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TRAUMA OF TAMIL LABOURERS DURING BRITISH COLONISATION IN
MALAYA AS REFLECTED IN MALAYSIAN
TAMIL FOLK SONGS

LOGESWARY A/P ARUMUGUM



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ABSTRACT

This study was aimed to discover the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs, to analyse the trauma and to evaluate the impacts of the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Qualitative approaches with historical, descriptive and explanatory designs were used for this study. A total of 146 Malaysian Tamil folk songs that met the research objectives were analysed. Historical trauma theory and thematic analysis were used to collect information from the folk songs. Data were analysed using narrative and discourse analysis. Narrative analysis describes the content of the folk songs while discourse analysis explains the usage of terms and words used in the folk songs that can be related to the emotions and trauma. The findings showed that physical abuse, economic destruction and segregation were the significant traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation. The result also showed that physical, social and psychological impacts affected the Tamil labourers significantly. As a conclusion, Malaysian Tamil folk songs exposed the suffering, frustration and the shattered hopes of the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation. The study implicates that the Malaysian Tamil folk songs serve as a historical documentation of the Tamil labourers in Malaya during the British colonisation.





TRAUMA BURUH TAMIL SEMASA PENJAJAHAN BRITISH DI MALAYA SEPERTI YANG DICERMINKAN DALAM LAGU SASTERA RAKYAT TAMIL MALAYSIA

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini bertujuan meneroka sejarah latar belakang lagu-lagu rakyat Tamil Malaysia, menganalisis trauma dan menilai kesan trauma yang dialami oleh buruh Tamil pada zaman penjajahan British di Malaya seperti yang digambarkan dalam lagu-lagu rakyat Tamil Malaysia. Kaedah kualitatif dengan reka bentuk sejarah, deskriptif dan penjelasan telah digunakan dalam kajian ini. Sebanyak 146 buah lagu rakyat Tamil Malaysia yang menepati objektif kajian telah dianalisis. Teori trauma sejarah dan analisis tematik telah digunakan untuk mengumpul maklumat daripada lagu-lagu rakyat tersebut. Data dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis naratif dan wacana. Analisis naratif menjelaskan intipati lagu rakyat, manakala analisis wacana menerangkan penggunaan istilah-istilah dan frasa-frasa tertentu yang dapat dikaitkan dengan trauma. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa trauma yang terdiri daripada penderaan fizikal, kemusnahan ekonomi dan pengasingan merupakan trauma yang ketara dialami oleh golongan buruh Tamil semasa penjajahan British. Dapatan kajian juga menunjukkan bahawa kesan fizikal, sosial dan psikologi telah meninggalkan impak yang ketara terhadap golongan buruh Tamil. Kesimpulan daripada kajian menunjukkan bahawa lagu-lagu rakyat Tamil Malaysia telah mendedahkan penderitaan, kekecewaan dan harapan golongan buruh Tamil yang sudah berkecai semasa penjajahan British. Implikasi kajian menunjukkan bahawa lagu-lagu rakyat Tamil di Malaysia berperanan sebagai dokumentasi sejarah golongan buruh Tamil di Malaya semasa penjajahan British.



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This transliteration system is being used in **Tamil lexicon**.

Tamil Phonetics

Vowels

a	:	அ	e	:	எ
ā	:	ஆ	ē	:	ஏ
i	:	இ	ai	:	ஐ
ī	:	ஈ	o	:	ஓ
u	:	உ	ō	:	ஔ
ū	:	ஊ	au	:	ஔ

Consonants

k	:	க	m	:	ம்
ñ	:	ங	y	:	ய்
c	:	ச	r	:	ர்
ñ	:	ஞ	l	:	ல்
ṭ	:	ட்	v	:	வ்
ṇ	:	ண்	l	:	ழ்
t	:	த்	l	:	ள்
n	:	ந்	r	:	ற்
p	:	ப்	ṇ	:	ன்

Aytam

k ஃ

OTHER LETTERS

j	:	ஜ்	s	:	ஸ்
ṣ	:	ஷ்	kṣ	:	க்ஷ்
h	:	ஹ்			

Source: Institute of Graduate Studies, UPSI. Received on 28 APR 2015.



**NOTE:**

1. The above transliteration is used to spell titles of Tamil works and the Tamil folk songs for want of appropriate English equivalents.
2. In the case of author's names, the spelling used by these persons or spelling in common use is adopted.
3. In the case of character's names, the popular spelling adopted in English is given, for example Thandayutham, Muniammal, Veerayi, Kaatayi, etc.
4. Non-Tamil words are written as they would appear in their original language, for examples from English, railway station, depot, road etc.

A note on language: I have used the usual diacritical marks in transliterating Tamil sources. However, for names (of people, places, and rituals) that are widely known and frequently transcribed into English, I have used their more familiar forms (e.g., Nagapattinam rather than Na_kapat_t_ in_am; Ramasamy rather than Ra_maca_mi)





CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction



The term folklore is the combination of the words ‘folk’ and ‘lore’. Whereas ‘folk’ is people in general (ordinary working class); ‘lore’ is the stories and traditions of a particular group of people (Oxford, 2016). Folklore in the most recent western European scholarship refers to the village, buildings, farmsteads, plants, superstitions, language, legends, folktales and folk songs (Propp, 1984, p.4). The same subject has been discussed in different sources (Brunvand, 1998, p.5-6; Dorson, 1972, p.2; Dundes, 1965a, p.1-3) with detailed specializations along with its elements such as rituals, weddings, holidays, proverbs and so on. Combining the definition from the Western European Scholarship and the definition discussed in the books, the study views folklore as a fusion of verbal, material and traditional elements.





Folklore embraces the art of all people of upper class and the oppressed class. Feintuch (1976) has a coinciding view on this by arguing folklore is not restricted to a particular stratum of society, but rather represents traditional processes. Traditional processes in folklore disclose the characteristics of a community through verbal art. Haviland & Prins (2010) agrees to this by explaining that traditional processes carry the realities of human life (p. 613). The realities of human life in folklore can be scrutinized from folk literature and folk arts or beliefs.

Folk literature composed of folk songs, folk tales, ballads, proverbs, riddles and myths. Folk arts and beliefs encompass arts, crafts, practices, customs, religion, medicine and games (Sakthivel, 1996, pg. 16). In reference to what have been said previously, the study concludes that folklore is the tradition and story of a country or community expressed in different ways and means such as songs, dance, drama, beliefs, etc. Since folklore reflects the overall culture of the people in broader way and is considered vast, this research will shed light on only with reference to folk songs, i.e, a form of folk literature.

Folk song plays an important role in depicting the life experiences of human being. As pointed out by Kenny (1991) "...the oral tradition reaches down to our day...The oral is pure and true. It is not for the eye; it must be seen with the ear, heard in the heart, felt in the spirit" (p.5). Hence, listening to folk songs helps us know and comprehend the very human emotions. Besides expressing the emotion, folk songs also encapsulate the flow of life thereby providing information on history of a community. The function of folk songs as historical source has been authenticated by





Vincent (2007) whom stated folk songs stand as evidence just as the “stone carvings, brass plates and written literature” (p.22).

Thus, this research focused on how Malaysian Tamil folk songs serve as historical documentation of the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya. It also sheds light on the trauma faced by the Tamil labourers as reflected in the folk songs. They used the folk songs to express the grief, frustration and the pain. For this reason, folk songs are considered an apt source to introduce the historical trauma of Malaysian Tamil labourers during the British colonisation.

1.2 Research Background



Folk literature, being a traditional creation conveys the history, social and cultural essence of the people (as explained earlier in the introduction). This portrays the relationship that exists between these elements and folk literature. Sakthivel (1996) has asserted the relationship by stating that folklore intertwines with other disciplines of study (p.20). There are

1. Folklore and history
2. Folklore and sociology
3. Folklore and anthropology
4. Folklore and psychology
5. Folklore and philosophy
6. Folklore and linguistics





The intertwining relationship can also be related to the study of folk literature. Since the current study focuses on Tamil labourer's history, hence the relationship between folk literature and history is highlighted.

1.2.1 Folk Literature and History

As a historical source, folk literature interprets the life of the human and their experiences and therefore acts as a compilation of human knowledge. It preserves the knowledge by keeping alive the memory it conceals. This affirms the study of Dorson (1972) who affirmed the significance of folk literature in helping to reconstruct the history (p.13). Similarly, in the context of this research folk songs are proposed to serve as historical evidence. This is possible when the folk songs are documented.

The following section elucidates the process of documentation which enables the analysis of folk songs.

1.2.1.1 The Documentation of The Folk Songs

Folk songs may take the form of eye-witness evidence about the past and show degree of continuity by linking the present with the past using the oral transmission. Since the oral transmission contains evidence, folk song is also said to serve as an oral testimony (Vansina, 1985, p.3-12). Oral testimony has a significant place in oral history. Lourdu (2000) claims that, oral testimony only function as a piece of historical evidence once they are documented (p.77). He also cited the work of John



Vansina, who has delineated the process on how an oral testimony transmitted to a written form and attains the form of documentation. For the current research the same process has been equated with folk songs.

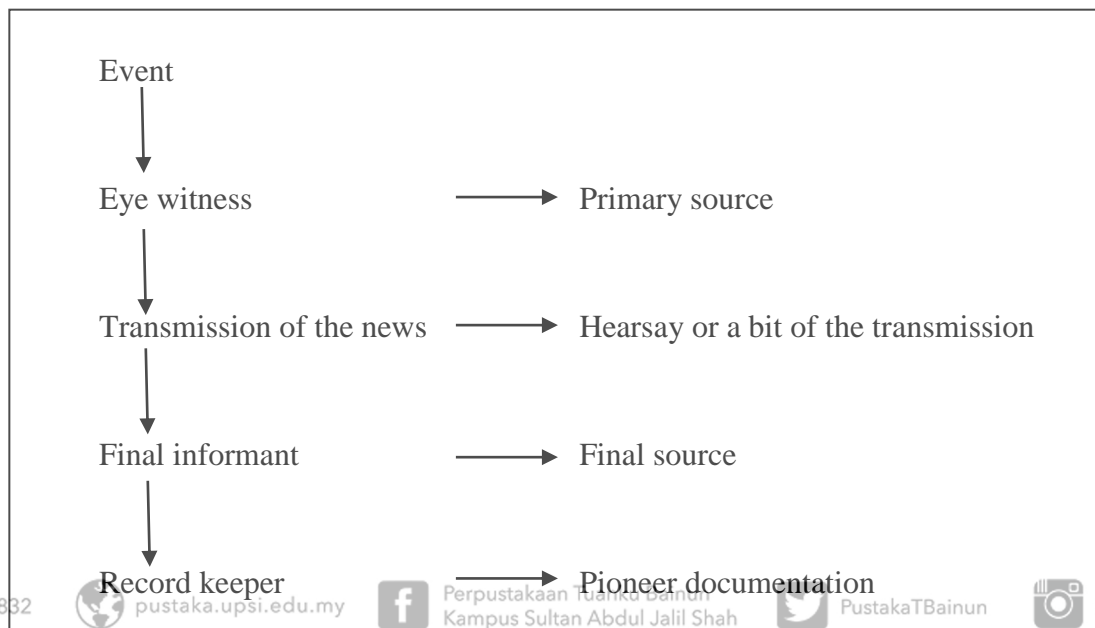


Figure 1.1. The transmission of folk songs to documentation

1.2.1.2 The Transmission of Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs To Documentation

The following section shed light on the documentation of Malaysian Tamil folk songs in three compilations by Murasu Nedumaran, Thandayutham and Mutthammal Palanisamy.



I Murasu Nedumaran

Earlier, no effort has been made to perpetuate the documentation of Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Little care was given by the poet K.Perumal (1929-1979) and the writer S.Kamalanathan (1932-1992) (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p.12). They have published few folk songs in magazines and gave speeches on it. However, the condition does not last long as the first initiative to document the folk songs was taken by Murasu Nedumaran. He had successfully documented 18 folk songs, explained the essence of the songs and named the source for the songs in his book entitled ‘Malēciyat Tamil Kavitaik Kaḷañciyam’.

II Thandayutham



Thandayutham made the pioneer attempt of collecting the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. His appreciable contribution was financed under the grant of University Malaya. In 1980s, Thandayutham during his four years of university life had spent the weekends and semester breaks with his friends by exploring each plantation in search of the Tamil people who sing folk songs. He sound recorded his collections with the help of his friends and successfully collected ample folk songs. Since the older generation no longer alive he was unable to retrieve some of the songs fully. Some songs were partially written as the source could not transmit it fully due to the lapse of memory.

The folk songs collection by Thandayutham constituted verbal and written forms and they were not categorized. Thandayutham planned to share his fieldwork





experience of collecting the folk songs, the names of the source and transmit it into a stable written form. Sadly, just before executing his plans Thandayutham passed away. Murasu Nedumaran (1997), has notified in a statement by hoping that the Thandayutham's folk song collections will be able to convey detailed historical events in the lives of Tamils and thus it should be documented (p.150). After the death of Thandayutham, his wife Latha Thandayutham and friends took over the initiative and documented them in the form of a book entitled 'Malēciya nāṭṭuppuṟap pāṭalkaḷ' in 1998. It was the magnum opus for the late Thandayutham. Murasu Nedumaran also contributed by writing the glossary for the folk songs.

The book consists of eighteen subtopics which were categorized based on meaning of the folk songs and its structural form. They are namely plantations and labourer, Englishmen, war, labourer, kangany, love, lullaby, lament, miscellaneous, society, labourer songs, gods, Gandhi/ India/ independence/ Netaji, Gandhi's dream/ Tamilnadu political philosophy, relations, others, riddles and Kūṭṭāñcōṟu (vegetable rice). The categorizations were made upon the content of the songs.

III Mutthammal Palanisamy

Next documentation effort was continued by Mutthammal Palanisamy in her book entitled "nāṭṭuppuṟap pāṭalkaḷil en payaṇam" which was published in the year 2006. Her compilation comprises her experience in collecting the folk songs. Most of her song collections were transmission from Kongu Vellalar community. It is a community from Gounder caste that lives in western region of Tamilnadu and known as Kongu Nadu. Mutthammal has even included some of her own compositions. For





the purpose of this research, her compositions were excluded since they cannot be defined as folk songs. She has written her experience of collecting the folk songs in narrative form. They are more than ten songs which reflected the lives of the Tamil labours.

Most of the folk songs documentation will have information regarding the song such as the name of the place it is obtained from, name of the source, age and the social background of the source. But, Mutthammal compilation is beyond this. In her book Mutthammal, managed to unleash the background of each folk songs collection from the live experiences of her relatives. The compilation itself is from her lively moments. Some songs are engaged in her childhood memory.



The documented folk songs are noteworthy when analysing the lives of the people from the lower status. In accordance with this discussion, the following section focused on the documented Malaysian Tamil folk songs to analyse the lives of the Tamil labourers.

1.2.1.3 Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

The advent of Malaysian Tamil literature is rooted upon Malaysian Tamil folk songs (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p.ii). Few scholars namely Murasu Nedumaran, Thandayutham and Mutthammal Palanisamy had documented the folk songs in Malaysia. The essence of the documented folk songs expressed loss, gain and hopes





of the Tamils. Most of the songs reflect the trauma experienced during the subjugation. This has been represented in the following verses.

āṅkilēyarkaḷum nammai
whitemen us
kūṭṭil aṭaittu vaittu
cage confined put
kotumaikal ceykinrārē...
cruelty doing

(Thandayutham, āṅkilēyar koṭumai, p. 7)

“...like herds of goat and cow
White men inhumanly
confined us in a cage...”

curukkā varalānnu ayyā aṭiccārē!
quick did not come sir whacked
Anta kampu etutulē aṭiccāru
that stick take whacked
ayyayō ammā! Appā! aṭukkumā
Yārukuttān paṭil colvēn turaimārē
to whom answer tell dorai

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyin vākkumūlam, p. 23)

“...beaten for the late coming
Kankani (supervisor) armed a stick to beat us
Owh dear mother! Father the pain is unbearable
To whom shall I answer dear superior”

These verses function as a medium to voice out the brutality and violence subjected on Tamil labourers during the colonisation. Representations of the colonisation clearly have been depicted in the folk songs. According to Murasu Nedumaran in his preface for ‘Malēciya nāṭṭuppuṇṇa pāṭalkal’ book, he mentioned that folk songs reflect the reality of folk people (Thandayutham, 1998, p. i). That is the reason folk songs are considered a good source in documenting the historical trauma impacts. Thus, analysis on the folk songs will facilitate us to have a further





understanding and feel the suffering of the Tamil labourers that has been uttered in their very own words.

1.2.2 The British Colonisation

The modern history of Tamils in Malaysia begins with their immigration to Malaya at the end of 18th century. Murasu Nedumaran (2007) has outlined this period of immigration as between end of 18th and 19th century (p.14). The immigration became a significant feature following the consolidation of British power in Malaya. It begins to intensify in the succeeding years. Manickam (2012) reasoned the intensification by outlining that, political and economical changes in South India caused the later migration to be on a large scale (p.7). The modern migrants were chiefly uneducated labourers (Sandhu, 2010, p.31).

The migration to Malaya which was meant for better life started to take a toll on Tamil labourers as they felt wretched, dispirited and toiled during the British colonisation. This has been clearly proven in the study of Stenson (1980) whom pointed to Tamils as “sucked oranges” under the British colonisation (p.21). The hardships faced by the labourers were clearly depicted in Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Hence, the research sheds light on the historical trauma of the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. The analysis enables us to visualize each and every traumatic moment of Tamil labourers.





1.3 Problem Statement

It is quite difficult for anyone to comprehend the Tamil labourers in Malaya. This is due to the scarcity of literature on their daily struggles (from their own perspective) while in Malaya (Manickam, 2012, p.67). In the context of Malaysian Tamil literature, researches focusing on the anthropological studies of Malaysian Tamil labourers have been conducted. Most of these researchers have analysed the novels, short stories and poems to collect the data and information regarding Malaysian Tamils. However, there are very few studies that analysed their internal experiences. The previous researches had explored into details about their exterior environment while their internal conflicts and emotional upheavals remain hidden. This makes the efforts to understand them much more complex. So, in order to comprehend the internal conflicts and emotions of the Tamils, Malaysian Tamil Folk songs will be analysed. The finding will resemble the reality of the life from the labourer's own experience, perspective and helps to document the historical facts.

1.4 Objective

This research has three objectives as follows:

1. To discover the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.
2. To analyse the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.
3. To evaluate the impacts of the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil





folk songs.

1.5 Research Questions

This research has three research questions as follows:

1. What is the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk song?
2. What are the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs?
3. How did the trauma impact the lives of the Tamil labourers as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs?



1.6 Importance of Research

The study was chosen because folk songs enable the researcher to comprehend the internal conflicts experienced and expressed by the Tamil labourers in their very own words. Moreover, this research will be documenting the unwritten historical heritage found in the folk songs. The research serves to prove that Malaysian Tamil folk songs help in reconstructing the history of the Tamil labour community in Malaysia.

The study was chosen based on the literature review collected. So far there are only three books that have documented the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Furthermore, there are less historical approach studies that analysed the traumatic experiences as reflected in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs. So, these reasons strengthened the purpose





of doing this research. Since no research with traumatic scope in Malaysian Tamil folk song has been conducted yet, this research would be a first stepping stone and can be used as a review for future research. The research also benefits the modern Tamil society and the readers on knowing and understanding the hardships faced by the Tamil labourers during the colonisation period. It will contribute to the existing body of knowledge in Tamils diaspora studies.

1.7 Research Limitations

The research studies Malaysian Tamil folk songs. The songs are known as Malaysian Tamil folk songs since they documented the essence of Malaysia (known as Malaya before the independence). They are altogether 531 documented Malaysian Tamil folk songs. For the purpose of this research, only 146 folk songs were analysed. The folk songs were mainly subjected from the year of immigration (1887) until the year 1940 as a majority of the colonisation themes revolves around this period. These songs encapsulate the trauma and its impact on Tamil labourers during the colonisation period. It also discloses the aftermath effect of the colonisation. Only the verses that elucidate the traumas and its impact during the British colonisation among the Tamil labourers were given as evidence to answer the objectives. As the research implements thematic analysis, these verses serve as themes and codes. They provide more insight leading to the trauma identified in the song as experienced by the Tamil labourers.





The research focuses on South Indians who immigrated to Malaya when the plantation economy emerged. Throughout the text, Malaysia is denoted by the term 'Malaya' or 'British Malaya' as it was called before the independence (Sandhu, 2010:1 ff). Tamil labourers were used as the subject of this research as the majority of the immigrants were South Indian Tamils. Tamils made up of 85.2% in the composition of labourer immigration into Malaya from 1844 to 1941 (Sandhu, 2010, p.43). They came to work in rubber plantations; the place that confined the Tamil labour community. The life of Tamil labourers was full of struggles during the British colonisation and Japanese occupation in Malaya. The British was in Malaya from 1786 to 1941, when the Japanese invaded and took over until 1945. The British then returned to continue its rule over Malaya until 1957, when the country gained independence. For the purpose of this research, only the British colonisation during the migration period from 1887-1940 was studied.



1.8 Sources

This research used primary and secondary sources. Primary sources included documented Malaysian Tamil folk songs. In the context of this research, three books containing Malaysian Tamil folk songs entitled 'Malaysia Tamil Kavitaik Kalanciyam' by Murasu Nedumaran, 'Malaysia Tamil nāṭṭupuraṇ pāṭalkaḷ' by R.Thandayutham and 'Malaysia nāṭṭupuraṇ pāṭalkaḷil en payaṇam' by Muthammal Palanisamy, three folk songs documented in a study and three folk songs documented in the current research were used to collect the information needed. Only 146 from





531 folk songs were chosen for the study. Songs documented in Thandayutham's book formed the major source for the current research.

The table below shows the total Malaysian folk songs that have been documented and the total folk songs used for the purpose of this research.

Table 1.1

Total Documented and Analysed Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Source	Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs	
	Documented	Analysed
Malaysia Tamil nāṭṭupurap pāṭalkal	497	121
Malaysia Tamil Kavitaik Kaḷañciyam	18	12
Malaysia nāṭṭupurap pāṭalkal en payaṇam	10	7
Transnational collaboration and media industry in South India- Case of the Malaysian -Indian diaspora	3	3
Folk song collected by the researcher	3	3

Secondary sources consisted of interview, dissertations, thesis, books, journals, articles, and magazines which studied the historical trauma, background of Tamils and the folk songs. The researcher had interviewed Murasu Nedumaran, a well-known Tamil scholar who has written a number of articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs to collect information. These secondary sources were used for extra information and as evidence to strengthen the analysis of the research. This ensures the validity of the research.





1.9 Instructional Definition

The title of the current research is “Trauma of Tamil labourers during British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in Malaysian Tamil folk songs”. The following are the meaning of the key terms used in the research.

1.9.1 Trauma

Trauma is defined as distressing experience. According to Briere and Scott (2006), trauma is defined as major events that are psychologically overwhelming for an individual (p.3). Below is the statement quoted by a psychological association that

clarified the distressing events as ‘extreme traumatic stressor’ and provided examples of the traumas as,

....events that includes military combat, violent personal assault (sexual assault, physical assault, robbery, mugging), being kidnapped, being taken hostage, terrorist attack, torture, incarceration as a prisoner of war or in a concentration camp, natural or manmade disasters, severe automobile accidents, or being diagnosed with a life threatening illness (American Psychiatric Association, 2005, p. 463).

Based on the examples, it can be derived that physical, emotional and sexual abuses are traumatic events and they can be caused by natural disasters as well (except sexual abuse). Figley (as cited in Atkinson, 2010) defined trauma as an emotional





state of discomfort and stress from memories of an extraordinarily dreadful experience which shattered the survivor's sense of invulnerability to harm (p. 135).

Combining all three definitions, trauma in the context of this research is defined as, overwhelming psychological traumatic event involving subjugation that caused violent personal assault on Tamil labourers during the British colonisation.

1.9.2 Tamil Labourers

In this study the term "Tamil labourers" is used to refer to the majority of South Indian labourers who emigrated. Tamils are Dravidian ethnic group whose mother tongue is Tamil. Subramanian (1996) and Minahan (2002) have pointed that Tamils with a population of about 77 million living around the world are one of the largest and oldest of the existing ethno-linguistic cultural groups of people in the modern world to exist without a state of their own (p. 151, p. 1835). South India and Sri Lanka have been homelands of the Tamils, from the beginning of recorded history (Velupillai, n.d., ¶ 2). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Tamils migrated to some British colonies in search of employment and thus there are substantial Tamil populations in Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius, Fiji and South Africa.

Tamils in the scope of this research refers to the labourers who were immigrants and brought by the British for developing Malaya. The bulk of migrants brought under the dreaded Colonial indentured system succinctly encapsulated in the Colonial administrator Sir Thomas Hyslop's famous phrase "We want Indians as





indentured labourers not free men" (as cited in Ramachandran, n.d., *The Malaysian Indian In The New Millennium*, ¶ 1). The following excerpt signifies the contribution of the Tamil labourers,

Without the roads, railways, bridges and the rubber plantations, Malaya won't amount too much. It will be nothing only a collection of fishing villages. It is our people who opened up and developed Singapore and Malaya with their sweat, blood, and tears, and very often with their lives. Don't misunderstand me, thambi. When I say our people I mean Tamils. Not the other Indians. The Sikhs came here as policemen, soldiers and *jagas*. The other collection of northerners came here as traders. These people especially traders and businessmen did not sacrifice their sweat and blood for this country. Our



people did (Manickam, 2012, p.49).

Hence, Tamil labourers who contributed to the development of Malaya have been chosen as the focus of the study. The study analysed the folk songs of Tamil labourers to comprehend and document the sufferings as it can be equally valuable source of reconstructing and reinterpreting the past of Tamil labourers.

1.9.3 British Colonisation

Colonisation refers to the act of creating colony in a place. It is also known as subjugation. Subjugation requires domination of an area and sending people to live there (Gandhi, 1998, p.35). The study uses the term colonialism to describe the





process of European settlement and political control over the rest of the world, including the Americas, Australia, and parts of Africa and Asia (Marx, 1972, p.34). The current research analyses the British colonisation in Malaya. British colonisation in the context of this research directs to the ruling of British on Malaya during the 18th and 19th century.

The colonisation in Malaya is known as exploitation. In exploited colonies, the colonisers used force to maintain control and compress resistance. In the case of Malaya, British exploited the Tamil labourers. The advent of British colonial project became possible with the advance of transportation. It made labourers transported in large numbers across the Bay of Bengal to the host land, Malaya. Aziz (1989) supported, it was during the British colonisation that a large number of Tamil indentured labourers were brought to Malaya (p.5). Kohn (2012) asserted that the transportation maintained the political sovereignty (definition and outline, ¶ 1).

1.9.4 Folk Songs

Folk song is a type of folk genre. Scholars had given a wide range of definitions to folk songs. It is said to be an oral literature disseminated from mouth to mouth in the form of poem (Murasu Nedumaran, 2007, p.15). According to Alagappan (2009), folk song is defined as the expression of emotions in the form of songs (p.15). He added that these songs function as mind reflector and flooded with emotions. It also helps to penetrate and lighten the dark side of these people. The same definition is recognized by the folk song society which claims that folk song as a song and melody born of the





people and used by them as an expression of their emotions, and (as in the case of historical ballads) for lyrical narrative (Clark,1972,p.11). Being a verbal art, folk song plays an important role in conveying history and culture of a particular society. In the context of this research the folk song is defined as the creation of the Tamil labourers who used songs as a medium to express their grief and despair.

1.10 Summary

This chapter deals with the introduction, background, problem statement, objective, research questions, importance, limitations, sources, and instructional definition of the study. This study focused on the analysis of folk songs based on historical trauma for proper understanding of the Tamil labourer community during the British colonisation.





CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction



This chapter discusses studies and sources that are relevant to the current research. It consists of dissertations, thesis, books, journal articles and proceedings. The literature reviews were selectively chosen to serve its purpose according to the research. The reviews added strength and support to the current research.

2.2 Literature Reviews

The literature review has been categorised into studies related to the trauma, British colonisation, sociological and anthropological studies of Malaysian Tamils and literature studies of folk songs. This division emphasizes on the significance for the current research to be conducted.





2.2.1 Studies on Trauma

This section provides studies that have examined various responses to trauma experienced during colonisation. The researcher had taken a grant project, two doctoral dissertations and a thesis which were found to be apt for the current research. It discusses the reflection of the traumas as captured in two case studies and two literature studies.

A research grant prepared for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation by Cynthia (2014), entitled 'Historic trauma and aboriginal healing' developed a comprehensive historical framework of Aboriginal trauma, beginning with the colonial contact in 1492 through to the 1950s. The primary focus was given to the immediate period after the contact. The study had proposed a model to depict the intergenerational transmission of historic trauma. In this model, historic trauma is seen as a cluster of traumatic events and as a disease itself. This study is broken down into five areas of impact: physical, economic, cultural, social and psychological. These areas of impact are then organized chronologically, according to the waves of colonisation: cultural transition (early period), cultural dispossession (middle period) and cultural oppression (late period). The findings revealed that indigenous people were physically, spiritually, emotionally and psychically traumatized by deep and unresolved grief. Cynthia has pointed out, historic trauma causes deep breakdowns in social functioning that may last for many years, decades and even generations. The research forms a major contribution to the current research which uses the historical trauma theory to analyse the Malaysian Tamil folk song. Information regarding the historic trauma and how it





has been proven to be affecting the colonised community was used for the current study.

The effect of trauma on mental state has been discussed in a doctoral dissertation by Sporle (2007) entitled “trauma and construction of self and others following psychotic experiences”. The study has been conducted to examine how trauma affects the development of psychosis. Psychosis is a mental condition in which thought and emotions become so impaired that it detach oneself from the external reality. The study has supported previous researches that have found people with schizophrenia or psychosis have poor self concept. The study aimed to find the relationship between trauma and self concept. So, Sporle has conducted a case study on 21 people who had experienced psychosis completed repertory grids. These grids were examined from three stages namely self at different times in one's life, self in different life events and other people. The finding of the study revealed that traumatic life events deteriorated the development of elaborate self concept. It leads to lower and created a greater conflict among oneself. The study reported that people with severe trauma experience, saw themselves as less. This study has been useful in explaining the traumas faced by the Tamils during the British colonisation as many of the folk songs reflected the unconditional being of self worthless. Due to the traumas incurred the Tamils were completely became ignorant of themselves and lost the contact with the external reality. Thus this research has been helpful to strengthen the analysis on psychological impacts faced by the Tamil labourers under British colonisation in Malaya.





Apart from the case studies, the reflection of the trauma was also examined in literature studies. This supports the function of the literature as a mirror of life. A doctoral research entitled “The representation of trauma in narrative: A study of six late twentieth century novels” has corroborated by elucidating the representations of trauma in six late 20th century novels. The study by Rogers (2004) was conducted upon an argument that claims the relationship between narrative and trauma is paradoxical. Despite of its character as witness to the trauma, the narration can also create inauthentic version of events. But the researcher had successfully chosen the novels that clearly depict the collective trauma which was explored from personal point of view or personal experience of trauma that have managed retain to the reality. The novels were the examples of narratives that best represented the trauma incurred. The novels explored the trauma content using thematic and formal level. Traumatic



events such as war, genocide, American deportation, and enslavement of African, Second World War, colonisation and exploitation were authentically represented in these narratives. The character on each novel is shown to be suffering due to these traumas. Based on these, the researcher had implied the efficiency of narratives in representing the trauma reality. He had drawn two benefits from it. Firstly, the traumatic experiences of the victims are articulated in a chronological manner. Secondly, it also bears witness to the later generations. This particular finding is fundamental in supporting the current research that is narratives, i.e: in this case folk songs can best represent the traumatic events suffered by the Tamils. The truth are spoken and flown into lyrics from their very own experiences which strengthen the analysis of the current research. The significance of Malaysian Tamil folk song as historical representation of Tamil labour community has been supported with this research.





Besides, a master thesis conducted by Bubenechik (2012) entitled “Trauma Novels in Postcolonial Literatures: Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, and Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen*” depicted the traumatic condition of the colonised indigenous peoples of Africa and Canada. The theory of decolonisation and psychoanalytic thought were used to analyse the novels. These novels are the firsthand account of colonial experience under the British Empire. They reflect the resistance shown by the formerly silenced natives. The research has voiced out the perception of the colonised towards the subjugation. The researcher had managed to capsule the formation of colonial and post colonial identities, the nature and impact of colonial trauma and the possibility of resistance exhibited by the colonised. Findings revealed the portrayal of the colonisation era and the devastating experiences faced by the people. The suffering of the colonised and the effect of subjugation, oppression, and



discrimination has been pointed out. Issues such as gendered ideology, burden of femininity, distortion of identity and trauma of abuse were among the suffering discussed. The research became significant in recording the facts that were never recorded in history books. This research guided the current study in analysing the impact of colonisation. It also used to explain how gender division provoked sexual harassment. The research also helped to elaborate the form of the suffering faced by the Tamils during the British colonisation.





2.2.2 British Colonisation

Studies related to the colonisation era were aimed to find the hurdles and traumatic experiences that people under the colonisation period had gone through. So, in this section, the researcher has taken a doctoral dissertation and two books to support the current research on the British colonisation. These reviews helped to identify the policies administered in the colonies by the British government which aided the maintenance of subjugation. Besides that, it also discusses the cultural and social impacts of the colonisation.

A doctoral dissertation by Árný Aurangasri Hinriksson (2014) from University of Iceland on “Dissident voices socio cultural transformations in Sri Lankan post-independence novels in English” focused on a number of novels which revolves around the themes of socio cultural and political climate in post independence Sri Lanka. The study aimed to examine the depiction of the British colonial’s impact. The novels were selected from the period of 1948-2012. These novels were written by both Tamil and Sinhalese and they had successfully articulated the aftermath violence of British colonisation. Themes such as national identity, language, ethnicity and post-colonial education were analysed. The finding revealed the essence of the novels which criticized the colonialism that caused poverty. The fierce organisation and systems that continues to follow colonial methods and culture disrespected the colonised people. This study helps the current research on analysing the management of British colonisation and how it affected the social system of the Tamils. Tamil novels were referred particularly as it could help to explain segregation engendered by the colonisation and its effects upon the common people. This is because the British





government administered the divide and rule policy which favoured their political regiment and discriminated the poor. The same situation has been witnessed in the lives of the Tamil labourers in Malayan plantations.

Previous research pointed how a strategy could maintain a strong subjugation. Discussion on this further leads to the examination of policy implemented by the British in Malaya. The research book entitled “British Rule in Malaya” by Robert Heussler in 1983 was found to be apt to comprehend the British rule. The research begins with explanation on subjugation, the war, the occupation years and the emergency. It elaborated the leadership of British government in Malaya. The information in this research book was used to gather information regarding British colonial policies. The historical events discussed during the subjugation were also



used as supporting facts for the interpretation of the folk songs.

Another memoir book entitled “British, Japanese and Independent Malaysia: A Memoir” written by Aziz bin Zakaria on 1989 also discussed on the policies of the British. The writing was articulated based on his experiences during the service with the government. In this book, the writer successfully recalled the changing scenario from colonial administration to nation building. The changes that took place were explained thoroughly as the writer live through it all- as an administrator of the changing Malaya from the time of its domination by the British and Japanese, the aftermath of the war, the trials and troubles of the emergency period until and into the growth of Malaysia. The book contributed to the current study on understanding the early life during British colonisation.





2.2.3 Sociological and Anthropological Studies of Malaysian Tamils

The sociological and anthropological studies used in this chapter are for the purpose of finding the history and problems of the Malaysian Tamils. In this section, a dissertation, two theses, five research books and three journal articles are presented. The capitalist exploitation of the Tamil labour community has been the subject of these detailed studies.

A doctoral thesis on “Tamils in Malaysia: Problems in socio-economic development for an immigrant minority group” by Dennis. E. Supernor from Rice University on 1983 analysed the socio-economical situation of Tamil and its consequences on them. Malaysian Tamils were selected due to the scholar’s former fieldwork experience with Tamil peasant group in south India. Data was collected from different labour Tamil communities in the town and urban areas of the country. These data were further augmented by interviews with urban – based Tamil merchants, clerical and administrative employees, union officials, politicians, life insurance salesman, Tamil school teachers, government bureaucrats, and Malaysia’s single Tamil millionaire. This research applied Land Saligo method. Traditional ethological method was used to collect and analyse data. Finding of the data indicated that Tamil people face a lot of social, and economical problems from the community and the nation itself. For the purpose of this research analysis that covers plantations and plantation economies, capitalist nature of plantation economy, indentured labour, kangany system, and migration, socio-economic improvement for the migrants, estate labor line communities, alcohol, and debt were referred. The





finding on these aspects helped to elaborate and authenticate the interpretation of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

A master thesis by Spencer (2013), entitled ‘Malaya's Indian Tamil labour diaspora: Colonial subversion of their quest for agency and modernity (1945-1948)’ described how the Tamils were utilised for the development and taken advantage of over their docility and malleability by the British colonials. This study presents the events of 1945-1948 as a time when Indians resisted the perception of the colonial who consider them as inferiors and stand against the colonial power. However, their efforts were weakened by the British. This consequently ensured the maintenance of labour exploitation. Archival material from the Malaysian National Archives, The National Archives of the United Kingdom, the Labor History and Archive Study



Center at the People's History Museum in the United Kingdom, and the Hull History

Center in the United Kingdom, were analyzed to present an alternate narrative as opposed to the colonial narrative, in recognizing and attributing a modern spirit and agency amongst this formerly docile labor diaspora. This research had contributed in providing vast information regarding the historical background of Indian migration. The thesis itself kicked off with the prominent command of a British ruler that sounds “We want Indians as indentured labourers, not as free men.”. The opening has concealed the suffering awaits the Indian at the host land. The research had focused on colonialism and Indian migration, colonial attitudes on race and class, and the impacts it had on the labourers. The research has been very beneficial in terms of explaining the impacts incurred by the Tamils during the British colonisation. It also discloses events that allies with the fact tracked from the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.





The history of labourers in Malaya can be traced back to their migration. To understand this, a master thesis entitled 'Indians in Malaya, 1900-1945' by Khan (1963) was found to be helpful. The study has scrutinized the historical migration of the Indians especially the Tamils from South India, characteristics, magnitude and pattern of the migration to the host land Malaya. It also shed light on life of the Tamils in developing the country. The research had deeply analysed the reasons for the migration. It has outlined the factors such as overpopulation, famine, poverty, and starvation as the reason for the migration. The researcher had also analysed the conditions in Malaya and the alternatives taken by the British to start an economically well established land for development. It has elaborated how the Tamils were toiled for the development. Khan had also discussed the Japanese period in his study. But as the current research focuses on British colonisation, the occupation is left aside. The



researcher carefully studied the physical, social and economical aspects of the Tamils and how these elements affected during the British colonial. This research had been helpful in describing the nature of the recruitment and the life of the Tamils in the plantation system. Besides, it was also helpful in supporting the analysis for physical and psychological abuses and economic destruction faced by the Tami labourers as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

A 17 year thesis product also formed a major contribution for current research. It was documented by Janakey Raman Manickam on 2012, with the title, "The Malaysian Indian Dilemma". This research report, has traced the overall presence of Indians in Malaysia beginning from their arrival throughout colonial times to their contemporary status as a largely marginalised underclass. The research examined socio economic issues challenging the Indian community especially the Tamils and





how these problems have existed since independence. The details and analyses are compiled with data, charts and tables. Manickam had executed personal interviews, and collaborative private communications authenticate his findings. Valuable information from reliable resources such as internet, multimedia and newspaper, and other print media. This research covers the lifelong suffering, and merciless act exhibited towards the un-privilege, working class Indian immigrants in rubber and oil palm estates. This research report will be a useful reference for the current research as it gives a very enlightening overview of the history of the Tamil labourers.

Growing concern among Indians in Malaysia about problems faced by the Indian poor has resulted in the writing of an anthropological study in 1989. Jomo Kwame Sundram's *Sucked Oranges: The Indian Poor in Malaysia* was an attempt to pull together the reflections of several people who are concerned with these issues and who have discussed them. The research discusses history, migration, and socio-economic involvement and engagement of Indians in colonial Malaya during the British era. The study acknowledges that the 'estate workers' face challenges such as low income and educational attainment as well as poor living conditions and access to public amenities. For the purpose of this research, the researcher scrutinized the study on history of Indian migration and settlement in Malaya, and their role in Malaysia's development, as well as problems and challenges arising from British colonial policy. Particularly, subtopics such as Indian poverty in Malaysia, Indian labour's forgotten legacy and Indian women plantation workers assisted the current study. It helped to comprehend the situation of the labourers during the British colonisation.





The sociological examination on Tamil community has also been explored by Stenson (1980). The book is based on colonialism that scrutinizes the Indian community as its sample. It is entitled 'Class, race and colonialism in West Malaysia: The Indian case'. This has been his first study on Indian community in Malaysian history. The book has given facts and interpretation of the secondary literature with the author's own detailed reading about the colonial records, news paper accounts and other primary articles. For the purpose of this research the first chapter of this book entitled 'Indian peoples in the colonial economy 1907-1941' has been referred. In the first chapter the author has expatiated on Chinese as pioneer labour, mass migration of South Indian labour, mass recruitment of labour, exploitation of South Indian labour and the social consequences of mass labour migration. The study had elucidated that Indian labourers were brought to Malaya not due to the labour shortage but because of the shortage of cheap labours. It also pointed that the wage increment and improvement on working condition in plantation was due to external pressure and not the profit obtained. The research forms a big contribution to the current study as it helps to describe the trauma faced by the Tamils and give causal explanation for them especially the social and economic status of the Tamil labourers in the plantation.

Arasaratnam Sinnappah's "Indian in Malaysia and Singapore" written in 1970 forms a useful survey of third largest component in Malaysia's plural society. The work based largely on official records of the Indian and Malayan administrations and Tamil newspapers. The author had dealt with issues of Indian settlement, politics, education and most importantly stratification of the Indian labourers. The author has concluded that although the influx of Indian labourers into the commercial plantation sector has contributed immensely to boost British Malaya's economy, and also the





country's post-independence economic development, the socioeconomic conditions of the Indians, especially those entrenched in the estates never really changed, and in fact has remained deplorable for decades. This study was useful in describing the socio economic status and the vulnerability of the Tamil labourers in Malayan plantation. The finding of Arasaratnam regarding their vulnerable position was exemplified with his statement as “completely helpless and utterly inarticulate Indian workers”.

“South Indians on the Plantation Frontier in Malaya”, was written by Ravindra K.Jain on 1970. The study concerns the problems of Indians in Malaysia. This is a social anthropological study of Tamil labourers on a Malaysian rubber estate. Social system of Tamil labourers also was studied as part of the larger social system-the hierarchical organization headed by the European plantation manager designed for the efficient production of rubber. This book also described the domestic and economic organization of the Tamil labourers and their social stratification. It also analysed the political processes among them. The rise and fall of the British colonialism, the Japanese occupation and the emergency and the increasing development of Indian and Malaysian nationalism are all well explained in this research book This book will be a great contribution for the current research as it will help to comprehend the lives and complexities of the Tamil labour community during the colonisation. It helped to explain how the social stratification system kept the Tamil labourers discriminated and isolated.

Amarjit (2006) had written a journal article on ‘Indian Labour, Labour Standards, and Workers Health in Burma and Malaya,1900–1940’. For the purpose of





this study discussion regarding the immigration of the Indian to Malaya has been elaborated. Her writing focused on the immigration of the Tamils and how they became significant for the development of the plantation sector. The study also covered the labourer's health in rural environment. Amarjit has classified her study onto three sections. Section one shed light on labour recruitment policies and methods; the role of intermediaries; the magnitudes of migration and settlement patterns. The second section analysed labour rights—workers' wages and working and living conditions. The final section scrutinized the mortality rates, the disease history of plantation workers and the provision of health services in Malaya. Amarjit's study has been a great reference to the current research in terms of analyzing the mortality rates. It has successfully elaborated the reasons behind the death rate, the effect, and the measures taken to overcome it. She had pointed out that the stoppage of new planting and opening of new estates caused reduction in the mortality rates.

Another journal article written by Satyanarayana (2001) entitled "Birds of passage"; Migration of South Indian labour communities to South-East Asia; 19-20th centuries, a.d. examined, the course, nature and effects of migration of Telugu-Tamil speaking communities, from South India to Burma and Malaysia in a historical and comparative perspective. It has analysed the historical formation of immigrant labour communities in these countries. Besides that, it also studied the interaction and contribution of the migrant labour to the host lands. Analysis on the migration pattern revealed the free/voluntary and indentured migration paradigm. Satyanarayana had successfully disclosed the method of labour recruitment, control, motivations, perceptions and aspirations of the migrants, and the forces factors that shaped the





process of migration. The study contributed to the current research by providing information regarding the Tamils migration and their working conditions in Malaya. Particulars such as kangany system, wages and working conditions of labour, savings of Indians in Malaya, amount sent to India and social composition of the migrants and effects of migration were used largely as a reference and supporting facts to the current research.

In the article entitled “Malēciyat tamīḷk kavitaikaḷil pāl maram”- Rubber tree in Malaysian Tamil Poems written by Sugunadevi on 2015, the significance of the rubber trees in the lives of the Tamils were explained. Tamils were brought to Malaya to work on the plantations which consist of rubber trees mostly. Based on the analysis, it was found that rubber trees are inseparable from the live of Tamils. They are intertwined with them. Rubber tree symbolizes the culture of Tamils. Rubber tree was used as a code to express their emotion. This includes unity, relation, nation’s rich source and disappointment. The article concludes that from the poems on rubber tress the hurdles of the Tamils can be seen. These poems carry the emotions and thoughts of the Tamils. It acted as a medium to voice out their feelings. The article will help the current research on interpreting the usage of the words that conceals rubber tree and its elements in it.





2.2.4 Studies on Folk Song

This section focuses on studies that incorporated the sociological issues in the folk songs. In this section, a dissertation, a thesis, a book and six articles have been reviewed.

To begin with, a study that affirms the importance of studying the oral testimony is given. V.Manikkam (1994), in his doctoral thesis entitled 'Kaṭṭabommu kataippāṭalkaḷ oru varalārṟu aṇukumurai'- An historical approach on Kaṭṭabommu folktale songs revealed that, the British colonial tend to downgrade the subjugated Indian group in their historical documentation by addressing them as uncivilized and extremely vulnerable. His finding even corroborates a research which states that,

"They- British- wrote about their own conquest; they wrote about the people they conquered - told them what they were before they came under the protective British wings, and what they would be" (The question of ethnicity and of response, ¶ 2, p.65). The British scholars had only used these documentations to provide evidence for their historical writing. These writing favours more on reflecting the subjugation process by the dominant group. This made impossible to learn how the revolutionaries acted against the dominant group and how the people at the particular time went through the upheavals. This research helps the current research on constructing how oral testimonies such as folk songs, serve to grand the thoughts and actions of the subjugated group explicitly.





“nāṭṭuppuṇap pāṭalkaḷ: tiṛanāivu - Analysis on Folk Songs” written by Dr. R. Alagappan (2009) from University of Annamalai was originally a thesis which was published as a book later. This research pointed out a detailed explanation on the concept of folk songs. The folk songs taken into analysis were originated from Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka. This book comprises the background history of folk songs, settings, and types of folk songs. The author had categorised the folk songs into a few types namely children songs, devotional songs, work songs, celebration songs, emotional songs, lullaby and other themed songs. Each type of folk songs is further explained with its characteristics. Furthermore, the author had managed to explain the setting, meaning and the historical significance of each song and also the impact it had given to the people who sang it. Based on these contents, this book contributed a lot for the general writing on introduction, definition, history, types of Tamil folk songs and its characteristics in this current research. The contents were picked selectively to suit with the context of this study.

Smita Tewari Jassal’s (2012) study which was published as a book entitled “Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India” focused on the feminism aspects found in the songs. Using the Bhojpuri folksong as an analytical frame, Jassal explored the women’s lives in rural north India. The songs were collected over five years of fieldwork in rural Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The centre of her study was the relationship between songs and labour. She argues that the “conventional understandings of caste, gender, labour agrarian relations, and the complex workings of power may be strengthened, questioned, and fine-tuned through the study of folksongs”. Her study revealed that women would not respond to direct questions about their labour practices and rights to land. However, women would freely sing





about these issues. This definitely inform us how songs act as vehicles for the construction and reproduction of gender identity, broaden the understanding of women's agency, and maintaining the internalization of inequality in women's lives. Jassal has recorded, translated, and interpreted the songs. This leads her to the finding that folk songs not only accompany the work but also as gendered discourses on migration, the changing division of labour, agrarian structures, and how these have impacted the women themselves. She has also given a special attention to labor and emotion and emotional labor. Her intriguing analysis on the woman labor community was very much helpful in interpreting the emotions delivered by the woman labourers in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. This research contributed to the current study on implying the significance of the folk songs as a vehicle to voice out the grief and depression. As the current study focuses on the role of Malaysian Tamil folk songs in documenting the history of Tamil labourers, this research served as a great supporting reference. It signifies the authenticity of the folk songs to construct the unwritten historical facts of peoples.

There are collections of Tamil folk songs in Malaysia too. A collective amount has been gathered with the initiative taken by a few scholars. Among the collection is from Murasu Nedumaran, R.Thandayutham and Mutthammal Palanisamy. There was not much research conducted on the Tamil folk songs in Malaysia. Three articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs written by Murasu Nedumaran have been presented in this section, which were considered the vital point in the research of Malaysian Tamil folk songs. All the three articles, contributed a lot in obtaining the historical background of Malaysian Tamil folk songs, meaning of the terms used in the folk songs and its contextual meaning.





Moreover, they were also articles written by few other scholars taken for review. These articles assisted the current research in explaining the form of sexual troubles faced by the Tamil women labourers from the Kangany and European planters, to reason the toddy problems, to explore the lifestyle of Tamil labourers, to interpret the folk songs and to gather details on the challenges faced by Tamils as reflected in the folk songs. The articles have been explained further as below.

The article written on (2014) entitled ‘Malēciyat tōṭṭappuṟap pāṭalkaḷil pāliyal ceytikal’ - Depiction of sexual feeling in Malaysian Tamil folk songs elucidated the sexual feelings provoked among the labourers and the troubles faced by the women labourers in the form of sexual abuse. Researcher only focused on the sexual abuse depicted in the folk songs as it is related to the physical traumas experienced by the



Another article on ‘Malēciyat tōṭṭappuṟap pāṭalkaḷ- oru pārvai’- A view on Malaysian plantation songs) also describes the Malaysian Tamil folk song. The article shed light on the characteristics of the folk songs, the appointment of recruiters, folklore, situation of the songs, the classification of the songs, the frustration, workload and low wages, helpless situation, sexual abuse, and love among the Tamils in the plantation.

The third article on ‘Malēciya nāṭṭuppuṟap pāṭalkaḷil avala uṇarvukaḷ’- The depiction of plight in Malaysian Tamil folk songs elucidated the misery experienced by the Tamils. The article supplied additional information regarding the characteristics of folk songs, Malaysian Tamil folks songs, works in sugar,tea and





rubber plantation, the helpless state, Japanese occupation, lullaby and lament. The topics covered revealed the form of the miseries incurred by the Tamils in Malaya. Apart from helping the song interpretation, this article also authenticates the current study.

There is another article on folk songs with the title of ‘Malēciya nāṭṭuppuṟappāṭalkaḷ kāṭṭum tamilar vāḷviyal’ -Malaysian Tamils in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs, written by Baskaran Nadesan (2015) from Sultan Abdul Halim Teaching Institution. This article contains the element of Tamils lifestyle as reflected in Malaysian Tamil folk songs. This article used R.Thandayuthem’s book as the primary source. The article was written based on library work. It discusses about the slavery life of the indentured Tamil labours, conflicts of post war, brutality of *Kangany*, defence mechanism of Tamils, love, feminism, religious belief and alcoholism. These things were at its peak during the British colonisation and Japanese occupation. Based on this article, it was concluded that the whole article compromise with the hardship faced by the old generations.

Kingston Pal Thamburaj’s article on “Malēciyat Nāṭṭuppuṟappāṭalkaḷil Matu”- ‘Alcohol in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs’ written In 2015 expressed the general view on Tamil males, their loss and hopes. This article begins with the explanation on the need of protection from males for the females. Females felt more secured with the presence of their male counterparts. Tamil women on those days were dependent on their partner. But when the male failed to cater for the protection the females feels rejected. The author had shed light on the reasons behind this failure of giving protection to the females. He identified addiction to the consumption of alcohol





among Tamil males as the main reason. Consumption of alcohol is not new in Tamil culture. It can be evidenced in the Tamil classic literature. So the author made a stand point here that, the habit of drinking was not introduced in the British colonisation. Rather British made it more accessible. The author outlined three factors that contribute to the alcohol addiction. They are to alleviate body pain, to wash away the sorrowfulness and to cope with the denial experienced. Addiction to alcohol caused a lot of troubles. They faced problem in pursuing job and caring for the family. The family structure gets imbalanced. The author also found that the folk songs sung by females expressed the concern they have on society and family. Meanwhile, song sung by males reflected their unresolved feelings. As a conclusion, it was found that economical depression was one of the dominant factors that depressed the Tamils and therefore leads to the consumption of alcohol.



Besides that, there is also another research that looked into the social aspects of Tamils in the Malaysian Tamil folk song. An article written by Logeswary Arumugum, 2015 entitled “Malēciyat tōṭṭappurappāṭalkaḷil camūka amaippu” –Social structure in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs shed light on the social living of the Tamils. It focused on the relation, praise of demigods, feminism, morality, and caste. Another article written by Nanthini Pannir Selvam, 2015 on “Malēciyat tamiḷarkaḷum Nāttuppurappāṭalkaḷum”- Tamils in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs also analysed the living conditions, emotions and the religious belief among the Malaysian Tamils.





2.3 Summary

Based on the literature review gathered it was found that there are many historical studies that contemplates the traumatic experience evidenced in colonisation, impact of British colonisation around the world and Malaysia and some sociological studies conducted on the Malaysian Tamils. On the other hand, when traced back the impact of dominant group on a subjugation of a population as reflected in folk songs there were only a few to name. When focused on the studies on Malaysian Tamil folk songs there was not much research to be found. Besides that, there are no studies on the reflection of British colonisation from the concept of historical trauma, done in the Malaysian Tamil folk song. So, to fill this gap, this research is being conducted focusing on the traumatic experience of Malaysian Tamil labourers as reflected in



Malaysian Tamil folk songs. In between, this research will not have any repetition as it is a sole traumatic study being conducted on the Malaysian Tamil folk songs with historical approach. Even though there are books and few articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs but less focus was given in the interpretation of the folk songs. So this current research will help to interpret the emotions embedded in the folk songs whilst documenting historical events in the lives of Tamil labourers during the colonisation.





CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction



This chapter discusses the research methodology aspects that were used in this study. It discusses further by introducing the methodology used. The methodology applied in this study was carefully selected and designed to suit its objectives and the research questions that were set earlier, i.e., as mentioned in chapter one. This chapter will begin by explaining the research design and research framework. Next it will present a description on the research method, data collection, data analysis and finally the theory employed.





3.2 Research Design

This study integrated a combination of historical, descriptive and explanatory designs. The combination will strengthen the authenticity of the current research. This has been affirmed by Martella (2013) who claimed that combined designs increase the validity of the research (p.477). Research design relies on research questions. This has been supported by Vaus (2001), who clarified that research design is fundamentally affected by the nature of the research question which can be either descriptive or explanatory (p. 2).

The research questions for the present study were built after an exploratory method where in, the researcher's idea or observed phenomenon that seeks to understand more about it, is highlighted (Salkind, 2010, p.1254). In order to comprehend the folk songs, researcher explored the content and message conveyed in it. During this process, researcher had determined the period of the folk song, examined what happened to the character singing the folk song and associated the event with the fact recorded by the historian.

After these identifications, the researcher had decided to implement historical design. According to Howell (2001), "the purpose of a historical research design is to collect, verify, and synthesize evidence from the past to establish facts that defend or refute a hypothesis" (p.16). In the process of collecting, verifying and synthesizing, the researcher used two steps. Firstly, the researcher had analysed the connection between the recorded historical fact and the period and content of the folk song. Secondly, during the analysis researcher had found the themes and codes in the folk





song which was in the form of special terms, symbols, and figurative language that has strong connection to the moment of past. These steps enabled the researcher to comprehend the content and message of the folk songs by associating the historic event along with the documented folk songs. So, historical design has been used throughout the research to answer all the research questions. This allowed the researcher to see the folk songs as a reflection of the Tamil labourer's life and times.

The researcher felt intrigued by the content of the folk songs and decided further to analyse the songs by implementing descriptive and explanatory designs. Descriptive focuses on 'what' questions and explanatory focuses on 'why' questions (Description and explanation, n.d., p.1-3). The research questions were prepared based on this scope in order to comprehend the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.



1. What is the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk song?
2. What are the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs?
3. How did the trauma impact the lives of the Tamil labourers as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs?

The first research question required information regarding the historical background, the characteristics and essence of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. The researcher used information from sources on Malaysian Tamil literature and Malaysian Tamil folk songs to analyze and explore the historical background. Information was also obtained from the interview with Murasu Nedumaran, a Tamil scholar. The elements, embedded in the folk songs were categorized and described.





In order to get answer to this question, historical and descriptive designs were implemented.

Second research question which deals with the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers as depicted in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs required information regarding the traumatic event, mass trauma experience and other supportive facts related to the British colonisation. Initially, historical design was implemented to collect data from the songs. To collect data on the trauma experienced and the hurdles faced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation the song was described upon its content. The description was made based on other secondary sources that have documented the history of the Tamils and the traumatic components.



related data. These multiple sources of information are related to the life of Tamil labourers during the British colonisation and traumas experienced during the subjugation. This follows the procedures found in descriptive research design as supported by Glass & Hopkins (1984) who outlined “descriptive research involves gathering data that describes events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection” (p.63). This identification described the hardship of the Tamil labourers and the traumatic event which triggered the traumatic impact.

Third research question is on identifying the traumatic impact that require explanation on the events and its relations to the impact which affected the Tamil labourers as depicted in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Since the answer for this research question needed to pleat causes behind a situation, explanatory design was





used in conjunction with historical design. Explanatory design is defined as an attempt to connect ideas to understand cause and effect (Maxwell, 2008, p.324-326). It will explain the study by looking at how things come together and interact. In the current research, this method used information from the thematic analysis on the folk songs and related it to the traumatic impact. To explain the impacts, causal explanation also was used. For instance, in the context of this research, it was found that subjugation of a population affects the health condition. This was based on the analysis made on a few songs which depicted the health condition of the labourers.

...ini enna ceyvōm-katavule
now what do God
enru toluvōm
worship
vayittu valiyilum ulanōyilum
stomachache mental
ciṭapēṭikuta
diarrhea
inta vētanai seyyum
paining

(Thandayutham, pīlaikka vantavarin paritāpa nilai, p. 15)

“...Oh, god
 what will we do
 stomach pain, mental illness
 diarrhea
 its unbearable...”

This song depicts the physical and psychological violence as the result of the subjugation on Tamil labourers. The impact of the subjugation has been reflected in the following figure.



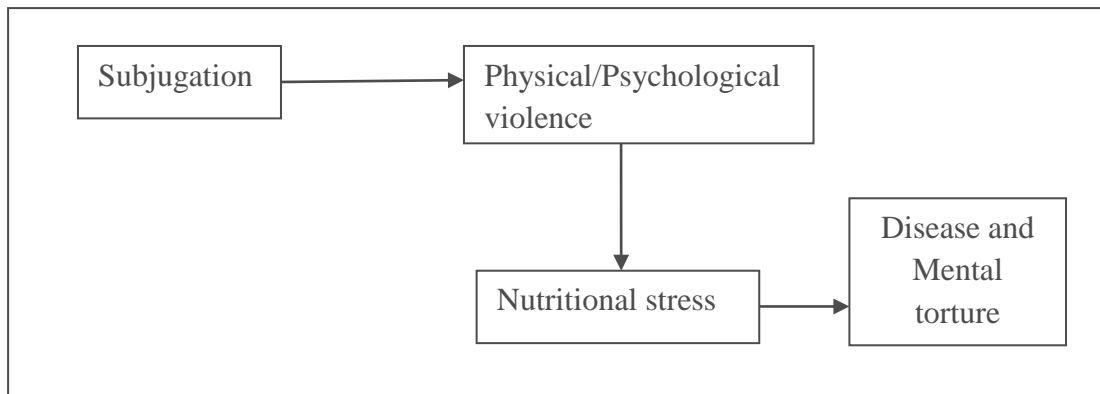


Figure 3.1. Indirect causal relationship of colonisation on Tamil labourers as reflected in Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

The data obtained from all three research questions through the integration of historical, descriptive and explanatory designs were worked on inductive and deductive methods. Based on this, explanations were given in the form of writing. The writing has broken down the data and reconfigured them. In the end, discussion of the findings by analysing it with personal views was provided.

3.3 Research Framework

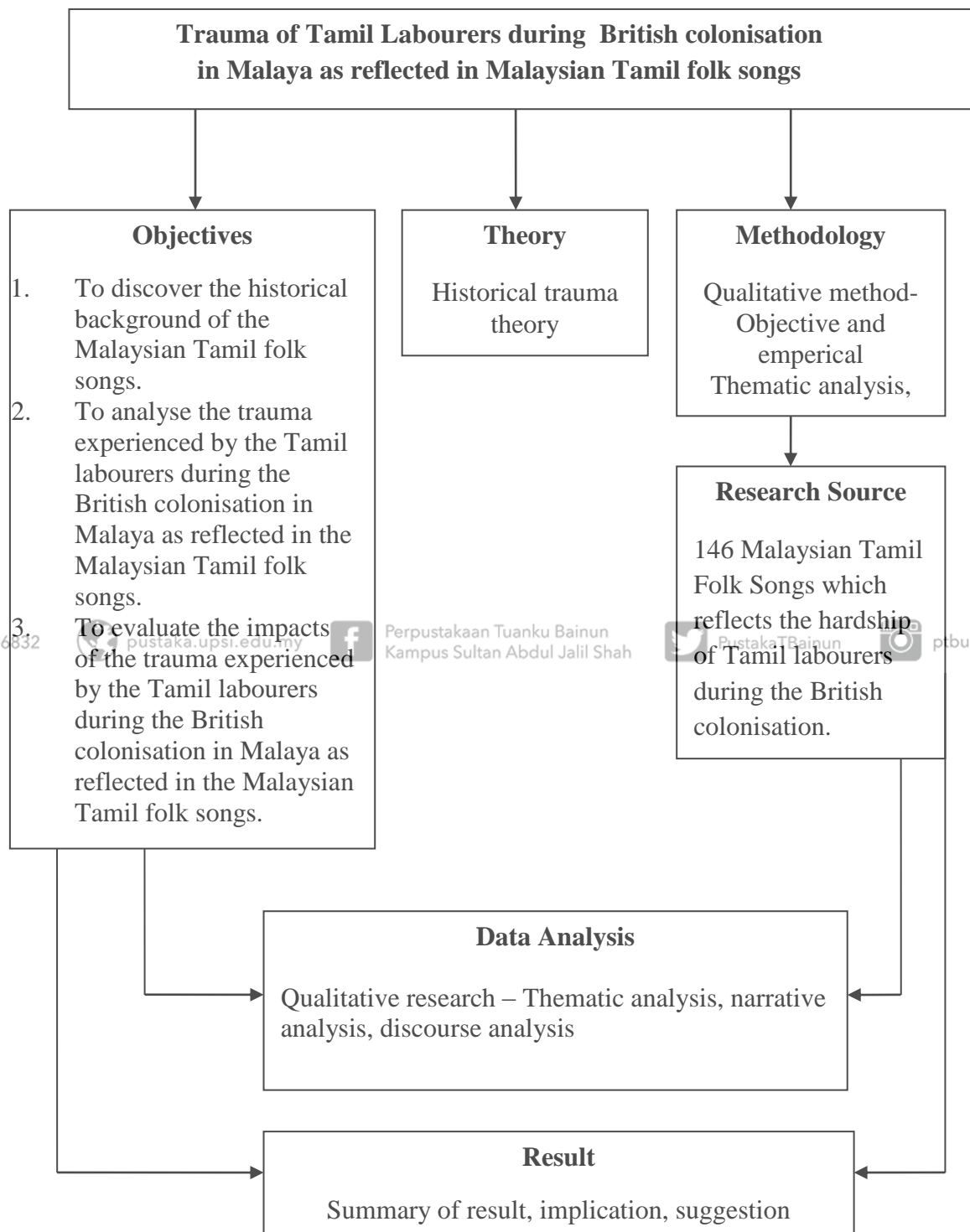


Figure 3.2. Research Framework



3.4 Research Method

Researcher used qualitative method to achieve the objectives of the research. Qualitative methods have much to offer when we need to explore people's feelings. Since the folk songs engage with the experience and feelings of the Tamil labourers, researcher found qualitative method to well suit the study. This has been affirmed in Biggerstaff (2012) study that, interpreting a phenomenon in terms of the meanings which people bring to them is one of the requirements in a qualitative research (p.176). Denzin (2011) has also supported by stating "qualitative researchers study the things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3).



Next, to describe the folk songs in terms of the meaning conveyed by the Tamil labourers, researcher used the objective and empirical analysis on the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. According to Dundes (1965b), there are only two steps in studying folklore in literature (p.136). There are

1. Objective and empirical (Identification)
2. Subjective and speculative (Interpretation)

Identification looks for similarities. Interpretation delineates differences. As mentioned previously (see section 3.2), researcher had found the association between the content of the folk songs and the recorded historical facts that showed similarities. Hence, researcher decided to apply the objective and empirical (identification method) for the song analysis.





In the identification process, researcher applied thematic analysis to collect the information. The thematic analysis involved the identification of themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice, 1999, p. 258). It was used systematically to gain the knowledge and the understanding about the Tamil labourers, the interaction with the colonisers, the traumatic events and the sufferings incurred. In thematic analysis researcher developed "codes," words or phrases that served as labels (Boyatzis, 1998, p.iv) for identifying the types of the traumas and its impact on Tamil labourers. This research required both inductive and deductive (theory driven) thematic analysis. The inductive codes were used, as the themes were reflected in the folk songs. The deductive (theory driven codes) were also used as the research applied historical trauma theory as the framework.



3.4.1 Instruments

The researcher had used semi structured interview as an instrument. The researcher identified, described and jotted notes during the interview to analyse the data from the songs, texts and documents. Recorder had also been the instrument since the researcher also documented three folk songs.





3.4.1.1 Interview

Researcher had used semi-structured interview to obtain details from Murasu Nedumaran, the scholar who has written articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs. The interview was thematic and topic centred with fluid and flexible structure.

3.5 Data Collection

The research described and explained the documented folk songs collected by Murasu Nedumaran, R. Thandayutham, Mutthammal Palanisamy, Shantini Pillai and the researcher herself. Data were identified using the thematic analysis method on the folk songs. According to Halhojailan (2012), "thematic analysis will be more appropriate for analyzing the data when the research aims to extract information to determine the relationship between variables and to compare different sets of evidence that pertain to different situations in same study" (p.8). So, the researcher extracted information on trauma events and the impact of the trauma from the folk songs and collected evidence from the historical records to find similarities and associated them. So far the researcher managed to collect few songs which reflected the grief and despair of the Tamil labourers. An example of the collection is shown as below.

maravalli nalla val̥i
cassava
māntarukku ērra val̥i
human suit
maravalli illai enrāl
cassava no
makkal māṇtintiruppār





people die

maravalli....

cassava

(Saraswathi age 75, Teluk Intan, 15-08-2015; 5:15 pm)

“Cassava a good cassava

It suits for humans

without cassava

death is bound to happen

cassava oh cassava...”

This folk song depicts the extreme of famine situation. There is also another song which sounds as below. It reflects the betrayal of the middleman to the Tamil labourers.

Cañciyanai nampi vantōm

middlemen trust came

tañcam kitaikkum enru

refugee will get

pañcattil āltti viṭṭāṇē

famine fall

pāvi

ominous fellow

pātaiyil ētti viṭṭāṇē

bier lifted

(Saraswathi age 75, Teluk Intan, 15-08-2015; 5:15 pm)

“We trusted the middleman

We sought for refugee with him

We were caught in between famine

He lifted us to the bier”

Both the folk songs contain information that has been proven in the historical record (explained in chapter 4).





3.6 Data Analysis

The data was analysed using thematic analysis consisting four stages. Narrative and discourse analysis were also used for the data analysis.

3.6.1 Thematic Analysis

1) Developing the code manual

According to Boyatzis (1998), a “good code” is one that captures the qualitative richness of the phenomenon (p.1). So, a code should be clear and concise as it is the foundation for the themes used by the researcher. Typically, the researcher had coded single, two or more verses from the songs. These verses had identified the key words of historical trauma, its impact, image and how it was reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

2) Code validation

In code validation, to ensure the codes have not been misinterpreted and are free of researcher bias, they have been reviewed by more than one person. The codes for current study have been reviewed by Murasu Nedumaran, research supervisor and co-supervisor. Researcher had also reviewed through read and re-read the data, double-checked the codes for consistency and validation. The integration of the codes from the data become the codebook from which the themes emerge.





3) Themes identification

In the process of themes identification, the researcher identified themes and sub-themes from the coded data. The themes in this research emerged from the inductive and the deductive thematic analysis. Each theme was defined sufficiently in general and in the colonisation context so that it makes clear to others what the theme exactly referring about.

4) Consolidate information

The last step is to consolidate information under the theme names. The researcher had used narrative and discourse analysis to consolidate information from the themes and



illustrated it with the verses from the folk songs to help to communicate its meaning to the readers.

3.6.2 Narrative Analysis

Narratives describe experiences of people. Biggerstaff (2012) has defined narrative analysis as examining people's stories and account of events (p.190). This kind of approach suits best when analyzing the own view of the participants from the stories listened or studied. In this current study, this approach was used for analyzing the folk songs, the creation of the Tamil labourers.



3.6.3 Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis examines the verbal behavior as direct medium of conveying underlying cognition. In current study discourse analysis described the usage of terms and construction of words used in the folk songs to understand the emotions that the expressive word or phrase appeals. This corroborates the hypothesis of Ogden & Richards (2001), who states that language has an influence upon thought (p.11). The following model (a) represents their connections.

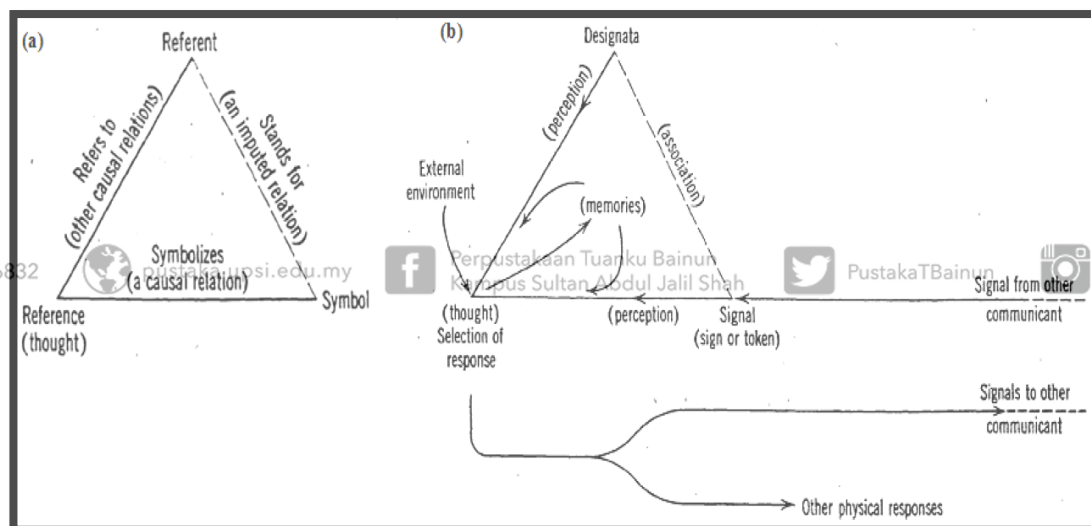


Figure 3.3. (Words and meaning. Signal-thought-designata relations. (a) The thought- word- thing triangle, after C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards, *Meaning of Meaning* ; (b) “Meaning of words” A functional flow diagram. (As cited in Jones, 2010, *Embodiment*, ¶ 4).

The thought-word-thing triangle (see diagram (a)) illustrates the relation of **symbol** or word to both **thoughts** (reference or meaning) and **referent** or things. The dotted line connecting symbol and referent shows that the symbol is not the referent and thus they do not have direct relationship. Thought has direct relationship with both the symbols



and referent and it is indicated with the solid line. So it can be said that symbols are used by the people to represent the things they sense and experience (Steinberg, 1995, p.49). However this model seems to reflect only an individual response. So, further additions were made to include the responses from both the informant and the other communicant as can be seen in diagram (b). This will aid the study by exploring the role of language in the lyrics of folk songs which describe the thoughts and events that happened in the life of Tamil labourers.

Researcher used the thought-word-thing triangle method to describe the content of the folk songs. The period of the song was deduced upon the symbol and referent expressed which follow the functional flow of meaning of words model (see section 3.6.3 diagram (b)). The symbols and referent used in Malaysian Tamil folk songs to convey thoughts and responses delineated the colonial period. For example the usage of the referents such as tea, sugar plantations, rubber tree, depot, doriai, shipyard, Kangany, bungalow, etc directly indicates the influence of British subjugation.

Researcher also sought help from Murasu Nedumaran on comprehending the songs. Folk songs compilation of Murasu Nedumaran which accompanied with references eased the analysis. Mutthammal also has documented the source of her songs collection and also conveyed the meaning as told by the sources. So, the views from the sources itself were used to analyse her songs collection.





3.6.3.1 Translation

Translation of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs to English was done under the discourse analysis. Cre-A dictionary was used in reference to the translation. The translation facilitates the non Tamil readers to comprehend the contextual meaning of the folk songs. The current research perceived the translation into two aspects namely direct translation and contextual translation. In direct translation, each word concerned with the colonisation, trauma and its impact used in the folk songs were translated. Exception was given to particles. The direct translation helped in providing codes for the research. The contextual translation was meant for the contextual meaning of the particular verse from the song. It is this contextual meaning that gives a whole comprehension about a song. Researcher referred to this contextual meaning to do the



3.7 Trauma Theory

The researcher has used theoretical lens as an overarching perspective within a design that contains qualitative data. This lens will provide a framework for topics of interest, methods for collecting data, and outcomes or changes anticipated by the study (Creswell, 2003, p.15). In the context of this research historical trauma theory was used as a framework to collect and analyse the information from data.





Trauma represents an emotional state of discomfort and stress resulting from memories of an extraordinary, catastrophic experience (Figley, 2012, Trauma, sensitive research topics, and secondary trauma, ¶ 1). The DSM-IV-TR defines Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as,

The person who has been exposed to a traumatic event in which both of the following have been present: (1) The person experienced, witnessed, or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror (as cited in Colston, 2015, p. 101).



The definition above derives that all trauma experiences are technically historical in nature and it focuses on psychological, physical and social effects of individual's exposure to the traumatic events. There are few types of trauma including inter generational trauma, historical trauma and race-based or insidious trauma (Sotero, 2006, p.3). The current research will work based on historical trauma theory.

3.7.1 Historical Trauma Theory

Since the current research involves the trauma caused by British colonisation on Tamil labourers, it is subtle to use the historical trauma theory as a framework to analyse the data. It has been supported by Evans-Campbell (2008) whom suggests that, the concept of historical trauma could be applied to all colonised, Indigenous people (p.





317). Historical trauma refers to a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance.

Scholars from various disciplines have described the generational aspect of historical trauma as transgenerational, intergenerational, multigenerational, or cross-generational and have introduced concepts, such as soul wound or Post Traumatic Slavery Syndrome to capture the collective experience of trauma by specific cultural groups across generations (Mohatt, 2014, p.2). Despite the multitude of terms, historical trauma can be understood as consisting of three primary elements: a “trauma” or wounding; the trauma is shared by a group of people, rather than an individually experienced; the trauma spans multiple generations, such that contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing events.

This relationship between history, memory, and contemporary contexts highlights the dual nature of historical trauma—on the one hand, historical trauma refers to events and experiences that many people consider traumatic; on the other hand, these events are carried forward through public narratives that not only recount the events but individual and collective responses to them. Historical trauma operates through a layering of narrative turns, including trauma as a concept represented in stories, history as socially endorsed memory, and an internal logic linking history to present suffering or resilience (Mohat, 2014, p.3).





Historical trauma includes three successive phases. The first phase describes the dominant culture executing mass traumas on a population, resulting in cultural, familial, societal and economic devastation for the population (Sotero, 2006, p.3). The second phase occurs when the primary generation of the population responds to the trauma in biological, societal and psychological aspects. The final phase is the transition of trauma response to the successive generations (Rice, 2014, Core Concepts of Historical Trauma, ¶ 1). This research only focused until the second phase. Here, the impact of trauma on Tamil labourers with reference to physical, social and psychology have been analysed.

Historical trauma originates with the subjugation of a population by a dominant group. According to Sotero (2006), they are four elements in a successful subjugation: (1) overwhelming physical and psychological violence, (2) segregation and/or displacement, (3) economic deprivation, and (4) cultural dispossession (p. 99). The British enforces subjugation through colonisation. In Malaya, the Tamil labourers were chained by the British colonisers in a type of relentless dependency, shaping their respective features and dictating their conduct. This is one of the characteristic of the colonisation (Heyden, 2009, p.7).

Primary generations are the direct victims of subjugation and loss. Danieli (1998) has recorded that the loss threatens the population, economic and cultural survival of the primary generation (p.3). The Tamils who were brought to Malaya as labourers during the British colonisation were the primary generations of modern migrants. The labourers were plagued with physical injuries, malnutrition, and high rates of infectious and chronic diseases. This has been proven by Faimon (2004)





whom attributed the injuries and epidemics to great loss of life, brutality, starvation, and disease (p. 240). Tamils faced a lot of struggles under the British colonisation.

According to Fast (2010), trauma impacts at three levels: the individual, the family and the community (p. 131). At the individual level it is reflected as mental and physical health problems. At the family level it includes damaged parenting quality and ruptured family structure. At the community level it losses traditional culture and values which causes maladaptive behaviours. These impacts were so evident when the researcher conducted the exploratory method. So, to categorise the trauma and its impacts on Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in Malaysian Tamil folk songs, historical trauma theory has been the suitable framework.



3.8 Historical Trauma Theory Framework

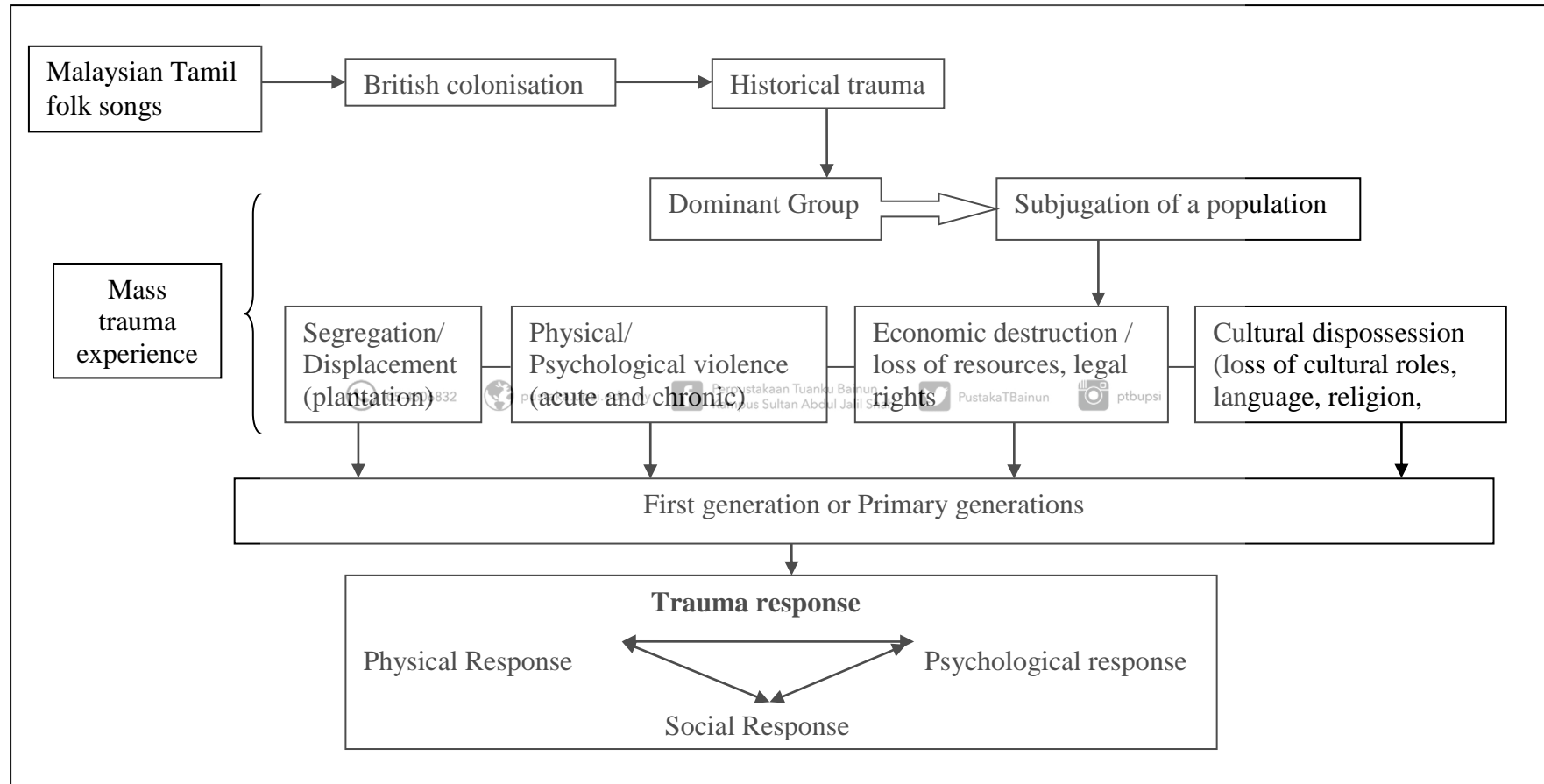


Figure 3.4. Historical Trauma Theory Framework



3.9 Summary

This chapter described the methodology which was used to obtain and analyse data to answer the three research questions presented in the first chapter. In this chapter, the research designs involving historical, descriptive and explanatory designs were described. This was followed by the qualitative method applied involving identification and thematic analysis. The semi-structured interview used in the study as the research instrument was highlighted. Next to be explained was data analysis, which would help to shed light on identifying the trauma of the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation and in the event of such traumas, the probable impacts of it. The next chapter presents and discusses the findings made through the use of the thematic, narrative and discourse analysis.





CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction



The aim of this chapter is to achieve the three objectives of the current research as mentioned in Chapter 1 (section 1.4), which are as follows:

1. To discover the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.
2. To analyse the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.
3. To evaluate the impacts of the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.





This chapter elucidated, analysed and described the data collected from the Malaysian Tamil folk songs based on these objectives.

4.2 To Discover The Historical Background of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

The first objective was aimed at finding out the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs in Malaysia. Information from Malaysian Tamil literature books, articles on Malaysian Tamil folk songs, Malaysian Tamil folk songs compilations and interview with Murasu Nedumaran were used to analyze and explore the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Before analysing the development of Malaysian Tamil folk songs, it is important to comprehend its historical development which begun at Tamilnadu (South India), the ancestral land of the Tamil labourers in Malaya.

There is an intertwining relationship between the early Tamil literatures from Tamilnadu and Malaysia. This has been affirmed by Rajantheran (2012) who stated, due to the strong feelings towards the Tamil language, Tamil migrants brought Tamil literature together with them (p.80). Thus, Malaysian Tamil folk songs being a form of Tamil literature is also said to have strong connection with Tamilnadu. It formed a fundamental basis for the folk songs in Malaysia. This statement has been clarified by Murasu Nedumaran when he was interviewed (17 April 2016, 11.00a.m.). He stated that “In order to study Malaysian Tamil folk songs, one has to explore its root from Tamilnadu”.





This explained the necessity of the current objective to explore the folk songs in Tamilnadu priorly, before stepping into the context of Malaysia. The following section highlighted the existence of folk songs before the Sangam period, documentation of the folk songs in South India, contribution of the Tamil folklorists, classification of the folk songs and the function of the Tamil folk songs as a medium of protest against the British.

4.2.1 Tamil Folk Songs In Tamilnadu

Tolkāppiyam is an earliest extant work of Tamil literature. Tolkāppiyam has mentioned about the folk song. It has been proven in a verse from Tolkāppiyam as below. The word ‘Paṇṇatti’ allude to the folk songs (Sakthivel, 1996, p.26).

Pāṭṭiṭaik kalanta poruḷavākip
pāṭṭiṇ iyal paṇṇatti iyalvē (tol, col, 180)

The verse indicates that folk songs are ancient and they have existed even before the articulation of poems.

Despite its ancient value, research on Indian folklore is said to only commence through the effort from foreign scholars (Sanmugasuntaram, 1975, p. 44). This has been pointed out by Cuppiramaniyan (1981) who clarified the contribution of a foreign scholar, Charles. E. Gover, the author of the book entitled “The folk songs of Southern India” in 1871 (p. 658). His book became the spearhead of South Indian folksongs documentation. The compilation comprised of Tamil, Telugu, Canarese,





Badaga, Coorg, and Malayalam folksongs. On the other hand, the first book on Tamil folk songs entitled “kāṇṇil vanta kavitai” was published by Arunachalam, in 1943 (Cuppiramaniyan, 1981, p.658).

Primitively, most of the folk song books only offered insights into the collections and commentary of the folksongs and only few folk song research articles have been published (Sakthivel, 1996, p.26-27). Among the folklorists who contributed in compiling the folk songs of Tamilnadu are R. Ayyasamy, M. Arunachalam, Aravinthan, R. Alagapan, Annakamu, Ramalingam, Rajaraam, Tamilannal, Thuran, and N. Vanamaamalai. They have managed to compile the variant folksongs according to the districts in Tamilnadu. Folk songs in Tamilnadu have been categorised into eight types based on the social context namely lullaby, children rhyme, children play songs, labour songs, religious songs, celebration songs, lament songs and irattal songs (begging). This categorisation was recognised among the other proposed classifications (Ramanathan, 2007, p.134).

The function of the folk songs can be evaluated according to their social context. Since the current research focuses on folk songs as manifestation of historical moments, only its function as a vehicle to elucidate historical events has been shed light on. Thus folk songs that express one's discontent were taken for analysis. Analysis on the folk songs from Tamilnadu shows that folksongs are used as a medium to exhibit protest against the brutality of the dominant group. This has been exemplified in the finding of Perumal (1995), who highlighted the themes such as famine, problems in landholdings, caste differentiation, protest, social principles, the migration in search for better life, effects of epidemics such as cholera, and religion





conversion involving the people from lower status to be revolving in the folk songs in Tamilnadu (p.130-131). The finding corroborates the statement of Dundes (1965a) that, “the most important functions of folklore is its service as a vehicle for social protest” (p.308). For instance, the following folk song uncovers the British control on Tamils economy before the independence.

Ūrān ūrān tōttattilē - avan
a plot belongs to others he
Oruvan pōttatu vellarikkā
a man sowed cucumber
Kācukku rentu vikkac colli
paisa two sell tell
Nalla kāyitam pōttānti vellakkāran
good paper deliver whiteman

(Alagappan, 2009)

“Some planted cucumber
In others plot
White man order him
To sell two pieces for an anna¹”

Another song ascribed to kaṭṭabomman (a heroic figure) whom refuses to pay the land tax to the British.

vānam poliyutu pūmi viḷaiyutu
sky pour down soil grow
kumpinikku ēnatā tīrvaip panam?
company why tax money
tānam teriyāmal vantu talaiyittāl
donation unwittingly came interfere
mānam alintu maṭintituvīr
dignity destroy dead

(Alagappan, 2005)

“sky pours down, soil yields
why should I pay tax to the company (of Britain)
if you still interfere with no brains

¹ An anna was a currency unit formerly used in India and Pakistan, equal to 1/16 rupee or 12 paise





your dignity shall perished and leads you falling”

Songs were even used to curse the atrocious British colonials. The next song exemplifies this.

kallai vettac connān vellaikkāran
rock cut told whiteman
kallāp pōvān vellaikkāran
rock shift to whiteman
maṇṇai vettac connān vellaikkāran
soil cut told whiteman
maṇṇāp pōvān vellaikkāran
soil shift to whiteman

(Alagappan, 2009)

“Whiteman, he ordered us to stroke the rock
Whiteman you shall turn to a stone
Whiteman, he ordered us to stroke the land
Whiteman, you shall be cursed to nothing”



The folk songs above reflected the dominant’s control and the objection shown by the colonised groups. This confirms the function of the Tamil folk songs in Tamilnadu as a medium of expressing the feeling of discontent, besides providing historical information. Malaysian Tamil folk songs also showed some resemblance to the folk songs in Tamilnadu. The folk songs conveyed the historical event occurred in the lives of the Tamil labourers in Malaya. The manifestation of historical events in Malaysian Tamil folk songs supports the finding of Alagappan (2009) who referred folk songs as the representation of history.





4.2.2 Historical Background Of Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Tamil literature has a long period of evolution which extends over two thousand years. Its literary tradition not only covers South India but also spread over to Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Singapore and the Mauritius (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997. p.145). Tamil literary creation of Sri Lanka spanned into the era of Sangam period. Meanwhile, Malaysia and Singapore's Tamil literary creations only started to develop over the last two centuries. This section will only focus on Malaysian Tamil literature.

Malaysian Tamil literature comprises folk songs and written literature. According to Ramaiya (1978), the history of Malaysian Tamil literature began to develop in 1946 (p.13). However there is a statement that contradicts his claim by pointing out that, literary creations before 1946 were also categorised as Malaysian Tamil literature (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p. 147). This has been also notified in Murasu Nedumaran's preface for Thandayutham's (1998) book, that the oral literary creation of the society is older than the written literature and it had started to develop around 1887 in Malaysia. An Indian researcher also supported that "Malaysia folk songs are the one considered as Malaysian Tamil literature" (Mathiyalagan, 1988, p.24). Based on these affirmations, the research concludes that Malaysian Tamil folk songs are the pioneer form of the Malaysian Tamil literature.

In Malaysia, Tamil folk songs are said to be known as *tōṭṭappuraṇ pāṭalkaḷ* (plantation songs). The term was used due to the settlement, as 85 % of the Tamils lead plantation life. So, their oral creations were called as *tōṭṭappuraṇ pāṭalkaḷ*





(Murasu Nedumaran, n.d., Male:ciyat tōṭṭappuṟap pāṭalkaḷ- oru pārvai, p.2). Mutthammal also categorized the songs as pāḷkāṭṭup pāṭalkaḷ (rubber estate songs) and tōṭṭakkāṭṭup pāṭalkaḷ (plantation songs) in her book. Despite of the naming, the researcher maintained the term folk songs since there are songs, sung along the migration which indicates the presence of the songs even before the Tamils settled in the plantation. Some songs were born during the process of clearing the jungle, constructing the railway track, and laying roads. So, the researcher used the term Malaysian Tamil folk songs as it was found to be apt with the content and the background of these songs.

Researcher had analysed few aspects such as the source, period, typologies, function, characteristics and essence of Malaysian Tamil folk songs to collect its



4.2.2.1 The Source of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Literature manifests human emotions. Therefore, to study the literature it is important to comprehend the emotions. In the context of Malaysian Tamil folk songs, the emotions of the Tamil labourers were found to be the source of the folk songs. The emotions were triggered by the historical events that occurred in the lives of Tamil labourers. Thus, this section explored the migration history of Tamil labourers, the life of the labourers in the new host land and how these elements manifested themselves as a source of Malaysian Tamil folk songs.





I Migration History of Tamil Labourers

At the end of the 19th century, Penang, Melaka and Singapore became the focal point for British settlement (Saw, 2007, p.318). The whole of Malaya was conquered in 1914 after the focal points were firmly consolidated. The rich natural sources of Malaya brought British's attention to exploit it. The development was facilitated with the presence of Indian sepoy, domestics, army "camp followers", and government employed coolies (Robert Heussler, 1983, p.3-7). The exploitation was made possible with Tamil labourers from South India. The presence was due to the mass migration of Tamil indentured labourers at the end of 18th century. The mass migration has been highlighted in Dennis (1983) who clarified, between 1786 and 1957, nearly four and one quarter million Indians mostly from South India, were transported to provide labour for the purpose of the development (p 87). They were utilized by the British to work on plantations in Malaya.

South Indians were preferred by the British officials and public works contractors as they were recognized to suit perfectly for this development project. Lal (2006) has attributed the preference to the attitude of the South Indian labourer who was,

malleable, worked well under supervision, and was easily manageable. He was not as ambitious as most of his Northern Indian compatriots and certainly nothing like the Chinese...He was the most amenable to the comparatively lowly paid and rather regimented life of estates and department. He had fewer





qualms or religious susceptibilities and cost less in feeding and maintenance (p.157).

The migration was also attributed to the socio-economic situation of the Tamil labourers in South India under the rule of landlord and British colonials. The labourers were only provided with mere wages with no shelter or food in return for their services. Thus, it triggered them to migrate in search of better life. This has been affirmed by Murasu Nedumaran (2007) and Khan (1963) in their studies by concluding that poverty, caste differentiation, and low self -esteem and self -confidence were among the reasons for the migration of Tamil labourers to Malaya.

Initially, the labourers migrated to Malaya under indentured labour system.



Later on, this system was abolished due to its inefficiency (Arasaratnam, 1993, p.191).

Then, it was replaced with the Kangany system. Kangany or the headman who was a South Indian is the supervisor for all the labourers. His job was to recruit workers. Kangany used deception to recruit the labour force. This has been supported by Dennis (1983) whom listed seducing, cheating and kidnapping as a tool of deception applied by the Kanganies to meet the labour force needed (p.88).

II Glimpse on The Life of The Tamil Labourers at Malaya

From the beginning of the settlement, life of the Tamils was miserable in Malaya. Manpower was utilized at maximum for the colonial exploitation. The exploitation was based on agriculture primarily. The hurdles faced by the Tamil labourers were entrenched after the British lost in the war with Japanese army. They continued living





in hardships during the Japanese occupation. Life was described as a living hell under the tyrannical Japanese occupation. They suffered and were depressed under the Japanese government policy. The statement above corroborates the finding of Khan (1963) who noted that Tamils perished during the Japanese occupation (p.224). The loss was attributed to the widespread of extreme famine and disease. Satyanantha (1957) had supported further that food shortages and diseases caused numerous deaths of the Tamils (p.66). The hardships were clearly conveyed through the folk songs sung by the Tamil labourers.

III Manifestation of Migration History and Life of The Tamil Labourers in Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Folk songs are a part of the Malaysian Tamil literature. They play the same role as literature by serving as a nation's biography (Thamilannal, 1988. p.9). The Census Report of Madras (1931) reported that the emigrating Indian labourer 'takes his own world with him and sets it down in his new surrounding' (cited in Arasaratnam, 1970. p.65). This resembled the life of the migrant Tamil labourers. Their migration was accompanied with literature and beliefs. A folk song sung in the ship that was making its sail towards Malaya serves as a good example for the above statement.

vātakkāttu vīcutati taṅkamē!
Northwind wafting darling
Cērntu vanta kappalilē taṅkamē!
come together ship darling
Ciṅkāra maṇam kūṭaliyā?
beautiful mind gather

(Thandayutham , Kūṭa manam kūṭaliyō, p.67)





“North breeze slipping slowly, my darling
Across the ship we both sailed, my darling
Has the beautiful mind united yet?”

The song portrays the blossomed love during the migration. It takes around fourteen days for the ship to end its sail at Malaya from South India (Murasu Nedumaran, 2014, p.2). During the voyage, a boy had fallen for a girl who was on the same ship. He expressed his love by singing the song. It functioned to express the feeling of the male labourer to another female labourer. The song exemplifies that literature was taken along the migration.

There is another song which conveys the troublesome journey faced by the Tamils along their sail to Malaya. It sounds as below.



Malāy rappar tōttam
Malaya rubber estate
āl̥katal ōrattil nīrōttam
deepsea side water flow
intak kappalla kashtappaṭum
this ship suffering
intiya makkal - ayyō
Indian people ayyo (particle used for expressing pain)
intiya makkal - itaik
Indian people this (demonstrative adjective used to refer things)
kāṇa varōm!
face coming

(Thandayutham, *Malāy rappar tōttam*, p.5)

“Malaya rubber estate
water flows along the deep sea
Indians are suffering on ship - Owh gosh
Indians are coming to see this”





Tamil labourers were singing this song along their journey to Malaya. The song was a composition born from the hardships faced by the labourers on board. It reflects the troublesome journey. In this situation folk song was perceived as a medium to express the deprivation of the labourers.

The following verse exemplifies the economic hurdles faced by the Tamils in the rubber plantation.

pālumaram vettalānnu palaya kappal ērivantēn
rubber tree tap old ship boarded
nāppattañci kācappōttu nattelumpa murikīrānē
forty five cents backbone broken
muppattañci kācappōttu mūṭṭelumpa murikīrānē
thirty five cents joint broken

(Murasu Nedumaran, 118. mūṭṭelumpa murikīrānē, p.336)



“I came in an old ship to rubber tap
 given 45 cents and a broken backbone
 given 35 cents and a broken joint”

According to Thandayutham (1983), it is impossible to expect a surge in a person to develop literature when he/she is leading an atrocious life as an indentured labourer (p.10-11). Despite the situation, they always find time to express their feeling throughout their daily life through singing. It was the only way for them to convey everything. They usually incorporate the songs during folk arts performances, such as kummi, kōlāṭṭam and oyilāṭṭam. They even sung the song when they are working. It helped to make them feel better.





4.2.2.2 The Period of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Analysis on the Malaysian Tamil folk songs revealed the period of its composition with the advent of Tamil labourers migration. Murasu Nedumaran (n.d., Male:ciyat tōṭṭappurap pāṭalkaḷ- oru pārvai) had supported this by pointing out that Malaysian Tamil folk songs started to emerge during the end of 18th century and develop around the beginning of 20th century (p.2-3). Researcher had found that the Malaysian Tamil folk songs comprised of three eras. The songs have been classified according to the year and its themes.

- I. Songs born before the Japanese occupation (before 1941) - fraudulent, disappointment, work load, poverty, and physical abuse by estate managers were among the focused themes.
- II. Songs born during the Japanese occupation (1941-45) - war impact and Death Railway construction which causes tragic loss of lives.
- III. Songs born after the occupation till the era of independence (1945-1957) - no evidence of huge songs collection. A small number of songs that encouraged revolutions and appreciated the sacrifice made by a few leaders on protecting the lives of the plantation workers.

Some songs appreciated the leaders of Tamilnadu. There is also a song that compared the British and the Japanese troops.





4.2.2.3 The Typologies And Function Of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

According to Thamillannal (2000), politics, economy, science and religion reflects the historical background of a nation's literature (p.62). As notified by Thamillannal, the research has broken down the typologies of Malaysian Tamil folk songs into three major aspects in accordance with their function. They are economic functions, political functions and social functions.

I Economic Function

For economic functions the songs were sung during communal labour. It helps to ease the tension faced by the labourers. Work songs fall into this category. Work songs were everywhere on the plantations. These songs had repetitive rhythmic riffs which suits for the monotonous work. Kummi, kūttu, paddy field are among the songs that function economically. Some of the tasks that induce the song to be sung in this realm are clearing the forests, rubber tapping, harvesting palm trees, constructing road, making ditch, plucking tea leaves and so on.

II Political Function

In political function, the songs serve to prove as historical piece and to stimulate nationalism among the labours. The songs under these levels are war songs, labour songs, songs about plantation, Kangany, nationalism, patriotism and Tamilnadu political ideology songs.





III Social Function

Song is enshrined in every social event of Tamil labourer's life such as birth, death and marriage. Based on analysis it was found that Malaysian Tamil folk songs also served for social function. Murasu Nedumaran elucidated the social functionality of the folk songs as, friends gathering together on moon lit nights entertaining themselves with songs and dances such as kummi, kōlāṭṭam and oyilāṭṭam (Male:ciyat tōṭṭappurap pāṭalkaḷ- oru pārvai, p.2). Funeral songs, birth songs, philosophical songs, love songs, riddles, allusive songs or songs of insult fall under this category.

4.2.2.4 The Characteristics Of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs



Malaysian Tamil folk songs can be divided into three parts. They are

- I) Folk songs which retained the originality of Tamilnadu
- II) Folk songs with few alterations based on the host land, Malaya
- III) Folk songs that completely reflects the host land, Malaya

I Folk Songs Which Retained The Originality of Tamilnadu

Folk songs, sung by the early Tamil migrants at Malaya, were actually the resemblance of Tamil Nadu folk songs. These folk songs retained their originality even in the host land.





Ūrāṇ ūrāṇ tōṭṭattilē - avan
Oruvaṇ pōṭṭatu vellarikkā
Kācukku reṇṭu vikkac colli
Nalla kāyitam pōṭṭāṇṭi vellakkāraṇ

(Ramanathan, 2007, p.271)

“Some planted cucumber
In others plot
White man ordered him
To sell two pieces for an anna”

Ūrāṇ ūrāṇ tōṭṭattilē - avan
a plot belongs to others he
Oruvaṇ pōṭṭatu vellarikkā
a man sowed cucumber
Kācukku reṇṭu vikkac colli
paisa two sell tell
Nalla kāyitam pōṭṭāṇṭi vellakkāraṇ
good paper deliver whiteman

(Thandayutham, vellāikkāraṇ paṇam, p. 35)



This piece of song was found in both the Tamilnadu and Malaysian folk songs. There was no addition made to the song lyric. So, it can be deduced that the maintenance was due to the similar situation in both countries.

II) Folk Songs with Few Alterations Based on The Host Land, Malaya

As the migrant began to feel close with Malaya, the nativity of Tamilnadu and India slowly began to fade away. This firmly supports the research of Dodsworth (2000) who claims that,

To understand the nature of folksong one must think of them as a species which can grow for thousands of years, the seeds of which may be spread to foreign regions where they are subject to new environments, standards and





understandings (including misunderstandings), and sometimes grafted on to other versions of themselves and/or entirely fresh examples (p.19).

Few alterations made on the original folk song depending on the situation in the host land. It was exemplified when the elements of Malaya started to embed in the folk songs sung by the Tamil migrants. Hence the original lyrics were replaced with the situation faced in Malaya.

Ārārō ārārō

terms used to sing lullaby

Intap pālum atuppilē

this milk kiln

Pālakanum tottiyilē

male child cradle

Intap pālakanaip pettetutta

this male child given birth by

pāntiyanām kāttililē

referred to the husband bed

(Vanamaamalai, 2006, tamiḷar nāṭṭup pāṭalkaḷ, tālāṭṭu)

“Ārārō ārārō

The milk is on woodstove

My young boy is on bassinet

The father of the boy

Is in bed”

Ārārō ārārō

terms used to sing lullaby

Intap pālum atuppilē

this milk kiln

Pālakanum tottiyilē

male child cradle

Intap pālakanaip pettetutta

this male child given birth by

pāntiyanām cayām kāttilē

referred to the husband Siam forest

(Saraswathi age 75, Teluk Intan, 15-08-2015; 5:15 pm)





“Ārārō ārārō
The milk is on woodstove
My young boy is on bassinet
The father of the boy
Is at Siam forest”

There is an alteration made on the last line of the song which flows as “pāṇṭiyanām cayām kāṭṭilē (The father of the boy is at Siam forest) replacing the original line “pāṇṭiyanām kaṭṭililē (The father of the boy is in bed). The replacement exemplifies the current situation faced by the wife whose husband was separated, to build railway at Siam during the Japanese occupation.

III Folk songs that completely reflect the host land, Malaya



In the third form, the Tamil labourers were coerced into a hopeless situation of returning to their homeland. Thus, the folk songs began to hold firmly to the elements of Malaya. It has been represented in the following songs.

ārārō ārārō ārirāri ārārō
(terms used to sing lullaby)
en rāsā makanē, nī uraṅku
my refer endearment son you sleep
ōyāte malaiyilē, virakukūte ketaikkule
incessantly rain firewood not to be found
maṇeṇṇai vāṅketān kāsukkē valiillai
kerosene buy money no way
(transcribed from Nathupuram
Gananghal, Audio production courtesy
Astro vanavil Malaysia)

“ārārō ārārō ārirāri ārārō
My beloved son, please fall asleep
It has been raining incessantly, firewoods are not to be found
I don’t even afford to buy kerosene”





nalla tampi tōttamlē, Cinna Tampi volaikayilē
a plantation's name a person's name hard work
ellai kaṭantu vantēnaṭi,
border pass through came
Pondiceri kappal ēri, Penangke nānē pārttēnaṭi
Pondicherry ship board Penang I saw
Depotle ataiccāṇṭi
Depot confined

(transcribed from Nathupuram
 Gananghal, Audio production courtesy
 Astro vanavil Malaysia)

“Cinna Tampi laboured in Nalla Tampi estate
 I left my homeland to the host land
 Across the sea by Pondicherry ship and saw Penang
 They (the colonial officers) confined me in the depot”

kālaile eluntu kaṭuvāli tūkkanum,
morning rise rubber milk pail carry
katumaiyāka nūru marattai vettanum,
toughness hundred trees cut
olaippāli nānke ōṭā tēyanum, varumaiyile nānke yayiru kāñci
labourer we worn out poverty we stomach famished
vēlaiye ceyyā vittā mutuke piṭittu talluvān...
work not done back

(transcribed from Nathupuram
 Gananghal, Audio production courtesy
 Astro vanavil Malaysia)

“Get up before sunrise and carry the pails of rubber milk
 Have to persistently tap 100 rubber trees
 We the labourers are worn out, left famished in midst of poverty
 If the work left unattended, we will get bashed to the ground...”

(Note: The above three consecutive folk songs were obtained from Shantini's (2007), article on ‘Transnational Collaboration and Media Industry in South India: Case of the Malaysian—Indian Diaspora’)

The songs seemed to progress an evolution from its original form by
 integrating to the host land Malaya and gradually conceal the elements of their





ancestral land, Tamilnadu (South India). The themes of the songs began to enfold local issues. As the Tamils forward the movement towards the life in Malaya, each generation began to indulge the customs and traditions that were adapted according to the host land into the collective folk memory.

4.2.2.5 The Essence of The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

Malaysian Tamil folk songs, completely resemble the thoughts of the Tamil labourer community. This has been affirmed by Subramanian (2005) who explicitly endeavoured the functionality of the folk songs by stating that “...in a way, songs were a spontaneous overflow of their emotions depicting their life and experiences...”



(p.362-3). Similarly, Malaysian Tamil folk songs depict the life of the Tamil labourers from the plantations, road and railway communities. The folk songs portrayed their sufferings. Among the themes conveyed in the folk songs are fraudulent, British colonisation, excessive work load, poverty, salary, religion, troublesome estate managers, sexual harassments, love, lullaby, lament, war impact, revolution in India and Indian revolutionist (Logeswary, 2015; Nantini, 2015). For instance, the verse below conveys the suffering of the Indians in Malaya.

... paritavittōm nām
desperateness we
intiyarayyā
Indians
pollāta pātupattōm...
vicious toiled

(Thandayutham, c̣itai pulamparatum, p.172)





“...quiver of desperateness engulfed us the Indians
we were viciously toiled...”

Murasu Nedumaran (1997) claimed that, Malaysian Tamil folk songs contain the elements of the nation itself (p.148). It has been represented in the following verses which encapsulated the reality of the life.

kankāṇinnā kankāṇi karuppuc cattai kankāṇi
kangany kangany black shirt kangany
cañciyilē kūṭṭivantu cākatikkum kankāṇi
indentured system brought killing kangany
cīnikkuk kākkāi ṭṭic cīrāka vālālānnu
sugar crow chase mannerly live
cirikkac cirikkap pēcic cīralikkum kankāṇi
laugh talk ruining kangany

(Murasu Nedumaran, 117. cākaṭikkum kangany, p.335)



“Kangany oh kangany, black shirt kangany
you dragged us in the name of recruitment and killed us
cheated us by offering an easy job for a better life
seduced us with your sweet talks
you have ruined our life kangany”

The verse above discloses the act of the agent who made fake promises with the south Indian labours.

nāva paṭṭinam vantēṇṭi
Nagapattinam came
nammavarap pāṭṭēṇṭi
our people saw
teppōvil ataicciveccic
depot put in
caripāti potaccāṇṭi
exact half buried

(Murasu Nedumaran, 128. nammavaṇka poḷappu, p.340)





“I came to Nagapattinam
I saw our people
were confined in a depot
and buried nearly half of us”

The verse above signifies the suffering experienced by the labourers upon their departure from Tamilnadu. The following verse reveals the plight of the labours living under poverty.

kocuvāla kuṭicca miccam
mosquitoe drunk balance
kollaiyilum pōnāṅka
epidemic went

(Murasu Nedumaran, 129. vantakata vāṇtakata, p.342)

“beaten by mosquitoes
suffered with epidemic disease”



The verse below appraises the extremity of the settlement. Tamils in plantations live in labour lines similar to the slave rows.

attāppu vītu kattik kuttit taṅkam
attap house built word of endearment
atila oru jannal vaccik kuttit taṅkam
in one window put word of endearment

(Murasu Nedumaran, 126.attāppu vītu, p.340)

“An attap house, kuṭṭit taṅkam
With a window on it, kuṭṭit taṅkam”

...cāti pattip pītturīṅka- periya
caste about brag big
cātakamē pākkurīṅka
horoscope seeing
tīṇṭāta cātinnu- teriṅcē





untouchable caste knowingly

tiṇṭu mettai kēppīṇka...

touch bed asking

(Murasu Nedumaran, 130. vākkut taravēṇum, p.343)

“...You brag about caste

Looking deeply at the horoscopes

Despite aware of the untouchables

You are still seeking for sexual enticement...”

The verse above illustrates the caste system that has rooted firmly in the Tamil community. Meanwhile the verse below shows the life of the labourer after the end of the agreement.

malāynātu uttuvantu

Malaya return

mattaiyum atikkātē

monotonous

puttiyum vacamākki

senses custody

polaikkavali pārumaiyā

survive look

(Murasu Nedumaran, 128. nammavaṅka poḷappu, p.340)

“Upon the return from Malaya

Do not be monotonous

Bring the senses to your custody

Look for a way to survive”

vārāṇṭi vārāṇṭi japan torai

coming coming Japanese dorai

varakaricik² kūlukum³ paratēciyā māttenāṇṭi

begger changed

(Murasu Nedumaran, 131. kaḷaṇciyap pāṭal, p.344)

² Varakarici - Husked grain of common millet

³ kūlu - Koozh is the Tamil name for a porridge made from millet





“Japanese is heading
He made me wandering like a beggar for porridge”

The verse above tells the extreme famine and poverty in the life of the Tamil labours in Malaya.

nopparānē cappānkāran
term used to curse *Japanese*
rompa mōcamām
very *cheat*
appurāṇi manucar nammai
meek *human* *us*
aticcik kollurān
hit *killing*

(Murasu Nedumaran, 132.kaḷañciyap pāṭal, p.345)

“Japanese troops
Are atrocious
Docile lives
Are beaten to death”



The verse above reveals the hurdles faced by the Tamils during the construction of the Siam Death railway track.

Songs obtained from Murasu Nedumaran’s documentation mostly reveals the appalling situation faced by the Tamils during the colonisation and few on Japanese occupation. Thandayutham’s compilation has diverse themes. The songs symbolize the expression of social and cultural organization, which reflects the values, and the life of the human beings. In addition to the colonial and Japanese occupation, themes such as religion, caste, family, food, health, settlement, ornaments, clothes, entertainment and games were elucidated throughout the songs. Mutthammal’s compilations reflect the lives of the Tamils in plantation. They have various themes





like inequality in life, theft, lies, cases of infidelity, wars and exploits. It is also important to note down that occupational structure as reflected in the songs is mostly subjected to the tappers.

In a nutshell, the essence of the folk songs compiled by Murasu Nedumaran, Thandayutham and Muthammal Palanisamy expressed loss, gain and hopes of the Tamil labourers. The content of these folk songs allies with the finding made by Manikkam (1994) whom stated folk songs, serve to grand the thoughts and actions of the subjugated group explicitly.

Among these compiled folk songs, researcher was intrigued with the songs that expressed the anger and annoyance at the Europeans. The Europeans were referred as useless, deleterious and evil spirits as reflected in the following verses.

...patumōcakkāran pālum vellakkāran ...
extreme cheat useless white man
(Thandayutham, veḷḷaikkāranum jappānkāranum, p.37)

“...the useless white man is totally deleterious...”

and

...alaiccalulla āṅkilap pēykall...
torment whiteman ghosts
(Thandayutham, āṅkilap paṭaiyin tōlvi, p.45)

“...the tormenting white men are evil spirits...”

The naming extensively reflects the feeling of hatred by the Tamil labourers towards the British masters. If the people’s song is carefully studied and analyzed, it





will be of considerable use in reconstructing the life of the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation as claimed by Vansina (1985) who notifies, historical songs and poems are works intended to provide an account of historical events” (p.148).

Based on the analysis it was found that, Malaysian Tamil folk songs reflect the reality of Tamil labourer’s life in Malaya and the appalling situation they went through. The finding of this objective validates the study of Rogers (2004) who clarified that narratives are efficient in representing any traumatic events given that the product is explored from the personal experience of the victims. Similarly, folk songs as the product of the Tamil labourers reveal the truth of their traumatic experiences in Malaya. This has been discussed in the following objective.



4.3 To Analyse The Trauma Experienced by Tamil Labourers During British Colonisation In Malaya As Reflected In The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

As evidenced in the previous objective, Malaysian Tamil folk songs reflected the difficulties experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation, Japanese occupation and the period of independence. Hence, this section aimed to elicit the difficulties and associate them to the historical relevance of the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya. The songs were analysed in terms of their thematic content, established upon the historical traumatic theory.





Based on the traumatic theory, researcher had identified the mass trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers in the form of segregation, physical and psychological violence, economic destruction and cultural loss as expressed through the folk songs. The folk songs provided substantial evidence for each of the trauma experienced. Each event that triggered the trauma as reflected in the songs, fundamentally evidenced with the information obtained from the reliable research sources and historical records.

4.3.1 Segregation

The Oxford dictionary (2016), defines segregation as the act or state of setting someone or something apart from others. Segregation also alludes to separation.

There is an important relation between segregation and colonisation. To understand this relation, it is wise to recap the meaning of colonisation. According to Kohn (2014), colonisation is described as practice of domination, which involves the subjugation of one people by another (colonialism, ¶ 1). A successful subjugation requires several destructions. Cynthia & Smolewski (2014) have affirmed that destruction in a successful subjugation requires physical and psychological violence, segregation, economic deprivation and cultural destruction (p.32-56).

How does segregation lead to a successful colonisation? Segregation makes way for the dominant to establish their colony. Segregation in the context of colonised Tamils began when they migrated to Malaya. Tinker (1974), has best described the Tamil's migration as "they merely moved from one part of the Indian Empire to





another” (p.111). The migration initiated the separation. Separation of Tamils occurred in different ways. According to Schelling (1969), there is segregation by sex, age, income, language, colour, taste, comparative advantage, and the accidents of historical location (p.488). Despite of variant segregation, the current research intends to look at the segregation in terms of displacement.

Based on the exploration of Malaysian Tamil folk songs, the researcher scrutinized the segregation by pre determined colonial displacement. The displacement was well organized and economically determined. It was executed at different stages. They are,

- 1 Displacement of the Tamils into the plantations (estates),
- 2 Isolation at the work field
- 3 Caste isolation



4.3.1.1 Displacement into Plantations

Plantation is defined as a large farm, especially in a hot part of the world, on which a particular type of crop is grown (Cambridge English Dictionary, 2016). The study defines plantation, as a system of agriculture in which large farms in Malaya used the enforced Tamil labourers to plant and harvest sugar, tea, rubber and palm tree for trade and export.





Rubber plantation became the significant source of economy among the other plantation as stated above. This has been affirmed by Amarjit (2006) who pointed that Malaya emerged as the world's largest exporter of rubber (p.428). Similarly, most of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs represented the life of the labourers in rubber plantation. This implies the significant role played by the Tamil labourers in rubber plantation. The plantation settlement provided for the labourers during the colonisation induced segregation. The segregation was due to the isolated life led by the labourers beyond the far reached plantations.

Researcher has categorized the discussion on the isolated life in the plantation into two features. They are,



- a) Structure of the plantation
- b) Colonial systems in the plantations

The features helped in the displacement of the Tamil labourers into plantation.

a) **Structure of The Plantation**

Analysis on the structure of the plantation was made based on its function and characteristics. In terms of the function, the plantation was looked upon as a colonial settlement. In terms of the characteristics, the plantation was located at isolated frontier. It also forms restricted boundaries. The structure of the plantation helped in keeping the labourer community confined in a place.





I Plantation As A Colonial Settlement

Plantation was set to play the role it was designed for. Firstly, it was seen as a settlement that facilitates the establishment of a colony. It has been corroborated in the definition given by the Oxford dictionary (2016) that, plantation is known as an early method of colonisation in which settlers or the immigrant labourers were ‘planted’ to establish a colonial base. Secondly, it was perceived as a total institution that enclosed the Tamil labourer community from the external world. According to Beckford (1999), Western powers designed the plantations as ‘total institution’ to expand the agricultural potential of their exploited colonies (p.9). Jain (2000) also acknowledged Malayan plantation as a ‘total institution’, within which Indian labourers not only produce rubber for export but also grow up, marry, save and consume, quarrel and cooperate, and die (p.2).



These plantations were owned by the British and they were commonly known as ‘estates’. A folk song incorporates one of the estates as below.

...Sriputih estate tōttam

name of an estate

Cinna turaikkum maṅkaḷam...

small dorai goodbye

(Thandayutham, āṅkilēyar koṭumai, p.7)

“...Goodbye to the dorai of
Sriputih estate...”

The verse indicates the existence of an estate called Sriputih. Meanwhile, the appraisal of the dorai (word used to refer to European employer) indicates the





plantation community. Essentially the given verse reflects the wish of the labourers of putting a stop to the atrocious European planter.

II Isolated Frontier

According to Oxford (2016) the frontier refers to the “extreme limit of the settled land beyond which lies wilderness”. Correspondingly the settled lands resided by the Tamil labourers were located in isolated frontier area. This cause the labourers to always feel concerned for their safety as the isolated plantation held danger lurking environment. It has been reflected in the following verse.

...pārttā payamākutē- intak

see frightening this

Gleria Estate- le
name of an estate

(Murasu Nedmaran, 122. Gleria Estate, p.338)

“...It is frightening here
in Gloria estate...”

The isolated plantation set so many difficulties for its occupants. It has been represented in the following songs. The song narrates the struggles faced by a labourer to get back to his work after being out of the plantation to settle his pending salary.

...velakkā kātirukku

whiteman waiting

cīnanōta vīttilatān irukkirāru

Chinese house being

īrāntu pillaipōla irukkirār...

two years like child being

...avar kūliyattān koṭukkalēnnu





he wage never give
Mayaṅki ninnārē...
unconscious standing
...tolilālītān mayaṅki ninnārē
labourer unconscious standing
kūli koṭuttāruṅka
wage given
Arici kurunai koṭuttāruṅka
rice grain granules given
Vēlaikkuk kilampi
work leaving
Varumpōtu katavulē
coming owh God
Perampallaruntu nālāvatu mail
refer to a place fourth mile
Curāṅkattatān utaiccittāṅke katavulē
mine exploded God
Kapārññūtān varamutile katavulē
refer to quick act cannot come God
atō katiyar muṭiñciṭāru
miserable plight finished
 (Thandayutham, tōṭṭak kūli, p. 18)



“The Whiteman has been around
 for two years in Chinese house
 The wages were hold out
 poor labourers losing consciousness
 they barely could stand
 And then the wage has been given
 with granules
 upon leaving a mine exploded
 blocking the way to return
 owh gosh how to face this plight ”

The song begins with the disappointment expressed as the labourers were not paid their wages. The labourers waited for the European planter who was sojourn in a Chinese residence for nearly two years. At the end, the labourer was only paid in mere wage and kurunai rice which is nothing but broken rice. It was a devastating and frustrating form of payment in return for their labour. The timidity restricted them to fight for the unfair wage. Exhaustedly, the labourer accepted and head to his





plantation. Unfortunately, the way to the plantation was blocked due to the mine explosion as stated in the line - ‘Curaṅkattatāṇ uṭaicciṭṭāṅke’ (mine exploded). He was unable to continue the journey. It has to be noted here that the term ‘journey’ is used instead of the word path. This is because it metaphorically indicates the location of the isolated plantation which is four miles that is approximately 7 km from the mine settlement. This corroborates the study of Amarjit (2006) who claims plantations were established in isolated frontier areas, far from the towns and mining settlements (p.456).

The Chinese residence is situated around the mine settlement as evidenced in the line ‘Curaṅkattatāṇ’ (mine). The Chinese labourers who were meant for the tin development were placed around the mining settlements (Khoo, 2005, p.5). These settlements are located at urban areas. Thus, there was no way for the labour to make a quick escape through. The labour was blacked out as elucidated in the line- ‘atō katiyar muṭiñciṭāru’ (owh gosh how to face this plight). He found no option. The thought of the people at the plantation who were waiting eagerly for his return seized him. The line utters the helpless condition faced by the labourer.

The song above serves as an authentic example on how Tamil labourers were isolated and suffered in the rural frontier. The migration of the Tamils as coerced by the British was directed to a distinctive demographic distribution. They could not even make a quick escape in case of any emergencies due the far located plantations. This shows how an isolated area can restrict the movement of its occupants.





III Restricted Boundaries in Plantation

Geographically, plantation set boundaries to the life of the labourers. The boundary was the colonial's strategy to keep the Tamil labourers 'bound' down by confining them. The strategy was in accordance to the divide and rule policy of the British colonial. This validates the study of Árný Aurangasri Hinriksson (2014) who stated the administration of divide and rule policy favours the management of colonization.

The following verse depicts the restriction towards the mobility of Tamil labourers in Sriputih estate. The labourers were not even allowed to wander around after 7.pm. It was indicated in the following line.



...ēlu manikkullāka India
seven hours before
tūntilitta mīn pōla...
fishing rod fish like



(Thandayutham, ānkilēyar koṭumai, p. 7)

“...India became as the fish on rod
writhing before seven’o clock...”

As shown in the verse, the freedom to move around was restricted in plantations. The rights of the labourers have been violated with such restrictions. The isolation of plantations, apprehensiveness of the workers, and their assimilation into the plantation borders abridged this mobility. A study by Alatas (2013), also discusses the restriction period applied on estate labourers. He stated that the labourers will be locked from 6pm to 6 am (p.88). This periodic confinement was found in remote places.





Murasu Nedumaran, recalled how the restriction obligated. It was not only imposed on movement, but also on their electricity and water supply. He added that, the power supply will be shut down after 9.pm and the water supply coordinates according to the allocated time. Labourers have to struggle in between their work load to finish the home chores before the current and water supply were cut off.

b) Colonial Systems in Plantation

The colonial system implemented in the plantation was a strategy used by the British on the displaced Tamil labourers. The strategy ensured the efficiency of the plantation development by keeping the displaced community in a circle of dependency. It also allowed the British to exercise control over the Tamil labourers. The implementation of the strategy has been scrutinized by the researcher into four features namely bureaucratically organised system, social stratification, paternalism and hegemonic kangany. These features helped to keep the labourers under control.

I Bureaucratically Organized System

As noted earlier, plantation served as a total institution. Smith (1967) clarifies the notion total institution, as a “bureaucratically organized system in which whole blocks of people were treated as units and are marched through a set of regimentation under the surveillance of the small supervisory staff” (p.230). In the case of plantations in Malaya the Tamil labourers especially the rubber tappers ‘marched’ through a set of regimentation known as roll call or muster, treated under the supervision of Dorai and





Kangany, every early morning. The regimentation has been manifested in the following verse.

...perattilē pērkotuttu,
muster name given
Periya turaikku calām pōttu...
Big dorai salute given
añcip patunki ninnu,
dread hide stand
ayyā mārukkū cālām pōttu...
sir refer the form of respect salute given
(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84)

“...registering at the muster
whilst saluting dorai and Sir apprehensively...”

The verse notes on the situation at the muster. Every early morning the labourers muster around an open space in the estate. The assemble is crucial for the proper operation of the plantation. Shanthini (2007) has strengthened the significance of the muster as the “grid of control that assembles them within the framework of their task and consequently marshals them out into the field” (p.10). After the assembly, labourers are required to register their attendance in the presence of the superiors. The names will be called out. The song below calls out the attendance of the labourers for the registration purpose.

ēṭtaip puratturāru
page turn over
ellammava kūppitarāru
name of a woman labourer calling
katu katunnu kūppitarāru
scowl calling
kaataayiye kūppitarāru
name of a woman labourer calling
viru virunnu pōrāru
quickly going
veerammava kūppitarāru





name of a woman labourer calling

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyiṇ vākkumūlam, p.23)

“...whilst thumbing through the pages
ellamma given a scowl call
kaataayi was called
heading briskly
veeramma was called...”

...perattukku vantittānti,
muster arrived
purattukāra kankāṇi,
fact distorter kangany
ēṭṭaip puratturāṇṭi
pages flipping

kūppiturā,
calling
pukkaip puratturāṇṭā
book flipping
pullāiyiayik kūppiturān...
name of a woman labourer calling

(Mutthammal. pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 2, p. 85)

“The fact distorter kangany has arrived muster
flipping vigorously he is calling Pullaayi”

The presence of the labourer will be notified when they answer to the call. The previous song denotes the obedient answer made to the call. The line - ‘Periya turaikku calām pōṭṭu’ - (saluting dorai) reflected the respectful manner of the labourer during the roll call. In some roll call such event are frequently replaced with the labourers having their own way of recording their presence. Some display the voice of grudge and some reply in humoristic mode. Shanthini (2007) has cited a scene at muster as follows:





Some were grouchers whose tones betrayed the ‘grudge’ they felt at being torn from their slumbers and others ‘humorists’ who pretended not to have heard their name called out, for the innocent pleasure of having it repeated (p.47).

The line ‘torn from their slumber’ refers to the act of waking up from sleep due to the wakeup call made for the assembly at muster. Normally the call will be given at dawn, the daybreak. The verse below shows the time when the bell or the gong is summoned for the roll call.

Kālaik karukkalil
morning pre dawn
Kankāṇi maṇiyatikka
kangany ringing bell

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84)



...kālaiyilē nālu maṇikku kēl
morning four hour listen
kilakku maṇi aṭikkumpōtu ṭiṅku ṭiṅkutān
east bell being rung sound of the bell

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyṇ vākkumūlam, p. 23)

“Listen to me, its 4 a.m in the morning
and the bell rings (ting ting...)”

Veerayi cīkkiram eluntuvāti
name of a woman labourer quick wake up
Kankāṇi virattu vāṇṭi
kangany drive away
vīttukkulliruntu veliyē vāti
from the house out come
caṅku cattam kēkkutati jaltiyā vāti!
siren sound heard quickly come
toṭa toṭattān vaṇṭiyēri
sound in vehicle
turaiyum vantuttān vāti





dorai came come

A.B.C patitta turaiyum vantuttānti!...

refers to the accountant come

(Thandayutham, jaltiyā vāṭi, p.55)

“Oh, Virayi!

Rise up quickly

The kangkani is here to drive you away

Hurry up for the roll-call

The dorai too has come

In his car with its crattling noise

and the accountant is here too...”

The verses given above imply that the labourers are required to assemble at the assembly upon hearing the bell. The term ‘karukal’ in the first song refers to the daybreak. The verse ‘kālaiyilē nālu maṇikku’ (early morning at 4am) in the second song refers to the time they are usually awakened. This is the time where most of us

will be tucked under the bed. But the labourers were unfortunate. The sleeping hours had also been violated. They wake up with half sleep. Any delay in the coming for the roll call costs them with physical abuses. The following songs stand as evidence that rushes the labourers to the muster to avoid unwanted consequences.

...cāmakkāran

kūppitūrān

a person who makes the wake up call calling

viruvirunnu taṇṇi pōtu ellamma!

briskly water put name of a woman labourer

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyin vākkumūlam, p.23)

“...wake up call has been made Ellamma,

quickly boil the water”

The delay of the labourers to register at the muster is attributed to the house chores that have to be done before going for work. It is known that the roll call is





made early at the dawn. The woman at house needs to play their role as care takers before indulging in the duty as income earners. They have to settle all the house chores before the assembly. They need to sort out the works accordingly. Sometimes the children were not properly taken care of, since both the parents hurried to work. This affects the child. For example, the song below elucidates how the father rushed the mother who was about to feed her little one. He claimed that kankāṇi will trash her away if she comes late for the roll call.

...pālūṭṭa vēṇṭāmaṭi veerayi
feed milk not needed name of a woman labourer
cīkkiram eḷuntu vāṭi unnai
quick get up come you
vilakkituvār kankāṇi
push aside kangany
perattukkup pōṭi...
muster go

(Thandayutham, kankāṇiyin kaivannam, p. 58)

“...Oh! Veerayi no need to feed the baby
 get yourself ready to muster quickly
 or else
 get ready to be pushed aside by kangany...”

This song depicts how the labourers were afraid of the kankāṇi. The labours were submissive and even tend to ignore their children. It should be their responsibility and priority to cater the basic needs of the child. But, they were so apprehensive about the ‘regiment’ system that requires them to assemble on time. On the other hand, the child left without being fed. There was no proper maternal care. Halfway with the house chores, the labourers rush to prepare the tools needed for the rest of the day and run towards the muster. The superiors will record the presence and





deliver the labourers with the day's chore. After the roll call they scatter to their allotted tasks.

The submissive nature of the Tamil labourers as reflected in the finding above can be related to the social stratification system in the plantation.

II Social Stratification

Warner (1963), has defined social stratification as “two or more orders of people who are believed to be, and are accordingly ranked by members of the community, in socially superior and inferior positions” (p.32). In the context of this research, the plantation management was the superior and the Tamil labourers were the inferior.

Hence, this offers a clear picture of plantation having a rigid system of social stratification. This has been affirmed by Beckford (1999) whom clarified that, plantation provided sufficient authority and control to create new social order (p.38).

The authority and the control were executed through force. The force was implemented via a class structure. A class structure is made up of the subordinate on the lower rank depressed by the superior ordinate on the highest rank. The subordinate is the subjugated and the superior is the dominant group. In the context of this research Tamil labourers are the subjugated, whereas plantation management is the dominant group. As reflected in the folk song, the class structure of the plantation society in Malaya is made up of three groups: the White European planters at the top; the Kanganies and other superior mediators at the intermediate; and a large body of





Tamil labourers at the bottom. The class structure is clearly pictured in the folk song below.

... āmām turaiyai nampi ēlēlappati taṇtalirukka
 ...yes *dorai* *believed by* *rhythmic term* *tax collector*
Āmām collu - anta taṇtalirukka
 yes *tell* *that* *tax collector*
Anta taṇtala nampi ēlēlappati tolilālirukka...
that *tax collector* *believed by* *rhythmic term* *labourers*
 (Thandayutham, *ēlē ēlō pāṭṭu* -1, p. 253)

“...Oh tax collector rely upon *dorai*
 and the labourers depend on tax collector...”

...pērukkup periya turai
big dorai (more superior)
pirattu vaikkum cinnaturai...
muster put small dorai (superior)
 ...ayyā kaṇakkuppillai...
sir accountant

(Thandayutham, *kankāṇi*, p.56)



“...Oh the superior *periya dorai*
 the master of *muster cinna dorai*
 and accountant...”

The songs above illustrate the dependency of each class to its superior. The *taṇṭal* rely on *dorai*/ European planters. The labourers are dependent on the *taṇṭal*. This once again illustrates the principle of plantation system that keeps illiterate labourers isolated, ignorant and totally dependent upon the governing/managing class of a few white planters and labourer mediators (*Kanganies*). The dependency exerted by the management on Tamil labourers successfully restricted their progress. This state of dependent is due to the paternalistic social-security environment that existed in the plantation.





III Paternalism

Paternalism restricts the freedom of the people. Coons (2013), further clarifies paternalism as a fatherly governing system that provides the need of the people by limiting their autonomy (p.28). The autonomy was limited with the creation of the paternalistic environment. Despite of taking care of the labourers well being, the environment formed a condition of dependency which engages the labourers to the managers.

The dependency system has been well captured in the verse below. It shows how the labourers even depended on European planters for economic purposes.



...Periya torai varuvārām

big dorai will come

Namakku campalam taruvārām...

us salary will give

(Thandayutham, etirpārppu, p.220)

“...The superior dorai is heading
and the salary is arriving....”

This particular verse expresses the hope of a labourer who waits for the arrival of dorai. The labourers were expecting their wages from the ‘mighty’ dorai. The dorai also contributed to the celebration of the labourers wedding function and religious festivals. Celebrations were maintained during the colonization as it gives the sense of belonging and attachment to the Tamil community with their ancestral land. This has been validated in the research conducted by Kumaran (2011).





For instance, the following song shows the contribution made by the dorai for his labourer. It narrates the situation in a wedding celebration.

...vārārām tora vārārām
refer to the herald of dorai
vellila potti vāṅki
silver box buy
vārārām tora vārārām
refer to the herald of dorai
vantu potti torappārām
come box will open
irukkirata alli allit taruvārām
money reserve extravagantly will give
karumpaayiram alakanukkuk
refer to a male labourer
kalyāṇam colli
marriage informed
allit taruvārām...
extravagantly will give

(Thandayutham, ūrāṇ tōṭṭattilē, p.36)



“...Here comes the Dorai with his shiny silver box
He will generously present with money
for Karumpaayiram marriage...”

The song announces the arrival of dorai who is coming to Karumpaayiram’s (a labourer) wedding function. It was noted in the line ‘vārārām tora vārārām’ (Here comes the Dorai). The people were anticipating for his huge monetary contribution for the wedding. They happily voice out ‘kalyāṇam colli, allit taruvārām’ (generously present with money for Karumpaayiram marriage).

Besides that, there will be an exchange of prestations between the labourer and the dorai. The labours collectively bought present (varisai) and hand it over to the manager in his bungalow. In the context of colonization, a bungalow describes any house occupied by a European (Hembry, 2011, p.26). This is literally known by the





term “Great House” syndrome which acted as the central feature of a plantation social hierarchy. It describes the structure of the manager’s house as large, ostentatious, baronial house. The manager then ask the woman labourers to perform a folk dance (kummiyaṭital) and offer sweets and money to labourers and children (Cultural Continuity and Change, p.104). The celebration has been portrayed in the following verse.

...Vārārām turai Vārārām
refer to the herald of dorai
Bankalā vittu velivāṅkati
Bungalow from come out
Vantatum petti torappārām
once arrived box will open
Ettanaiyō velli taruvārām...
how many unit of currency will give
(Thandayutham, kummip pāṭṭu, p.242)



“...Here come the dorai
ladies come out of the Bungalow
Upon his arrival we shall be showered with fortunes...”

This ceremony dramatizes the social system in an estate. There is also another song sung at this prestation ceremony.

Irumpu nārkāli pōṭṭukittu torai
iron chair fix dorai
Eṇṇeyum tēccut talai muluki
oil rub head bath
Sūryan pōlat teppakulavīti
sun like temple tank
Eppa varuvārō kaccērikku!
when coming performance
(Thandayutham, kummip pāṭṭu-4, p.244)

“...Dorai graciously sitting on iron chair
while taking his oil bath
he was like the Sun shining in the middle
eagerly waiting for our performances...”





Analysis made on the Malaysian Tamil folk songs revealed two things about Kummipāṭṭu. It was sung during the event of prestation and religious feast. The song above was intended for the prestation ceremony to welcome the dorai. The line ‘Eppavaruvārō kaccērikku’ (eagerly waiting for our performances) describes the anticipation of the women who are waiting for the ‘kaccēri’- (performance of music and dance) to commence.

Despite of the hidden intention, the European planters helped the Tamils during the festive and wedding celebration. The festive celebration was the only occasion for the community to gather around the temple and celebrate happily. Even, it was also a part of the plan to constrain their autonomy. It complies the statement of Shanthini (2007) that, “the fact that planters built temples of worship within the vicinity of the plantations is to induce the labourers to stay and not stray” (p.12). The estate management provided facilities for the celebration. The accommodation provided reflected the paternalist attitude. Colonizers premeditated to make the subjugated group feel that the colonizers are being affectionate towards them. Jackman (1994) clearly signifies “affection is the emotion that dominants want to feel toward groups that they exploit” (p.383). It is also a type of exploitation known as ‘sweet persuasion’ preferred by the dominant groups (Stets, 2006, p.400). Apart from the paternalistic character exhibited by the Europeans, kanganies also showed dominancy and dependency by being hegemonic.





IV Hegemonic Kangany

Kangany also exhibited the paternalistic character by being hegemonic. According to Cambridge (2016) hegemonic refers to the “position of being the strongest and most powerful and therefore able to control others”. Thus by being hegemonic, kangany was able to exert control and keep the Tamil labourers bound down. Kangany used subtle method to keep the labourers attached to and dependent on him. The method was known as debt-bondage relationship.

Arudsothy (1968), has affirmed to this by stating that, the hegemonic character of the Kangany was manifested in debt-bondage relationship (p.75). The debt-bondage relationship occurred between the labourer and the Kangany themselves. The method keeps the labourers continuously indebted to kangany. Frequent debt caused them to be unable to repay. The relationship took two forms in which, the kangani related to the labourer as shopkeeper and money lender.

For instance, their role as a shopkeeper made the labourers to buy the vegetables from them. Since the labourers are confined, they were not able to leave the plantation to purchase grocery things. The kanganies pre-planned to make the labourers buy the vegetables from them. For example the song below shows how brinjal- ‘kattirikkā’ is being sold to a labourer.

...kattirikkā vāṅkikitta kaṭavulē!-avan
brinjal if bought god he
Kaiyaik katti nikkirāṇṭā kaṭavulē...
hand fold standing god
...āṭa vītiyila naṭantu varumpōtu kaṭavulē





express annoyance street walk coming god
kankāṇi poṇṭātti
kangany wife
Kattirikkā vaiccuruppā...
brinjal have

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.25)

“...Owh my God hands are folded
 if brinjals are taken
 even on the streets
 kangany’s wife waiting
 with brinjal in her hand...”

The first line in the song reflected the dependency of the labour after he bought the brinjal from the kangany. The line ‘Kaiyaik kaṭṭi nikkiṛāṇṭā kaṭavuḷē’ - (he was standing with hands folded), literally illustrates the position of a docile labourer who obediently waits for the kangany’s command. Apart from that, the song also narrates how the labour spent his so called ‘salary’ of 30 cents after a long tiring workday. On his return from the toddy shop, the kangany’s wife will be waiting at the side of the road with brinjal in her hand. He was indirectly reminded to give the rest of the money. In return, the labourer was all left with a penny.

Despite the paternalistic environment, the Tamils were still under pressure as they were vulnerable. Due to physical and psychological abuses they were depressed with the European planters. Even tough, the plantation was owned by them, the management was supervised by the intermediates who constantly act barbarically as reflected in the previous songs before. The labourers lost hope on them and cried out as given below.





...pālāyp pōna vellakkārā
wretched *whiteman*
nīyiruntu eṅkaḷukku enna utavi?
you *us* *what* *help*
 (Thandayutham, kummippāṭṭu -1, p.241)

“...Eh useless whiteman
 what is the point of your existence here?”

The verse questions the existence of the European who is not doing anything to help the labourers.

4.3.1.2 Isolation at The Workfield

Isolation at the work field also caused separation. The separation can be attributed to the nature of the work. This section focuses on the working nature in Tamilnadu before explaining the working nature in Malaya plantation.

The Tamil labourer force in Malaya belonged to socially and economically rearward section of rural community. This has been supported by Khan (1963) whom pointed that the migrants were mostly involved in agricultural work at India (p.359-360). The agricultural work required them to work communally (Murasu Nedumaran, n.d., maleciya tottapurap padalgal-orupaarvai, p.3). They had an opportunity to mingle around, talk and sing together during the ploughing activity.

On the contrary, the labourers were coerced into a different working environment in Malaya. They had neither opportunity nor time for gathering. This is





due to the nature of their job. The bulk of indentured and assisted labourers were recruited to do the manual jobs. These jobs required them to toil on physical works such as clearing the forest, constructing the dikes, cutting the tress and etc. The physical work was harder because preparing the land for cultivation usually meant clearing the virgin forests. They only used picks, shovels, axes, and other hand tools to do the works. Most of the works required them to work individually (Murasu Nedumaran, n.d., maleciya tottapurap padalgai-orupaarvai, p.3). Even, the works required for the plantation also was conducted individually. The labourers have to plant, weed, and harvest themselves.

Besides that, the working field also attribute to the isolation of the labourers.

The work field was usually located deep in the forest. For example, in rubber plantation some of the tapping plots located near the forest covers. This causes the labourers to be occupied with terror due to the interior work field. They feared for their safety. The following songs reflect the horror amidst the forest cover.

...pākkap payamā irukkuṭaṭi-namakkum

see fear be us

pāluvetu vēṇāmaṭi...

milk cut don't want

(Murasu Nedumaran, 119.cinna cinna poṅkaḷukku, p.336)

“...its scary to see and be here

lets don't tap rubber here..”

...añcām number kāttukkullē

fifth number forest

enna vettac colrār

me cut told

mettappaya mākutayyā...

greatly scaring

(Murasu Nedumaran, 121. vēṇattōṭṭam pōṇenayyā, p.337)





“...I am told to cut the fifth plot
it scares the hell out of me...”

Moreover, the tappers work at a distance from each other. They rarely have nearest company. This leads to lack of connection and communication among the labourers. Slowly the social isolation develops the feeling of loneliness among the workers. Across time, the loneliness engulfs them. Long term exposure to loneliness causes depression. One study found that time spent alone tend to depress a person's mood and intense the feelings of loneliness (Robinson, 1991, p.196).

However, the labourers occupy and accompany themselves in the tranquillity of the forest by collecting the memories they had. Some gives pleasure but mostly it reflected the grief they had. They tend to wash away the sorrow by voicing them out through flow of lyrics. For instance, this folk song is a composition born from the memory of a woman tapper. She used to sing the song when tapping the rubber tree.

...Alli nān pāramenru
name of a girl I burden
Ammāvām pāviyaval
mother wretch
Accāram vāṅkikittu
money given in advance received
Ayal nātu tāttināṅka...
foreign land tall and stout

(Muthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal -3, p. 87)

“...I was seen as a burden
By my wretched mother
Who received advance money
And washed me away...”





The song has best manifested itself as a company for the woman tapper who lonely taps in the rubber plantation.

4.3.1.3 Caste Isolation

Caste system is inseparable in the lives of the Indian society. In fact, the Indian community often been defined by its specific socio-religious mode of segmentation (Claveyloras, 2015, ¶ 1). According to Williams (1951), caste implies the existence of a 'superiority-inferiority scale' (p.79). The superiority and the inferiority that existed among the Tamil labourers can be attributed to the caste division.



inferiority social system. The depression was so magnified that it caused them to migrate. This statement has been corroborated in the findings of Murasu Nedumaran (2007) whom elucidated that land insufficiency, caste differentiation, low self -esteem and self -confidence were among the reasons for the migration of Tamils to Malaya (p.11). The emigrants saw the migration as 'fleeing from caste oppression' (Satyanarayana, 2001, p.26).

Emigration of labourers to Malaya consisted of people from low castes and upper castes (Khan,1963; Shantini, 2007; Amarjit,2006) . The folk songs below show the presence of different castes in Malaya such as Nāṭār, vaṇṇār, Mutaliyār and ceṭṭiyār.





Āraiyā kataiyilē,

who in shop

Arumuga nāṭārē...

the person belongs to naṭār caste

(Mutthammal, kaḷḷuk kaṭaip pāṭal 1, p. 88)

“who is in the shop?

Arumuga nāṭār”

This musical lyric questions the whereabouts of the person who owns the toddy shop. It is known that Arumugam who is from the Nadar caste owns the shop. Nadars were positioned barely above the untouchables (Mansingh, 2006, p.327). The Nadars were a community mostly engaged in the palmary industry, including the production of toddy, in the early 19th century (Gough, 1981, p.333). They were hereditary toddy tappers. There was some degree replication of caste or even “an invention of caste” within the plantation economy as workers hierarchy broadly conformed to the caste system.

The following song exemplifies the presence of different caste among the Tamils.

...enna petta māṭāvē

me give birth mother

Nā mutaliyār ponjāti...

I type of a caste wife

(Thandayutham, mōcam paṇṇip pōnāṅka, p.143)

“...Oh my mother!

I am mutaliyār’s wife”

...vaṇṇāra jātiyilē...

type of a caste

...Pāppāra jātiyilē...

type of a caste

(Thandayutham, keti ilanta peṇ, p.144)





“..vaṇṇāra caste
...Pāppāra caste...”

The two songs above were sung as lament songs. They portrayed the caste the labourers belong to. The first song shows the mutaliyār caste while the second song shows the existence of vaṇṇār caste and Pāppār which is actually a corrupted form of Pāppanār the Brahmins.

Despite the migration, the caste consciousness continues to persist in the plantations. In fact caste was one of the prime causes of early disturbances among the labourers. (Cultural continuity and change, p.65). The distinction was not created by the European planters, but it was the conspiracy of the Kanganies and Brahmins and other ‘clean’ castes. The labours from lower castes were abused by these so called upper castes. It has been represented in the following folk songs.

tiruttu murattup paya
furtive ruffian fellow
kilattu vaṇṇārap paya
aged person vaṇṇār caste
ippati atikkalāmā en
in this manner beat my
cinnap poṇṇa...
little girl
...ippati atikkalāmā?
in this manner beat
Ayyā cettiyaṛē
respect form type of caste
Tappitam ellāmē eṅkaḷ...
mistake all us

(Thandayutham, ippaṭi aṭikkalāmā, p.190)

“The furtive vaṇṇār fellow
ruffiantly whacked my little girl...
...The cettiyaṛ hit us to the ground
as though the mistake was ours...”





The song above narrates an elderly man from vaṇṇār caste who beat a little girl. The song flows as the parent disputed his act. The same song raised objection upon the physical abuse commanded by the Ceṭṭiyār. The Ceṭṭiyār was seen to recklessly abuse the innocent people.

The following song voices out the Brahmins abuse on women.

Antap pātaiyile pārppaṇarkaḷ
this street Brahmin caste
Paritavikka vittārkaḷ
suffer let
pāvappatta peṇkalellām
piteous women
varuttap paṭātinka
do not worry
vayittericcal colli manam...
frustration tell mind
kōttiram pārūṅka
caste notice
inta cāṇ vayittukku
this span stomach
ellām pātupatuṅka
all work hard
sutukātu kākkum reṇtu
crematorium guarding two
cāti mūṇu ētuṅkaṇṇu
caste three what for

(Thandayutham, cātikaḷ illaiyaṭi, p.238)

“...Brahmins let the piteous women
 to suffer in the streets
 do not worry
 what is the caste for?
 getting toiled to fill the stomach
 what for is the caste in the crematorium?”

The term pārppaṇarkaḷ refer to the Brahmin caste. The folk song expresses the depression of the subordinates who were ill treated by the Brahmins. It was elucidated in the line ‘Antap pātaiyile pārppaṇarkaḷ Paritavikka vittārkaḷ’ (Brahmins let the





piteous women to suffer in the streets). The song consoles the women not to get worry. They were solaced to work and strive hard to continue living and not to get dispirited with the Brahmins act. They also question if the caste matters even after the death? It shows the extent of the brutal treatment received by the labourers from the upper castes.

The next song reveals the clashes that occurred between the two distinct castes.

ēninta vātam
why dispute
cātiyin pētam
caste difference
ēlai makkal namakkul
poor people between us
ēnō virōtam?
why enmity?
tiṇṭat takātavarkalukku
untouchables
paktarkalukku inaiyākātō
devotee unequal
avarkalukku tēkamatil
they body
ūrum rattam vērō
blood flow different
ennaip pulaiyarenru pēcalāmō
me low caste told

(Thandayutham, irattam orē niṇam, p.237)

“why argue on caste
why is there an enmity among ourselves?
are the untouchables unequal to the devotees?
or do they have different blood?
why addressing me as *pulaiyar*?”

The phrase ‘ēninta vātam cātiyin pētam’ (why argue on caste why is there an enmity among ourselves) connotes the confrontation between the castes. It depicts the





social suffocation that emerges from the discrimination against the working classes, who were largely from the lowest strata. Arasaratnam (1970) has also evidenced the occurrence of the clashes between untouchables and upper caste men, and between various clean castes (p.66). Whereas the line ‘*t̃ṇṭat takātavarkaḷukku paktarkaḷukku iṇaiyākātō*’ (are the untouchables unequal to the devotees?) shows that they were even prohibited from entering the temple. The phrase ‘paktar’ refers to the devotee. The untouchables had their separate shrines, both in estate and towns, and were not allowed into the temples of the upper castes (Arasaratnam, 1970, p.65).

The musical phrase, ‘*avarkaḷukku tēkamatil ūṛum rattam vērō*’ (do they have different blood) notifies the protestation of lower castes on caste based discrimination. Blood has been used as a symbol to reflect their argument. The social equality is justified as both castes live on same blood colour. Cameron (1998), has designated such belief in sharing same blood as one-blood ideology (p. 242). According to this ideology, equality is achieved through existential reality and substance. The last line ‘*eṇṇaip pulaiyareṇṇu pēcalāmō*’- (why calling me pulaiyar) shows the resistance of the people towards the discrimination. Pulayar refers to low caste person. Despite of sharing the same blood, the low castes were still ill treated.

Substantial evidence was obtained when the caste discrimination was blinded for sexual purpose. The song below stands as evidence.

...*cāti* *pattip* *p̃ttur̃ṇka-* *periya*
caste *about* *brag* *big*
cātakamē *pākkur̃ṇka*
horoscope *seeing*
t̃ṇṭāta *cātinnu-* *teriñcē*
untouchable *caste* *knowingly*





tintu mettai kēppīṅka...

touch bed asking

(Murasu Nedumaran, 130. vākkut taravēṇum, p.343)

“...You brag about caste
Looking deeply at the horoscopes
Despite aware of the untouchables
You are still seeking for sexual enticement...”

The song conveys the sexual exploitation made on the women labourers from the lower strata. Besides being a target for physical violence they were also assaulted with sexual violence. It questions back the perception of the society that bias against the victim’s position and brag about their higher caste. Their degraded action does not reflect the so called clean community they belong to. The labourers were so vulnerable. The state can be reasoned with their position in the social caste system.

Haspels (2001) states that subordinates were more backward and therefore the men are ‘less educated’ and more oppressive while women are highly unlikely to take action (p.18). Thus, the dominants take advantage of the vulnerable women.

4.3.2 Physical Abuse

This section examined the physical abuse into two categories namely physical force that controls the labourers and physical conduct of sexual nature that harasses the women labourers. The discussion begins with explanation on physical force followed by physical conduct of sexual nature.





I Physical Force That Controls the Labourers

According to the Encyclopedia of Applied Psychology, physical abuse is defined as the physical force that causes “injury, physical pain, or impairment” (Spielberger, 2004, p.695). Correspondingly, physical abuse in current research is defined as physical force exerted on Tamil labourers that caused them to feel physically diminished and suffer from injury and pain. The colonials resorted to physical force as a mean of control and to maintain authority over the labourer community.

Since, the function of the force was to control the Tamil labourers within limits, researcher has analysed the physical force in terms of restraint. Anything that causes injury, physical pain, or impairment is discussed in restraint. The current study has examined several forms of restraint such as confinement, overwork and punishment. Each of the form has been scrutinized further. Confinement has been analysed in terms of recruitment and settlement. Overwork has been investigated in terms of nature of the work, and the dangerous that incurred during the work. Finally, punishment has been examined in terms of violence acts.

II Physical Conduct of Sexual Nature That Harasses The Labourers

The study has also defined the physical abuse as intentional and unwanted contact made with a body. The unwanted contact has been clearly expressed in the folk songs in the form of sexual harassment. Thus, the research has also perceived the sexual harassment as physical conduct of sexual nature. Sexual harassment has been described as unwelcomed physical contact for sexual favors.





As reflected in the folk songs, the sexual harassment was seen to be systematically planned. The labourers employment in the plantation serves to exemplify this. This is because their employment in the plantation was based on gender division. Thus in this section, analysis on how the gender division facilitated sexual harassment has been explained.

4.3.2.1 Restraint

Cambridge (2016), defines restraint as a method or a device that controls the mobility of a person or a thing and thereby preventing any development and growth. Anything under restraint is prohibited for its freedom. Hence for a successful colonisation, restraint has been used as a method to inhibit the mobility and freedom of the people thriving for better life. British had also applied several restraints that caused the Tamil labourers in Malaya to become weak. There are strong evidences throughout the songs that links the physical restraints and its side rails. The current subtopic has categorized the restraint into confinement, overwork and punishment.

a) Confinement

Confinement is keeping someone closed in a place forcefully (Cambridge, 2016). British colonisers confined the Tamil labourers within a boundary. It helped the British to monitor the activity of the labourers well under their supreme colonial power. In return, the confinement caused pain and impairment to Tamil labourers.





The confinement has been identified along the migration process and settlement. In migration process confinement at the emigration depot, on ship (torment voyage) and at the immigration/quarantine depot have been discussed.

I Emigration Depot

Depot played an important role in the migration of the labourers. According to Jackson (1961), the depots were made to receive and process the labourers (p.62-69). There are two types of depots that facilitated the migration process. The depots are known as emigration and immigration depot (also known as quarantine depot). The depots became the temporary sojourn spot for the labourers. The purpose of the depot was to rejuvenate the labourers after a long voyage. But during colonization, it played a dubious role. Firstly, the depot served as a place of confining the labourers under a shelter. Secondly, depot served as a place of controlling the labourers. The dubious roles have been manifested in several folk songs.

The verse below offers an insight into the setting up of the depot as the place of confinement.

nāva pattinam vantēṇṭi
Nagapattinam came
nammavarap pāttēṇṭi
our people saw
teppōvil ataicciveccic
depot put in
caripāti potaccāṇṭi
exact half buried

(Murasu Nedumaran, 128.nammavaṇka poḷappu, p.340)

“I came to Nagapattinam
I saw our people





was confined in a depot
and buried nearly half of us”

The song discloses the grief of the labourer who was kept encased in Nagappatinam depot. Depot at Nagapattinam functioned as emigration depot. Before the embarkation from Nagappatinam depot, the labourers begin to experience and witness the travail of getting confined. It has been voiced out in the line ‘ceripāti potaccāṇṭiz’ (buried nearly half of us) that indicates the death of the poor labourers even before the migration. The confinement at the depot caused nearly half of the labourers to only arrive to their last resting place. The word ‘āṭaikki’ (confined) and ‘potaccāṇ’ (buried) implies the cramped environment at the depot. It literally refers the entrapment of labourers as life stocks. The line ‘āṭṭu māṭṭu mantaiyaip pōla’ (flock of cows and ships) in the song below clearly reflects their conditions in the depot as



life stocks.

...āṭṭu māṭṭu mantaiyaip pōla
goat cow herd like
āṅkilēyarkaḷum nammai
whitemen us
kūṭṭil ataittu vaittu
cage confined put
koṭumaikal ceykinrārē...
cruelty doing

(Thandayutham, āṅkilēyar koṭumai, p. 7)

“...like herds of goat and cow
White men inhumanly
confined us in a cage...”

The song also portrays the situation of the labourers being confined in a cage. It has been represented in the line ‘kūṭṭil āṭaittu vaittu’ (confined in a cage). This cage





actually refers to the container that has detained the labourers at the depot. Another verse clearly describes the physical structure of the crate- like container as below.

...kampi valaikkul kalaṅkip pulampukirōm

wire net worried lamenting

ayyō ammā eṇru

particle expressing pain mother

alarip pulampukirōm...

scream of pain lamenting

(Thandayutham, aṇṇiya nāṭṭil aṭimaikal, p.290)

“....Oh mother! it is paining in here
we are worried
surrounded by the wired fence
left to mourn together, Oh mother!...”

The term ‘kampi valai’ represents the fence. The verse shows that the labourers were kept within the closed fence. The confinement was described as misery. It has been shown through the word ‘ayyō’ which refers to a calling full of pain and sorrow.

Besides confining the labourers, the depot has been also misused by the agents to fully exercise control over the congested population. Amarjit (2006) has supported to this by clarifying that, depot keepers forfeit even for a small breach during the detention (p.442-4). The forfeit is meant to retain the labourers from questioning and further bound them to be more docile. This reflects the function of the depot as ‘the crates of docility’.

The confinement at the emigration depot is further magnified by overcrowding. In order to fill up the ships, recruiting agents lured away a lot of Tamil





labourers. The enticed labourers began to flood in. Thus, it results in overcrowded environment at the depot. The following excerpt authenticates the fact of encased situation. It states that, “two ships of coolies could be accommodated at the depots for two or three weeks before sailing” (Indians overseas, p.11). Such an enormous number offers a pitiful sight on the condition of the overcrowded labourers. Despite of the amendment that requires seventy-two cubic feet of space to be given to adult labourers at the depot, it was to no avail in the recruitment (Indian overseas, 1830-1920, ¶ 14). The legislations were only good on papers.

The confinement at the depot gets worse when it is prolonged. There are no records of folk songs that clarify the duration of confinement at depot. But, the delay of the ships was viewed as the reason for the prolonged detention. Researches claimed that when there are no ships to sail across, a delay of two to three months was common. The following report on contract of service corroborates to the prolonged confinement.

...long delays often occur between indenting for and receiving labour. The contracts are often dated six weeks or two months before the date of arrival of the labourers on their estates, with the result that the labourers are at times badly affected by the long detention in the recruiting depots.

(Source: Federated Malay States 1914: Report on the working of the labour department for the year 1913)

The prolonged detention and overcrowded voyage deteriorated the health of the labourers thereby increasing the mortality rate. Several records claimed that the labourers were completely ignorant of the place they agreed to go or the duration





needed to reach the place they were intended to (National Archives: India). The ignorance is attributed to the submissive nature of the Tamil labourers. All they could think at the time of recruitment was betterment in their life as promised.

II Torment Voyage

In the hope of escaping from the hardships, the labourers opted to board the ships. The confinement persisted along the voyage. Significant pieces of evidences have been collected from the folk songs which give an awful virtual passage to the colonies. Journey across the Bay of Bengal to the colonies of British, was cramped. Sandhu (2010) has clarified this by stating that the voyage made by the Tamil labourers was one of “confined mobility” (p.89-103). Shantini (2007) validated this by pointing out that, transportation of the South Indian labourers from the port completely resembles to “the packing and transporting of cargo goods” (p.2).

The confined voyage turns perilous when the length of the journey prolonged. The length of the journey depends on the type of the ships used. In Malaya sailing ships, steamships and Chinese junks were used to transport the labourers.

Sailing ship

Until the advent of steamships (1884-1916), sailing ships were used (1879-1904) to transport the indentured labourers to the respective colonies (Cliff, 2013, p.73). Sailing ships made use of the monsoon winds. It became boon and made the transportation across the Bay of Bengal easier. Transportation from India to the





Southeast Asian countries was made during the southwest monsoon (May-July). The return passage was possible during the northeast monsoon (October onwards). The current of the wind was appropriate for the trip during these months (Tripathi, 2006, p.864). Likewise, during the colonization period, the British sailed their ships according to the prevailing monsoon to transport the labourers from South India to Malaya and for the return passage as well (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p.33).

There is only a verse that elucidates the sailing ship as the mode of transportation used by the labourer. It has been pointed out as ‘pōyvārēn pāymaramē’-(Thandayutham, vilaivāci, p.237). pāymaram refers to sailing ship. It was most probably used during the beginning of 19th century to carry the labourers from South India. Cliff (2013) clarifies this by pointing that sailing ships were dominant during the period of 1879-1904 (p.73). The ship made its back and forth journey across the deep dark Bengal Sea as reflected in the verse ‘karuṅkaṭal kappalla vantu vantu’ (sailing across the dark sea) (Thandayutham, kāvaṭi, p.329).

In addition to the dangerous oceanic path, the structure of sailing ships was so pathetic. It extends the journey of the voyage since it depends on the flow of wind and current. The unpredictable monsoon arrival affects the journey and the passengers onboard. Besides that, the sailing ships can only accommodate fewer passengers due to its smaller size. Despite of the size, the British constrained the labourers to fill up the body of the ship and travel across, amidst the dangerous deep ocean. If the wind becomes unfavourable, the voyage had to be made accordingly by reefing the sails. Thus, the journey takes a longer time than it is expected to be. Being captivated for a long period can be a mental torture apart from the physical restraints. Since the





mobility become limited, the labourers have to cage themselves in those sailing ships. The following folk song metaphorically resembles the speed of the ships to the movement of turtle and snails. Consequently the slower journey excretes too much of pain to the Tamil labourers which is clarified in the verse as follows ‘aṭipattu aṭipattu nānka vantōmayyā!’ (battering throughout the journey).

...āmai attai pōla
tortoise leech like
kappal nīnta nīnta
ship swim swim
atipattu atipattu nānka
through hardships we
vantōmayyā!
came

(Thandayutham, ēmānta ulaippu ēlai, p.17)



“... We sailed like tortoise and leeches
 slowly across the dark sea
 battering throughout the journey!”

Chinese Junks

Amidst the use of steamers, the labourers were also transported to Malaya by Chinese private junk transport. Few songs that relate to the presence of Chinese network in maritime transportation of the South Indian labourers serve to prove this.

...cinānkappal mēl ēri...
Chinese ship on board
 (Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyin vākkumūlam, p.23)

“...boarding the Chinese ship...”

...cinānkappal ēttik konu
Chinese ship taken on board





inta ūrukku kontu vantiyē...

this place bring

(Thandayutham, kangany eṇum kayavan, p.51)

“...boarded in the Chinese ship
and placed on this land...”

The verse discloses that the labourers were shipped across in a Chinese ship. These ancient Chinese sailing ships were known as junk (Moreland, 2010, p.232). Due to its inexpensive construction and well planned ship design it has been attested to its size and efficiency for trade and long distance voyage. Apart from their function as vessels to transport goods in maritime trade, they have been also used during the colonisation to ship the labourers. These Chinese private junks were used to transport Chinese labourers to Malaya (Lai, 2010 p.53).



physical structure, the British company insisted on transporting the Tamil labourers on it. They wanted to cut cost on voyage expenses as travelling on steamship costs higher. The old junk ships were preferred. Junk refers to old ropes and cables used on ships. Thus, it can be deduced that the Chinese ships used to bring the Tamil labourers across were old.

The lives of the Tamils were insignificant to the colonial administration. It is reflected when the safety of the labourers on board were threatened. Complaints have been made on the ship condition but to no avail. In order to avoid any increased expenditure, no immediate reforms on shipping conditions were legislated. It was only in 1927, with the efforts of agent from Government of India an immigration





contract with the British India Steam Navigation Company was signed. This contract gave the provision of two new better steam ships (Khan, 1963, p.153).

Steamships

During the industrial revolution, technological advances started to emerge therefore commencing the use of steamships. Steamships became more efficient for large scale transportation. It speeded up, halved the journey of the sailing ships, and proficiently increased the carrying capacity. Amrith (2009) notifies the expansion as, “in the age of steamship, the mobility across the Bay of Bengal has been narrowed and the number of journeys increased” (p.548). So, it can be deduced that the transition from sail to steamships dramatically increased the number of labourers to the desired

colonies in Southeast Asia.



The advent of steamships during the British colonization had remarkably increased the number Tamil labourers to Malaya. The British India Steamship Navigation company holds the responsible of shipping the labourers. The colonial government made boon of this migration by providing steamship subsidy in 1887 (Amarjit, 2006, p.440.2). In order to stimulate the immigration, ship fare were also reduced. Sandhu (2010) has noted that the transport fare from India to Malaya was reduced from Rs 15 per head to Rs 8 per head (p.61). Such a dramatic fall on the fare induces the poverty- stricken labourers to migrate in large numbers. The increment of the migrant population gave no choice but to constraint them in one ship in order to cut the cost of the travelling expenses. The shipping companies took advantage by





jeopardizing the lives of the labourers. The labourers were confined and amounted as much as possible.

The Indian Government received complaints regarding the overcrowded ship in which caused laws to be legislated on specifying the amount of deck space for each passenger (Alatas, 2013, p.89). But as usual, it was all good on papers. The demand left unmet as the law in return will decrease the number of migrants and increase the transport expenses. The legislation will also not favour the shipping companies. Khan (1963), has cited the words of A.U. Mukarram on the packed steamers as,

It is not a day's journey that has to be made in a few hours inconvenience and unpleasantness but a seven days voyage, and in many cases this amounts to



seven days of concentrated misery. In the first place there is much overcrowding. There is not the slightest attempt made to separate families or sex, all are packed together...(p.152).

The folk song below discloses the event of overcrowded ship.

...kappalukkuk kappal

ship to ship

kaṇakkinri ēttittān...

uncountable taken on board

(Thandayutham, kashtam vanta malāy, p.5)

“...we were forced onboard
uncountably”





The song reflects the inhuman transportation of the labourers. It proves that the Tamils were shipped to Malaya in a huge number. The voyage itself was considered a confined passage due to the overcrowded decks which resemble large crates of transportation. The confined space means each labourer was positioned in exactly measured space. This defies the right of a human capital. The exactly measured space clearly implies the pathetic situation onboard whereby the labourers were constantly motionless. The suffering has been reflected in the verse below.

..inta kappalla kashtapatum
this ship suffering
intiya makkal ...
Indians

(Thandayutham, malay rappar tōṭṭam, p.5)

“Indians suffering in this ship...”



Satyanarayana (2001) has claimed that the journey by ship was inhuman and resulted in high mortality rates (p.21). This is due to the overcrowded unsanitary suffocating surrounding. The labourers were kept under wretched conditions on ship with stank of human wastes. They have no choice but to sit, sleep and eat amidst their own waste. This shows that the ship has no proper accommodation for waste excretion management. Khiun (2010) has cited the report of the PAM Labour Committee that described the congestion on board as,

... In the fair season (November to May) the full complement of coolies was permitted by the Board of Trade is 3,150. In the monsoon season (June to October) it is 2,450...the deck superficial area is less than 4.2. square feet per coolie in the fair season. In the foul season, when coolies usually come over in





greater numbers, the superficial area per coolie is 5.4 square feet....The sanitation was very bad. There were only 23 latrines, 15 for men, 8 for women. ... Unfortunately the latrines appeared to be no more popular on the high seas than on the estates and night-soil was generously disposed all over the ship ... the condition of the latrines was indescribable ... the manner in which the food is prepared and served on these ships is not all that it might be ... hospital accommodation on board the ship we visited consisted of one cabin with four bunks in it ... There was no place for the coolies to bathe. We were told that a short time ago a ship had 3,200 coolies on board apart from other passengers and crew and that the total life boat accommodation was for 150 passengers (p.99).



The congestion also caused prevalence of diseases. Numerous ill stricken passengers consisting of women, men and children died along the journey due to dysentery, typhoid, and malnutrition. The following song represents the occurrence of diseases on board.

...vānti pēti kāsavantu
vomit diarrhea tuberculosis
vayireriyac cettānti
frustration die
kappamēla kappavuttuk
ship on ship
katarak katara ēttunānti...
waited take on board
 (Murasu Nedumaran, 128. nammavanka polappu,
 p.340)

“...vomiting, dysentery, tuberculosis
 all leads to the horrific death
 engulfed with frustration, forced on board





wailing all along the sail...”

The over congested steamers gets even worse with their conditions. Some of the steamers were reported to be in bad conditions and they were used to bring the labourers. The old ships had wrecks and holes on it. Despite of its bad condition, the labourers were transported across the Bay of Bengal by the precarious steamship voyage. The following verse stands as evidence to exemplify the condition of the ship.

pālumaram vettalānnu palaya kappal ērivantēn...
rubber tree tap old ship boarded

(Murasu Nedumaran, 118. mūṭṭelumpa muṛikkirāṇē, p.336)

“I came in an old ship to tap rubber ...”



many to face the end of their life even before reaching their final destination. There were also cases where the labourers arriving at the port of immigration near death (Sandhu, 2010; Murasu Nedumaran, 2007; Shantini, 2007)). Such a scenario could be reasoned with the inadequate medical aid. A surgeon on board was hired on the ships making its way to the British colonies (Manderson, 1997, p.52). It was the duty and responsibility of this European surgeon to be taking care of the health of the passengers onboard. Despite of the presence of medical figure, there was a significant disease transmission. It can be related to the poor investment in public health made by the European planters. Manderson (1999) corroborates to this by pointing that, colonial officers showed “reluctance to invest in infrastructure” concerning medical health (p.103). This once again signifies that the labourers were only treated as production units.





III Quarantine depot

Due to the less medical attention, the health condition of the labourers upon their arrival was deteriorated. There are several sources that documented the poor health condition of the labourers who arrives at the immigration depot suffering from the long detention and tormenting voyage (Sandhu, 2010; Hagan, 2005; Amarjit, 2013). As soon as the labourers arrived at the host land they will be directed by the depot officers to a quarantine depot. These quarantine depots were located at Penang or Port Swettenham (Khiun, 2010, p.96). Several folk songs that display the detention at quarantine depot are shown below.

...Pondiceri kappal ēri, Penangke nānē pārttēnati
Pondicherry ship board Penang I saw
Depotle ataiccāṇi
Depot confined

(transcribed from Nathupuram
 Gananghal, Audio production courtesy
 Astro vanavil Malaysia)

“...Across the sea by Pondicherry ship and saw Penang
 They (the colonial officers) confined me in the depot”

The verse narrates the journey of labourers recruited from Pondicherry depot and arrived at Penang depot. As soon as they arrived they were quarantined. The labourers will be normally kept for seven days. This detention period has been clarified in the following lyric. ‘...ēḷunāl maṇṭapattil taṅka vaittu...’ (seven days sojourn in a hall) (Thandayutham, ēmāṇṇiyavarkaḷ, p.16). Meanwhile the following verse points out the name of the quarantine depot.





...poramalayil tallināṅka...
place of detention *pushed*

(Murasu Nedumaran, 129.vantakata vāṇtakata, p.342)

“...captured in the difficult condition at poramalay...”

The song denotes the detention of the labourer at “poramalay”. It’s the place where the labourers will be kept under strong supervision before letting them to enter the country (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p.342). The supervision requires them to be fit enough to begin their work at the host land.

Besides that, the detention period also serve to rejuvenate them after a long tiring torment voyage. At the quarantine the labourers will be inspected on their health status and gets vaccinated before embarking to the working site (Khan, 1963, p.180).

Their clothes get disinfected. This is done to stop further prevalence of disease transmission. If the vaccination does not work they get re-vaccinated on their eight day of discharge. Moreover during the temporary stay the labourers were provided with new clothes. It has pointed in the verse ‘...tuṇi maṇi yāvaiyum koṭuttu...’ (given provision of clothes) (Thandayutham ēmārriyavarkaḷ, p.16).

Detention at the quarantine depot is also nothing less than the confined situation at the immigration depot. On 1906, the immigration had to be stopped due to the overcrowded depot that could no longer accommodate newly arrived labourers (Khiun, 2010, p.98). Another dramatic incident on 1911 also witnessed the constrained quarantine depot in Pulau Jerajak. Due to the outbreak of cholera in August, the quarantine accommodation was so overwhelmed. About 12,000 labourers were locked up the in Port Sweetenham and Pulau Jerajak quarantine camps for





several months (cited in Khiun, 2010, p.98). He had also cited the recount given in a PAM meeting regarding the incarceration in quarantine depot:

The ground was a black mass of filth and flies; no one could approach within yards of a latrine. The scavenging completely broke down. Smallpox, cholera and malaria were rampant, and the death rates of two camps were 29.6 percent of cases treated. ... In my seventeen years of experience in the Federated Malay States, I have never known a more wretched collection of coolies than those discharged from the quarantine station. ... Many only crawled away from Penang to die on plantations.

(Source: Penang Gazette, 14 Sept 1913, cited in Khiun, 2010, p.98)



The appalling health condition of the Tamil labourers at the quarantine depot can be related to the duration of the voyage. The duration of the voyage depends on the type of the ship used to bring the labourers across the Bay of Bengal. It was found that, the transition from sail to steamships has altered the transmission of infectious diseases. The finding of Cliff (2013) on the infectious diseases in relation to the voyage journey clarifies this (p.73-74). The study notified that infectious viruses do not survive the journey made by smaller slower sail ships. The victims either recovered or died in their journey before reaching the host land. Whereby, with the advent of steamships which are larger and faster the infective diseases were still carried on departure. So, it is clarified that the virus posed potential threat to larger groups travelling in shorter travel times which was made possible by the steamships. Thus, the steamships only benefited the colonial masters. It saved the cost of





transportation of the labourers in bulk and the Tamils as usual swept away from any concerns.

After getting discharged from the quarantine depot, the labourers will make their way to the place for which they had been recruited. Kangany will arrange for their departure. After suffered from emotional upheavals during the death-defying voyage the labourers were coerced to enter the new chapter of life in the new land. The next form of physical confinement was analysed in terms of the labourers living condition.

IV Settlement



Plantation estates become the settlement of the Tamil labourers which was established in an isolated frontier. It houses the labourers in a housing pattern known as line rooms. The housing patterns are known as line due to their placement in long rows. The lines were partitioned into numerous cubicles (Shantini, 2007, p.10). The cubicles also resemble the barrack type structure. They were far from satisfactory.

The houses were built of attap or bertam (Khan, 1963, p.297). The attap house, is a traditional wooden house. The roofs are made from attap tree or palm leaves. The folk songs below exemplify the attap houses.

attāppu vīṭu kattik kuttit taṅkam

attap house built word of endearment

atila oru jannal vaccik kuttit taṅkam

in one window put word of endearment

(Murasu Nedumaran, 126.attāppu vīṭu, p.340)





“An attap house, kuṭṭit taṅkam
With a window in it, kuṭṭit taṅkam”

...attāppu vītu katti
attap house built
atula reṇṭu jannal veccu...
in two window put

(Thandayutham, iravu purushan, p.66)

“...An attap house,
With two windows in it...”

Both the song indicates the presence of windows in the house. The former was built with a window. The latter has two windows. The sizes of the windows are just small. Khan (1963) states that there is little ventilation as the quarters have apertures (p.297). Perhaps these apertures are merely considered by the labourers as windows.

Besides attap or palm leaves, the lines were also roofed with corrugated iron. The long lines gets partitioned which does not even reach the roof, creating a gap between the cubicles. Consequently, there is no privacy for the family among occupants.

European planned the structure of the house. Sandhu (2010) authenticate this by notifying that the design of the house and dwellings are provided by the Europeans (p.218). For them it is suffice to house the labourers in a wall; A wall that nucleates them; A wall that prevents the labourers from having contacts with outsiders and a wall that confines the labourers by keeping them close under constant supervision. The house pattern left impact on the labourers physical and psychological impairment.





b) Overwork

Cambridge (2016) defines overwork as to cause someone to work too much. In the context of this research overwork was seen as a mean of restraining the mobility of the subjugated group. It was perfectly planned and executed by the British colonial. The docility, hard working, servile Tamils were coerced by the Kanganies under the European planter's instruction and the colonial government itself to work too hard. This section discusses 'overwork' as a restraining factor in aspects of its nature and the dangerous. Under the nature of the overwork, researcher investigated the workload carried by the labourers and the physical pain caused by the workload. In terms of dangerous, animal attacks has been pointed out and explained.



I Workload

Bearing a weak physical condition after the voyage, the workload took its toll on Tamil labourers. They were not prepared for the scrupulous field work conditions which were harrowing. The field works required them to clear the jungles, tap rubber trees, harvest palm trees, construct roads, make ditches, and pluck tea leaves and so on. The works assigned for the labourers has been represented in the following diagram.



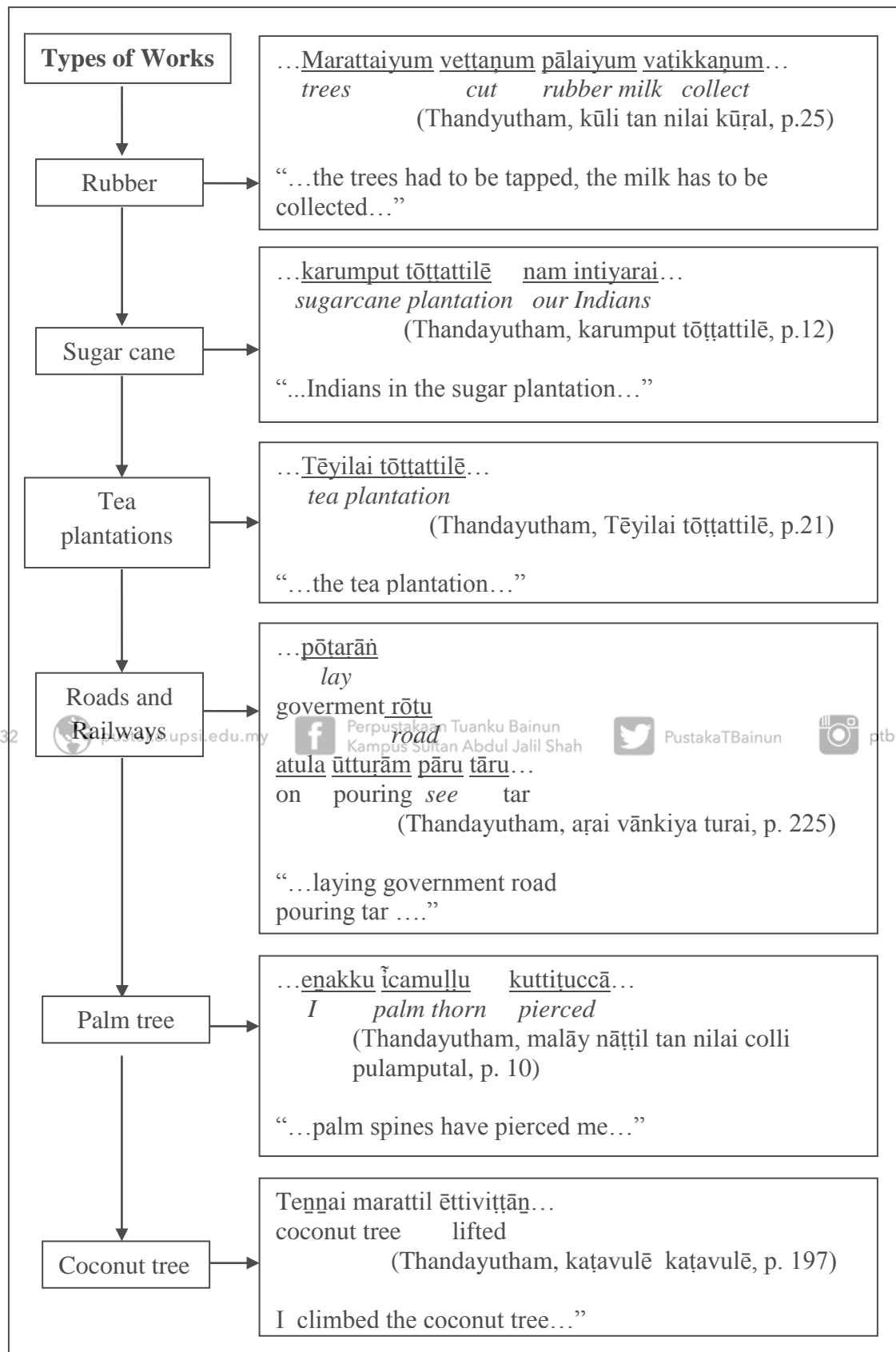


Figure 4.1. Types of the work load designated to the Tamil labourers (Obtained from Murasu Nedumaran. (n.d.), Male:ciya nāṭṭuppuṛaṇ pāṭalkāḷil avala uṇarvukaḷ with few additions made by the researcher)



The figure above reflects the types of the works designated to the Tamil labourers as reflected in the work songs. Only the verses that elucidate the types of the work are given. The workload required for these works were immense. The jungle terrain became their workplace. Having cleared the virgin jungles, the labourers were required to prepare the land for cultivation. The preparation was full of sorrowful experiences as reflected in the following verse.

kātu malai kaṇṭa kaṇṭa
jungle mountain just any
itaṅkalilellām malaiyēri - pātupattu...
places mount climb toiled
(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷar nilai, p.19)

“mountains, jungles and any pieces of uncultivated lands
was the path taken
it was travelling, we were toiled...”



kātu malai mēṭu pallam
jungle mountain raised ground pit
kaṇṭa itaṅkalellām
just any places
mātukalai pōla ulaikka
cows like work hard
malaiyēri pātupattu...
mount climb toiled
(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷiyiṅ koṭumaiyāṇa nilai, p.20)

“jungle, mountain, raised grounds and pit
we climbed and toiled
like cows we worked hard...”

Both the songs amplify the workload of the Tamil labourers. They exhaustedly overworked to clear the jungle. The geological upheavals encountered during the clearing worsened the situation. But still, they had to work hard. Analogously, the





hard work was symbolized with the cows. Just as the cows, the Tamils were only treated as productive unit. They worked restlessly as reflected in the line “...ōyātu (incessantly) nāḷ muḷutum (all day long) vēlai ceytu (working)...” (Thandayutham, aṭṭai kaṭittu, p.56).

Some folk songs voiced out the terrible experiences in rubber plantation. For example the following song portrays the cultivation of the rubber plantation.

...kāttaiyum vettanum
jungle cut
Rappar marattaiyum nātanum
rubber cut plant
Atukkup pukkāvum pōtanum
setting up for rubber tapping
Marattaiyum vettanum pālaiyum vatikkanum...
trees cut milk collect
 (Thandayutham, Kūḷi taṇ nīlai kūṛal, p.25)

“...the jungle has to be cleared
 for rubber plantation,
 things has to be set up
 for rubber tapping
 rubbers have to be tapped
 to collect latex...”

The song above narrates the procedures in rubber cultivation. Enormous areas of land had to be cleared for the rubber plantation purpose. The rubber crops had to be planted and the lands need to be prepared for its plantation. The seedling grown in nurseries, are planted in neat rows. During the growth a lot of detailed precautionary method needs to be exercised. The rubber has to be fertilized well and protected from weeds and pests. It takes seven years for the trees to get tapped. Tapping is the method used to cut the bark of the tree using a knife to get its latex. It involves a V-





shaped cut on half the circumference of the tree never more than 36 inches above the ground (Gardner, 2004, p.40). This cut must by no means reach the wood, and the quantity peeled off each day must not be more than three-quarters of an inch per month. Great care is taken when tapping rubber to avoid injuries on trees as it can cause reduction in the yield. The terrific part is the tappers have to pay for the consequence.

The great precaution taken during the taping continues even after the collection. It has been exemplified in the following song. The song recounts the pile of works given to the rubber tappers who were exploited for the development of rubber plantation.



katumaiyāna nūru maratte
toughness hundred trees
nānke vettanum...
we cut
olaippāli nānke iruntu
labourer we be
ōṭā tēyanum
worn out
pālai cumantu koṇtu vantu
milk carry bring
pakkuvamā ūttaṇum
carefully pour
paṭi tavarik kīlē viluntāl
stair mistakenly down fall
ēnenru kēkka nātiyillai
why ask no one to support

(Thandayutham, kūli taṇ nilai kūṛal, p.25)

“Have to persistently tap 100 rubber trees
we are worn out
the milk has to be poured carefully
if fall mistakenly from the stair
there is nobody for us ...”





The tappers are required to tap hundred trees. After the collection of the latex, they had to carry the pail using a strong pole. The pole will be placed on their shoulder and two pails are hanged at the end of the poles. The tapper has to balance the pails full of latex. The following verse reflects the burden carried by the tapper.

...katti kaivāli kāntā cākkukal
knife latex pail sacks
kanamutan ōr kāiyilē...
heavy one hand

(Thandayutham, kangany ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)

“...knife, pails, sacks
 all the burden in one hand...”

With the added burden on shoulder, the labourers wrap up themselves with pouches containing tapping equipment. Carrying the burdens, they had to walk to the estate factory to deliver the collection for further process. The path taken to reach the factory is not in a good condition and has a lot of pits and holes. So, extra precaution has to be exercised not to spill the collection as indicated in the line ‘pālai cumantu koṇṭu vantu, pakuvamā ūttaṇum’ (milk has to be poured carefully). Any mistakes will cost reduction in the wages.

With so much of works accompanied with difficulties, the labourers go on with the life. They felt it is better to do anything than nothing. Amidst the difficulties, the labourers also faced the consequences of the workload that forced them to over work. Due to the workload they suffered from physical pain and injuries.





Injuries

The jungle of Malaya not only witnessed the exhaustive labourers but also the injuries suffered by them. These physical scars can be attributed to their work field and work load. For example, the following verse shows the body pain caused by the tiring work at the rubber plantation.

...ōti ōti maram vetti
running tree tap
utkārntu pattai āyntu
sit strip clean
parakkap parakkap pāl etuttu
relentless milk collect
pakkamellām nōkutati
side ache

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84)

“...incessantly running to tap
 followed by the peeling of crepe
 relentlessly collect the latex
 ouch! my flank hurts...”

The labourers are all set to work from sunrise to sunset. As usual the day for a tapper starts as early as 2-4 am; the time that most will tuck into their beds. The work begins as soon as they dismiss from the muster. They are required to tap all the trees as allocated on the day. Discussion with Murasu Nedumaran, revealed that the tapper should spend less than 30 seconds to tap a tree if they wanted to meet the yield requirement. The line ‘ōti ōti maram vetti’ (incessantly running to tap) corroborates to the rushing made by the labourers. They also had to be careful while doing the





delicate job since any carelessness can cause injury to the tree. The worst part is, the tappers will be assaulted for the injury.

As shown in the verse ‘uṭkāntu paṭṭai āyntu’ (peeling the crepe) tappers also had to peel the crepe (the congealed strip of latex that remains on the tapping cut as a natural seal after the latex has finished flowing (Gardner, 2004, p.37). Then the latex has to be collected in pail and carried all the way to the store to be weighed. Such a repetitive long tiring work physically and mentally impairs the tappers. The whole process accompanied with restlessness has been captured in the song above.

Nanjundan (1951), had signified the contribution of the labourers as, “it was Indian labour that helped to clear jungles and swamps and plant rubber seedlings...”

(p.11). In the process of clearing the jungle, labourers were driven by the Europeans to stand for long hours. They were forced to clear the jungle with bare hands using axes and burn it. The job was done restlessly to prepare the land for cultivation. The song below helps us to visualize the situation.

...kāṭalici oti koluttik
clearing of jungles *burning the trees*
kālkaṭukka nikkayilē...

leg pain *standing*

(Murasu Nedumaran, 130.vākkut taravōṇum, p.343)

“...cleared the jungle, set fire to the trees
foot throbbed with pain...”

The song born out from the cries of the ill fated labourers suffering from leg cramps and pains due to the overwork.





The clearing of jungles had also left unhealed scars on the bodies of labourers
The following verse encapsulates the wounds caused by wild date (*ĩca / ĩccai*),
alang and bamboo (*mũnka*) plants.

...*enakku ĩcamuļļu kuttĩuccā...*
me palm thorn pierced

enakku mũnka mullu taiccitucci
me bamboo thorn peirced

(Thandayutham, *malāy nāṭṭil taṇ nilai colli pulamputal*, p.10)

“...flesh get pierced
with palm spines and bamboo thorns...”

...*lālān mullu tĩnkunucci..*
alang thorn pierced

(Thandayutham, *katirvelu kangany*, p.51)



“...ouch! lalang thorn pricked...”

These plants tore their skin continuously creating wounds that could not heal.
Thus the wounds became festered. They had scabs growing over scabs. It is rather
pathetic to see the labourers in such condition.

Besides that the daily use of axes and saws also caused blisters on the hand of
labourers. It was indicated in the following verse.

...*alluru tān vettac connānka kaiyellām koppaliccu katavulē...*
ditch cut told hands blistered god

(Thandayutham, *kūli aṭimai*, p.24)

“...we were ordered to make ditch, God! our hands blistered...”





Those blisters attributed to the process of clearing the land. They were given no machines but only bare hands; the hands that have contributed to the development of Malaya.

During the clearing of the jungle, Tamil labourers were physically abused. By using manual skills alone the labours were coerced to do the works. The long hour over work in the virgin jungle and isolated work fields took its toll when the labourers had to struggle with the dangerous lurking work field.

II Animal attacks

The wild infested jungle was a threat to the Tamil labourers. The threat was posed by the wild and poisonous animals. It has been exemplified in the following verse.

karatikal pulikal vācam ceyyum

bear tiger living

malāy nāṭṭilē...

Malaya nation

(Thandayutham, vāṭṭilānta vāṭṭikai, p.7)

“Malaya land pervaded
with bears and tigers...”

The song traces the dense Malayan jungle infested with bears and tigers. The clearing of the tropical jungle is beset with elephants, leopards, tigers, snakes, and bears. The wild infested jungle was a threat to the labourers. A quote from the Adventurer Rene Jadfar , “In the virgin jungle, there is nothing on your side, nothing





friendly. Everything is hostile,” which was cited by Liebersohn (2009) could be the appropriate description on the dangers lurking in the jungle (p.23). Countless became victim to the animals that roamed in the jungles in the early days. The clearing was needed to prepare the land for rubber cultivation. A narrative description, “A man working next to me had his belly ripped open by a wild boar” cited from Bhattacharjee’s work, shows how the jungle threatened the life of the Tamils (Manickam, 2012, p.51). He also added it took five men with axes and parangs to save the man from the boar.

In addition, the labourers also worked amidst poisonous insect such as centipedes (*pūrāṇ*) and blood sucking leeches (*aṭṭai*). The following verses reflects the pain caused by these venomous centipede and blood sucking leeches.



...*pūrāṇ* *aṭṭaik kaṭittu*
centipede leech bite
alarit *tutikkirōm*...
scream tremble

(Thandayutham, *tēyilait tōṭṭattilē*, p.21)

“...ouch its paining
centipede leeches are biting
we are trembling...”

...*aṭṭai* *kaṭittu* *alarukirār*...
leeches biting screaming

(Thandayutham, *aṭṭai kaṭittu*, p.56)

“...leeches sucked us dry of blood...”

enakku pūrāṇ *mēñci varum*...
I centipede grazing

(Thandayutham, *taṇṇīr pañcam*, p.10)





“...centipede crawls on me...”

Centipedes which could be found largely in tropical jungle are mostly huge in size. Even though their sting is not fatal but it could cause discomfort. Leeches on the other hand, sucks blood and may cause death if unsuspectingly taken into mouth by drinking raw water (Simmons, 2013, p.161). There are two types of leeches in Malayan jungle which could be troublesome. The habitat of the tiny ‘vampires’ is on shrubs along jungle paths. So, the labourers who passed by into the jungle take hold of these leeches.

The Malayan jungle was beset with Malaria as well. The following verses captured this.. ‘...kocukkaṭṭiyil nāṅkaḷ paṭumpāṭu...’ (...suffering amidst the swarms of mosquitoes...) (Thandayutham, *kūḷi taṇ nīlai kūral*, p.25) and ‘...kocuvāḷa kuṭiccamiccām...’ (...Swarms of mosquitoes bit us at ill...) (Murasu Nedumaran, 129.vantakata vāṇtakata, p.342). Clearing of the jungle had caused the formation of large stagnant water favoured by the mosquitoes. It became heaven for them to breed. This causes the spread of Malaria and eventually led to the death of many Tamil labourers and thereby became the primary cause for the mortality rate at Malaya. Amarjit (2006) has cited the work of Mill on Malaria whom counted that, in 1908, “the death rate due to malaria on 21 estates in the FMS was over 200 per 1000 persons” (p.467).

The newly arrived labourers were acknowledged of Malaria as a mysterious illness, as back in South India they had no such issues. The endemic of Malaria was relatively very low there (Shlomowitz, 1992, p.60; Amrith, 2013, p.128). Since the





clearing of jungles in the early period of colonization was so new to both colonials and Tamils, the means to control Malaria was yet to be discovered. Besides the labourers whom were readily arrived at Malaya with poor physical shape was prone to the attack and easily became victims of Malaria. They became so weak that they could not even resist other diseases.

Due to the spreading of Malaria, and the increasing death toll, the Europeans came with a solution in the form of chemical powder. It was known as quinine. Quinine is a medication used to treat malaria (Rajoppi, 2013, p. 108). The medication could be taken by mouth. It was said that the British would ask the labourers to line up and forcefully dump the quinine into their mouth. The following musical phrase resembles this situation.



...koyina taṇṇiya

quinine water

kuṭikkavum veccāṅka...

drink forced

(Murasu Nedumaran, 129.vantakata vāṇtakata, p.342)

“...We were force feed
with quinine water...”

The quinine tastes bitter. But it was given to the Tamil labourers so that the Malarial infection could be stopped. So, they forcefully fed the bitter powder to reduce the risk of the infection.





The jungle of Malaya became the resting place for thousands of Tamil labourers. It has witnessed the cruelty acted on them. The inhuman treatment also incurred in the form of punishment. It was given to keep the labourers ‘productive’ and controllable.

c) **Punishment**

Punishment was used as an alternate way of creating unquestioning obedience and adherence to the plantation restriction among the Tamils. The poor labourers get whipped for no reason. They were only meant to fulfill the political and economical aspirations of the British. So, any interference or failure in this aspiration will cost the labourers in the form of punishment.



The punishment consists of several violence acts. The National Centre on Elder Abuse-NCEA (2016) has framed “striking, hitting, beating, pushing, shoving, and shaking, slapping, kicking, pinching, force feeding and burning” as the forms of violence acts. Among these, the research had focused on few punishment received by the labourers. From the folk songs, it was found that, the labourers get hit, slapped, beaten, kicked and shoved.

I Hit

According to Cambridge (2016), hit is defined as the movement of hand or an object onto the surface of something to touch it with force. Correspondingly, the research has defined hit as the movement of tool or weapon used forcibly on Tamil labourers.





Based on the folk songs, it was found that sticks/rod was used as weapon to hit the Tamil labourers.

The use of stick as a commanding tool was found extensively in the plantation system. Tully (2011) has cited such barbaric act on the Sabrang Estate in Malaya in 1913. He jotted that an English assistant named Paton spanked a Tamil labourer with a stick for behaving impolitely (p.262). As such, the event of labourers getting whipped with rods was common. The song below stands as evidence for such inhuman act by the supervisors.

...kālaiyilē nālu maṇikku kēl
morning four hour listen
kilakku maṇi aṭikkumpōtu tīṅku tīṅkutān
when bell rung sound
Nā pōkāvittāi cōrumilla...
I absent no rice
...periya mammutti etuttup purappatt nā pōnēn
big hoe take leave I went
curukkā varalānnu ayyā aticcārē!
quick did not come sir whacked
Anta kampu etutulē aticcāru
that stick take whacked

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyiṅ vākkumūlam, p. 23)

“Listen! its four in the morning
the bell rings
If I shall be absent, no rice for me...
...I left with a big hoe in hand
and get whacked for not coming quickly
I get whacked with a stick”

The song describes the early wakeup call made at 4 am. It has been clarified that when the management intend to increase the latex productivity, it will coerce the labourers to tap more tress. Sometimes the labourers required to tap 800 trees per day.





So, they had to wake up at the crack of dawn to finish the house chores and later go to work as the tapping would start at 4.am.

Moreover, the song also cries out the emotion of the labourer whom given a hit for the late attendance. It is stipulated in the line - ‘*curukkā varalāṇṇu ayyā aṭiccārē!*’- (I was beaten for the delay), ‘*Anta kampu eṭutulē aṭiccāru* (I get whacked with a stick). There is also another song that captures the punishment given by the kangany when the labourers are late for the roll call. It sounds as,

...Veerayi ċikkiram eluntu vāti ,
name of a woman labourer quick get up
aticci ōtturān kankāni - perattukkup pōti!...
whacked away kangany muster go

(Murasu Nedumaran, 122. Gleria Estate, p.338)



“...Veerayi get up quickly kangany is whacking, go to the muster quickly...”

The act of hitting as reflected in both the verses impaired the labourers psychologically and physically. Hitting with a stick was used by the dorai, kangany and tyndals as abusive commanding tool. They hit the labourers using the sticks as if they are animals. It is a heart whelming situation to witness such a barbaric scene. Sticks are used to control the animals. It corroborates the study of Grandin (2014) whom clarifies “stick has been used to exert dominance over bull elk”...But it was never used to hit the bull elk (p.56). In the case of colonisation the stick was used to exert dominance and hit the labourers. The act was implemented to control the labourers in the name of ‘organised system’ as been notified in Robert Heussler’s (1983) ‘British Rule in Malaya’. They claim it as part of civilizing the work process.





The following verse reflects the civilizing process that exerts the authoritarian dominance on the poor Tamil labourers.

killip perampetuttu
snip took a rattan
kilimūkku lēñci katti
parrot nose kerchief tie
vattak kallup pāraiylē
circle stone rock
vantu cattam pōtuvāṇti...
came shout

(Thandayutham, kankāṇi, p.56)

“With a rattan
 and covered face
 he stands on rock
 shouting at us...”

The verse narrates how the kangany with his masked face control and supervise the activity of the labourers whilst standing on a big rock. Standing on a higher spot with a stick in hand indirectly represents the controlling position of the kangany.

II Slapped

The labourers get slapped when they injured the tree during the tapping process. There is a song that reveals that intensive care was given to the rubbers and not to the tappers. If the tapper mistakenly injured the tree, the supervisor or the kangany will ‘reward’ him with a slap.





...marattil utanē kāyam pattal
tree immediately injury struck
araitituvār ōr araiyilē...
slapped one slap

(Thandayutham, kankāṇi ceyyum koṭumai, p. 55)

“...if tree gets hurt
 we get slapped...”

...arukkum marañkalil kāyam pattāl
cut with knife tree injury struck
alaitituvār tam arukilē
called him near
itenna kāyameṇru
what is this injury
eṇenna colli
tell
virattituvār...
chase

(Thandayutham, karumput tōṭṭattilē, p.113)

“...when tree gets hurt
 he called, questioned it
 and chased us away...”



Injuries on tree costs wage reduction. It further amplifies the anger of kangany who is meant to have a close supervision on the tappers. Any damages incurred cause the labourers to get hit and slapped by the Kangany. Kangany being the supervisor abuses the labourers regardless of their age. He shows no respect even to the elders. This is because any mistakes made by the labourers will also affect the wellbeing of Kangany. Jain (1970) narrates clearly the consequences paid by the kangany for such mistakes,

He is expected to wield the tapping knife himself if he finds a gang member repeatedly making wound in the tress, because his immediate boss, the





conductor holds the kangany responsible for any faults by a member of his gang (p.31).

In the case of such event, kangany is said to exhibit and impose sanction on labourers. Occasionally he lodges complaint which leads to the suspension of the particular labourer for few days. The kangany is also reported to be denying the access to the concession of the labourers, as he holds the responsibility of controlling the wage payment. The labourers could not put up an end to the atrocities of the Kangany. They were so helpless. Even at the slightest pretext, the labourers get abused. The following verse captures the mourning of the labourers at the milk wood.

... kaṅkāṇimār ceyyum kotumaiyilē

kangany do cruelty

katarukirōm getah marattilē

wailing rubber trees

(Thandayutham, kaṅkāṇi ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)

“...kangany treating us inhumanly

we are wailing amidst the rubber trees...”

III Beaten

The British make use of all the means to control the Tamil labourers according to their needs. Consequently, arbitrary punishment of the Tamil labourers became a part of the controlling means used by the colonial power. The folk songs below epitomize the condition of the assaulted Tamil labourers whom were treated like prisoners.





...tappitam ceyta taṇṭanai
mistake do punishment
kaiti pōla aṭittu...
prisoner like whacked

(Thandayutham, karumpuṭ tōṭṭattilē, p.12)

“..We are punished and whacked
 like a prisoner...”

...tappitaṅkalē janitta taṇṭanaikal
mistake do punishment
anupavitta kaitipōla...
experiencing like prisoner

(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷar nilai, p.20)

“...we get punished
 like prisoners...”



Both the songs reflect the situation of the Tamil labourers who were held and treated as prisoners of circumstances. The lyrical term ‘kaiti’ (prisoners) clearly resembles the situation on which the labourers had no control over. Tamils were not like their Chinese counterparts who were also intended for the same colonial purpose. Manickam (2012) has cited the warning given by the Governor of Straits Settlements whom stated that “over dependence on Chinese labourer as problematic” (p.46). This explicitly shows that Chinese were hardly manageable. Unlike the Chinese, Tamils were easily governed. Stenson (1980) has cited another view of an English planter on the condition of the Tamils as being a “poor specimen, both in physique and morale and of being abject, cowardly and generally lacking in vitality” (p.17). In fact, he also added that Tamil always have a blind admiration for the whites.





The perception of the European planters on Tamil labourers exhibits the vulnerability of this poverty stricken group. Despite being maltreated they still leave their destiny to the hands of British. There was no escape gate for them since they were bounded and confined to serve in Malaya. They were held as prisoners. Regardless of being stripped off their dignity by the European planters and their very own people (Kangany) the Tamils felt it was their fate.

IV Kicked

Apart from the hit, beatings, and slap the Tamils labourers were also violently kicked. For instance the following lines extract how the labourers were assaulted.



mātukaḷ pōla ulaittum varāḷ boots kālāl utaikka
cows like work hard coming leg kick

(Thandayutham, *tolilāḷar nilai*, p.19; Thandayutham,
tolilāḷiyin koṭumaiyāṇa nilai, p.20).

“...despite driven like cattle pulling ploughs
he is coming to kick us with his boots...”

Even though working exhaustedly for extended hours, the labourers were kept abused. They were kicked off by means of the boots with heels on, which would have generated more pain. The song directly shows that it was the European planters who commenced such act since the boot was the common footwear of the Europeans. There is also a proverb in English which symbolizes the use of boots for the purpose of assaulting. It sounds "put the boot in" which means inflicting violence on someone. The function of the boots as footwear extended as the tool of assault in the lives of the Tamil labourers.





Another song discloses the same act but does not specify the type of the footwear. It only voices out that the labourers were kicked with the shoes on.

...pālāyppōṇa makkala atittār pār
useless *people* *stricked*
cappātti kallālē
shoes *leg*

(Thandayutham, ponṇu rattinamē, p.62)

“...people get kicked
 with shoes on...”

Nevertheless, it entails the same effect of being kicked. The song also expresses the fate of the Tamils being useless and wretched. The line ‘pālāyppōṇa’ (useless) elucidates this. Such a self impression that engulfed the labourers themselves shows how they carry and consider themselves. It significantly shows that the physical assaults took its toll on the mind of the Tamil labourers. They degraded themselves as useless creatures. This implies the extent of the cruelty and exploitation made by the colonial government on Tamil labourers.

V Shoved

Any failure to accomplish a job as instructed by the superior also costs the labourers physically. For instance the following lyrics demonstrate what happens if one could not meet the job accomplishment.

...itta vēlaiyai nāṅkalākavē
ordered *work* *we*
etuttuk kūri ceyvanum
take *tell* *do*





seyvāvittāl pin mutukil

not done back

pitari pitittut talluvār...

nape hold push

(Thandayutham, kūli taṇ nilai kūṛal, p.25)

“...repeatedly agonizing over the tasks to be done
any failure would costs us down to the ground...”

This song particularly cries out the grief of a tapper. The labourer gets a hefty shove if missed to do the works. The song also shows that the labourers should be able to do and to know his routine works without being informed. This has been displayed in the line, ‘...itṭa vēlaiyai nāṅkaḷākavē, eṭuttuk kūṛi ceyyaṇum’ (...repeatedly agonizing over the tasks to be done). Excessive workload tends to make one to forget the tasks that need to be completed. It is common for the human beings.

But the effect is much higher among the depressed people which in this case would be the labourers. The labourer preoccupied with their mental burden simultaneously receive other inputs (work chores) and apt to ignore previous ones. A study conducted by Law (2014) corroborates to this by pointing that over workload causes anxiety and make people to forget things (p.22). Thus it causes them to stay out of focus. Meanwhile, the supervisors who kept being ignorant about the well being of the labourers continue treating them inhumanly.

4.3.2.2 Sexual Harassment

Sexual abuse was found prevalent under the British colonization. It is an act of undesired sexual behavior caused by one person to another vulnerable person. The





women labourers became the victims of sexual harassment conducted by the kanganies and the European planters. They systematically planned the sexual assault on women labourers by commencing gender division at the work field. This has been proven in study conducted by Murasu Nedumaran (2014) who clarified gender divisions are pre planned for sexual purpose (p.6)

a) **Gender Division for Sexual Harassment**

Gender division is defined as the way work is divided between men and women according to their gender roles (Module on Gender, Poverty and Employment, 2008, p.1). Gender division in the context of this research refers to the work given to the Tamil labourers at the work field according to their gender. The work division is



It was stated earlier that most of the labourers who made up the tapper community works in an isolated environment. The isolation was due to the gender division. This statement validates the finding of Eaton (2003) who states that “women and men were treated differently in the colonial period (p.170). Correspondingly, based on the folk songs it was found that women labourers are selectively given isolated plots. It also authenticates the study by Bubenechik (2012) whom stated British colonial practices control female’s self and sexuality.

The men will always get isolated with women. The plot determines their distant. Normally, the plot assigned for men are located at the valley (pāca), a low





area of land. The plot at the valley is numbered as the 10th plot or ‘pattām number pāca’. The folk song below denotes the location of the 10th plot at the valley.

...pattām number pācaviḷa...

tenth low ground

(Thandayutham, kūli caka kūliyiṭam pāṭṭal, p.197)

“...the 10th plot low ground ...”

...Pattāvatu malaitonkal

tenth end of the hill

Pācākilam kātturār...

low ground shown

(Thandayutham, kankāṇyin kaivaṇṇam, p.58)

“...I was shown the 10th plot
the frontier low ground...”



...ettām number tonkalilē

eighth end

moccak kōṭṭa vikkira nā

lima beans selling I

...paccak kāṭa irukku...

dense jungle

(Thandayutham, vēlaippāṭṭu, p.22)

“...lima beans sold at the end of 8th plot
the plot of dense jungle...”

Most of the plots are located near the dense jungle. The 8th plot in the song above is located at the frontier. It was indicated in the line ‘paccak kāṭa irukku’. A short story written with estate as its background also denotes the position of the 8th plot at the top of a hill (Larina, 2005). It sounds as follows ‘8-ām number malaiyuccciyil’. Thus it is





concludable that the 8th plot was located far interior. Generally, the women labourers will be given the 8th plot as denoted in the folk songs as ‘ettām number toṅkal’.

...ettām number toṅkalilē

eighth *end*

Moccai kottai vikkap pōnēn!...

lima beans *sell* *went*

(Thandayutham, kuṭṭi cākku, p. 22)

“...I went to sell lima beans at the end of 8th plot...”

...paccakkāttu toṅkalilē

dense jungle *end*

Taṅka rettinamē- ava

word of endearment *she*

Moccai kottai vikkirālām...

lima beans *sell*

(Thandayutham, poṇṇu rettinamē, p.62)



“...she went to sell the beans -Taṅka rettinamē
deep down in the jungle...”



Based on these lyrics, it is understood that women were positioned in a distant plot for two purposes. They were required to tap the rubber and to sell the lima beans (Moccai kottai). Lima beans are often associated with Tamils since the period of migration. It was ought to be the primary nutrient source for them during the voyage (Ramanathan, 1996). On the other hand, lima beans in plantation were associated as a side dish for toddy drinking. The women were placed at the 8th plot to sell the beans to the toddy drinkers.

The gender division was also meant for a hidden purpose; for sexual harassment. It has reflected in the following song.





...angkamuttuk kankāṇiyum kirāṇiyum kūṭi
name of the kangany clerk join

Enneppōlap penkaḷukku
like me women

Nalla number kāṭṭurān!
good show

enakku
me

Pattāvatu malaitoṅkal
tenth end of the hill

Pācākilam kāṭṭurār
ground show

ettāvatu malaittoṅkal
eighth end of the hill

irakkattilē kāṭṭurār
low ground show

...kankāṇi
kangany

vēkamutaṇ ṭṭivantu
fast run

tāvaṇiyait tottānati...
piece of cloth worn over blouse and skirt touch

(Thandayutham, kankāṇyin kaivaṇṇam, p.58)



“...Angkamuthu kangany and the clerk assigning
 interior plots for women like us...”

“..he showed me the tenth plot
 at the hill and the low ground
 the eighth plot at the hill

...kangany quickly rushed and
 placed his hands on my blouse...”

The song, narrates the plot behind the gender division. The woman complains to her partner that the Kangany and the Kirani (clerk) often give isolated plots for women labourers. The line ‘enneppōlap penkaḷukku nalla number kāṭṭurān’ (assigning interior plots for women like us) declares this. This placement benefits the kangany more. It gave him space to take advantage of the vulnerable women. The line ‘vēkamutaṇ ṭṭivantu tāvaṇiyait tottānati’ (kangany quickly rushed and placed his hands on my blouse) serves as an evidence for the sexual harassment. The following





lyric also shows the same situation where by the women became a subject for sexual purpose.

...kankāṇi, tāvaṇiya puticcāru...

kangany half saree catch

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyiṇ vākkumūlam, p.23)

“...kangany pulled my cloth...”

Whereas, the man on the other hand complains that he was given the plot at the valley, a place where he will be dislocated far away from his partner. The following verse elucidates the sexual harassment on the women labourer.

...ettām number kāttukkulla

eighth jungle

Enna vetta colrāṇ

me tap told

Pattām number kāttukkulla

tenth jungle

Pācāṅku kāttac colrāṇ!

pretence show told

(Thandayutham, kankāṇi vantutṭāṇ , p.53)

“...in the 8th plot

I was asked to tap

in the 10th plot

I was asked to pretence...”

The woman was allotted to tap the trees at 8th plot. Later she was called to the 10th plot to entertain the Kanganies. More songs have been identified in the placement of women into the deep jungle.

...murukku mīcāiyai tatavikittu

twisted state moustache stroke





Muniyammaalaik kūppiturān
name of a woman labourer calling
Añcām number tonkalilē,
fifth end
avalai vettac colrān
her tap told
ettām number tonkalilē
eighth end
ennai vettac colrān
me tap told
kumarippenkalaip pārttu pārttu
young girl selectively
kutukkirāṇṭi neraikalai
giving row

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 2, p. 86)

“...whilst stroking the moustache
Muniammal was called to tap at 5th plot
I was assigned to 8th plot
young girls are selectively picked
for different rows...”



...ennāttam penkalukkē
like me young girls
ettām number koṭuttār
eighth given
paccakkāttut tonkalilē
dense jungle end
pattām number koṭuttār
tenth given
pāttālum payammārukkē...
see frightening

(Thandayutham, turai vantaṭṭān p.220)

“...young girls like me
are given 8th plot
at dense jungle’s end
are given 10th plot
it scares the hell out of us...”

...cinna cinna poṇkalukku nallanera kātturār
little girls good row shown
ennappōla āṇkalukku ētō pācā kātturār...
like me men low ground shown

(Murasu Nedumaran, 119. cinna cinna poṇkalukku, p.336)

“...young girls are selectively assigned to the plots





men like me are assigned to the low ground...”

The three subsequent songs above disclose the placement of the plot according to the age of women. It reveals that younger women get to placed to interior plots. It is the perfect surrounding favoured by the Kanganies and the delinquent European planters to take advantage on them. The vulnerable position added with the younger , good looking girls provoke the desire of onlookers, thereby exposing the opportunity of the labourer being sexually abused.

European planters also took advantage of women. They also get sexually associated with the labourer. The ceremony at bungalow serves as the place for sexual enticement. The song below indirectly unravels the purpose of celebrating the



prestation at the bungalow.

kummiyaṭip peṇṇē

kummiyaṭi...

dancing of girls with rhythmic clapping

Mānu vēṭtaikkup pōvārām

deer hunting go

Mayilu vēṭtaikkup pōvārām

peacock hunting go

kōli kūppittum nērattilē

cock crow time

kumari vēṭtaikkup pōvārām

young girl hunting go

(Thandayutham, kummi pāṭṭu - 2, p.242)

“dorai hunts deer

dorai hunts peacock

when dawn rises

he hunts young girl...”





...kilattu torai vantuttāru- nammala

old dorai came us

Kaiya puṭikka varrāṇṭi...

hand hold coming

(Thandayutham, kummi pāṭṭu - 3, p.243)

“...the old dorai has arrived

to hold our hands...”

...kālaiyilē perattilē

morning muster

maṅka māru eluppayilē

young girl waken

vaṅkalā anuppa connār

bungalow sent told

maṅka mār anuppivittu

young girl sent

vētikkaikum pārttiruppārē...

fun see

(Thandayutham, ponṇu rattinamē, p.62)



“young girl was waken up

early morning and

sent to the bungalow

to amuse....”

Both the songs elucidate the sexual harassment of the woman labourer by the European planters. They intentionally bring the woman labourer over the Bungalow to sexually entice them by offering money. Even the younger good looking brides were also exploited by them.

Based on the analysis, it was known that plantation became a place where the women bodies were also exploited for sexual purpose. The isolated plantation added with control barriers causes the pleading of the vulnerable women unheard.





4.3.3 Psychological Abuse

The immense physical abuses exposed the Tamil labourers to severe menace. The mass form of destruction took its toll on the mental state of the labourers. The impact on the mental state can be associated with the psychological abuse exerted on Tamil labourers during the colonisation. Weiss (2003) clarified that psychological abuse is an intentional attempt to cause mental suffering (p.38). It is deliberately exercised over subordinates, with the intention that, subjugates could always dominate. The control could be achieved with physical abuse alone. Sometimes, it is also accompanied with psychological abuse to retain the supremacy.

Colonisation of British in Malaya involved the combination of both form of abuses put into effect on Tamil labourers. The current section analysed the psychological abuse in terms of two factors namely push factors and pull factors. Under the push factor discussion was made on the well -orchestrated migration. Under the pull factor discussion was made on gas lighting.

4.3.3.1 Well -Orchestrated Migration as The Push Factor

It all started when the Tamils at South India were rejected, isolated and ignored by their masters and colonial superiors. The acts of rejection, isolation, and ignorance were sought as a part of well-orchestrated plan by the British to recruit cheap labourers from South India to Malaya.





Due to the abolishment of the slavery method on 1807 (National Archives, Abolition of the Slave Trade, ¶ 12) British faced difficulties in developing the colonies. They desperately needed labourer source for their economic development as, Malaya had the potential of functioning as colonial capitalists. They found the Tamils from South India to perfectly suit as cheap labourers. As such they started to create artificial destruction to induce migration of the Tamil labourers.

One such artificial destruction was the famine. Meena (2015) has corroborated to this by stating that “the British government was rather lethargic in her response to confront the famine” (p.35). It clearly showed the ignorant and absence of British political strategies to resolve the scarcity of foods. Chandra (1966) clarified the impact of scarcity over the death of millions of Tamils at Madras Presidency due to starvation (146-153). These destructions caused Tamils to get overwhelmed with the desperation to make living. British used this opportunity and took advantage on the vulnerability of the Tamils. They started to offer jobs for the poor Tamils at Malaya. The starvation that saw huge amount of death finally induced migration of Tamils to Malaya. It served as a push factor. On the other hand, gas lighting served to be the pull factor of emigration.

4.3.3.2 Gaslighting

Psychological abuses varied. But generally it caused the emotional destruction. Anything that causes a mental and emotional deterioration is considered psychological abuse. Weiss (2003) notified psychological abuse as an attempt to get





onto the head of victims, and utilize their own weaknesses against them. Such an interpretation similarly regards the act of gas lighting as it also involves manipulation of the victims mind. In this case, it is analysed as a form of game that controls the mind; played by the British colonials on Tamils. It took a great deal of gas lighting to attract the psychologically ill-stricken Tamils.

Gas lighting is defined as denying facts and giving false detail to the victims, leading to a false perception. It is also known as brainwashing (Scott, 2011, p.34). The research construes gas lighting as a manipulative trick used by the British to brainwash the Tamil labourers. The labourers believed whatever being propagated by the recruiters. The recruiter appeared to be the only one they can have their grip on to. The recruiters took advantage of the situation and used all those tricky brainwashing propaganda to lure the Tamil labourers away. The manipulative method used by the colonial dominants has been reflected in the following folk songs.

...cutta karuvātla
roast salted dried fish
kañciyak kuticcinnu
gruel drink
kācupaṇam cēkkalānnu
money gather
kaiyaṭicci koṭṭānka...
sworn
...pakaṭiyāna vārttayila
glamorous words
pālmarattil paṇankāykkum
rubber milk bear money
atirshṭamum tānē varum
luck come
ippadiyum jālākkū
artful pretence
eppadiyum pōṭṭānka
stated

(Murasu Nedumaran, 129.vantakata vāṇtakata, p.342)





“...money can be saved
porridge and dried fish
all leads to lavish life
that was the word promised
...all those glamorous utterness
that rubber yields money
and luck always accompany
were the artful pretence
coated to us...”

The song above shows the labours being enticed with the promises of a bright future in the colonies. They were promised with a provision of better financial state as indicated in the line ‘kācupaṇam cēkkalānnu kaiyaṭicci koṇṭānka’ (...money can be saved). A better life with dignity was also promised to be awaiting them at the new land, Malaya. This has been reflected in the following verse.



...Muthusaamy kaṅkāni
name of a kangany
cālvaip paṇṇi pōṭaraṇṇu
shawl put (better life with dignity)
kūṭṭi vanta kaṅkāni
brought along

(Thandayutham, kaṅkāni, p.50)

“...Muthusamy kangany
promised a better life with dignity
and brought along...”

Both the songs above demonstrate a vision of more yielding future in Malaya. The Tamils with torn self respect, lost identity, and poor found those visions to be worth experienced in the host land.





Shantini (2007) has cited the following excerpt of a recruiting poster issued in Nagapattinam, in 1890 by Ganapathy Pillay and Co., Agents for Planters, Penang which reflects the brain washing method used by the colonial authorities (p.7).

Houses, fuel, and land for gardens will be given free ... There are shops and a good supply of water. There are doctors who speak Tamil. Rice is sold at market price ... The country is quite similar to our own places, and comfortable. Many of our own countrymen are working on each estate.

These visions were actually faked. The actual situation does not resemble the yielded visual. The following song questions the fake promise made by the kanganies.



...malāy nāṭṭilē kaṭavulē
Malay land God
cinikkā kakkā oṭṭanum?...
sugar crow chase?



(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“...are we here at Malay land
to chase away the crows?...”

Cañciyanai nampi vantōm
middlemen trust came
tañcam kitaikkum eṇru
refugee will get
pañcattil āltti viṭṭāṇē
famine fall
pāvi
ominous fellow
pātaiyil ētti viṭṭāṇē
bier lifted

(Saraswathi age 75, Teluk Intan, 15-08-2015; 5:15 pm)

“We trusted the middleman
We sought for refugee with him
We were caught in between famine
He lifted us to the bier”





The songs manifests the shattered promises made to the Tamil labourers. Instead, the labourers led unsanitary living condition and became submissive to fatal diseases. It has been exactly captured in the following verse.

...ārumaṭal tunpam inta malāy nāṭṭilē
misery this Malay nation
innaikku vanta itam pōmaramnu vante...
today came place garden came

(Thandayutham, pōriṇ etirolī, p.8)

“...Misery flooded the land of Malaya
the place I thought is a garden...”

Labour recruitment was known for its malpractices, use of coercive, abusive and fraudulent methods implemented by the Kanganies (Heidemann,1992, p.59).

Thus by faking the reality, Kanganies enticed the labourers to agree for the recruitment. The labourers were made to believe that the work in Malaya is far more comforting. The line ‘pōmaramnu vantan’ (place I thought is a garden) shows the expectation hold by the women on the plantation. She was given a rosy picture of the plantation but it was the other way round. The plantation/rubber estate held a false impression among the labourers. Sandhu (2010) clarifies this impression as below,

An Estate to translate into Tamil is a ‘Tōṭṭam’ and when this Tōṭṭam is again converted into English , it becomes ..a ‘Garden’...Thus the labourer before leaving India imagines the work in an estate is like the work he has to do in an Indian flower garden...(p.107).





Amidst the desperation of hard living at South India, Tamils became unsure of the face of reality. They got along with the persuasive words and flooded to be recruited.

nāva pattinam vantēṇṭi

Nagapattinam came

nammavarap pāttēṇṭi

our people saw

teppōvil ataicciveccic

depot put in

caripāti potaccāṇṭi

exact half buried

(Murasu Nedumaran, 128.nammavaṅka polappu, p.340)

“...I came to Nagapattinam

I saw our people

was confined in a depot

and buried nearly half of us...”



The song discloses the grief of the labourer who was kept encased in Nagapattinam depot. It is an emigration depot. Nagapattinam was acknowledged as the only official port of emigration for Southeast Asia (Amrith, 2009, p.559). But there is also another song that shows an additional presence of emigration depot at Pondicherry.

...Pondiceri kappal ēṇi, Penangke nāṇē pārttēṇṭi

Pondicherry ship board Penang I saw

(transcribed from Nathupuram
Gananghal, Audio production courtesy
Astro vanavil Malaysia)

“...Across the sea by Pondicherry ship and saw Penang...”





Emigration from India to Malaya has been specified and restricted to certain ports. Madras and Nagapattinam became the ports of embarkation (Khan, 1963, p.60). But, the song above revealed different emigration port contrary to what has been legislated. This clearly exposes the illegal shipping made for the recruitment. Pondicherry was an illegal emigration depot. Amrith (2013) has noted a remark made on the illegal recruitment made by a veteran of Madras Army, whom stated the emigration to be escaping the British control (p.132). Emigration from the Pondicherry was more to the free migration from South India. Legal depots required the registration and agreement of the labourers made in the presence of supervisors. But emigration from illegal depots embellishes from such safeguards. As such no records about the labourers can be obtained since there were no legal records kept on this embarkation. This directly implies that we have lost information on these labourers. Their historical path and sufferings has been hidden forever. The fate of the labourers buried together with them.

Based on the evidences, it can be concluded that gas lighting functioned to form a social dependency. They were psychologically manipulated to entrust the colonials. It was clearly portrayed in Malaysian Tamil folk songs. It reflected the superior control and paternalistic social distribution among the British and Tamils in a plantation. Tamils were always become as a specimen of docility, malleable, non resistant, hardworking and etc. All the callings are actually the intimidators. They were meant to decrease the self esteem and self confidence thereby restricting the labourers to function independently. Physical abuse takes lives. Psychological abuse destroys a spirit". This is indeed true in the lives of Tamil labourers in Malaya. Section 4.4 sheds light on the destroyed spirits.





4.3.4 Economic Destruction

The economy destruction was one of the mass traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation. Cambridge (2016) defines economy as the “system of trade and industry by which the wealth of a country is made and used”. The wealth of a country relies on the interaction of people within the market to accomplish the prosperity. So, human force becomes the driving force for the exploitation of raw materials of a country to produce wealth. In the context of this research, the colonial economy of British in Malaya is studied to analyse how the Tamil labourers as the driving force were monopolized and how it destructed their economical status.



Colonial economy is one of the strategies applied by the British to fully monopolise the colonized community. Kamii (2009) has affirmed on this by claiming that colonial economy is a production system deliberately established in a society which had been physically, politically, economically, culturally and socially dominated (p.92). The colonial economy implemented by the British in Malaya was known as colonial agricultural economy. Before the agricultural economy, British concentrated on tin and mining sector (Arman, 2008, p.20). Since European capitalist faced failure in mining sector, focus was shifted to the agricultural economy (Ghee, 1977, p.14-15). The principle of colonial agricultural economy is to produce cash crops to feed European industrialization.





Hence, to feed the capitalist economy, British needed a colony that guarantees a steady supply of raw materials, and cheap labourers to extract the raw materials. British opt for the Tamils from South India to develop and help achieving the economic aspiration of the British. Tamil labourers became the driving force for the exploitation. But, they never gained profit or benefit from the exploitation. As in exchange, it only leads to their economical destruction. The focus of this section commence with the exploration of economical depression in India and manipulation of economy in Malaya. The manipulation of economy in Malaya focused on the early development of agriculture and the forms of manipulation faced by the Tamil labourers.

Before studying the economical pressure faced by the Tamils in Malaya, it is better to comprehend the Tamils economical situation at their ancestral land. This is because, economic depression was one of the reason that triggered the migration of the Tamil labourers to Malaya.

4.3.4.1 Economic Depression In India

India was known for its agrarian economy. It remained agrarian under the British control (Khan, 1963, p.43). The revenue from the agricultural land kept growing that it caught the attention of the British. Since the colonial government needed money to finance their administration, they imposed several direct and indirect economic controls which caused hardship to the cultivators. The British demanded share in the production. They even determined the price for the selling and thus interfered with the





economical life of the Tamil peasants. A folk song of Tamilnadu had captured the power and control of the British over the cultivation.

Ūrān ūrān tōttattilē - avan
a plot belongs to others he
Oruvan pōttatu vellarikkā
a man sowed cucumber
Kācukku reṇṇu vikkac colli
paisa two sell tell
Nalla kāyitam pōttāṇṭi vellakkāran
good paper deliver whiteman

(Alagappan, 2005)

“Some planted cucumber
 In others plot
 White man order him
 To sell two pieces for an anna”



The song clearly defines the property right of the land owned by the British. The economic control resulted in the stagnation of the agricultural sector. It has been evidenced that British colonial government held responsible for such situation (Krishna, 2015, p.286). They took advantage on the impoverished and servile Tamil population by executing several plots. Manickam (2012) pointed that British depleted the treasury of the Madras Presidency of South Indian (p.46). It has been also corroborated by Khan (1963) who had cited the claim made by The Acting Controller of Labour, A.S Jeif who had written on the economic conditions in South India by describing that, “the outlook in the Madras Presidency for agricultural labourer is very unfavourable” (p.85).

The depletion of the treasury paralyzed the economic function of the Tamils whom were from the peasant families and triggered them to migrate. This





corroborates the finding of Arasaratnam (1970) whom argues that migrants were usually from the peasant families (p.27). The folk song below reflects the situation faced by the Tamils at Madras Presidency.

paṇammāyirukku ayyayya
do we have money
kuruva tutikkutu
paddy writhe
vatiyattalaikku mēla
channel
vāraṇṭu irukkutu
drought
vāṅkina katan tāṇa
borrowed money
pōrittu alaikkutu
fight calling
...panireṇṭu mātamā
twelve months
polakkutu veyilu
drought
ayya nāṭṭu purāṅkal
rustics
ellām ōttam pitikkutu...
all flee

(Thandayutham, japti, p.239)

∴,do we have any penny
the paddy writhes
the channels dried up
the debt kept haunting
it was drought all year through
and the folks are fleeing away...”

The word ‘kuruva’ refers to the short term crop of paddy cultivated during May -August at Tamilnadu (Cre-A dictionary, 2008, p.461). The song commenced with a strong deprivation of money entrenched with drought which affected the paddy plantation. The song further entails the burden of the debt. It shows the frustration of the labourers claiming that the debt owed pushed them down to the core. Analogously





the labourer equated the situation as striving in uphill battle. Apart from this they also suffered the prolonged drought for nearly a year. Due to the persistent situation many were forced to migrate. The following excerpt from Hagan (2005) signifies the appalling situation of the Tamils at Madras Presidency.

Madras Presidency, like much of the rest of India, was a fertile recruiting ground. Frequent failure of the monsoon resulted in drought and famine; the system of taxation the British Raj imposed exacerbated poverty and indebtedness (p.144).

The tax system caused the Tamils to lose their livelihood and made them vulnerable. British used this opportunity by offering jobs at Malaya. The loss of income triggered them to migrate abroad temporarily to earn a living. The following lines express the disappointment of the poor peasant whom migrated in search for better life.

...ulutu payirittu pātupatta
plough cultivated toiled
pāttāli makkal nāmayyā
labourers people we
piṭuṅkittān tinpatu ēmāliyā tānāyyā!
snatch eat gullible person
nāṅka pilaikka vantatu
we survive came
Penangku Singaporu...
Penang Singapore

(Thandayutham, ēmānta ulaippu ēlaikal, p.17)

“...cultivating the land
 We, the labourers get toiled
 were made gullible
 We came to Penang and Singapore
 to survive...”





The song narrates the injustice treatment given to the Tamil peasant whom worked hard in farming. Later they were recruited by the British, in search for good life. British encouraged the expansion of the plantation agriculture and recruitment of a controlled, needy, and low-waged labour forces which primarily consist of Tamils. Tamils were desperate enough to believe and accept whatever been told to them by the recruiting agents. Emigration was seen as an alternative to starvation. Satyanarayana (2001) has claimed the emigration to be a ‘safety valve’ from the economy depression they faced at India (p.9). They were brought to Malaya in the hope that they would earn easy money. The labourers were also told that they could receive higher wages in the new land. The poor illiterate Tamils delighted with the rosy pictures of Malaya and believed that they could save money and send it back to their family in India. The folk song below whispers the hope of the Tamils who are looking forward for a better life upon their return to the ancestral land.



...kācaiyum cēkattum

money save

tirumaṇattai muṭikattum

marriage done

tirumpi varattum

return

cukamāka vālattum...

happy state live

(Thandayutham, kūli taṇ nilai kūṛal, p. 25)

“...save money
get married
return back
and live happily...”





But it was a designed propaganda by the British. British do not intend to uplift the Tamil community. They only wanted them as cheap labourers who committed themselves as slaves to extract the raw materials and feed the European capitalist.

4.3.4.2 Manipulation of Economy In Malaya

The migration which was meant as safety valve did not protect the Tamil labourers. It even worsened their economical situation in Malaya. The repentance has been showcased in the following songs.

...kākkā ōtta vantikalā tamilā
crow chase did u came Tamils
ippō ĉiraliya pōrīnkata tamilā
now ruin going to Tamils
British valikāttina tamilā
guided Tamils
anta vali porakka allām vali
that solution to born all way
turanta tamilā...
open Tamils

(Thandayutham, pīlaikka vanta tamiḷārkal, p.15)

“...Oh Tamils! did u came to chase away the crows?
you are only going to get yourself torned
Tamils oh Tamils guided by the British
You have lost all you ways for it...”

ĉīmān malāy nāṭṭilē
wealth Malaya nation
āriṭamenru ata colvār
to whom that tell
alukirār jati pāṭṭilē..
crying rhythmic song

(Thandayutham, kangany ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)





“...Wealthy Malaya nation
to whom we shall tell
that we are wailing rhythmically...”

The songs above imply the frustration and disappointment of the labourers. The verses represented the actual intention of the British who wanted to exploit the labourers as manual force to maintain their industrial supremacy. This was achieved through the plantation agriculture (Peebles, 2001, p.80). It was used as the site for the cash crops and Tamil labourers were monopolized to meet the economic aspirations of the British.

The song below shows the occurrence of the control the British had on the economy of the Tamil labourers in Malaya.



Ūrān ūrān tōttattilē - avan
a plot belongs to others he
Oruvan pōttatu vellarikkā
a man sowed cucumber
Kācukku reṇtu vikkac colli
cent two sell tell
Nalla kāyitam pōttānti vellakkāran
good paper deliver whiteman
vellaikkāran paṇam
whiteman money
cinnap paṇam vēṭikkai
Insignificant money amusement
pākkutām kallap paṇam
see deceitful money

(Thandayutham, vellaikkāraṇ paṇam, p. 35)

“Some planted cucumber
In others plot
White man order him
To sell two pieces for a cent
The white men’s money is insignificant
And illegal”





It centers on the agricultural production of cucumber. The particular line ‘oruttan pōṭṭān veḷḷarikkā, kācukku reṇṇu vikkaccolli- nalla kāyitam pōṭṭāṇṭi veḷḷaikkāraṇ’ (Some planted cucumber ,In others plot, White man order him,To sell two pieces for an anna) shows repetitive occurrence in few songs (Thandayutham, veḷḷaikkāraṇ, p.35; Thandayutham, ūrāṇ tōṭṭattilē, p.36; Thandayutham, veḷḷaiyaṇukkuk kaṭṭiyam kūṛutal,p.36; Mutthammal, kummip pāṭal, p.70). It gives an account on the economical control held by the British. This implies the extent of economical subjugation faced by the Tamils both in their ancestral and host land as the same song has been documented in a Tamilnadu folk songs compilation.

The song also discloses the devalued currency which is indicated in the line ‘veḷḷaikkāraṇṇ paṇam cinnap paṇam- The white men’s money is insignificant’. It directly shows the devaluation of the currency. In addition, the money of the British was also claimed to be illegal. The currency under the colonial government was referred with many names. It was used as an allusive object to show the fraudulent and the devaluation of economy under the British colonisation. References such as ‘cinnap paṇam’ (insignificant money) (veḷḷaikkāraṇ, p.35), and ‘kaḷḷap paṇam’ (illegal money) (veḷḷaikkāraṇ paṇam, p.35), shows how the currency during the British colonisation faces devaluation.

The devaluation of the currency during the British colonisation reflects the manipulation of the economy in Malaya. The manipulation was exerted on agriculture sector. Hence, discussion was made on the early development of agriculture and the forms of the manipulation which leads to the economic destruction of the Tamil labourers.





a) Early Development Of Agriculture

Before the booming of rubber plantation, Malaya was known for its capitalist agriculture. Grist (1950) claimed that “through the East India Company, the British introduced and developed local new crops which were suitable” (p.10-12). Among the crops, sugar cultivation was seen to have a broad agricultural economical prospect as the world's most important cash crops.

The consumption of sugar in Europe was significant during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The consumption was boosted with the introduction of new drinks in Europe. The Europeans preferred sugary beverages and foods such as lemonades, tea, coffee, cakes, chocolates. They became stapled with sugar as it became an important menu in an English diet (Galloway, 1989, p.6). The Europeans were interested with the potential of the sugar as sweetener. It also conspicuously used for alcoholic purposes and had been notified the significant role it plays on displaying the wealth of a person. Following the demand, the sugar industry showed an important emergence around 1860 at Malaya.

The Malayan sugar industry had its initial focal development at Province Wellesley (now known as Seberang Perai) until the year 1874. The expansion elicited with the immigration system introduced by the Colonial government which provided cheap labourers from India (Satyanarayana, 2001, p.7). Detailed analysis on the folk songs also revealed the initial immigration was for the sugar cultivation. It has been indicated with the codes such as ‘cīni’ (sugar) and ‘cīnikku kākāy ōṭṭanum’ (to chase





away the crows from sugar). The songs also unravel the relationship between the crows and sugar as both phrases were used to call forth the immigrants.

...karumput tōttattilē - nam intiyarai
sugar plantation our Indians
kūliyenūm peyarkotuttu...
coolie name given

(Thandayutham, karumput tōttattilē, p.12)

“...sugar plantation was the destination
coolie was the name given to the Indians...”

...tēyilai karumput tōttattilē
tea sugar plantation
kūppittu nam intiyarkku...
called us Indians

(Thandayutham, ēmārriyavarkaḷ, p.16)

“...Indians were called
to tea , sugar plantations...”

...čīnikkuttān kākkā viratta
sugar crow chase
koṇṭu vantu cērttānyā
brought
malāy nāttilē...
Malaya nation

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“...Landed on Malaya
to chase the crow away
from sugar...”

...kākkāykku čīni ōṭṭa vanta...
crow sugar chase came

(Thandayutham, kankāṇi, p.50)

“...came to chase away the crow from sugar...”

Phrases of čīni (Thandayutham, katirvelu kankāṇi, p.51), kākkā (Thandayutham, kankāṇiyenum kuḷḷa nari, p.60), kākkāikkuc čīni ōṭṭiṇa nā...(Thandayutham, vaṅki, p.327), kākkā ōṭṭa (Thandayutham , piḷaikka vanta





tamilarkaḷ, p.15) were also found throughout the folk songs. The use of kākḱā (crow) to fish the labourers for the recruitment can be seen as an allusive object to create a false perception on the work load that awaits them at Malaya. They were so naïve to believe that they are only needed to chase away the crows from the sugar cultivation plots. The labourers were easily tempted with the ‘sugar’ coated words of the agents. Upon the arrival they learn to fathom the real situation.

After 40 years the sugar production started to decline around 1914 and gave way to rubbers, oil palms, and coconuts (Arman, 2008, p.37 ; Ghee, 1977, p 14-16; Galloway, 1989, p.214). Economic importance was given to other cash crops that triggered higher demand. Among these crops rubber created a potential demand for economic enhancement. It tempted the British capitalists with tremendous wealth.



Satyanarayana (2001), has cited the work of Sandhu whom notifies the investment of the British on rubber commodity as, “by 1913 British capital investments in Malaysia amounted to 40 million, by 1923 it rose more than 100 million” (p.6). The development of rubber plantation took its toll on the lives of the Tamil labourers. The development marks the continuous economical destruction on Tamil labourers.

b) Forms Of Manipulation That Leads To Economic Destruction

The economic condition of the Tamils does not encounter much change in Malaya. In fact, it began to deteriorate due to the manipulation. The research had categorized the forms of manipulation into three aspects namely debt bondage-peonage system, tax payment, and wages.





I Debt Bondage- Peonage System

In debt bondage the Tamil labourers were bonded to serve until their debts are paid in full. The system of debt bondage implied in Malaya plantation was known as peonage system. Carper (1976) defines the peonage system, whereby the laborers are bound in servitude until they settle all the debts (p.85). In the system the workers are exploited. Often, the workers are unable to repay the debt and consequently found themselves in the work cycle. Some even continues to generation. The inability to repay confined them to a life filled with eternal debts.

The peonage system was established upon the debt bondage. The debt commenced from the point the labourers were recruited. The debt covered their passage expenses. It has been corroborated in the record of Indian emigration which states that, “most new emigrants arrived in debt which was mainly caused through the settling of affairs at home and expenses for the journey” (Indian overseas). For instance, the verse below shows how the debt -bondage created upon the recruitment. The Kangany advanced the workers with passage pay. It point out that the labourers were given 10 rupee each to onboard.

...ālukkuru pattu rūpā kotuttuṅka
each ten rupee given
ñiṅkal kappalēri vāṅkannu kūppittāṇē...
you board ship come called

(Thandayutham, kankāṇiyenum kuḷḷanari, p.60)

“...each given 10 rupees
and boarded on ship...”





The debt bondage functioned to dominate the labourer relations. The debt was literally used as a tool to tie the labourers to long-term contracts. This ensures a steady stream of labourers. Tinker (1974), claimed that “Indian labour recruits arriving at Penang were burdened with a debt of \$17 to cover their passage charge and advance of pay, later recoverable from their wages” (p.112). The advance of pay has been elucidated in the following verse.

...ālonru pattu rūpā
each ten rupee
advance eṇṇu kotuttu...
give

(Thandayutham, ēmāṇṇiyavarkaḷ, p. 16)

“...each given 10 rupees
as advance...”



The debt was further magnified with charges on food, transport, job, and etc. The following excerpt from an elderly man who lived the colonial period clearly depicts the perpetual debt they faced in Malaya.

We were indebted from the moment we put our thumb prints on the documents. We were in debt for the steamship fare, for the transport overland to the estate and anything else you could think of.

(Obtained from Bhattacharjee, 1989, The Immigrant)

The inflation created an impossible situation for the labourers to repay. They were forced to work long hours and do multi works. The song below reflects the multi task done by the Tamil labourers.





pattu maniyāccu kaṅkāṇiyē- nān
ten'o clock kangany me
pālam vettappōrēn kaṅkāṇiyē
bridge pare kangany
inta tōttam irukka mātten kaṅkāṇiyē
this plantation stay will not kangany
vērattōttam pōra kaṅkāṇiyē ...
another plantation going kangany...
 (Thandayutham , kankāṇiyē!, p.50)

“it’s already 10’o clock kangany!
 I’m going to pare kangany!
 I will not stay here, in this plantation kangany!
 I’m heading to another plantation kangany!...”

The song narrates the situation of a labourer whom informs his wheareabout to the kangany. The labourers has to head for another plantation to construct ditch. The time as shown in the song (10’o clock) indicates that he has collected the latex at rubber plantation and ready to go for another job which is situated in a distant plantation. They were coerced to a situation to do many jobs because the sum of the pay was not enough to cover the unsettled debt.

The debt bondage caused the Tamil labourers to lose control over their working conditions. With more debts to be settled it became inevitable for the labourers to expatriate. Eventually the bondage trapped the labourers in a cycle of debt. During the contract, labourers activity was forcefully controlled by the coercion of European planters and the subordinate superiors. The forceful subjection also restricted the labourer’s freedom of movement. This supports the claim made by Breman (1990), stating that workers typically tied to long-term contracts through debt were controlled by indirect and direct coercion (p. 54).





... tola tolattān kaṅkāṇi
 loose kangany
tuṇṭu eṭukka vantuttān
 towel to take arrived
aṅcu velli kotukka
 five unit of currency give
kāṇōm appa kāran!...
 missing father

(Thandayutham, toḷilālī, p. 19)

“...the loose Kangany has arrived
 to take the towel
 have to give 5 ringgit
 appa is missing...”

For instance, the verse above depicts the feeling of anxiety of a labourer over the presence of Kangany. It shows the Kangany came to collect debt with a sum of 5 ringgit. The labourer was worried since the father whom is supposed to pay the debt is not around. The labourer has to confront the Kangany. The verse reflects the role of the kangany as the manipulator of economy. Kangany in an attempt to control, garner the economic benefits by doing money landing activities. Satyanarayana (2001), notify this activity as an important aspect of the Kangany's so called paternal role (p.21).

The debts were mostly recovered by deduction in wages. The Kangany note down the amount of debt of each labourer, and deducted it from their wages. With mere wages, the labourers were just given enough by the Kangany to stay alive. Eventually, it became harder for the labourer to release themselves from the never ending debt. The failure of settling the debt to the employer caused the labourer not to receive higher wages and to some extent subjected to criminal penalties. Hagan





(2005) clarified the penalty as, “if he left before he had acquitted his debt and served his time, he was subjected to criminal penalties” (p.145).

For instance the musical phrase below shows what happens to the labourer if he resists buying the brinjal. Consequently, the labourer is bashed whilst tied to the ground. The labourer is treated as if he committed a crime. Brinjal used as an allusive object to credit the debt owed by the labourers.

...kattirikkā vānkātti
brinjal *did not buy*
katti pōṭṭutān atikkirāntā...
tied *whacked*
 (Thandayutham, kankāṇiyēṇum kuḷḷanari, p.60)

“...if brinjal is not taken
 we get tied and whacked...”



Vegetables were also sold to recover the debt. It has been reflected in the verse below.

ata vītiyile natantu varumpōtu katavulē
that street *walk* *coming* *god*
kankāṇi poṇṭātti
kangany *wife*
kattarikkā vecciruppā
brinjal *keep*
 (Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“kangany’s wife having brinjal
 and standing
 at the corner of the street...”

According to the lines above it was described that, on the salary day the kangany’s wife will be waiting to sell the brinjal. Its been used as a recovery to collect





the debt from the labourers. The labourer will have no choice but to buy the vegetable. The encounter between the labourers and the superior (kangany's wife) which is narrated in the song reflected the discourse of subordination that visualize the dominance they had on the Tamils in the form of debt bondage-peonage system.

The songs serve as best examples to show the relation of Kangany to the labourers. He was related as shopkeeper and moneylender to the labourers. Arudsothy (1968) claims that the kangany system was a 'variant of the indenture system, as in effect, the debt-bondage relationship between servant and master still remained, although indirectly' (p.75).

II Tax Payment



Apart from the debt, the Tamils were also burdened with tax payment. The tax was imposed for irrelevant things. The song below shows the type of the taxes fixed. It entails the tax fixed on the Tamil labourers.

...kāttuvari mēttuvari
land tax ground tax
katalilōtum kappal vari!
sea sailing ship tax
kaiyilulla tolilkaḷukkuk
in hand jobs
kaṭumaiyāṇa varikal vāṅka..
severity tax give

(Thandayutham, variccumai, p.190)

“...land tax, ground tax
 ship tax
 severe taxes for all the jobs...”





There was tax for the land, the ship, and even for their job. British levied taxes to run the colonies. The hope of saving and returning home got shuttered when their economical life was interfered and gradually destructed by the colonial government. Adding to this, Manickam (2012) has cited the work of Stenson (1980) whom explained the form of taxes that super exploited the cheap migrant labour as below.

...before the Second World War, internal public capital formation was largely financed by the taxes on the consumption of Malayan labour. Major part of internal revenue was obtained from taxes on opium, alcohol-toddy, tobacco, textiles and other consumer imports (p.56).

Based on the statement above, it is known that toddy was used as revenue by fixing



tax on its consumption.

Toddy

Alcohols-toddy consumption had significant place among Tamil labourers. This is because, toddy functioned as spirits and seen as an institutionalized escape mechanism for the Tamil working class.

For example, the verse below narrates the chore of a labour who returns home upon receiving his wage. The toddy shop becomes the next destination for the labourer.





muppatu kācu campalam tāntā katavulē

thirty cents wage give God

vīṭṭukku varumpōtu

house coming

kuliccu mulukikittu

bath

kalluk kataikkup pōkumpōtu katavulē - antak

toddy shop going God that

kallak kuṭiccavutan kaṭavulē!...

toddy drunk God

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“... given 30 cents God!
went home and took a bath
heading to the toddy shop
and getting drunk...”

The plantation management knows exactly how to collect the revenue from the labourers. In order to attract them to the estates, the managers made the toddy shop easily accessible as an incentive to these labourers. According to Arasaratnam (1970) the rural Indian of the tapper's income bracket spends 10 % of his monthly wage on toddy (p.69-70). Toddy becomes an incentive for the plantation management as the contract of the toddy shops are managed by the plantation owners. The following statistical phrase, represent the tax obtained from the quantities drunk by the labourers.

In the year 1935, Government revenue on toddy, at 40% of the sale price, was 2,081,718 Dollars, which meant that the total amount spent by the labourers on toddy for that year was 5,204,295 Dollars.

Source: Central Indian Association of Malaya, Toddy in Malaya, Memorandum submitted to the Agent of the Government of India, December 1935, Cited in *Manickam (2012), The Malaysian Indian Dilemma*,





Thus, it can be concluded that the expenditure on toddy benefited the colonial government. Next form of economy destruction was witnessed in the wages of the Tamil labourers.

III Wages

Wage is a “particular amount of money that is paid, usually every week, to an employee, especially one who does work that needs physical skills or strength” (Cambridge, 2016). Wage in the context of this research is deemed to the amount of money paid based on day and hourly basis of the Tamil labourers who worked as tappers majorly. Wage during the colonial period involved the cost of using labourer in contrast to the cost of using resources or property. British colonial economy in



Malaya ensured to run on low wage labourers. This substantiates the claim made by Peebles (2001) that the foremost obligation of the British colony is to affirm revenue exceeded expenditure (p.80). To ensure revenue exceeds expenditure the British looked for cheap recruitment and low wage labourers. The Tamils were preferred because they were the most acquiescent to the comparatively low paid jobs (Manickam, 2012; Amarjit, 1998). From the early point of the Tamils arrival, British imposed control on their wages. Arasaratnam (1970) explains the wage structure as,

Wages were fixed at the time of recruitment and were not subject to any change...The charges for recruiting, and the expenses involved in the transport of the labourers were borne by the employer, and the wages were calculated with due allowance for this initial expenditure (p.11-12).





Wages were not subjected to any changes because the workers were left out from the wage deliberations (Amarjit, 2006, p.447). So, it made impossible to influence the wage structure. Besides that, the wages depended on a productivity-linked wage scheme. The wages were paid at a daily rate or a piece rate (Jain, 1970, p.30). As a result a Tamil labourer income was based on the number of days worked to deliver the product.

Analysis on the structure of the wage was deemed into two parts namely factors impacting the wages and the nature of the wages received by the Tamil labourers. Firstly, as reflected in the folk songs ‘The Great Depression’ was found to impact the amount of the wage. Secondly, as represented in the folk songs the nature of the wage was examined into three features. They are



- I Denial to decent wage
- II Half wage
- III Low wage

The Great Depression

The price of the rubber was tied to the international economy. So, if the price fluctuates it will immensely affect the wage of the labourer. But if the price rises in the market, the wage of the labourer will not be revised. The fluctuation was related to the Great Depression. The Great Depression (1929-1939) was an economic catastrophe of modern times (Eichengreen, 1996, p.3). So many countries faced financial difficulties. The impact of the depression was seen in Malayan plantations as





well. Amarjit (2006) has notified that, the effect of depression that caused the drop of rubber prices (p.455). It has been pointed out in the following verses.

Pāluvitta kālam pōccu...
milk sell time gone

Thandayutham, vilaivāci, p.237)

“The rubber business has gone...”

kuppurap patukkiccē rapparup pālu...
downward fall rubber milk

(Murasu Nedumaran, (120) kuppurap paṭukkiccē!, p.337)

“The rubber economy has fallen...”

The verse shows the fall of the rubber price that affected the economical life of the Tamils. It was reflected in consecutive line ‘paṅkam pōl nilai kuḷaintār’ (shattered as blemished). This once again serves as an example of the British obligation to maintain high revenue by cutting down the wages of the labourers.

The years 1920-1922 and 1930-1934 witnessed such a drastic fall in the price of rubber. The fall of the rubber price affects the economical position of the labourers as whole. The fluctuation was followed by wage reduction of estate labourers. In the 1930’s this wage reduction was below the official subsistence level (Stenson, 1980, p.35). Another song clearly elucidated the impact of the Great Depression as below.

Kaṇṇiyam mikunta malāy nāṭṭilē
dignity enriched Malaya nation
Paiya paiya kashtam vantatālē
slowly suffering came
Nām eṇṇārē eṇṇi
we think of dear one
Manam ēkkattālē





mind pining
Ippayō ayyā eṇṇi
now think
Maṇam tukkattālē
mind sad
Periya kammalakkārarē
big hoarse voice
Pēcāme niruttiṭṭān
unhesitatingly stopped
Kappalukkuk kappal
ship to ship
kaṇakkinri ēttittān
uncountable boarded
pōrri vaṇaṅkuvamē
praise worshipped
cārri vaṇaṅkuvamē
declare worshipped

(Thandayutham, kasṭham vanta malāy, p. 5)

“hurdle slowly crawls in the dignity land of Malaya
 pining, in the thought of the dear ones
 the hoarse voice came to an halt unhesitatingly
 boarded to ship countlessly
 goodness we would declare praise upon you...”



The song begins with the appraisal of the host land as a land of dignity, referred by the line ‘Kaṇṇiyam mikunta malāy nāṭṭilē’ (Malaya a land of dignity). Despite of it, it was caught in between depression which slowly infected the whole nation. Slowly the hurdles crawled in. Amidst the depression, the labouers were constantly in the thought of the dear ones. The line ‘eṇṇārē eṇṇi Maṇam ēkkattālē’ shows that they are longing for the love. Not enough with that, the plight was added with the economy depression which causes them to be repatriated back to India. It can be evidenced in the line, ‘Kappalukkuk kappal kaṇakkinri ēttittān’ - which means they were countlessly boarded on ship. The last two lines, ‘pōrri vaṇaṅkuvamē cārri vaṇaṅkuvamē’ reflect the sense of appreciation of the labours as they were repatriated.





They had endured the pain long enough and it was the time for them to let it go by returning to their home land.

This was even evidenced in one of the folk song below.

Pōyvārēn pāymaramē
goodbye sail ship
Pāluvitta kalam pōccu...
milk sell time gone
cīṭṭuppāl⁴ oru vilaiyum
a price
kōṭṭuppāl⁵ oru vilaiyum
maṅkuppāl⁶ oru vilaiyum
cīṅkam pōl vilaiyai virrār
lion like price sold
paṅkam pōl nilai kulaintār
blemished shattered

(Thandayutham, vilaivāci, p.237)



“...Goodbye sail ship
The rubber business has gone
a price for field coagula
a price for bark crepe
a price for cup latex
prices get hiked
they get shattered as blemished...”

The Great Depression caused reduction in production and even wage cut. Employers started to depress the wages. It has been estimated that wages in 1930 were about 40 cents (Amarjit, 2006, p.455). They declined to between 25 and 30 cents at the end of 1931 and were lowered to 20–25 cents in mid-1932. At the end of 1932, they stood at between 25 and 28 cents (Bauer, 1948, p.225–6). Workers were also repatriated if employers did not wish to pay them.

⁴ field coagula

⁵ bark crepe

⁶ latex on collection cup (The rubber economist Ltd, 2008)





Denial To Decent Wage

Colonialism resulted in Malaya's businesses to be effectively conquered by the European, principally British. It can be witnessed when 70 percent of the acreage of rubber estates was owned by British companies (Curtis, 2008, p.335). This numerical figure clarifies the significance of the capital that British had on Malayan rubber industry. It became lucrative money generator for the British. Despite such economical benefits, the Tamils were only paid meager wage. The standard maintenance wage were based on the number of days worked (Amarjit, 2013, Indian Workers and Rubber ¶ 5).

Most of the folk songs documented, voices out the appalling life of the estate workers especially the tappers. The wage earning labourers collect their pay from the divisional office. Jain (1970), notifies them as "daily rated or piece rated employees and receives variable sums as wages twice a month (on payday and "advance" day)" (p.90). At some point, the tappers were coerced to receive what is given as their wage. Sometimes they were even refused and neglected to be paid. The tappers given payment lower than their actual meager salary. Unfortunately, they are not allowed to negotiate, question or stand for their rights as it will cost them later. The following verses captured the desperate situation of the labourers who were refused to meet their economical rights by the management and the kangany.

...ayyā tappu kaṇakkup pōtātinka
Sir miscalculation do not put
kaṇakku kaṇakkutāṇām...
right amount

(Thandayutham, dakku mukku tālam, p.326)





“...Sir, do not miscalculate
settle the right amount...”

The labourer pleaded the manager not to miscalculate his rightful wages. An excerpt from “The Immigrant” by Bhattacharjee (1989) clarifies the pathetic situation of the innocent labourers who were shortchanged and robbed.

...let say I bring in 10 pounds of rubber latex after tapping the rubber trees, the tally clerks credits me with eight pounds, or if he is in a generous mood, perhaps eight and a half pounds of latex. Since I can’t read English, I can’t say for sure that he is cheating me. They sell it and pocket the money. I hear the clerks divide the spoils among themselves.



At some extent, the labourers were also left unpaid for several months. The verse below stands as evidence.

...tōttattilē tolilālarkal
plantation labourer
vēlai ceykirārē
working
...avar kūliyattān koṭukkalēnnu
he wage never give
Mayaṅki ninnārē...
unconscious standing

(Thandayutham, tōṭṭak kūli, p.18)

“...labourers toiling in plantation
The wages were held out
poor labourers losing consciousness...”





It is compulsory, for any management to uphold the rights of their employees which also includes ensuring that the employees are receiving their wages. But, Tamil labourers were made exceptional to this. It is pitiful to fathom from the song that the workers left stranded with no salaries given. This situation reflects the insubstantial perception hold by the plantation management on the ‘peripheral’ Tamils. The labourers could not do anything to have their rights protected. They became strangled as they do not have any money. They found it increasingly complicated to complete even the basic necessities of living and to survive from one day to the next. This further leads to depression and affect their mental and physical health.

What economic improvement one would expect if they continuously were being robbed? This is what exactly happened to the poor Tamil labourers when they were even denied their actual wages. The following verse stand as an exemplification for this.

... mātam mutiñca campalatta
month finish salary
kuraiyutannu kēttuppāttā
lacking if asked
pōtuminta erikirārē...
enough here fuming

(Thandayutham, kūli taṇṇi nilai kūṛal, p.25)

“...end of the month
if questioned about the lacking wage
we get fumed...”

The song discloses the act of the management that pays less than the actual wage. When the labourer questions the injustice, he will be told that ‘you have been given enough’ and the remuneration will be thrown. Such an act is disgraceful as the





labourers were denied to even ask for the rightful payment and treated inhumanly. After all the hard work and sacrifices, they return home with the mere wage on hand helplessly. A deduction in the wages could be reasoned with sanction imposed by the kangany. In the early twentieth century, the management pay the wages to Kangany (Satyanarayana, 2001, p.21). Thus, it enables the kangany with the paternal role to deduct a proportion of the debt owed to them.

The money, taken from the poor labourers was used by the medium supervisors that consists of clerks and kanganies to buy properties. Manickam (2012), has cited the work of Bhattacharjee who clarifies how the ill gotten money was used to empower the education of their kin (p.53). The clerks send their children to English universities, and prohibit the labourers to do the same. This clearly reflects the hidden intention of the notorious management which prefers to confine the labourers within the plantation by contesting the education of a child. Education was limited for the children in plantation. Marimuthu (1971) attribute the limitation as a mean of social control (p.88). Minimal education provision was sufficed to keep them controlled.

One of the reason Tamils were preferred as labourers was, they were the most amenable to the comparatively lowly paid and cost less in feeding and maintenance (Manickam, 2012, p.42). The Tamils were even known to be non rebellious. The docile nature readily makes them submissive. Having known this, the management took advantage over the labourers by not giving them the wage properly. It has been also recorded that a majority of the Tamil labourers did not receive their rightful wages. Satyanarayana (2001), added to this fact by revealing that minimum





“standard” or “living” or “family” wage determined by the colonial governments from time to time in Malaya were not received by the labourers (p.21).

Half Wage

Amidst the issue of denial to the decent wage, the Tamil labourers also encountered with the payment given in half or known in Tamil as ‘*araipēr pōṭutal*’. For instance, if the collected yield weighed less than what it was fixed for the labourers, or if the kangany or the clerk stated so, then their wage will be halved. The wage will be jotted in the record as halved. The following verse illustrates the corruption.

...kaiyaik kaiyaik kātturān

hand showing

pattuvelli kotukkurān

ten unit of currency giving

āū

ennu connā

particle expressing shock tell

araipēru ennurān...

half wage calculating

(Murasu Nedumaran, (122) Gleria Estate-lē, p.338)

“...stabbing the hand to fro
we were given 10 ringgit
as half wage...”

Any interrogation on the amount received will not be entertained by the kangany or the clerks. A further discussion of this song with Murasu Nedumaran discloses another event. As the supervisor, the kangany could not collect his due if the wage was halved. In return, the kangany will behave heartlessly on the particular labourer. When the labourer’s yield increases, the kangany also benefit accordingly. They take advantage on the productivity.





for the labour increased. A Strait Settlement Ordinance was passed on 1884 to fix the wages (Manickam, 2012, p.63). The ordinance later adopted some changes to make the wage structure more amenable. The table below helps us to comprehend numerically the variant in the wage structure.

Table 4.1

Wages of rubber tapper across the year 1924- 1938

Year	Wages per day (cents) key areas		Wages per day (cents) Non- key areas	
	M	F	M	F
1924	35	27	-	-
1925	40	30	-	-
1927	50	40	58	46
1930	40	32	47	37
1931	25-30	-	-	-
1932	25-28	-	-	-
1936	40	32	-	-
1938	50	40	-	-

Source: Annual Report FMS 1930:10, Cited in *Amarjit, 2006, 'Indian Labour, Labour Standards, and Workers' Health in Burma and Malaya 1900-1940'*, p.455 Note:(-) indicates no data obtained, Amount of the wages on year 1926, 1928, 1929, 1933-35, 1937 could not be obtained

The above table lacks some information on the wage rates of certain period. Thompson (1943), claimed that such absence of official cost of living and wage records 'prevented any exact appraisal of real wages' (p.91). However, the folk songs gave a little information on the amount received which could be tallied with the record obtained.





ensures that labourers only receive wage for survival. They made all the commodities easily accessible in one place and thus kept the cost of living down (Manickam, 2012, p.64). Tully (2011) has cited the work of Leopold Ainsworth whom notified about the low wage and speculated how the Tamil labour community of the plantation “possibly exist as ordinary human beings” by surviving on mere pennies given by the Malayan plantation (p.258).

Another song reveals the unfair payment given selectively to particular labourers.

periya torai varuvārām
superior dorai coming
namakkuc campalam taruvārām
us salary give
ayyāmāru ālappāttu
sir selectively
pōtuvārām!...
give

(Thandayutham, etirppārppu, p.220)

“the superior dorai will arrive
and present us with salary
the salary which is
selectively presented...”

‘Periya dorai’ refers to the European planters. They are said to pay the wages selectively. Further discussion on this with Murasu Nedumaran, discloses the act of some delinquent European planters. They try to entice the women or young girls by offering more wages. At times the men also will be given such honorarium when they helped to accomplish the intentions of the British. On the other hand, the poor and coward labourers receive lesser than their actual wages. Despite such treatment the labourers left their destiny to their masters.





In a nutshell, economic policies of the British were concerned more with the safety and endorsement of the economic interests of their country than with the growth of the labourer's economy. Exploitation of peripheral society with meager wages, in the assurance of better life provision was the biggest parody in which the Tamil labourers have fallen into. Working as labourers for cash wages was the foremost economic strive of the Tamils during the British colonization. The impoverished Tamil became servile and agreed to be recruited to Malaya. British used the opportunity and took advantage over the servile Tamils and destroy their economical status.

4.3.5 Cultural Dispossession



Culture is considered as a lived and embodied practice. According to Tylor (1974), it comprises “knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p.1). Thus, it could be said that culture reflects the identity of a society. Analogously, Tamils also have a great and flourished culture which becomes an important part of the Indian culture. It is exemplified through beauty, motherhood, language, dance, clothing, food, and festivals (Brenda, 1976; DehejIa, 2002).

For Westerners such as British, the societies that did not follow the European way of life were considered culturally inferior. As cited by Zimmermann (2015), this perception essentially seen in all the colonized countries and people. It has been evidenced in the subjugation of the British that has threatened the cultural survival of





the Tamils in Malaya. The culture of the Tamils was dispossessed. Dispossession is an act of taking somebody's property, land or house away from them (Oxford, 2016).

In the context of current research it was seen that British colonization has indirectly dispossessed the culture of the immigrant Tamils. It was understood that the immigrant culture would fade as individuals adapt to values, beliefs and traditions of the host culture (Kidd, 2012, ¶ 3). But the immigrant Tamils under the colonization faced the cultural dispossession due to the imposed dominance. This is because, the British appropriated the culture as a property and not as identity. Based on the analysis, it was revealed that the cultural dispossession took place on the Tamil labourer's motherhood. The dispossession had changed the role of the motherhood which consequently lead to major changes in social relationship (discussed in section



4.3.5.1 Motherhood

Motherhood is generally equated with Tamil culture (Gerhaz, 2014, p.126). The first controlling image applied to the women in Tamil culture is as compliant servants and competent domestics for their men folk. They are nurtured in a way to be conservatively secondary and supportive of the men. Dennis (1983) has put in the picture of woman's role as "she is cloistered in the home" (p.138). For example the folk song below depicts how the women are 'protected' in the home by the portrayal of her and the man's role.





kōttai kīṭṭaip pōttukittu,
coat wear
kōṇal kirāppai cīvikkiṭṭu,
side parted crop comb
pāṭṭaik kīṭṭaip pāṭikittu
song sing
payanaṁ ceyyaṇum āmpillai
travel man

ūṭaikkīṭṭai kūttikiṭṭu,
house sweep
uṇṭāna vēlaiyai pāttukittu,
work manage
cōṭṭaik kīṭṭai ākkikiṭṭu,
rice cook
cummā irukkaṇum pompillai
nothing to do be woman
 (Mutthammal, malayā nāṭṭu tōṭṭakkāṭṭup pāṭalkaḷ, p.88)

“...singing with a coat on,
 combing a side parted crop,
 and travelling
 that’s what a man should do
 sweeping, house cleaning, cooking
 nothing but these
 a woman should do...”

The song describes as if the men are designated for outside tasks. Women on the other hand are designed for domestic chores. The song sounds rather sarcastic. It states that man has to travel around with impressive look. He has to wear coat, comb nicely and joyfully sings around to ‘stray out’. This shows that man does nothing but to roam around aimlessly. Woman on the contrary has to do the housekeeping and cooking. But she was claimed to sit back home relaxing. The line ‘cummā irukkanum pompillai’ (doing nothing) reveals this.





This song particularly describes the house chore of the women.

Pālum tān atuppilē
milk on kiln
Pālananum tān tottlilē
male child cradle
Pāla irakkuvanō
milk put down
Nānpetta celvatta īntuvanō?
I give birth child carry
cōrum tān atuppilē - ennap petta
rice on kiln
cuntaramō tottlilē
handsome child on cradle
cōra irakkuvanō
rice put down
cuntarattai īntuvanō?...
child carry

(Thandayutham, pālakan tottlilē, p.94)

“The milk is on woodstove
My young boy is on bassinet
will I put down the milk
or carry my baby
rice on kiln
the baby on cradle
what shall I do?
put down the rice or
carry my boy?...”

This song portrays the multi task carried by a woman who is struggling to determine the priority of her house chores. At one hand, she has a baby in the cradle that needs to be pampered as the infant continuously bawling. At another hand, she has to remove the boiling milk and also drain the rice. As a mother, she has to care for the child and also cook for the home.

Traditionally, being a housewife is considered a pride among the men. It is said so as the pride enhances the status of a man if he is able to organize and cater the





need of his wife and children. However, under the oppressed living conditions, the women were forced to work and contribute economically. This can be traced back to their situation at India where it induced the migration of the labourers. It was known previously that early immigrants were mostly single adult men. But sooner the recruitment systems encouraged the migration of women in which it has established the family system in Malaya.

Under the British colonisation women were coerced to work in the plantations. It was due to the under developed socio economic of the family. With low wages the women supplements the family's income. Sufficient folk song was found to function as evidence to indicate the involvement of the women labourers in plantation job especially rubber tapping. It is suffice to point out the names mentioned in the folk song. Names such as Ellammaa-Pullaayi-Muniyamma (Mutthammal, 2006, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 2, p. 85), Kooyintammaa (Mutthammal, 2006, 2006, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 3, p. 86), Ramaayi (Thandayutham, 1998, toḷilāḷi, p. 19), Ellamma-Kaattaayi-Veeramma (Thandayutham, 1998, kūlikāriyin vākkumūlam, p.23), Muttu Veerayi (Thandayutham, 1998, vellaiikkāran, p.35), Saattayi (Thandayutham, canku cattam, p.56), Kannamma (Thandayutham, 1998, Kannammā ! en ponnammā, p. 75), Raasammaa (Thandayutham, 1998, ē Raasammaa, p.214), Ponnammaa (Thandayutham, 1998, vēlai paraparappu, p. 308) were used across the songs. The names were used upon the wakeup call and during the roll call at the muster. This implies that, women labourers too worked hard to sustain the family. They lead dual responsibilities as income earners and housekeepers. It contradicts the culture of Tamils whom only encourages women to stay home and manages domestic chores.





As the women play the role of supplementary earners, they had to compromise with their daily maternal care.

...pālūṭṭa vēṇṭāmaṭi veerayi
feed milk not needed name of a woman labourer
cīkkiram eluntu vāṭi unnai
quick get up come you
vilakkituvār kankāṇi
push aside kangany

(Thandayutham, kankāṇyiṇ kaivaṇṇam, p.58)

“...Oh! Veerayi no need to feed the baby
 get yourself ready quickly
 or else
 get ready to be pushed aside by kangany...”

The song sounds to be urging the wife to come early for the roll call. It reflects the domestic work of a mother amidst her work at the plantation. She was told by her husband not to feed their child. He insisted her to get up to avoid getting hit from the kangany. Apart from taking care of the child she also had to look after the plantation work. Afraid of being abused by the kangany the husband rushes her wife to even neglect her responsibility as a mother. The situation is a resemblance of the women’s vulnerable position. She has been confined to the oppressive economic and social structures which forced the women to be ignorant of her maternal responsibilities. Families in plantation relied on the income from both the men and women. Women bearing infant is pressured with multitask. She has to return to work as soon as possible. So, the proper breast feeding is ceased and thereby jeopardizing the health of the infant.

kūviṭuccu kilattuc cēval
crowed old cock
kūviṭuccu



*crowed*kaṅkāṇi cattam pōla*kangany voice like*Ponnammaa*name of a woman labourer*aluta pillaikkup pāl vārttu*weeping child milk feed*atutta pillaikkuc cōrapōttu...*next child rice feed*

(Thandayutham, vēlai... paraparappu, p.308)

“...the old cock has crowed

like the kangany does

Oh! Ponnamma

feed milk to the weeping baby

feed rice to the other child...”

The song begins with a wakeup call analogously made by the rooster. The rooster crowing is symbolized with the sound of Kangany. Ponnamma the character in the song hurries to feed her children. She has a little baby who is crying and need to breastfeed. She also has another child to feed rice. This song sets an exemplary of a woman’s daily chore before pursuing with her work. After feeding the children, they are taken to the day care known as Āyāk koṭṭakai as reflected in the song below.

...alāṛa alāṛa ācaip piḷḷaiyai

blaring dear child

Āyāk koṭṭakai viṭṭu viṭṭu

day care left

peraṭṭilē pērkoṭuttu...

muster register

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84)

“..leaving the blaring dear child

at crèche

then registering at the muster...”





Maunaguru (1995) describes that women are responsible for the reproduction of the family and society (p.160). This nurturing role has put her to be confined in a place. Despite of the confinement, she has to move on and get out of it to take care of her family. The male's income was not enough to cater their basic needs. The appalling life under the British colonization coerced and altered the role of women with additional role as income earners.

The folk songs generally imply the high rate of Tamil women's participation in agricultural sector especially in rubber tapping. They had remarked significant participation which was proportionately higher than the Malay and Chinese counterparts. The following excerpt describes the rate of participation of Indian women labourers.



In the Federation of Malaya in 1947, for example, about 41 per cent of the Indian females aged ten years and over were economically active compared with less than-a quarter of the Malays and Chinese.

(Obtained from Chapter 2: Cultural Continuity and Change, p.71)

The rate of women labourer's participation is often associated with the settlement and type of their economic activity. It was previously known that Tamil labourers were confined in the plantations. The women labourers led an isolated life in the estates. They worked for low wages. Most of them were rubber tappers as reflected in the folk songs. They were even given the provision of child care. As in urban areas the involvement of women labourers was relatively small. In the larger urban centers the rate has been even lower (Sandhu 2010: 245 - 247).





In a nutshell, the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers as analysed above are known as acute and chronic traumatic events. Acute traumatic event in the lives of the Tamil labours involved events such as, sudden or violent loss of loved one and physical or sexual assault. Meanwhile, chronic traumatic situation aroused due to the long term exposure of trauma faced by the Tamil labours under the British colonisation. The section has focused and analysed both the acute and chronic traumatic event that incurred in the lives of the Tamil labourers. The next objective evaluated the impact of these traumatic events in the lives of the Tamil labourers.





4.4 To Evaluate The Impacts of The Trauma Experienced By The Tamil Labourers During The British Colonisation In Malaya As Reflected In The Malaysian Tamil Folk Songs

The previous section 4.3 has identified and documented the form of traumas namely segregation, physical abuse, psychological abuse, economical destruction and cultural dispossession experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Each of the traumas collectively imprinted impact on the body, mind and souls of the Tamils. This section seeks to evaluate the impacts of the traumas experienced.

The study is broken down into three areas of impact as illustrated in the theoretical concept previously (see section 3.7). They are physical, social and psychological impacts. Physical impacts were evaluated in terms of mortality and malnutrition. Social impacts were evaluated in terms of separation from the loved ones, rupture of family structure and loss of resources. Finally, psychological impacts were evaluated in terms of depression and maladaptive behaviours.

4.4.1 Physical Impact

Physical trauma has been identified affecting the Tamils substantially during the colonization because the colonisation capitalised on the hard work of the Tamil labourers. It had used most of the physical force of its labourers. The exploitation drained the labourers and caused them to be physically impaired. The impact of colonisation has been authenticated by Lakshmi (2008) who cited the study of Frank





as “excessive exploitation of colonies and drain of resources from the colonial rule has long-term negative effects on physique (p.1). As such, the section discusses the impact of British colonization on the physique of the Tamil labourers. The manifestations of physical suffering as reflected in the folk songs are focused on two parts namely mortality and malnutrition. Discussion on the mortality was focused on the appalling living, work conditions and epidemics. Discussion on malnutrition was focused on the loss of nutrient and famine.

4.4.1.1 Mortality

The early period of British colonisation interfered with the well - being of Tamils in the form of mortality rate. Mortality refers to “death, especially on a large scale” (Oxford Dictionary, 2016). An elevated mortality rate had been witnessed among the Tamil labourers during the period of British colonisation. Sandhu’s (2010) word on mortality as, “Malaya was branded as white man’s grave and a death trap yawning to engulf the surplus population of India” aptly exemplifies the immense of the mortality rate (p.53-60). The research has associated the mortality rate to the appalling living conditions of the Tamil labourers and the epidemics suffered by them during the British colonisation. Hence this section analysed the mortality as a physical impact from two categories. They are

- a) Appalling living and work conditions
- b) Epidemics





a) Appalling Living and Work Conditions

Several folk songs had captured the appalling living conditions of the Tamil labourers in Malaya during the British colonization. The life style led by the Tamil labourers was described to be inhuman. The inhuman conditions have been manifested in the following songs.

...pōna nēram pollāta nēram
went time wicked time
tān kettuc cākirarkal makkal
deteriorate dying people
talai vitiyō enna ketiyō
fate or plight
rājakulir vantālum tōcipaya
extreme cold came ominous fellow
yōcittup pārppatillai
think never
kālil punnālum
leg injury
kaṭṭa maruntillai
no medicine
nittam nittam māntavar
daily dead people
kaṇakkillai...
uncountable

(Thandayutham, catiyō ketiyō, p.163)

“...it was wicked period
 people met their end
 is this the fate or plight
 the ominous fellow never thought of
 extreme cold
 no medicine for injuries
 the death is uncountable...”

The song implies the uncountable loss of lives of the Tamil labourers in Malaya. According to the song the death was attributed to the environment and appalling work conditions. It has been indicated in the line ‘rājakulir vantālum



tōcipaya yōcittup pārppatillai...’ (the ominous fellow never thought of extreme cold). The calling of the superiors as ‘tōcipaya’ (ominous fellow) shows the suppressed anger of the Tamils on the colonial government. The colonial government neglected the well being of the labourers.

The decrease of temperature is known as hypothermia (Golden, 1983, p.195). An extreme perpetual cold weather has the capability of shutting down the body when it is exaggerated with the physiological status of the threatened individual. The following figure exemplifies the statement above. It illustrates the condition of the body along with decrease in its temperature.

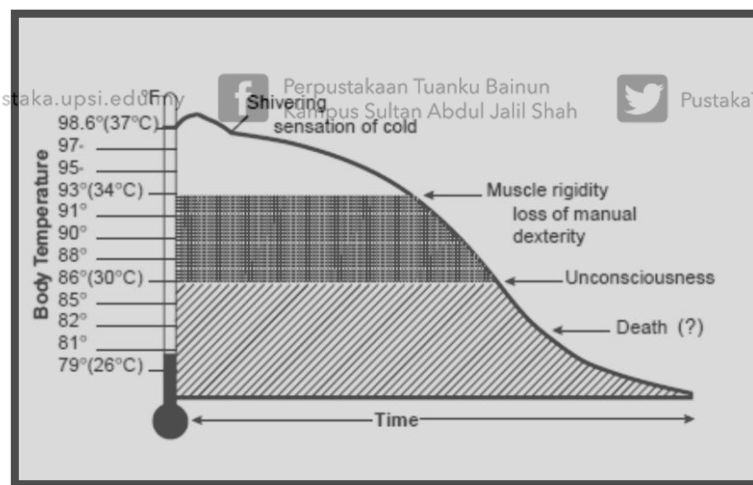


Figure 4.2. Core temperature decrease leading to hypothermia. The figure demonstrates the schematic representation of the fall of core temperature with both primary and secondary hypothermia. The question mark by the term “death” refers to the life-sparing property of hypothermia—in certain conditions. Adapted with permission from Pozos RS, Danzl D (2001) *Human physiological responses to cold stress and hypothermia*. In: Pandolf KB, Burr RE (eds) *Medical aspects of harsh environments*, vol 1. Textbooks of military medicine. Borden Institute, Office of the Surgeon General, US Army Medical Department, Washington, DC, pp 351–382



In the case of Tamil labourers, the extreme cold weather has stricken them to death. The term ‘rājakulīr’ indicates the intensity of the coldness that could freeze oneself. This is due to the improper dressing and absence of shelter which was prevalence during the early years of colonisation. The appalling living condition is aggravated when labourers left cloth less. Clothes are worn to protect the body from nature. Besides that, it expresses the personality of the wearer. It also has another function of symbolizing the social roles. But, clothes left meaningless in the lives of the Tamils at Malaya.

On the land of plantation, provision of clothes was overlooked to the poor labourers. They were provided with insufficient clothing. They had nothing to cover themselves at the dangerous lurking work fields and to keep them warm during the extreme cold season. A study conducted by Harper (2001) corroborates to this situation by clarifying “communal harvesting broke down when women were unable to go out to the field because they had no clothes to wear” (p.39). Several verses imply the condition of the labourers who were cloth less.

...kattat tuniyuminri...
wear no clothes

(Thandayutham, aṭṭai kaṭittu, p.56)

“...no clothes to wear...”

tēylait tōttattinil
tea plantation
kattat tuniyuntā...
wear have clothes?

(Thandayutham, tēylait tōṭṭattilē, p.21)

“...do we have clothes
in tea plantation?...”





...kattattuniyum inri makkaḷ ellām
wear clothes without people all
kantal porukki ninrōm
tattered cloth pick standing
mōṭṭai jannal ellām
barrenness window all
pattāṭaitān pōṭṭurār...
silk cloth wearing

(Thandayutham, ēlaiyum paṇakkārarum, p.236)

“...people left to stand with no clothes
picking tattered cloth
windows showing barrenness
are covered with silks...”

The labourers working in tea plantation cries by questioning out their poorest physique left exposed to the unconditional environment. They were no form of protection for the labourers. The bare body exposed to the environment easily succumbed to physical injuries, animal attacks, insects bites and hypothermia. Pozos (2001) has elucidated “clothing, body size, metabolic rate, physiological state, hydration, and nutritional status” as the factors affecting the condition of hypothermia (p.352). Thus, clothing an important factor of keeping the body warm was found to be resisted to the Tamil labourers.

Even the houses have been furnished with high silk material. This shows how ignorant the European planters towards the Tamils. Some were left with the same clothes and no belongings throughout their pitiful life in Malaya. This has been exemplified in the next song.





Malāy nāttila penkal

Malaya nation women

kattuna tuṇiyōṭu kaṇ kalankiṛār

wear cloth eye perturbed

(Thandayutham, pōrin etirolī, p.8)

“....women of Malaya land

brimming amid tears with just clothes on...”

The monthly budget for Indian labourers on 1925, allocated 61 cents per month for the clothing distribution (Manickam, 2012, p.66). The labourers could only afford 3 clothes for the payment. It was huge amount spent for the clothes. The poor labourers could not afford to buy the clothes due to their economic situation.

Moreover, as reflected in the song it was found that the physiological state of the Tamils also contributed to the massive death. The line ‘kālil punṇālum katta maruntillai’ (no medicine for injuries) exemplifies this. Injuries incurred during the work that required the developing of sugar, coffee, rubber plantation, and clearing of the virgin jungle left untreated. This clearly shows that labourers had lack or poor medicinal attention given. It is worth to be noted here that medical provisions were lacking in the plantations (Arasaratnam, 1993; Amarjit, 2006; Khiun, 2010). Thus the chances of recovering or surviving from any diseases or injuries during the early period were little.

Without any medical aid, the injury gets worsened. Things become more complicated if the person undergoes hypothermia. The study conducted by Pozos (2001) corroborates to this as a person who has “lost blood and is dehydrated will not be able to respond adequately to the temperature challenges of a cold environment”





(p.352). With no medical treatment, the injury gets fatigued and left the Tamils drained out. Before the 1920's, 60-90 percent of Tamil labourers died within the first year of arrival (Dennis,1983, p.88). The immense death has been portrayed in the following verses.

...pātaiyil cettavar pāti- ataip
path die half that
pārttu matintavar kōti...
see die millions

(Thandayutham, en nilamai, p.330)

“...half went the way of all flesh
 millions perished witnessing this...”

...nātta cāṭalamō nallatō keṭṭatō
smelly corpse good or bad
ūtta cāṭalamō....!
foul corpse

(Thandayutham, uṭal, p.292)



The verses enable us to visualize the death trap engulfed in Malaya. The verse portrays the dead bodies scattered around. The term ‘nātta , ūtta’ describes the foul filthy smelling of the corpses. The foul smell shows that the bodies undergoing the process of decay giving out putrescent stink. It is a heart wrenching scene to discover the dumping of corpses left unclaimed. The survivors had to deal with the aftermath. They were not permitted to mourn or bury the bodies in a proper way. Land that had been cultivated with the sweats, tear and blood shedding swallowed their tattered bodies.





The appalling work condition also contributed to the mortality rates. The Tamils were forced to drain themselves to develop Malaya. The following verse captured the impact of the workload. The only flesh left on bone was the skin.

...tata taṭamāka mūṭṭai tūkka
noisy and roughly sack carry
catai ataiyālamāka vāḷalāṇōm...
flesh sign live

(Thandayutham, uḷaippavaṇukkuk kiṭṭum paṭṭam, p.20)

“...grinded with sacks on
 living with only flesh on...”

The workload had coerced a great stress to the physique and the mind of the labourers. It increases the chances of developing stress. It has been supported in the situation of the Tamil labourers. Exhaustion from the overwork took its toll on the physical state of the labourers. The physique could be related to their malnourished condition. They appear skeletally thin. The quoting of an English planter on Tamils as “they had haf-starved look” cited by Stenson (1980) authenticates the condition (p.17). It gets exaggerated when the health condition gets deteriorated. The finding of Czyzewski (2011) who claimed that colonialism is the distal determinant of the subjugated group’s health (p.3-4) clearly implies the relation of the health to the mortality rate among the Tamil labourers.





b) Epidemics

Epidemics are defined as the prevalence of diseases. Cambridge (2016) defines it as the “appearance of a particular disease in a large number of people at the same time”. The first four decades of the twentieth century is considered to be unhealthy in the plantation settlements. This could be reasoned with the prevalence of infectious diseases. Diseases such as malaria, debility, anemia, diarrhea, tuberculosis, cholera and dysentery attributed to the death of Tamils. Based on the study made on the folk songs it was found that lack of access to safe water attributed to the health deterioration of the Tamil labourers.

I Lack Of Access To Safe Water



Lack of access to safe and clean water aggravated the health condition of the Tamils whom were already in poor health. Netto (1961) has elucidated that “the drinking of unwholesome water and delay in proper treatment of the sick” as other contributing factors to death (p.39). This has been reflected in the following verses.

...cōttut taṇṇikku- rompa
rice water a lot
ciramappattōm aiyyā
suffered
aṅkattut taṇṇikkup
body water
paṅkam vaiccutanna...
harm why put

(Thandayutham, cuttam paṇṇa pōṭṭiṅkaḷā, p.168)





“...no water for food
no water to clean our self
we are suffering alot
why being so detrimental?...”

The verse reflects the state of the labourers who relatively had no provision of water. Lack of access to water caused a great difficulty in the lives of the labourers. They had no water to cook rice or to clean themselves. In the beginning, labourers were not supplied with ‘modern’ hygiene facilities or even bucket latrines (Amarjit, 2006, p.457). River water and streams became the drinking source. They had to carry water from the nearby water sources using ‘aṇṭā’ (large vessel with wide mouth) and ‘kuṇṭān’ (vessel with a wide mouth and tapering bottom). The subsequent verse depicts this.



...innaikku aṭṭula taṇṇi varum
today river water flows
... aṇṭā jāyint varum...
vessel joint come
...innaikku kulattil taṇṇi varum
today pond water flows
enakku kuṇṭā jāyint varum...
me vessel joint come

(Thandayutham, taṇṇīr paṇcam, p.10)

“...water flows in river
I collect water in vessel
water flows in streams
I collect water in vessel...”

There is another verse that reveals the use of water tapper. It shows that the labourers relied on the public /street pipe waters.

...paiput taṇṇi puṭikkaṇum
pipe water collect





...kuḷāykku vantēnē kutattai tūkki vantēnē
tap came pot carry came

(Thandayutham, kuḷāyaṭik kūttu, p.319)

“...I came to collect pipe water
 I carried a pot near to the tap...”

Not all plantations had the accommodation of such water provision from taps. Mostly the labourers only depend on the rivers. It was impure because water source became the habitat for frogs. This has been pointed in the following verse. Labourers have no choice but to consume this unhygienic water.

...enakku tāy kotukkum taṇṇi
me mother give water
inta malāy nāṭṭilē - innaikku
this Malaya nation today

tavalaikalām nīntumayyā ...
frogs swimming

(Thandayutham, taṇṇīr paṇcam, p.10)

“...Malaya the land that
 provides water
 but today frogs are swimming...”

The water provision given in the plantation was not agreeable to the Tamil labourers in the early years. This was due to the contamination found in waters. Several verses captured the issue of unsanitary water consumption as follow. ‘kurōṭṭā taṇṇinnu’ (kurōṭṭā water) (Thandayutham, taṇṇīr paṇcam, p.10; Murasu Nedumaran, 124. āttula taṇṇivarum, p.339). ‘kurōṭṭā’ water refers to the water that has been contaminated with the acids used to coagulate the rubber latex (Murasu Nedumaran, 1997, p.339). The acidic water used to wash the rubber sheets poured into the river stream thus contaminating it. Besides the acid, the water also polluted with dirt,





sewages, and poisonous liquids and drugs. The song shows the pollutants found in the water such as ‘pācāñ’, ‘pala marunthu’, ‘iṭimaruntu’ (poisons) and warns the other labourers to take a great care before drinking it.

...taṇṇi ammā
water mother
nāma pāttu kuṭikkalēnnā
we aware drink
pācāñ kalaiñcu varum
poison mixed
pala maruntu tūvi varum
chemicals mixed
iṭimaruntu kalantu varum
poison mixed
 (Thandayutham, namma ūru taṇṇi,
 p.336)

“Oh! mother!
 we should be careful with the water
 aware when drinking it
 as it comes with poisons and chemicals...”

The impure water becomes the reason for the spread of cholera, a bacterial disease. It spread through the contaminated water and causes severe dysentery and dehydration. Khan (1963) has notified that many Tamils had succumbed to the dysentery due to drinking polluted water (p.352). The subsequent song, represent the effect of drinking unsanitary water.

cutu taṇṇik kāya vaiccuḥ kuṭitā
boiled water cool drink
antap paccat taṇṇi kuticukkittā
unboiled water if drink
vayattālap puṭuñkumaṭā...
diarrhea

(Thandayutham, kālarā, p.230)





“...drink the cooled boiled water
drinking the unboiled
causes diarrhea...”

For instance, the following verse, has captured the death as the result of cholera.

...kālarā kaṇṭatu pōlavē janam
cholera affect people
kāttinilē uyir vittārō
forest die
kāraṇam onrum nāmariyāmō
reason anything do we know
kaṭavulīn cōtanai yāmō?
God test

(Thandayutham, en nilamai, p.330)

“...people trembled with cholera
only to meet their end at the forest
do we know the reason
is it the God’s test?...”



Dysentery could be fatal if untreated (Mayo Clinic, 2016). Commission report on estates health signifies that over 90 percent of deaths among the labourers were caused by malaria, dysentery, pneumonia, phthisis and anemia (Amarjit, 2006, p.466). Hence the verse from the folk songs above clearly shows that epidemics was one of the factors that undermined the Tamils population at Malaya.

4.4.1.2 Malnutrition

Malnutrition is known as the deficiency of nutrient. According to Encyclopaedia of Public Health, malnutrition is defined as “deficiency of essential diet ingredients” (Kirch, 2008, p.876). Malnutrition was deemed to be one of the factors that tarnished





the Tamils population during the British colonisation. It has been proven in the words of Spencer (2013), “of the 1.2 million that remained in Malaya, many died from diseases and malnutrition” (p.7). The Tamils were forced to adapt to bad eating habits due to suppressed situation under the colonisation. They had poor consumption of nutrients and thence lacked essential vitamins, proteins and minerals. Malnutrition is intertwined with diseases for the reason that it affects the resistance of the body towards diseases. Eventually the poor health conditions due to the lack of nutrition became the reason for mortality. This section focuses on loss of nutrient and famine as the cause for the malnutrition suffered by the Tamil labourers.

a) Loss of Nutrient



Food was scarce during the British colonisation. The food scarce has been elucidated in the following.

....appappā pacik kotumai...
particle used when something in excess hungry severity
 (Thandayutam, karumput tōṭṭattil, p.12)

“...owh the harshness of hunger...”

There were no proper diet or nutrients provided for the labourers. Right from the recruitment to the settlement in plantation, provision of better food was always seen inadequate among the Tamils. They were only fed and not eat. The food provided during their confinement at the depot was tasteless. This clearly shows that





the labourers were looked upon as livestock. Food regardless of taste sufficed to keep them on board and during the stay at depot. The succeeding verses encapsulate this.

...uppu puli urappu illāta uṇavalittu...

salt sour spicy nothing food given

Thandayutham, karumput tōṭṭattilē, p.12; Thandayutham, toḷilāḷar nilai, p.19)

“...salt, sour, spicy fed with tasteless foods...”

...uppillāta paṇṭamō!...

salt less food

(Thandayutham, uṭal, p.292)

“...salt less food provisions...”

The loss of nutrient was witnessed in the food consumption pattern of the Tamil labourers. The food consumption pattern has been categorised into protein, fiber, and

carbohydrate foods.



I Protein Energy Malnutrition-Dry Fish

One of the essential lacking nutrients found in the food habit of the Tamils was protein. It results from a diet that has less energy and protein. According to World Food Programme (2016) protein energy malnutrition lacks all foremost macronutrients, such as carbohydrates, fats and proteins (Types of malnutrition, ¶ 2).

As a substituent for the protein energy, the consumption of dried fish became common. It became the supplement for protein. Since the labourers could not afford to buy fish which costs much they look for dried fish. A song on dried fish sounds as follow, ‘...kaccak karuvāṭu...’ (...a type of dried fish)...(Thandayutham, ponnu





rattinamē, p.62). Old rice became substitute for carbohydrates as indicated in the line ‘kañcipānai kaiyileṭittu...’ (...holding the porridge pot...) (Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84). Another verse demonstrates the combo of both old rice and dried fish. A dried fish taken in small quantity always goes along with the old rice.

...cutta karuvāṭla
grilled dried fish
kañciyak kuticcikkinnu...
porridge drinking
(Thandayutham, 129.vantakata! vāṭtakata!, p.342)

“...dried fish
eaten with porridge...”

II Fiber- Brinjal



As for fiber, the consumption of brinjal was common. The dietary intake of brinjal was prevalent among the labourers. It can be attributed to the native of the brinjal which is common in India and America (Chandra, 1967, p.127). Brinjal is very beneficial due to its contents of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, dietary fibers and other compounds. Tamils also relied mostly on brinjal. The usage of the vegetable referred as ‘kattirikā’ was seen in few verses.

...natteruttēn kattirikkā...
plant cut brinjal
...Ninna aruttēn kattirikkā...
standing cut brinjal
(Thandayutham, viṭukatai -1, p.316)

“...I plucked the brinjal...”

...kattirikkā vāṅkikittā katavulē...
brinjal if buy god





(Thandayutham, kŭli aṭimai, p.24)

“...Oh God! if bought brinjal...”

Despite its beneficial fiber nutrients, consumption of brinjal in large intake can cause adverse effects on health. As it contains toxic alkaloid called solanine excess intake of it can lead to constipation, diarrhea, and complication in nutrient absorption (Friedman, 1996, p.989).

‘kattirikkā’ (brinjal) was one of the common foods consumed by the labourers apart from ‘muruṅkai’ or moringa (drumstick tree) during the colonisation periods. International Service for the acquisition of Agri - Biotech Applications has stated the significance of brinjal as follow.



It is often described as a poor man’s vegetable because it is popular amongst small-scale farmers and low income consumers. A poor man’s crop it might be, but brinjal is also called by some as the ‘King of Vegetables’. Brinjal has embedded itself deeply into the Indian culture. Numerous folk songs in Indian languages center on the humble vegetable.

(Obtained from <http://www.isaaa.org/resources/publications/pocketk/35/>)

As described above, the Brinjal (poor man’s crop) was the only option had by the poor labourers due to its low costs. Besides that, expenditure on healthy diet was ignored by the labourers. They favor on spending over alcohol. This echoed the finding of Kowsalya (2014) whom stated that “increased spending over alcohol





reduces the amount of expenditure on healthy diet and safe household environment” and causes malnutrition (p.5). The following song reflects this.

muppatu kācu campalam tāntā katavulē
thirty cents wage give God
viṭṭukku varumpōtu
house coming
kuliccu mulukikittu
bath
kalluk kataikkup pōkumpōtu katavulē - antak
toddy shop going God that
kallak kuticcavutan katavulē!...
toddy drunk God
ata viṭiyile natantu varumpōtu katavulē
that street walk coming god
kankāṇi pontātti
kangany wife
kattarikkā vecciruppā
brinjal keep

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)



“... given 30 cents God!
 went home and took a bath
 heading to the toddy shop
 and getting drunk
 kangany’s wife having brinjal
 at the corner of the street...”

With a mere wage of 30 cents, the labourer spent over for drinking. At the end of the day, with the balance cents, he had no choice but to buy brinjal which was cheaper. The labourers worked hard. Despite the hard work they are poorly fed since the earning becomes substituent. Thus they always try to fulfill their nutrient requirement in the cheapest way. As reflected in the song a general image of the poor labourer can be perpetrated: the poorer have only few choices to make. But they choose not to spend more on food. Instead, the wage is spent on alcohol, the inebriant that could relief their physical and psychological suffering temporarily. This echoes





the finding of Banerjee (2007) who states that the “poor feel no extra compulsion to purchase more calories” and prefer other intoxicants such as alcohol and tobacco (p.146).

Brinjal - the Mad Apple

The brinjal also seem to have a special elucidation in other traditional literatures. It often referred to insanity. Europeans called brinjal or eggplant as the “Mad Apple”. It is their belief that consuming it could drive one crazy and insane (Cumò, 2013, p.386). So does the 13th century Italian folk tradition and the 19th century Egyptian tradition, which claims the same consequences of eating brinjal (Lane, 2012, p.378). As for the Tamil folk songs in Malaysia, Brinjal has been best described as the poor people’s food and its association to physical assaults as reflected below. In the context of Malaysian Tamil folk songs the insanity took as form social control by the Kanganies on the poor labourers.

...kattirikkā vāṅkāṭṭi
brinjal *not bought*
kattī pōṭṭutān atikkirāṇṭā...
tied *whacked*

(Thandayutham, *kankāṇiyenum kuḷḷanari*, p.60)

“...failure to purchase brinjal
and whacked whilst tied...”

This verse reflects the stressed out state of the labourer. He will be physically abused with ropes tied around if resist to buy the brinjal. That shows the extent of the sadistic tricks implemented by the kanganies. Breman (1989) justified the act of





violence as “it served to maintain the social distance between the coolies and bosses” (p.164-167). Moreover, it has to be noted here that money given on credit was recovered from labourers either by deduction from their wage (Daniel, 1992, p.99). This song added evidence that enforcing the labourers to buy vegetables from the Kanganies also served as a method to collect the indebted money. The management on the contrary, allowed the system to continue as the authority of kangany kept the labourer under check and facilitated smooth functioning of the plantation economy.

III Carbohydrate Rich Foods

During the British colonisation carbohydrate rich foods became prominent. This could be reasoned with the policy change occurred in India. India from the supplier of raw materials reciprocated as the consumer of refined industrial food products from Britain during the British colonisation. Thus the labourers were carried along with the new food habit to Malaya. Consequently, the consumption of foods such as dairy products, flour, coffee, biscuits and sugary foods and drinks became common. It has been reflected in the following verses.

...kōtumai rōtti...
wheat bread

(Thandayutham, en kaṇṇukku rārirō, p.73)

“...wheat bread...”

...cīni...
sugar
kōtumai rōtti ...
wheat bread

(Thandayutham, valla pōṭā, p.85)

“...sugar...
wheat bread...”





...karuppuccīni irukkutammā
black sugar got
varakopi pōṭammā...
black coffee make

(Thandayutham, uṇavu, p.299)

“....Oh lady! we have black sugar
 make some black coffee...”

...en biscuit rotti...
my bread

(Thandayutham, vaṇṇārak kuṭṭi, p.306)

“...my biscuit bread...”

The foods became a replacement for other carbohydrate sources such as rice. This is because the refined foods do not consume time for food preparation. The labourers need not wake up early preparing for rice any more since the preparation of rice requires them to start the fire from wood stacks. Despite of its easy preparation these introduced foods were reluctant to disease resistance. It is said to be causing diabetes and kidney diseases due to the refined sugar present in these foods (Cynthia, 2004, p.35). Cynthia also added that the “Western diet, high in refined starch and sugar” causes complications in cholesterol metabolism. As a result the consumers easily become victim of obesity, dental caries and heart diseases.

It is worthy to note here that Malaysians especially Tamils are more succumbed to diabetes and coronary heart diseases. The finding of a study that revealed “Indians had higher rate of diabetes mellitus (DM) and family history of premature CAD” by Lu (2013) corroborates this (p.1). The presence of these diseases could be due to genetic susceptibility (World Health Organization, p.1; Allison, 2013,





p.e4). Consequently, the prevalence of diabetes and heart disease can be attributed to the food habit as the impact of British colonisation.

Another source of carbohydrate was ‘maravalli’ (cassava) , as depicted in the verse below.

.....kappal ēri ōti vantēn
ship board ran
kalyāṇam paṇṇi vaiccān
marriage get
māmiyā vūttukku
mother in law house
marutinna pōratu
go in to eat
mara vallik kiṭankayyā
cassava
kiṭanka verukkalāmā?
cassava hate?

(Thandayutham, kiṭanka verukkalāmā, p.300)

“...I boarded the ship and hustled here
 get married
 going to eat cassava in mother in law’s house
 how can we hate cassava?...”

uyiraiḱ kotuttatu
live give
maravellik kiṭankayyā...
cassava

(Thandayutham, ata marakkalāmā, p.331)

“...cassava gave life...”

maravalli nalla valḷi
cassava
māntarukku ērra valḷi
human suit
maravalli illai enṛāl
cassava no
makkal māṇṭintiruppār
people die
maravalli....





cassava

(Saraswathi age 75, Teluk Intan, 15-08-2015; 5:15 pm)

“Cassava a good cassava
It suits for humans
without cassava
death is bound to happen
cassava oh cassava...”

Despite of its strong connection during the Japanese oocupation, cassava was also found to be the source of calories during the British colonisation. It was the savior during the famine period occurred in Malaya. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (1990) has claimed that cassava acted as the “food security crop in time of famines”. Cassava was eaten in different forms by the poor labourers. It was considered to be cheaper source of calories than rice. Despite of the average calorie consumption cassava was still not sufficed to cope up with the energy requirement for manual works by the laboureres.



According to Kirch (2008), malnutrition can be attributed to broken economy, weather conditions such as drought or natural disasters such as flood (p.867). As such several folk songs revealed the occurrence of famine in Malaya. It was often accompanied with disease making people to lose strength to survive hunger.

b) Famine

Famine is the product of food scarcity. The longer it exists the higher the chances for increased mortality. There was food scarcity during the British colonisation in





Malaya. A collective amount of folk songs has been documented on famine. They became transparent to the hunger suffered by the Tamils. Each verse cries out the pathetic situation of not being able to feed them.

...āntavūttuk kūlukku
that house porridge
añcatilē nikkarēṇti...
space in front of house standing
(Murasu Nedumaran, 128. nammavanka poḷappu, p.340)

“...I am begging for porridge
outside the house...”

....appappā pacik koṭumai...
particle used when something in excess hungry severity
yāritam colvatenru
to whom tell
eṇṇukirēn
thinking

(Thandayutam, karumput tōttattil, p.12;
(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷiyin koṭumaiyāna nilai,
p.20)

“...owh the harshness of hunger
to whom I shall tell...”

palīnku malāy tēcattilē
polished Malaya nation
pālum pālum pañcam inku cūlntatanāl
useless scarcity here engulfed
(Thandayutham, pañcam, p.6)

“...wretched scarcity engulfed
the prosperous land of Malaya...”

...appā paci eṇramē..
hungry tell
(Thandayutham, uḷaippavanukkuk kiṭṭum paṭṭam, p.20)

“...ouch! we are in hunger...”





patakēri vantēnnā

boat boarded came

pañcam tīralayē...

scarcity never ends

(Thandayutham, kālam vantatunnu, p.173)

“I boarded the boat
the dearth is never ending...”

...nālañcu nāl nā pattiniyāl

four to five days I hunger

ātukirēn...

suffer

(Thandayutham, cāvu vārātō, p.174)

“..I starved and suffered for
four to five days...”

...pānaiyil kañci inri makka

pot porridge without people

pattiniyāl vāti ninrōm

starvation suffer standing

(Thandayutham, ēlaiyum paṇakkāranum, p.236)

“...people left stranded
starving with no porridge on pot...”

The rice shortage became prevalent in Malaya due to the domino effect in India whereby the drought that occurred during the year 1918 has ruined the crops (Lee, 2011, p.76). This has greatly affected the rice import from Burma to Malaya as it was diverted to India. In the early years, Tamils in plantation of Malaya lacked the practice of food cultivation. There was no proper plot or soil allocation for them. Compared to their counterparts in Ceylon whom had their own plot to cultivate vegetables, the Tamils in Malaya lost the relationship with the soil. They largely depended on the imported rice from Burma. At least the cultivated the food could have become the security crop.





Another song reflects the physique of the labourers due to the famine.

oru vāramāy...

one week

akamum vāti utalum melintu

heart suffer body thin

pulu vaitta karuvātu

worm dried fish

pūcaṇikkāy tinru

white gourd eat

pālum kaṅkāṇikal

wretched kangany

kāvaṭikaḷ tūkkalāccu

pale carry

pālum paṅcam cūlntatālē

wretched scarcity engulfed

pālum vettāmalē

rubber not tapped

kāykarī tinru pilaikkalāccu!

vegetable eat survive

(Thandayutham, paṅcam, p.236)



“...for a week

heart suffered, body became lean

dried fish infested with worms

white gourd were eaten

useless kangany carried the latex pale

scarcity has engulfed

rubber is no longer tapped

left to survive on vegetables...”

The song above exemplifies the impacts of famine and struggle over the hunger suffered by the Tamils. Even the Kanganies were up to the impact as they were seen to be tapping rubber trees along with the labourers. It was reflected in the line ‘pālum kanganykaḷ kāvaṭikaḷ tūkkalācc’ (useless kangany carried the latex pale). ‘kāvaṭikaḷ’ is used as an allusive object to refer to the pails containing latex. It also reflects the emaciation of the labourer due to the starvation. Amrith (2013) has cited the ill stricken physique of the Tamil labourer as





If the Malayan government argued that Indian emigrants should be grateful for the escape that Malaya offered them from famine, a port surgeon in India had quite a different view: he saw workers returning from Malaya “in a worse state than the famine- stricken and diseased creatures I have seen in the hospitals of famine camps.” (p.128-129)

The extent of the suffering from the famine had psychologically affected Tamil labourers. To some extent they even begged for death as reflected in the song below.

...teivam cāvu varātā?
god death will not come?
itayam cōru tarātā?...
heart rice will give?

(Thandayutham, cāvu varātō, p.174)

“...Owh god! will we be perished with death
 will we be offered food?...”

This clearly authenticates the extent of the starvation suffered by the Tamils. The need of having food was so intense that it was manipulated in the forms of dream.

Dream of Eating Good Food

Dreams have always been an interesting discussion particularly among the psychologists. They believe dream to have the potential of communicating (Parman, 1991, p.1). Freud believes that dreams are disguise of wish fulfillment. He claimed it as the “manifestation of suppressed material” (Freud, 1911, p.189). It was true in the case of Tamil labourers. The famine and poverty caused them to be craving for good





food. They become so anxious about it that it started to manifest itself in the form of dream. The repressed wished flows into the dreams as below.

...inraiya tinam pattup
today ten
palakāram talai vālai
dishes banana leaf
cāppitak kantēn!
eat dreamt

(Thandayutham, kanavu, p.96)

“today dreamt of having
 ten dishes on
 banana leaf...”

...ilai mēla ilai pōṭṭu
leaf put
ilanīr mēl tutaiccu
tender coconut wipe
cāppittu eluntiruntēn...
eat get up

(Thandayutham, pakal kanavu, p.293)

“...wiped the leaf
 with tender coconut
 got up after had the meal...”

In a nutshell, it was evident that Tamils had loss their life in search for better one in Malaya. The migration had its own cost. Curtin (2002) corroborates this by stating that, migration “exacts a cost from the migrants in the form of increased mortality” (p.116). His statement supports the mortality rate at Malaya among the Tamil labourers as discussed above.





4.4.2 Social Impact

Social impact is the total effect of an activity on the well being of individuals, families and community. The amalgamation of social impact to the current research specifies it as the response of the Tamil labourers individually and communally towards the coerced power exercised by the British administration. The current research specified the types of social impact faced by the Tamils in terms of three elements namely separation, rupture of family structure, and loss of resources. It also complies with the finding of Atkinson (2010) who argues that the impact of traumatic stress includes “family violence and the high prevalence of grief and loss” (p.137).

Discussion on separation, focused on the arrangements made by the colonials to employ the Tamil labourers. The arrangements include recruitment and employment. Discussion on rupture of family structure focused on parent-child relation, parenting practices, quality, and adult intimate relations. Discussion on loss of resources focused on the impacts of the Great Depression. The breakdown was based on the folk songs.

4.4.2.1 Separation

Separation is defined as dissociation. Cambridge dictionary (2016), defines separation as a situation in which two or more people or things are dissociated. In the current research, it suits to define the separation as the removal of the labours from the one(s) they are attached with, to an alienated location to fulfil the colonial requirements. It





involved a systematic arrangement to bring Tamil labourers from South India to the Malayan plantations to accomplish the colonial development (Indian Overseas: Malaya, ¶ 1, p.25). The arrangement was made by the colonial office in London, Indian government, Malayan government, and the employer (Amarjit, 2006, p.466). It includes the arrangements for the labourer's recruitment and employment which caused the separation.

a) Recruitment

Recruitment became the focal point for segregation. Based on the analysis, it was found that the nature of the recruitment which encompassed fraudulent strategies used by the recruiting agents initiated the separation.



I Nature Of The Recruitment

Initially, recruitment of the labourers was conducted under the indentured system. Recruitment under indentured system was mostly individual. Married men were discouraged from emigrating as they could not afford to have their families together in host land. This is due to the low wage and harsh working condition (Arasaratnam, 1970, p.32). Besides that, accommodation was made available only for single men. Driven by the socio-economic motives they went alone leaving behind their loved ones with a hope of giving a bright future upon their return to South India.





The indentured system was found to be abusive It was abolished and replaced with Kangany system (Sandhu, 1993, p.316). Kangany system became the main recruitment system (Amarjit, 2006. p.443). Kangany means overseer. He was given the responsibility by the British planters to recruit the manual labourers. Kangany implemented deceitful strategies to collect the labours.

Fraudulent Recruitment By Kanganies

The subsequent verses exemplify their fraudulent act. Tamil labourers always refer the Kanganies as ‘kōlcollik kaṅkāṇi’ (...telling talles kangany...), ‘catikārak kaṅkāṇi’ (...plotting kangany...) (Murasu Nedumaran, 122. Gleria Estate, p.338), ‘mayiruvāyi kaṅkāṇi’ (...bad mouth kangany...), ‘purattukkāran kaṅkāṇi’ (...fact distorter kangany...) (Mutthammal, pālkāttup pāṭal 2, p.85), ‘tiruttuk kaṅkāṇi’ (...furtive kangany...) (Thandayutham, kaṅkāṇi enum kayavan, p.51) and ‘cāṭiketṭa kaṅkāṇi’ (...inhuman kangany...), ‘vekkaṅkeṭṭa kaṅkāṇi’ (...shameless kangany...) (Thandayutham, caṅku cattam, p.56).

The verse below, notes the kangany who recruited the Tamil labourers and boarded them on ship.

...cinnak kaṅkāṇi
small kangany
vellakkāran kappalla
whitemen ship
ēttivantiyātā...
boarded

(Thandayutham, kaṅkāṇi enum kayavan, p. 52)





“...Oh kangany
you boarded us on
whitemen’s ship...”

To fulfil the need for the manual labours, recruitment systems were implemented strategically. The statement has been affirmed in the study conducted by Baskaran (2015) whom clarified that some were forced and deceived to leave their parents, spouses, children and relatives during the recruitment. The folk song below serves as an example of this unscrupulous act.

...nākappattanāṁ kāraikkālu
nagapattinam karaikal (places in South India)
pattanāmā ōṭivanta tampi...
cities run brother
...ālukkōru pattu rūpā kotuttu
each ten rupees given
kappalēri vāṅkenu kūppittānē...
ship board called
...tāy takappan teriyāmalē
parents unknowingly
Tantiramā nammaḷa kappalla ētti...
cunning us ship boarded
(Thandayutham, kankāṇiyenum kuḷḷanari, p.60)

“...Nagapattinam and Karaikal
running to these cities ...
... offered 10 rupee each
And requested to board..
...without the parents acknowledgement
We were shipped cunningly...”

This musical phrase elucidates the deceitful recruitment made by the Kangany. Kangany lured the labour with his cunning tactics by enticing him with sweet talks. The line ‘Tantiramā nammaḷa kappalla ētti’ (We were shipped cunningly) refer to above statement. He promised the labours a better future in the distant land and started





recruiting them by giving away 10 rupees in advance for each of them. The youngsters identified as ‘tampi’ (brother) in the songs were excited with the offer and boarded. The parents were ignorant about the recruitment and it was revealed in the line ‘tāy takappan teriyāmalē’ (without the parent’s acknowledgement).

The ignorance is also evidenced in Heidemann (1992) research, which describes the fraudulent method used by the Kangany as “ignorant people of the village are enticed away from their homes. Husband and wife are separated, young girls kidnapped... (and) boys are spirited away from their... parents...(p.59). The line ‘tāy takappan teriyāmalē’ (without the parents acknowledgement) shows the dependency of the Tamil youngsters upon their parents. Despite of it, they were coerced with the rosy picture on the work load in the distant land and decided to leave at once without even informing their parents. It shows that young adults were easily enticed with the cunning promise made by the Kangany as reflected in the song.

It can be learnt from the song that, Kangany even recruited young adult males to fill the ship as reflected by the usage of the term ‘tampi’ (brother). Amarjit (2006) and Satyanarayana (2001) have evidenced by stating that the labour emigrants consisted mostly of single adult males aged between 15-40. This recruitment was against the Rule 23 of the Rules under the Act which prohibits the emigration of the individuals below the age of eighteen years unless accompanied by guardian or relatives over eighteen years of age (Sandhu, 2010, p.146). However, the rule was never put into effect (Sandhu, 2010, p.146).





The recruitment continues to face irregularities. Even to some extent the children were kidnapped. These malpractices continue as the recruitment systems were not prepared to jeopardize the interest of the British government. Rogers (2012) has justified the act by stating that the “essential feature of the colonizing process was not the betterment or development of the colonized peoples, it was the provision of resources for use by the colonizing powers” (p.48). This clearly shows that British needed the work force to exploit the resources at any rate. Hence, the fraudulent strategies did not concern the colonials.

Arasatnam's (1970) has also pointed out the fraudulent strategies in recruitment which segregated the families apart as follows,



...Kidnapping minors and catching recruits at the weekly shanties (markets), seducing young men with the promise of getting them married in the colony (Malaya), working upon the petty domestic quarrels between son and father, husband and wife etc and inducing them to leave their home, matching strangers as brothers, father and son, brother and sister and husband and wife to avoid legal hurdles (p.17).

Besides, enticing the Tamil labourers with rosy picture, recruiters also offered liquors to them. For instance, Brandy was paid in to sign up the labourers. The labours were excited when offered brandy upon their agreement to be taken away.

Oru pāṭṭil pirāṇti kotuttu
one bottle brandy given
Aṅka cīnikkuttān kākkā viratta





there sugar crow chase
 koṇṭu vantu cērttānayyā...
brought

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“...one bottle of brandy given
 brought across
 to chase away the crow from sugar...”

The labour was seduced with the liquor offering and was given a wrong interpretation of the work waiting at the distant land. He was lured by the simple work load, that all he has to do is to just chase away the crows from sugar. It was an allusive technique used to recruit the labour. A bottle of Brandy was lucrative and just enough to convince the labourers. Tamils showed a great interest for the Brandy as it intoxicates them just like the toddy. Toddy is a corruption of the Tamil word tari, and is the juice extracted from various palms (Khan, 1963, p.310).



Tamils have the habit of drinking toddy at their home land. It is considered as a healthy beverage. Brandy on the other hand gives the same sense of high as toddy. Encyclopedia Britannica define brandy as a liquor obtained from distillation of pomace (pomace brandy) or mash or wine of any other fruit (fruit brandy). Western always has a luxurious impression on drinking brandy. Epstein (2014) has cited the following excerpt of James Boswell’s *The Life of Samuel Johnson (1791)* in her study on brandy, which describes its illustrious position.

...claret is the liquor for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be hero (smiling), must drink brandy....brandy will do soonest for a man what drinking can do for him (p.i).





The statement above denotes brandy as luxury sipping spirit. Tamils were happy and feel prosperous when offered with such high cost drinking. They get fascinated with it and started to fantasise the ‘wealthy’ life ahead at the host land.

The plight of the Tamils reflected when they willingly emigrate in order to alleviate the hard pressed life they face at South India. The emigration was continued despite of the fraudulent, discomfort and the hardship in the host land. But this time, the suffering was not experienced alone. The whole family migrated to live the hurdles. Family migration was encouraged under the Kangany system (Kondapi, 1951, p.29). This was done to establish a family structure.

Tēyilai karumput tōttattilē

tea sugar plantation

kūppittu nam intiyarkku

called Indians

kūliyenap pēr kotuttār

coolie name given

koṇṭu vantār rayilētti

brought by train

pativu ceytu

registered

pentu pillai anaivaraiyum ēmātti...

wife children all deceived

(Thandayutham, ēmārriyavarkaḷ, p.16)

“...Indians were called to
tea sugar plantation
given the name as coolie
boarded in train and
registered
deceiving the dear families...”

The labourer was recruited to work on tea and sugar plantations. He and the fellow labourers were loaded into a train. It was notified in the song that the labourers





were remarked with the term 'coolie'. The "coolie system" was a mixture of various labour systems and stood somewhere between slavery and "free" wage labour (Mahmud, 1997, p.639). They have to emigrate in search of socio-economic betterment of life. In addition to this, the labourers were enticed with the promises of a bright future in the colonies. The labourer conveyed that the whole family were cheated by the recruiting agents to lure them away. This message was depicted in the line 'peṇṭu piḷḷai anaivaraiyum ēmātti' (deceiving the dear families). As reflected in the songs, agents are known to integrate malpractices in the recruitment of the labours. This recruitment had separated and relocated the labourers from their families in Tamilnadu.



b) Employment

The development of Malaya initiated when British established a colony in Malaya, recruited and shipped the Tamils from South India to fulfil its colonial requirements. After settled with the procedures at the immigration depot, the labours were then transported to the targeted development area to begin their employment. The song below reflects the beginning of their journey by train to the targeted area.

...nalamutan alaittār ceñci toraiyum
fine *called* *dorai*
āl onrukkup peyaraik kotuttu
each *name* *give*
anuppiviṭṭār railway station...
sent

(Thandayutham, en nilamai, p.330)





“...dorai finely called
gave name to each of us
and sent us to railway station...”

The employment required the Tamil labourers to clear the jungles to develop the plantations and transport facilities. Before the development of plantation, Malaya was covered with virgin jungle. Caestro (2002) has cited the definition of virgin jungle given by Pequeno Larrouse ilustrado that, it is a jungle that has not been explored and has never been cultivated (p.140). Due to its geographical fame as jungle forested peninsula Malaya was widely recognized among Tamils as Malaiyūr or hill-town (Arokiaswamy, 2000. p.43). Two hundred years ago, the nation was not developed and the jungle was left unexplored. Upon colonisation Tamil labours were exploited to clear the wild jungle and expand it. The employment required separation. For



example, the verse below shows the separation of the men from their wives.

karatikal pulikal vācam ceyyum

bear tiger living

malāy nāṭṭilē - peṅkal

Malaya nation women

kaṭṭiya puruṣaṇai viṭṭu pirintu kalaṅkiṛār...

husband separate worried

(Thandayutham, vālviḷanta vālkkai, p.7)

“Malaya land pervaded
with bears and tigers
women being perturbed with
separation from their husbands...”

During the period of Kangany recruitment system, the female oriented migration became significant (Belle, 2014, p.121). Hence, labours started to emigrate with their wives. But it turns out for them to only experience separation from their men as the





men were employed to clear the ‘dark’ jungles. The verse manifests the pain felt by the women. They were left abandoned.

Another verse denotes the pain of separation that caused a major life change.

...Petta vaṅkaḷa maratēnunka
parents forgotten
Pēranellām maratēnunka
grandchildren forgotten
Tāy takappan maratēnunka ...
mother father forgotten

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.25)

“...parents were forgotten
 grandchildren were forgotten
 mother and father were forgotten...”



The labourer expresses that he had forgotten his family. One had forgotten his parents; one had forgotten his grandchildren. The term ‘Petta vaṅkaḷa maratēnunka’ (parents were forgotten) is repeated over and over to confess what the separation has done to them. This explicitly tells us that the labourers had stayed long enough to endure the pain of separation. The long stay can be related to the indentured system. Indentured system works on period of employment. The workers are required to work until they repay the money spent for their recruitment. Once settled the payment and served the period of indenture, the Indian labours were theoretically considered free. But it was found that the indenture system denied the freedom of the labours (Amrith, 2011, p.34). Many were still bonded to their employers regardless of the years. This long term separation also had its effect on Tamils. It magnifies the depression faced by the Tamil labourers due to the separation.





Tamils recruited under indenture system were treated as individuals and randomly allotted (Mishra, 2015, p.373). They feel isolated since the work demands them to have less social contact. They were doing and seeing the same thing every day. Thoughts of the native land and the loved ones keep playing in the midst of the depressed situation. The labourers were even denied the access to reunite with their family at home land. These situations aroused emotional trauma that leads to memory loss. A long term consequence of depression results to memory loss (Becker, 2002 p.540). People under depression always feel confused, distracted and face difficulty in concentrating thereby losing their memory. Commissaris (1997) has cited in his study on psychological cause of memory loss as, "...people who worry a lot can be so preoccupied with their problems that their minds are full. This can occur when people have lost a loved one..." (p. 305). Tamils has lost their loved ones upon their departure to the colonial land. The separation due to the death caused the Tamil to agonize.

The Death Of The Loved Ones

The separation in search for better life took its toll, when many found Malaya as their last resting place. For example, the following verse portrays the death of the labourers.

...Tānā aṅkuc cākirār makkal
there die people
Pōṇa uyir pīlaikka
to survive
Pollāta kālamatu tuṇaikkut
wicked time accompanied
Tāy tantaiyaraip pirinta catiyō...



*parents**separated plot*

(Thandayutham, nittam nittam, p.45)

“...The people knowingly falling to the grave by themselves
 To secure the life
 In the midst of wicked period
 Is it a plot
 Is it due to the separation from parents?...”

The song is a reflection of personal responses and behaviours of the Tamil labourers to the massive death rates they experienced under the British colonisation. The line ‘Tāṇā aṅkuc cākiṛār makkaḷ, Pōṇa uyir piḷaikka’ (The people knowingly falling to the grave by themselves) conveys the frustration when the development intended literally resulted in the death of the peoples. The expression corroborates Dennis (1983) who pointed out in his research that “before the 1920’s, 60-90 percent of the labour force died within the first year of arrival” (p.88). The life loss conveyed in the folk song also supported Sandhu’s (2010) statement which identifies Malaya as “the white man’s grave” and a “death trap yawning to engulf the surplus population of India” (p.53-60). The line further consider the period as wicked and unscrupulous. The labours were deeply depressed as they started to associate the situation as a complot for leaving their parents. This was referred in the line ‘Tāy tantaiyaraip pirinta catiyō’ (Is it due to the separation from parents?). They started to question themselves for those lose. Such an attitude is the result from the traumatic separation.

The separation started taking toll on family system. It begins to rupture the system. The rupture is attributed to the employment of the labourers.





4.4.2.2 Rupture of Family Structure

Relationship can be defined as a social connection. Umberson (2010) has cited the work of Smith and Christakis whom have drawn out the features of the social connection that comprises social isolation, social integration, quality of relationships and social networks (What do we mean by social relationship, ¶ 1). According to study it was claimed that successful social relationship relies on all the four aspects as mentioned above. Negative alteration on any of these aspects collapses a relationship. In the context of this research, the quality of relationship was found to be the core for the rupture of the family system.

Colonisation is evidenced as one of the reason for the collapse in a relationship especially in the family ties. It has been proven in the study of impact of colonisation on the traditional family structure by Taylor (2003) as follows,

Colonisation impacted on the social foundations of traditional society by creating and aggravating generational and gender tensions. The resultant bitter conflict around these divisions eroded the cooperation and trust essential to the viability of the nuclear and extended family (p.209).

Few researches about the Tamils in Malaya generally revealed that the family structure of the Tamils was bent off during the colonisation (Dennis, 1983; Satyanarayana, 2001; Amarjit, 2006). This corroborates the finding of Taylor (2003) as explained previously. Analysis on the folk songs also showed the presence of conflicts in a family structure.





The family system in Tamilnadu was glimpsed before discussing the impact of colonisation on families in Malaya. This will help to create a better understanding on the quality of a family system in ancestral land and how it deteriorated in the lost land during the colonisation. Back in Tamilnadu, Tamils lead a nuclear and extended family life. Even though struggled with daily hassles such as caste discrimination, poverty, and famine (as stated before) they stayed and stand together. The significance of the family unity was clearly depicted in the study of Niranjana (1998) whom cited the finding of Beteille that “despite of socio-economic and political changes, family life and family structure have remained as an integral part of Indian society with the spirit of family solidarity” as the supporting power (p.287). But sooner, colonisation was seen to disrupt the family structure.



The living condition, the desperate of making a living and the poverty were among the reasons that ruptured the structure of a family. This echoes the finding of Kiser (2005) who clarifies life under “chronically harsh, traumatic circumstances slowly erode family processes, specifically structure, relations, and coping” (p.715). These traumatic circumstances became prevalent during the colonisation.

The research is applying the FITT model to explain the trauma impact on family structure of the Tamil labourers in Malaya during the colonisation. The model is apt for the discussion as it aims to attend to the consequences of distressing events on the quality of a family system. The diagram below illustrates the components of the model.



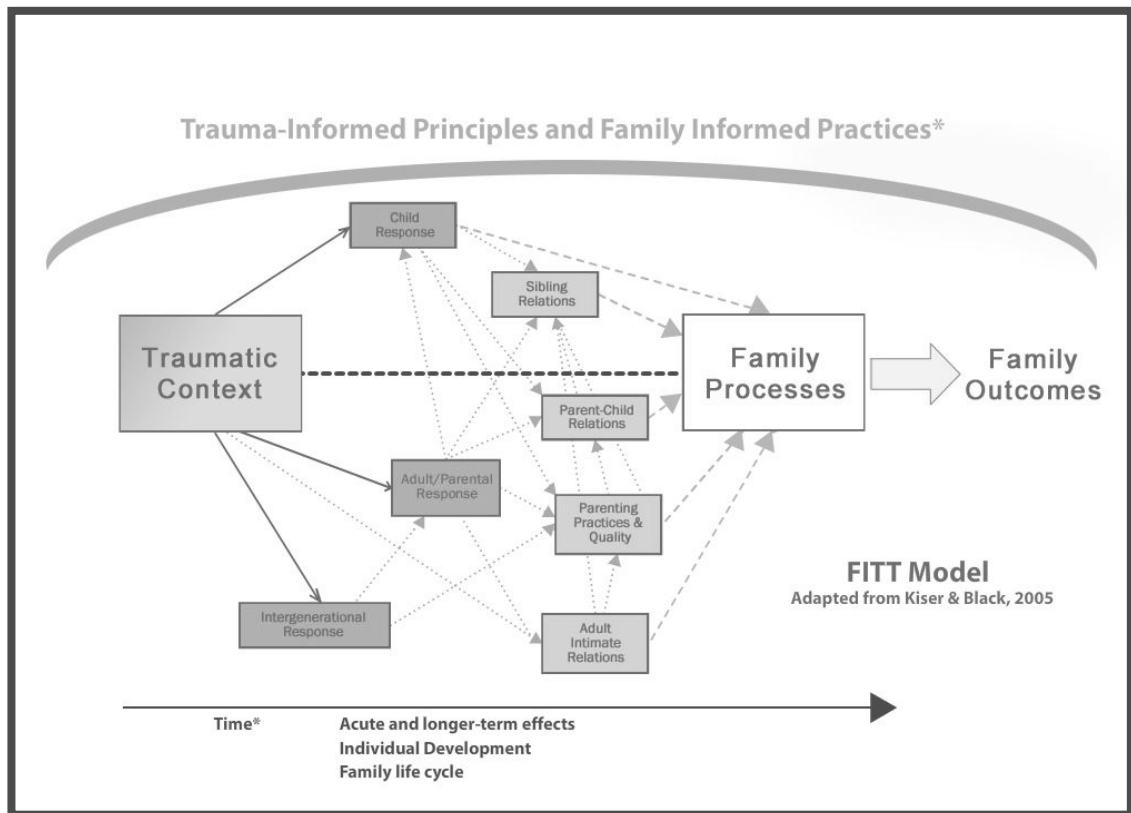


Figure 4.3. The FITT Model, Obtained from (Family informed trauma treatment center, p.6).

Based on the folk songs there were ample of evidences collected on the parental response. Thus, discussion on this section will only revolve around the adult parental response and its association with a) parent child relation, b) parenting practises and quality and c) adult intimate relations to the family process.

It is worth to emphasize again that the economical destruction during the British colonisation was the primary contribution to the disrupted family functioning. It goes along with studies of Evans & English, 2002 and Esposito, 1999 which state families raised in poverty develops negative outcomes. The negative outcomes has been related with the parenting quality in this study.



a) **Parent Child Relation**

The economic impact of British colonisation in Malaya has interacted in the complex manner and affected the child and parent relationship. Researches show that the quality of parent-child relationships deteriorated when the mother engulfed with traumatic event(s) and/or when the child experiences the trauma. In the case of living under colonisation, the traumatic events were so intense that it started developing negative outcomes. Factors such as economic hardship and stress could be attributed to this negative impact. These include compromised detachment from the family member to sustain the economical condition. Hence, in this section the parent child relation was seen to be disrupted in the form of daycares and abandonment as reflected in the folk songs.



I **Daycare - āyāk koṭṭakai**

As evidenced in the folk songs the development process of Malaya involved more women labourers particularly as rubber tappers. Transparently their involvement means less time was spent to look after the children. Provision of ‘āyāk koṭṭakai’ (daycare) was seen as an alternate to solve the problem. But only some plantations have good conditioned daycares. Most were a complete disaster.

Women have significant role in the development of the plantation. They played double roles as income earners and care takers. To facilitate the women’s participation in the workforce British created such day cares (Selvakumaran, 1994, p.32). In plantations a woman was selected to care for children by feeding and





watching them during the day when the parents went for work. The place is called as āyākkōṭṭai the woman is known as āyā (Mutthammal, 2006, p.83). The childcare centre became a place for maternal separation under a short period of time. The verse below shows the condition whereby the bawling child is left at the āyāk koṭṭakai before the mother proceeds to the muster.

..alara alara ācaip pillayai
weeping dear child
āyāk koṭṭakai vittu vittu...
crèche left

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p. 84)

“...leaving the bawling child to
 crèche”



The song begins with the hurry burry situation of a woman who has to wake up early in the morning, complete the house chores, cook for breakfast and feed the little one. She had to multitask so that she can reach on time for her work. In between, she needs to handover her child at the day care. The child was distressed when it has to separate from the mother. That causes the child to bawl. The mother has to send the child to āyāk koṭṭakai, so that she can do her works. So, the temporary separation was unavoidable. After tapping rubber, the mother comes back to get her child. The same routine continues every day. This short term separation may ill effects on the emotions of the child. If suitable substitute emotional care is given at the āyāk koṭṭakai then the children will learn to cope. But if anything happens to the contrary, then the child will be emotionally dislocated from the mother as the attachment bond is being disrupted.





II Abandonment

Cambridge (2016) has defined abandonment as “to leave a place, thing, or person, usually forever”. In the context of this research abandonment is defined as the withdrawal of the responsibility of child care. There were folk songs that exemplify the event of abandonment. The abandonment could be attributed to several factors such as the desperate situation of making living. The verse below authenticates the situation of the child whom was left to survive on its own. The verses exemplify the situation of the abandoned child who was starving.

...ciru pen ēlaiyenrāl
little girl if poor
manam irankātā
heart will not come down?
nālañcu nāl pattiniyāl
four five days hungry
vātukirēn nān...
suffering I

(Thandayutham, cāvu varātō, p.174)

“...Won’t you feel pitiful
 for the little poor girl
 been starving for four five days
 I am suffering...”

..ciru paiyanai alaippār
little boy called
cōttukku vāvenru...
for rice

(Thandayutham, vālviḷanta vālkkai, p.8)

“...little boy is called
 to be fed...”

...puḷḷa kuṭṭi anaivarayum aḷavaittu...
children all made to cry

(Thandayutham, ēmārṇiyavarkaḷ, p.16)





“...children were left to shed tears...”

The provision of daycares was only to the child who needed maternal care. Child beyond the care was left at home or at times brought to work together. The child left at home had no attention given. Imagine the same situation which could have incurred during the initial state of colonisation which required its labourers to stay away from home for several months in the quest of clearing the jungle. What was the condition of the child under the care of single parent? What if the parent never returned? The fate of the child became unknown.

There is also shocking information revealed from the folk song. It narrates the fate of the abandoned boy who was homeless and was taken advantage on by the prostitutes. The following verse from the song indicates the women as prostitute.

attāppu vīttukkāri
atap house owner
atula oru pāttukkāri
inside a singer

(Thandayutham, oyyārap pāṭṭu, p.90)

“...lady of multi houses
singing inside the house...”

A same line depicting the life of a prostitute was identified in a folk song from Nellore district, Tamilnadu. It sounds as below.

...añcāru vīttukkāri
five to six house owners
atula oru pāttukkāri





inside a singer

(Vanamaamalai, payalkaḷaip pārppālām)

“...lady of multi houses
singing inside the house...”

....cirukki

abusive term used for women

ūru urankinālum

village sleep

cinnap paiyana tēturalē

little boy searching

attāppu vīttukkāri

atap house owner

atula oru pāttukkāri

inside a singer

pāttellām pātuvālō

songs singing

cinnap paiyana tētuvālō...

little boy searching

(Thandayutham, oyyārap pāṭṭu, p.90)

“ the whole village be asleep
the ominous lady is seeking for little boy
lady of the attap house
singing the song
searching for a boy...”



The abandoned boy was lured by the prostitutes. It is indeed heart wrenching to know the ill fate that has overwhelmed the boy.

b) Parenting Practises and Quality

The ability to parent is strongly associated with the physical and mental condition of the parent. If any of this gets distressed then it deteriorates the quality of parenting. Similarly, the same impact manifested in the family management of the Tamil





labourers during the British colonisation. The following verses reveal the distressed adult who is unable to cope with their parental and social obligations.

...pālūṭṭa vēṇṭāmati veerayi
feed milk not needed name of a woman labourer
ĉikkiram eluntu vāṭi unnai
quick get up come you
vilakkituvār kankāṇi
push aside kangany

(Thandayutham, kankāṇyiṇ kaivaṇṇam, p.58)

“...Oh! Veerayi no need to feed the baby
 get yourself ready quickly
 or else
 get ready to be pushed aside by kangany...”

..alara alara ācaip pillayai
weeping dear child
āyāk kottakai vittu vittu...
crèche left

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p. 84)

“...leaving the bawling child to
 crèche”

Pālum tān atuppilē
milk on kiln
Pālakanum tān tottlilē
male child cradle
Pāla irakkuvanō
milk put down
Nānpetta celvatta īntuvanō?
I give birth child carry

(Thandayutham, pō koṇṭu varuvāyō, p.98)

“The milk is on woodstove
 My young boy is on bassinet
 will I put down the milk
 or carry my baby...”





The trauma and the economical stresses had affected the parenting ability of the labourers. The content of the verse above is suffice to exemplify the inefficiency of parental care that has less warmth and limited cater of child needs. There is always an unvarying dispute about the impact of women's involvement in the labour force on the children's health. Federated Malay States Annual Report (1933), has reported the increase in infant mortality that occurred in the states of Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, and Perak in 1933 which was attributed to the economical stress (p.9). Manderson (1999) also has cited the engagement of the women in employment with the neglect of infants (p.105). This shows that, parenting practices directly influences children's behaviours. These childhood experiences consisting of abandonment, malnutrition and further traumatic stressors is said to increase adverse effect on the health problems to their future being of adults (Family informed trauma treatment center, p.22).



Such a decreased affection and the need to multitask once again is strongly related to the need of overcoming economical pressures. The role of the women as care takers is jeopardized when they also had to work in the field to support the family. The women had to look after their house chores before stepping to the field work. For instance, the song below exemplifies the work of the labourer in a rubber plantation.

Kālaik karukkalil
morning pre dawn
Kankāni maṇiyatikka
kangany ringing bell
 aṛakkap paṛakka aṭuppu mūṭṭi
hurriedly kiln start
araikuraiyāy pōṭṭukittu
incompletely put
pālkāttu kaili cattai





rubber milk garment hanging from waist shirt
pattai cākkai mēlē katti

sack containing tapping tools top tie

kāṇṭā vāli tōlil māṭṭi

latex pail shoulder carry

kañcipānai kaiyiletittu

porridge pot hold

ninru neṇaikaiyilē

standing

neṇcamellām kanakkutati...

heart

wrenching

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 1, p.84)

“...Here comes the Kangany
 ringing the bell at pre dawn
 hurriedly started the kiln
 half heartedly put on the kaili blouse
 tied the tapping sack on back
 carried the latex pail
 holding the porridge pot
 standing with wrenching heart...”



The woman woke up early and hustled to cook. The line ‘aṛakkap paṛakka

aṭuppu mūṭṭi’ showed that she had rocketed to prepare the firewood stacks before cooking. That will consume a huge time. Later she gets dressed. Female rubber tappers usually tuck in kaili or known as ‘sarung’ and a blouse. It was the general attire. Then she got her buckets placed on the shoulder and a food carrier in her hand. It was common for the labourers to have porridge (kaṇci) as their meal as it was the only option they had besides of its nutritional value. The women labourer has to make sure she finishes her house task before attending to the roll call. Overall, the song displays the situation of a labourer who is caught in between house chores. She is getting herself prepared for the tapping with burden in her hand and her mind. That represent the workload that she has to carry repetitively throughout the day and her life.





Most of the folk songs embed the wakeup call made for the women labourer requesting to get up as soon as possible. For instance, ‘Veerayi cĥkkiram eĥuntuvāṭi’ (Veerayi wake up faster...) (Thandayutham, kangany vantuṭṭān, p.52; Thandayutham, jaltiyā vāṭi, p.55), ‘eĥuntiruṭi Ramayi perattuku vāṭi’ (wake up Ramayi go to muster...) (Thandayutham, toĥilāḷi, p.19), and ‘....cāmakkāran kūppiṭuṛān, viṛu viṛuṇṇu taṇṇi pōṭe Ellamma’ (...wake up call has been made Ellamma, quickly boil the water...) (Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyin vākkumūlam, p.23) reflects the situation of the women labourers whom have to rush themselves for the roll call at the muster. Any delay can cost them to be physically punished. The daily work before the roll call has been captured in the following narrative. It shows that workers have to get up early to prepare and settle things.



The coolies had been stirring some two hours previously, for they have a meal of rice and coffee before the day's work is started. They come to muster one by one, tappers with buckets and knives, weeders with their " momaties " (a large hoe), and all their pots of rice, already cooked for a snack in the fields (obtained from The Journal of the Kew Guild, 1931, p.56).

Amidst all these suppressions, the tendency to shower love, tender and care towards the child gets highly vulnerable. At certain point they get so frustrated. A woman had even revealed her frustration of not aborting the child due to the severe dilemma.

...katai carakka vānki
shop toddy bought
kai maruntu pukattiruntā





home remedy given
karuvaik kalaicciruntā
abort
ippe kashtamē tōṇātu
now suffering never came in mind
karuvai uruvākki inta
embryo make this
malāy nāttila
Malaya nation
ulaikkattān untu pannunā...
work hard created
 (Thandayutham, mankai kuṛai tīrātē, p.211)

“...if only fed with toddy from the shop
 and the remedy
 if only aborted the child
 the suffering would never come in thought
 failure to abort is only to make us
 work hard in Malaya...”



The maternal emotions as the reflection of such stressors were even demonstrated thorough the singing of lullabies.

Lullaby

Lullabies were the expression of the thoughts, hopes, feelings and expectations of a mother to her child delivered through singing. It functions primarily to make the baby fall asleep. Analysis on the lullabies revealed how the material life conditioned the content of the song sung to the babies.

...kāci nakar irukka - kaṇṇē
kasi city is there my dear
kaṭukivanta kāraṇamenna!...
arrive quickly reason what
 (Thandayutham, pāṭṭi aṭittārō, p.94)





“....my dear kasi city is here
why did you arrive so quickly...”

The verse reflects the wish of the mother whom questions the early arrival of her infant in to the poverty world of Malaya. The economic depression faced by the mother shows how she faces difficulty in bringing up the child in the poor condition.

Some verses serve to resent the inability of the mother to feed her child.

ārārirō ārārirō
inta māṇikkatta nā
this ruby I
vaiccurunta inta maṇikkuṭal vēkutaṭā!
kept this small intestine sore
intac ceṇbakatta nā
this flower I
vaiccurunta inta
kept
pāvam ceṇca ammālukkū
sin do mother
cirukūṭalu pāvi vēkutaṭā
small intestine sore

(Thandayutham, maṇikkuṭal vēkutaṭā!, p.96)

“...ārārirō ārārirō
the small intestine of my dear little one
is getting sore
the intestine of this poor woman
is getting sore...”

...ammā pālu vāṅkuvanō
milk buy
roti vāṅkuvanō
bread buy
nā petta makanē
my boy
unṇaip patti ammā
you about mother
cintu pātukirēn
singing song





ciramappattu nikkirēn!

difficulty standing

(Thandayutham, cintu pāṭukiṛēn, p.100)

“...my baby boy
what am I going to buy for you
milk or bread
singing in botheration...”

c) Adult Intimate Relations

The change in adult intimate relation of the Tamils is highly attributed to the social isolation. According to Umberson (2010), social isolation refers to the ‘relative absence of social relationships’ (p.54). Economically industrialization during the

British colonisation had induced the migration of the Tamil labourers to Malaya. The migration initiated the social isolation which caused the absence of intimacy in relationship.

The social isolation commenced due to the recruitment system introduced by the British colonial. It was previously explained that initial recruitment only involved adult males. As the males outnumbered the proportion of females the structure of a social system began to collapse. It affected the quality of relationship of the Tamil labourers. It was witnessed that colonisation degenerated the quality of relationship by straining conflicts and stress on it. The adult intimate relationship was seen to be disrupted with extramarital affair and prostitution. The following songs serve to prove the prostitution activity.





Rōcāppū ravikkaikāri
rose bloused lady
ṽṭtukkulla varattu māti cinnakkutti
home can come my dear
 unka coat paiyukku!
your pocket
 paṇanōṭṭu irukkumena
money got
 pāṭṭu meṭṭu varumayyā...
can come

(Thandayutham, cinnakkutti, p.70)

“oh! rose bloused lady
 can i come to your house my lady
 if your pocket is full of money
 you are allowed inside...”
Rōcāppū ravikkaikāri
rose bloused lady
ṽṭtukkulla varattu māti cinnakkutti
home can come my dear
paiyak kāṭṭu
bag show
paikulla nōṭṭu iruntākkā
bag inside money have
enka pāṭṭiya kēṭṭu
my grandmother ask permission
ulla vārumayyā...
come inside

(Thandayutham, paiyaik kāṭṭu, p.89)

“oh! rose bloused lady
 can i come to your house my lady
 show me the bag
 if you have the money
 grand your wish from my grandmother
 and step in...”

Such an immoral activity is associated with the initial migrant. This is due to the imbalance in sex ratio as the Tamil labourers predominantly form the male migrant community. It has been evidenced in the census conducted on 1931 that, there were only 515 Tamils women labourers recruited for every 1000 Tamil male labourers (Vlieland, 1932, p.82). The imbalance of sex ratio caused a high proportion of sex crimes among the labourers. It also turned the marriage to become a very flimsy





institution thus creating path for “marital infidelity, enticement of married women, and prostitution” (Arasaratnam 1970, p.67). The following song stands as evidence for the marital infidelity.

...attāppu vītu katti
 attap house built
 atula rentu jannal veccu
 two windows built
 etti etti pārttālumē avan iravu purushanati
 if sneaked he night husband
 (Thandayutham, iravu purushan, p.66)

“...attap house built with two windows
 sneaking through to see her illicit affair...”

The illicit affair as reflected in the song can be associated with the living conditions. The song kicked off with the description of the house and infidelity occurring in it. It clarifies that the house structure could attribute to sexual feeling. It corroborates the study if Jackson (2010) who stated, a confined space exaggerates sexual feeling (p.62). Shantini (2007) cited the confinement of the labourers into the rooms that have literally no space as follow,

...on one estate the building is divided into a number of rooms about 10 feet square, in which six people are usually put. Other rooms in the same building are 20 feet by 14 feet, and in one of these eighteen people were leaving, men and women indiscriminately. Sometimes three married couples in one small room, in other cases one or two couples, as well as several single men (p.10).





Since there is no privacy and everyone is crumpled in one area regardless of sex, it causes the moral of the labourers to deteriorate. The depiction of the collapsed marital relationship of the Tamils continues in the following song.

kaṭṭiya puruṣanai viṭṭu pirintu kalaṅkirār...
husband separate worried
pakkuvam nirainta kumarikal atainta
maturity filled young girls confined
paṇṇuḷḷa tāymār viṭṭilē
mother house
ciru paiyanai alaippār
little boy called
cōttukku vāvenṟu
for rice
paṇivāy rōṭṭilē
at road
aintāru mātam cāppituvān
five months eat
akka tankai enru kūppituvān-
sisters as called
tīrāta nōykalum vāṅkituvān
incurable disease affected
avan teru teruvāy tūṅkituvān!
he street sleep

(Thandayutham, vāḷviḷanta vāḷkkai, p. 8)

“...separated from the husband
 young girls fill up the house
 little boy from the street is called
 to be fed for five months
 the girls are called as sisters
 affected with incurable disease
 the boy is sleeping on streets...”

The woman was separated from her husband for longer period. The husband was recruited to clear the forests. Hence, she was alone with her girls. The family was economically and socially vulnerable. She had no male company with her. Being helpless, she needed income to cater the needs of her children. It was quite shocking





to know that the woman turned to an illegitimate path to get a solution for her problem. She gave space for an unknown boy who was straying out at the street. The boy stayed there for almost 5-6 months. He supported the family financially. In return the woman fulfilled the boy's desires. She had exploited herself sexually. He even called the girls as his sisters. The boy was fed and in return sexually entertained by the girls. The song ends by pointing that the boy was contaminated with incurable diseases. This was denoted in the line 'tīrāta nōykaḷum vānkiṭuvān' (affected with incurable disease). From the song itself it can be concluded that he had sexually transmitted diseases. At the end, the boy was said to stray again and sleeping on streets.

The songs described above clearly shows the fate of family left without a head or males to protect the family. The songs certainly describe the extent of poverty that caused the females to willingly let themselves to be exploited for sexual purpose. Next song portrays the condition of females whom are encouraged to be mistresses instead of wishing to become a wife for someone.

...vānkaṭi vānkaṭi penṭukalā-oru
come dear women
vāṭṭa cāṭṭa cattāmpillaiyaik kaṇṭiṅkalā?
tough bodied monitor have seen?
pōnkaṭi pōnkaṭi penṭukalā- oru
go women
purushanukku ācaipattu niṇṭiṅkalā?...
husband dreamt

(Thandayutham, kushal paṭṭu, p. 257)

“...come my dear women
 are you looking for a tough bodied man?
 go women go women
 are you dreaming for a husband?...”





There were also cases where the European planters had sexual relationship with the Tamil women. The following verse reflects the relationship.

...cēttukku irankāta cinnat dorai
mud never come down dorai
avaru poṇṇukku iranki varārām...
for his daughter get down to
 (Thandayutham, vellaiyanukku kaṭṭiyam kūṟutal, p.36)

“...dorai who never comes down to the mud
 getting down for his daughter...”

One of the demands made upon the Klang Strike-1940 was to put an end to the “molesting of labourers women folk by Europeans” (Manickam, 2012, p.86). This explicitly shows the existence of the European delinquent whom took advantage on women labourers.



The relationship between the colonial officials and the labourer could have unfavourable effect on the reputation of the man. However for the women it provided commercial opportunity. The relation gave a sense of pride to the women. They also received gifts from the man. It was seen as the bonus for the illicit relationship.

4.4.2.3 Loss of Resources

During the Depression, thousands of Tamil labourers lost their jobs as the Malayan government cut down many of its employees (p.106). Sandhu (2010) argues that the plantations were either shut down or serve only on a care-and maintenance basis as a





result of the Great Depression (p.106). This resulted in a heavy mass departure of Tamil labourers from Malaya (Amarjit, 2006; Hagan, 2005). The following line elucidates the exodus of the dorai, Kangany and the labour himself when they were oppressed under the Depression. It was sought as the only way to relief themselves from the appalling situation.

...kannāti turaiyum pōnār
glass dorai went
kankāṇiyum vīṭum pōnār
kangany home went
pinnāl kirāmaṇiyum pōnār
behind clerk went
taṅkāma nānum pōran pāymaramē...
without staying going sailing ship
 (Thandayutham, vilavāci, p.237)

“...specky dorai has gone
 kangany has left to his home
 followed by clerk
 Oh sailing ship! I am also leaving...”

When the price of rubber falls planters began to retrench their labourers. Many labourers were repatriated. The government and the Indian Immigration committee paid for the repatriation. When repatriation of unemployed immigrant workers was being scrutinized by British during the Depression, it was contemplated to permit unemployed workers to stay in Malaya since their being would lower the wage rates (Sandhu, 1993, p.299). A lot of employers were even geared up to maintain the labourers on the estates at reduced wages which later left the labourers in droves.

For instance, the following musical phrase denotes the issue of unemployment during the depression. The title of the song, ‘vēlai vēṇṭi pāṭum pāṭṭu’ (suffering for





job) centralizes on unemployment. It narrates the life of a labourer who lost his job at the plantation. The absence of the dorai or the estate manager indirectly implies the return of the dorai to their nation. It was indicated in the following line- ‘atak kēṭka ayyā dorai ille’ (dorai is nowhere to be found).

tōttam vēla vālantennan tōttam
plantation job coconut plantation
ṇalamutan ceyvēn tānē
betterment do
 atak kēppēn enru tānē
ask
ceppukirēn terintu kol nalla cīmānē
tell get to know man of wealth
appappa avatippatukira tollai
particle used when something felt in excess haste problem
antarattile tollai
uneasy
atac colla manam valla
that tell heart no
 appaṭi atak kēṭka ayyā dorai ille
to listen no

(Thandayutham, vēlai vēṇṭi pāṭum pāṭṭu, p. 17)

“...listen man of wealth!
 a job in coconut plantation
 I will do for the betterment
 I’m hasting in problem
 feeling uneasy
 has no desire to speak out
 since the dorai is no where to be found...”

The labourer insists of finding a job in the coconut garden. The labourer expresses his frustration when his requests were not heard by the dorai as the dorai himself left the plantation due to the economical fall. The unemployed life filled with struggles which could not be described. With the presence of depression, the labourers were preoccupied with economical difficulties. They lead a poverty life despite of all the hard works. The following verses depict this.





...ulaikkum makkal nāṅkal

labourer we

varumaiyāy vāṭaṇum!...

poverty suffer

(Thandayutham, kūli tan nilai kūṛal, p.25)

“...we the labourers

have to suffer in poverty...”

ēlaikku periya narakamaṭā

poor huge hell

inta ulakam enna ulakamaṭa...

this world what world

(Thandayutham, ēlaiyum paṇakkāranum, p.236)

“its a living hell for the poorer

what world is this, I wonder...”

...paṭuvu kappal ēri vantārē

boat ship boarded

pātupattu kalavēla mukkātu

toiled threshing ground hide

pōṭṭu nīṇru koṇṭu alutārē

weeping

tonkutayyā mārpil mēlē

mind

tuyar rumba takātalālē

suffer excess

(Thandayutham, piḷaikka vantavarkaḷ, p.15)

“...boarded on boat and ship

toiled in the threshing ground

hiding to weep

suffering to the core...”





4.4.3 Psychological Impact

Psychological impacts were prevalent among the survivors of a disaster. Likewise, the Tamils having the pain of segregation, physical and psychological abuses, economical destructions and cultural dispossession under the British colonisation begin to emotionally collapse. Several folk songs had captured the interminable emotional and mental destruction. The impacts of emotional and mental destruction were categorised into

- I Depression
- II Maladaptive behaviour



4.4.3.1 Depression

Among the significant psychological impact experienced by the Tamil labourers was depression. Cambridge (2016) defines depression as the state of dreadful unhappiness and hopeless future. Depression is a state of mood that can cause the victim to feel sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, angry, ashamed or restless (Brooks, 2013). The feelings of depression have been witnessed in the life of the Tamil labourers. Among the feelings identified in the folk songs are restless, worthless, hopeless, helpless, spiritual-less, and rumination.





a) Restless

The docility, hard working, servile Tamil labourers were coerced by the Kanganies under the European planter's instruction and the colonial government itself to work too hard. They became restless. The verse below stands as evidence that exhibits the restless life endured by the Tamil labourers.

...ōyātu nāl mulutum
continuously day full
vēlai ceytu utampaluttu ayyayyō!
worked tired

(Thandayutham, aṭṭai kaṭittu, p.56)

“...incessantly worked the whole day
and became weary...”



The constant workload made them vulnerable. It took its toll on their physical

being. They became physically and mentally exhausted. In spite of the tiredness, the labourers had to continue their living. The weariness reflected in the following verses that urges the women labourer to get up early as she will be late for the muster call ‘cīkkiram eḷuntu vāṭi’ (faster get up) (Thandayutham, jaltiyā vāṭi, p.55; caṅku cattam, p.56; viṭiyal, p.57; kanganyin kaivaṇṇam, p.57). Each day became restless for the labourers and consequently they had poor concentration. The following verses exemplify the impact of poor concentration.

ēttuli kuṭṭic cākke enkaṭi vaccē
chisel sack where put

(Thandayutham, es nos kerani, p.59)





“...oh lady where did u place the chisel and the sack...”

ēttuli kuṭṭic cākke enkaṭi vaccē
chisel sack where put
enkumē cuttiṭṭi pārttu
everywhere search
cittam karuttēn
mind blacken

(Thandayutham, viṭiyal, p.57)

“oh lady where did u place the chisel and the sack
I have searched everywhere
and became anxious”

...ētta uli paṭṭai cāṅku
chisel sack
enkaṭi vaccē Goyintamma
where put name of woman tapper
enkaṭi vaccē
where put

añcā number mēttu mēlē
fifth raised ground
ankētān vaccēn māmā
there put
kalalittup pōnēn tēti tēti
leg tired in search
kāṇalai māmā atai
missing its
...etuttu vanta kāntā vāli
brought latex pail
enkaṭi vaccē Goyintamma
where put name of woman tapper
enkaṭi vaccē
where put

reṇṭā number mēttu mēlē
second raised ground
inkētān vaccēn māmā
here put
tēti tēti kalalittup pōnēn
search leg tired
teriṭalai māmā atu
don't know

añcā number vecce vāli
fifth placed pail
arukilirukku pāru Goyintamma





is beside

rentā number vecce vāli

second placed pail

inkē irukkutu pāru Goyintamma

here it is

(Mutthammal, pālkāṭṭup pāṭal 3, p.86)

“...oh lady where did u place the chisel and the sack?

I’ve place on the raised ground at the 5th plot

I’ve searched everywhere

my legs became wearied

its missing my dear

oh lady where did u place the pails?

I’ve place on the raised ground at the 2nd plot

I’ve searched everywhere

my legs became wearied

I don’t know my dear

pail placed at 5th plot is beside here Goyintamma

pail placed at 2nd plot is here Goyintamma...”



Both the song implies the poor concentration faced by the labourers. They became anxious with their situation that it causes them to have forgetfulness. They found difficulty to even remember the thing that they had placed. The anxiety and the depression blanked things out. The song echoes the finding of Wig (2001) whom clarified poor concentration and inability to work as the symptoms of depression (p.3).

b) Worthless

Despite of all the hard work, the Tamil labourers were resisted from their due. On long term, the feeling of worthlessness started to immense them internally. They were socially rejected. The social rejection finally reached to the self rejection. The continuous devaluation of the Tamil has been represented in the following verses.





kaṅkāṇi mār ceyyum kotumaiyilē
kangany do brutality
katarukirōm getah marattiḷē!
bawling rubber trees
marattiḷ uṭaṇē kāyam paṭṭāl
tree hurt
araintituvār ōr aṛaiyilē...
slapped

(Thandayutham, kangany ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)

“the brutality of kanganies
 caused us to bawl amidst the rubber trees
 if tree gets hurt
 we get slapped instantly...”

...kaitipōla atittu...
prisoner beat

(Thandayutham, karumput tōṭṭattiḷē, p.12)

“...whacked like a prisoner...”



...āttu māttu mantaiyaip pōla
goat cow herds like
āṅkilēyarkaḷ nammai...
whitemen us
 ...tūṇṭiliṭṭa mīnpōla
like fish
tutikkinrōm...
writhe

(Thandayutham, āṅkilēyar, p.7)

“...whitemen herding us like goat and cow
 we are writhing as the fish that gets caught...”

...mātukal pōla ulaittum...
cow like work hard

(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷar nilai, p.19)

“...toiled like cows...”

...mātukalai pōla ulaikka...
cow like work hard

(Thandayutham, toḷilāḷiyin koṭumaiyāṇa nilai, p.20)

“...to work hard like cows...”





The songs captured the inequality and tyrannical continuous humiliations of the colonised. The Tamil labourers were only treated as productive units and not as humans. The elucidation of themselves as the prisoners and animals shows the extent of devaluation faced despite of their contribution for the development. The unfathomable settled feelings associated with physical and psychological abuse became adequately uttered in the course of these metaphors.

The British enjoyed the product of the development while the Tamils were pushed to live in the subhuman conditions. They were only seen as accumulations. The term 'sucked oranges' (Stenson, 1980,p.21) used to refer the Tamil labourers exemplifies the unappreciated hard work of the Tamils. At some point they even began to question their unreciprocated deeds. The following line '...intiyarē rōcam



illaiyā...' (Indians! don't you have dignity?) (Thandayutham, ānkilēyar koṭumai, p.7),

shows how the intensity of the self rejection have occupied them internally. This corroborates to the finding of Sporle (2007) whom stated traumatic life events deteriorates the development of elaborated self concept.

c) HOPELESS

The endurance of rejection on long basis faced by the Tamil labourers created a chronic conflict which impasses and eventually set in the depression. They became hopeless. The following verses exemplify the situation undergone by the Tamil labourers.





patakēri vantēnnā

boat came

pañcam tīralayē...

dearth unsettled

Thandayutham , Kālam vantatunnu, p.173)

I boarded on boat

But the dearth never come to an end

...patuvu kappal ēri vantārē

boat ship boarded

pātupattu kalavēla mukkātu

toiled threshing ground hide

pōṭṭu ninṟu koṇṭu alutārē

weeping

tonkutayyā mārpiḷ mēlē

mind

tuyar rumba takātalālē

suffer excess

(Thandayutham, piḷaikka vantavarkaḷ, p.15)

“...boarded on boat and ship

toiled in the threshing ground

hiding to weep

suffering to the core...”

...malāy nāṭṭilē kaṭavulē

Malaya nation Owh God

cīnikkā kākkā ṓttanum?...

sugar crow chase

(Thandayutham, kūli aṭimai, p.24)

“Owh God! are we here in Malaya

to chase away the crow from sugar...”

...kappal ēri vantuttēn

ship boarded

eṅkālamē tolaiyilē

my time never eradicate

nā vanta kappal tīrumpalayē...

I boarded ship never returned

(Thandayutham, kālam vantatunnu, p.173)

“I boarded the ship

my time never eradicates

the ship I boarded never returned...”





The verses convey the disappointment of the Tamil labourers. They get deceived with the rosy pictures of Malaya. They agreed for the recruitment to make a better living in the host land. But, things were contrary with what the Tamils have been told about Malaya. The Tamils were unable to suspect the degree of cunning played by the Colonials. It can be reasoned with the blind admiration they had on Europeans (Stenson, 1980, p.17). Such a perception eases the conquest of their mind by the British. Thus the labourers, began to lose control over their lives. They were badly undermined as continuously faces tragic loses and abuses in the British colonisation. Life became deadlock; accompanied with endless melancholy and thereby preventing any self progress among the Tamil labourers.



The continuous rejection projected the state of helplessness. Tamils were alienated. During the British colonisation Tamils were segregated. The segregation was intended to entrap them from the external world. Plantation was seen as the solution for the entrapment. This is due to the social setting of the plantation. The projection of the helpless condition has been reflected in the following verses.

ċĩmaikku kākkā vanta tamilā - ippō
foreign country protect came Tamils now
ċĩraliñcu pōrĩñkal tamilā
ruin getting Tamils
innikku kākkā ōṭṭa vantĩñkalā tamilā
today crow chase came Tamils
ippō ċĩraliya pōrĩñkatā tamilā...
now ruin going to Tamils

(Thandayutham, pīlaikka vanta tamilārkal, p.15)





“ Oh Tamils! you came to the host land to protect- now
you are getting ruined
Oh Tamils! did you came to chase away the crow
now you are going to get ruined...”

ċimān malay nāttilē
wealthy Malaya nation
āritamenru ataic colluvār...
to whom that tell

(Thandayutham, kangany ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)

“to whom he will tell
in the wealthy land of Malaya...”

...appappā pacikkotumai
hunger severe
āritam colvatenru enṇukirēn...
to whom tell thinking

(Thandayutham, karumput tōṭṭattilē, p.12;
tolilāḷiyin koṭumaiyāṇa nilai,p.20;
ūlaippavanukkuk kiṭṭum paṭṭam,p.20)



“...thinking to whom shall I tell
of the hunger....”

...appappā vitikkoṭumai
fate wicked
enru aluvukirār
crying

āritam pōy colvatenru enṇukirār
to whom tell thinking

(Thandayutham, ēmārriyavarkaḷ, p.16)

“...it’s the wicked fate
crying and thinking
whom to tell...”

...ēnenru kēṭka nātiyillai
why question no one
etutturaikka ketiyillai...
give advice no pace

(Thandayutham, kūli tan nilai kūṛaḷ ,p.25)

“...nobody to question





no pace to give advice...”
 ...nā pōkāvittāl cōrumillai
I didn't go no rice
 aiyayo enna ceyvēn!
what do

(Thandayutham, kūlikkāriyin vākkumūlam, p.23)

“...If I didn't go
 I get no rice...”

The British were very incisive. They prohibit any form of voices stood up for the sake of Tamil labourer's well being in plantation. Any rebellious acts will cost them severely. The labourers were rejected for the course of self improvement. It dramatically caused them to feel helpless.

...pōna nēram pollāta nēram
went time wicked time
tān kettuc cākīrarkal makkal
deteriorate dying people
talai vitiyō enna ketiyō
fate or plight

(Thandayutham, catiyō ketiyō, p.163)

“...it was wicked period
 people met their end
 is this the fate or plight...”

With so much of burden and suffering the pain has been entirely blamed on the time which has been described to be ‘pollāta nēram’ (wicked period) and on Tamils themselves. The line ‘talai vitiyō enna ketiyō’ (is this the fate or plight) reflects their doubted readiness to accept the plight as their fate and destiny. Such an attitude is known as denial. Despite of learning the cruelty under the British colonisation, the Tamil labourers projected the denial on the time and fate. They had coped up the loss by shifting the impacts as their fate.





e) Spiritual-Less

The trauma endured by the Tamils also costs them to loss their faith. It probed them with questions about the existence of the God as they view Him as the protector. So when they suffer the pain they lose hope on God. Daniel (2012) has corroborated to this as “those who see God as a protector may feel deceived or punished by a traumatic experience” (p.19). Survivors of trauma feel hopeless and they begin to question the faith by being angry towards The Creator. The following verse embeds the fade of faith towards the God.

...āṇṭavan utavi illai eṇṟu
god help no
alukinrōm kittā marattilē...
weeping rubber trees

(Thandayutham, kangany ceyyum koṭumai, p.55)

“...weeping amidst the rubber trees
thinking that God isn’t helping...”

...makkal nimmati teriyāta katavulē
people relief not knowing God

(Thandayutham, tōṭṭak kūli, p.18)

“..God never knows the peace of people...”

Trauma causes detachment from different parts of a person's being. This disengagement is a result of a defence mechanism against the effects of trauma. On a longer basis it affects the relationship. In the case of Tamil labourers it had also presented itself with the relationship with God.





f) Rumination

The death and tragic loss of the dear ones caused the Tamil labourers to ruminate. Nolen -Hoeksema (1998) defined rumination as the “compulsively focused attention on the symptoms of one’s distress and on its possible causes and consequences, as opposed to its solutions (p.448). Rumination is the sign of the separation anxiety disorder (Blinder, 1988, p.318). Tamil labourers never thought the separation incurred during the colonisation was irreversible. The massive death authenticates this.

...Tānā an̄kuc cākirār makkal

there die people

Pōṇa uyir pilaikka

to survive

Pollāta kālamatu tuṇaikkut

wicked time accompanied

Tāy tantaiyaraip pirinta catiyō

parents separated plot

(Thandayutham, nittam nittam, p.45)

“...The people knowingly falling to the grave by themselves

To secure the life

In the midst of wicked period

Is it a plot of the separation from the parents?...”

The rumination in the song was event related. The Tamils dwelled on the death and constantly replayed on it. They never had opportunity to grief over the lost. To a certain point they started to agonize over the trauma and questioned themselves by asking ‘Tāy tantaiyaraip pirinta catiyō’ (was the separation from the parents meant for the tragic loss of lives). They focused on their emotion to find the probable cause of the dilemma. Matthews (2014) clarified this state of mind as ‘self- referent information’ (p. 127). They were desperate to cope with loss incurred. Instead of





finding ways of relieving themselves from the dilemma, they brood on the causes of the death.

The rumination is self damaging. It leads to further negative thoughts which clearly happened in the lives of the Tamil labourers. Maladaptive behaviour was found to be the result of the rumination.

4.4.3.2 Maladaptive Behaviour

Traumas suffered by the Tamil labourers intrigued and coerced changes in thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviours. This eventually led to the practise of maladaptive behaviour. This corroborated with the study of Jacobson (2001) whom notified that “individuals with depression may take on maladaptive activities” (p. 256-257). An inappropriate behaviour that results in dysfunctional outcome is called as maladaptive. Maladaptive behaviour as reflected in the folk songs manifested in the form of suicidal behaviour and drunken behaviour. The behaviours were sought as the solution for the never ending problems of Tamil labourers.

a) Suicidal Behavior

Suicide became a feature in Malaya during the colonisation. Such an aggression can be viewed as the ultimate act of oneself to solve the severe physical and psychological dilemma. These dilemmas were intolerable and the Tamil labourers had lack of





support to overcome them. Based on the analysis, several folk songs were found to be incorporating suicidal behaviour. Suicidal behaviour is defined as the “thought or tendencies that put a person at risk for committing suicide” (Suicide and suicidal behavior, 2016). The suicidal behaviour of the Tamil labourers during the colonisation as reflected in the folk songs, marked itself in the form of thoughts and tendencies to commit suicide.

cālaiyilē reṇṭumaram

street two trees

carkkāru vecca maram

government planted trees

ōnki valarnta maram

tall grow tree

atu unakku ēṭta tūkku maram...

it is suitable gallow

(Thandayutham , ponnu rattinamē, p.64)



“..two trees on the street
trees planted by the government
two trees are tall trees
suits you as gallow tree...”

...kappal ēri vantuttēn

ship boarded

eṅkālamē tolaiyilē

my time never eradicate

nā vanta kappal tirumpalayē...

I boarded ship never returned

(Thandayutham, kālam vantatunṇu, p.173)

“I boarded the ship
my time never eradicates
the ship I boarded never returned...”

...cāvu varātā

death will not come

itayam cōru tarātā?

heart rice will not give

(Thandayutham, cāvu varātā, p.174)

“..will the death perish
will the heart feed us...?”





The songs convey the desperation to live, making better life and starvation as the reason for the self destruction. If looked further it discloses the emotional distress, shame and grief occupying the Tamil labourers. The predicament peters out their sense of safety and trust towards the new place. Sooner they started to develop reduced sense of worth, and lacked self esteem and at one point the pressure become excessive that it end up their life. The fight for survival became increasingly hostile that it also made the women to regret of her birth. It was expressed in the following song that cries out her despair when she wishes never been born and rather been aborted than living amidst the misery. The emotion was so intense that she had dissociated herself from consciousness and began to deny her own existence in Malaya. The despair shows how her spirit has been destructed by the sufferings.



...katai carakka vānki
shop toddy bought

kai maruntu pukattiruntā

home remedy given

karuvaik kalaicciruntā

abort

ippe kashtamē tōṇātu

now suffering never came in mind

karuvai uruvākki inta

embryo make this

malāy nāttila

Malaya nation

ulaikkattān untu paṇṇunā...

work hard created

(Thandayutham, mankai kuṛai tīrātē, p.211)

“...if only fed with toddy from the shop
and the remedy
if only abort the child
the suffering would never come in thought
failure to abort is only to make us
work hard in Malaya...”





She felt that her absence could have saved the family from plunging into poverty. But her birth was only an additional responsible as it only worsen the condition. She even persisted that her existence was only meant for hard work. Such an attitude shows the amount of hatred that engulfed herself in Malaya.

b) Drunken Behaviour

The drunken behavior among the Tamil labourers is attributed to the consumption of toddy/arrack. Addiction to toddy and arrack (the mature toddy) is the consequence of the repressed emotions of the Tamil labourer's appalling living in plantation. The life in plantation was seen to be hostile and beyond their control. To alleviate from the

despair, the labourers turn to abuse themselves by drinking into oblivion.

...nān maṭṭumtān kuṭikkirēnnu
I only drink
ninaikkāṭi kaṇṇē - itu
don't think dear this
nā- nālu -talaimuraiyāy
four generation
naṭakkutaṭi peṇṇē
happening

(Mutthammal, kaḷḷukkāṭaip pāṭal 2, p.89)

“...don't think I'm the only one drinking dear
 its been happening for four generations...”

The song serves as a preface for the drinking habits found among the present Tamil labourers. It sounds as if the drinker is justifying his act by stating that the habit is a recurrence. The justification made by the drinker shows that they are incapable of





coping with stress and traumatic events. Thus they often resort to such defence mechanisms. He defended himself by stating it was carried across the generations. When tracing back to the history of the Tamils in Malaysia it proves the prevalence of drinking habit. Toddy was the common alcoholic beverage during the colonisation.

Toddy consumption had significant place among Tamils primitively. Besides used for medical purpose it also functioned to strengthen the social relation. Drinking together let them to share and thereby creating an alternate path to relieve the stress. Sandhu (2010), claims that the toddy drinking habit was carried to Malaya. But a large majority picked up the drinking habit in Malaya (Arasaratnam, 1970, p.69-70). During the colonisation the consumption turned into maladaptive drinking patterns.



...kālayīliruntu mālaivarai
since morning evening
mātupōl ulaikkirān
cow like working
maṇ vetṭi vēlai ceyṛān
land cut working
mūccu mūccā cārāyatta kuṭikkirān...
persistently arrack drinking
(Thandayutham, kuṭi keṭukkum kuṭi, p.234)

“...from dawn to dusk
toiling like cows
clearing the land
persistently drinking...”

Toddy functioned as spirit. After a long whole tiring day of working, the Tamil labourers sought for it for body and mind ache relieves. It was also seen as an institutionalized escape mechanism for the Tamil labourers whom were oppressed. Instead of sharing they tried to conceal themselves by drinking alcohol. The labourers





wanted to hide their anguished selves. They became emotionally numb due to the suffered traumas. So, to reciprocate they wanted to feel something different; something that is not painful; something that is not despair and certainly something that makes them oblivion. Such desperate needs show the extent of the agony under the British colonisation. With bearing the cumulative painful sufferings and memories, the Tamils were only identified as ‘*kuṭikkāraṇ*’ (drunkards) as reflected in the following verse.

...inta paṭiyāka *kashtappattē* *namma*
suffered we
intiya makka enna pēru veccirukku
Indians what name given
kuṭikkāraṇ enṇa peyartāṇ veccirukku...
drunkards name given

(Thandayutham, *uḷaippavanukkuk kiṭṭum paṭṭam*, p.20)



He was resisted for the hard work. He was not recognized. Thus, the only solution for him to forget the mental anguishes was to drink. The addiction to the toddy drinking had costs the live and family of the Tamil labourers. The toddy was known for its abusive nature. A song reflects the toddy as a heinous crime that could take away one’s self as follows. ‘...caṇṭāḷak kuṭi...’ (...heinous toddy) (Thandayutham, *kuṭikka māṭṭen*, p.235)

Some songs revealed the loss of self control due to the addiction, that caused a man to sexually exploit his own wife for the benefit that could be used later. It has been manifested in the following song.





...kuttimārkalaiyum kūttikittu- ennaik
young women bring along me
kunta veccu vuttupittu
squat left
paṇam vāṅkkittu
money taken
aṭa kūru ketta māmā
characterless husband
kuṇamilanta māmā
quality lost
ninaivilantu pōkalāmā...
unconsciousness

(Thandayutham, keṭṭup pōna maccān, p.78)

“...you brought chicks with you
 leaving me squatted
 taken the money
 Oh my husband!
 you have lost your character
 qualities and
 consciousness...”



kallukutitta veriyilē
toddy drink drunkenness

(Mutthammal, kaḷḷukkaṭaip pāṭal 2, p.89)

“drunken with toddy”

...kalluk kataiyil tāṇṭā
toddy shop
kavuntukittu kiṭanta paiyaṇṭā...
collapsed young man

(Thandayutham, tillālē pāṭṭu, p.80)

“...young man collapsed
 at toddy shop...”

...kallu kuṭikkap pōyi
toddy drink went
kācu pōccutati āttē...
money gone

(Thandayutham, kaḷ, p.234)

“...went to drink toddy
 lost all the penny...”





...mūccumutta
persistently
kallak kuṭikkaiyilē
toddy drink
kīlē viluntu maṇtaiyap
fall down die
pōṭṭānām...

(Thandayutham, kaḷḷut taṇṇi, p.307)

“...persistently
 drink toddy and
 laid down the life...”

The drunken labourers became so helpless that they start to abuse their loved ones as reflected in the following song.

...kallukkulla tēliruntā
toddy inside scorpion
tallippuṭṭ kuṭikkac collum
flick away drink
cōttukkulla kalliruntā
rice inside stone
poṇṭāṭṭiyai atikkac collum!
wife beat

(Thandayutham, kuṭikāraṇiṇ vīram, p.85)

“...if there is a scorpion inside toddy
 it will be flicked away and drunk
 if there is a stone in the rice
 the wife gets whacked...”

..inta cārāyatta kuticcatanāla
this arrack drink
namma kuṭumpam innakki
our family today
theruvila nikkutayyā!
street standing

(Thandayutham, kuṭi keṭukkum kuṭi, p.234)

“...arrack left our family
 to stand on street...”





The males were the direct victim of such self abuses. They felt powerless under the tyrannical living condition, as they easily exposed for physical abuses by the European planters and kanganies. With the continuing abuses and suffering under the colonisation the men felt a complete failure of their obligation as protectors and breadwinner for the family. Accompanied with deep pain and concealed anger, they manifest the feeling to violence and act upon their family member (Kingston, 2015). They had no time for communication and to share the feelings as both the women and men has to go for work. So, they had difficulty to channel the stress in a right way. The destructive character causes them to act violently.

The following quote from Yellow Horse Brave Heart, Maria (1999) authenticated the adaptation to oppressor's ways as "power through control, manipulation, lack of respect and nurturance of women, abandonment of family and responsibility" (p.4). The acts were a complete resemblance to some of the Tamil male labourers. While women had no channel of relieving their stressful conditions, they constantly became victims of abuse. They became hopeless. They had to cope with traumatic events (sexual, emotional and physical abuse) and protect the children at the same time. Based on the analysis, it was found that the depressive state was released by the women thorough singing. It was found as window of escape. This ally with the finding made by Jassal (2012) whom stated women would not respond to direct questions about their labour practices but instead sing them out freely.





4.5 Summary

The first objective of the research had discovered the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. To achieve the objective, analysis has been made on the source, period, typologies and function, characteristics and the essence of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

The second objective of this section analysed the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonization in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. The traumas as identified in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs are segregation, physical abuse, psychological abuse, economy destruction and cultural possession. Segregation discussed in terms of the displacement of the Tamils into the plantations (estates), isolation at the work field and caste isolation. Physical abuse was examined in terms of physical force that controls the labourers and physical conduct of sexual nature that harasses the women labourers. Psychological abuses was analysed in terms of the push and pull factors that contributed to the migration. Under the push factor discussion was made on the well -orchestrated migration. Under the pull factor discussion was made on gas lighting. Economical destruction analysed the exploration of economical depression in India and manipulation of economy in Malaya. The manipulation of economy in Malaya focused on the development of agriculture and the forms of manipulation faced by the Tamil labourers. Finally cultural dispossession was examined in terms of the Tamil labourer's motherhood.





The third objective of the research had evaluated the impacts of the trauma experienced by the Tamil labourers during the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in the Malaysian tamil folk songs. The impacts were categorised into physical, social, and psychological impacts. Physical impact was evaluated in terms of mortality and malnutrition. Social impacts were evaluated in terms of separation from the loved ones, rupture of family structure and loss of resources. Finally, psychological impacts were evaluated in terms of depression and maladaptive behaviours.





CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction



This chapter summarized the research that was conducted. The summary included a restatement of the research questions, the significance of the research, and the implication of the research. Recommendations for further research concluded this chapter.

5.2 Summary

The research questions for this study were: (1) What is the historical background of the Malaysian Tamil folk song? (2) What are the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil Folk





Songs? (3) How did the trauma impact the lives of the Tamil labourers as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs?

The first research question is addressed with the following finding. Themes such as the source, period, typologies and function, characteristics and essence of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs were analysed to find the information on its historical background.

- 1) The migration history of the Tamil labourers from South India to Malaya and the life of the Tamil labourers in Malaya were the two most important sources for the creation of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs.
- 2) Malaysian Tamil folk songs consisted of three periods namely songs born before the Japanese occupation (before 1941), songs born during Japanese occupation (1941-45) and songs born after the occupation till the era of independence (1945-1957)
- 3) The typologies of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs were divided into economic function, political function and social function.
- 4) The characteristics of Malaysian Tamil folk songs deemed into three parts namely folk songs which retained the originality of Tamilnadu, folk songs with few alterations based on Malaya and folk songs that completely reflects Malaya.
- 5) Essence of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs expressed loss, gain and hopes of the Tamil labourers in Malaya.

The first objective of the research is thus achieved.





The second research question is addressed with the following finding. Segregation, physical abuse, psychological abuse, economy destruction and culture dispossession were the traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation in Malaya as reflected in Malaysian Tamil folk songs.

The trauma of segregation manifested in three forms namely displacement of the Tamils into the plantations, isolation at the work field and caste isolation. The displacement of the Tamils into the plantations (estates) is attributed to the structure and the colonial systems in the plantations. Besides serving as colonial settlement, the plantation is also isolated and has restricted boundaries. In addition, the colonial system in the plantation features bureaucratically organised system, social stratification, paternalism and hegemonic kangany. Isolation at the work field compared the work nature in Tamilnadu and Malayan plantation. In Malayan plantation, the nature of the work required them to work individually. Finally, segregation also manifested itself in the form of caste isolation.

Another form of trauma as identified in the Malaysian Tamil folk song was physical trauma. Physical trauma was deemed into two parts namely physical force that controls the labourers and physical conduct of sexual nature that harasses the labourers. Physical force was exerted in three forms namely confinement, overwork and punishment. The confinement manifested itself in two forms namely recruitment and settlement. During the recruitment, the Tamil labourers were confined at emigration depot, along the sea voyage and at the immigration depot. Overwork being another form of physical force was deemed into two, namely the nature of the work





which exerts huge workload leading to physical injuries and the dangerous lurking in the work field caused by the wildlife. The Tamil labourers were also get punished. They were violently hit, slapped, kicked, beaten and shoved. Meanwhile gender division at the work field favored the planters and the Kanganies. They sexually assaulted the women labourers.

The immense physical abuses exposed the Tamil labourers to severe menace. The mass form of destruction took its toll on the mental state of the labourers. The impact on the mental state can be associated with the psychological abuse exerted on Tamil labourers during the colonisation. The traumas identified under the psychological aspect was analysed according to the push and pull factor. The well orchestrated migration acted as the push factor. It was planned to trigger the Tamil labourers agree to be recruited. The gas lighting served as the pull factor. Rosy pictures about Malaya were given to the poor labourers in which it has succeeded in attracting millions of the Tamil labourers.

The economy destruction was one of the mass traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers under the British colonisation. The focus of this section commence with the exploration of economical depression in India and manipulation of economy in Malaya. The economical depression in India was caused by the depletion of the treasury. It further intensified by the tax impose. These have paralyzed the economic function of the Tamils whom were from the peasant families and triggered them to migrate. The economic condition of the Tamils does not encounter much change in Malaya. In fact, it began to deteriorate due to the manipulation. The economy of the Tamil labourers was manipulated in three forms. They are debt bondage-peonage





system, tax payment, and wages. The debt bondage functioned to dominate the labourer relations. It was further magnified with charges on food, transport, job, and etc. The debt bondage caused the Tamil labourers to lose control over their working conditions. With more debts to be settled it became inevitable for the labourers to expatriate. Eventually the bondage trapped the labourers in a cycle of debt. Apart from the debt, the Tamils were also burdened with tax payment. The tax was imposed for irrelevant things. Analysis on the structure of the wage was deemed into two parts namely factors impacting the wages and the nature of the wages received by the Tamil labourers. 'The Great Depression' was found to impact the amount of the wage. The nature of the wage was examined into three features. The Tamil labourers were denied for a decent wage. Besides, they were also allocated for half and low wages. What economic improvement one would expect if they continuously were being robbed?



This is what exactly happened to the poor Tamil labourers when they were even denied their actual wages.

Finally, the Tamil labourers also encountered cultural trauma in the form of dispossession. The cultural dispossession took place on the Tamil labourer's motherhood. The dispossession had changed the role of the motherhood which consequently leads to major changes in social relationship.

The second objective of the research is thus achieved.





The third research question is addressed with the following finding. Physical, social, and psychology were among the identified trauma impacts as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. Physical impacts were evaluated in terms of mortality and malnutrition. The mortality was due to the appalling living, work conditions and epidemics suffered by the Tamil labourers during the British colonization. Research found that lack of access to safe water was a major perceived influence on epidemics suffered by the labourers. The findings suggest that the malnutrition was due to the loss of nutrient and famine suffered by the Tamil labourers. The loss of nutrient was due to the protein energy malnutrition, lack of fiber consumption, and carbohydrate rich foods. The intensity of the famine was projected into dreams when the poor labourers started to dream of eating delicious food. Social impact were evaluated in terms of separation from the loved ones, rupture of family structure and loss of resources. Findings suggest that the arrangements which included recruitment and employment made by the colonials to employ the Tamil labourers caused separation. Finding also revealed that poor parent-child relation, poor parenting quality and illicit affairs ruptured the family structure of the Tamil labourers during the colonisation. The Great Depression was found to be the major influence for the loss of resources among the Tamil labourers. Depression and maladaptive behaviours were found to be the psychological impact of the colonization. Feelings of restless, worthless, hopeless, helpless, spiritual-less, and rumination were the major cause of depression. Maladaptive behaviours consisting of suicidal and drunken behavior were found to be the result of depression.

The third objective of the research is thus achieved.





It should be stressed that the study has been primarily concerned with the Tamil labourers and how they incurred and affected by the trauma faced during the British colonisation. The analysis has concentrated on labourers as the folk songs resembled the life endured by the Tamil labourer community in plantation. The findings of the study are restricted to only British colonisation until the Japanese occupation. The research has addressed the verses as the evidence for the traumas since they acted as the code and theme for the research.

5.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the research derives to a conclusion that, Malaysian Tamil folk songs are the creation of the primary generation of migrant Tamil labourers. The folk songs which imply the impact of the colonisation was born from the first generation. Similarly, songs born during the Japanese occupation and the period of independence were from the first and second generation of the Tamil labourers. The documented folk songs also reveal that, the development of the songs halted after the independence. The essence of the Malaysian Tamil folk songs proves that it was used by the labourers to voice out their grief, and disappointments.

Most of the songs resemble the suffering occurred due to the physical abuses, economic destruction and segregation. Hence, the research concludes that physical trauma, economic destruction and segregation are the most significant traumas experienced by the Tamil labourers as reflected in the Malaysian Tamil folk songs. They are 62 verses that elucidated the physical abuses; 42 verses that points out





economical destruction; 30 verses that shows segregation; 14 verses that manifests cultural dispossession of motherhood and 7 verses that represents the psychological abuses. From the finding, it is known that ample of songs focused on the physical abuses. It explicitly reflects the immense of the physical abuses suffered by the Tamil labourers. Segregation, physical abuse and economic destruction are associated with the first stage of colonization. Cultural dispossession is associated with the second stage of colonization and the psychological abuse is associated with the third stage of colonization.

The trauma impact significantly affected the physique, social, and psychology of the Tamil labourers. The trauma impact are in the form of redemption, compensating for other forms of dominance such as segregation, physical and psychological violence, economic destruction and cultural possession. The forms of dominance overlapped with one another and caused traumatic impacts on the labourers. The research finds that physical, social, and psychologies of the Tamil labourers are significantly affected by the traumas. Physical impact elucidated in 43 verses; social impact reflected in 42 verses and psychological impact elucidated in 42 verses. Researcher concludes that physical abuse takes lives. Social and psychological abuse destroys a spirit. The Tamil labourers were left spiritless throughout their life due to the chronic traumas experienced during the British colonisation.





5.4 Significance of Research

Malaysian Tamil folk songs enabled the researcher to comprehend the internal conflicts experienced by the Tamil labourers in Malaya during the British colonisation. The research had also documented the historical facts found in the folk songs, thereby signifying the contribution of Malaysian Tamil folk songs in documenting the history of the Tamil labour community in Malaysia.

5.5 Implication

The facts found in the folk songs allies with the record of historians on the history of the Tamils in Malaya during the British colonisation. Hence, the study implicates that

Malaysian Tamil folk songs serve as a historical documentation of the Tamil labourers in Malaya during the British colonization.

5.6 Recommendation For Further Research

Further research on Malaysian Tamil folk songs may be done in terms of

1. Subjective and speculative (Interpretation) study.
2. Typologies studies, such as songs that portray economic, political and social functions.





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3. Japanese occupation
4. Semantics studies



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