from Ceylon.¹⁰⁰

Yet in 1862, fresh arrangements had to be made again for transporting immigrants based on proposals from William C. Twynam, assistant agent, Mannar.¹⁰¹ Twynam took an active interest in and showed much sympathy for the welfare of the immigrant labourers, and moreover, he also had a knowledge of nautical affairs. Therefore, according to Twynam's scheme¹⁰²

94. SLNA - 20/272 - No. 94 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 4 May 1855 and enclosures.

95. *ibid.*

96. SLNA - 6/2385 - No. 144 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 20 May 1857.

97. *ibid.*

98. SLNA - 6/2385 - No. 144 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 20 May 1857, see especially reply to Colonial Secretary No. 216, 8 June 1857 to Government Agent.

99. SLNA - 6/2349 - No. 34 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 30 January 1856; also see SLNA - 6/2350 - Nos. 206 and 208, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 July 1856.

100. *Governor's Addresses*, Vol. I, *op. cit.* p. 350.

101. SLNA - 20/285 - 419 - No. 29 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 1 February 1862.

102. *ibid.* also see No. 86 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 24 March 1862 in reply to Colonial Secretary's No. 38 of 17 February 1862, to Government Agent; and SLNA - 20/645 - 425 - No. 38 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 17 February 1862.

vessels were chartered for providing a packet service for labourers from and to India. The Collector of Customs managed the vessels and supervision of arrangements at the landing point was delegated to the assistant government agent, Mannar.¹⁰³

In the 1860's there was even more concern for providing welfare facilities for immigrant labourers. Greater pressure from various quarters, especially the planting interests, accounted for this. The Government Agent detailed fresh works and further arrangements required for facilitating the passage of immigrants to the plantations. The Secretary to the Immigrant Labour Commissioner had pointed out to the Colonial Secretary the necessity for officials to visit rest-sheds at least monthly to ensure that they were well-kept and sick labourers were assisted. Hence, the Government Agent and his assistant were required to inspect the sheds regularly.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, since false and frightful rumours about epidemics had been spread among labourers, which could discourage movement to Ceylon the Governor wanted these rumours dispelled.¹⁰⁵

The Government now displayed an interest also in conditions on the points of embarkation in South India. Rest-houses or *maddams*, were to be built at Mandapam and at Devipatam, the port northward of Pamban. More facilities for temporary accommodation were furnished at ports of disembarkation and along the route to the interior.¹⁰⁶ As conflicts had arisen between emigrant labourers and the residents of Devipatam owing to the latter's objections to labourers drawing water from wells because of caste prejudices, wells for exclusive use of labourers were to be provided.¹⁰⁷ With these new measures, the Governor felt happy that the "immigration scheme" would function satisfactorily.¹⁰⁸

At this time Indian administrative authorities, however, were not so cooperative. The Governor requested the authorities at Madras to provide accommodation and wells for use of emigrants to Ceylon on the routes to

103. SLNA - 20/645 - No. 77 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 31 March 1862 ; also No. 83 of 4 April 1862, from Colonial Secretary to Government Agent.

104. SLNA - 20/411 - 285 - No. 124 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent ; also see enclosure No. 2119, Secretary, Immigrant Labour Commissioner's Office, to Colonial Secretary 3 July 1861.

105. SLNA - 20/411 - 285 - No. 44 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 14 August 1861 ; also see Government Agent's No. 132, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 27 July 1861 which acquainted the Governor of the circulation of such rumours and the Colonial Secretary's letters to Government Agent, Kandy and the Immigrant Labourer Commissioner referred to in this despatch, also see de Silva K. M., *op. cit.* p. 263.

106. SLNA - 20/1454-421 - No. 148 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 10 May 1862 ; also see Government Agent's No. 133, to Colonial Secretary of 30 April 1862 for details of the plan for bettering conditions for immigrant labour.

107. *ibid.*

108. SLNA - 20/645-425, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 26 June 1862.

ports of embarkation from Trichnopoly, Tanjore and Madura districts from which the labourers came. Since such sheds and wells would be solely for the benefit of labourers for Ceylon the Madras Government refused to incur any expenditure in constructing them,¹⁰⁹ and wanted the cost to be borne either by the Ceylon Government or the Planter's Association for whom such labour was essential. With such an attitude nothing helpful was done in South India.

But once again, the need for buildings for immigrants at Devipatam and for improvements to the ferry route from Rameswaram was stressed¹¹⁰ since Twynam the assistant agent himself had witnessed the inconvenience undergone by labourers at Devipatam.¹¹¹ Owing to the want Indian cooperation the assistant agent of Mannar himself had to provide the shelter at Rameswaram pier.¹¹² A Superintendent of Immigration who had been now appointed however notified Ceylon of suitable sites for sheds selected by the authorities at Pamban.¹¹³

In spite of these efforts there still remained shortcomings in the arrangements made for the welfare of immigrants. In June 1863 the Government Agent complained of the lack of adequate means for transporting labourers.¹¹⁴ Consequently large numbers of immigrants were detained at ports and this tended to spread sickness, which was often brought in by them. Since government had assumed responsibility for transporting labour, engagement of private vessels for conveying workers had been discontinued. Unfortunately, however, this service was not being carried out satisfactorily. Thereby the interest of the labourers, the country, the planting community, and the Indian government, which was anxious that its subjects should not suffer, were in jeopardy. The Government Agent alleged that neither he nor his assistant had been provided enough means for transporting the immigrants and should therefore be not held responsible for ill consequences that could occur owing to deficiencies.¹¹⁵

109. SLNA - 20/1435 - 287 - No. 283 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 17 October 1862 - also see enclosure No. 1161 - Chief Secretary to Fort St. George to Colonial Secretary, Colombo. 1 October 1862, in reply to Colonial Secretary's No. 46 of 5 August 1862.

110. SLNA - 20/1454 - 421, No. 343 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 10 October 1862.

111. *ibid.*

112. SLNA - 20/1454 - 421 - No. 403 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 22 November, 1862.

113. *ibid.*

114. SLNA - 20/1703 - 423 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 1 June 1863. (no number).

115. *ibid.*

This strong representation was followed by improvements. In August 1864 Major General O'Brien,¹¹⁶ commented that the government's ferry system between South India and Mannar was a success and that it was undesirable to discontinue it until the immigrant labourers preferred taking the more expensive but more comfortable route by steamer to Colombo.¹¹⁷ The planters' sensing that labourers would always choose the less expensive mode of travel had really prevailed on the Governor to continue the ferry service between Pamban and Mannar.¹¹⁸ But the officials thought of abandoning this service, and of allowing immigrants to enter *via* Colombo and in September 1866 a Company was floated to ply steamers from the Indian coast to Colombo.¹¹⁹ But, it was still doubtful whether it would be possible to induce immigrant labourers to give up the North route *via* Mannar and take to the steamer and the route from Colombo to the coffee estates.

The Government Agent, Northern province, reckoned the immigration service an "already expensive service" in 1865.¹²⁰ Yet, greater expenditure on it was inevitable. Rocks off Rameswaran island were a hazard to immigrant vessels plying between Mannar and Devipatam in South India. As officers supervising the transport service were responsible for ensuring the safety of immigrant labourers he recommended that a light-vessel should be placed at perilous points on the route as a precaution.¹²¹ Mr. Reidy, the Superintendent of Immigration, and the assistant agent, Mannar, were managing the transport service.¹²² Although the Governor approved the stationing of a light-vessel, the Government of Madras objected,¹²³ and there was no alternative but to withdraw the light-vessel. The Government Agent was then asked for alternative schemes for ensuring the safety of vessels passing the rocks off Rameswaram on their way to Mannar.¹²⁴ Finally, in 1866, it was decided on advice from Madras that instead of a light-boat off Rameswaram to display a red light from the mast or pole of vessels.¹²⁵

116. O'Brien was Lieutenant-General during the Governorship of C. J. Mac Carthy (1860 - 1865).

117. *Governors' Addresses, Vol. II*, (Colombo, 1877), pp. 38-39.

118. *ibid.*

119. SLNA - 20/989 - 293 - No. 188, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 4 September 1866.

120. SLNA - 20/53 - 431 - No. 68 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 20 March 1865

121. *ibid.*

122. *ibid.*

123. SLNA - 20/779 - 292 - No. 201 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 17 August 1865 ; also see annexure No. 165, Fort St. George to Colonial Secretary, 22 July 1865.

124. SLNA - 20/779 - 292 - 212 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 30 August 1865.

125. SLNA - 20/989 - 293 - No. 54 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 16 March 1866.

In the meantime shelter-sheds too continued to be built by contractors on the road from Mannar to Madawachchiya.¹²⁶ As suggested by the Chief Engineer, the assistant agent, Mannar, supervised the work so as to ensure that contractors fulfilled their engagements.¹²⁷ In 1865, at a cost of £50, more wells were also constructed. "It would be difficult to overestimate the relief afforded to the coolies by the wells which have been provided along the line of road and it is most desirable that they should be kept in an efficient state"¹²⁸ asserted assistant agent, Twynam. It is easy to agree with him considering the extreme heat and arid desolation of Mannar.

The successful management of the immigrant service was largely due to assistant agent Twynam's and superintendent of Immigration¹²⁹ Reidy's personal efforts. However, it was still the responsibility of the Ceylon government to make an arrangement with the Madras government for providing suitable care for immigrant labourers in South India. Else, all the efforts of the Ceylonese authorities could fail and a regular supply of labourers would collapse.¹³⁰ But, unfortunately, while Ceylon was providing more and more for the comfort and convenience of immigrants, the Indian authorities showed little responsive cooperation. The welfare of the immigrant labourer became Ceylon's and not India's burden.

With immigrant labour came cholera and small pox.¹³¹ These diseases were so recurrent and regular that many were the measures taken to combat the scourge of epidemics. In Talaimannar, and all along the route taken by these labourers, not only the immigrant, but, unfortunately, even the indigenous inhabitant suffered perennially. In 1854, an exasperated Government Agent confessed that the source of infection was the labourer and that nothing could be done to prevent outbreaks of diseases as long as there was immigration.

Immigrants travelling along the central road to and from the estates through Anuradhapura were so stricken by cholera in the 1850's that a good many died along the roadside.¹³² Patrols from Mannar to Dambulla were

126. SLNA - 20/587 - 291 - No. 138 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent 7 June 1865.

127. *ibid.* also see annex-correspondence between Chief Engineer, his assistant and the Colonial Secretary - Chief Engineer to Colonial Secretary, No. 494 of 12 May 1865; Assistant Chief Engineer to Chief Engineer, No. 207 of 2nd May 1865; and Colonial Secretary's reply to Chief Engineer No. 523 of 22 May 1865.

128. SLNA - 20/725 - 432 - No. 170 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 22 June 1860

129. SLNA - 20/725 - 432 - No. 98 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 21 April 1866

130. *ibid.*

131. Rasanayagam, C., *op. cit.* p. 156 - Ievers, R. W., *op. cit.* p. 99 for the conclusion of the Committee, appointed in 1866 to report on immigration, that frequent outbreaks of cholera stemmed from immigrants, and pp. 103, 104, for accounts of outbreaks of small pox and cholera epidemics and deaths on the wayside.

132. SLNA - 20/1153 - 276 - No. 230 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 29 September 1857.

employed to detect sick labourers so that they could be isolated for treatment, and also to have deceased "coolies" buried. The cost of these patrols were to be borne by the planters.¹³³

Since, the Colonial Secretary's office was inundated with reports in 1857 the Governor inquired from the Government Agent of the number of cholera victims found along the road from Mannar to Dambulla.¹³⁴ At one time about forty corpses were known to have been lying unburied. Meanwhile, the assistant agent at Anuradhapura too reported that cholera was prevalent among immigrant labourers at Madawachchiya hospital,¹³⁵ and the Colonial Secretary called for a statement from Government Agent Dyke, about the incidence of cholera among immigrants at wayside rest bungalows.¹³⁶ Persons found dead on the roads were also frequent and assistant agent, Anuradhapura, wrote, "You are probably aware that the coast coolies generally leave behind on the road (not at the bungalow), any of their companions taken ill".¹³⁷ This was not unusual as the immigrant labourers could ill-afford to wait behind and tend their sick companions since they would have suffered if they had done so.

Although cholera and small pox epidemics broke out from the time the immigrant labourers started arriving, it was only in the 1850's that attention came to be paid to this problem following the increasing interest taken then by administrators. In 1858, the Government Agent, Central Province, where the coffee plantations were, wanted the road taken by the immigrant labourers to the coffee estates to be placed under medical supervision.¹³⁸ The Government Agent, Northern province, also pointed out the need for a medical establishment.¹³⁹ Both his assistants at Mannar and Nuwarakalaviya, areas through which came the labourers, concurred with him. This special establishment

133. SLNA - 6/2386 - No. 200 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 15 July 1857; also see SLNA - 20/778 - 264 - No. 86, Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 7 May 1851, and Government Agent's No. 183 of 25 April 1851; and especially SLNA - 6/2304 - No. 449, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 29 December 1854 and enclosure, Report on the district of Nuwarakalaviya for 1863.

134. SLNA - 20/1153 - 276 - No. 230 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 29 September 1857.

135. SLNA - 6/2386 - No. 280 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 September 1857; also see enclosure No. 278, from assistant agent, Anuradhapura, to Government Agent, 11 September 1857.

136. SLNA - 6/2386 - No. 310 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 15 October 1857; also see enclosure No. 172, from Government Agent to Assistant, Anuradhapura; No. 172, assistant agent, Anuradhapura, to Government Agent, 10 October 1857; and also No. 355, Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 3 November 1857 and enclosure letter from assistant agent, Anuradhapura.

137. *ibid.* see enclosure No. 172 assistant government agent, Anuradhapura, to Government Agent, 10 October 1857.

138. SLNA - 6/2438 - No. 46 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 8 February 1858; also enclosures—extracts from letters to Government Agent from assistant agent, Anuradhapura.

139. *ibid.*

for catering to the needs of the immigrants was to be supervised by a properly qualified independent medical head and not a member of the normal medical service. Government Agent Dyke had made a similar suggestion as early as 1844 and 1847, but then the administration had been indifferent. A medical officer in-charge, a dispenser, and five medical practitioners at various stations *enroute*, were to compose the new medical establishment. The American missionaries in Jaffna had trained young men in medicine and the Government Agent wanted them to be used in this set-up as it was economical and also gave employment opportunities for such personnel.¹⁴⁰

While cholera was the most common malady that afflicted labourers small pox was an equally serious ailment. In 1858 the assistant agent, Mannar, observed that immigrants arrived at Pesalai frequently instead of disembarking at Talaimannar and that they introduced small pox there and a health officer was necessary.¹⁴¹

An attempt was made to get *kanganies* to attend to sick labourers; but not with much success.¹⁴² These *kanganies* reported frequent and many deaths of immigrant labourers owing to dysentery or fever complicated by diarrhoea-obvious symptoms of cholera; but, they could not deal with these cases intelligently even after receiving general instruction from medical sub-assistants. Such reports now were disturbing to the government and the Colonial Secretary regretted that the Principal Civil Medical Officer could not take some salutary action to combat this menace.¹⁴³

More serious, to the Government Agent were the ill-effects of these epidemics in areas through which immigrant labourers passed.¹⁴⁴ In May 1858 the Government Agent arrived "... with great reluctance at the conclusion that the population of the island of Mannar of the maritime districts of the mainland, and of those in particular of the Vanny or inland Pattoos which adjoined the line of road followed by the Indian immigrants has of late years decreased.¹⁴⁵ In addition to the illnesses caused by the insalubrious climate and other conditions that prevailed as a check on the increase of population "... of

140. *ibid.*

141. SLNA - 6/2438 - No. 71 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 8 March 1848; also see enclosures extract of letter from assistant agent, Mannar to Government Agent, and Colonial Secretary's No. 101, 27 March 1858 to Government Agent urging the Principal Civil Medical Officer to attend to this problem; Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 September 1864 (no number).

142. SLNA - 6/2438 - No. 120 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 April 1858; also see enclosure, assistant government agent, No. 84 to Government Agent, 9 April 1858.

143. SLNA - 6/2438 - *ibid.* see enclosure, Minutes of Colonial Secretary's office, 26 April 1858.

144. Ievers, R. W., *op. cit.* pp. 103-104.

145. SLNA - 6/2438 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 21 May 1858.

late years has been superadded the most constant prevalence of Cholera".¹⁴⁶ In Nuwarakalaviya too the disease was not only introduced, but, also increased annually because this... presence (of coolies), is an unmitigated curse to the people of these districts".¹⁴⁷ No wonder that the Government Agent emphasised this factor when he pressed for a steamship travel service¹⁴⁸ as that would take the immigrants to the southern part of the island and away from these districts.

Evidently Dyke wanted his province to be freed of these epidemics. But the government paid no heed for as the planters suggested the easiest route for the coolies was *via* Mannar; and that was to be maintained. To the administration, more than the interest of indigenous inhabitants, the interests and the pressure of the planters were telling. But the arrival of the immigrant labourers stricken with disease continued to create havoc among local inhabitants. In 1861 the people of Mannar district showed reluctance to go to Mannar whenever cholera raged.¹⁴⁹

Meanwhile, pressure from planting interests on the administration to provide even better facilities for labourers and thereby ensure a steady and increasing supply of labour grew weightier. In 1859, the planters really got agitated when a local newspaper alleged that, "Of one million of Tamils who have come to Ceylon since the real commencement of the coffee enterprise in 1837, at least 250,000 have found graves in its soil".¹⁵⁰ This grave charge made publicly, indicated that out of four, who had left India for Ceylon, one died. Planters felt that it was too monstrous a reflection on them to be treated indifferently. If the charge was substantially true a remedy for the state of affairs was required; or else, "... no time should be lost in contradicting a statement so fraught with prejudice to the best interests of the country and the character for common feelings of humanity of the planters and the Executive of the island",¹⁵¹ complained the Chairman of the Planters' Association, R. B. Tytler, to the government. The correct number of departures, he said, cannot be ascertained because labourers often travelled back in *dhonies* (native crafts) picked up by tindals off ports. The Government was asked therefore to ascertain the extent to which returns furnishing numbers of departing coolies

146. *ibid.*

147. *ibid.*

148. *ibid.*

149. SLNA - 20/285 - 419 - No. 183 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 26 October 1861; also see SLNA - 20/347 - 415 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary from Murunkan, 14 March 1859.

150. SLNA - 20/295 - 280 - No. 86 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 4 April 1859; see enclosures - Letters from Chairman, Planter's Association, R. B. Tytler, to Colonial Secretary, 11 March 1859, and the newspaper referred to was the Colombo Colombo Observer.

151. *ibid.*

were reliable.¹⁵² The Government Agent was also required by the Colonial Secretary to supply henceforth quarterly returns of arrivals and departures of immigrants from ports in the Northern province.¹⁵³

The Government Agent answered that it was easy to obtain accurate returns of arrivals as labourers landed in Mannar, Talaimannar or Pesalai from May to September;¹⁵⁴ but when they departed, between November and April, they also left from the Southern Coast from places where no records were maintained. This was because of the movement of vessels according to the prevailing direction of winds. Hence returns of departures were defective¹⁵⁵ and to obtain more accurate returns of arrivals and departures hereafter an ordinance enacted in 1860 prohibited shipment of passengers from any port or place except from those notified in the Government Gazette.¹⁵⁶ The Government Agent was asked to cooperate with the Customs department in enforcing this rule.

Meanwhile, although expenditure on medical facilities was being increased—£200 or more for the hospitals for immigrants at Anuradhapura and Mannar were required in September 1859¹⁵⁷—the ravages of cholera waxed unabated. In 1860 there were complaints of deaths among labourers in the estates in Matale and Rangalla districts owing to cholera introduced by immigrants entering *via* the North road; "... all the men seem determined to come by the North road this year, and I believe that several gangs of our coolies have turned back being afraid to come from fear of Cholera which is destroying the men coming by that route" complained Andrew Nicol, a planter.¹⁵⁸ "If few hundreds of the many thousands spent by the immigration Labour Commissioners had been applied to the amelioration of the route thousands of additional coolies would have arrived and many human lives spared", he added¹⁵⁹ Nicol wrote to the Governor suggesting that shelter should be kept clean and wells pure. Efforts of the earlier years to improve sanitary conditions had not proved so successful, but it was equally evident that none had a clear notion of the infectious and fatal nature of cholera in these years.

Such forceful representations from planters naturally diverted the attention of administrators towards further improving medical and sanitary facilities. Out of £1,000 sanctioned for expenditure on immigration in 1859-60, the

152. *ibid.*

153. *ibid.*

154. SLNA - 20/1147 - 416 - No. 167 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 11 July 1859.

155. *ibid.*

156. SLNA - 20/891 - 294 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, Circular of 16 October 1860.

157. SLNA - 20/1147 - No. 240 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 14 September 1859

158. SLNA - 20/891 - 284 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 1 August 1860; also see enclosure from A. Nicol to Colonial Secretary, 28 July 1860.

159. *ibid.* see enclosure, letter of Andrew Nicol to Colonial Secretary 28 July 1860 - see postscript.

Government Agent recommended that a part could be spent on the employment of two men who had received medical education from the American Mission¹⁶⁰ to attend on sick labourers along the Northern road. In December 1861 additional funds were again spent for management of the hospital for immigrants.¹⁶¹

But only in September 1862, did the Principal Civil Medical Officer really moot a scheme to cater to the needs of sick labourers. He consented to exercise a control over medical officers stationed along the road between Mannar and Kandy; the superintendence of all matters relating to the health of the immigrants also came under his supervision.¹⁶² Thus matters connected with sick immigrants were exclusively assigned to the Principal Civil Medical Officer, but other matters, relating to labourers, continued to be under the charge of the Government Agent and his assistants.¹⁶³ The Principal Civil Medical Officer was hereafter entrusted with a general control over medical officers and exercised general superintendence over matters related to the health of immigrant labour on the roads.

The Government Agent, however, objected to this arrangement stating that the assistant agents were performing these functions and that any system implying a division of authority between medical officers and assistant agents might not function harmoniously. Nevertheless the scheme was introduced.

Meanwhile, cholera among arrivals continued to be constant and common. In April 1862 immigrants at Pesalai and along the central road and in Nuwarakalaviya¹⁶⁴ were afflicted. In September again cholera raged among itinerant labourers on the central road and in the Vanni pattus of Mannar. The helpless Government Agent exclaimed: "The extent to which this district of country suffers from this disease, as introduced into it by the immigrant coolies has often been noticed by me to Government".¹⁶⁵ But this cry was

160. SLNA - 20/285 - 419 - No. 133 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 31 July 1861.

161. SLNA - 20/285 - 419 - No. 210 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 3 December 1861.

162. SLNA - 20/1435 - 287 - No. 248 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 22 September 1862; also see enclosure, a copy of the Principal Civil Medical Officer's scheme.

163. SLNA - 20/1454 - No. 349 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 14 October 1862; also see Colonial Secretary's Nos. 248 and 264 of 22 September 1862 and 3 October 1862; and No. 378, 6 November 1862 to Government Agent.

164. SLNA - 20/1454 - 421 - No. 115 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 19 April 1862; also see SLNA - 20/1454 - 421 - No. 417 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 27 November 1862.

165. SLNA - 20/1454 - 421 - No. 312 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 23 September 1862.

futile. The labourers were needed at whatever cost, and in 1864 cholera was introduced again by the immigrants.¹⁶⁶

Under such circumstances, administrators in the North could only continue with newer measures hopefully expecting to combat this regular pestilence. Plans were even undertaken for providing an establishment of men and boats for attending to the sick on board immigrant vessels before they could land. Twynam, assistant agent, Mannar, had explained the benefits of such a preventive scheme at Pesalai¹⁶⁷ to the Governor.

Although the Governor was convinced of the merits of Twynam's scheme the sub-committee on the supply ordinance of 1863 was sceptical.¹⁶⁸ It was suspected that the money for providing attendants to care for the sick on board the immigration vessels "may possibly be perverted from the purpose for which it was granted".¹⁶⁹ This imputation irritated the assistant agent and he asserted that it was morally impossible that there could be any irregularity in the hiring and payment of attendants. The Government Agent wanted both him and his assistant to be defended against such an allegation¹⁷⁰ and to strengthen his case he forwarded a letter to the Governor from his assistant at Mannar describing the manner in which sick immigrants on board vessels had been treated.¹⁷¹

The unremitting efforts of Dyke and his assistant at Mannar and Anuradhapura were still insufficiently rewarding. More disease affected not only incoming labourers but even those outgoing, and on the Indian side they were left utterly helpless. Therefore, the Planters' Association at Kandy drew the attention of the Ceylon Government to the reports of conditions in which labourers often landed on the Indian coast.¹⁷² During the outbreak of epidemics,

166. SLNA - 20/786 - 428 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 5 October 1864, (no number written while on circuit); also see enclosures No. 56 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 14 February 1861 in reply to Colonial Secretary's No. 206, 13 August 1863; Government Agent's Nos. 43; 123; 85; of 20 January 1851, 13 May 1851, 23 April 1852 also of 1 May 1852 and Colonial Secretary's replies Nos. 96 31 May 1851; also of 24, May 1862 - this last despatch gives all details of sickness reported and measures planned to combat it.

167. SLNA - 20/1454 - 421 - No. 322 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 25 September 1862.

168. SLNA - 20/1703 - 423 - No. 436 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 15 December 1862.

169. *ibid.*

170. *ibid.* Dyke emphasised that the need for such an arrangement had been demonstrated by Twynam and was necessary in terms of Clause 49 of Ordinance 15 of 1858 - this ordinance was enacted by Governor Henry Ward, (1855-1860), for the management and control of vessels, since vessels had occasionally capsized earlier - see Ward, H. G. *op. cit.* quoted in Balasingham, S. V., *op. cit.*, p. 52.

171. SLNA - 20/1703 - 423 - No. 446 Government Agent to Colonial Secretary, 25 December 1862 and letter of assistant government agent, Mannar, 28 April 1866.

172. SLNA - 20/293 - No. 93 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent, 28 April 1866.

which were usual, labourers proceeding from Ceylon to their villages fell a prey to disease while crossing the Pamban Channel. They arrived on the Indian Coast with no prospect of obtaining medical assistance and were usually left to die uncared and unprovided for.¹⁷³

Having coaxed the Government to do as much as it could in Ceylon, the planters urged it to attend to the needs of the sick labourers on their journey homeward through India. Such relief was called for on grounds of humanity alone, "but when it is considered to what extent the colony is indebted to the Tamil Cooly",¹⁷⁴ the Government should accede to their requests, they emphasised. The Government alone could provide remedial measures to combat such a situation argued the planters who wanted the government to bear the responsibility for implementing their suggestions although they were mostly and ultimately in their interests. The Chairman of the Planters' Association made this obvious when he stated "... but presuming that it would cost double the aggregate amount, it will bear no proportion to the benefit that the Colony would derive by relieving the wants of those passing to and fro between this and India and thereby offering an encouragement to others to come over".¹⁷⁵ The Planters required an unfailing supply of labour, and the State had to provide all facilities to get it.

This representation in 1866 from the Planters' Association at Kandy, was referred to Government Agent Dyke. The Association had wanted hospitals and staff to be furnished on the Indian side of the Pamban Channel for the use of immigrant labourers. The Colonial Secretary asked Dyke to report on the necessity, feasibility and the cost of such a scheme. The immigration of labour may be diverted to Colombo by steam vessels on the completion of the railway to Kandy and the proposal had hence to be considered in the context of that probability, advised the Governor.¹⁷⁶

The diseases to which immigrant labourers regularly fell a prey and their distressing conditions had by now received so much publicity, and pressures from many quarters for an amelioration of their lot were applied at all levels. Hence, in 1866, even the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London was provoked to call for periodical reports on the actual condition of the Indian labourers.¹⁷⁷ The Governor required from the Government Agent half yearly comprehensive reports¹⁷⁸ with particulars such as the number of immigrants in

173. *ibid.* see enclosure letter from Chairman, Planters' Association, Kandy, to Colonial Secretary, 12 April 1866; and copy of Associations' Resolution of 17 February 1866.

174. *ibid.*

175. *ibid.*

176. *ibid.*

177. SLNA - 20/989 - 293 Colonial Secretary to Government Agent - Circular of 21 May 1866.

178. *ibid.*

the province, births and deaths among labourers, their wages, days of work, provisions for education, their general conditions of health and other details such as medical facilities available.

However, sadly, in spite of the efforts taken by the Ceylon government, although useful changes were effected and beneficial measures were introduced,¹⁷⁹ the plight of the immigrant labourers continued to be poor even in the years after. Most of the concern for the immigrants came as a result of planter pressure and because of the economic importance of South Indian immigrant labour to Ceylon and her plantations at this time. Even the initial and occasional hesitation arising out of the *laissez faire* concepts of these years in the 19th century was overcome owing to pressure from British commercial and mercantile interests ; and the colonial government of Ceylon endeavoured hard to soften the hardship of the immigrant labourer on his journey mainly to ensure a steady supply of cheap labour for the coffee plantations in central highland Ceylon. Despite the desire not to intervene because of the attitude of the administration, influenced by *laissez faire* beliefs, the government of Ceylon did, although not too successfully, interfere to make things better for the Indian immigrant labourers but more to make things easier for the British planting interests.

179. Ievers, R. W., *op. cit.* pp. 14, 104-105, for details of the improved facilities furnished.