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THE RAJ AGENT IN CEYLON

1936 - 1940

SHARADA NAYAK

The Raj Agent in Ceylon

1936 - 1940

Sharada Nayak

This world lives
because

some men
do not eat alone
not even when they get
the sweet ambrosia of the gods

they've no anger in them,
they fear evils other men fear
but never sleep over them;

give their lives for honor,
will not touch a gift of whole worlds
if tainted

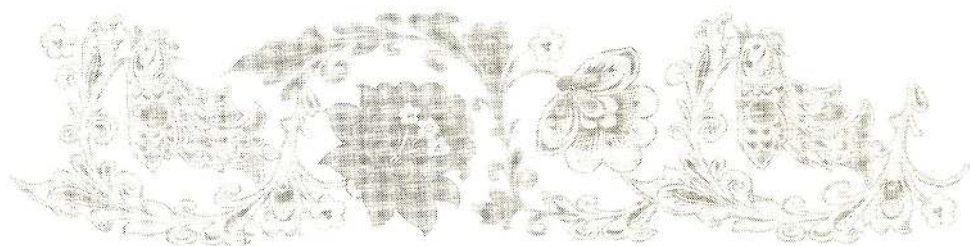
there's no faintness in their hearts
and they do not strive
for themselves

because such men are,
the world is.

A. K. Ramanujam

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Foreword

The Indian diaspora is today regarded as a national asset, which contributes handsomely not only to the overall image of the country abroad, but also to the promotion of its political and economic interests, across the world. But, problems also arise, like one witnessed in East Africa and even now in Fiji, when the Indian community is singled out for discrimination, dispossession and deprivation. While avoiding interference in the internal affairs of others, India has acted consistently to ensure that while Indian populations abroad associate themselves with the aspirations of the people of their country of domicile, they are not subject to violence, discrimination or deprivation. Even before independence, particularly from the 19th century onwards, the Indian Diaspora spread far and wide, for promoting business, as professionals like teachers, or in much larger numbers, as indentured labour.

Sharada Nayak dwells at length in this book, on the problems which had started in 1827, when Indian Tamils, primarily from Tirunelveli, Tiruchi, Madurai and Thanjavur, proceeded with the encouragement of the Government to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), to take up employment in tea, coffee and rubber plantations, being set up by British planters. These plantation workers and the businessmen and professionals from across the Palk Straits who sought domicile in Sri Lanka inevitably faced jealousies and even hostility from influential sections of the local Sinhala population. This hostility did not, however, contain strong elements of religious animosity between the predominantly Buddhist Sinhalas and the largely Hindu Indian Tamils. Moreover, these "Indian Tamils" were treated quite differently from the Tamils in the island's north and east who had lived and even ruled large tracts of the country over the centuries. Despite centuries of hostilities and tensions the Tamils in the north and east were regarded as indigenous.

As problems faced by the Indian Tamils working in the plantations grew and discrimination and exploitation against them flourished, the Government of India posted young civil servants from the Indian Civil Service (ICS) to highlight and address issues affecting the welfare and well being of the "Plantation Tamils," as they were known.

Sharada Nayak's father Mr A.V. Pai was an official of the Madras Presidency cadre of the ICS, who served as the "Agent" of the British Raj of India, in Ceylon. This book is a detailed account not only of the problems of the "Plantation Tamils" in Sri Lanka, but also of the competence, professional ethics and devotion to duty of the Indian Civil Service. It also depicts the sensitivity shown by Mr. Pai and those wielding authority in New Delhi, towards the interests of Indian labour in Ceylon, at a time when power was increasingly being devolved by the British to influential local leaders like D.S.Senanayake and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, who were later to become Prime Ministers, after the country attained independence.

"The Raj Agent in Ceylon" focuses primarily of the sterling role played by Mr. A.V. Pai between 1936 and 1940 in dealing with the growing demands from the Sinhala political leadership in the country for repatriation of large numbers of India Tamils. This was a particularly difficult task, as Mr. Pai had to tread carefully to be an effective interlocutor in securing justice for the embattled Tamils. He had to ensure that he enjoyed the confidence of not only the Tamil workers, but also the local Sinhala leadership in Ceylon. At the same time he had to maneuver deftly to ensure that his assessments of the emerging scenario, which he sent to Delhi, paved the way for an amicable settlement to what was a pressing human problem, involving the fate of thousands of Tamils.

The book contains a fascinating account of the visit to Ceylon in 1939 by Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru to personally assess the dynamics of developments in Ceylon on the growing pressures for the exit of Indian Tamils from the country. While Mr. Pai was a civil servant representing the Government of British India, he realized the immense importance of ensuring that Mr. Nehru, then an important leader of India's struggle for freedom, was properly briefed on developments in the Island, so that his talks with local Sinhala leaders were productive and set the tone for realistically and humanely addressing the immediate problems facing Indian Tamils. Moreover, Mr. Nehru's views on the role of Tamils in Ceylon and his perspectives on what the relationship between an independent India and Ceylon should be, make fascinating reading. They are relevant even today. The mutual regard that was established between Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mr. Pai following Mr. Nehru's visit to Sri Lanka led to a long term relationship of mutual regard and respect. This served India well in the years immediately after Independence, when Mr. Pai held key positions in Mr. Nehru's Government.

Reading "The Raj Agent in Ceylon" was particularly interesting for me. I was designated by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to handle issues pertaining to the fall out of the presence of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka between

1987 and 1989. Mercifully, the horror of the terrorism that engulfed Sri Lanka for three decades is now a thing of the past. But, those who read Sharada Nayak's book will realize that narrow sectarian prejudices will have to be shunned and a political settlement arrived at that recognizes the legitimate rights and aspirations of the Tamil population, in a united, democratic and pluralistic Sri Lanka. The beautiful Island Nation and its gifted people will not be able to attain their true and full potential unless this happens. Human aspirations can be fulfilled not by military victories, but by statesmanship. As Jawaharlal Nehru noted in 1939, India has a stake in the welfare and progress of the people of Sri Lanka. The lessons of history should not be forgotten. This book draws attention to some of the historical complexities in building a vibrant, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multi-religious polity in Sri Lanka.

G. Parthasarathy (I.F.S.Retd.)



Preface

Discovering my father, A. Vittal Pai

Grief has many dimensions. The death of a parent often leaves one with a sense of guilt that perhaps one did not do enough to care for him in difficult last days, not fully sensed his unspoken needs, and above all not understood the helplessness of one who lives in a dark loneliness due to blindness and physical incapacity. Trying to converse with my father in his last days, was difficult. His mind was fractured, his memories disjointed. He often mistook me for my mother who had been gone over 15 years. They had enjoyed a close bond and he had confided in her those experiences which no one else shared. He was a very private person, and it was my mother who reminisced, and talked to me about his long career in many places in India and abroad. She was the one who squirreled away trivia from London, Moscow and Kandy. Above all there were letters carefully saved in neatly-tied bundles, from a grandfather to his son, a grandfather to his daughter, grandparents to grandchildren, and a mother to her daughters-- treasure that begs to be saved and yet crumbles, reduced by time to dust.

With both parents now gone, I had to deal with closure, and let grief dissolve into an ocean of memories, walk the beach and pick up pieces of flotsam that the tide had washed ashore. The apartment where we lived had an assortment of "things" from three generations of our family. Just as I had cared for my father in his last years, my mother had nursed her father through his lone-parent years of childlike dependency. Grandfather's diaries too hold a wealth of information. My father, who was devoted to his father A. Srinivas Pai, had carefully saved letters he received from him, responses to the concerns a son had confided in his father.

After his death in 1989, in clearing out the books and papers in the apartment I came across a trunk of papers which my mother had saved from the years in Ceylon. Among them were many letters of congratulations from Indian and British friends on his being awarded the O.B.E. (Order of the British Empire) during the King's Birthday Honours 1939 in recognition of his work as the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon. There were also letters of farewell, appreciation, and invitations to farewell parties in his and his wife's honour just before they left Ceylon.

But most importantly there were a few letters in original from the correspondence between Jawaharlal Nehru and him written soon after Nehru visited Ceylon in 1939. Some of the letters and newspaper clippings alluded to in the correspondence are missing, and I have tried to retrieve them from archives but with limited success. Nevertheless the letters piqued my interest and I starting reading and learning about the "Tamil Question" from available literature. These letters were all written in a personal tone, and not on official stationery. Through all these I pieced together a portrait of my father in his years of service in Ceylon. I remembered childhood years in Kandy, but here was a part of my father's work that I did not know. I began to read.

Some time later I had a chance meeting with Professor V. Suryanarayan, then professor of South Asian Studies at the University of Madras. He has researched and written numerous articles and books on Sri Lankan issues. In the course of our conversation he asked me if I was the daughter of A.V. Pai who had been Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon. I answered that indeed, I was. He then said to me he had done much of his research on my father's papers in the National Archives. I was surprised. He talked at some length of my father's detailed and informative reports from his office in Kandy, Ceylon, to the Government of India in New Delhi. I told him that I had found some of his correspondence with Nehru which I was later able to share with the professor. He spoke of my father's humanism and empathy for the Tamil plantation labourers who were pawns in a chess game between British India and Ceylonese politicians. He wrote to me: "Your father's commitment to the cause of Indians overseas was great, greater than even that of Jawaharlal Nehru and you owe it to yourself and the country that you put down this invaluable information in writing". I owe Professor Suryanarayan a debt of gratitude for motivating me, introducing me to people in Sri Lanka who I later interviewed, and above all pointing me to the files in the archives which I avidly read.

At about the same time I had a visitor from the US, Lakshmi Crane, a woman of Indian descent from Trinidad, and wife of the late Dr. Robert Crane, Professor of History at Syracuse University. Professor Crane's work in South Asian history in general and Nehru in particular, is well known.

Lakshmi and I talked about indentured labour from India in the West Indies and her own family history, for her grandfather, who had migrated to the West Indies, was from Eastern U.P. When I mentioned my father's papers, she was immediately interested, and without giving me a chance to protest she took it upon herself to make arrangements for the two of us to visit Sri Lanka. A return to Ceylon after 70

years was a journey back in a time machine. The changes, both in the cities and in the tourist facilities around the old Buddhist monuments, were to be expected. The country is still as beautiful as I remembered it. However, when I went to the shops with Indian names, and spoke in Tamil, there was a strange silence. No one would respond in Tamil; I could only speak in English.

But for Professor Suryanarayan and Lakshmi Crane, this book would not have been written. Thank you for pushing me!

I was greatly assisted by Professor P. Sahadevan of Jawaharlal Nehru University and his graduate student, T.C. Karthikeyan who helped me access the papers in the National Archives. Dr. Krishen Kak, and Betty and Kenneth Hanson, my friends from Connecticut, read the manuscript and made invaluable suggestions. I am very grateful for their time and patience in reading it so thoroughly.

I met the Deputy Director of the Nehru Museum and Library, Dr. Balakrishnan to whom I took the papers to donate them to the Library. He too suggested that I write a book about my father's tenure in Ceylon and gave me a letter of introduction to the National Archives. At first I was overwhelmed by the extensive material available from the files of the Department of Education, Health and Lands, of British India, and particularly the correspondence and the reports of the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon. It was absorbing reading, a discovery of a man I never knew in this phase of his life and aspect of his work. The story of discrimination and the suffering of indentured labor in the former colonies is something that has been extensively documented and written about. But this cameo of my father's role is very vital for me, because it was such a significant time in the history of both countries, India and Ceylon. – 1936 -1940 – the years following the Depression, the beginning of the Second World War and the years leading up to independence for both countries.

The two Crown colonies had an uneasy relationship. Ceylon and its politicians, a British-educated elite, were aware of their dependence on Indian immigrants for the island's economy, but clearly nervous about India's dominance and nursed a continuing fear of being "taken over" by India. Gandhiji referred to this when J.R.Jayawardene asked him what Ceylon could expect from a free India. ..that they would prefer to remain a British Dominion than be... swamped by a free India. Gandhiji laughed and said "Ceylon has nothing to fear from a free India."

Nehru articulated this Sri Lankan fear but said these fears were unjustified.

A.V.Pai's deep and continuing concern for the plantation Tamils is evident from his extensive correspondence with, and annual reports to, the Department of

Education, Health and Lands. Girija Shankar Bajpai was the Secretary of the Department (he was later knighted and became a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council). Most of Pai's letters however are with G.S. Bozman, Deputy Secretary, who expressed, often strongly, his criticism of the illiberal attitude of the Ceylon Government. Pai's response was always to emphasize the need for continued dialogue. His letters indicate his many conversations with F.C.Gimson, the Labour Commissioner in Ceylon, with the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, and with the Chief Secretary of the Ceylon Government, Mr. Murphy. Among the papers I found a warm personal letter of appreciation from Governor Caldecott written to him at the end of his tenure in Ceylon. On his return to India in 1940 Pai was posted as Deputy Secretary in the Department of Education, Health and Lands in Delhi, and continued to be involved in matters concerning Overseas Indians. His association with G.S.Bozman (Secretary in the Department in 1940) continued to be warm and cordial. He corresponded with him after his return to England in 1947, until Bozman's death.

Sri Lanka and its troubled political situation have made headlines. The linguistic and ethnic divide continues to trouble the island. There is much empathy among people in India for their close neighbour in these times of unrest but there is still some pain for those who severed their connection after years of domicile. The brief and tragic intervention by Indian forces in 1987-1990, followed by the assassination of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, had strong repercussions in India.

I am grateful to former Indian Ambassador G. Parthasarathy for writing the Foreword. He not only brings his special perspective on Sri Lankan events from his experience in the Foreign Service but also the personal warmth of a friendship his family shared with the Pai family.

Writing this book is an attempt to understand a period when my father's work was outside my area of knowledge and experience, and to try to unravel the threads that connect with the present.

There is much to learn about Sri Lanka, but the years in Ceylon continue to shine in the memories of my childhood.

Sharada Nayak

Note :

Throughout this book I have referred to Sri Lanka as Ceylon and Chennai as Madras, as that is how they were called in the period which this book covers.

Quotations and extracts from official documents have not been edited; spellings are

unchanged. The official abbreviations commonly used in the documents are HM –Honourable Minister, HE – His Excellency (The Governor, or the Viceroy). DO (Demi-official letter), GOI (Government of India).

All documents cited here are from the National Archives of India. I am grateful to the Director-General Professor Mushirul Hasan and Mrs. Jaya Balakrishnan for their assistance A.V.Pai's letters, and correspondence with Nehru, are now deposited in the Nehru Memorial Library.



A.Vittal Pai – 1901 -1989

A.V. PAI – 1901 -1989

Ammembal Vittal Pai was born October 11, 1901 and spent his early years in Mangalore where he attended the Canara High School. He went to Madras for his higher education.

On graduation from Presidency College, Madras, in 1921 with a Bachelor of Arts degree, Vittal Pai proceeded to England and was enrolled in Wadham College, Oxford University. He was called to the Bar in 1925 and appeared for the Indian Civil Service competitive examination that year. He passed the examination, the year of allotment being 1925, and after training, was appointed on October 25, 1926.

On arrival in India in December 1926, he was assigned to the Madras Presidency cadre and was appointed as Assistant Collector and Magistrate– December 16, 1926, Sub-Collector and Joint Magistrate– March 27, 1927 and Under Secretary to Government, Department of Public Works.

He was posted to the districts as Sub Collector, Hosur, April 4, 1934, and in Palghat and Kumbakonam 1934 – 36.

In 1936 he was appointed Agent to the Government of India in Ceylon, where he stayed until September 1940. In 1939 he was awarded the O.B.E. in the King's Birthday Honours list.

On his return to India in 1940 he was posted in New Delhi as Additional Deputy Secretary, Education, Health and Lands, and as Deputy Secretary, Indians Overseas, in November 1941, later promoted to Officiating Secretary in the Department.

In 1944 he was posted as Deputy Secretary, later Officiating Secretary, in the Department of Commonwealth Relations, Government of India. Later that year, he was appointed Controller of Emigration and Secretary, Department of Commonwealth Relations, Government of India,

In 1945 he was awarded the C.I.E. in the King's Birthday Honours List.

In May 1947 he was appointed Officiating Secretary, Department of External Affairs, and, shortly after Independence, posted as Minister Counselor in the Indian Embassy, Moscow. (August 1947), the first Embassy of independent India, where Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit was the Ambassador.

On his return from Moscow the following year, he rejoined the Ministry of External Affairs as Secretary, and later was the first Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru.

He was Secretary, Ministry of Communications. (March 1950) under the Minister Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, and later Home Secretary, when Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant was Minister of Home Affairs (March 1953).

He was appointed Secretary to the President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad in January 1958, and retired from I.C.S., December 5, 1961.

After retirement he was the first Director of Asian Institute of Educational Planning and Administration, funded by UNESCO, (now known as NIEPA), New Delhi from 1962 – 1965.

A brief family history.

Ammemba Vittal Pai was born in Calicut, in the home of his maternal grandparents. His father Ammemba Srinivas Pai was an advocate who was educated at St. Aloysius College, Mangalore, the oldest Jesuit institution in the city. His uncle Subba Rao Pai was a lawyer, a leading citizen and philanthropist of the city, who founded the Canara Bank in 1910. Srinivas Pai was the first Manager of the bank and was responsible for the early growth of what is today one of the leading nationalized banks in India. Subba Rao Pai also founded the Canara High School in Mangalore, where Vittal Pai his brothers and cousins had their schooling.

Vittal Pai therefore grew up in a family which deeply valued education, and his father nurtured his eldest son in the best traditions of the family. His two brothers also were successful in their chosen careers; Purushotham Pai was a well known physician who practiced in Girgaum, Bombay, all his life. The youngest brother Narayan Pai followed his father's profession, practiced law in Madras, and later moved to Bangalore when the state of Karnataka was born. He retired as Chief Justice of the Karnataka High Court.

His only sister Susheela married P. Sarvotham Nayak who was Manager of the Canara Bank.

Vittal Pai married Tara, the only daughter of Dr. Kesava Pai, who was a pathologist and well known in Madras as a specialist in the treatment of tuberculosis. Dr. Kesava Pai had a long and distinguished career in research at the Pasteur Institute, Kasauli, the Haffkine Institute, Bombay, and retired as the first Indian to head the King Institute, Guindy, Madras. Vittal and Tara Pai had three daughters, Kanaka, Sharada and Shanthi, and seven grandchildren.



Chapter 1

A New Assignment

In late 1935 the Collector of Kumbakonam, a young officer of the Indian Civil Service Ammembal Vittal Pai, was asked to report to the Madras Government headquarters at Fort St. George and was told of his appointment as the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon. From Madras he went to Delhi for a meeting and briefing with Sir Girija Shanker Bajpai, then Secretary, Department of Commonwealth Relations. There was great concern about the situation in Ceylon at that time with the strained relations between the governments of the two countries over the vexed question of Tamil labour on plantations in Ceylon. But he saw it as a challenge, and it was with eagerness and excitement that he set out from Madras in April 1936 with his young wife Tara and three little daughters, the eldest was five, and the youngest a year old toddler. I was the second girl and was not quite four years old. There was a small group of relatives and friends to see the family off at Egmore railway station where they boarded the Indo-Ceylon Express with several large bags of household goods, tiffin carriers of food for the overnight journey, and rolls of bedding. The train arrived at Mandapam railway station in the morning where officials of the Health and Immigration Department of the Government of Ceylon boarded the train to check the inoculation certificates of the passengers bound for Ceylon. For the Agent's family it was an easy formality, but a long and anxious wait for the crowd of immigrant labour from south India that had gathered in the camp at Mandapam waiting to cross the sea to Ceylon. The Mandapam camp was run by the Government of Ceylon, where officials of the Immigration department checked the applications of the labourers for work papers, and the health officials got them inoculated. They obeyed the instructions of the *kanganis* who had recruited them as they waited to enter the island for work on the tea and rubber estates. From the train window the passengers could see the large sheds where the labourers, some with their families, were camped waiting for entry permission to travel to

Ceylon. The procedure under which these emigrants from India were held, and their entry papers were processed, was checked periodically by the staff of the Agency of the Government of India in Ceylon. It was much later that I learned that these groups of ragged peasants and their concerns were the reason for my father going to Ceylon; they were the reason for our adventurous journey. From Mandapam the train proceeded a short distance to cross the narrow Palk Strait over the Pamban bridge to the temple town of Rameshwaram, an important place of pilgrimage, situated on an island. The two older girls were excited as the train clacked its rhythm over the cantilevered bridge, and they could see the many small ships waiting for the bridge to raise its arms and let them through. The idea of a bridge opening up was novel and they wished they could wait and see this happen! The glass shutters were pulled down to keep out the soot, as the children pressed their noses to the window to look for the Ram Sethu (which the British geography books called Adam's Bridge). They knew the story of the Ramayana and of this bridge of stones built by Hanuman and his followers, but to actually see the place where all this happened excited their fantasy. Many of the travellers got off the train at Rameshwaram, as we traveled on to Dhanushkodi.

Sadly, all these places are now only a faint memory. Dhanushkodi was totally destroyed by the disastrous cyclone of 1964. Pilgrims who visit the temple town of Rameshwaram ten kilometres away, today make a tourist trip to the ghost town of Dhanushkodi to see the stark ruins of the once busy town. Their main interest however is the site of the Ram Sethu – the bridge which they believe is the site of Rama's crossing to Lanka to rescue Sita. The Ramayana is alive everywhere in this southern tip of India in the faith of the pilgrims who visit here. There are stories from the Epic that are related by storytellers and tourist guides. Here Rama worshipped the Shiva lingam in preparation for his battle with Ravana to rescue his wife Sita held captive in Lanka. Here he conferred with Hanuman, who undertook the mighty task of building a bridge of boulders across the ocean to Lanka, with his followers, the "monkey brigade". One such story may amuse latter-day political scientists: Having killed Ravana and rescued his wife, Rama installed Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, as king of Lanka. As Rama took leave of the new king on the seashore, Vibhishana said ruefully, "As long as we were an island the sea surrounded and protected us. Now that you have built a bridge, we are vulnerable." Rama smiled, and with his bow he struck the bridge and broke it. Hence the name Dhanushkodi - broken by the bow. The remains of the legendary bridge survive as a string of coral islands. The Ram Sethu is now in the midst of a controversy as the Government of India

plans to “break the bridge” (albeit without a bow!) to deepen and dredge the channel, destroying a part of the coral reef in order to allow passage for ships which now have to circumnavigate the island of Sri Lanka. The opposition is not only from the Hindu believers, but the environmentalists and fishermen who see this as grave threat to the coast.

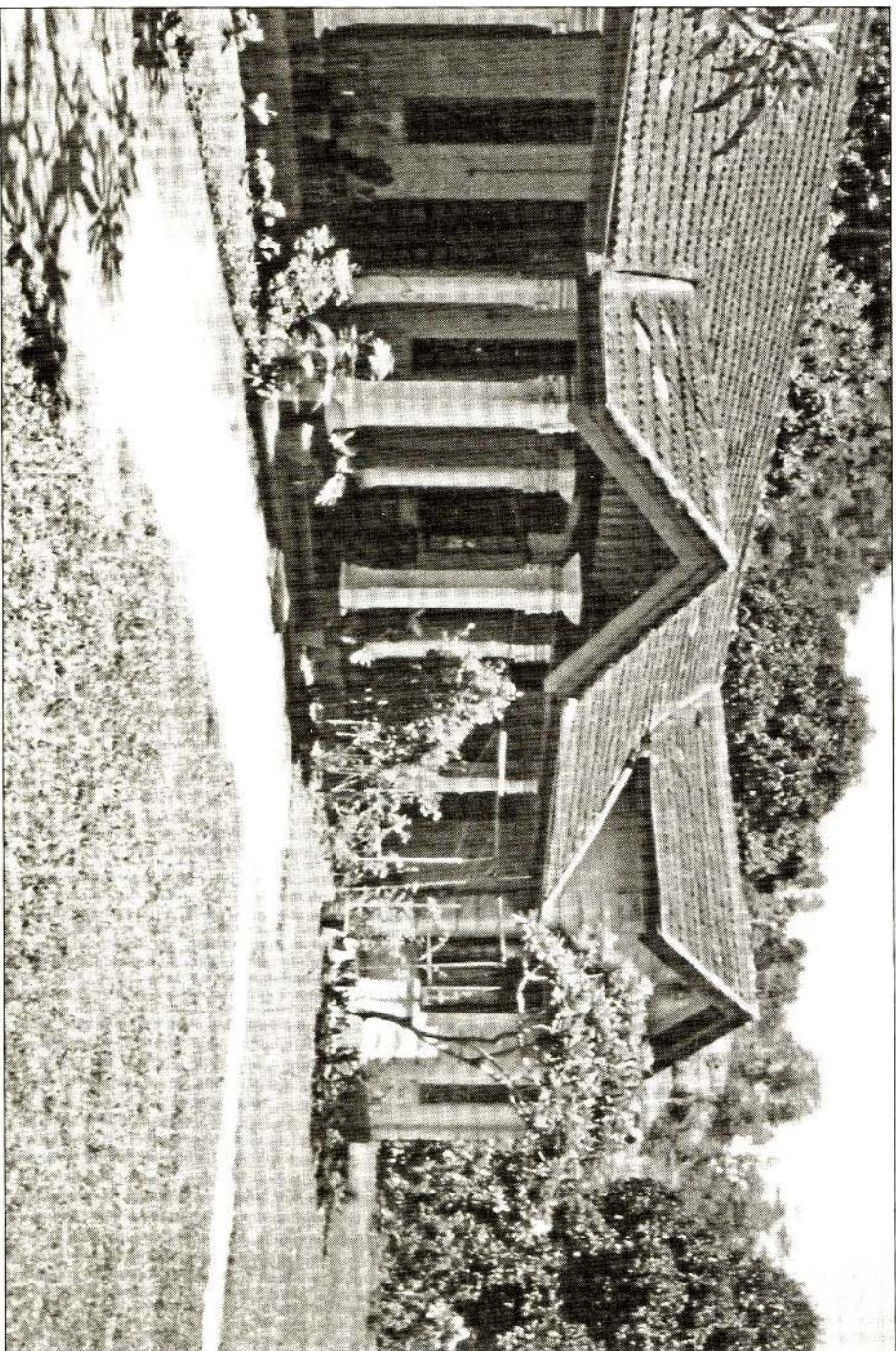
After crossing the bridge the train reached Dhanushkodi and the passengers were transferred to the ferry to the island. Crossing the Gulf of Mannar the Pai family reached Talaimannar in Ceylon by late evening and were met by personnel of the Raj Agent’s office. The luggage was unloaded on the pier in the gathering darkness, and the tired children barely got any sleep on the train they boarded to travel to Kurunegala. Here a car met them, to begin the long drive over winding roads through forested hills to reach Kandy.

Kandy Remembered

Kandy is arguably one of the most beautiful towns in Ceylon, clustered around a lake set like a small jewel among the encircling hills. Vittal Pai did not take long to find a suitable house in Ampitiya. It was a short distance from the one rented by his predecessor Mr KPS Menon, but he chose “The Orchard” for its pleasant gardens sloping down to the road, shaded by tall durian trees, with open space where the children could play and with the office of the Agent of the Government of India not far away. There were two Sinhalese peons, waiting to greet the family on arrival. Dressed in white “mundus” and shirts, each wore on the shoulder the red sash with a brass badge of the Agent of the Government of India. They were named Punchi Banda and Mudiyanchi Banda, but they were called Periya (elder) Banda and Chinna (younger) Banda respectively. Then there was Abdul Khader, from Palghat who was employed as a driver. The durian trees in the front garden had fruit resembling the familiar and popular jackfruit of South India. When the children did try to eat it, however, they found its taste not to their liking. Overripe durian fell to the ground splattering on the grass, the odour lingering in the air was not very pleasant! The Bandas however liked it and were happy to take the fruit home to their families. The next door neighbours and owners of “The Orchard” were the Jonklaas family. They were Burghers, as the settlers of Dutch-Sinhala descent were called. Vernon Jonklaas, a planter, and Mrs. Jonklaas came visiting as soon as the Pai family settled in, to offer any help their new neighbours may need. For the young Tara Pai this was the first of many friendships that made the four and half years in the island happy and memorable, despite the political problems that her husband wrestled with in his official capacity. It was Mrs Jonklaas who, when she first came to call, asked Tara the names of her children. When she was told the meaning of the

names – Kanaka, Sharada and Shanthi – she said with a broad smile “Well, you have Wealth, Learning and Peace – what more can you want in life!” Delighted, Tara never forgot that remark, as she reminded herself that she did not miss a son! Moving to Kandy presented no difficult problems for Tara; she had moved frequently within the Madras Presidency as her husband was transferred from one district to another. After his return from England, where he had passed the Indian Civil Service examination, he had been placed in the Madras Presidency cadre. Tara had joined her husband and had traveled with him in four districts, as wife of the Sub-Collector in Vellore and Hosur, and then when he was Collector in Palghat, Kumbakonam and Thanjavur. She had been brought up in Madras where her father was a doctor, Dr. Kesava Pai, a pathologist who specialised in the treatment of tuberculosis. At the end of his career he retired as the Director of the King Institute in Guindy, Madras, the first Indian to head the research institute. Dr. Pai was determined his only daughter would be educated, for it was customary at that time to get girls married before puberty, and they therefore had minimal schooling. Tara was educated at Queen Mary’s College, Madras, and had completed two years of Intermediate Arts, before she joined her husband at Vellore where he was Sub-collector. Her education and facility in English gave her confidence to assume different roles as the wife of an official in the civil service in his several postings. Tara’s three children were born in Madras between 1931 and 1935 at her parental home, and she continued to receive support from home as long as she was in South India. From her father she received instructions on the health and care of her children especially as they were going to Ceylon where malaria was endemic. The epidemic of 1934-35 had affected large areas of Ceylon and the high mortality rate especially in the estates had been widely reported. The young mother therefore had been advised to give the children quinine as a prophylactic – the only known treatment for malaria at the time. She brought with her a woman servant Kamala whose home town was Mangalore in South Kanara District. Kamala was a young widow who was looked after and trained by Tara’s mother, had taken care of the children since they were born, and had done much of the cooking and household chores. Tara was therefore fortunate to settle in the new surroundings with few housekeeping problems. She made friends quickly and the diversity of Ceylon was evident from her friends – Mrs Breckenridge, a Sinhala; Mrs Kaimal, a Malayali; Mrs Rajan, a Tamil; and Mrs Jonklaas, a Burgher. From her friends she learnt a new Chinese game called mahjong. Soon her little girls got used to the foursome gathered in the drawing room where they heard the clacking of the tiles on the mahjong table and the laughter as someone called “pung!” or “kong!”

Every morning Kamala took the two older children for a walk around the lake, a



“The Orchard”, residence of the Agent on the Government of India in Ceylon., Photograph taken in 1974

slow amble down the road, across the culvert and past the Club, where they sometimes stopped to watch a tennis game. As they neared the town there were people seated on the pavement selling fruit and vegetables. They then came to a busy street crossing and to the Queen's Hotel, the best hotel in town, with its British ambience, the porch, wide verandahs and balconies. As they walked around the shore of the lake in the direction of the Temple of the Tooth, the children got visibly excited running towards the steps leading down to the lake. Kamala could hardly control them. At the landing a woman sat selling small packets of puffed rice wrapped in cones made of newspaper scraps. Kamala bought each of the two older girls a packet and tried to grab their hands, shouting to them to be careful as they stepped down to the edge of the lake. The girls carefully tossed the rice into the water squealing with delight as scores of turtles rose to the surface to gobble the grain. This was the most memorable ritual in the morning outing that is still savoured with nostalgia. Alas, now there are no more turtles in the lake!

In May the family had their first experience of the traditional festivals of Ceylon. In Kandy, at the Temple of the Tooth – *Dalada Maligawa* – where, what is popularly believed to be Buddha's tooth, is enshrined and worshipped, – the most important festival is *Wesak*, the commemoration of *Vaishak Purnima*, the full moon when the Buddha was born, gained enlightenment, and died. The *Perehara* when the Tooth relic of the Buddha is carried on elephant back in procession, is one of the most colourful festivals on the Island. The entire family, with the children and Kamala, sat on the balcony of the Queen's Hotel watching the *Perehara* procession of ornately – decorated elephants, led by a group of important personages, the Rajas of Kandy walking with dignity as befitted their important lineage. Dancers with drums – their movements reminiscent of Kathakali, preceded the leading temple elephant carrying the holy relic in a gold casket under a canopy. As the elephant walked ponderously, attendants unrolled a cloth on the road before him, so that he never walked on the bare ground. Lamps and banners were carried by men and boys, as also large pictures of the Buddha, and bright parasols, all contributing to the kaleidoscope of colour. As the *Perehara* procession moved down the street from the *Dalada Maligawa*, the spectators were overwhelmed by the heady sound of drum beats and music, the images of the vigorous movements of the Kandyan dancers – the sounds lingering throbbingly in the air. The noise and clamour, the colour, lights and pageantry left an indelible impression on the minds of the family, and especially the children. The little girls were soon asleep and had to be carried to the car at the end of the festivities as they drove home to a late dinner.

* * * * *

While Kandy has undoubtedly grown in population and is today more crowded than I remembered it, my clearest memory is of the Temple of the Tooth where Buddha's relic is worshipped. We had visited it on more than one occasion, sometimes with guests from India, for it was the centre not only of tourism, but more often of devotion. Entering along the long entrance path one walked barefoot as a pilgrim, in silence and prayer, carrying a tray of flowers as offering. Now, the quiet contemplation ends at the entrance gate as one approaches the security barricade, where belongings are confiscated for inspection and every visitor frisked – a security precaution after a terrorist attempt to blow up the temple in recent years of unrest. An entrance fee, twice as high for non-citizens, marks the Temple now as a major tourist attraction, fortified to protect it against marauders. A sad commentary on the violence of our time, a scene replicated in so many heritage sites, in many countries.

I returned to Kandy in 2008, over seventy years after I had left as a child. The Temple of the Tooth was easily located but our home "The Orchard" was difficult to find; the main road has been widened and the lane leading up the small climb appears narrower than I remembered it. At the entrance to the lane an insignificant board with the name "The Orchard" is nailed on to a tree. Rather excited I walk up the lane, enter the gate and find to my dismay a small piece of garden, no durian trees, and only half the house, as though someone had sliced a cake exactly in half to share it equally. Obviously the property had been sold and divided among two buyers. The right half of what was once the house that Jonklaas built, has a high wall as the present owner has built a two storied building. I walk in, unable to communicate to servants; the owners are not at home. It appears to be a guest house, the entrance and the front verandah and the front room are as I remembered them. I was not permitted by the servants to walk into the building, but was content to forego further disillusionment. I was able to take half a photo, to blank out the high wall, of the half of the house that I once lived in!

* * * * *

The year 1936 ended badly for the children. The youngest child Shanthi, who was just over a year old, developed a rash on her body which resisted all soothing lotions and creams. It developed into a fearsome redness all over the body and she cried incessantly as the itch tormented her. The problem was finally diagnosed as an allergy to quinine which the children were taking on a daily basis as a preventive for malaria. After several phone calls to the doctor grandfather in Madras, the decision was made to move the children to Madras. Dr. Pai, our grandfather, came to Kandy to take us to Madras. There he summoned Sankunni Menon, an ayurvedic

practitioner, to the house, who brought his ayurvedic oils, herbal medicine and prescribed baths (in water in which *neem* leaves had been boiled .) The treatment cured the child of her affliction and she was her cheerful, chubby self again. It was decided that the children would continue staying with their maternal grandparents in Madras for their schooling, as much as for their health.. The children missed their parents and looked forward to their vacations when they visited Ceylon making the train and boat journey escorted by Kamala. Tara missed the children too, and looked forward to visits to Madras whenever her husband had official business there. Her life in Ceylon was however far from lonely, as she accompanied her husband on official occasions, and played the essential role of hostess to many of her husband's official contacts - Ceylonese politicians, planters and Indian residents. Friends and relations from India also came to visit and were welcomed as house guests. For Vittal Pai the next four years were spent in Kandy, with considerable travel to Colombo, Madras and the labour camp in Mandapam, an unusually busy tenure, when he was unable to spend any personal leave to be with his family in India. While an occasional official visit to the Madras Government offices gave him a chance to see the children, he met his parents only infrequently, as they lived in Mangalore on the west coast.

Education For Estate Labour

Vittal Pai's immediate interests after he took over as Agent and had visited many of the estates, were the education and health of the plantation labour. He was appalled by the living condition of the labourers who lived on "estate lines" - rows of shacks with little sanitation. Although planters were required to provide schools on their estates, they were far too few, inadequate, and confined to the primary level in the vernacular medium. Under the law it was the duty of the superintendent of every estate to provide for the vernacular education of the children of labourers between the ages of six and ten, to appoint competent teachers and to set apart a suitable school room. The number of registered estate schools was about 600, although the percentage of school-going children fell sharply during the Depression years. Amongst the largely non-literate labourers, there was apathy, and education was not a priority. The few interested and motivated boys who wished to study in high school and beyond faced problems in getting admission to schools in Kandy. Because of their poverty and low caste background, they suffered discrimination, and with their consequent low esteem few sought education in high school and college.

The problem of childhood education was not merely a subject of investigation, but also a matter of personal involvement and a deep interest he retained throughout

his life. In any move, his children's education was his first concern.

Soon after Vittal Pai came to Ceylon he had a visitor of Indian origin, who came to invite him to visit an institution he had founded called the Indian Students' Hostel. He was a young man, then in his twenties, called PT Rajan. He had migrated from Madras after a tragedy in his family to get away from his sorrow and to seek employment in Kandy. To quote him "This was a period of darkness in the annals of the hill country. The Tamils were then mostly coolies on estates and the line rooms in which they lived were shackles of bondage. To spot one educated man among them was like finding a needle in a haystack. There was none to guide and inspire them...to make matters worse the canker of caste and prejudice was eating into their vitals and the schools in the district were reluctant to admit their children. The fault was partly theirs because they suffered from lack of education..."

Educational facilities for the older children were unavailable and, even if the Tamil workers wished to educate their children, it was not easy to send them to Kandy, which was a fair distance from the estates, and where there was no place where they could live during their schooling. PT Rajan founded the Indian Students' Hostel, a small building where the students could stay when they attended school. Rajan's vision and sincerity impressed Pai and he supported the hostel, took his visitors from India to see the modest building, and constantly encouraged the young founder and the teachers and students in their zeal for education. Both Vittal Pai and his wife Tara took personal interest in the school and hostel, and periodically visited the students, especially at festivals like *Deepavali*, to share the festivities with them, and distribute gifts.

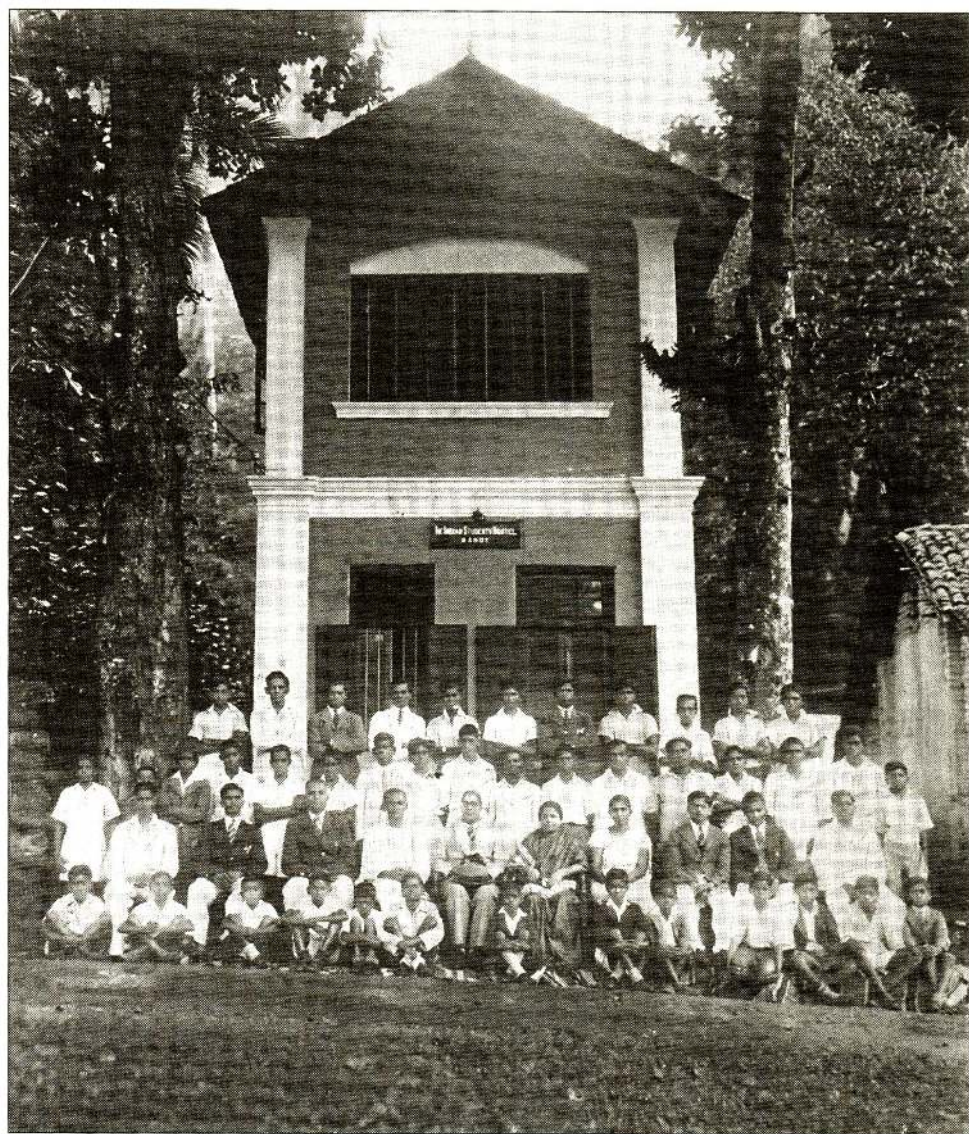
The Indian Students' Hostel was started in 1935 with nine students, and on its first anniversary Vittal and Tara Pai were the guests of honour. Rajan was appointed a teacher at Kingswood College, and later at St. Sylvester's College, Kandy, and through his efforts he was able to admit Tamil students to receive higher education at these two colleges. A small but significant change in the attitude towards the "coolies" was noticeable through the impressive performance of students from the poorest background. In 1951, at the suggestion of C Rajagopalachari, then Premier of Madras the name was changed to Ashoka Students Hostel, after the Buddhist emperor revered in Ceylon and India alike. Four more buildings were added, to expand the hostel facilities, and more and more Tamil boys from the hill country came to Kandy for an education. Rajan kept in touch with Pai for many years after Pai's return to India. In 1960 Rajan wrote to inform his friend and mentor that the school and hostel would soon be celebrating its silver jubilee. It was proposed to build a hall (auditorium) and he would be very happy if he could have a photograph of the first

Patron of the school to frame and hang in the hall. In a subsequent letter to Pai he wrote, *"At the Silver Jubilee celebration Sir CP Ramaswamy Aiyer ** delivered the key address and Mr AS Karunaratne, Proctor, unveiled the portrait of AVPai. Mrs Pushpam Rajan distributed the prizes..."*

In 2008 when I visited the Ashoka Hostel I found the auditorium now houses an elementary school. The Silver Jubilee Hall had been partitioned into classrooms, now filled with the chatter of small children. Portraits of Mr and Mrs PT Rajan and AVPai still hang on the wall.



** (Sir CP Ramaswamy Aiyer, former member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, was Dewan of Travancore State at the time).



Annual Day at the Indian Students' Hostel, Kandy. 1937 Mr. and Mrs. A.V.Pai, Guests of Honour; Mr. P.T.Rajan on Mr. Pai's right; Mrs. Pushpam Rajan on Mrs. Pai's left. Photographed with students and staff of the hostel.

Chapter 2

Plantation Labour

With the abolition of slavery in 1834, plantation owners in the British and French colonies felt the need for cheap and plentiful labour. The stories of these migrants, the landless poor who set out to seek work on sugar, tea, coffee and rubber plantations, have been extensively documented by economic historians and also described by writers of fiction. Novels about the cultivation of indigo and opium poppies in India give insights into the colonial policies of continued exploitation of Indians to meet the economic interests of British imperialism.

The demand for labour from the slave-plantation colonies started a wave of migration of the rural poor from India in the 1880s. As British goods came into the Indian market, the indigenous crafts and cottage industries, particularly textiles, virtually disappeared and there was large-scale unemployment and poverty in the rural areas. Even those who were farming their small plots of land were affected by recurrent droughts and many families sought to move out to seek a living. The offer of work in far away countries offered hope of a better life. Since the early 18th century many from the Tamil south had left to seek work in Burma, which was then a part of British India. They came as free settlers to work on agricultural land and in the harbours. Later in the 19th century Indians found work in government of Burma.

Between 1830 until 1920 the recruitment of Indian labour to British and French colonies was done under what became known as the indenture system.

The large scale rural unemployment, poverty and starvation created a situation which was readily exploited by British and French planters who no longer could use slave labour for work on their estates. They decided to adopt the indenture system which was used by South American planters who got labour from the Portuguese colony of Macao. While slavery was now considered an inhuman and abhorrent practice, the indenture system was seen as different. The labourers chose to come,

it was pointed out, and they were not coerced. They were recruited by agents, called *kanganis*, under agreed terms: to work for a fixed period of time, usually five years, during which time the employer was expected to provide fixed wages, housing, and all amenities. At the end of their period of indenture, the labour could continue to stay to work, settle on land provided for them by the Government and pursue other avenues of livelihood, or return to their homeland.

Despite the terms of indenture and employers' obligations, in reality there were many malpractices in the indenture system. In actual fact the immigrants were victims of an exploitative policy that ensured their continued indebtedness, lived in poor living conditions and inadequate health services. The benefits that plantation owners were expected to provide them were in reality not satisfactory. The recruiting agents lured them with offers of assured wages, and then gave them loans for their move and their passage expenses. These debts were recovered from their wages with interest, leaving them with little to live on, until they found themselves bonded to the *kanganis* for life.

Labourers were recruited from the south of India, and from United Provinces and Bihar, and shipped to Mauritius, the West Indies and South Africa from 1830 onwards. They were "free" labour but in reality the plantation owners treated them hardly better than their former slaves. The sugar plantations in the West Indies and British Guiana saw Indian "coolies" – those who survived the ship journey from Calcutta, in overcrowded conditions, disease and death, - deprived of the promised wages by their recruiters. The British government, and many church groups, acted on reports of the harsh treatment and inhuman condition of migrant labour and condemned the trafficking in the system. Emigration of labour was banned, but the abuses continued on plantations for some time.

Despite this, when the ban was lifted, emigrants continued to leave India to escape poverty in their villages in expectation of a better life with steady wages and believing in the promises of a five-year period of work before they returned home.

After 1900 public opinion in India, Great Britain and other countries in Europe became more and more against the system of indentured labour and called for an end to it. There were protest movements led by leaders in several countries. In South Africa, Gandhi had started his passive resistance, and he along with 2000 Indian workers was sentenced to jail.

Despite the strong feeling about the abolition of the indenture system urged by Lord Hardinge, Viceroy in India, the beginning of the World War caused a postponement of any further action.

The colonies in Guiana (now Guyana), Jamaica and Trinidad were not concerned about the move for abolition and they continued to seek more labour. They, however, faced a shortage as many were being recruited by the British military for the war in North Africa. However, protests in India became louder and there were demands for a change in the laws on emigration. By the end of the war in 1918, abolition of the indenture system was near and, seeing the writing on the wall most colonies had stopped taking Indian labour. However, one country, Fiji, tried to delay its implementation claiming that its sugar production was badly affected and some amendment in the indenture system should be considered. The Colonial Office did not take any action until, finally in 1920, the Governor of Fiji cancelled the indentures of Indian labour.

Migration to Ceylon

Tamil labourers from the districts around Madras migrated to Ceylon in the early part of the 19th century and their situation was slightly different from the indentured workers who went to work in Africa and the West Indies.

The initial recruitment of Tamil labour was for the coffee plantations which needed a high volume of labour. In the late nineteenth century, coffee plants in Ceylon were badly hit by blight and the planters then turned to tea cultivation. Labour was recruited by Indian contractors not controlled by the Indian government.

An ordinance by the Ceylon government sought to protect the Indian coolies, relating to the contracts for the hire and service of plantation labour. The Indian government accepted the system. In 1904 the Coast Agency was established for the recruitment of labour, which meant there was an agency that controlled the recruitment and there was also recruitment uncontrolled by government. In 1922 the Indian Emigration Act was passed by which the Government of India was empowered to control emigration and protect Indian interests.

Despite the attempt to control and safeguard the interests of the migrants, the situation in tea plantations in Ceylon was far from satisfactory. The migrant labour from the southern districts of Madras Presidency who went to work in the plantations in Ceylon were not indentured, as in the other British colonies and, therefore, it was often stated that they were “free” and that they chose to come for a “better life” as conditions in their villages were so bad that work on plantations was much sought after. In fact, the plantation owners were free to treat them in any manner they wished, as there was no legislation that governed them similar to that for indentured labour. Moreover, the “free” migrants had no assurance of an existence beyond their work on plantations, as there was no attempt made to assist them to settle on land or to improve their living conditions. When there was no

need for extra labour they were let go with no compensation or place to live.

However they suffered from the same exploitative methods of the *kanganis* as in other colonies and the scene at the depot in Mandapam was similar to the depots in Calcutta where the *kanganis* approached the crowds of workers waiting to be hired and transported across the strait to plantations in Ceylon. The workers lived in slave-like conditions in lines of shacks for a wage as low as half a Ceylon rupee a day.

In the depression years the wages were reduced, with the poor economic conditions cited as the reason for this measure. The wages were not increased even in 1935 and 1936, although by 1934 the planters had applied for licenses to hire more labour as prices of tea and rubber rose, even though there was not an increase in tea/rubber exports. There was however, a great increase in the inflow of labour as *kanganis* started recruiting aggressively. More than 70,000 immigrants entered Ceylon in 1934 – '35 despite high unemployment, causing political tension.

Agency of The Government of India.

With the passing of the Emigration Act, the Government of India established an Agency in Ceylon in 1923, to which were deputed members of the Indian Civil Service. This elite service (ICS) had been created by the British Parliament after the Government of India Act was passed in 1858. At first the officers were all British, educated at some of the best schools in England. After passing a competitive examination the successful candidates had to undergo a one or two year probation period at the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge, or, after 1916, the School of Oriental Studies where they studied law, including criminal law, the revenue system, Indian history and the language of the Province to which they were assigned.

My father, Vittal Pai was inducted into the service in 1924 and spent a year at Wadham college, Oxford. During his period of probation he studied Tamil under a British professor, S.G. Roberts. He used to say that his Tamil was more correct than the Tamil his wife Tara spoke so fluently – and perhaps in today's Tamilnadu he would be more at home with the official Tamil that is used in Government communication. While Tara, my mother, spoke Tamil "like a native" having been brought up in Madras, her accent and vocabulary were quite clearly "upper-class" and much more suitable for the social circles in which they moved!

The Agency of the Government of India in Ceylon was set up in 1923 and had its headquarters at Kandy. The Raj Agent, as he was known in Ceylon, was a member of the I.C.S. and had the main responsibility of dealing with issues relating to Indians in Ceylon, which in fact largely involved the Tamil labour on the tea and rubber

plantations. He sent half-yearly reports on major events affecting Indians, and an annual report by April 1 of the following calendar year. The annual reports were exhaustive, giving not only statistics but comments on the outstanding problems and complaints of the labour on plantations. The reports were edited and printed for distribution in India to the newspapers, government offices, and were available for the general public through government sales offices.

The following extract from *The Labour Monthly*, (Vol. 19, August 1937) a Left wing publication from London, gives a description of the harsh realities of the time:

“The term plantation labour refers to Indian workers imported into Ceylon by direct Government supervision under the special Immigrant Labour Ordinances.

According to the Government statistics of 1935 there are about 775,000 men, women and children who are controlled by these ordinances. They form about 17 per cent. of the whole population. They are by law treated as aliens who have no right of asylum in Ceylon except when under a contract to work in the tea and rubber plantations. It is a penal offence for them to remain in Ceylon if they are unable to find employment as immigrant labourers in registered estates.

Over 50 per cent, of these labourers were born in Ceylon and have lived there for two or three generations and have lost all connection with their homes in India. Yet the moment they are discharged from the estates they are put under arrest by the police and sent to a detention camp for what is called compulsory repatriation in India.

Ninety-five percent of the 557,000 acres of tea in Ceylon are worked by this system of labour and about 85 percent of the plantations are owned by the British. The British Co-operative Wholesale Society is one of the biggest owners. Tea forms over 60 percent of the total value of the export trade of Ceylon. Apart from the ownership of the commodity itself, British interests have the monopoly of the shipping trade and financing of the tea industry. In addition to this, about 60 percent of the rubber plantations are owned by British capital and are largely worked by Indian labour.

The employers are very efficiently organised. The Planters' Association, with the Governor as patron, controls the Government policy with regard to the employer. The European business houses in Colombo act as the agents for the proprietors in England. These business houses have the full monopoly of the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce. The Ceylon Association in London, an exclusively European body which represents the British vested interests in Ceylon, controls policy through the Colonial office in Whitehall. The European planters are a highly organised military body. The Planters' Rifle Corps are exclusively British units in the Ceylon Defence

Force. Ceylonese are excluded on racial grounds although the total cost of training and maintenance is borne by the Ceylon Government.

The labourers, on the other hand, have no organisation whatsoever. Any attempt to organise them is crushed by the employers and the whole machinery of government is invoked to prevent labourers from organising themselves.

The machinery of the Ceylon and the Indian Governments are working very effectively to supply the plantations with an unlimited supply of able-bodied men and women for the estates. The chief recruiting agent is appointed by the Ceylon Government and his headquarters are at Trichinopoly in South India, the centre for this human traffic.

He has his four assistants at Salmi (sic)** Vellore, Mandapam and Trichinopoly. Two quarantine camps are established at the Indian ports from which this human merchandise is shipped to Ceylon. The main function of the Medical officers at these camps is to select the able-bodied and their families and to reject the sick and infirm. These men and women are collected by paid agents, the Kanganis, who act on a commission basis. A money advance to defray the cost of the bare needs during the journey and liberal promises of quick reward are sufficient to entice these poverty-stricken peasants to leave their homes in search of work. Being victims of British imperialism and driven into desperation through starvation, these peasants become a ready prey to the unscrupulous Kangani.

In 1934, 140, 607 of these peasants were imported to Ceylon and in 1935, 43,018 permits were issued by the Ceylon Government for the recruitment on application by the employers' organisation. The labourers have to enter into a monthly contract of service which in practice means they are daily paid labourers who receive their wages once in four or six weeks. The labourer must give a month's notice before he leaves the estate. The breach of this contract by the labourer is a penal offence. The employer can expel a labourer from the estate without notice on payment of a month's wage. The planters have devised a very efficient system to keep the labourers in virtual slavery by the Discharge Certificate System which was introduced to replace the less efficient Tundu system. No employer who is a party to this agreement is at liberty to employ a labourer who does not produce a Discharge Certificate or comes from an estate which is not a party to this agreement. This is a convention among the planters and has received the indirect sanction of law. Perhaps the best comment on the practice is in the annual report of the European Planters' Association for 1933. It states that:

The Discharge Certificate agreement, though excellent in principle, proved to be open to abuse which could not be controlled This Agreement was undoubtedly

being made use of by the Kanganis as security against money advanced to labourers and the evils of the old advance system threatened to reappear.

Thus it will be seen that although the labourer is free from arrest for debt, and his freedom of movement was protected in 1921 when the Tundu system was abolished, he is still in bondage.

The official witness before the Royal Commission of Labour stated that "The Indian labourer is born in debt, lives in debt and dies in debt."

** Salem

Note : It was the then British Prime Minister David Lloyd George who called the ICS "the steel frame on which the government and administration of India rests." Several Indians were inducted into the service, so that by 1942 roughly half of the 1000 ICS officers were Indians. Most of the British officers left at the time of independence. By 1945 the Indians were numerically greater in number and their loyalty between the Raj and Independence was often an issue. Jawaharlal Nehru is supposed to have said derisively "we are unfortunately still afflicted in this country... (with the ICS which is) neither Indian, nor civil, nor a service."

Yet with the transfer of power, the new Prime Minister and his Cabinet were well-served, and depended on the administrative skill and undoubted commitment to the new nation by senior ICS officers, who headed the bureaucracy as Secretaries in all the Ministries. Many were deeply affected by the trauma of transfer of populations, but the civil services rose to the occasion and transferred their energies to stabilize a new India.

At Partition when many of the former ICS opted for Pakistan, a Pakistan Civil Service was born. In India the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) was created in 1948, to which were recruited educated young Indians including many who had migrated from across the border of Pakistan. They were trained on the same pattern as the ICS; most of the former British laws and administrative procedures are only now being slowly reformed to suit a changing India. Selection for the IAS is now through a competitive examination.



Chapter 3

Dealing with Diversity

In 1505 the Portuguese became the first Europeans to colonize Lanka, and they named the island Ceilao, which transliterated into English as Ceylon. They were defeated by the Dutch, who gained control of the island in 1602. Numerous Portuguese and some Dutch married local Sinhalese women and their descendants are called either Portuguese Burghers or Dutch Burghers, a distinct community many of whom became planters or, like the Anglo Indians, found employment within the colonial administration. In 1796 the British in turn supplanted the Dutch, in the course of the Napoleonic Wars. In 1815 the British defeated the Kandyan Kingdom and thus became the only European power to control the whole island. The British were also the ones who introduced the cultivation of tea to the island's central hills around Nuwara Eliya where the Planters Association had its headquarters.

The area of Ceylon is 25,331 square miles or 16,212,400 acres. In 1937, the total cultivated area was 3,484,891 acres. of which 5,739 acres was for tea cultivation, 605,152 for rubber; 1,100,000 for coconut, and 1,222,000 for other products.

Population

The total estimated population of Ceylon in 1937 was a little less than 6 million of which 900,000 were Indians. Of the Indian population 677,897 were estate labourers and their families, i.e, almost 85%. The Planters estimated that 460,000 of the laborers were men. Given that the balance consisted of women and children, it follows that most of the men were unmarried.

There were 1372 estates employing more than 5 Indian labourers, and the planters paid fees, according to the size and acreage of the estates, to the Indian Immigration Fund. This fund took care of the expenses of the Immigration Office staff at Mandapam, of repatriation of destitute labourers and other exigencies.

Diversity of Indian Groups

Although the Tamil labour on estates were the most discussed and most discriminated against, they were only two-thirds of the population of Indian origin. The island had received migrants from the Indian peninsula for centuries before the advent of the Portuguese and British colonizers. The considerable population of Indian origin was as diverse as India itself. A major settlement region was in the northern region nearest the Indian peninsula, called Jaffna, which had been settled by Tamils probably as early as 2nd century BC, and ruled by the Chola king Rajaraja in the 11th century. The Tamil speaking people living here are referred to as "Ceylon Tamils" or Jaffna Tamils – they are culturally distinct from the "Indian Tamils" who were the more recent immigrants - poor and low -caste labourers brought by the British to work on the plantations beginning in the 1830s.

It is in this northern part of Ceylon that the Tamils, long settled, educated and influential in public life voiced their demand for Tamil as a second state language, and an equal part in the governance. Faced with the counter- response of Sinhalese nationalism, there arose a strong separatist movement which later engulfed the island in a civil war. . While the rulers of South India had held sway over Jaffna, the northernmost district of the island, fishermen and coastal peoples of the Coromandel coast had often been recruited by the Kandyan Rajas. The Tamils of the southern tip of India were converted to Catholicism and many of them who had sought employment as mercenaries for the Kandyan Rajas settled in the Island, migrating from Tuticorin, the main port for travel to Ceylon. Other Catholic Tamils from Tuticorin began flowing into Ceylon starting in the mid 19th century to do business and this is evidenced by those in the island with personal names such as Motha, Paiva, Machado, Carvalho, and Devotta. Textiles, spices and other goods were their chief items of trade.

The earliest migration of traders from India were from Kerala. A large number of Kerala Muslims were engaged in commerce. There are also Muslim descendants of Arab traders from the Maldives who exported spices from Ceylon. The Muslims live largely in the coastal areas and are called "Moors;" a name used by Europeans for Muslims. Their mosque in Colombo is reminiscent of Middle Eastern and African architecture.

The Indian Ocean was for many centuries crisscrossed by the wake of ships sailing from Malabar round Cape Comorin. The Malayalee speaking people of Kerala, looked outwards at the Indian Ocean and their spirit of adventure and search for livelihood took them on journeys around the Cape that brought them to Ceylon. They were mostly engaged in the spice trade. In the eighteenth and nineteenth

centuries Ceylon welcomed traders from western India – Parsees, and Memons, a Sunni Muslim group from Kathiawar and Sindh, and Dawoodi Bohras, a Shia sect, from Gujarat.

Nattukottai Chettiars from Chettinad were moneylenders and pawnbrokers in Ceylon. This Hindu community hails from the district of Sivaganga, a district of Madras, from where they migrated to Burma and Ceylon and countries in Southeast Asia in the 19th Century. They are wealthy bankers and businessmen in India even today. In the countries where they migrated they made their fortunes generally by money lending, which made them an economic force to reckon with wherever they settled. Many Sinhalese and Tamils in Ceylon were indebted to them. Their homes and temples in Ceylon are architecturally similar to the beautiful mansions of Chettinad.

The labour contractors called *kanganis* were Mudaliars, another caste group from south India, and they recruited labour from the camps of the hundreds of jobless who waited at Mandapam. The *kanganis* not only received money from the estate owners for the labour they provided, they also extracted money from the Tamils waiting to be hired as unskilled labour on the estates. Most Tamil plantation workers were in debt to the *kanganis* – sometimes for life.

Discrimination

A large number of non-estate migrants, however, were engaged in work, mostly as daily wage earners, at the harbour in Colombo, as secretarial employees in Government, or as domestic servants in Colombo. Scavenging and other municipal services employed unskilled immigrant labour from India. They were a floating population, largely from Tamilnadu and Kerala, who came when they heard that work was available and returned to their homeland when there was none.

With so many Indian workers contributing to the economic activity, there was considerable prejudice and overt discrimination against them, particularly if they were the unskilled labour who appeared to take up any available jobs in the port city of Colombo. They were often stated, by Ceylonese politicians, as undercutting wages and depriving Sinhalese of work and repatriating large sums of money from Ceylon to their homeland. Most remittances to India were to meet family obligations and emergencies, but the notion that vast amounts of money were involved was quite untrue. In order to seek clarification on this issue of the drain of money out of Ceylon, the Madras Premier Mr. C Rajagopalachari asked the Indian Government in 1937 for figures on money sent home by Indians working in Ceylon. The request was forwarded to the Agent who worked with the main post office to get an average

figure of remittances by Indians through money orders to their families. A long time-consuming exercise resulted in a figure of about Rs.1,500,000 per year which included money sent by *kanganis*, as well as estate labour. On an average it was not more than Rs.10 per person for it was hardly likely that an estate worker would have savings to send home, when he was in deep debt to *kanganis* and shopkeepers!

Indian Associations and Political Involvement

The Indian population set up associations in Kandy and Colombo, - the Malayalee Association, the Gujarati Association and others. The Indian Mercantile Chamber of Commerce was active in the affairs of Indians domiciled in Ceylon. In 1936-1940 it was headed by a Gujarati, Mr. H.M.Desai. Gujarati traders had their own small association.

There was an Indian Association which met in Kandy on festive occasions to which Mr. and Mrs. Pai were always invited. The President at the time was PC Chawla whose family still continues to carry on the family business in Sri Lanka, although his daughter married and lives in India. The members of the Indian Association also included people in business and education, as many teachers in schools and colleges were from India. The members of the Association were largely Indians who had settled in Ceylon for decades, in professions and business, an educated elite who lived in a world apart from the margins in which the estate labour struggled for survival.

All these ethnic groups had a strong voice in the economic affairs of Ceylon, and some were nominated to the State Councils, like Diwan Bahadur IXPerera and Natesa Iyer at the time when Pai was the Raj Agent.

The Political History

With this diversity and with competing ethnic groups on a small island the British found governance a complicated business. They had to safeguard the interest of the British and European planters (the Burghers were for all practical purposes considered part of the English-speaking ruling elite), and also maintain a balance between the Ceylon Tamils, the plantation Tamils (who together comprised more than half the Tamil population), the hill country Sinhalese and the low country Sinhalese, and the small group (about 3%) of the Moors.

In 1833 the British set up an Executive Council under the Governor, which consisted of sixteen members nominated by the Governor. In addition to the Colonial Secretary, Commander of the Armed Forces, Attorney General, Auditor General, and Finance Secretary (all of whom were British and acted in an advisory capacity) there were nominated members from the major ethnic groups, who served a five-year term.

In 1927 the British Government sent the Donoughmore Commission, headed by Lord Donoughmore, a Liberal, and two members of the Labour party. They spent four months interviewing leaders of all parties and ethnic groups. The Constitution that they drew up was not readily acceptable to the Sinhalese and the Tamils alike because they proposed universal suffrage. (It was interesting that they also recommended voting rights for women at the age of 21, when this was not yet accepted in Great Britain.) The Tamils were apprehensive that universal suffrage would give the majority Sinhalese greater powers.

The Donoughmore Commission sensible to the fact that ethnic strife must be avoided, proposed a Council of State with executive committees which would not be controlled by any one group. However the first Council of State in 1917 did not include representation of the Tamil immigrant estate labour. The conservatives among the Ceylon Tamils did not support either the universal suffrage or women's right to vote.

When finally the first State Council was formed in 1931, the representation had been divided on ethnic and regional lines: the low country Sinhalese and the Kandyan Sinhalese, the Ceylon Tamils and the plantation Tamils, and the other minorities such as Muslims and Burghers. The Ceylon Tamil leadership opposed it as they wanted self-government; the Sinhalese felt there was a dominant Tamil voice, and they would have preferred a cabinet form of Government. This they achieved only in 1947 on attaining Independence. The Plantation Tamils remained the overall losers.



Chapter 4

The Agent Reports

AVPai was able to establish many links with groups of Indians, European estate managers, British officials, and the Sinhalese intelligentsia, but despite that his office was inevitably at the centre of many political controversies that erupted in 1937 and 1938. His contacts were invaluable in helping him see the issues from many perspectives, and his cordial relations with them made it possible to call on them for discussion and analysis. Dewan Bahadur IXPereira and Mr. Natesa Iyer were the two nominated members on the State Council representing the Indian population. Mr. Pereira in particular was helpful and available for discussion and counsel. A friend who kept in close touch was H.M.Desai, President of the Indian Mercantile Association.

The year 1937 found the Agent extraordinarily busy. His office was invariably crowded with labourers, anxious to have him hear their petitions. Sitting on their haunches, on the floor in the small front room, or on the strip of verandah outside were these huddled immigrants whom he found difficult to face every morning for he could not remain untouched by their anxious expressions as they rose respectfully, en masse, the moment his car turned into the driveway. By the time he arrived his assistants, Narayana Iyer and Gopala Menon, and often his secretary Raghuraman had already spoken to most of them, separated those who wanted the routine endorsements on their work permits and immigration papers, from those who wished to be heard, and their petitions accepted.

Two matters that took up considerable time and travel in 1937 and 1938 were the contemplated eviction of the Kandapola cultivators and the debate on the Village Communities Ordinance. These issues caused considerable agitation among Tamil labour and took Pai out of Kandy for discussions with planters, Ceylon Government officials, and state council representatives.

In 1937 Pai had visited 49 estates, and his assistant had visited 47, usually to

hear complaints alleging irregularities or, at the request of the superintendent, to settle disputes. No systematic inspection was possible for the Agent when estates employing 5 or more Indian labourers were 1372 in number.

The total population of Ceylon was approximately 6 million of which Indians were 8 lakhs. In an estate population of 677,897, there were 462,522 workers, and non-workers (children and dependents) were 215,375.

The year 1937 was one of general economic improvement both in plantations and in the general trade of the Island. The tea export quota was increased by 5% with effect from April 1, 1937. The demand for labour and availability of work also increased. By May a shortage of labour was reported and although attempts were made to meet requirements by employing Sinhalese, the demand could not be adequately met. Estates made greater attempts to get "old-to-Ceylon" labourers from India. From July to October there was a heavy influx of non-recruited labour from India, for estates felt that without additional labour they would not be able to meet the export quota and run the risk of the quota being reduced in future assessments, and consequent loss of revenue.

In 1937 the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott, under considerable pressure from the Board of Ministers, especially SWRD Bandaranaike, Minister of Local Government, appointed a one-man Immigration Commission to go into the whole question of immigrant labour on the island. The Commissioner Sir Edward Jackson arrived early in the year and began interviews with all stakeholders and officials concerned with immigration. The Agent A.V.Pai was one of the persons he interviewed. Preparing for, and giving evidence before the Immigration Commissioner, as also the routine work dealing with matters involving estate labour, kept the Agent constantly on the move.

The Executive Commission on Labour in August 1937 decided to permit the recruitment of 5000 new labourers from India and this was endorsed by the State Council. The Government of India told Ceylon they would not feel justified in permitting the reopening of recruitment to Ceylon unless they received satisfactory assurances on two outstanding questions: (1) restoration of wages in mid- and low-country estates to the levels which prevailed between 1931 and 1932, and (2) grant of franchise for Village Committees to estate labour settled in Ceylon. These two questions dominated the Government of India's concern about the status of the estate labour from India. No settlement was reached and no licences were issued for recruitment.

The wages of the estate labour, which were fixed according to the issue price of rice, had been cut in 1931 when the price of rice fell from Rs.6/80 to Rs. 4/60 a bushel. The wages were further cut in Feb 1932 in the wake of the widespread depression.

The daily wage for up country estates was 49 cents for men, 37 cents for women and 29 cents for children, which was lower than the wages in 1929.

The Agent wrote in his annual report for 1937, dated January 1938 :

“Outside the estates however there was less employment available for Indians. With the willingness and availability of increasing numbers of Ceylonese on account of economic pressures, to take up work for which Indians were hitherto in demand, there will naturally be less scope for employment for any newcomers from India, especially because Ceylon appears to have adopted a policy of giving preference to Ceylonese over others for all branches of public service and public works for which Ceylonese can be found; it is not however clear whether it has been provided that in the application of this policy Indians permanently resident or domiciled in Ceylon should be treated as “Ceylonese.”

Not since the days of the proposals of franchise under the Donoughmore Commission scheme for reform of the Ceylonese Constitution have the Indians and their position and status in Ceylon come so much in the arena of public discussion as in 1937. When the year began, the Commission on Immigration was sitting and recording evidence. As Indians form the bulk of “immigrants” in Ceylon, a good deal of criticism informed and uninformed came to be leveled against their presence in the Island. With the publication of the Draft Village Communities (Amending) Ordinance in March and the passage of it through the State Council and its Standing Committee during the remaining months of the year, the question of Village Communities franchise for Indian estate labourers gave occasion for almost continuous and occasionally acrimonious discussions on the subject in the press and on the platform. Incidentally, the case of the contemplated eviction of certain Indian cultivators on Crown land at Kandapola helped to add to the discussion on the status of Indians long resident in the island who aspire to settle on land.

In September the decision of the State Council to reopen recruitment of labour from India for Ceylon estates brought the Indian labourer further into the limelight. The disinclination of India to send labourers out of their home country without some assurance of their future status ... gave some food for thought for those who profess to be scared by the flow of India’s “surplus” labour into Ceylon, and for those who consider them desirable as workers but unwelcome as potential settlers and voters....

The majority of the Select Committee who sat to consider the report of the Special Officer in charge of the last State Council elections felt that the time was most inopportune to affect any change in the conditions of the Indian franchise.... There was a great deal of discussion on the working of the present Constitution and whether any and what changes are called for, including the question of franchise.

A year of discussion, debate and controversy, 1937 has been singularly devoid of results. Not one of the major or minor questions concerning Indians has reached a solution during the year. When the year closed, the Immigration Commission Report had not been published, the Village Communities Ordinance was reserved for the consideration of His Majesty's advisers, and the recruitment of Indian labour for Ceylon's estates, continued to be held up."

By 1938 however the dispute had become acrimonious, the dialogue between the Ceylon Government and India more heated and the correspondence between the Agent and the Department in New Delhi more voluminous to which the Madras Legislative Assembly members added their anxious queries on the "Tamil question" all of which were referred by the Department in New Delhi to the Agent for response.

Village Communities Ordinance

The Village Communities Ordinance was a contentious issue for both governments in 1937, as the Ceylon Government refused to enfranchise Indian estate labour under this Ordinance. As a result the Indian Government refused to permit the recruitment of labour until two issues, (1) that of the rights of franchise in village communities and (2) the issue of revision of wages for the labour were first addressed by the Ceylon Government.

In September 1937 the demand from planters for extra labour from India became insistent. Their requirements were estimated at 20,000, but the Government of Ceylon decided to permit only 5000. The Agent kept the Government of India informed of the developments and, acting under their instructions, when recruiting licences were sent to him for countersignature he requested the Ceylon Government to approach the Government of India directly. This was done and the Government of India asked that (a) some revision of wages be promised and (b) Indian estate labourers be accorded the vote for Village Committees. The Ceylon Government while not promising any specific revision of wages, said the matter was being undertaken by the Wages Board. The Government of India, therefore, did not press this point further. No assurance however was forthcoming regarding the franchise for Village Committees and the Government of India, therefore, were unable to agree to further recruitment. These village committees, very much like the village panchayats in India at the time, had jurisdiction over a number of comparatively minor aspects of village life – such as grazing grounds and playgrounds, regulation of sales of local products, location of temples and shrines and similar matters of interest to the villagers. In the original Village Communities Ordinance, estate labour, Burghers and Europeans on plantations were not included in the electorates nor did they contribute to the

village funds. The draft of the Village Communities Amendment Ordinance was published in March 1937. The object of the Amendment to the Ordinance was to extend the franchise to Europeans and Burghers but to exclude the Indian estate labour on the grounds that they derive little benefit from the activities of the village.

There was considerable debate as agitated Members of the Madras Legislative Assembly raised the issue and asked for reports from the Agent of the Government of India.

The Agent met the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott On November 3, 1938, and wrote to his superiors in Delhi:

“H.E. (the Governor) remarked that... he was surprised that GOI and its officers would be prepared to tax the Indian labourer irrespective of the fact whether he gets material benefit or not. I tried to explain our position saying that it was mainly the question of status of Indians in Ceylon and the GOI had to take into account Indian public opinion both in India and Ceylon. I also stated that if Indian labourers were to be brought within the jurisdiction of village committees it was not unfair that they should ask for a voice in their elections. I added that if it was stated that the estates had no interest in the villages the contrary would also hold good that the villages can have no interest in estates and therefore logically it may be asked that estates should be excluded from village areas.

H.E. retorted that the estates were included only for the purpose of taxation, and that the question of whether they should or should not be taxed was entirely an internal matter in which India had no voice and all that India could ask for was that racial discrimination should be removed which has been done by means of the amendment suggested by him personally...”

Confidential. D.O. Letter from AVPaI dated December 5, 1938

“The change in the attitude of the European members of the State Council is disappointing. Even now they aver that they are not at all satisfied with the amendment of Section 12 and would prefer that either the estates should be excluded altogether or that all labourers should be enfranchised. But evidently they do not wish to displease the Governor and do not think it good policy to go counter to a proposal which, they were informed, was sponsored by the governor and supported by the Secretary of State. Another consideration that weighed with them in voting for the amendment seems to be.... that they have received a semi-official promise that the levy of land tax will be permitted only in the case of comparatively few estates which are shown to derive some benefits from the village amenities....

I understand that what they mean to do is to see whether estates will be mulcted in large sums in the shape of land tax and whether they would secure any effective

voice in the village communities by the success of any members of their staff in elections to the village Committees.

---- the exclusion of Sinhalese labourers from the village vote provides them with an argument in case they should be asked by the Minister why the number of Sinhalese labourers on estates is not increasing as much as he would like to see.... But this I believe is merely a dialectical point..

In my opinion the main consideration that persuaded the Europeans to vote in favour of the amendment was the desire not to displease the Governor and to take a "realistic" attitude towards what was practically a fait accompli.

I am afraid that we still have not heard the last of the Village Communities Ordinance... There is also the statement of Mr. S.W.R.D. Bandarnaike, Minister for Local administration, in his speech on 1st Sept. 1938 (vide page 3348 of Hansard dated 21st Sept. 1938) that the possibility of amendment to the Village Communities Ordinance is one of the cards they wish to play at the trade negotiations with the Government of India."

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Report from the Ceylon Times December 3, 1938

"ROYAL ASSENT NIPS INDIAN PROTEST

Royal Assent has just been given to the Village Communities Amended Ordinance which excludes all labourers living in houses or buildings provided by estates, from the right of exercising the franchise in future village committee election.

There was considerable opposition to the amended Village Communities Bill when it was introduced in the State Council in September last. Dewan Bahadur IX Pereira (nominated member) representing Indian interests, made a vehement protest and said although discrimination against the Indian labourer has been removed by the amending Bill yet the original intention to shut him out was maintained.

Compromise

In the original Village Communities Ordinance which was passed by the State Council in December last, provision was made to exclude from the vote only the Indian labourer.

The Bill was reserved for the Secretary of State's approval as it was felt there was a definite discrimination made against a certain section of the population by name. SWRD Bandaranaike, Minister of Local Administration, discussed the matter with the Governor and His Excellency suggested that the difficulty might be removed by excluding all estate labourers – not only Indian labourers – from the franchise.

The amendment was accepted by a large majority in the State Council. Mr. IX Pereira and Mr. Natesa Iyer were prominent members of the Opposition. The amended Ordinance will be proclaimed shortly.”

* * * * *

The Kandapola Tamils

The issue of the Kandapola Tamils, which also erupted in 1937, is an example of how plantation workers who after several years of working on tea estates attempted to settle down in what was now their homeland. There were sudden orders to evict them which became a major issue especially in the Madras Assembly and a cause of serious concern for the Raj Agent.

It is said that in early 1937 the then Minister for Agriculture DS Senanayake went to Nuwara Eliya for a golf tournament. During his visit he saw the area of Kandapola where, when he heard that a group of Tamils were farming on plots of land, he immediately ordered their eviction. The land in question had been leased to these families about 30 years earlier by the adjoining tea estate.

About 40 acres of land belonging to the Portswood tea estate were marshy and unfit for tea cultivation. Having no use for it, the estate leased it to some of the estate labourers almost 30 years earlier. The labourers improved the land and started growing vegetables. They found this very lucrative as they were able to market their produce in nearby Nuwara Eliya. They gave up estate work and made vegetable growing their main source of income. In 1929 the estate wanted to take back the land for tea cultivation. The lessees appealed to the local authorities and finally in 1935 the Ceylon Government acquired the land and gave the tea estate alternative uncultivated land as compensation. The Government was now collecting the annual lease from the cultivators.

In 1937 DS Senanayake the Minister of Agriculture served eviction notice on the 34 Indian families who were cultivating the land. They were given orders of eviction to quit by December 31, 1937. The Minister cited the Land Development Ordinance on the grounds that this was Crown Land and was acquired for the purpose of settling Sinhalese middle class. He publicly stated that he proposed to evict non-Sinhalese who did not possess a “domicile of origin.” The notice stated that the land was required for “public purpose” namely the improvement of living conditions. Under the Ordinance Crown lands can be assigned for various purposes, and the improvement of living conditions cannot be excluded. So in fact the Minister was adhering to the letter of the law. However, the fact that he sought to take away from the Indian settlers the land they were cultivating for decades and give it to the Ceylonese naturally caused resentment.

The Agent made several trips between Kandy, Nuwara Eliya and Colombo, meeting with the Minister, planters in the area, and listening to the grievances of the settlers. Each cultivator of the plots of land was interviewed to get details of the status, length of stay, and the names of the original lessee. Many had been there for two or three generations. There were however some who were cultivating land leased by "absentee farmers" - that is, those cultivators who were on land leased by others.

In September 1937 the Nuwara Eliya Planters' Association met and unanimously protested against the action of the government in ordering eviction notices served on all Indians leasing Crown lands for vegetable cultivation in the Kandapola area because that appeared to be one of racial discrimination.

In January 1938 the Agent AVPai met Sir Andrew Caldecott, Governor of Ceylon at the imposing Government House.

The Governor listened to Pai's explanation of the situation and the details of his personal survey of the 34 Tamil families in Kandapola and their long tenure as lessees cultivating the land, the injustice of the eviction order in singling them out for this eviction. Pai reported in his letter to the Government of India:

"His Excellency thought the procedure I had adopted was right but that he as a constitutional governor could not interfere until I had a final reply from the Minister of Agriculture."

The Government of India reported the matter in the Madras Assembly "The leases being annual, Ceylon Government has full power to take possession without compensation. The action of the Minister therefore was probably within the law. The fact however that it is sought to take away from the Indian settlers the land they had cultivated, and give it to the Ceylonese naturally caused much resentment, and the Agent took up the matter with the Ceylon Government. The Government of India has received information that the Ceylon authorities are now considering the eviction of only 12 out of the 34 lessees on the ground they are non-resident and not those who cultivate the land themselves. The Agent has examined and confirmed this to be not the case of 4 of them. The cases of the remaining eight are still under discussion with the Govt. of Ceylon".

The matter was finally settled in May 1938 when all but eight cultivators were permitted to stay.



Chapter 5

The Immigration Commission

The strident anti-Indian sentiments expressed in every aspect of the Indian immigrant's presence in Ceylon – whether on the plantations, or on non-estate employment, dominates the statements of the Ceylonese politicians reported in the press, and the lengthy correspondence between the Agent and his superiors in Delhi at the Department of Health and Lands. Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai was the Secretary, and his Deputy Secretary GSBozman were the main commentators. Sir Jagdish Prasad was the Member of the Executive Council and in overall charge of the colonial matters in the department. However, the Tamil labour situation continued to agitate the Madras Legislative Assembly, where C Rajagopalachari was the Premier and members like S Satyamurti, Avinashalingam Chettiar and Prof. NG Ranga raised questions which in his replies, Bajpai referred to the Agent for answer.

The Governor of Ceylon appointed a one-man Immigration Commission in 1937 to look into the much debated question of migrant labour in Ceylon. The Commissioner Sir Edward Jackson spent five months in Ceylon and met several parties including all stake holders, planters, state officials, and the Agent of the Government of India. Pai was very involved and busy with meetings as indicated by his father's concern that he expressed in his letters to his son.

The findings of the Commission and the report were anxiously awaited, with heightened interest especially among various political parties and groups in Ceylon. There was a flurry of correspondence between the office of the Agent of the Government of India in Ceylon and the Department of Education, Health and Lands in New Delhi. From April 1937 when Sir Edward Jackson returned to England there were frequent requests from New Delhi asking for advance copies of the report and enquiries on whether the Jackson Report had been submitted to the Government of Ceylon. There was considerable delay however, as Sir Edward

submitted part of the report before he was sent by the British Government to Malta as Legal Adviser, and the final parts of the Report with his recommendations, were sent later. The Immigration Commission Report was finally published in April 1938.

The main conclusions and answers in the terms of reference were reported by the Agent in his half yearly report that year, which summarized them :

1. In all fields of employment in which Indians customarily occupy themselves, the immigrant comes when work is available, and returns home when there is not. This is a broad truth and accepted in the absence of accurate statistics. As long as Ceylon needs immigrant workers and as long as these are available from India the rise and fall of immigration will follow this rule. This will change only when there are Ceylonese who are employable in these fields. The immigration from India is attuned to conditions in the Island.
2. The immigrant workers make possible the economic advance which would not have taken place without them, and the permanent population of the Island benefits and shares in this. There is no evidence to show that there is an undercutting in wages, nor is this a factor in influencing employment.
3. The existing control of immigration of estate workers is adequate to maintain the flow of the number of migrants on plantations.
4. In the case of non-migrant workers, unless there is sufficient indigenous labour able to take up work so far done by immigrants, any attempt to restrict their number would adversely affect the economic prosperity of the island. Any restriction through quotas, or compulsory recruitment of Ceylonese through a percentage system without sufficient proof of the availability of Ceylonese labour would adversely affect the sources of employment.
5. The main problem is how to enable the Ceylonese worker do the work which so far the immigrant has made his own.

The Commissioner concludes by recommending no restriction of immigrant workers, and advising the promotion of Ceylonese by means of employment bureaus, training schools for domestic servants, cooperative labour societies and similar initiatives.

The Report of the Immigration Commission was received with a great deal of resentment by Sinhalese politicians who wanted to reject it and ignore its findings and recommendations. The Commission's report while satisfying the Indian opinion clearly did not meet the expectations of the Sinhalese.

Soon thereafter the Executive Committee of Labour passed a resolution to the effect that further immigration of non-Ceylonese should be prohibited, exceptions being non-Ceylonese who have made the island their permanent home, visitors and tourists. This did not seem to include estate labour, and "non-Ceylonese" clearly meant Indians and not persons from other countries such as Malaya. And it was also inconsistent with the fact that the Government of India had already refused recruitment of estate labour until the Village Communities Ordinance has agreed to franchise of estate labour and the Minimum Wage had been restored to the pre-Depression years (1932) level.

The shrill anti-Indian pronouncements rose to a crescendo. The *Sinhala Maha Sabha* met on May 21, 1938 when SWRD Bandaranaike, Minister for Local Administration moved the motion that "The Sabha requests the State Council to take immediate steps for the restriction of immigration."

In his presidential address to the Sabha he referred to the economic stranglehold that Indians are gaining in Ceylon. "The trade both in our towns and villages is controlled by Indians....the secured and unsecured debts of individuals amounting to the colossal sum of two thousand million rupees .. most of the creditors are Indians."

HW Amarasuriya, a planter politician, and leader of the Sinhalese Merchants' Chamber, took up the issue of non-estate immigrants for Indians were a sizeable chunk among the employees in the Railways, PWD and the municipalities, as also harbor and dock workers. They were largely unskilled labour. Amarasuriya described the Indian trader as a "real menace" to the wellbeing of the Ceylonese. He said these Indian workers brought diseases like VD and plague, for 10 or 20 of them would get together and one woman amongst them, because the ratio among them was one woman to seven men.

When they objected to non-Ceylonese immigrants they meant only Indians, and clearly their ire was directed at all Indian other than estate labour as the Tamils on the plantations could not be easily replaced by Sinhalese and any move against them would have serious consequences on the plantation industry.

The Board of Ministers proposed drastic measures to control immigration counter to the recommendations of the Immigration Commission. While awaiting the statement of the Ceylon Government, the Agent was able to privately get the information from the nominated Indian member of the State Council, IX Pereira. He informed his government that the measures contemplated by the Board of Ministers were more drastic than existed in any of the other Dominions, and that the whole scheme was designed to restrict immigration specifically of all Indians

other than estate labor. "This is clearly opposed to the 'open door' policy in respect of Colonies accepted by His Majesty's Government..." he wrote.

In his confidential letter of November 10, 1938, Pai outlined the proposals of the Board of Ministers which they had sent to the Minister of Labour, adding "I will let you know in due course what action the Executive Committee decide to take..."

The Board of Ministers asked the Executive Committee of Ministry of Labour to consider the following:

- 1) That the conditions regulating the landing of persons in Ceylon be revised.
- 2) That no person be allowed to remain in Ceylon for more than 6 months, unless
 - a) He is not engaged in any business or employment, or
 - b) If he is engaged in any business he is possessed of substantial capital, or
 - c) If he is engaged in any profession or employment, a permit will not be granted if it is considered that a Ceylonese is available who could be employed efficiently in his place.
- 3) That every immigrant should have a passport or identity card and should present himself to the proper authority as and when necessary.
- 4) That quotas of Ceylonese employees be imposed in the case of all businesses in Ceylon employing labour, other than estates.

The file notes on the Agent's letters, by the different officers at the Department of Education, Health and Lands, in response to these developments are interesting and reveal their mindset.

"We shall have to watch developments. We cannot accept the position that we shall supply Ceylon with plantation labour only. – (Sir) Jagdish Prasad.

The acceptance of the proposals of the Board of Ministers is bound to result in hardship for the non-estate Indians in Ceylon, particularly Indian traders of small means and Indians in the various professions...Before we decide on the line of action, if any, to be taken by us, the further communication premised by the Agent may be awaited .. – R.S.Mani

Hitler seems to have come to Colombo! -- G.S.Bozman

I am afraid we can take no action until the Ministers' intentions come to our notice in a regular manner.— (Sir)G.S.Bajpai

Our Agent should be asked to keep us informed of the developments. I anticipate

a big tussle with the Ceylon Government over this question of immigration of Indians. With the development of political particularism in Ceylon and in Burma, Indians are going to have difficult time in both countries. We shall have to see that their interests are properly safe guarded. – (Sir) Jagdish Prasad”

It was suggested that the immigration question should be discussed at the time of the trade talks between the two countries. The conference which was to be held in August was proposed at the initiative of the Ceylon Board of Ministers. The Indian official brief was to be on the two main questions: the recent proposals to restrict Indian immigration, and the administrative restrictions on the employment of Indians. The Board of Ministers however sent their own memorandum to London listing their interpretation of franchise for Indians which were clearly unacceptable to the Indian Government.

In March 1939 the Ceylon Government put into effect the proposals they had discussed after rejecting the Jackson report. Indians employed in Government jobs were discharged; all those who had five years of service were given a month's notice to leave, with the offer of free tickets to India and one month's bonus. Those who had more than five but less than ten years of service were offered “voluntary retirement” with the threat that they would not receive the bonus if they did not resign voluntarily.

The number of Indians employed in Ceylon Government service was less than 20%,- a majority of them were daily wage earners such as dockworkers and labourers in Railways and Public Works department. The total number of non-Ceylonese employed in Government was less than 7000, and if, as they claimed this measure was to solve unemployment among Ceylonese, the number was so small that it could have little effect on the problem. The move to sack 800 daily-wage earners was clearly more political than economic. It however brought the Indo-Ceylon relations to a new low. The Governor and the Colonial Office did not see this as a serious move as these were low paid, unskilled labour, and they clearly differentiated between them and other Indians, either plantation labour or employees in other spheres of private commercial interests.

The officials at Department of in Education Health and Lands who were preparing for the Trade negotiations discussed retaliatory measures. In a long note Bozman suggested that the Government of India take a hard line, and cut down on imports of Ceylon's coconut products, one of the Island's main export items. With the onset of war in Europe Ceylon had lost its market for oil, oil seeds and coconut products such as coir.

However, the furor in India was in all sections, bureaucrats in the government,

politicians and the public, especially in south India from where most of the immigrants originated. The fact that the Government of India was not consulted or informed despite several communications to the Ceylon Government is noted in several of the files. The proposed Indo-Ceylon trade negotiations were cancelled. The Congress Working Committee proposed to send Mrs. Sarojini Naidu to Ceylon. Gandhiji was distressed that Indo-Ceylon relations had come to this sad impasse and persuaded Jawaharlal Nehru to go, and the Ceylon Government was informed of this proposal. The politicians in Ceylon were not too happy, but the trip planned for July 1939 was officially welcomed.



Chapter 6

Nehru's Visit to Ceylon

Jawaharlal Nehru accompanied by his sister Krishna Hutheesing arrived in Colombo by air on July 15, 1939. During his stay in the city he met the Ministers in the Government and groups of Indian workers and businessmen. He had a meeting with a committee of the Ceylon National Congress presided over by Sir Baron Jayatilake.

Pandit Nehru also addressed a meeting of the Indian Mercantile Chamber which was presided over by HM Desai. He first spoke in Hindi and then in English. He reminded them that their interests were in the progress and economic interest of Ceylon where they had settled and they should not be seen to be exploitative. Their loyalty should be to Ceylon and not in special privileges or political gain as Indians.

On July 21 Pandit Nehru and Mrs. Hutheesing left by car for Kandy accompanied by the Agent Pai and drove directly to the Agent's residence where they stayed as guests of the Mr. and Mrs. Pai. In the afternoon there was a public reception where the distinguished visitors were received by the Mayor, Sir Cudah Ratwatte, at the Ratwatte Pavilion. The Raj Agent presented the other members of the reception committee who garlanded them. Nehru's visit to Kandy was a crowded programme when he met groups of Indians resident in Kandy, members of various Indian associations and a group of planters. On Sunday he spent a quiet morning at the Peradeniya Botanical gardens, traveled further upcountry and visited a tea factory and met estate labourers at a tea estate. He met a delegation of the Sinhalese Merchants Association led by Amarasurya where an address was read out in Sinhala following which Nehru spoke for about an hour. He spoke of his earlier visit eight years ago and now, on his second visit he found unemployment and distress. But, he pointed out, this was largely due to economic conditions in the world. Although he had come because of the unhappy decision of the dismissal of some Indian workers, the issues were fundamental to India-Ceylon relations. India was concerned about the dignity of the poor peasant who migrated in search of

a livelihood, and to any injury that may be done to him. There were two kinds of Indians who came to Ceylon, those who had business interests, had lived several years in Ceylon and made the island their home. They cherished aspects of Indian culture which was their heritage, but in all respects their commitment and loyalty was to Ceylon. There were also the migrant labour who came when work was available and returned home to India. This was possible because both countries were part of the British Empire and there were no restrictions on their movement.

He met members of the Ceylon Indian Congress and listened to their concern about the citizenship and rights of Indians in Ceylon.

When Nehru returned to Colombo he met the Ministers again. Nehru pointed out that Indian labour had contributed to the wealth of Ceylon, but Sir John Kotelawala, then a member of the Senate (and later Ceylon's third Prime Minister) said, "What is the net result of the wealth produced? You have driven the people out of this country who occupied those lands, away from the land itself." The fact that the lands had been taken away from the local farmers by the Dutch and British colonists, who brought in Indian labour to develop plantations, was deliberately ignored and the Indians accused of usurping Sinhalese lands.

Nehru was interviewed by Justin Kotelawala, brother of Sir John Kotelawala, who was Director of the Ceylon Insurance Company, an influential businessman and a wealthy planter. He put forward a list of written questions to Pandit Nehru which revealed the prevalent strong anti-Indian sentiment of the Ceylonese political and business elite and their prejudices.

A transcript of the interview with Nehru's responses to the questions, was sent by Pai to Pandit Nehru. This is included in the next chapter.

Nehru and Mrs. Hutheesing returned by air to Bombay on July 25th from where he wrote a warm letter of thanks to Pai for his assistance, and to him and Mrs. Pai for their hospitality in Kandy.

When he returned to Allahabad he wrote to Pai for information to assist him in writing his report to the AICC. The letters were personal and Nehru sent Pai a copy of the report.

The letters and Nehru's report to the Congress Working committee, at its meeting in Wardha in August 1939, which he sent to Pai, are included in the next chapter.

The correspondence ended here as soon thereafter the Quit India movement was launched and Nehru along with several other Congress leaders was arrested.

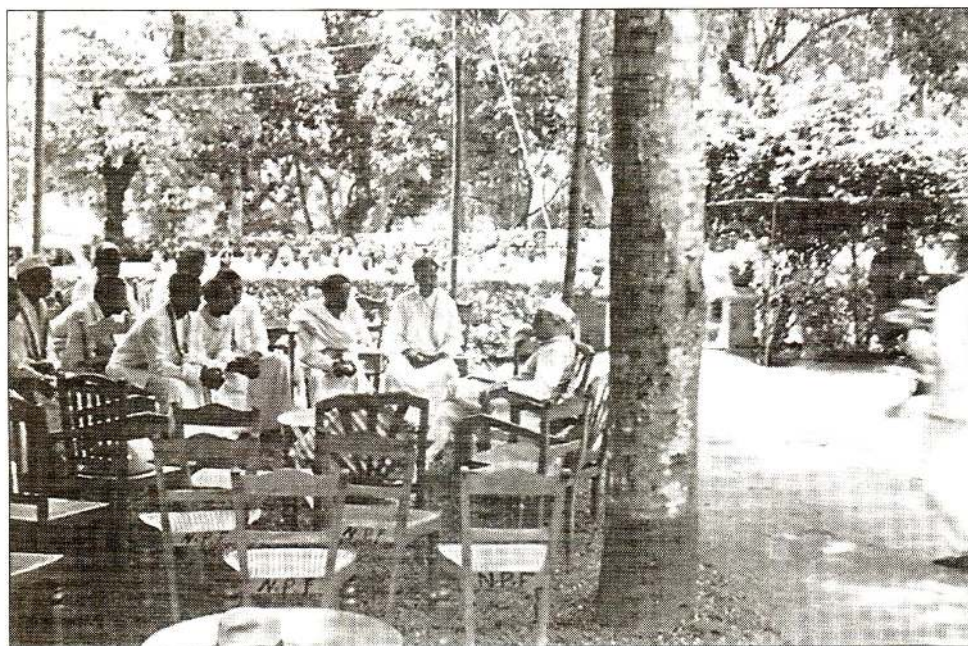




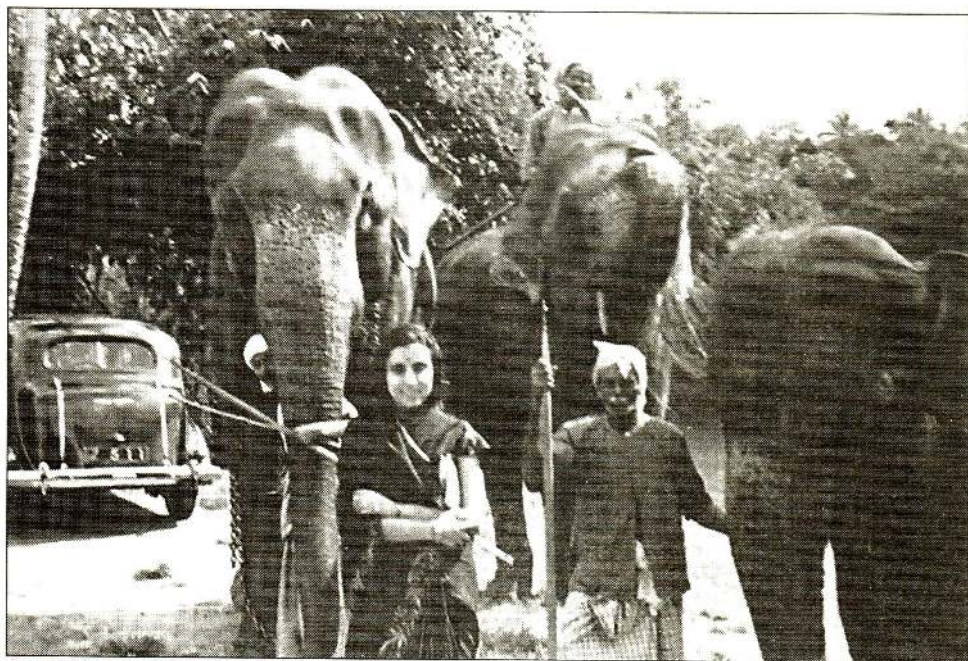
Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs. Krishna Hutheesing with Mr. and Mrs. Pai in front of their residence. July 21, 1939.



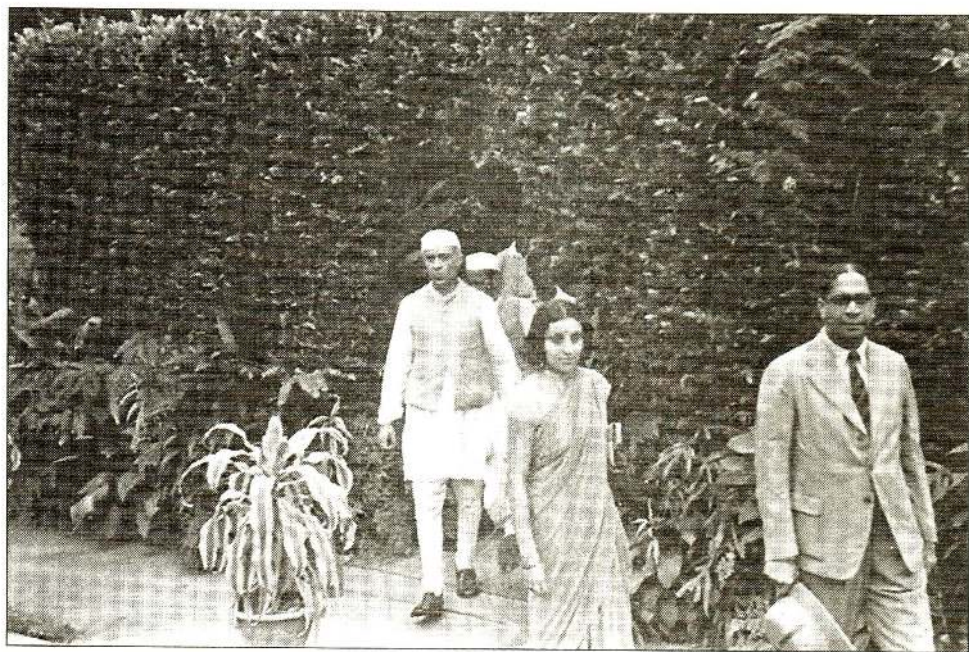
Nehru addressing a mass meeting from the pavilion
in Kandy, July 1939.



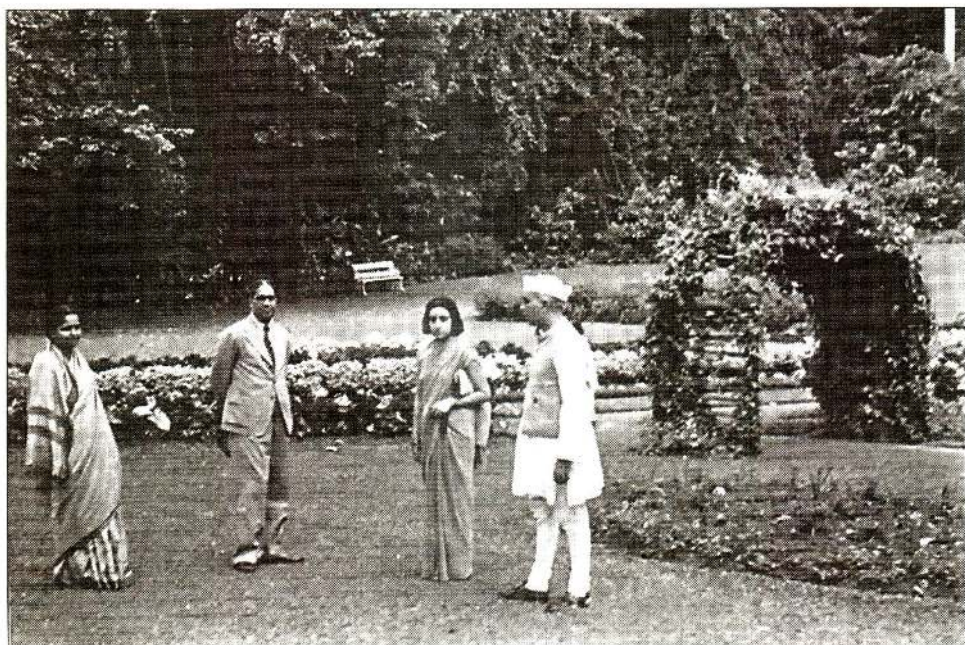
Nehru in discussion with representatives of the
Indian community in Kandy.



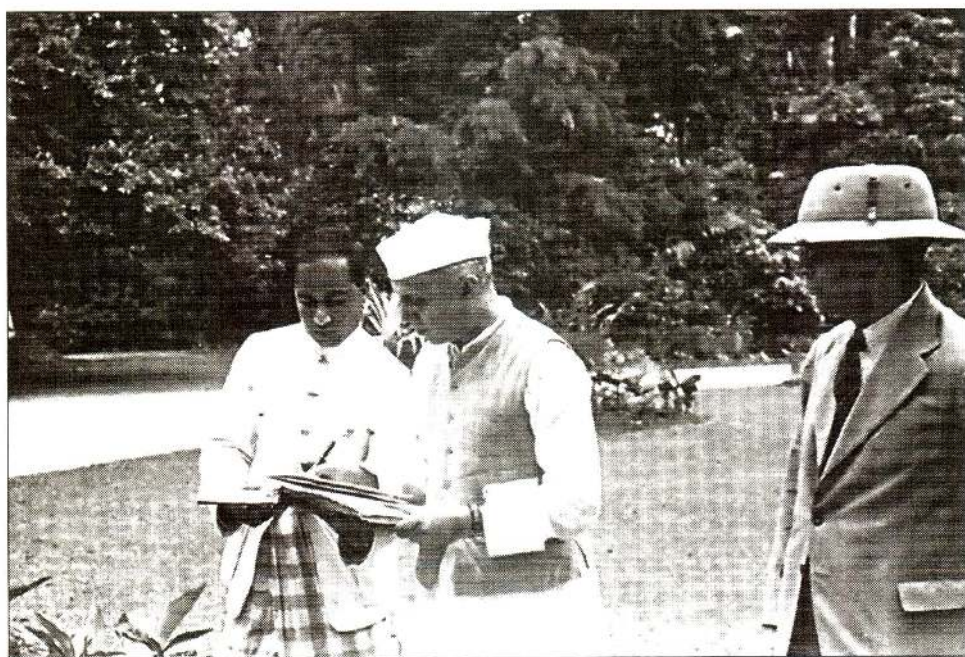
Krishna Hutheesing is greeted by elephants.



Nehru and Mrs., Hutheesing with Mr. Pai at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.



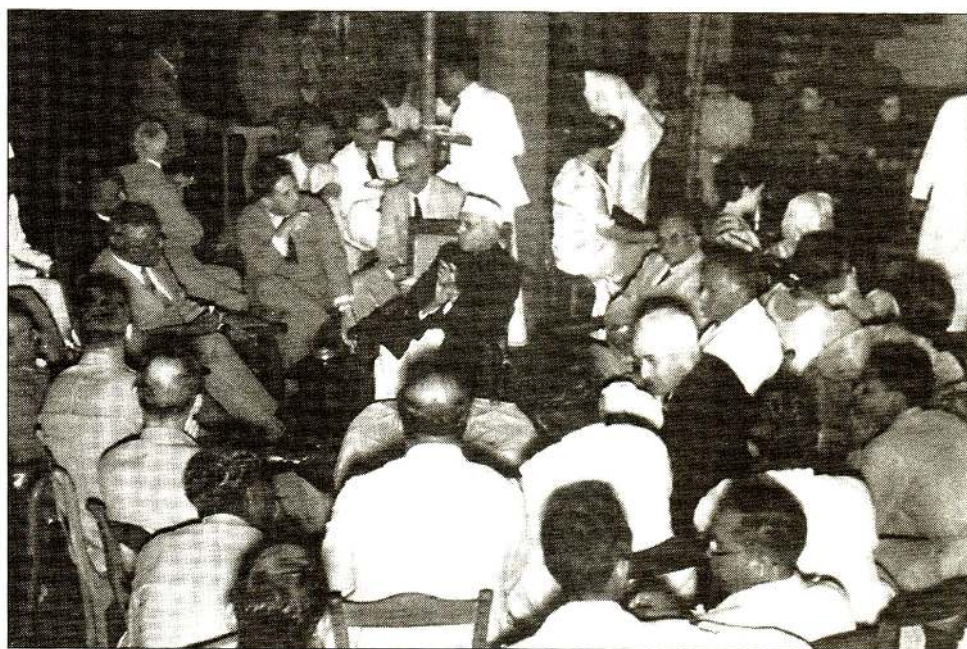
Nehru, Mrs., Hutheesing and Mr. and Mrs. Pai
at Peradeniya Botanical Gardens.



Nehru signing the visitors book at Peradeniya.
Mr. Pai on the right.



Nehru and Mrs. Hutheesing received ceremoniously on entering Kandy, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Pai, and Mrs. Ratwatte, wife of the Mayor.



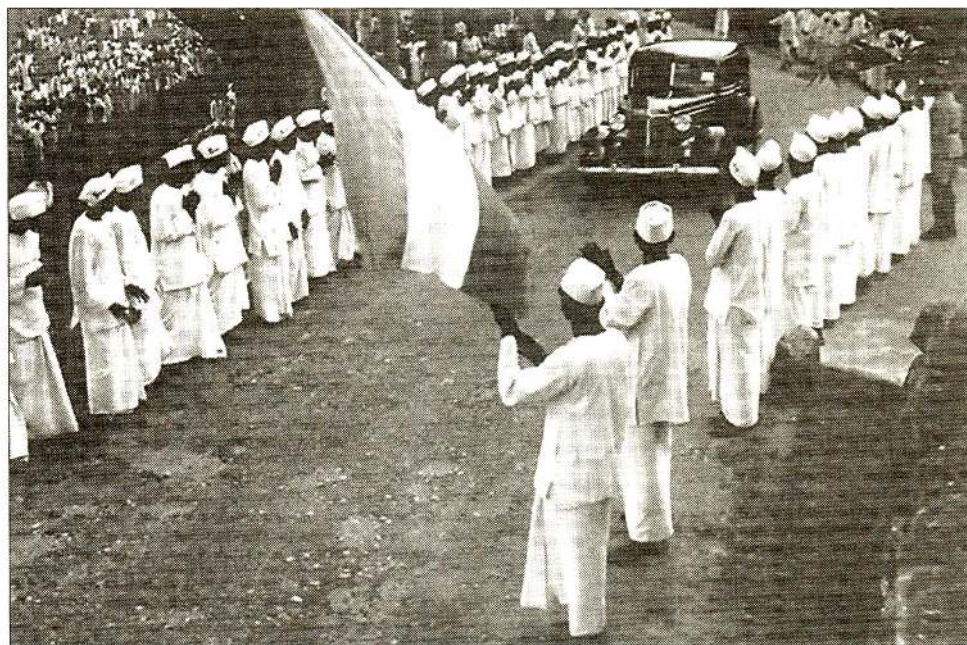
Nehru meets European planters and other leading citizens at a reception in Kandy. July 21, 1939.



Jawaharlal Nehru and Mrs. Krishna Hutheesing
at "The Orchard", Kandy



Nehru talks to European and Burgher planters at a reception given by the Agent.
In the foreground, the wives of the planters.



A guard of honour of Indian volunteers to greet Mr. Nehru.

Chapter 7

Nehru – Pai Papers

1. **Transcript of interview with Justin Kotelawala** sent by Pai to Nehru.

Indo-Ceylon discussions between Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Justin Kotelawala.

1. Q. Mr. J.K. Do you admit the right of existence to small nations?

A. P. Nehru. I entirely admit the right of existence of small nations and indeed I think that in any proper world order they should be fully protected. At the same time under present world conditions it is becoming exceedingly difficult for small nations to live economically apart from other countries. Indeed even the big nations cannot do so. Possibly the only countries in the world that might be in a position to do so in a very large measure are the United States of America and the Soviet Union. The only two other countries that are potentially capable of this are China and India, but it would be a long time before they can actually do so. The fact of the matter is that the old idea of more or less self sufficing entities does not fit in with the modern age or with modern developments which are increasingly on a world scale. We are tending, wherever we might live, in Asia or in Europe, towards either world freedom or world subjection. There is going to be no half-way house between these two.

For a small country there are only three possibilities open in the future. (1) To be a subject part of an Empire. (2) To be associated with other countries big or small economically

(3) To be part of a world order which includes the big and small countries alike. The first is obviously undesirable. The second

may be a desirable passing phase, but unless it leads to the third it will lead to vast conflicts between large groups. Therefore the only objective that any country, more especially a small country can have, is to think in terms of this world order and to work for it. Isolation is bad even for a big country but for a small country it is fatal to it.

2. Q. Mr. J.K. Do you admit the right of self determination to the Ceylonese?

A. P. Nehru. I admit the right of self determination for the Ceylonese. But there is no such thing as complete self-determination for an individual or group, or a nation, because all manner of interests overlap. Generally speaking however I am perfectly prepared to admit that the interests of the Ceylonese must have primary consideration. This however does not take us very far in this complex world full of conflicts.

3. Q. Mr. J.K. Do you not admit that without some protective legislation against the powerful onslaughts of British and Indian capital, and human power from the millions on the continent of India, the position of the Ceylonese is impossible?

A. P. Nehru. The Ceylonese are entitled to have protective legislation against British as well as Indian capital and also to limit or to stop the influx of labour from abroad. It is another matter however when you consider the interest of existing labour. But the real question to be considered is much more difficult. Unless the Ceylonese develop a balanced economy and a political structure which can withstand impacts from abroad, merely protective legislation will not help. It may even come in the way of their objective.

4. Q. Mr. J.K. It is a well known fact that Indian traders and labourers under cut, and thereby lower the standards of living. Is it then wrong for the Ceylonese to legislate against such persons?

A. P. Nehru. Ceylon by paying low wages to Indian traders or labourers exploits them to Ceylon's advantage. The right way is to have high standards for every body where there is no under cutting. Legislation to this effect should be welcomed. This in addition to the stoppage of labour emigration should deal with the problem.

5. Q. Mr. J.K. Nearly 60-70 per cent of the Indians in Ceylon are the

untouchables of India. As such are they not better treated in Ceylon? It is only in Ceylon that they get their self respect as human beings. Is it not then hypocritical cry of Indian agitators to say those Indian are badly treated in Ceylon, when India treats them worse?

A. P. Nehru.

It may be that many Indians who go to Ceylon are those who unfortunately belong to the depressed classes. India happens to be something more than an odd country in the world. It is a major problem and a major culture. It has got very degrading aspects attached to it due to centuries of stagnation and deterioration. It has also the finest aspects that a nation can produce. We want to get rid of the degrading aspects and we are going to succeed. The fact is that people in India are very poor and that they get better wages abroad sometimes does not mean that we can put up with their treatment of others abroad. In India some of the wages paid are relatively speaking very high, far higher than any wage in Ceylon. At the same time wages paid elsewhere in India are very low. This disparity induces us to raise lower wages to the higher level and not to be content with a very slight betterment of the lowest. But it is not merely a question of wage. There is a human side to it and a national side. An Indian who goes abroad cannot be allowed by us to be a mere hewer of wood nor can we approve of the slightest discrimination against him. We prefer to see him starved at home.

6. Q. Mr. J.K.

Can those Indians of the middle class in Ceylon show any proof that discriminations are made against them in social, political or economic matters? When Ceylon's Trade Commissioner in India is an Indian, when a Government Agent, the Excise Commissioner, and many other Civil Servants are Indians, when Indians are freely admitted as members to the Ceylonese premier club "The Orient Club". The Turf Club etc., when Indians are welcome at Ceylonese homes, how could any one Indian say that he was insulted because he was an Indian? Is it not then unfair on the part of agitators to exploit the complex from which India is suffering today that the whole world ill treats her sons and daughters, by bringing the charge that Ceylon is doing the same, in order to get the sympathy of Indians at home?

A. P. Nehru

The Indian today like most people I suppose is suffering from many complexes. The more sensitive a people are in this modern world the more they suffer from complexes. But few Indians suffer from inferiority complex today. We have made good our position in world affairs and established our right to the respect of the world by what we have done in the last 20 years. We have confidence in ourselves and in our future. But that confidence is not for the upper classes but is essentially for the peasant and worker in India. We judge our progress by the progress of the humblest Indian. We judge our cities not by a few palaces but by the presence or otherwise of slums. I am not interested in clubs and the superficial middle class life which they represent. Nor am I interested in the fact that some Indians in India belong to the most exclusive of clubs here. I belong to no club, because the group I want to belong to must include the untouchable and the peasant and the worker.

I think you are wrong in imagining that India thinks that the whole world ill-treats her sons and daughters. We imagine no such thing. But we know that the weak are ill treated everywhere and the strong and self reliant get respect wherever they go.

7. Q. Mr. J.K.

The Waste Lands Ordinance of 1840 is an act of plundering on the part of the British of the peoples land. If not for cheap Indian labour the Ordinance could never have been introduced. So is the claim of the agitators that Indian labour developed the Ceylonese not a myth What actually happened was that they only did help the British capitalist to exploit the country more and to get a greater amount of economic domination, at the expense of the Ceylonese.

A.P. Nehru.

I do not know much about the Waste Lands Ordinance to which you refer. Probably it was a sheer act of plundering on the part of the British. If you read history you will find that wherever modern capitalism has come in contact with mediaeval conditions this same process has happened. In England the Enclosure Acts are famous when land was plundered from the peasant proprietors without any compensation whatever. It seems to me an extraordinary thing that you should blame Indian labour for this. What Indian labour has done in Ceylon is to work for a pittance in producing wealth for Ceylon. The

wealth thus produced did not go to the labourer. It went largely to foreign vested interests and partly to Ceylon. But for this development of that country Ceylon might have been poor and in a semi-mediaeval condition still.

8. Q. Mr. J. K. Do you know that the majority of the Indians in Ceylon are devoid of any sense of social obligation? They do not give anything to Ceylonese charitable causes. They do not employ Ceylonese. Their mental outlook is purely extraction and self interestedness. Wherever possible they try to lower Ceylonese prestige by informing Europeans and others that Ceylonese are an unreliable and lazy race.

A. P. Nehru. I cannot say anything about the want or otherwise of a sense of social obligation on the part of the Indians in Ceylon. Quite possibly you are right. But from your very questions it appears that there is neither affection nor respect in your mind for the Indians in Ceylon. If so it is not surprising that they do not exhibit that sense of social obligations. Personally I should like them to have that sense anyhow.

9. Q. Mr. J.K. Do you know that it is a general practice amongst Malayali labourers 10 and 20 of them to keep one Sinhalese woman. Often 50 and 60 labourers live in one house. That the opinion of the Sinhalese masses about Indians in Ceylon is that they take "their jobs, their lands and their women".

A. P. Nehru. I do not know any thing about Malayali labourers and their relations with Sinhalese women. Undoubtedly, if what you say is true, it is highly objectionable and must be ended by law or otherwise.

10. Q. Mr. J.K. The average Ceylonese who reads of the ideals and actions of Indian leaders like Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, The Nehrus etc and feel the pressure of Indian exploiting and wherever possible joining hands with the British exploiters are forced to the conclusion that Indian idealism is humbug.

A. P. Nehru. If the Ceylonese think that Indian idealism is humbug surely they have a right to their opinion. What exactly to you want me to say about it?

11. Q. Mr. J.K. The average Ceylon opinion of the average Indian is that in heart

they were worse tyrants than the English. That the ill treatment that the Indians get at home and abroad is the Karmic result of their own ill treatment to those helpless amongst their own nationals.

A. P. Nehru. If in your opinion an Indian is a worse tyrant than an Englishman you are welcome to that opinion. Personally I do not consider either an Englishman or the national of any other country a tyrant. Systems are tyrannical, individuals do not matter. I am afraid I cannot discuss the law of Karma.

12. Q. Mr. J.K. The Sinhalese believe that Buddhism is the flower of Hindu thought. A great portion of the human race venerates the "Buddha" as the greatest human ever born and certainly the greatest of all Indians. Emperor Asoka was the greatest ruler the known world has seen. His period of reigning is considered the peak of ancient India. It was he who sent his son and daughter to convert the Sinhalese into Buddhism about 2300 years ago.

13. Q. M.J.K. Later on whilst the whole of the Indian continent succumbed to Priest Craft, took to animal sacrifice, suttee, untouchability, child marriage, purdah, temple prostitution and other social evils, the Sinhalese in Ceylon as a nation maintained a high level of rational and spiritual culture and a sturdy spirit of independence; and rejected the confused thinking emanating from the continent for a period of over 2000 years.

14. Q. Mr. J.K. Does India realize that the Singhalese are the only people of the Indian race, who have preserved in its purity, with their blood century after century, the flower of Hindu thought – Buddhism? Does India know that if not for the Sinhalese that the greatest Indian Sakyamuni Gautama Buddha would today be known to the world as of Mongolian extraction?

15. Q. Mr. J.K. Are the efforts of a race for over 2500 years religious thought which is acknowledged by the world as the most rational of human thinking mean nothing?

A. P. Nehru. 12,13,14,15. I fear these questions deal with matters which it is difficult to discuss as people's minds are full of the most extraordinary misconceptions and prejudices. Your questions are framed in a way which exhibits your own extraordinary prejudices. I claim to be a scientist and if I deal with these

matters I would do so in the spirit of science. Your mind seems to be so full of hatred for India and the Indian people that arguments would probably be useless. I would only say that I agree with you that Buddha was certainly the greatest son of India. I am inclined to think that even today there is more of the true spirit of Buddhism in India, by what ever name it might be called, than in Ceylon. Our very national movement has exemplified that and I wish that Ceylon might in honour of Buddhism follow these national ideals which we have ventured to serve in India.

16. Q. Mr. J.K. Is not the present thinking on the continent of India that Indian labour be allowed to travel from one province to another and be allowed to undercut wages result in a lowering of the standard of living of the whole Indian race another form of loose thinking amongst Indians?

A. P. Nehru. Your question illustrates a narrowness in outlook which surprises me. India is a big country and yet we try to think in terms of the world and of raising world standards. You want us even to cut up India into bits to preserve one group here or there, to the disadvantage of others.

17. Q. Mr. J.K. Do not Indians object to British and Foreign capital coming into India which means economic strangulation and hindrance to emancipation? Then why should Indians not appreciate our sentiments as regards the flow of Indian capital and labour into Ceylon?

A. P. Nehru. Indians do not necessarily object to foreign capital coming to India but they do object to foreign control of that capital. We want to regulate and control such foreign capital as comes in here.

18. Q. Mr. J.K. The Indians know very well that the way to frighten British vested interests is to threaten to remove Indian labour from the estates. This "big stick" when used always results in the British crushing Ceylonese aspirations. Is this fair? Is it in harmony with Indian National Congress principles?

A. P. Nehru. It surprises me that you should put this question. You cannot have it both ways, keep Indian labour on the estates and at the same time blame India for sending it. We are perfectly willing

not to send a single worker to Ceylon to help you to find your own feet. It so happens that this upsets British vested interests. India is not interested in British vested interests being preserved either in Ceylon or in India. To stop emigration is not only in harmony with the principles of the Indian National Congress but is the inevitable consequence of our whole policy.

19. Q. Mr. J.K.

Ceylon supports nearly one million Indians in Ceylon. These send away to India annually about Rs. 10,000,000/- a year. Ceylon imports from India about Rs. 50,000,000/- a year and exports to the extent of Rs.10,000,000. The ratio is 60 – 10 millions; and on the Rs. 10 millions that Ceylon sends to India 9 millions of which is coconut products, India puts a prohibitive tariff. Is this the attitude of a big brother to a smaller?

A. P. Nehru.

If Ceylon supports one million Indians in Ceylon they produce far greater wealth by their labour there than is paid to them in their wages and the very paltry sum that they send to India represents an exceedingly small fraction of the wealth they have produced. Ceylon has obviously kept them there because she finds it a paying proposition. So also Ceylon buys in the Indian market because she gets goods cheap here. Partly because Ceylon is so circumstanced geographically and partly because no efforts have been made to manufacture the goods there, Ceylon has to rely on commodities from outside. If Ceylon could buy them cheaper elsewhere she should no doubt do so. I am not aware of any prohibitive tariff in India on Ceylon products though there has been a talk of it no doubt. You should know that in spite of the tension that has existed during the past few months between Ceylon and India the National Congress has tried its utmost to prevent any retaliation on the part of India.

20. Q. Mr. J.K.

Indian leaders come to Ceylon from time to time express great ideals about world social order, unity of Ceylon and India etc – but in practice what have such leaders done to help the plight of the exploited Ceylonese – Nothing. So is the Ceylonese view that until such time as the world social order is established “that self help is the best policy” a wrong view?

A. P. Nehru.

I agree with you that for an individual as for a country, self help is the best policy.

21. Q. Mr. J.K. Finally if you were a Ceylonese what would you do to help your fellow country men? Would you give us some advice please, as to how we Ceylonese should develop ourselves? How we should steer clear from the two fires that surround us -- British vested interests and Indian labour and capital?

A. P Nehru. If I was a Ceylonese the advice I would give my fellow countrymen would be to get out of their little groups and insularities and try to understand the real problems of their country in relation of the world. Before one can find a solution of a problem one must know what it is. Before one can answer a question, the question must be framed.

I think I have dealt with all your questions.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Correspondence

By Air Mail

Confidential

“The Orchard”

Ampitiya, Kandy, 2—8—39.

My dear Nehru,

Many thanks for your letter of July 27th from Bombay which reached me here yesterday. It is good of you to take the trouble to write to me in the midst of all your activities which leave you very little leisure.

Thanks also for the newspaper cuttings which you have sent. I have read all your interviews to the Press; the one you gave in Bombay puts the position most clearly.

I am grateful to you for putting down your ideas on the Indo-Ceylon question in writing in paragraphs 3 and 4 of your letter. As it happens, in my report to the Government of India written immediately after your departure from Colombo I made the same suggestions and used almost the very words that I find in your letter. You will have known by now that with effect from 1st August, the date on which the Ceylon Government scheme came into operation, the Government of India have prohibited, under SECTION 30-A of the Indian Emigration Act, all persons from departing by sea out of British India to Ceylon for the purpose of unskilled work. We had to consider whether this ban should operate immediately or some days later, say, after the All India Congress Committee had met. For the reason which you have so correctly appreciated, namely, that the slightest hint of the stoppage of emigration would be an incentive to planters to get over additional labour and over-stock their labour force, we thought it best to place the ban without delay; and the 1st of August was chosen partly for psychological reasons as that was the day on which Indian labourers under Ceylon Govt. employ were being compulsorily discharged under the present scheme. I hope you agree that it was the right course to take. What effect this will have on Ceylon remains to be seen.

I enclose for your information cuttings from the “Times of Ceylon” and the “Ceylon Daily News” of yesterday and today. You will observe that the Press report endeavours to give the impression that the Ministers are prepared to supply all requirements of estates by recruiting local labour, -- and this at a time when they are confessing their failure in this direction by closing down 2 recruiting agencies which they had started a year ago for the recruitment of Sinhalese labour. Our

weakness however consists in the fact that estates are already sufficiently stocked with labour and it will therefore be some time before the planters feel the pinch. The "Daily News" leader suggests that we are spiting our own face by "depriving Indians of the poorest classes who live on the border line of starvation a chance of earning a decent living under decent conditions on Ceylon estates". I think this is only an attempt to put a brave face on what is rather perturbing to Ceylon economy.

It is also curious that the Governor should have made the formal opening of the Bank of Ceylon on the morning of the 1st August the occasion for a statement on the subject of Indian labour. As the cutting from the newspaper shows, he has dwelt on what he calls 12 "facts" on the question of immigrant labour. All these facts are of course well known to you, and I would only offer the following comments:-

Fact No. 1. In enunciating fact No. 1 His Excellency seems to be anxious to show that the Ceylon Government has no proposal which involves estate labour; and evidently he wants to throw on the Government of India the responsibility for interfering with estate labour. Our position is of course quite clear, namely, that we cannot make any distinction between unskilled estate labour and unskilled urban labour. Moreover though at present there is no proposal of the Ceylon Government to fix quotas for estate labour or to displace Indian estate labour with Sinhalese, having regard to the Ceylon Government's position in regard to Government labour it is difficult to escape the apprehension that the principle might in course of time if necessary be extended to estate labour as well. In any case our position has been made clear by the Associated Press Correspondent's report from Simla explaining that the Government of India's decision to stop emigration of unskilled labour was taken not as a retaliatory measure but solely in the interests of Indian labour as a whole. I have also made the position clear on similar lines to the Press Correspondents and other here.

Fact No 8. In his fact No. 8 His Excellency mentions that the compulsory discharge of the 800 and odd Indian labourers from Government Departments is under no special law, but in exercise of the ordinary rights of an employer. The whole point is whether the ordinary rights of an employer to dismiss a labourer is not subject to the ordinary rules of justice and equality of treatment of all workers. A fact that has not been made clear however is that the Ceylon Government have paid no heed to the repeated request of the Government of India that they should be given an opportunity to place their views on the scheme now being enforced before the Ceylon Government took any irrevocable decision on it, and that the present action of the Ceylon Government is entirely unilateral.

Fact No.11. The recent decision of the Ministers that for the purpose of

future retrenchment non-Ceylonese employees with more than 10 years' service under Government will be treated on a par with Ceylonese is no doubt, so far as it goes, a fairly important modification. This was made after your arrival in Ceylon though it is being stated that it was decided long before. It is however necessary to realize that in practice this means very little. If about 5,000 unskilled labourers – (out of in Ceylon Government departments) – are to be eliminated by the end of this year, 800 by compulsory discharge and 4,000 under the voluntary retirement scheme, as expected, that will leave very little necessity for any further reduction by actual retrenchment of posts in 1940. Whatever be the extent of retrenchment, it is not likely that it will extend to more than one-tenth of the total labour force under Government departments especially seeing that the Government have already in view new works such as a Hydro-Electric scheme, extension of the Harbour, new buildings, etc. Elimination of 5,000 Indian labourers would mean a very considerable reduction in the total unskilled labour force. Even if retrenchment should exceed this limit, the brunt will first fall on Indians between 5 and 10 years' service; and it is very unlikely that the retrenchment axe will reach the 10-year men. It will therefore be clear that the so-called important modification is not of great moment in practice.

Though the fact that the important modifications made by the Ceylon Government have been conveyed to the Government of India has been published, no mention is made of India's point of view that the modifications did not make any substantial difference to India's objection on principle; and the fact that even the Government of India's request for a postponement of action until the proposed talks in October did not find favour with the Ceylon Government has not been made public.

I understand that last night 10 Indian labourers discharged from Government departments left for India under the present scheme of the Ceylon Government. Indian labourers in Colombo have been so scared by the present conditions, especially on account of the activities of the Goonesinghe group in Colombo city, that I shall not be surprised if a large number of people take advantage of the offer of repatriation to India so that when, as we expect, Ceylon does come to terms with India, she will have already achieved her purpose, namely, the sending back of a few thousands of Indians to India. It seems to me that in view of this, whatever arrangements are agreed to ultimately, we shall have to make it a condition precedent that the labourers now sent away should be given the first offer of employment in Ceylon before other labour is allowed to be recruited.

I understand that yesterday and the day before there have been several

demonstrations of jubilation in Colombo City on the part of several Sinhalese groups, notably the followers of Mr. Goonesinghe I also understand that the boycott of Indian shop-keepers has been very intensive during the last 2 or 3 days. You will notice that a reference to this has been made in the "Times of Ceylon" leading article of yesterday also. I have advised the Indians to make urgent formal representation to the Home Minister who is in charge of the Police Department. There have no doubt recently been several prosecutions of rowdies indulging in violent anti-Indian propaganda, but even so it is rather lamentable that more vigorous action is not taken to stop these activities.

I quite agree that the stoppage of emigration cannot be considered a measure of reprisal and should not be declared as such. I took the precaution of making a statement to that effect to the Press correspondents here. I am glad to see that a similar statement has been made by the Simla correspondent of the Associated Press.

One of the Press correspondents who saw Sir Baron Jayatilaka yesterday tells me that he found Sir Baron very worried and that he stated that "if India chose to take extreme measures we can only try to bear up as best as we can".

I shall keep you informed of any important developments in this connection as well as about other allied questions.

I shall be glad if you will please let me have in due course a copy of your report to the All India Congress Committee. May I add that I shall be personally grateful for any advice or suggestions that you may like to give me for my personal information and guidance.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely,

(A. Vittal Pai)

Sri. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru,

Allahabad.

PERSONAL

Wardha

August 11, 1939

My dear Pai,

Thank you for your letter of the 2nd August which has just reached me here, also for your previous letters with their enclosures.

I have been greatly rushed since my return from Ceylon and have had no time to write a proper Report or otherwise put down my thoughts in writing. Ultimately I wrote a very superficial report overnight for the Working Committee. I enclose a copy of this. We are not publishing this but you can show it to such friends as you may consider necessary. I also enclose a copy of the Working Committee resolution.

It seems to me that for the moment no other steps should be taken. It may, however, become necessary if the situation worsens to take other steps. I have no doubt that the stoppage of emigration is itself a big enough step and it will exercise continuous pressure on the Ceylon Government. But we have to make sure that this stoppage is real and that people do not trickle in. You could help by impressing this fact on the Government of India and the Madras Government. I am also writing to the Madras Government about it. You will notice that in the Working Committee resolution we have asked for the closing down of the Mandapam Depot. I think this should be insisted upon. This in itself will not only be an effective step but also it will have a psychological importance. The planters and others will realize that we are serious.

You will notice that in my report I suggested that the Government of India might consider a scheme of voluntary repatriation. The Working Committee were not keen on making this recommendation as it might lead to difficulties.

Desai has written to me asking my advice about the desirability of the Ceylon Indian Congress sending a deputation to the Government of India. I do not think it will be advisable to do this especially at this stage. It would have no effect at this end and it would have a bad effect at the other end. Of course if and when some trade talks take place it might be desirable for the Ceylon Indian Congress to send representatives who might help as experts.

Regarding these trade talks the Working Committee have said nothing in their resolution because it seems to be uncalled for. But they were clearly of opinion that no trade talks should take place till the situation was more favourable.

Goonasinghe's activities are very undesirable, especially the aggressive boycotts of Indian shops. In this matter a strong line should be taken with the Government of Ceylon. It is fantastic that Indians should be forcibly prevented from entering Indian shops.

Generally I feel that our line should be to treat Ceylon as a somewhat spoilt and wayward child, not behaving properly. We should not be too hard and should appeal to its better nature to assert itself. That there is this better nature, I have no doubt.

Sir Baron Jayatilaka sent me a long letter in answer to the letter which I wrote to him from Kandy. There was nothing very new in it and he merely repeated what he had told me.

Do keep me informed of developments. But there is a considerable chance of my going to China for a few weeks towards the end of this month.

I fear that some of the figures given in my report are not very accurate. I have written in a great hurry.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

A.V. Pai Esqr. I.C.S.

Agent to Government of India in Ceylon,

Kandy (Ceylon)

Encls : 2

BY AIR MAIL

“The Orchard”

PERSONAL.

Kandy, (Ceylon): 16th Aug. 1939.

My dear Nehru,

Many thanks for your letter of the 11th August enclosing a copy of your report to the All India Congress Committee. Though you call it a superficial report I think it covers all the ground and deals with all the aspects succinctly. I do wish, if I may say so, that you will write a book on the subject in course of time when you find some leisure; and if you want any further material for the purpose please do not hesitate to let me know.

I have noted all the points that you have mentioned in your letter to me and I shall try to do what I can in the directions you indicate.

It is quite clear that the stoppage of emigration has had important psychological effect already although its effectiveness from a practical point of view will of course be gradual but, I expect, none-the-less sure. All the employing interests have bestirred themselves already and are trying to bring as much pressure as they can on the Government of Ceylon to induce the Government of India to lift the ban or at any rate to come to terms with India as early as possible. We should of course try to make the ban as effective as possible by not allowing “leakages”. But already many Indians are asking for concessions in the case of certain classes, e.g. the older resident labourers of Ceylon. Our position of course is that exemptions could be granted only in very exceptional cases and only in proved cases of individual hardship, e.g., when a wife or child wishes to join the husband in Ceylon. It seems to me that in the course of a few months Ceylon will make approaches to India for the supply of labour. We shall then have to consider what our minimum demands should be and whether we should allow further labour at all. In making our demands we should of course take Ceylon's point of view into consideration, but I foresee many difficulties in the way. We can however wait for some time unless the position becomes more clear.

This morning's paper says that the Ministers are determined to bring forward

a Bill for the restriction and control of immigration from India as early as possible. It is also learnt that in reply to some query from Whitehall the Ministers are going to say that though they are willing to enter upon a discussion of all the outstanding problems between India and Ceylon they will not consider any proposals which go beyond their modified scheme regarding the discontinuance of non-Ceylonese daily paid labour in Government departments. There is however no confirmation of this so far.

No effective action has so far been taken by the Ceylon Government to counter the activities of Goonesinghe and his kind. But from my conversation with Mr. Corea the other day it seems that they are considering the question seriously.

I do not know if this will reach you in time before you leave for China. I shall write again after your return to India from China.

Yours sincerely,

A.V. Pai

Shri. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru,
Allahabad.
(N. India)

NEHRU'S REPORT TO AICC WORKING COMMITTEE

Wardha,
August 9, 1939

To
Shri Rajendra Prasad
President Indian National Congress
Dear President,

The All India Congress Committee, at its meeting held in Bombay on June 24th 1939, passed the following resolution about Indians in Ceylon;

“The All India Congress Committee views with grave concern the measures proposed by the Ceylon Government with reference to their Indian employees and hopes that it may be possible to find a way to avoid the most undesirable and grave conflict that, as a result of these measures, is threatened between such near and ancient neighbours as India and Ceylon.

The Committee cannot contemplate without much concern a quarrel between the two countries which are separated by only a strip of water but which have a common culture and which have been intimately connected from times immemorial. The Committee desires to explore every means of avoiding conflicts and, therefore, appoints Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru to go to Ceylon and confer with the authorities and representative associations and individuals on behalf of the Working Committee and do all that may be possible to effect a just and honourable settlement”.

2. In accordance with the direction of the A.I.C.C. I proceeded to Ceylon by air on July 15th and spent nine days there. I received a very cordial welcome during this visit from all communities and classes of people. The Board of Ministers extended to me every courtesy and hospitality. The Sinhalese, Jaffna Tamils, the Moors, the Burghers, and of course the Indians, joined in this welcome and gave me abundantly of their affection. Apart from my conferences with the Ministers and with representatives of Indians and Ceylonese organizations, I addressed very large gatherings both in Colombo and in the highlands, and I was happy to meet at these gatherings scores of

thousands of plantation and town workers. I should like to express my deep gratitude to all these Ceylonese and Indian friends who made this visit of mine a memorable one for me.

3. Shri A.V. Pai, the Government of India Agent in Ceylon, gave me every help and his special knowledge of the subject was of the greatest assistance to me. I realized how earnestly he had tried to protect the interests of Indian labour in Ceylon.
4. The immediate issue that had induced the A.I.C.C. to send me to Ceylon was the action taken by the Ceylon Government in regard to their daily-paid Indian employees whom they were seeking to remove. This action was two-fold. Those non-Ceylonese daily-wage earners who had been engaged by Government after the 31st March 1934 were to be discharged, and in the event of their returning to their villages in India, they were to be given free tickets and a bonus of one month's pay, which was to be paid on their return to their villages. The other non-Ceylonese daily wage earners, of more than five years' service under Government, were offered what was called a scheme of voluntary repatriation; free tickets and gratuities varying according to length of service, were proposed. This offer was, however, coupled with a threat that if it was not taken advantage of by a certain date, the employees would run the risk of being discharged without free tickets or gratuities. It was stated that retrenchment was inevitable in the near future and, when this took place, non-Ceylonese would go first. Both the government orders referred to non-Ceylonese but as a matter of fact they applied to Indians.
5. These two orders agitated the Indian community in Ceylon greatly and this agitation spread to India. They affected nearly ten thousand Indian daily wage earners, many of whom had been for long years in Ceylon. They introduced a principle of discrimination against Indians which was naturally resented. Further, they seemed to indicate that the Ceylon Government had decided upon a general anti-Indian policy of which these were the first fruits.
6. On my arrival in Ceylon I soon found that the problem I had to face was not confined to these two orders of Government. It was far more intricate and it comprised many other measures and activities of Government during the last few years. I had to consider also the economic situation and the growth of unemployment which, I was told had compelled Government to take these steps. The minorities question still further complicated the issue, and the attitude that Indians in Ceylon had taken in regard to this and other matters was an important consideration.

7. It is not possible for me in this brief report to deal with all these matters for this will involve writing a political and economic survey of Ceylon covering the last ten years in detail. It would also be necessary to indicate in such a survey how the plantation system began and the development of Indian labour on the estates. I cannot write about this here but I might mention that a Commission on Immigration into Ceylon was appointed by the Ceylon Government in 1936 and this presented a comprehensive report in April 1938. The sole commissioner was Sir Edward Jackson, who came to the conclusion that Indian labour had made a great contribution to the development of Ceylon and that the rights of these Indians, who by long residence in the Island had made it their permanent home, should be recognized. He was of opinion that Indian labour was at still required in Ceylon and that there should be no restriction on immigration. The Ceylon Government has not, so far as I am aware, passed any orders on Jackson's report, but I was informed by the Ministers that they do not agree with his argument or recommendations. The Report has in effect been shelved. Nevertheless the Report is an interesting document, full of information.

8. The following figures are taken from Sir Edward Jackson's Report:

Total population of Ceylon in middle of 1936	5,738,000
Estate Indian population	659,000
Non-estate Indian population - between	190,000 & 230,000
'Workers' included in non-estate Indian population ...	
between	152,000 and 184,000
Total number of workers employed by Government in 1936	42,000
Indians employed by Government in 1936 ...	11,000

There has been a gradual decrease in the number of Indian workers in Ceylon. Daily-paid Indian workers in Government employ were estimated this year to be about 10,000.

9. The population of Ceylon is divided up approximately as follows:-

Singhalese	about	3,500,000	...	65%
Old Tamils in H.K. Province ...		1,600,000		
Moors (old Muslims)	...	400,000		
Burghers	...	30,000		
Indian Tamils	...	800,000		

Other Indians	...	4,000
Europeans	about	10,000

Leaving out the Sinhalese, who form the majority community, all the other minorities together form about 35% of the population. The present representation in the State Council, however, gives the Sinhalese about 80% of the seats, and the minorities have been agitating against this.

10. There was practically no anti-Indian feeling prior to the Donoughmore Report eleven years ago. The demand of the Ceylonese before the Donoughmore Commission was for full responsible government but it is significant that many witnesses opposed an extension of the franchise. The Report accepted adult franchise, but recommended a constitution which is really an extension of a borough council or municipal corporation.
11. With the coming of this constitution new problems arose and conflicts between majority and minority communities became more evident. The old Tamils of the N.E. Province had so far played an important, and sometimes even a dominating, part in public life and the national movement. With the growth of mass consciousness in the Sinhalese wanted to dominate the scene, and fearing that if large numbers of Indians got the vote, they would side with the old Tamils, the Sinhalese leaders tried to put obstructions in the way of Indians getting the franchise. The issue originally was thus a political one, and it was only later converted into an economic issue.
12. Attempts to restrict the number of Indians enjoying the franchise led to objection and argument and to the growth of anti-Indian feeling. The law as it stood was rather vague and a clause relating to domicile could be variously interpreted. Under the rules made by the Ceylon Government, it worked to the disadvantage of large numbers of Indians who were permanent residents of the Island.
13. Subsequently the Village Communities Ordinance gave rise to further protests on the part of Indians as estate labour was excluded from exercising the franchise for these village communities. It is proposed to make these village communities the basis for the formation of districts and provincial councils. The great majority of the Indian population would thus have no say in the formation of all these various councils, even though many of them might have the vote for the State Council.
14. This question of franchise for the State Council and the Village Communities is a fundamental one for the Indians. It is a somewhat complicated one and

I cannot consider it here. But it is clear that when a proper adjustment takes place of relations between India and Ceylon, this question must be fully dealt with and settled satisfactorily. The Ceylonese view-point cannot be ignored. They say that migrant labour has no permanent interest in the country and therefore does not deserve a vote. In regard to the Village Communities especially, it is pointed out that estate labour has no organic connection with the old village community. It lives separately in estates and has separate interests. If given the vote it would overwhelm and extinguish the village community. There is some force in these arguments but it should not be difficult to meet them. Thus Indians who have been resident for a number of years might be presumed to be permanent settlers and given the vote for the State Council without further inquiry. Five years have been suggested as a fit period for this, but even a ten year period might be accepted. As for the village communities, it should not be difficult to form separate committees of groups of Indian workers in the estates.

15. The real difficulty is the growth of the new conception of nationalism. In law both Indians and Ceylonese are British subjects and have the same nationality. But in practice we are beginning to think more and more in terms of Indian nationals and Ceylonese nationals, which exclude each other. The Ceylonese say that if a person has become a national of Ceylon, he ceases to be an Indian National and cannot claim any special rights or privileges as such. Some such development is bound to take place. During this transition period we can fix period of residence which should be presumed to qualify a person for exercising the rights of citizenship.
16. The growth of this feeling of a separate nationality made the Ceylonese self-conscious and somewhat resentful of external intrusion. As a colony, they were completely under the economic domination of vested interests in Britain, but these major interests were too big and too well protected by law and otherwise to be combatted. Indian interests in business and service, though far less important, were more obvious and vulnerable. So anti-Indian feeling increased. When the economic crisis affected Ceylon (this was later than in other countries) and unemployment increased, the line of least resistance for those in authority was to make scapegoats of the Indians in service. It is interesting to note that the representatives of British authority in Ceylon have all along supported this anti-Indian policy. The British planters are, however, somewhat alarmed at it, as they fear that this might affect their interests in the plantations, which depend so much on Indian labour.

17. During the past two or three years some other steps have also been taken by the Ceylon Government which have been to the disadvantage of Indian residents and businessmen. Even more so, there are rumours of fresh attacks on Indian interests, of more stringent immigration laws, of greater strictness in extending the franchise to Indians, of rules affecting Indian business, and of an elimination of Indian employees from State as well as private service. All this has naturally alarmed the Indian residents of Ceylon, and the two Government orders, which were immediate cause of my visit, should be viewed in this perspective in order to be properly understood.
18. On the part of the Indians, everything has not been as it should be. There are Indian vested interests in Ceylon, which like all vested interests, exploit others, and it is not surprising that Ceylonese should view them with disfavour. These interests have not hesitated to seek special protection from the Governor or the British Government as against the Ceylon Government; they have sometimes opposed any extension of freedom to the people of Ceylon and allied themselves with reactionary forces. This has been resented greatly by the Sinhalese and has led to further estrangement.
19. In the tussle going on between the majority community (the Sinhalese) and the various minorities, the latter have joined together in the State Council and put forward a demand for fifty-fifty. That is to say the Sinhalese, although 65%, should only have 50% representatives, and the remaining 50% should be divided up among the minorities. They call this balanced representation. Personally I think this is an unreasonable demand, although I really realise that the minorities have not been well treated. Indians in the State Council (they are very few) allied themselves unfortunately with this minorities group and supported their fifty-fifty demand. This irritated the majority (Sinhalese) greatly, and it is this majority that controls the Government. Almost immediately after this decision of the Indians, the Government came out with their two orders for the removal of their Indian daily-paid employees. I do not mean to say that these orders would not have been issued but for the Indian group joining the minorities demand. The orders would have been issued in any case as they were the result of a long thought-out policy. But the anti-Indian feeling would have been less and the situation easier to handle.
20. I am quite clear in my own mind that when Indians go abroad in any capacity, they should not range themselves with the reactionary elements there. They must remember the principles for which we stand in India and for which the Congress has laboured. They should help in every way the freedom

movement in the country of their adoption and make it clear that they are not there to exploit the people. Adopting this basic policy, they should stand up for the rights of their own countrymen and not tolerate any infringement or limitation of them.

21. I come now to the two orders of Government to which I have referred above. The second of these dealt with a scheme for voluntary repatriation which could not have been objected to if it had been really voluntary. But the threat of subsequent dismissal without gratuities attached to it robbed it of all grace and left little of free-will about it. This second scheme applied to about 8000 daily wage-earners employed by Government – those who joined service before 1st April 1934.
22. The first order related to those daily wage-earners who had joined service since the 31st March 1934 and these were discharged. They were not to be forcibly repatriated, it should be remembered, but inducements were offered to them to go back to India. If they preferred to stay on in Ceylon, they could do so, but they would not then get free tickets or a month's salary as a bonus. Legally there is no doubt that the Government was entitled to discharge them but there are other and more vital considerations which govern employment, especially State employment.
23. I had long talks with the Board of Ministers and they assured me that they did not wish to discriminate in any way against Indians as such. They had been compelled to take action because of the growing distress and employment among their own people, who must have first preference. I pointed out to them that the economic problems they had to face were not going to be affected in any way by this discharge of a thousand or so persons. Other measures would have to be taken and there seems to be plenty scope for these as a large part of Ceylon was still undeveloped. I was perfectly agreeable to a complete stoppage of further employment of Indians by the State or indeed of immigration of Indian labour. This in itself would give immediate relief. Further I suggested that a really voluntary scheme of repatriation should be put forward and I felt sure that many would take advantage of it. But in so far as Indians at present in State service were concerned, they should not be pushed out in this way. The fact that they were daily wage earners made no difference as many of them earned a daily wage throughout their lives.
24. I could not make much impression on the Ministers although I pointed out that what they were doing was opposed to the rules laid down by the International Labour Office at Geneva. Further, the fact that they had taken

this action unilaterally without reference to India was naturally resented in India, and their refusal to postpone action, when the Government of India had requested them to do so, had been interpreted as an affront to India. I had a feeling that the Ministers realized that a mistake had been committed but they could not undo what they had done for fear of the consequences. Hopes had been held out to many Ceylonese who were unemployed, and in some instances arrangements had already been made for them to take the place of the Indians who were being discharged. An anti-Indian agitation had been allowed to grow up chiefly in Colombo and some irresponsible persons were preaching a boycott of Indian shops. The Ministers did not feel themselves strong enough, even if they so desired to go counter to this agitation.

25. At one stage an offer was made to me unofficially which I understood came from the Ministers. Under this offer the scheme of repatriation of those Indians who had joined Government service prior to March 1934, was given up. Regarding those who had joined service since March 31, 1934, and who were being discharged, certain important variations were suggested. A number of exceptions were laid down – marriage to a Ceylonese woman, previous service if any was to be taken into account, and generally hard cases of people with no homes in India were to be favourably considered. The most important exception was that if any one could show ten years' residence in Ceylon, he or she would be excluded from the operation of the order.
26. I did not like this proposal although I recognized that it was an advance on the existing position. I disliked it chiefly because it went against the principle for which I had been contending. I suggested that if the ten year period of residence could be reduced to five years' residence, this would be reasonable and in conformity with I.L.O. convention. This was not agreed to. Very reluctantly I agreed then to the ten year period of residence. This would have probably reduced the number of Indians discharged to about 500. It was not the number, however, that mattered to me so much as the desire to have an amicable understanding between India and Ceylon. I wanted this to lead to a full discussion of all problems between the countries and an enduring settlement.
27. I found later that this proposal to vary the government order, which had been made to me as if coming from the other side, and which I had with reluctance accepted, did not represent the view-point of the Board of Ministers. I was somewhat surprised at this and it was evident that I had been misled. The

Ministers were prepared to accept some minor variations but they could not agree to ten years' residence being considered sufficient for a person not to be affected by the order for discharge. They suggested ten years' Government service. Probably there were very few persons, in the class affected, who would have profited by this. I was unable to agree to this. The Ministers were unable to go beyond this as it was clear that any substantial change affecting those Ceylonese who had been promised posts, would have led, according to them, to serious trouble in the country. They assured me, however, again that no discrimination against Indians was intended and that they would examine favourably every hard case.

28. I attach to this report copies of my correspondence with Sir Baron Jayatilaka, as well as the verbatim reports of my three conferences with the Board of Ministers.
29. The net result of my visit was thus apparently not very great. Some slight relief was obtained for the 1934 and after class of employees who were being discharged. Probably two hundred or so additional persons were exempted and only about 600 to 700 are being discharged. As for the ante-1934 class, it appears that 4000 have accepted the offer of repatriation with gratuities.
30. I am inclined to think, however, that my visit produced deeper and more far-reaching results. It lifted the argument to the higher level of future relations of Ceylon and India and the immediate issues began to be examined in this perspective. The Ceylonese intelligentsia was greatly influenced and were rather ashamed of the irresponsible behaviour of some of the Sinhalese who were preaching racial boycotts. Almost everyone was convinced that the economic issue that had been raised was a cloak for a political objective, and next year's elections to the State Council were influencing many of the activities of Government. Though it would be folly to ignore many cleavages that exist between the Ceylonese and the Indians in Ceylon, I do think that my visit has resulted in bringing India and Ceylon nearer to each other, and to that extent it may be easier to find a solution for our mutual problems.
31. For the Indians in Ceylon, both the labouring classes and the businessmen, my visit was very welcome. It was tangible evidence of the great interest that Congress and India were taking in their welfare. It added to their self-respect and self-confidence. It gave them also, I hope, a new view-point. I did not hesitate to point out their errors and to urge them to cooperate with the Ceylonese for the advancement of Ceylon and her people. I warned them not to look for help to the Imperial Power as against the people of Ceylon, and in

no way to range themselves, for the protection of their own special interests, against the interests of the Ceylonese as a whole. I begged them to remember the principles for which the Indian National Congress stood. But keeping in mind all this, they had also to remember that they had to keep up the honour and dignity of the Indian people and to tolerate no affront or injury to them, more especially to the hundreds of thousands of Indian labourers who work in the plantations and the urban areas.

32. As is usual in foreign countries, I found Indians split up in numerous mutually suspicious groups. It was difficult to get them to work together or to have faith in each other. One of the substantial results of my visit was to induce these various groups to join together and form one organization – the Ceylon Indian Congress. I was assured by all of them before I left that they would cooperate together in all matters affecting Indians in Ceylon, and would also work in cooperation with the Ceylonese for the freedom of Ceylon. The organization, the Ceylon Indian Congress, would be guided by the principles of the Indian National Congress.
33. Ceylon is backward in many ways although, till recently, the living standards of her people were considerably higher than those of the Indian masses. The rich soil produced wealth for them without much labour, the cocoanut trees were laden with cocoanuts without any special effort of man's part. A great part of this wealth, especially from the plantations, went abroad. Yet some remained to keep the people of the country more or less contented with their lot. These people were not very industrious and, where hard work was necessary, they preferred to see Indians doing it. Their economy was based on two factors: the tea and rubber plantations and the cocoanuts. It was an insecure foundation and the economic slump hit them hard. There were restrictions on tea and rubber, and the price of cocoanuts fell. For the first time large number of Ceylonese felt the pinch and were thrown out of employment. Peasants owning land were ejected by forced sales on the part of the Chettiar money-lenders. They flocked to the cities and joined the unemployed. They could not compete with the Indian labour which was cheaper and more efficient. In business also, the Ceylonese could not easily compete with Indians. Big business was in British hands, though Indians were beginning to have a share in it. Small business was controlled by Indians and whole streets in Colombo were full of Indian shops.
34. Ceylon is going through a belated economic revolution and this is a painful process. She cannot subsist on a cocoanut economy, nor can the plantations

continue in their present form for very long. Meanwhile a narrow nationalism grows, the masses, egged on by distress, become aggressively awake, and look upon the Indian as a usurper. There is fear of British and Indian capital controlling Ceylon and of Indian labour swamping the country. British capital and interests are too strong and too well-protected to be dealt with; not so Indian capital or labour or interests. Ceylon for the Ceylonese is a natural and popular cry.

35. It is easy to understand all this and India should not withhold sympathy from it. But it is clear that Ceylon cannot politically or economically stand by herself. A glance at the map is sufficient to demonstrate this. When the British Empire fades away, where will Ceylon go? She must associate herself economically at least, with larger groups and India is obviously indicated. Because of this, it is unfortunate that many of the leaders of Ceylon should help in creating barriers between India and Ceylon. They do not seem to realize that while India can well do without Ceylon, in the future to come Ceylon may not be able to do without India. There is talk of new immigration laws and other restrictions which inevitably would affect Indians more than others. New rules are being framed restricting the employment of Indians in private and even domestic service. To some extent all this may be justified, but the spirit underlying it is very undesirable. I venture to hope that my visit may have done some good in changing this spirit and background.
36. Probably the most important question affecting Indians in Ceylon is that of franchise. I discussed this matter with the Ministers, as I did many other matters also, but I could not, and had no desire to, go deeply into these questions. We were faced with an initial hurdle in the shape of the Government order of discharge of Indian employees. So long as this hurdle was not surmounted, it was not easy to discuss other matters. I pointed out however, and the Ministers agreed to this, that there should be at some later stage a full and frank discussion of all problems between India and Ceylon.
37. When this later stage will arrive I cannot now say. While I was in Ceylon, the Government of India intimated to the Ceylon Government that the proposed trade talks would not take place. They have apparently been indefinitely postponed. This decision had a very noticeable effect on the Ceylon Ministers. They were perturbed by it and feared some untoward consequences. An embargo on Ceylon copra or a heavy duty on it would hit Ceylon very hard. It is true that in an economic war between India and Ceylon, India would suffer more as her exports to Ceylon are far greater than

her imports from the Island. But India's economy would not be seriously affected, while Ceylon's would be completely upset. The Ceylon Ministers were therefore eager and anxious to have the trade talks with Indian and they pressed me to have these fixed up. Because of this desire of theirs, they were prepared to go far to meet our wishes, but, again, fear of local reactions prevented them from upsetting their previous orders about the discharge of Indian employees.

38. The Travancore State, as a measure of retaliation against Ceylon, has increased the duty on Jaffna tobacco. This is hitting Jaffna hard as this particular brand of tobacco apparently has only the Travancore market. It is peculiarly unfortunate that the Jaffna Tamils have been made to suffer, as they are in no way responsible for the decisions of the Ceylon Government. They have consistently opposed these decisions.
39. The question for us to consider now is what, if any, steps should be taken on behalf of India. I am entirely averse to any thing in the nature of retaliation, such as an embargo on Ceylon copra. This would begin a cycle of conflict and mutual injury which would result in bitterness and ill-will between the two countries. In spite of the unfortunate and ill-advised action of the Ceylon Government, there is a fund of goodwill for India in the country and it would be a great pity to lose this.
40. One step is obviously indicated and this has already been taken by the government of India in consultation with the Madras Government. This is the immediate and total stoppage of further labour emigration from India to Ceylon. This is not in the nature of retaliation and yet it is bound to bring considerable, though indirect, pressure on the Ceylon Government. For the present there is no lack of labour on the plantations and for a year or two or even more, the stopping of further emigration will not be felt. But psychologically the effect will be immediate. It will demonstrate that India is not prepared to put up with any ill-treatment of her children abroad. It will also be considered as a possible fore-runner of other action. One immediate and desirable effect will be the betterment of Indian labour on the estates. As the fresh supply is cut off, the existing labour in the plantations will be treated better and will be in a stronger position to bargain. This stoppage of further emigration must therefore be welcomed. Care must be taken, however, that this stoppage is definite and there are no leakages.
41. A necessary consequence of this stoppage of emigration is the closing of the Mandapam emigration depot near Rameshwaram. In any event it was

undesirable for an emigration depot on Indian soil to be in charge of the Ceylon Government.

42. It may be worthwhile to consider a scheme of voluntary repatriation of Indian estate labour. The great majority of these people are permanently settled in Ceylon and there is no question of their being encouraged to come back to India. But if there was a purely voluntary scheme, this might induce ten or twenty thousand estate workers to return to India. This would take away all the surplus estate population and would leave the barest margin for the plantations. The value of the Indian worker would immediately rise both in the plantations and in the urban areas, and all talk of pushing out Indians would cease. Such a scheme might be drawn up by the Government of India in cooperation with the Madras Government and the Ceylon Government. I make this proposal for the consideration of the Working Committee, realising that it might involve difficulties.
43. Apart from this I do not think any further steps need be taken at present. We should watch developments. Trade talks should not take place till a more suitable atmosphere prevails.
44. I am attaching to this report a number of press cuttings from newspapers in Ceylon. These will enable the Working Committee to appreciate how my visit was viewed by the people of Ceylon and what reactions it produced upon them. I propose to hand over to the A.I.C.C. office a large number of memoranda, reports and other papers which I received in Ceylon. Some of these are very valuable documents which can be studied with advantage in considering various problems affecting Indians in Ceylon. They may be kept for future use.
45. I must apologise for this superficial report on my visit to Ceylon. I should have liked to write more fully and to deal with the position of Indians in Ceylon in some detail. But the very wealth of information at my disposal has prevented me from doing so, for nothing short of a little book would have done justice to the subject. I am unable to find time to write it and the members of the Working Committee may not find time to read it if it was written.
46. There is one matter, wholly unconnected with the object of my visit, which I should like to mention. This relates to the Buddh Gaya Temple. There is considerable feeling over this in Ceylon and a strong desire to see it under Buddhist control. An increasing stream of pilgrims comes to Gaya from Ceylon every year. This matter was considered some time back by a

committee appointed on behalf of the Congress and, so far as I remember, it was recommended that a joint committee of Hindus and Buddhists should control the temple. Such a solution would be acceptable to the Buddhists. I do not know why no steps have been taken so far to give effect to the Committee's recommendations. If this could be done, it would be a graceful and very welcome gesture to the Buddhist world. Even otherwise, it would be the right thing to do.

Yours sincerely,
Jawaharlal Nehru

Note for Jawaharlal Nehru's Report On Ceylon

-----The Population figures given in this Report are incorrect. It is requested that the following population figures be given instead.

Population 1931 Census	5,312,548
Estimated population at the end of 1938.....	5,864,000
Singhalese	3,473,000
Tamils	1,427,477
Moors	325,913
Burghers	32,315
Malays	15,977
Europeans	9,153
Others	32,564

According to religion:

Buddhists	3,267,457
Hindus	1,158,522
Christians	523,066
Muslims	356,888
Others	938

Estimated Indian Population:

On estates	677,897
Non estate	200,000

Resolution On Ceylon

Passed by the Working Committee on August 10, 1939

The Working Committee, having considered the report of Jawaharlal Nehru on his visit to Ceylon, as the representative of the Congress, to explore all possible means of bringing about a just and honourable settlement on questions relating to the Indian employees of the Ceylon Government, desire to record their appreciation of his labours and the success that has attended them in bringing the peoples of India and Ceylon nearer to each other. The Committee regret, however, that the Ceylon Government have not thought it fit to make any major change in the measures they had proposed in order to remove a large number of Indians from their employment under the Government, though the committee are aware that assurances have been given that all cases of hardship will be carefully considered by the Government. The Committee regretfully feel that the action of the Ceylon government in respect of these measures is not in conformity with justice or international practice.

Jawaharlal Nehru has drawn attention in his report to the background of the problem which Ceylon has to face, to the new spirit of nationalism and the mass awakening that is following in its wake, and to the economic distress and unemployment which Ceylon, like every other country, has to deal with. The Working Committee desire to assure the people of Ceylon of every sympathy with this national awakening and of every desire to cooperate in the solution of economic and other problems which afflict Ceylon and India alike. Standing as they do for the ending of imperialism and all exploitation in their own country, they must apply this same principle to other countries also, and more specially to Ceylon which is not only a near neighbour but which has been connected with India from time immemorial by links which cannot break. While the Committee desire and expect that every Indian who goes abroad will be treated honourably and with justice, they do not want Indians to go anywhere as unwanted outsiders who exploit the people of the country. The Committee recognize the right of the people of Ceylon to be given preference in State service or otherwise in their country and are fully prepared to cooperate in this.

Of the hundreds of thousands of Indians who have gone to Ceylon and by their labour on the land and elsewhere produced wealth and increased the riches of the country, the great majority have settled down there and made Ceylon their homeland. They have thus earned the right to be considered on a par with the other inhabitants of the island and to have all the privileges and to shoulder all the responsibilities of citizenship. The other Indians, who have not been there for so long, have also given of their labour and service to Ceylon and deserve consideration

and just treatment. The Committee is prepared to cooperate in all steps to adjust relationships so as to give every opportunity to the people of Ceylon to advance and find self-fulfillment. But such steps when they affect two parties must not be taken unilaterally and should take into consideration the interests of those who, for no fault of their own, find themselves in their present situations.

The Committee are convinced that for historical, geographical, cultural and economic reasons the fate of Ceylon is linked with that of India, and are desirous of strengthening these bonds for the mutual advantage of the two countries. In view, however, of the circumstances that have arisen, they are of opinion that all future emigration of labour from India to Ceylon must be completely stopped and they welcome the decision of the Government of India to this effect. Because of this stoppage of emigration, there is no longer any necessity for an emigration depot and the Mandapam depot should therefore be closed. In any event it is undesirable for a depot of this kind on Indian soil to be in charge of the Ceylon Government.



Chapter 8

The Agent's Last Annual Report 1939

(EH&L Overseas Branch File No.22/40 OS)

This was in effect the last complete report by Pai to his superiors in the Government of India Department of Education Health and Lands. Like his other Reports, it was exhaustive, covering all aspects of his official responsibilities.... Immigration and Emigration, Labour position on Estates, Minimum wages on Estates, Labour Ordinances, Conclusions, Resume of events.

The larger part of the report however emphasizes the effect of Ceylon Government's policies on Indian labour and its effect on Indo-Ceylon relations :

(Begin quote from Report)

"The Ceylon Government's scheme for the discontinuance of Indian daily paid employees – partly compulsorily (in the case of persons employed after 31st March 1934 and partly on what was called a "voluntary" basis – was taking effect The following is an analysis of the number of Indian daily paid labourers in Government departments under the three respective categories about whom returns had been received by the Retirement Officer up to the end of the year under review: -

Under 5 years service (compulsory class)	1,354
Between 5 and 10 years' service	381
Over 10 years service	3,425
Unverified, pending and other miscellaneous cases	901
Total number of daily paid workers about whom	_____
Returns have been sent	6561

Of the above it was understood early in January 1940 that 1,225 of the "compulsory class" had been discontinued; and 1,037 workers with over 10 years of service and 286 hands with between 5 and 10 years' service had expressed their willingness to retire under the Retirement Scheme.

The scheme has not yet taken full effect.

Daily paid workers under Municipalities, etc. – The implementing of the scheme for the discontinuance of Indian daily paid workers in Government departments had its repercussion on municipalities and other quasi-government and private bodies employing Indian labour. For example, a resolution was moved in the Colombo Municipal Council urging the replacement of non-Ceylonese daily paid hands in its service by Ceylonese. The number of such Indian workers under the Colombo Municipality is about 2,700, of whom about 2,000 have over 10 years' service and only about 300 have less than 5 years' service. Most of these employees are engaged in scavenging and conservancy work. On a consideration of all aspects of the case including the feasibility of replacing its Indian workers with indigenous labourers, however, the resolution was dropped and the Municipal Council decided that instead of discontinuing the existing non-Ceylonese labourers the policy should be to employ only Ceylonese labour in future save in exceptional circumstances. A similar resolution was moved in the Galle Municipality, and they also were reported to have come to the same conclusion as the Colombo Corporation. But a move like the above is in itself sufficient to create, as in fact it did, a general feeling of insecurity among the existing Indian workers under these bodies. Certain business firms too were infected to a certain extent with this idea of discontinuance of Indian workers: and one well known firm did in fact think it fit to send away all their Indian employees.

Indian labour in Government works contracts – Soon after the policy of discontinuance of Indian workers in Government departments was implemented, a circular was issued by the General Treasury, Colombo, that in all Government works contracts the Heads of Departments should see that so far as is possible only Ceylonese labour is employed. For this purpose "Ceylonese" is defined as "all persons born in Ceylon and no others". In order to give effect to this decision two clauses are inserted, one in the notice calling for tenders and the other in the agreement or contract, under which the employment of only Ceylonese labour to carry out the work tendered or the employment of a definite only of non-Ceylonese labour for such work is made a condition of the contract, preference being given to the tenderer who specifies the lowest percentage of non-Ceylonese labour which he proposes to employ for the work. Failure on the part of the successful tenderer to fulfill this condition will render the contractor liable to cancellation of the contract and in addition to payment of a penalty of a certain sum a day for each non-Ceylonese labourer employed by him over and above the percentage of non-Ceylonese labour which he is permitted to employ on the work in terms of his contract. The penalty sum has been found to vary from 50 cents to Rs. 10 in the tender notices published in the Government Gazette.

Thus an Indian worker discontinued from Government service under the voluntary retirement scheme who decides to stay on in Ceylon – or even any Indian worker who has made Ceylon his home though not born in Ceylon – has very little chance of obtaining work even under Government contract works. Nor will Indian workers discontinued from service under Government under the Retirement Scheme in anticipation of retrenchment, even if they are born in Ceylon, have any chance of being re-engaged on daily paid work under Government at any time in the future as according to a circular issued by the Chief Secretary on the 7th September 1939 “Ceylonese born”, “Ceylonese” and “born in Ceylon” will be interpreted as “a British subject born in Ceylon, at least one of whose parents was a British subject born in Ceylon”.

Indian teachers in assisted schools – A proposal was mooted in some quarters to discontinue all non-Ceylonese teachers from the service of assisted schools and replace them by Ceylonese as a cure for unemployment among the educated. As far as could be gathered, the number of Indian teachers in assisted English schools in Ceylon does not exceed 150 out of a total of about 3,750 teachers. As a result of consideration of the whole question a report by the Executive Committee of Education was placed before the State Council and accepted by it. According to this decision instructions were issued to the Director of Education not to approve the appointment of any non-Ceylonese teacher to the eligible staff of an assisted school in the future, except in a few exceptional cases like the appointment of Principals of Senior Secondary and Collegiate Schools. This decision does not affect non-Ceylonese teachers who, on the 1st day of September 1939, were in the service of Government and those in service in assisted schools whose names appear on the register of pensionable teachers on that date. Appointment of Indian graduates and others as teachers in Ceylon schools in the future is however barred.

Anti-Indian agitation in Colombo - A circumstance which caused great concern in Indian circles during the year was the fact that anti-Indian agitation carried on in certain quarters in Ceylon gradually took a more violent form about the middle of the year, particularly in Colombo and the neighbourhood. The publication in March of the proposals of the Ministry of Communications and works for the discontinuance of Indian daily paid employees in government departments provided the occasion for an intensification of the agitation against the employment of Indian labour. Letters and articles that appeared subsequently in the English and vernacular Press, public speeches directed particularly against Indians and their employment, propaganda against Indians by means of pamphlets, leaflets, street songs in procession, etc., all tended to create and foster public hostility towards Indians. An organised campaign of picketing with the object of driving out Indian traders was pursued with some vigour by certain sections of Sinhalese. Instances

in parts of Colombo City of assaults on Indians, aggressive boycott of Indian shop-keepers, signing of provocative songs directed against Indians, particularly Malayalees, distribution of scurrilous anti-Indian pamphlets, holding of meetings at which Indians were abused and open intimidation in boutiques, tea shops and other business places were reported to the Agency, and were promptly brought to the notice of the authorities concerned. The Police took such action as they could to deal with the situation. There were some prosecutions of offenders, but they did not seem to have had much effect till about the end of July 1939. The visit of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru to Ceylon in July helped to clear the atmosphere to some extent and to encourage those who wished to work for a restoration of the friendly relations that had been subsisting between the Indians and Sinhalese all along. With the declaration of war in September and the promulgation of the Defence Regulations active anti-Indian propaganda subsided.

Labour unrest on estates – At much the same time as the publication of the Ceylon Government's scheme for discontinuance of Indian daily paid employees in Government departments in March 1939, signs were noticed of unrest among Indian labourers on tea and rubber estates. The planters took immediate steps to reassure their labour that there could be no question of their being affected in the same way as the Government's Indian employees. Unfortunately, however, the anti-Indian agitation in Colombo and its neighbourhood, of which mention is made in the preceding paragraph, had its repercussions in estate areas. In some planting districts the Indian labourers withdrew their custom from Sinhalese boutique-keepers. This led to strained relations between the two communities in a few places and there were a few incidents and a minor disturbance in a small planting town. The Sinhalese movement to boycott Indians abated on the outbreak of the war; it was then announced that on account of the war the sponsors of the movement were suspending the holding of public meetings to advocate the boycott of Indians. With the abatement of the boycott of Indians in Colombo the movement in estate areas also subsided.

The uneasiness among estate labourers however took a new direction after the visit of Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and the formation of the Ceylon Indian Congress immediately thereafter. Many associations called "Sanghams" were started on estates by the labourers themselves, though the objects were not always clearly defined. The organisational movement that was thus started appears to have come to stay. It is not surprising that this movement which has hitherto been almost unknown among Indian estate labour in Ceylon has been watched with the closest interest and not a little concern by the planting community. The new attitude on the part of their labour forces has not been to the liking of some Superintendents

and particularly, of some of the subordinate staff. In a few cases attempts by the staff, openly or privately, to stifle the labourers' attempts at association, by resort to such means as securing the dismissal of "leaders", provoked incipient strikes which were fortunately short-lived in most cases. The labourers appeared to become very rapidly conscious of the strength of association, and for the first time have begun to give united expression to their grievances. These are largely of a comparatively simple nature, but they intimately affect the labourer's conditions of work and life in the lines. In most cases their complaint has been directed against the conduct of subordinate officials and their treatment of labour. In a number of cases the labourers have resorted, rather precipitately, to strikes in order to demand the removal or punishment of a subordinate, like a conductor, kangany or clerk. A number of employers are inclined to attribute the unrest mainly to the activities of outside 'agitators', but this explanation does not take account of the fact that unless there are genuine grievances left unredressed by the employer himself it is unlikely that an outsider would be able successfully to create dis-affection among the labour. As the Chairman of a District Planters' Association said recently:-

"It is futile to lay the whole blame on the political adventurers or agitators who try to gain their ends by creating chaos or the genuine labour leader who tries to work in the best interests of the labourers to ameliorate their conditions. Unless there is room for disaffection and unrest among the labour, the outsider cannot get a hold on a contented labour force, and I appeal to the planters up-country to put their house in order and remove the causes of disaffection and unrest. This may involve a changing of established traditions in the management of labour and also an increase in the cost of production".

It was also alleged that in many instances though the strikes were originally spontaneous, outsiders came to foster them in order to further their influence with the labourers. In some cases the labourers may have gone to the wrong people for advice. This was perhaps largely inevitable having regard to the paucity of educated leaders among themselves, and their fear that they might not get a sympathetic hearing from people in authority inside the estates. But on the whole it can generally be stated that the strikes that have occurred are really a sign of the times and are evidence of a growth of consciousness among the hitherto inarticulate labourers. As rightly stated in the course of a circular issued by the Controller of Labour:-

"It is therefore not surprising that estate labourers in Ceylon are at present showing enthusiasm for the formation of associations through which they can voice their sentiments. The history of similar movements in other parts of the world makes it

clear that it is impossible to stop such a development once it gets under way. As far as labour is concerned, the right to combine for mutual benefit is internationally recognized as one of labour's fundamental rights. If an attempt is made to oppose such development it is abundantly clear that the opposition is bound to fail and harmonious relations between employers and employees are likely to be seriously jeopardised”.

Thus in this respect Ceylon's experience is only what has happened in other parts of the world. This is now largely recognised by the employers. As has been found by experience in other countries the only cure for labour unrest is the growth of healthy trade unionism. This is now acknowledged on all hands and it is to be hoped that every employer will work to this end in the proper spirit in his own interest and in the interest of the labourers. It is encouraging that Mr. R.C. Scott, Chairman of the Planters' Association, has publicly stated that it would be possible within a short period of time for accredited representatives of employers and employees to meet together and agree to a settlement of disputes by negotiation. He also stated at the annual meeting of the Planters' Association:-

“It may have been, and still be, the case that a few Superintendents are slow to agree that our labourers have a right to define their rights and gain better conditions of employment. I maintain that the majority are prepared to march with the times and to sympathetically consider representations made for the formation of estate clubs or unions or requests made to join reputable labour organizations. Progress in the direction has been overwhelming in its rapidity, so much so that today there is evidence that these newly formed labour organisations are insufficiently organised to take their definite place”.

The Tamil labourer in Ceylon is growing up and will continue to do so. Employers, by showing sympathy and tolerance towards a growing movement, can help it to develop on right lines. Even one case of intolerance may well vitiate the atmosphere of goodwill towards the movement, which according to their Chairman exists among the majority of planters and planting association, and may undo the good arising from a dozen cases of friendly and sympathetic treatment.

The first strike on a Ceylon estate occurred in April 1939, and it was not long before strikes spread to estates in different districts.

Exact information is not available as to the actual total number of strikes that occurred between April and December 1939. The number of strikes on estates that came to the notice of the Ceylon Labour Department are reported to be 19 and the total number of labourers involved about 8,937, though the number involved in two estates could not be ascertained together and agree to a settlement of disputes by negotiation.

Criminal trespass cases against estate labourers.

In some cases employees tried to meet the situation created by the spread of the organizational movement among labourers by trying to get rid of the “leaders” who were canvassing membership for associations. Since August the Agency received 135 petitions alleging victimisation of labourers for no reason except that they worked for the formation of associations. In almost every case it was denied that the associational activities had anything to do with the dismissal of the particular labourer. Dismissal of employees on the grounds of their associational activities is in no case justifiable. But in the case of Indian employees of Ceylon estates it entails particular hardship and a serious sense of grievance. An Indian estate labourer dismissed from an estate has no home to go to in Ceylon. He is always under a cloud of suspicion; and having regard to the widespread unrest on Ceylon estates at present, and the fact that employers are well organised, it is well nigh impossible for a labourer dismissed from one estate to get employment on another. If... a labourer who has received notice is one who has lived on an estate for a long number of years, his reluctance to leave the estate can be easily understood. Having nowhere else to go and with a rankling sense of grievance the labourer tends to stick to the estate and accept the consequences. Therefore the employer usually takes legal proceedings to evict him. Unfortunately in a few cases the employers have taken resort to the criminal courts for evicting the employee whose notice has expired. The allegation is invariably that his continued presence on the estate is with intent to cause annoyance ...whereas the real reason for the labourer to remain on the estate is ... the impossibility of finding employment or a home outside at short notice..... especially as there is ample labour available and no demand for new hands. Resort to the criminal courts is to be deplored. Apart from humanitarian considerations it lowers the employer in the estimation of the labouring population and tends to undermine the cordial relations that have hitherto existed between the Ceylon estate employer and the Indian estate labourer.

It is significant that the number of criminal trespass cases increased with the increase in the unrest on estates and the increasing anxiety of the employers to meet the situation.”

(End of quote from Agent’s Report)

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On the question of a conference to discuss these proposals the Government of India suggested that the proposals regarding daily paid employees be held in abeyance until the trade negotiations took place, but the Ceylon Government was not prepared

to postpone the dismissal of these Indian employees in government service. The repercussions of this caused the AICC to resolve to send Jawaharlal Nehru to Ceylon to do what he could to bring about a just and honourable settlement.

Pai reported that although Nehru was received with every courtesy, his talks with the Ministers were largely fruitless. The Ceylon Government did however agree to a minor modification: They offered to treat non-Ceylonese (i.e. Indian) employees with over ten years service under Government, on the same footing as Ceylonese employees in respect of retrenchment.

The Ceylon view was that there was no desire to discriminate against Indians—they were compelled by the growing unemployment amongst Ceylonese. The Indian view was that the economic situation would not appreciably improve by the discharge of a couple of thousand daily wage earners.

It was clearly a political stance and not an economic one.

The proposed trade negotiations were therefore given up as Ceylon government refused to include the discussion of retrenchment of Indian daily paid workers on the agenda.

The Agent's Report for 1939 is dated April 1940 but it was not published until December 1940, by which time Pai had returned to New Delhi. This Report however was discussed thoroughly by the officials in Delhi before its summary was published. The contentious issue of the termination of employments of Indians in Ceylon Government service had perturbed the country. Ceylon had proposed a joint meeting, by sending a delegation to Delhi to discuss trade issues, a meeting that took place in November 1940 in Delhi. Certain sections of the report may have affected the discussions. Bozman noted on the file "I have made some alterations. The whole of Para 58 must go. The Ceylon Government would have a genuine grievance if we used the Agent's Report to develop theories about citizenship".

Para 58, which is the concluding chapter in the report is subtitled Resume of Events :

"1939 has been an eventful year in the history of Indian labour in Ceylon. The Ceylon Ministry's scheme of dismissal of Indian daily paid workers was published early in March 1939. The announcement of this policy provided the occasion for an intensification of the anti-Indian agitation, particularly in Colombo and its neighbourhood. This took the form of an aggressive boycott of Indian shops and demonstrations against the employment of Indians in Colombo. Repercussions of this movement were felt in the planting areas where a certain amount of uneasiness among estate labour was first noticed. The first strike in the history of Indian estate labour in Ceylon occurred towards the end of April 1939....

With the outbreak of the war on September 3, active anti-Indian boycott movement in Ceylon subsided. The uneasiness among estate labourers however took a new turn. Organized associations of labourers began to be formed on many estates. The movement grew rather rapidly...it indicated a rise in a new consciousness; and Indian labourers in Ceylon learned for the first time the value of collective bargaining... fortunately no cases of violence were reported up to the end of the year. The movement for the formation of labour unions appears to have come to stay."

* * * * *

The retaliation by the Indian Government was swift and immediate. The ban on emigration from August 1 was effective, to the surprise of the Ceylon government. Unskilled labourers were stopped from entering Ceylon. Plantation workers refused to leave Ceylon for fear they would not be allowed to return, creating a surplus of labour. Only those workers who could demonstrate that they were permanently settled in Ceylon were permitted to return. Although the Indian Government had for long protested against the discrimination faced by Indian workers they had not taken the steps to stop emigration, which was a proviso in the Indian Emigration Act, an action that was perhaps long overdue. Although Nehru had supported the move to stop Indian emigrants he had not seen this as a reprisal but rather as a gesture to the Sinhalese who feared an Indian population swamping the Island and taking away all employment opportunities for Sinhalese.

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Chapter 9

Back Home and After

Through all the difficulties and official tension in 1938 and 1939 there were bright days with family. Vittal Pai's parents came to visit, the children came for their vacations and they were able to get away on weekend excursions car trips to Dambulla and Sigiriya with picnic lunches under the trees, elephant rides for the children, the drive through forests en route to Kandy and the excitement of the children when they sighted a panther at dusk, were memorable moments to cherish.

By the beginning of 1939 two key questions came up for the Government of India's decision: the continuation of the Agency in Ceylon, and the end of Pai's tenure as Agent.

The Agency of the Government of India in Ceylon was created in 1923 on a temporary basis. As the number of Indian labourers increased there were reasons given for it to continue and it was due to expire in October 1939. While the Department in Delhi sought ways to make it a permanent office, they decided to get financial sanction for its continuance on a temporary basis.

At about this time Pai wrote to Bozman reminding him that his term was due to expire and he wished to apply for four months leave, as he had taken "only 2 ½ months leave in 12 years of service."

Pai's three year appointment was to end in April. He was appointed "on a grade pay on a senior time scale of an I.C.S. officer with a special pay of Rs. 300 and a motor car allowance of Rs. 100 per month." The Secretary was asked to take a decision. Sir G.S.. Bajpai replied that he would speak to the HM (Honourable Minister Sir Jagdish Prasad).

Bajpai was keen to retain Pai for the coming year when the trade talks between India and Ceylon were expected to take place. There were plans to include the

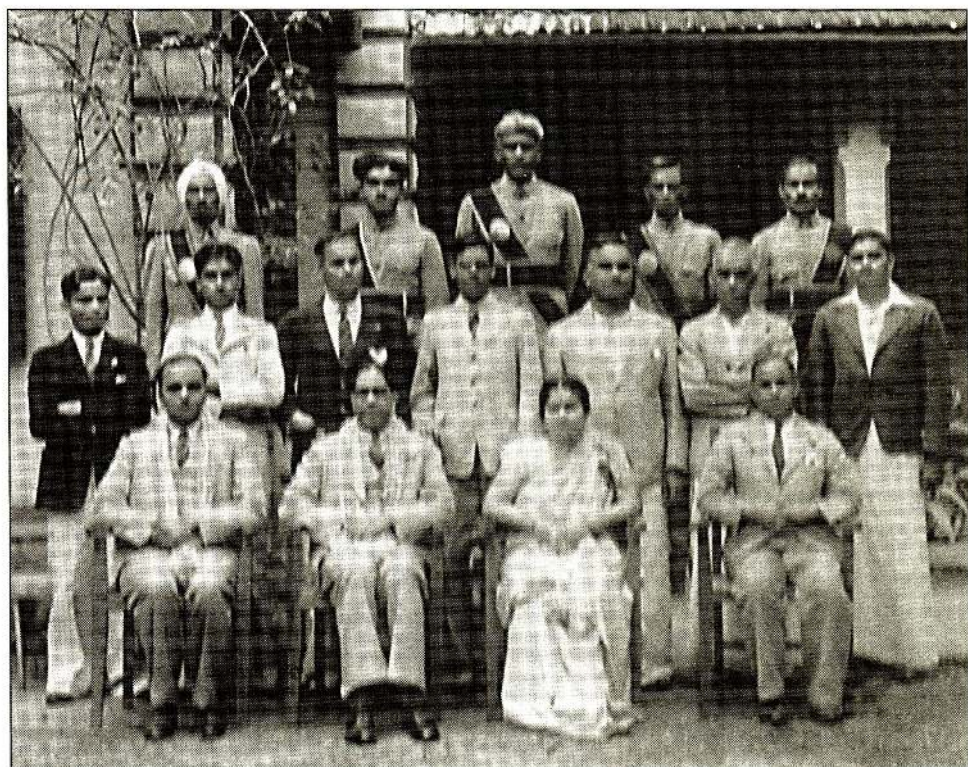
immigration proposals of the Ceylon Government in the agenda. Accordingly the Madras Government was approached to approve his extension of another year in Ceylon. A letter was sent to Pai asking if he was agreeable. He was perhaps anxious to return home. A letter he wrote to his father mentions the correspondence with Delhi and in his reply his father advised him to agree to stay on because his presence at the conference was required and would certainly favour his further posting in India.

The extension certainly proved to be fortuitous because 1939 – 40 proved to be momentous in many ways. It changed the course of Pai's career and his future postings in the service of the Government of India.

The visit of Jawaharlal Nehru to Ceylon, accompanied by his sister Krishna Hutheesing, was the highpoint of 1939. Tara was excited that the distinguished visitors were to be their house guests. The two extra bedrooms were made ready with attention to every detail for the guests' comfort; menus were planned with care. The visit was hectic with Nehru's meetings with estate workers, planters and politicians. The women were included in evening receptions and teas, one of the most pleasant being the reception by the India Club where all the Indian businessmen settled in Ceylon and their families gathered to hear Nehru speak. Both Vittal and Tara Pai were drawn to Nehru, his charm and grace, his quick laughter and animated conversation. Tara wrote to her father giving her impressions of the tour, adding a note (with several exclamation marks) that she was surprised that despite Gandhiji's exhorting people to boycott foreign goods, Nehru, although always dressed in khadi kurta and jacket, enjoyed his French cigarettes after dinner, and Krishna Hutheesing wore only imported georgette sarees and perfumes!

That year AV Pai's name appeared on the King's Birthday Honours List for the award of an O.B.E. There were many congratulatory messages and telegrams from friends and family in India, from colleagues in Government, as also the many friends he had made in Ceylon. This recognition of his sustained efforts and hard work in the cause of overseas Indians was gratifying, but equally important to him was the foundation of goodwill that he had been able to generate among individual Ceylonese because of his unfailing cordiality in reaching out to those who were vehemently opposed to the Indian presence on the island but gave him courtesy and respect.

His successor T.N.S. Raghavan was to report on September 26, 1940, two days before his departure, but Pai requested the Government to request him to come earlier so that he could be introduced to many of the people he had known in the course of his official duties. There were receptions from various Indian associations as also



Staff of the Agency bid farewell to Mr. and Mrs. Pai and welcome the new Agent,
Mr. TNS Raghavan September 1940.

an official reception from the Government of Ceylon at the well-known Galle Face Hotel in Colombo where a printed menu card was signed by all the guests present, a collection of autographs from some of the prominent citizens of the capital.

On the eve of his departure from Ceylon the following article appeared in the *Ceylon Times*:

The Retiring Raj Agent

(Clipping from Ceylon (Kandy) newspaper source

September 1940 Exact date not known.)

As the readers are aware the Raj Agent in Ceylon, Mr. A.V.Pai, O.B.E., I.C.S., is shortly to relinquish his post here and it is but meet and proper that we should review his work during his tenure of office in Ceylon.

Of the services of Mr. Pai to the Indians in Ceylon we cannot say enough. Mr. Pai was in Ceylon for the longest period any past agent was in Ceylon; and during these last 4 ½ years he had to tackle more intricate and important problems affecting Indians in Ceylon than any that fell to the lot of his predecessors. Problems assailing the position of Indians in Ceylon as a whole, and not merely estate labourers, arose and we can now say publicly that he handled these as a true son of great Mother India, with dignity, tact and sincerity. His was indeed a task few Indians knew, but many were eager to criticize. And if, as is evident, he has been able to carry with him the approbation of all sections of the community in his work, it is because of his innate greatness. He is by nature unassuming in disposition, amiable, courteous, and charming in manners, ever alert, ungrudging in work, tolerant of criticism, anxious to see the other man's point of view, a thorough sport in personal dealings, level-headed dignified and calm but firm in official dealings. Added to these are his kindness of heart even to a fault. He had none of the faults usually ascribed to the "bureaucratic" Civil servants, as the treatment of him by Pandit H.N.Kunzru and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru during their visits to Ceylon, testifies.

Perhaps a few of the many important questions that arose during his regime are worth mentioning. Soon after he came to Ceylon in 1936 he realized there was more labour on estates in Ceylon than was necessary for the industries. There was the cry against immigration from India. So when the planters demanded recruitment from India and the State Council endorsed it, he unhesitatingly refused to re-open recruitment from India.

The usefulness of this step is beginning to be realized by even the less thinking among us.

The Village Communities Ordinance excluding Indian Estate labourers alone from the franchise was another bone of contention during his regime. Although the result of the protests against it cannot be said to be completely satisfactory, it tended to unite the amorphous Indian Community in Ceylon and resulted in open discrimination against Indians being removed from the Ordinance as finally passed.

The next question of considerable importance was the appointment of the Immigration Commission. Mr. Pai gave all help possible in helping the Indians to place their case before the Commission, and gave evidence on his own behalf with the result that the hollowness of all the cry of displacement of Ceylonese by Indian workers was exposed and the hands of the Board of Ministers stayed, though temporarily, from enacting measures, derogatory to the dignity of Indians and detrimental to the Indian and other interests here.

The question of repatriation of Indian daily paid workers in Government departments is still green in our memory. Largely through Mr. Pai's accurate and timely reports to the Government of India and the representations of the latter, what was anticipated to be the deprival of about 8000 Indians of their jobs culminated in the dismissal from employment of about 2,500.

Mr. Pai's assistance in getting timely Police intervention on the one hand and advising Indians on the other to keep up their morale and not give way to desperate foolhardism, is largely responsible for preventing the situation caused by the movement for the boycott of Indians and Indian shops and indiscriminate assaults and intimidation of Indians, getting seriously out of hand.

Above all Mr. Pai has been very sympathetic towards aspirations of Estate labourers for association; and it may be said to his credit that the seeds of trade unionism have been well and truly laid among these hitherto inarticulate labourers.

The action of the Government of India in prohibiting the emigration of all unskilled workers to Ceylon during Mr. Pai's regime is applauded by all thinking Indians in Ceylon and is an effective reply to the cry against permission of unrestricted immigration into Ceylon from India. With the conclusion of the Immigration commissioner and this action of the Government of India before them, one is inclined to wonder whether the still persistent move on the part of the Board of Ministers to legislate for restriction of immigration is not after all a pawn in the political game to keep some kind of agitation going. It is hoped that better counsel will prevail at the forthcoming Indo-Ceylon conference; and Mr. Pai who is also to attend it, will we trust be able to help to steer the ship out of all the present troublous

waters to the mutual benefit and lasting goodwill of both India and Ceylon.

Mention should also be made of the fact that Mr. Pai has seen to it that the cuts in the wages of Indian Estate Labourers made as early as in 1932, were restored, that a further increase against the rise in their cost of living on account of the war has now been vouchsafed and that a thorough revision of the meager and out of date family budget of 1926 is under the anvil.

The obtaining of just treatment to the Kandapola Indian vegetable cultivators who were to have been evicted of their plots of land, and the deletion of a clause detrimental to the Indian labourers in the Original draft of the Maternity Benefits Ordinance, are also matters to be mentioned to the credit of Mr.Pai.

There are several other matters, big and small in which his sympathetic hand has eased many an ailing heart but considerations of space prevent us from mentioning them.

He is leaving the Indians in Ceylon stronger, more united and more alive to the needs of their position in Ceylon than they were when came here. And we hope that at the Indo-Ceylon Conference which he is attending he will be able to settle once for all the question of the status and position of Indians domiciled and settled in Ceylon, or having vested interested in the Island.

In all the success of Mr.Pai a large share we venture to state, is due to Mrs. Pai. She too has shown herself to be a true daughter of Mother India, at home and in social philanthropic and all other activities.

We bid them both goodbye and wish them all happiness and prosperity. Indians in Ceylon can and will never forget them."

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Before he left Ceylon Pai wrote letters of thanks to those who had given him official support and cooperation, including his friends in Ceylon and the Governor Sir Andrew Caldecott who was always available to meet and talk over matters with him through the difficult times in his tenure.

Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai replied : "...it was personally a source of pleasure and officially a source of confidence to have had you in Ceylon during the last four years and a half, - as critical a period in our relations with Ceylon as I can remember. The best way in which I can express my appreciation is that if your successor can come up to your standard, we will have every reason to be gratified I look forward to your now joining the department as Deputy Secretary in the not too distant future..."

Vittal and Tara Pai returned to India by air, on September 27, 1940 from Ratnamalana airport, much to the excitement of the family, the children especially, who waited to receive them at Meenambakkam airport, Madras. The plane, a small single engine aircraft was piloted by Captain Gazdar (who later joined JRD Tata's Air India as its chief pilot). They were squeezed in along with several bags of mail. This was their first flight. Their nervousness at take off and landing, and excitement at looking down at a clearly etched map of the Palk Strait and the coast of Madras, were described vividly to the family at dinner that evening.

The children gathered around to listen to the conversation. The eldest girl, now nine years old, asked her father rather wistfully, when he and their mother were leaving them. The question brought home to him then how much he had missed the children and he assured her that they would not be left behind by their parents this time.

After a brief stay in Madras, when he reported to his "parent state" in Fort St. George, Vittal Pai was asked to report in New Delhi before he proceeded on leave. His designation as Deputy Secretary, Overseas Indians, in the Department of Education, Health and Lands, was essentially a continuation of his work with overseas Indians, in all countries of the British Commonwealth, Ceylon included. Before he could proceed on his long-anticipated four months leave, he was informed that he should wait until the proposed informal meeting of Ceylon representatives in India was finalised, as his presence would be required then.

Pai joined duty in Delhi in November 1940 as Additional Deputy Secretary in the Department of Education, Health and Lands, of the Government of India. His family did not join him for sometime. The Government of India at that time moved to Simla during the summer months. The children's schooling had to be adjusted according to the school year. Their travel to north India was also affected by the mass agitation for India's independence gathering momentum. There were disturbances in different parts of India when Jawaharlal Nehru was arrested on November 5, 1940 and sentenced to 4 years rigorous imprisonment. Students in several parts of the country, protested and students of Loyola College, Madras Christian College and Presidency College, Madras went on strike, as reported by Pai's father-in-law, who wrote to say that good friends of the family in Madras, including Dr. P. Subbarayan, Dr. Venkataswami Naidu and others were arrested on December 1. They were in jail at Trichy where those interned at the political prisoners' camp, included VVGiri, C Rajagopalachari, USMallya and Gopal Reddi.

By the middle of 1940 the British Government was preoccupied with the intensified fighting in World War II. Holland and Belgium were occupied by Hitler's armies



Group photograph of the Officers and Staff of the Department of Education, Health and Lands, Government of India, taken in Simla in the summer of 1941. Seated in the centre, Sir Girija Shanker Bajpai, member of the Viceroy's Executive Council and Secretary of the Department. A.V.Pai standing behind him.



UN Delegation meets Prime Minister Nehru to discuss the Kashmir issue.
Seated between N.Gopalaswami Ayyangar and G.S. Bajpai,
Nehru is seen speaking to A.V.Pai, (then PPS to PM)



Mr. and Mrs. Pai leaving for India
at Ratnamalana Airport Colombo in September 1940.

and Churchill became Prime Minister after the resignation of Neville Chamberlain. The new government in London had to deal with the growing movements for independence in the colonies as well.

The family finally joined Vittal Pai in Simla in May 1941. On their return to Delhi at the end of the summer, Pai was designated Deputy Secretary, Department of Indians Overseas. He was still involved in work for the Indians in Ceylon.

In Ceylon there was its own internal preoccupation with political change. With elections due in January 1941 the question of voter registration became an issue with Sinhalese politicians wanting to restrict the registration of estate workers on the basis of "domicile of origin". This debate occurred at a time when labour unrest on the estates spread and the police firing and killing of a labourer on Mooloya estate became an issue spreading a fear of unionization of plantation labour. A public inquiry resulted in the magistrate absolving the police by accepting the version that the man killed was leader of a gang of armed rioters and the policeman who fired was not to be blamed. Bandaranaike seized the issue to blame the British government and Baron Jayatilake's lack of powers.

The anti-Indian rhetoric rose sharply, with both Senanayake and Bandaranaike competing in their anti-Indian speeches vying for political position on this platform of Sinhalese nationalism. While Bandaranaike made his famous statement "... nothing will please me more than to see the last Indian leaving the shores of Ceylon...when I shall die a happy man." Senanayake said "I do not think a greater blow has been dealt...even by the Germans in Poland than what has been done by the enfranchisement of so many Indian labourers." It is interesting to note the differences in the attitudes and tone of speeches of the two politicians, Senanayake, himself a planter, did not strongly target the plantation labour, whereas Bandaranaike in his capacity as President of the *Sinhala Maha Sabha* voiced the sentiments of extreme Sinhala nationalism.

The Indian government reacted with alarm at Bandaranaike's statement regarding the enfranchisement "...that the government of this country will soon pass into the hands of Indians if the people of this country did not rouse themselves..." Governor Caldecott dismissed the competing anti-Indian statements of Senanayake and Bandaranaike as political posturing for populist vote catching.

Procedures were worked out for registering voters in 1940 for the approaching elections. Registration of Indian voters was made very difficult; a statement of domicile was not considered enough evidence even though a person may be born in Ceylon, and residence by itself does not constitute proof of domicile. Enumerators

visited estates and compiled lists of labourers who were born in Ceylon. Many labourers were removed from the lists and the number of Indian voters reduced considerably. Most of the labourers who were registered came under the category of "domicile"; those who were not registered were rejected because of their inability to meet the new procedures of scrutiny. Certainly most Indians who were not registered were eligible by their many years of residence and employment on the estates.

India protested against the citizenship laws and voters registration procedures, A conference in London proposed by the Board of Ministers of Ceylon was cancelled. In its place a meeting was proposed in Delhi in 1940. Pai was recalled from his leave for the meeting and he and Bozman worked with Sir. GS Bajpai in preparations to receive the Ministers from Ceylon, D.S.Senanayake, SWRD Bandaranaike, George Corea, Minister of Labour, and Mr. FC Gimson the Commissioner of Labour were assisted by their civil service bureaucrats. While the Ceylon delegation included their politicians, the Indian counterparts were almost exclusively members of the Civil Service led by G.S.Bajpai. The only political representative was Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar, a member of the Central Legislative Assembly.

The five days of discussions were marked by acrimonious debate and two irreconcilable points of view. Senanayake averred that citizenship rights would be given only to those Indians who had a genuine and abiding interest in Ceylon--- that they must give up all connections with India. Bandaranaike insisted on his oft-repeated point that Indians on plantations were not domiciled, they maintained their family connections with India, sent money home to relatives, they married Indians. The qualifications of "domicile of choice" they said would not imply just five years of residence and a declaration of intent but several factors including continued contact with relatives in India, to whom the labourers would send money periodically. It was clear that the Ceylon delegation wanted to restrict the number of Indians domiciled in Ceylon while maintaining a cheap labour force. They had a rigid agenda: they were prepared to negotiate on the number of Indians who could claim domicile, but the question of choice for plantation labour was not a matter for negotiation. The civil servants from Ceylon argued about economic pressure and population pressure, whereas the politicians pointed out lack of social assimilation. The Indian point of view was a basic test of whether a family, husband wife and children had been living in Ceylon for five years and sought continued employment on the estates, which would have given franchise to the majority of estate labour. The Ceylon Ministers wanted to restrict the number by investigating each case and eliminating the maximum by procedures involving proof of domicile and other details of their residence in Ceylon. It was impossible, they said, to think of a

way to absorb the whole of the Indian population in Ceylon.

The conference ended without any agreement. Trade and emigration issues were not discussed. There was no opportunity to seek the views of the Indian National Congress, most of whom had been jailed; Nehru was undergoing a sentence of four years' rigorous imprisonment.

In 1941 Bajpai and Senanayake met again and came to an agreement that Indians who had a certificate of permanent settlement i.e. those who declared their intention to remain in Ceylon with their families, and satisfied a strict residence requirement would be allowed to stay. The Bajpai – Senanayake pact was virtually a concession to Ceylon Government's demands, and was strongly condemned by the Indians resident in Ceylon as well as by press and public opinion in India. It was not ratified by the Indian Government. With the 1942 Quit India movement spreading throughout the country, Nehru and the Indian National Congress did not agree to it.

In an article he wrote in *Hindustan Times* on 3 November 1941, HM Desai, President of the Indian Mercantile Chamber wrote: "The "agreed conclusions" (of the Bajpai-Senanayake agreement) if given effect to, will (1) create in Ceylon a helot class of Indians as bondsmen under the same masters in the same employment (2) divide the Indian population into numerous categories with varying degrees of disabilities (3) convert a large class of persons possessing the domicile of choice, and their descendants, into an inferior class of permanent settlers; and (4) impose unjustifiable restrictions on employment and re-entry altogether ignoring the definite undertaking extended in the past and rendering the position of Indians much worse than it is at present".

Among the Indians resident in Ceylon promoting the cause of the rights of Indians there, the most energetic and committed, HM Desai, tirelessly wrote, met and lobbied with the British Government. In his book *CITIZEN OR OUTCAST* published in Colombo in 1946 he wrote a comprehensive and detailed account of the citizenship question, his visit to England and his discussions at the Colonial Office on the plight of Indians in Ceylon. He kept in close touch with Indian leaders and during his visit to London in 1945 he addressed a press conference arranged by V.K.Krishna Menon. He also intended to meet Sir A.Ramaswamy Mudaliar and A.V.Pai who were expected in London for discussions with the Colonial Office. Their arrival was delayed and he left a detailed note for them on his meetings with the British Government and his impressions. Sir Ramaswamy Mudaliar was then Dewan of Mysore and a Member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, and A.V.Pai was Joint Secretary of the Commonwealth Relations department. Desai says they

“put forth the Indian position vigorously” on the White Paper published by the British Government on the recommendations of the Soulbury Commission which it accepted. The Commission had left the question of proof of domicile unchanged, and this was not acceptable to the Indians in Ceylon because they feared continuation of discriminatory treatment in citizenship laws, even after five years’ residence on the Island.

In 1945, when he was Controller of Emigration and Secretary, Commonwealth Relations, A.V.Pai was awarded the C.I.E. in the King’s birthday honours list.

With the end of the war, there were celebrations, a parade down Kingsway (now called Rajpath) in New Delhi on March 7, 1946 in which the new Viceroy Lord Mountbatten and the Commander-in-Chief of the Army Gen Auchinleck took the salute. Later that month, a delegation led by Lord Pethick Lawrence, Secretary of State, and members of the British cabinet Sir Stafford Cripps and A.V.Alexander visited India to discuss Dominion status for India. Political activity increased with the release of the Congress leaders from prison. Gandhiji’s prayer meetings were attended by large crowds.

In October 1946 Vittal Pai was selected as a member of the Indian delegation to the Paris Peace conference, which was headed by Sir Samuel Runganadhan, then High Commissioner for India in London. On their return to India the delegates received a letter from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru appreciating the “hard work put in by the secretarial staff.”

The Constituent Assembly of India met for the first time on December 9, 1946 and the countdown to Independence had begun.

Vittal Pai renewed his contact with Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, soon to take over as Prime Minister of India, in 1946 when he was secretary, Department of Commonwealth Relations. In June 1947 when Nehru was busy getting ready to take office and making appointments, he retained Sir Girija Shanker Bajpai who had distinguished himself as Agent general of the British Government in the US, and named him India’s first Minister of Foreign Affairs. In the first important diplomatic position he made, Nehru named his sister Mrs Vijayalakshmi Pandit as India’s Ambassador to the UN and concurrently as Ambassador to the Soviet Union.

In late June Nehru summoned Vittal Pai to his office and asked him to accompany Mrs. Pandit to Moscow to establish the first Indian Embassy as Minister Counselor. Taken by surprise, Pai hesitated only a moment before politely declining! This time it was Nehru who was surprised. His eyes flashed with quick temper (an expression Pai was to recognize many times in later years) – as he asked “Why not?” Again

politely and softly, Pai replied that his father was terminally ill with cancer. And also, his children were young and still in school.

Nehru replied curtly, "Your father's ill health and your children's education are at this time of little consequence. Your duty to the country comes first!"

Pai walked out without saying a word. Reaching home he told his wife what had happened adding that he could not now refuse to go. She immediately told him he should not think twice, and that she would go with him. He explained how this was not going to be a plush diplomatic post. Moscow was a city still largely destroyed by the ravages of war. The Indian Embassy would have only a small staff, no building of its own; accommodations would be in a hotel; and besides families could not accompany them. What would they do with the children? Tara assured him that "we will be all right."

The next morning Nehru sent for Pai again, this time to apologise for being so sharp with him, and adding, warmly, that he would appreciate his going along to assist his sister, at least for six months, because she needed a senior official at the Embassy in Moscow during her absence at the UN sessions in New York. Pai thought later that perhaps Bajpai had talked to Nehru to recommend him, and to remind Nehru about Pai's earlier service record.

On August 3, 1947 less than two weeks before Independence, Ambassador Vijayalakshmi Pandit and her staff of the Indian Embassy, left New Delhi for Moscow. There was a distinguished group at Willingdon airport (now called Safdarjung airport) to see them off, among them Dr. Rajendra Prasad, Sarojini Naidu, Sardar Baldev Singh, Sir G.S. Bajpai several friends and their families. The children bid a tearful farewell as they hugged their parents and watched them board the plane. A special Dakota plane flew the new Indian flag, the tricolor with the Ashok Chakra, by special dispensation, as it had yet to be adopted by Parliament after August 15. As the plane taxied slowly, and everyone waved, the pilot slid open his small window reached out to remove the flag, before revving the engines and gathering speed for take off. The flight took more than a day with stops at Karachi, Basra, Baku on the Caspian Sea before heading for Moscow. The Pai children and their grandparents listened to radio reports that announced the stops on the itinerary of the special plane.

Setting up the new Embassy, learning Russian, getting acclimatized to the severe winter, watching the May Day parade outside the Kremlin, were all experiences that were described in the letters sent home through the diplomatic bag once a week. It was not an easy time for Vittal and Tara Pai as they had left the children in Delhi under the care of servants, and the kind supervision of neighbours. The

aftermath of partition and the riots in Delhi were a cause for great anxiety and the only source of news was the BBC which did not help allay their fears.

They returned to India in February 1948 when Pai joined as Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs. In 1948 Nehru reorganized his office and created the post of Principal Private Secretary to the Prime Minister, and Vittal Pai was designated the first PPS to PM. It was an eventful term in the Prime Minister's office, with the Kashmir question dominating the first two years. The Ceylon Indian question was only one of the many issues on the agenda of a newly Independent India.

They were challenging but memorable years. Nehru too appreciated Pai's devotion and long hours of hard work.

He wrote in the annual confidential reports :

"I have come in intimate contact with Shr A.V.Pai during the past year or so as he functioned as my principal private secretary. As such he had to deal with a wide variety of problems and he kept up a high standard of efficiency. He is a man of integrity with a capacity for hard work. He does not complain and maintains his affability and friendliness under strain, which is rather unusual. He has given me every satisfaction and I have liked the quiet and efficient way in which he has dealt with difficult problems".

J.N. 18.4.49

The opinion I formed of Shri A.V.Pai's work and capacity a year ago and which I recorded last year, has been confirmed after another year's experience. I have liked the way he has got on with all sorts of people - not a usual trait. I was sorry to lose him as my P.P.S. on his appointment as Secretary in another Ministry.

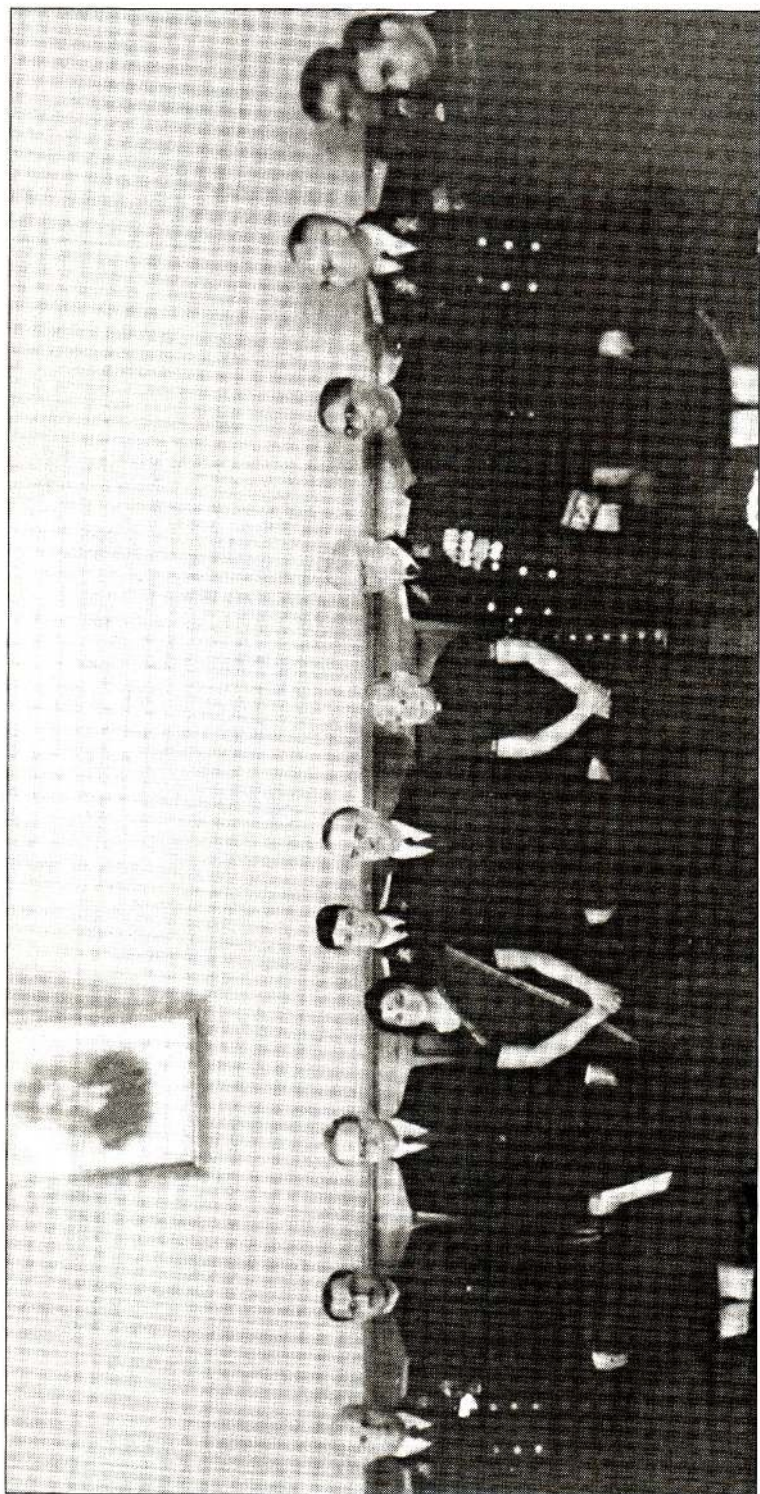
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In 1950 Nehru wrote to Rafi Ahmed Kidwai, Minister for Communications, asking him if he would accept Pai as Secretary in his Ministry. He wrote that although he liked Pai very much, he felt that no one should be PPS to PM for too long!

After serving three years as Secretary, Ministry of Communications, Pai was posted as Home Secretary under Kailash Nath Katju and later Pandit Govind Ballabh Pant, an equally challenging position where he served for five years.

Vittal Pai retired from service in 1961 after a three year term as Secretary to President Rajendra Prasad.





Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit presented her credentials as India's Ambassador to the USSR, at the Kremlin in September 1947. In the photograph taken on the occasion, Mrs. Pandit is flanked on her right by Vyacheslav Molotov, First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers, and then Minister for Foreign Affairs. Marshal Voroshilov, member of the Presidium, is on her left.

The Indians in the photograph : Prem Kishen, First Secretary, Indian Embassy, (2nd from left) Chandralekha Pandit, Mrs. Pandit's daughter, (4th from left); A.V.Pai, Minister Counselor, Indian Embassy, (4th from right); extreme right, T.N.Kaul.

Pact and Impact

In the years since Independence India has seen several large scale migrations of people that have tested the political will and the social resilience of the country. The trauma of partition left an enormous impact, and three decades later refugees from Bangladesh came in overwhelming numbers at the birth of that new nation.

The Indian Tamil diaspora may not have left such an impact on the history books, but for decades the voices of the stateless and the need for an equitable just solution were raised and political solutions were sought. The pain and suffering of the uprooted and the homeless is the same, in every age and in every country of the world.

Beset with problems from China on the one hand and the threats from Pakistan over Kashmir on the other, Nehru's fight for the cause of the Tamil Indians in Ceylon was on the back burner for a while.

Nehru and the Ceylon Prime Minister John Kotelawala met in January 1954 to discuss the repatriation of those Tamils in Ceylon who wanted Indian citizenship. Under the Nehru-Kotelawala Pact, India agreed in principle to accept the repatriation of Tamils of Indian origin who wanted Indian citizenship, but India did not accept the Ceylon position that all those who do not qualify for Ceylon citizenship should automatically be given Indian citizenship. Nehru objected to the compulsory repatriation of Indians because he feared this may apply to other groups of Indians overseas. He felt there should be political principles that would govern citizenship and franchise.

After a quarter of a century of protracted negotiations between India and Ceylon it came upon the new Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri after Nehru's death to meet Ceylon's Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike to once again strive to hammer out a solution to decide the fate of almost a million "stateless persons." There were hard and protracted negotiations, but both Prime Ministers earnestly sought a solution. Shastri not only consulted the Madras government and Tamil leaders but also sought the opinion of other state premiers in India about the rehabilitation of half a million stateless persons who sought to return to India. This

made it a national issue and not only a regional one.

The Sirima – Shastri Pact of 1964 worked on a numerical formula and thus deviated from Nehru's stance. Of the 975,000 Indian Tamils in Ceylon, the agreement provided for the repatriation of 525,000 persons to India and the absorption of 300,000 as Ceylon citizens under a 15-year phased program. The political status of the remaining 150,000 was to be discussed later.

While most public opinion hailed the Sirima-Shastri Pact as a breakthrough there was opposition both in Ceylon – by the Ceylon Workers' Congress which was founded after the Nehru visit to Ceylon in 1939 – and several politicians in India. While the Pact assured equal facilities and no discrimination between those accepted as Ceylon citizens and the others who were to be repatriated to India, the announcement that there would be separate electoral registers of the two caused indignation and resentment in both countries. Acharya Kripalani said the Pact was unjust and plainly discriminatory, the DMK party in Tamilnadu opposed the Pact entirely. The contention was that there had been no consultation with those who were to be repatriated or assurance whether they could take their assets with them.

What remains in my memory after my visit to Sri Lanka in 2008 is the expression in the eyes of a Tamil academic I met at the University in Peradeniya, as he remarked quietly, "Nehru saw the larger issue of human rights and cared about us, Shastri let us down."

I wonder what Vittal Pai would have to say? He was the consummate Indian civil servant in discussions, but as a humanist his heart reached out to the Tamil labourer whose small voice was barely heard.



Afterword

Vittal Pai's correspondence, including the letters reproduced here, were typed by his devoted and efficient secretary Raghuraman, who was from Palghat. We first knew him in Kandy and after Vittal Pai's return to India and subsequent posting in New Delhi, Raghuraman requested a transfer and continued to work for him with unfailing loyalty until his own retirement and return to Palghat. We last heard from him when he wrote a letter of condolence when Tara Pai died.

Tara Pai died in New Delhi in 1973 at the age of 65 years. Her memorabilia from Ceylon were treasured and passed on to her daughters, along with the many memories and stories that she recounted to them long after they returned to India.

Vittal Pai died in January 1989 in New Delhi at the age of 87 years. It was more than 25 years since he retired. He was lonely after Tara died, and spent most of his time reading books he borrowed from the India International Centre Library, until his failing eyesight made reading difficult. He was interviewed by BR Nanda for the oral archives of the Nehru Museum but he did not write his memoirs, or speak at any length about his years with Nehru to anyone but his wife. His devotion and loyalty to Jawaharlal Nehru were known to his family from many anecdotes and experiences we heard from him. He cherished old friendships, and kept in touch in correspondence with many of them including some from Ceylon. Good friends like B Shiva Rao and KPS Menon were in frequent touch until they too faded away, as he battled Alzheimer's in the last three years of his life.



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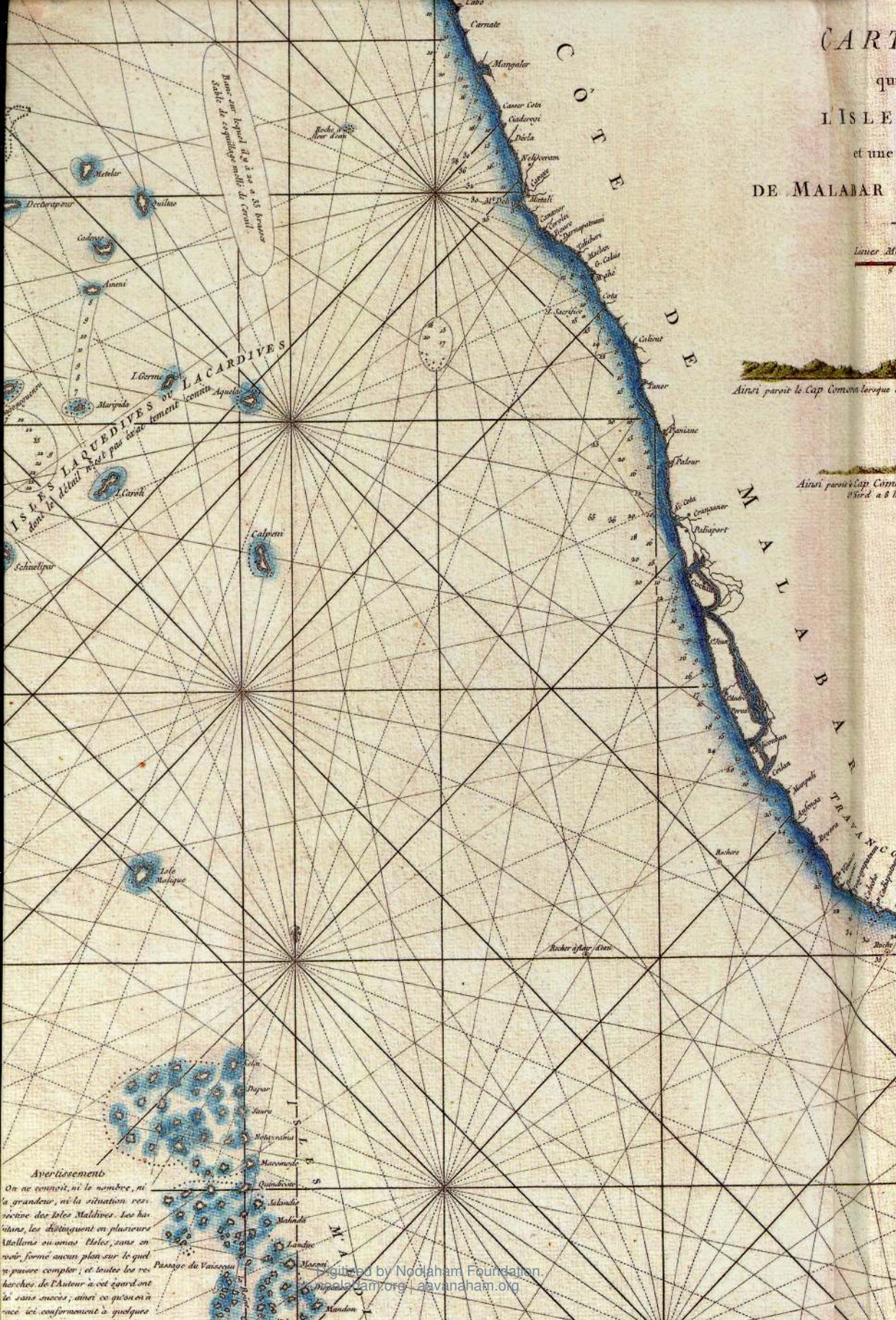
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Ainsi parait le Cap Comor lorsque

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Avertissement

On ne conçoit, ni le nombre, ni la grandeur, ni la situation exacte des Isles Maldives. Les habitants, les distinguant en plusieurs Atollons ou amas d'Isles, sans en avoir formé aucun plan sur le quel on puisse compter; et toutes les recherches de l'Auteur à cet égard ont été sans succès; ainsi ce qu'on en a tracé ici conformément à quelques