

## BOOK REVIEW

*Shantha Abeysinghe<sup>17</sup>*

**Title:** Tea and The Plantation Community in Sri Lanka- 150 Years (1867-2017)  
**Publisher:** Express Newspaper of Ceylon (Pvt) limited  
**Language:** Tamil  
**Edited by:** A. S. Chandrabose & R. Ramesh  
**Total Pages:** 526  
**ISBN:** 978-955-0811-15-1

This book is a collection of 28 research articles, exclusively written in commemoration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary (1867 – 2017) of the tea industry in Sri Lanka. It details the real story of the Black Gold (tea) produced from ‘Red Tears’ (drudging plantation workers’ labour) that made the nation: Sri Lanka. There are already a few books on this topic, such as the attractively presented work by D. M. Forrest entitled *A Hundred Years of Ceylon Tea - 1867-1967*, which provides an understanding about the tea industry during the first 100 years of tea in Ceylon, as the island was then known. In 1967, to mark 100 years of tea, the Tea Research Institute of Sri Lanka published a special issue of the Tea Quarterly

Journal, to which prominent tea researchers at home and abroad had contributed articles from various aspects of the industry and its changing dynamics. Recently, another book was published by the Tea Traders Association, Colombo, in commemoration of 150 years of tea in Sri Lanka. Similarly, the Institute of Policy Studies, Colombo, published a volume edited by Dr. Janaka Wijayasiri, Dr. Nisha Arunatilake and Dr. Saman Kelegama, which documents the changes that have taken place in the tea industry over time, and look at future prospects for the industry. Both these books speak more about the industry, production, market trends, challenges faced by the

---

<sup>17</sup> Department of Social Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, The Open University.

industry etc. and very little about the tea plantation workers.

Apart from the invaluable contributions of several ‘overseas researchers’, which cannot be underestimated, it must be acknowledged that the impact of the work written by them in English is negligible in terms of awareness creation among the educationally deprived plantation Tamil workers due to the inevitable language barrier. Although the English publications have been playing a significant role in understanding the socio-economic and political status of this community, the content of this work has not reached that community in full. Undoubtedly, much of the work available in English is very influential, and widely used at home and abroad to study the community and the industry, mainly by those who can understand English, while no attempt has been made to make these publications available in Tamil in a manner as to provide better access. Thus, the present volume is not just another book about the plantation industry and plantation workers. What makes this book different is that it is written by several experienced researchers, scholars and civil society activists of all levels from different perspectives.

They were authored not only by academics but also by on-the-ground activists. This book offers a vast amount of detailed information on the origins and evolutions of the tea industry, and the history of the Malayaga Tamils (people whose origin is traced to the plantation industry of Sri Lanka). It also reflects one of the most significant developments in the history of the Malayaga Tamils: the emergence of a new indigenous intelligentsia that think and speak about their community in their own right.

Every care has been taken to make intelligent partitioning of chapters, innovative chapter titles, felicitous writing style and to incorporate relevant references to inspirational sources. The extensive usage of reliable statistics and data makes these articles more authentic. It is, therefore, hoped that the use of this - well researched and key challenges identified - book will go beyond providing an understanding about the history of 150 year of Sri Lanka tea. Importantly, much of the articles in the volume are written based on empirical and theoretical evidence, therefore, we anticipate that the volume would make a policy implication over the years and pave the way for future research from different perspectives that are

unexplored in this volume. We do find some gaps in some of the articles and in the volume as a whole, for instance, land issues, cultural changes, youth, child labour, politics etc. are not fully captured – therefore, there is a need to fill these gaps in the future through scientific inquiry. The collection of research articles in this book are divided into six thematic chapters as follows: 1) The introduction and evolution of the tea industry, 2) Education and health, 3) Social conditions of the Malayaga Tamils in transition, 4) Human rights, governance and politics, 5) Social conditions and labour mobility of Malayaga women, and 6) Cultural identity and literature.

The edited volume of this book offers readers to get some new experience of the plantation sector and of course it is a valuable contribution to the field.