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**SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND MARGINALIZATION OF INDI-
AN PLANTATION WORKING CLASS –THE MALAYSIAN
PLANTATION EXPERIENCE**

M. Mahalingam



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Abstract

Abstract: This paper looks at the various forms of social exclusion which resulted in perpetuation of poverty and marginalization of Indian plantation working class. Thus, the paper takes upon social exclusion approach for analysis. Even though the plantation agriculture contributed for the national income at substantial level, the Indian plantation working class could not prosper on the flourishing plantation sector. Instead, the Indian plantation working class has become “under class” of the Malaysia and also they have been trapped under “vicious cycle of poverty” for various reasons. The neglected Indian plantation working class is under distress in the prosperous Malaysia.

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Keywords: Social Exclusion, Indian plantation working class, poverty, Marginalization

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Statement: All the views expressed in the paper are of the author(s).

Social Exclusion and Marginalization of Indian plantation working class –The Malaysian Plantation Experience

M. Mahalingam

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is being called as "Asian tiger" at the global level for its robust economic growth at present. The plantation agriculture was undoubtedly the mainstay of Malaysian economy since the colonial period to recent past. Interestingly, the plantation agriculture of Malaysia is synonymous of Indian labour force since its inception. The base of the modern economy was built upon the major contribution from plantation sector of the country, which dominated the economic scenario almost a century and also fuelled the GDP and GNP growth. These three plantation crops-rubber, oil palm and cocoa-occupied a total cultivated area of 4.2million hectares in 1990. In 1991, the three major crops contributed RM8.3 billion in export earnings, and plantations regularly contribute 8% to 9% of nation's total revenue (Ramachandran and et.al 1995:394). On the other hand, the Indian plantation working class could not prosper on the flourishing plantation sector. Instead, the Indian plantation working class has become "under class" of the Malaysia and also they have been trapped under "vicious cycle of poverty" for various reasons. It has been observed that various forms of social exclusion that has been executed or practiced against the Indian plantation working class could be the cause for marginalization of Indian plantation working class.

Social Exclusion: Theoretical Back ground

The term "social exclusion" is of relative origin and it has been coined by Rene Lenoir (Sen2004). The concept has been growing, and at present has different connotations. However, generally, the concept helps to understand the different socio and economic problems causing poverty and deprivation. There are different approaches of social exclusion through which we can look in to poverty and deprivation such as given by Adam smith, Aristotle, Charles Gore, Amartya Sen and others. For instance, Amartya sen defines social exclusion is constitutively a part of capability deprivation as

well as instrumentally a cause of diverse capability failures(Sen 2004). He investigates social exclusion as an approach to poverty by establishing within the general perspective of poverty as capability failure. Based on this premise, in this paper, it has been argued that the existence of the poverty and deprivation among the plantation working class is due to different kinds of exclusive measures inflicted upon by the Malaysian state and society which has led to their capability deprivation.

The Nature and Characteristics of Indian Labour Immigration to Malaysian Plantations

While India was under the British colonial rule, the British had first exported cheap labour force to its colonies, in the various parts of the world, before they exported cheap raw material from India. The cheap Indian labour force was very much utilized for the expansion and growth of plantation capital by the British in the Indian, Pacific oceans and Caribbean parts of the world. In the context of Malaysia, as soon as the British extended their rule in the peninsular part of Malaysia, they gave primary importance to plantation agriculture as part of colonial policy, to cater to the needs of British industrial revolution. But, the plantation agriculture demanded cheap labour force. The local Malay population was reluctant to take up the plantation jobs since it was considered a repetitive, monotonous, oppressive, deskilling, and low wages as well. Besides, the immigrants Chinese in Malaysia were not preferred by the British planters as they were known for unruly and independent mind in nature. Thus, the colonial government took steps to import cheap labour force from its colonies. Given the geographical proximity and also as the same aegis of British, India had become an indispensable destination to outsource its labour force to Malaysia. Among the Indians, South Indians especially Tamilians were favoured as the British planters and officials were very much familiar with nature and cultural life of them in SriLanka. Apart from this, in the words of Sandhu, "South Indian labour, was considered the most satisfactory type of labor, because, it was considered to be

docile, which created a relationship of dependence between employer and coolie. The south Indian peasant was malleable, worked well under supervision and was easily manageable. He was not as ambitious as most of his northern Indian compatriots and certainly nothing like the Chinese (and) was the most amenable to the comparatively lowly paid and rather regimented life of estates and government departments. He had fewer qualms of religious susceptibilities, such as aversion to crossing the dreaded Kalapane and food taboos.....and cost less in feeding and maintenance" (Sandhu1969:47). Thus, South Indians particularly Tamilians became an ideal labour force for the development of plantation agriculture.

The labour exodus was carried out through innovative, cheap immigration mechanisms such as Kangani and other forms of contractual systems, which helped to meet the ever increasing demands of the labour on the plantations. The immigration depots were set up in Madras, Nagapattinam and Karaikal to facilitate the passage of the immigrants. Since then, the immigration from the Tamil regions had been increasing every year. The prosperity of Malaya (as it was called on colonial era) after the first world war led to major influxes of migrants, with more than 3,50,000 arrivals recorded in 1926-27. By 1931 Indians, of whom 83 percent were Tamils, represented almost 15 percent of the total population, and even greater proportion of the labour force, especially in rural areas of Penang, Selangor, Perak... (Guilmoto1993:114). Generally, the enmasse of labour migration to Malaysia had taken place during 1911-30, around 90,000 persons entered in to Malaysia every year. There was a trend of decline afterwards. At the same time, the reverse migration had taken place between 1930 and 1932, more than 1,50,000 Indians were repatriated due to crash down of world economy. Along with labour immigrants, there were a large number of contingents of traders, educated professionals and administrators drawn from different Indian ethnic groups from South India and other parts of India as well who moved in to Malaysia. But, the plantation sector was prominently monopolized by Tamil and a few Telugu ethnic groups as working class and Malayalees as supervisory staff on the plantations. Given the numerical majority and presence of Tamils on the plantations, they emerged as an inevitable labour force of the plantation economy.

Social Composition of Tamil Labour Immigrants on the Plantations

The clarion call given by the recruiters to work on the plantations in Malaysia was enthusiastically accepted and there was a good response from the lower and middle strata of the Tamil society. The non-Brahmin castes especially small peasant castes such as Vellalar, Vanniyar, Goundar, Nadar, Muthurajah, Kallar, Maravar, Kammalar, Mudaliar, Melakkarar, Thevar, Vannar, Pillai, Naicker, Pandaram, Valluvar and other minor or smaller castes were higher in numerical strength and were recruited as the plantation labour force. The following Dalit sections were also as high as the non Brahmin castes namely Paraiyar, Pallar, Chakkliyar and Kuravar on the plantations. Particularly, the untouchable Tamil communities were more interested to emigrate in search of green pastures. David James Mearns has opined that South Indian labourers who comprised roughly 65 percent of the total Indian migrants to Malaya during the colonial period, were largely drawn from the depressed castes and untouchables (Mearns1975:34). To attribute this point, R,K.Jain further clarifies that many untouchable castes (Adi-dravidas) migrated to Malaysia but he says that it is difficult to substantiate it statistically (Jain 1984:175). Sandhu also describes the presence of South Indian Dalits belonging to Parayans and Pallans and other depressed castes as indentured labourers in Malaysia. The "Madrasi untouchables" were much in demand for plantation work for the estates preferred the untouchable or lower caste 'Madrasis', since they could perform light and repetitive tasks (Sandhu1969:56). Hence, the estate social structure was composed of non-Brahmins and Dalits. It is very important to note that though they belonged to different caste categories doing their caste occupations as per the social hierarchy pattern in the home land, they were same social class under the plantation industrial sub system.

The Political Economy: Race and Exclusion

On arrival to Malaysia, the Indian labourers were housed on the plantation areas itself connected with rubber, coconut and oil –palm since the plantations were located in the interior rural parts of Malaysia. It has been said that the commuting was considered tough and risky. Actually, the real purpose was to avoid desertion of workers, ready availability of workers all

the time and also prevention from the social relations with main stream local population since they were transient labour immigrants. Thus, they were forced to live in an isolated and insulated environment of the plantations. But, the real cause was owing to racial ideology of the colonial government, Indians as plantation working class were caged in the plantations, their social, cultural and economic life confined to the plantations had led to exclusion from other ethnic groups. As Stenson has rightly said that, the Indian estate labourers who comprised the largest body of industrial type of labour were isolated in their cocoon-like environment (Stenson1980:150). Hence, the social distance was well maintained and acculturation with other races was totally cut-off. It has been argued that Furnivall notion of "cultural pluralism" was encouraged in Malaysia in order to avoid integration with other local existing races. The colonial government "managed" the plural society by trying to maintain the Malay feudal social structure in the country side and a temporary immigrant population (Indians and Chinese) working in the mines, plantations and cities (Hirschman1986:356). So, on the economic front, the division of labour was based on racial lines. Indians as plantation workers, Chinese as businessmen and Malays as agriculturists. The categorization of races helped to preserve their respective social and cultural identities. But, it excluded each other and led to persistence of differences, resulted into the feeling of outsiders and locals, which paved the way for racial riots later. It also further helped the colonial government to quench its colonial interests by playing one race against other when they felt threatened for their nefarious activities. Further, the racial ideology of the colonial government was to create an unbalanced and unequal social structure as part of "divide and rule" policy of its colonial agenda. One could argue that the colonial legacy of the perpetuation of racial ideology in the economic functions in Malaysia accelerated racial distinctiveness when the sojourners had become settlers of Malaysia. Eventually, the institutionalization of racial differences provoked antagonism, mistrust, hatred and competitiveness in sharing the public resources as the economic inequality had got widened among the races due to appeasement of certain races in the process of economic development by the colonial state. For example, it has always been argued by the Malay nationalists that immigrant Chinese and Indians had greater economic advantages than native Malays under the British patronage. Nevertheless, one could say that the Indian ethnicity who bore the brunt of ra-

cial exclusion was rather neglected or ignored by the colonial state in the plantation sector. The racial discrimination was very much evident even in fixing the wages for different races. For instance, Chinese labourers obtained higher wages than the Indians all the times except world depression crisis period. Bauer attributes that Chinese wages were usually appreciably higher than Indians, as the Chinese worker is generally speaking stronger, more skilled and more careful (Bauer1948:219). Not only from the colonial state, but also after independence from the colonial power, the successive Malay ethno-centric governments were very much against the empowerment of poor plantation working class dominated by Indian ethnic minority. But promoted welfare schemes for poor Malay. After the racial riot in 1969, the government had come out with New Economic Policy (NEP) in order to balance the exclusive nature of economic functions by a particular race but this policy was only in favour of native Malays and it excluded other immigrant ethnic groups. Likewise, the racial factor played a greater role while allocating the resources and equal opportunities were denied in the futuristic plans as well to immigrant ethnic groups.

The Labour Welfare Policies, Plantation Working Class and Exclusion

As we discussed earlier, the labour immigrants were provided housing within the fringes of the estates, which either related to coconut, palm-oil or rubber plantations as the plantations were located in rural and far off from the inhabited place. Generally, the housing was wooden barracks or raised bricks with poor basic amenities. It was so poor and was in dilapidated conditions due to lack of maintenances. As per the workers Minimum Standards of Housing and Amenities Regulation Act, 1990, every plantation family is entitled to get reasonable accommodation to stay. But, according to SelvaKumaran Ramachandran, a labour department survey in 1991 in peninsular Malaysia revealed that of 85,729 estate houses surveyed, 12,002 houses (14%) had only one bedroom and 30,000 estate families were living in houses, that did not meet the requirements of the 1990 Minimum standards Act (Ramachandran and et.al 1995:400). The housing pattern was same in all types of the estates. Proper housing is essential for improved quality of life. Many studies have demonstrated that bad housing is profoundly detrimental to the life, health and welfare of a community

(Glazer1973:158-170).The labour lines of the estates resembled the slums of Indian cities. Lack of space and privacy had intensified quarrels and physical violence among the plantation labourers. Further, Dalits were segregated or excluded from other non-Brahmin castes in terms of housing allotments. Dalits housing area was separate and was worse than non-Brahmin castes. In the words of S.Arasaratnam, labourers of the untouchable castes who formed over a third of the labour force, were housed in separate lines, away from those of the clean castes (Arasaratnam1970:65).Plantations had a very rigid hierarchical organizations consisting of executive staff, non – executive staff and labourers or coolies, who were composed of Kangany, foreman, tappers, harvesters, weeders and others. Since the plantations were run and maintained by private parties, there was a coercion, unquestioned power and authority with them. According to Allen, the manager of any rubber estate was very much like king of the district and was respected by everybody in the district (Allen1983). The poor labour had become voiceless if he or she was forced to undergo harsh treatment in the plantations. The enactment of labour laws for the protection of labourers could not check the atrocities perpetrated against the labourers by the planters and higher executive staff of the plantations as the geographical location and isolation from the outside world favoured the management to flout those laws and labourers were taken for granted.

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the United Nations, "the concept of basic needs includes two elements: first, certain minimum private consumption requirements of a family such as adequate food, shelter, and clothing as well as certain household equipment and furniture; and second, essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe drinking water, sanitation, transport, health, and educational and cultural facilities. By and large, all these needs in relation to plantations are covered by the "Rump Labour code, 1993" and the "workers (minimum Standards of Housing) Act, 1966," which requires plantation owners to provide these services to their work force" (Cited in Ramachandran and et.al1995:398). All these welfare measures had been ignored and the planters were interested in mindless exploitation of the labourers. The rigid plantation system had made poor labourers very submissive and were not able to articulate their demands. The exit from and

entry to the plantations had been restricted so as to avoid the desertion of the labourers. Inevitably, the tress passing was strictly prohibited. Moreover, they had been provided three Ts in the plantations such as Toddy, Temple and Tamil school. To meet the personal needs of the labourers, the ration system was in practice for sundries. So, they had been stuck in "green ghettos" (the line houses were generally in green colour) and social interaction with mainstream was very much restricted. As R.K.Jain states that they had been kept almost entirely in the plantation subculture (Jain 1970). Thus, the social relations with others were undetermined or excluded for the labourers.

Water supply was either very much restricted or limited to the plantation's labour areas and the quality of water was poor. A 1991 Labour department study revealed that water was supplied for limited hours at 634 estates and at a further 184 estates the only source of water was the communal standpipe. One stand pipe can be shared by as many as 15 households with limited access time each day. Water scarcity issue was only specific to plantations but the other rural parts had water supply well, only the plantations were excluded in the rural water supply implementation scheme. For example, according to the Fifth Malaysian Plan, around 1.8 million people benefited from 2,300 rural water schemes implemented in the fourth plan. The Sixth plan reported that under the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation program, 18,314 water supply projects were implemented in the fifth plan to benefit 4,96,515 people living in rural areas. It also reported that water supplies were extended to new land schemes in the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) and Regional Development Authority (RDA) areas, and that efforts would be continued to supply new settler areas (Ramachandran and et.al1995:401). Sanitation and drainage facilities were not met by the labourers on the plantations though the labour code subscribed those facilities. A study by SelvaKumaran Ramachandran, Pit latrines (19.4%) and buckets (6.4%) which were used as types of latrines on communal basis and badly maintained in all types of estates (Ramachandran and et.al1995:402). As far as electricity supply was concerned, some estates could supply from central generator systems and others dependent on their own either using oil lamps or gas lamps or using own generators. Since the National Electricity Board treated plantations as industry, the tariff was so high for usage. Many estates could not afford electricity supply to the houses of

the labour lines keeping cost-benefit analysis in mind. Thus, they were forced to live in "subculture of poverty" to meet their livelihood under the harsh and inhospitable environment. Such kind of deprivation had affected or reduced their life chances and also promoted to have the feeling of low self esteem and so on. In addition to this, the plantation environment could not promote the human capital formation rather it had degraded the Indian plantation community.

Regarding health services, the Rump Labour Code permits employers to provide either a hospital on an estate or a convenient "group hospital" for a group of estates. "Employers were further obliged to provide food and medicine for inpatients, free transport to hospital when required, and if an employee was admitted to a government hospital, to pay the expenses. Where there was no medical officer, a visiting medical officer should visit a plantation at least once a month. In reality, these obligations were not met, resulting in an inequitable distribution of health resources (doctors, dental surgeons, nurses, midwives, hospital assistants, paramedical staff, clinics, and hospitals) workers on plantations and their families"(Ramachandran and et.al1995:403). Some estates had medical facilities but it was inadequate or ill-maintained. Hence, the workers had to go to nearby government hospitals. "The inadequacy of medical service results in workers and their families preferring to seek treatment from the nearest available off-plantation medical facilities. For instance, 31.3% of the workers preferred to use a government hospital, another 31% preferred government clinics, 17.1% used private clinics, and only 17.8% of the workers relied on estate clinics. However, the major stumbling block for worker access to these facilities was lack of transport. On average, most of the plantations studied were situated 7 to 10 Km, and in some cases 20-30Km from the nearest town or health center, whether government or private clinic. Moreover, the plantation management did not provide transport nor pay the medical expenses, even though it is stated under the Rump Labour Code that the management was liable for both. Only in few estates workers were reimbursed for the expenses they incurred for transport on medical grounds"(Ramachandran and et.al1995:404). In addition to this, compounding the worker's difficulties in using alternative medical services was that they did not receive sick pay when they used facilities outside the plantations. In order to qualify for sick pay, they must obtain prior approval from management, which was difficult because management often accused workers of "malingering" and refused to

give them permission (Ramachandran and et.al1995:395). On the plantations, snake bite, or fall from rubber tree and other contagious diseases were common given the poor infrastructure. But they failed to get the medical facilities though they were supposed to receive from the employer. Particularly, Women and children had been victimized in the absence of these facilities. The immunization program was carried out all over the country. It had the coverage of 70% in the nation as compared to others, but, at the same time, the coverage on plantation children was poor(ibid).

Development Plans and Plantation Sector

The plantation labourers were excluded from the successive development plans though they fell under the category of "targeted group" for the removal of poverty. The constant ignorance and indifferent attitude of the policy makers was visible if we look at the development plans after independence. The first and second Malaysian plans did not recognize the vulnerability of the plantation working class but it recognized poor Malays. Only the third plan had included them as "focus group". The welfare of plantation workers finally received official recognition in the third Malaysian plan, which identified these workers as a poverty group along with small holders, paddy farmers, fishermen, coconut small holders, new village residents, other agricultural workers, the urban poor, and indigenous people (Ramachandran and et.al1995:396). But it has been argued that the third plan of the government too failed to enhance the deplorable conditions of the plantation labor. At the same time, the rural poverty redressal programme, which excluded the plantation sector, was implemented by expanding the productive base of the poverty group of Malay and Chinese. This was done through new land development, replanting and rehabilitation, drainage and irrigation, improved provision of basic needs, various subsidy schemes, and an employment creation programs. None of these programmes were extended to plantations, and the fourth and fifth five year plans also failed to address poverty of the plantation section(see for details Ramachandran and et.al1995). The sixth plan's poverty eradication program was also not extended to the plantation sector. . The plantation industry fell under the jurisdiction of three or four ministries namely ministry of rural development, human resources development, health and education in terms of responsibility and the execution

of government welfare schemes, so much so that it was easy to pass the buck on each other whenever the ineffective and exclusion of plantation sector had been brought to the notice of authorities in the development plans. It has been observed that the subsequent development plans had excluded the plantation sector resulting in marginalization or ghettoization of Indian plantation working class. Further, lack of interests shown by the state as well as the hostile Malay bureaucracy towards the Indian plantation working class stranded them on the plantation sector with lingering poverty.

Unemployment , Wage levels and Plantation Labourers

Initially, the wages were as per the provisions mentioned in the Indian immigration laws, but it was not enough to sustain themselves and also as they had to pay back their debt owed to the employer for the passage to Malaysia. So, it could hardly alleviate the poverty and misery of the workers and resulted in frequent deaths and escape from the plantations (Jackson:1961:61-67). Later on, freed from the government legislations and the abolition of indenture system in 1910, the wage level of the labourers were determined in accordance with the price level of rubber in the world market and also collective bargaining of the labour force. As there were always fluctuations of rubber prices in the world market, it had resonance on the wage level, though standard wage level was fixed for the labourers later. Moreover, the availability of abundance of labour power was in favour of the employers or planters to keep the wages low. If the question of wage hikes was raised by the labourers, they were warned with either replacement or retrenchment. During world depression in 1930s, there was rubber price slump, the Indian workers were either paid very less than normal wages or repatriated to India. Even at the times of prosperity, the employers flouted the standard wage policies under the various pretexts. After independence, the larger plantations were subdivided and took over by Trusteeship companies or individuals. The wage level was lower though they were working very hard. It could not meet their expectations, thereby, it was hand to mouth existence on the estates. As compared to other industries, the plantation sector paid low to the labourers. In the words of Selvakumaran Ramachandran, plantation workers earned lower mean monthly incomes than workers in other sectors and industries performing comparable tasks. For instance, their mean monthly incomes (RM 315, RM480, RM491,

and RM673) earned by general labourers, production operators, watchmen, and lorry drivers, respectively, in the electrical and electronic industries in 1989. Semi-skilled in tin mine workers earned RM 497 in 1988, waiters and waitresses in the hotel industry RM630 in 1988, and by office boys in the banking industry RM492 in 1987(Ramachandran and et.al1995:399). The low wages coupled with unemployment problem occurred due to reduction of labour force during slump period, and it had been the normal phenomenon on the plantations, adding to hardships of their livelihood. Later, the increasing number of foreign contractual labourers to the plantation sector had worsened their employment and wage level because of their acceptance of cheap wages by them.

Education and Plantation Labourers

It was the responsibility of the employers to provide education for the children of the labouring class as per the labour immigration code so that they could retain the labourers on the plantations. It was also agreed that the medium of instruction would be in Tamil as requested by the labour while immigrating to Malaysia. According to Sandhu, the labour code of 1923 made it obligatory for the management of plantations to provide educational facilities if they were ten or more resident children of school going age of six to twelve years (Sandhu1969:259). But, it was implemented in a half hearted measures by the planters. The schools were generally a shed with thatched roof and the teachers were not recruited. R.K.Jain confirms that untrained teachers, or sometimes kangany, dispensers, conductors even labourers were left in charge of the school for some times (Jain1970:348). The poor quality of education and uncongenial atmosphere for learning had led to rising level of drop-outs as compared to Malay and Chinese schools. Even those who passed out could not cope with secondary level. Stenson observed that 'the estate schools were often mere apologies, their rooms were inadequate, their teachers untrained and they provide no opportunity for progress to higher education'(Stenson1980:180) Given the poor cultural capital and social capital of the plantation labourers coupled with lack of infrastructural facilities, it could not empower the plantation school children instead they were pushed into bleak future. After independence, though the plantation schools were converted into government aided schools under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education that provided trained teachers, books, and equipments, but the buildings were given away by the

plantation management to run the schools, which were poor and in dilapidated condition so much so that the Murad report had noted that plantation school children were under achievers, drop outs and obtained jobs of low socio-economic status. According to Coletta, the plantation school was an instrument for labouring class to push their children into the estate class structure instead of achieving social mobility (Colleta1975: 87-112). As T. MariMuthu says that the plantation school was an agent of social reproduction for plantation economy(Marimuthu1993:464-481). Hence, the plantation school system paved a way for exclusion of the progeny of the plantation labourers to compete with others in relation to grabbing the opportunities available in the globalised economy of Malaysia later.

Political Exclusion and Plantation Labourers

First of all, the oppressive plantation system could not let the plantation working class to develop political consciousness or emerge as a pressure group. Most of the labourers had refrained from the political activity because of fear, insecurity of their jobs. In fact, there was a relentless effort to organize or mobilize the plantation proletariat to fight against injustice. But, it was severely confronted and condemned with harsh measures thrust upon them by the plantation management. Political education was not allowed in the vicinity of the plantations. Above all, the plantation system was extremely hierarchical, arbitrary and always vigilant over the activities of the labourers. So, for long time, the class consciousness was not allowed to emerge among the working class and they were always kept on their toes. Later, despite the suppression of the trade union activity, trade unions like NUPW (National Union of Plantation Workers), CIAM (Central Indian Association of Malaysia) and others came in to existence. It sought the solidarity of the workers against the exploitation of the plantation capitalists. It had brought certain relief measures, but, later on, it also succumbed to its weakness and emerged as a weak body. With the help of Middle class Indians, Malaysian Indian National Congress (MIC) came in to being, which had the backing of plantation labouring class, but, it could not try to alleviate poverty of the plantation working class despite its role as part of the ruling government since independence to recent past. Further, it had middleclass bias, caste and faction-ridden party. Even though it had focused on the plight of the plantation working class and brought out some welfare measures, it could not complete the process given its fragile political position as part of the government. Thus, it could not bargain with the government

instead it became a mute spectator when the government went on working against the interests of the Indian plantation working class.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, one could understand that the social exclusive measures were pursued in the different spheres by the government and the Malaysian society against the plantation working class community from the colonial period till present, leading to marginalization, deprivation and deterioration of their socio, economic and political positions. This situation was correctly observed by Colleta, " Ignored by the government policy, hidden from the eyes of mainstream Malaysian society, the plantation Indian labour force indeed have become Malaysia's forgotten people."(Colleta1975). At present, as the government offers priority to manufacture export oriented industries, either plantation industries are being converted or dismantled for setting up of industrial parks or special economic zones (SEZ) or information super high way corridors. At this juncture, the Indian plantation working class has been evicted or forced to leave the plantations without any compensational measures. Without knowing the way out, they have squattered on the urban fringes and have become blue collar workers of the urban economy. Besides, generally being rural bound and also being left in the lurch, as they also historically lacked social and cultural capitals coupled with servile nature of plantation system, On the face of poverty, low self-esteem and hopelessness, as reported that they involved in anti-social activities by forming gangs and indulged in criminal activities. There were 38 Indian based gangs with 1500 active members from the plantation working class background, and also in Kuala Lumpur, 14 percent of the squatters were Indians; they had the highest suicide rates; 41 percent of vagrants and beggars were Indians; and 20 percent of child abusers and 14 percent of juvenile delinquents were Indians of plantation working class back ground (Ramachandran and et.al1995:406).Further, owing to social exclusive measures and unequal treatment since long time, the Indian plantation working class is being pushed from relative poverty to absolute poverty if the same situation prolongs in future also, they must be trapped or gripped over by chronic poverty. So, the government should intervene with concrete measures with a commitment and prevent the maladies that are being confronted by the Indian plantation working class. Moreover, the poverty eradication measures

though exists, it should be implemented for poor Indian plantation social group as like for poor Malays without any exclusive measures or discriminative way as they are also citizens of the country even though they belong to ethnic minority group. By doing so, let the Indian plantation social group be an inclusive group like any other ethnic groups of the country in the socio, economic and political development process.

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End Notes

1. kangani means foreman or overseer in Tamil in the Malaysian plantations. As per the system, he was labourer already employed on the plantation, was sent by his employer to recruit labour from his village.
2. Furnivall notion of cultural pluralism means the coexistence of different races, cultures religions without integration, living separately side by side under one political unit is controlled or ruled by colonial power. On the economic front too, the division of labour is based on racial lines.

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