



Research Conducted among the Selected Districts in
the Plantation Sector

Study on the Culture and Identity of the Plantation Community in Sri Lanka



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(Final Report: August 2024)

Research Conducted among the Selected Districts
in the Plantation Sector

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Message from His Lordship Rt. Rev. Dr. Justin B. Gnanapragasam

***Chairman of the Catholic National Commission for Justice, Peace and
Human Development and Bishop of Jaffna Diocese***

On behalf of Caritas Sri Lanka SEDEC as the Bishop Chairman, it is my honour to deliver my message for this research paper. Culture is a broad concept that refers to how people in society carry out their daily practices. They are the information, attitudes, techniques, practices, and products of the people in these societies.

The celebration of the arrival of the Indian-origin Tamil people (known as Malayagam Tamils), of the plantation community will be fulfilled in the year 2024, which will be 201 years of arrival. Caritas Sri Lanka is a social service organization whose main focus is to assist the less privileged and the poor in Sri Lanka. Through the past half a century, Caritas has been able to assist

the plantation community to enhance their standards of living and thus have a better tomorrow. I thought it would be important to explain how much some of the findings of our research about the culture and identity of the people of Malayagam are. This research is therefore very important in enhancing their quality of living and also in bringing out their plight to the global society. In this way, it is possible to explain the cultural background of these people, demand better conditions for them, and attract the attention of the world to their problems. The history and migration of the plantation community were explored, and their cultural beliefs, practices, and customs were also highlighted in the study. It analyzed such factors as family relationships, schooling and work, socio-economic development, and demographics of such communities. Particular emphasis was placed on the cultural identity of the Malayagam Tamils in the plantation economy. The study also sought to establish the various obstacles that the plantation community has faced in the process of maintaining their culture and also evaluate the effects of the outside world on their culture and social personality.

Besides these cultural issues, other emerging issues in the plantation sector include the likes of drug and substance abuse and cases of violence in the family. These problems also add to the deterioration of the communities' welfare and collective personality. Solving these complex problems is a necessity to maintain the cultural and social identity of the Malayagam Tamil People. Addressing these issues in combination with cultural nomads is essential, and involving youth in the

plantation sector with these activities will preserve their heritage for future generations. Therefore, I would like to recommend that the recommendations arising from this study be forwarded to the appropriate authorities. These findings should be used to call for policy changes that are crucial in the plantation communities concerning culture and social aspects while also calling for key strategic resource allocation. If these recommendations are to be followed, it will be possible to strive to retain cultural heritage as well as to solve some of the most pressing problems, including drug abuse and domestic violence. This way, not only the quality of life of the Malayagam Tamil people will be improved, but their unique culture will be preserved for future generations as well. These recommendations will go a long way in guaranteeing the protection and upliftment of these communities.

With every good wishes and blessings,

Rt.Rev. Dr. Justin Gnanapragasam

Chairman

Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC

Message from Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera
National Director – Caritas Sri Lanka SEDEC

Dear Colleagues and Friends,

I am delighted to share with you the launch of our research book ‘**Study on the Culture and Identity of the Plantation Community in Sri Lanka**’.

As the National Director, I take this opportunity to express my appreciation for your commitment to this extensive study, which represents the culmination of in-depth research into the history, traditions, and socio-economic dynamics that shape the lives of these resilient communities.

As discovered in the findings, the Indian Origin Tamil Plantation communities have a rich cultural heritage that has lasted for many years, displaying their unique traditions and shared experiences. However, they also face challenges that could harm their identity and social connections. This research not only highlights these challenges but also makes substantive policy recommendations aimed at fostering inclusive development and preserving their cultural legacy.

This book serves as both a resource and a call to action, encouraging policymakers, community leaders, and all stakeholders to engage in meaningful dialogue and initiatives that uplift the India Origin Tamil communities.

Moving forward, let us work together, to promote a society that values diversity, embraces cultural richness, and supports the economic empowerment of all citizens.

In conclusion, I invite you to explore the insights within these pages and join us in supporting the cause of our Indian Tamil community members, and together we can ensure that their voices are heard and their heritage celebrated.

Rev. Fr. Luke Nelson Perera
National Director
Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC

Message from Mr. Jayasiri Premaratne

*Unit Head - Ecological Conservation and Plantation People,
Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC*

The research titled "**Study on the Culture and Identity of the Plantation Community in Sri Lanka**" conducted across selected districts, uncovers a multifaceted and detailed understanding of the community. These communities have maintained a distinct identity shaped by their unique heritage, collective experiences of labour, and resilience. Despite facing ongoing socio-economic challenges, they have preserved their cultural traditions, showcasing a vibrant blend of customs, languages, and practices that contribute to Sri Lanka's diverse cultural mosaic.

The study emphasizes the importance of understanding plantation communities within the broader socio-economic and political context. It highlights the necessity of inclusive policies and initiatives that support their development while preserving their cultural heritage. By recognizing and valuing the unique identity and culture of Indian Origin Tamils (IOT) plantation communities, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable society.

Looking ahead, future research must continue to explore the dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and socio-economic conditions within these communities. Their voices and experiences must be integral to shaping policies and interventions that will contribute to the sustainable development and cultural preservation of plantation communities in Sri Lanka. To achieve this, the research outlines a series of policy recommendations designed to create an enabling environment for preserving and promoting the culture and identity of IOT plantation communities. These recommendations encompass a broad spectrum of areas, including inclusive development policies, education and awareness programs, cultural preservation funding, legal protection, economic empowerment, and the promotion of culture-based tourism.

By adopting these recommendations, we can ensure that the rich cultural heritage of plantation communities is not only preserved but also integrated into the broader socio-economic framework of Sri Lanka.

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This approach will foster a greater appreciation and respect for the unique contributions of IOT plantation communities, ultimately leading to a more inclusive and harmonious society. Let us work together to honour the legacy of the Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka, ensuring that their culture and identity are safeguarded and celebrated for generations to come.

Mr. Jayasiri Premaratne

Unit Head – ECPP Unit, Caritas Sri Lanka – SEDEC

Preface

The study focuses on the most pressing contemporary concerns concerning the culture and identity of Indian-Origin Tamils (IOTs) in Sri Lanka. During 1823, migrated Indian Tamils created a new socioeconomic group in the country and formed as were forced to focus primarily on the plantation sector, which had been developed by the British to gain foreign cash through exports of plantation production. As of now, 1.3 million of the IOTs are living in the country. The country greatly benefited from foreign exchange through the export of plantation production to the global market. However, the estate workers of the IOTs were separated by rigorously adhering to the social welfare system of the Estate Labour (Indian) Ordinance, which was introduced in 1889 and did not allow them to benefit from the public sector even now.

The study is based on primary data collected from 400 Caritas project users in nine plantation areas in Sri Lanka. The sample is indicative of IOT populations found in almost every plantation district in the country. Aside from that, the research team is acquiring critical data from key informants and revising previously supplied data through Focus Group Discussions (FDG). The numerical data received from the field and meetings were assembled using simple computations. My heartfelt gratitude should be conveyed to the study team for their genuine presentation.

The study revealed numerous intriguing cultural and identity phenomena, including the fact that 55 percent of IOT youth learn traditional features from their elders or parents and continue to practice them in their daily lives on the estates. According to the report, 41 percent of IOT do not wear their traditional dress at their festivals. The survey also discloses their level of education, participation in political debate, religious activities, and so on, attempting to provide a comprehensive picture of the IOT community's challenges in the country. On the one hand, a significant number of IOT are attempting to unite their culture and identity; nonetheless, integration into the dominant culture is also common.

The facts offered in this study would be extremely valuable to students, young researchers and members of states who are developing new approaches to development strategies that would allow for the exchange of moral advantages. Furthermore, the data presented here will contribute to the development of a discussion about integration among the country's people.

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The study was primarily initiated by Caritas Colombo. Caritas Colombo also runs a variety of social development programs to help IOTs living in the plantation sector, and this study is yet another visible attempt to address contemporary challenges of culture and identity. I am confident that the richness of information supplied by this publication will be used indefinitely.

Professor A.S. Chandrabose Ph.D

About Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC

Caritas Sri Lanka - SEDEC is the social arm of the Catholic National Commission for Justice, Peace and Human Development, operating under the guidance and supervision of the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka (CBCSL).

It serves as the National Secretariat of the Commission, supported by a network of 13 Diocesan Centers, each functioning under the direct guidance of the respective Diocesan Bishops.

Caritas Sri Lanka – SEDEC operates independently of all political parties or ethnic and religious affiliations. It draws inspiration from the teachings of Jesus Christ and His unconditional Love for all, with a mission rooted in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church.

Caritas Sri Lanka – SEDEC is a member of Caritas Internationalis, an international confederation under the purview of the Holy Father and the respective Episcopal Conference, promoting Solidarity, Social Justice, and Integral Human Development.

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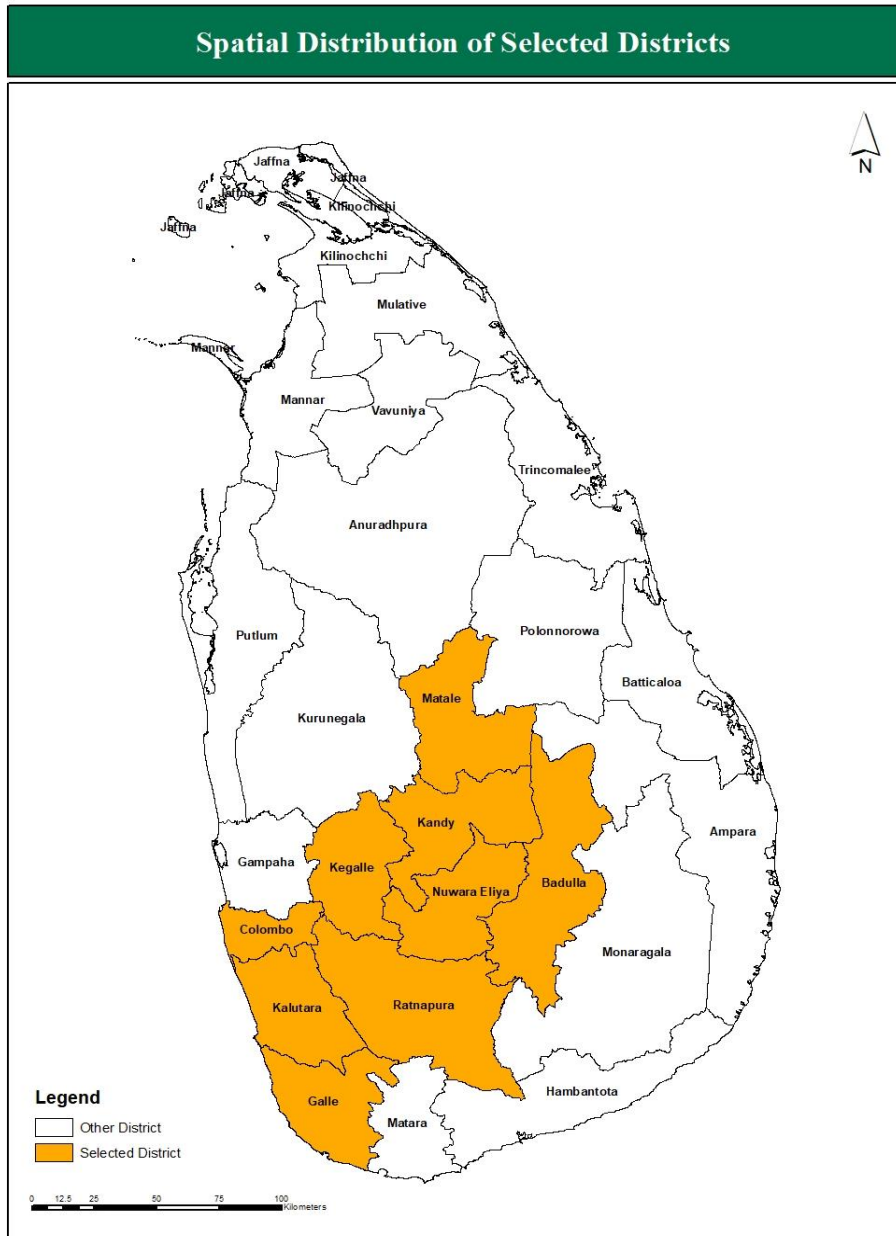


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The team is grateful for the comments and inputs provided by the expert panel appointed by Caritas to validate the research project outcomes and to improve the quality of the report.

We thank the enumerators, who enthusiastically participated in data collection at the household level in the IOT communities.

Finally, we acknowledge the Caritas financial support given to conduct this timely and important research study.

Dr W.G.Somaratne
Sudesh Rodrigo
Thambapanni Green Edge (TGE) (Pvt) Ltd.

Date: 07th August 2024

Abbreviations

CBCSL	-	The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka
CSOs	-	Civil Society Organizations
DCS	-	Department of Census and Statistics
EPCSL	-	Empowering Sri Lanka's Tea plantation communities to improve the quality of life with access to basic services, resources, and opportunities
EWHCSs	-	Estate Worker Housing Cooperative Societies
FGDs	-	Focus Group Discussions
HACCP	-	Hazard Analysis & Critical Control Point
IOT	-	Indian Origin Tamils
KIIs	-	Key Informants Interviews
PC	-	Plantation Community
PHDT	-	Plantation Human Development Trust
PIO	-	People of Indian Origin
RPCs	-	Regional Plantation Companies
SMEs	-	Small and medium Enterprises
TOR	-	Terms of Reference

Research on the Culture and Identity of the Plantation Community in Selected Districts

Executive Summary

The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka (CBCSL) has engaged in dialogue since late 2014 with various stakeholders to discuss, analyse and formulate effective recommendations to the policymakers to restore the dignity of the Indian Origin Tamils (IOT). This ethnic community known as the Sri Lankan Plantation Community (Malayaga Thamilar), has been providing labour especially, in the tea plantation estates that have contributed immensely to the economy of Sri Lanka for nearly 200 years. Consequently, the IOT community in Sri Lanka can be considered a cultural and social group. This research explores their culture and their identity and the selected nine districts are Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Matale, Colombo, Kalutara, Galle, Kegalle, Ratnapura and Kandy. The objective of the study is to offer a historical, social and cultural analysis of the lives of IOT plantation workers and their families.

The objectives of the study are (a) to conduct a comprehensive research document with reliable information on the identity issue of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka, and (b) to provide a policy document to the government of Sri Lanka and Policymakers on the Identity of the plantation community of Sri Lanka.

In this context, the following key aspects have been studied and recommendations made for policy changes at the macro level and changing operational dynamics to preserve the culture and identity of IOT communities¹.

- a. Explored the historical context and migration patterns of the plantation community;
- b. Examined the cultural practices, traditions, and rituals unique to this community;
- c. Studied the social structure, including family dynamics, education, and employment and other socio-economic dynamics;
- d. Demographic Profiles and Socio-Economic Development of the IOT Plantation Communities;

¹ In this research study, the terms 'Indian Origin Tamil (IOT) plantation communities', 'Indian Tamil Communities in the plantation sector', 'Plantation community', 'Indian Origin Tamils', 'Up-Country Tamils', Indian Tamils, and 'Malayaga Thamilar' are used interchangeably.

- e. Cultural Heritage and Traditions in Indian Tamil Communities in the Plantations Sector
- f. Identified the challenges faced by the plantation community in preserving their cultural identity; and
- g. Assessed the impact of external influences on their culture and identity.

The research methodology employed a mixed-method approach, combining a quantitative household survey, covering 391 individual persons of the IOT living in nine plantation districts by using the **KoBo Collect Data Collection Tool** to facilitate electronic data collection using hand-held electronic devices (Tablets or Smartphones). In addition, the qualitative interviews of Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held to gather the stakeholders' including women community leaders' and IOT communities' feedback, their views, expectations and aspirations on preserving the culture and identity. A comprehensive literature review based on secondary sources, such as historical records and previous studies relevant to the subject was also reviewed and analyzed to provide context and depth to the findings. Interchangeably

Key Findings of this study are as follows:

The Historical Context: The plantation community traces its origins to the British colonial period when workers were brought from South India to work in tea, rubber, and coffee plantations, in 1823. Over generations, they have developed a distinct cultural identity, blending elements of their South Indian heritage with local Sri Lankan influences. **The cultural practices are retained by the IOT community in the country, which includes many traditional customs, including religious festivals like Deepavali and Pongal, as well as** unique culinary practices and arts. The rituals associated with life events, such as births, marriages, and deaths, are deeply rooted in their cultural heritage. The Social Structure including socio-economic conditions, the plantation community is characterised by strong family bonds and a collective social structure. In addition, the education levels of IOT plantation communities are generally lower compared to the national average, with many children dropping out to support their families economically. The employment is predominantly in plantation labour, with limited opportunities for upward mobility to higher positions. The challenges to cultural identity were identified, in particular, economic hardships and social marginalization pose significant challenges to the preservation of cultural practices. The migration of younger generations to urban areas in search of better opportunities leads to a dilution of cultural continuity External Influences were also impacted upon cultural diversity with interaction of other ethnic groups and exposure to

mainstream media has led to a gradual assimilation and modification of traditional practices. Further, government policies and non-governmental initiatives aimed at improving living conditions have had mixed impacts on cultural preservation.

The IOT plantation community in Sri Lanka represents a rich tapestry of cultural heritage and identity, shaped by historical migrations and socio-economic conditions. While they have maintained many traditional practices, their cultural identity is under threat from economic, social, and external pressures. Efforts to preserve and promote their unique cultural identity need to consider these multifaceted challenges, ensuring that development initiatives are culturally sensitive and inclusive.

Recommendations: Policy Recommendations for Preserving and Promoting the Culture and Identity of the IOT Plantation Communities are as follows:

- a. **Inclusive Development Policies:** Formulate inclusive development policies that address the specific socio-economic needs of IOT plantation communities while respecting their cultural practices and social value systems.
- b. **Education and Awareness Programmes:** Promoting the ‘Education for All’ concept and integrating the history and culture of IOT plantation communities into the national education curriculum to promote awareness and appreciation among all citizens to create an enabling environment for sustainability. The provision of scholarships and educational support for members of IOT plantation communities is necessary.
- c. **Advocacy Programme for Cultural Preservation Funding:** It is required to develop an advocacy program to convince the government that there is an absolute necessity to allocate dedicated funding for cultural preservation projects, including the documentation of oral histories, traditional practices for showcasing the rich IOT culture, and the establishment of IOT cultural centres for promoting the culture.
- d. **Recognition and Legal Protection:** It needs to identify and establish cultural heritage sites and monuments to preserve significant locations and traditions of IOT plantation communities, enact laws to recognize the legal protection;
- e. **Economic Empowerment Programs:** It is required to implement community-driven economic empowerment programs that support the livelihoods of IOT plantation community members, such as specific microfinance schemes, entrepreneurship development programmes, and SME training to convert them into partners in the economic empowerment process;
- f. **Promote Culture-based and eco-tourism:** There are possibilities to position the plantation communities, through their rich culture and identity and establish the

tourism sites by promoting culture, traditional food, dancing and singing, showing them the importance of the modern world.

- g. Health and Social Services:** Ensure access to healthcare and social services tailored to the needs of IOT plantation communities, recognizing the impact of socio-economic factors on their well-being in the plantations. For example, initiating regular mobile health clinics for infants and middle-aged and elderly populations in the plantations to identify their health issues early.
- h. Representation and Participation:** It is necessary to guarantee representation of IOT plantation communities in local, regional, and national decision-making bodies to ensure their voices are heard in policy formulation and implementation.
- i. Cultural Exchange and Collaboration:** The government and provincial authorities need to facilitate cultural exchange programs within and outside the country to promote mutual understanding and respect for the cultural diversity of IOT plantation communities.
- j. Monitoring and Evaluation:** Whatever the policies are formulated and implemented, it is required to set up mechanisms for the regular monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs aimed at preserving and promoting plantation community culture and identity.
- k. Technology and Innovation:** While establishing IOT cultural centres, it needs to leverage technology to document and disseminate IOT plantation community culture, traditional documents, and artefacts, including digital archives, mobile applications, and virtual reality experiences, using digital economic applications.

Recommendations for Preserving and Promoting the Culture and Identity of the IOT Plantation Community

To maintain the cultural identity of IOT communities and promote the mainstreaming processes with society, the following recommendations are made.

- a. Economic Support and Development:** It is required to implement supplementary economic development programs that empower IOT community members, such as micro-finance initiatives, skill development training, SMEs and Livestock farming (dairy, goat, poultry, etc.).
- b. Promotion of eco-tourism and cultural tourism programmes** to attract tourists to the plantation sector visits, which highlights the unique heritage of IOT plantation communities, ensuring benefits are shared with the local population.
- c. Policy Advocacy and Inclusion:** Develop a programme for advocacy **for inclusive policies** that recognize and protect the cultural rights of the IOT plantation communities.

- d. **Promote the community representation of plantation communities in local and national decision-making bodies like those** in Malaysia.
- e. **Cultural Festivals and Events:** It is better to organize annual cultural festivals and events with IOT community participation that celebrate the traditions, music, dance, and traditional or age-old cuisine of plantation communities.
- f. **Cultural Documentation and Archiving of the IOT Programme Office:** In facilitating the cultural programmes, it is required to establish IOT community-based projects to document oral histories, traditional practices, and folklore. In addition, create digital and physical archives accessible to both community members, researchers and the general public.
- g. **Educational Programs and Workshops:** It needs to develop educational curricula in local schools that include the history and cultural heritage of plantation communities.
- h. **Community Empowerment and Participation:** It is required to encourage active participation of IOT community members in cultural preservation projects as community-driven projects, and appoint local cultural committees to oversee and manage cultural activities and initiatives with IOT communities.
- i. **Collaboration with Academic Institutions:** It is required to partner with universities and other research institutions to conduct further studies on the culture and identity of IOT plantation communities.
- j. **Infrastructure Development:** Further, in the process, it is required to facilitate student exchange programs and field studies that provide in-depth learning experiences about IOT plantation communities (Eg, **Community centres, museums, performance spaces and training centres.**
- k. **Media and Technology Utilization:** In collaboration with the state and private media, develop programmes to use media platforms **to promote awareness about the IOT cultural heritage of plantation communities.** In addition, develop **mobile apps and online platforms** that provide information and virtual experiences related to plantation culture.
- l. **Inter-Community Dialogues and Networks:** It is required to facilitate dialogues and exchange programs between different IOT plantation communities to share best practices and strengthen cultural bonds.

This research highlights the need for a balanced approach that respects and preserves the cultural identity of the IOT plantation community while addressing their socio-economic challenges. By implementing these recommendations, there is a possibility to ensure the preservation and promotion of the rich cultural heritage and identity of IOT plantation communities, fostering a greater appreciation and respect for their unique contributions to mainstream society.

Chapter 01 Background, Rationale and Research Methodology

1.1. Background and Rationale

The Catholic Bishops' Conference in Sri Lanka (CBCSL) has engaged in dialogue since late 2014 with various stakeholders to discuss, analyse and formulate effective recommendations to the policymakers to restore the dignity of the Indian Origin Tamils (IOT). This ethnic community known as the Sri Lankan Plantation Community (PC), has been providing labour especially, in the plantations that have contributed immensely to the economy of Sri Lanka for nearly 200 years.

Most of the IOT population still resides on Sri Lanka's tea plantations. As per the Department of Census and Statistics data in 2012, the population consisted of 839,504 persons registered as Indian Tamils, of which the majority reside in the Nuwara Eliya District in the Central Province and Badulla District in the Uva Province. Accordingly, based on the Census 2012, 4.1 per cent of the total population in Sri Lanka was IOTs (Table 1.1).

A series of legal reforms have resulted in Indian Origin Tamils of Sri Lanka being granted formal citizenship status. Despite positive law reforms, the Indian Origin Tamils remain one of the most discriminated against and economically, socially, and politically marginalised communities in the country. Formal citizenship status alone is inadequate in addressing the obstructions to the rights and development of the plantation community are majority amongst them (Table 1.1).

Table 1.1: Distribution of IOTs in the District of the Diocese in Sri Lanka -2022

No	District	Diocese	Total Population	% Share
1.	Nuwara Eliya		377637	45.0
	Kandy		85111	10.1
	Matale		23238	2.8
		Kandy	485986	57.9
2.	Badulla		150484	17.9
	Monaragala		5001	0.6
		Badulla	155485	18.5
3.	Rathnapura		62124	7.4
	Kegalle		43748	5.2
		Rathnapura	105872	12.6
4.	Matara		12127	1.4
	Galle		6146	0.7
		Galle	18273	2.1
5.	Kaluthara		23217	2.8
	Colombo		24289	2.9
		Colombo	47506	5.7
	Total in Sri Lanka		839504	4.1

Source: Compiled based on the population census, Department of Census and Statistics, (2012).

Despite Social and Economic discrimination, the Indian Origin Tamils of Sri Lanka have a rich culture and heritage. It is noticeable that there is a long debate amongst the community on their identity as Sri Lankan Malayaga Tamils or Indian Origin Tamils while they have registered as ‘Indian Tamils’ in the census report of the Sri Lankan government.

The Catholic Bishop Conference of Sri Lanka (CBCSL) has engaged in advocacy-level dialogue on the rights of the plantation community. With the guidance of the Catholic Church in Sri Lanka, researching the topic “Indian Tamils and Malayaga Thamilar: identity, heritage and cultural issues is very unique and important. The research methodology would be a mixed-method approach, which includes both quantitative and qualitative research with focus group discussions & key informant interviews. Quantitative research may not be well-suited for this particular study but that can be used wherever it must.

The plantation community is living in various parts of the country. As they have mixed with other communities, their identity issues differ. Therefore, the research needs to concentrate on all the plantation people residing in the plantation districts and the rest of the districts where the Indian Tamils are living. Since this is a cultural and identity issue therefore data collection should be taken from all the districts. In the central province, the issue revolves around discrimination, while in the Southern province; the identity issue is related to assimilation with the main society. Specifically, we should focus on studying cultural identity and Sinhalization or mainstreaming of the Indian Tamil.

Although the term "identity" is common, it takes on different forms in various regions. **Cultural identity** is the sense of belonging to a particular culture or group. It is individuals' self-identification and connection with their cultural heritage, traditions, customs, values, language, and shared history. Cultural identity shapes an individual's worldview and influences their behaviours, attitudes, and interactions with others. It encompasses the collective aspects of identity derived from one's cultural background, including race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and social norms. Therefore, these different facets need to be studied. Research should be focused on the cultural identity and challenges within the plantation community.

While identity is a significant component, other important issues exist, such as census problems and assimilation challenges, additionally, individuals living in the Northern Province have distinct issues, while those based in Colombo encounter different challenges. A comprehensive research should encompass all issues and gather opinions from the grassroots level. The proposed research will be developed as a policy research document.

In consideration of the above, Caritas has developed a project of 'Empowering Sri Lanka's Tea plantation communities to improve the Quality of Life with access to basic services, resources, and opportunities (EPCSL). The goal of the Caritas project was to dignified life for the people of the "Malayaga Tamils" in the plantation community with equal opportunities for community welfare & access to basic resources & services, through networking of all stakeholders for an effective intervention & mediation.

The objectives of the EPCSL project are:

- a. Formation of the network of CSOs, involving CSOs, human rights groups, and other stakeholders at the provincial and National levels
- b. Constructive advocacy and lobbying on the issues of the plantation community with a solution-based and positive approach to community empowerment & Welfare
- c. Conducting social research on the plantation community to identify the issues

at the community level, with a focus on concerns and solutions proposed at the community level

- d. Awareness building on community concerns and issues in an attempt to promote social dialogue, and to gain due consideration of stakeholders through strategic use of mass media

1.2. Research Design

1.2.1. Research objectives

- a. To conduct a comprehensive research document with reliable information on the identity issue of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka;
- b. To provide a policy document to the government of Sri Lanka, and policymakers on the identity of the Indian-origin Tamils of Sri Lanka.

1.3. Scope and Purpose of the Research as per the TOR

As the EPCSL project reaches its final phase, it needs to prepare a comprehensive document on the identity issue of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka and plan to submit it to the government and the policymakers. Thus, this research study aims to determine the relevance and fulfilment of objectives in the EPCSL project. The research study expects to provide information that is evidence-based, credible, and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned, recommendations, and good practices into the future decision-making processes of the EPCSL project and the donors to propose corrections on future similar projects and apply the informed decisions on identity issues of the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka.

1.4. Proposed Approach for the Research

1.4.1. Research Design

Understanding the TOR, to achieve the objectives, primary data, and information have been collected using qualitative and quantitative techniques known as the ‘mixed model method’ or ‘Quali-Quant’ mixed method. The mixed methods research is for the broad purpose of breadth and depth of understanding and justification. The mixed method allows us to be more flexible, integrative, and holistic in their investigative techniques, as they strive to address a range of complex research questions that arise in the Identity issue of the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka. The below section expresses the approach that the Consultant team expect to use in this assignment.

1.4.1.1. Review of Existing Literature and Documents – A Comprehensive Desk Review

The secondary data has been collected for this purpose through various means, which are explained below. The Consultants maintained a participatory approach throughout the EPCSL research project. In addition, it has been collected the required information relevant to project operation districts of EPCSL.

Accessing secondary data through a comprehensive desk review involved reviewing existing reports and records on the Indian-origin Tamil population in Sri Lanka, to extract statistics and previous findings relevant to the study. Hence, it helped the Consultants to find the necessary information as well as to triangulate the findings from the primary data collection. Accordingly, the Consultants have worked on the below subject areas/documents but are not limited to the following.

- a. Historical Context:** The historical background of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka is intricately tied to waves of migration from the Indian subcontinent to the island nation. The Indian Origin Tamils are descendants of labourers brought to Sri Lanka during the colonial period, particularly during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Accordingly, the following questions have been considered for the review in the literature.
- They examined the historical background of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka, including their migration from India during the British colonial period.
 - We explored the impact of historical events such as the indenture system, the plantation economy, and the post-independence repatriation agreements on the community's cultural and social identity.

In this context, the following aspects have been considered for reviewing the literature relevant to the historical context of the subject.

- a. Colonial plantation labor migration
- b. Sectors of employment
- c. Demographic impact
- d. Social and cultural aspects
- e. Political impact
- f. Language and education
- g. Post-independence period, and
- h. Civil conflict and aftermath

- b. Cultural practices and traditions:** The Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka, often referred to as Up-Country Tamils, have preserved a rich cultural heritage that reflects their South Indian roots. Accordingly, the following questions have been considered in the review of the literature.
- Investigation of the unique cultural practices, traditions, and customs of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka. This has included language, religious beliefs, rituals, festivals, and traditional art forms.
 - Analyzed how these cultural elements have evolved over time and whether there have been influences from both Indian and Sri Lankan cultures.

In this context, some of the following key cultural practices, traditions, and customs of the Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka have been reviewed.

- Language - Tamil language
 - Religion
 - Festivals and celebrations
 - Traditional clothing
 - Music and dance
 - Cuisine
 - Wedding customs
 - Tamil new-year (Puthandu)
 - Art and craft
 - Cultural performances
 - Pilgrimages, and
 - Community Gathering
- c. Identity Formation and Challenges:** Identity formation among Indian-origin Tamils in Sri Lanka is a complex process influenced by various factors, including ethnicity, religion, language, culture and regional differences. Accordingly, the following aspects have been considered for the review of the study of identity formation and challenges among the Indian-origin Tamils in the country.
- a. **Ethnicity:** The Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka have a distinct ethnic identity, which sets them apart from the majority Sinhalese community.
 - b. **Religion:** Religion plays a significant role in the identity formation of Indian Origin Tamils. The majority of them practice Hinduism, which influences their cultural practices, rituals, and social norms.
 - c. **Language:** Language is a crucial factor in identity formation. Tamil is the primary language spoken by the Indian Origin Tamils.
 - d. **Regional Differences:** Regional differences among Indian Origin Tamils can be attributed to their diverse origins in different parts of India. These regional variations may manifest in cultural practices, traditions, and dialects.

- e. **Historical and Socio-Political Factors:** The historical context of their migration and the socio-political developments in Sri Lanka have a profound impact on identity formation.

Challenges in identity formation:

- a. **Marginalization and Discrimination:** Indian Origin Tamils have faced historical discrimination and marginalization, which has affected their sense of identity and belonging in Sri Lanka.
- b. **Integration and Assimilation:** Balancing their distinct identity with the need to integrate into Sri Lankan society poses a challenge. This is particularly relevant for issues such as education, employment, and political representation.
- c. **Cultural Preservation:** As they adapt to the Sri Lankan context, preserving their cultural heritage and practices becomes a challenge, especially in the face of globalization and modernization.
- d. **Political and Economic Disparities:** Economic disparities and limited political representation can contribute to a sense of disempowerment and impact the identity dynamics among Indian Origin Tamils.

Accordingly, the identity formation of Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka is a dynamic process influenced by a multitude of factors. Reviewing and understanding their unique historical, cultural, and socio-political context is essential to appreciate the complexities of their identity and the challenges they face in the Sri Lankan societal landscape.

- d. **Integration and Interactions:** Exploring the processes of identity formation among Indian Origin Tamils in Sri Lanka is a complex and nuanced endeavour that requires a multidimensional approach. Identity formation is shaped by various factors, including ethnicity, religion, language, and regional differences. Accordingly, the following questions will be considered in the review of the literature.
- Analyze the extent of integration and interactions between Indian Origin Tamils and other ethnic communities in Sri Lanka. Explore the relationships and exchanges with the majority Sinhalese community, as well as with other minority groups, and
 - Investigate the role of Indian Origin Tamils in shaping the multicultural fabric of Sri Lankan society and their contributions to the country's socio-economic and cultural landscape.

In this context, the following key aspects will be considered for exploring the processes in integration and interactions of Indian Tamil Communities:

- **Historical Context:** Examine Historical Narratives
- Ethnicity
- Religion: Religious Practices and Beliefs

- Language: Language Use and Preference
- Regional Differences: Regional Histories and Influences
- Migration and Settlement Patterns: Migration Stories
- Generational Perspectives: Inter-generational Interviews
- Cultural Practices: Cultural Events and Practices
- Education and Socialization
- Educational Experiences, and
- Identity and Social Dynamic

The desk review focused on the review of existing internal and external documents, relevant to the subject. This exercise was carried out at the inception phase of the research. In addition, the information that has been collected based on the secondary sources has been used to design or improve data collection instruments used in the key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and sample household surveys.

Data analysis – Desk review

A data and information repository has been developed during this process, including all relevant reports, journal articles, web resources, etc. The documents have been grouped according to the subject themes of the research project. Then the essential findings of each source have been extracted by the team members. The summarized results have been used for designing/improving data collection tools in the upcoming components.

1.4.2. Primary Data Collection

Primary data have been collected using the mixed-method approach of qualitative and quantitative methods of sample survey, Key informant interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions. Thus, for this assignment, the consultant team has used both Informal Less Structured data collection methods and Formal more structured data collection methods to collect data and information from the identified households of Indian origin Tamil population in 9 districts. To maintain the objectivity of data, stakeholders and other government officials and individuals have been selected for primary data collection in each project operating district.

1.4.2.1. Sample Survey

The project selected IOT members from nine districts, namely Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, Matale, Badulla, Rathnapura, Kegalle, Galle, Kaluthara, and Colombo. The EPCSL project has provided a sample list of members of the beneficiary with contact information for the face-to-face interview/ quantitative survey. Accordingly, a sample size for covering 400 households was selected for conducting the sample survey (See Table 2 below).

1.4.2.2. Sampling Procedure

The primary unit of the household survey has been the members of the beneficiaries of the EPCSL project. A **Two-Stage Stratified Random Sampling** method has been used for each cluster targeted with district and DSDs as stratification factors.

1.4.2.3. Selection of Sample Size

The total minimum sample size required for infinite population size was calculated from the following accepted scientific statistics formula.

$$n = N / 1 + N (e ^2)$$

Where, N = Population Size (=17320)
n = Sample size
e = Margin of error-0.05
95% confidence level and p-value of 0.05

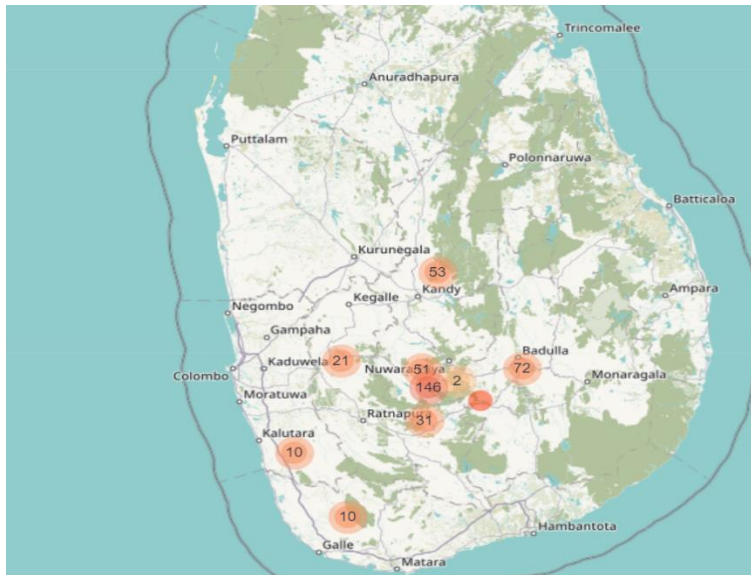


Figure 1.1: Sample Size Selected by Project Operation District

Substituting these values to the above formula, the sample size was 391 members of beneficiary, which has been selected as the sample size with a margin of error (e) of 5% and 95% confidence level, $(n = 17320 / (1 + 17320) (0.05^2) = 391)$. However, the total sample size considered for the survey was 400 (Approximately) household beneficiaries, covering all 9 districts of project operations (Figure 1.1 and Table 1.2).

Table 1.2: Sample Size by District and Province

Province	District	Sample Size (n)	% Share by District	% Share by Province
Central	1. Nuwara Eliya	186	46.5	59.8
	2. Kandy	42	10.5	
	3. Matale	11	2.75	
Uva	4. Badulla	74	18.5	18.5
Sabaragamuwa	4. Rathnapura	31	7.75	13.0
	5. Kegalle	21	5.25	
Western	6. Colombo	15	3.75	6.3
	7. Kalutara	10	2.5	
Southern	8. Galle	10	2.5	2.5
Grand Total		400	100	100

As indicated in Table 1.2, the majority of the sample members (78.3%) were selected from the Central province and the Uva provinces, proportionate to the distribution of the total Tamil population in each project operating district in Sri Lanka.

1.4.3. Data Collection Tool

The data has been collected by an interviewer-administered questionnaire in the local languages (i.e., Sinhala and Tamil). The questionnaire has been further modified based on the comments and inputs from the **EPCSL project**. Initially, the questionnaire was developed in English; once finalized with inputs from the client, it was translated into Sinhala and Tamil languages for easy management of the survey.

Once the questionnaires are finalized, they have been programmed into the **KoBo Collect Data Collection Tool** to facilitate electronic data collection using hand-held electronic devices (Tablets or Smartphones). Accordingly, the Consulting firm has provided a mobile data collection platform and the consultant team has developed the XML data collection form. During the programming of the data collection tool to KoBoCollect, additional information has been omitted. The data collected through the KoBoCollect DataCollection Tool has eliminated the need for data entry, drastically saving on time and expenses, reducing errors associated with pen and paper data collection, and improving the quality of data.

1.4.3.1. Data Analysis – Sample survey

Collected data from the survey through **KoBo Collet** has been uploaded into a centralized database which permits extraction on XLS format to do the analysis. The result has been the segregation of EPCSL by gender and age. Initially, a descriptive analysis of each variable has been done. It has been presented as percentages and measures of central tendency (i.e., mean or median) with relevant measures of dispersion (e.g., standard deviation or interquartile range). After the descriptive analysis, data has been cross-tabulated for selected variables.

1.4.4. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

As per the TOR, KIIs have been conducted with selected key informants. The target group for the Key Informant Interviews includes representatives from the EPCSL project team, district coordinators, members of multi-stakeholder working groups, selected Estate Superintendents of respective Regional Plantation Companies, and other supporting organization members, etc. The interviews were conducted by utilizing the semi-structured interview tools. The EPCSL has provided the names and contact details of the KII participants. Details on the proposed number of KIIs and suggested key informants have been provided subsequently. Moreover, the KIIs have been planned with open-ended core questions targeting the specific discipline and the field-level role relevant to the project outcomes.

The KIIs have been conducted over 45 to 60 minutes with a pre-appointment mostly visiting the relevant workplace/office. However, consultants have also conducted meetings remotely to some extent. Further, the proposed team have developed the relevant KII checklists to gather information. What's more, KIIs have been conducted by the Team Leader to gather qualitative data and information necessary in the form of bilateral discussions to identify their individualistic perceptions towards study areas of the project as specifically felt by an Individual. The following Table 1.3 summarizes the list of key informant interviews conducted for collecting qualitative information in this research study.

Table 1.3: List of Key Informant Interviews Conducted

No	Sector/ Person	Number of KIIs Conducted
1.	EPCSL officials	03
2.	District Coordinators of Dioceses in 5 districts	05
3.	Multi-Stakeholders/ Community Organization Group Members (One organization in each district)	11
4.	Superintendents of selected Regional Plantation Companies in each district	02
5.	Women Leaders in each operating District (2 Leaders from each district)	10
	Total	31

1.5. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Focus Groups (FGDs) have been conducted to collect qualitative data and information from the relevant target audience of estate communities to obtain a wider picture and feedback about the EPCSL project functions, their views on cultural norms, practices and traditions, functions, challenges and future expectations, etc. The necessary qualitative data (eg. their reflections, feedback, suggestions, challenges experienced, and lessons learned) has been collected through focus group discussions in each EPCSL project operating district. Accordingly, Consultant(s) have conducted FGDs in each project operating district (ie. Total FGDs – 13) with community groups of Indian origin Tamils. FGD Guideline and PRA techniques have been used to collect qualitative data through FGDs and collected data have been analyzed by using qualitative data analysis techniques (Thematic Analysis) (Table 1.4).

Table 1.4: List of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) Conducted

No	District	Location/s	Number of FGDs Conducted
1.	Badulla	Galaboda Village Society, Maha Uva Estate	2
2.	Colombo	Penrith Estate, Puwakpitiya, Avissawella	1
3.	Nuwara Eliya	Panmoor Estate, Hatton Stradon Estate, Western division, Hatton	2
4.	Kurunegala	Pathragala Division, Polgahawela	1
5.	Kegalle	Para Estate, Maththamagoda, and Edurapola Watte, Panapitiya	2
6.	Ratnapura	Nagollawatte, and Wooden Estate, Batangala	2
7.	Kalutara	Mathugama	1
8.	Galle	Ketandola estate, Galle	1
9.	Matara	Deniyaya	1
Total Number of FGDs Conducted			13

Chapter 02 Historical Overview of the Plantation Community

The plantation community in Sri Lanka has a deep and complex history intertwined with the island's colonial past and its economic development. This community primarily comprises Tamils of Indian origin who were brought to the island by the British during the 19th and early 20th centuries to work on coffee, tea, and rubber plantations. In particular, as described by Christopher Z Guilmoto (1993), more than 1.5 million ethnic South-Indian Tamils migrated to the British colonies including then Ceylon, in 1931, where they have poured in during the last one hundred years. In this analysis, it explores the origins, experiences, and socio-economic impacts of this community over the decades.

2.1. Origins and colonial context

The genesis of the plantation community can be traced back to the British colonial administration's need for cheap labour to cultivate cash crops in Sri Lanka. Initially, the British attempted to use local Sinhalese labourers, but they were reluctant to work on plantations due to the arduous conditions and low wages offered by the Colonial masters. In particular, Kandyans averted the estate work as they regarded it as degrading and that caste contributed to their antipathy to such work (Vandendriesen, 1954). Besides, the treatment meted out to the labourers by the planters of the 1840s served to further aversion to the regular estate work. Consequently, the British turned to India, particularly Tamil Nadu, to recruit labourers under indentured labour agreements². As per FGDs conducted in the plantation sector, it was revealed that ‘IOT communities were enticed by promises of finding Maldivian fish and coconut on the island. Their ancestors also said that they first came to Mannar and from there they reached the estates by walk. Additionally, they were compelled to relocate due to severe poverty under the leadership of someone known as 'Periyakangani'. In particular, based on the FGDs conducted, the majority of the 4th generation of IOT migrant communities have expressed their views. Accordingly, they have heard from their ancestors, that those labourers came from the districts of *Chenkelpettai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Neelagiri, Thanjavur, Thiruchirapalli, Ooti, Kodaikanal* and other parts of India (*Kerala*),³ to work in the Sri Lankan coffee plantations.

² The indentured workers (known derogatorily as ‘coolies’) were recruited from India, China and the Pacific. They signed a contract in their countries to work abroad for 5 years or more. They were meant to receive wages, a small amount of land and in some cases, the promise of a return passage once their contract was over. In reality, this seldom happened, and the conditions were harsh and their wages low. (<https://www.striking-women.org/module/map-major-south-asian-migration-flows/indentured-labour-south-asia-1834-1917>)

³ See Annexe 1 for the chronological order and details of the Indian Origin Tamil (IOT) migration in Sri Lanka.

Upon their arrival in the country, they were made to do a difficult journey of about 130 miles on foot to reach the district of Matale. From there, they were sent to tea estates in the hill country. Many died during this hazardous walk due to animal and serpent attacks, exhaustion, hunger, starvation and communicable diseases such as smallpox and cholera. On reaching the destination, they had to clear jungles in remote areas to cultivate coffee and tea. Many more died during this mission due to animal attacks and snake bites, along with exhaustion, starvation, hunger and illness.

In this context, a '*Kangani*' (*Or Periya Kangani*) system was followed by the British rulers to recruit Indian labourers and appoint them as supervisors to manage plantations under the British planters (Christopher Z Guilmoto, 1993; Chandrabose, A.S., 2020). As explained by De Silva K.M (1840-1957), given the nature of the "push" factors in South India and the spontaneous form of immigration, it is not surprising that the supply fluctuated. Several factors have influenced the fluctuations of labour migration from South India, which include:

- a. The travails of the journey were considerable and not uncommonly, fatal. Then the sea journey to Mannar or Colombo in unregulated, crowded and unstable sailing vessels was far from pleasing. Only a small stream used the Tuticorin-Colombo route. But, most travelled was completed via Mannar. Mannar to the hill country via Matale was a long walk of over hundred and fifty miles largely through tropical, malarial jungle beset with serpents, elephants and leopards.
- b. The labourers usually travelled in gangs and were not always protected from exploitation by those who ran the sailing vessels; or against some of the local populace (CO 54/235; 1847). Also, they were certainly no protection from cholera and smallpox which occasionally scourged immigrants and residents alike in the hill country.
- c. The planters treated their labourers with "disgraceful injustice and cruelty" (William, 1888). The sick labourers were turned out of the estates; discipline was exceedingly arbitrary and cruel.
- d. The housing and the medical aid provided were far from adequate, and
- e. Many planters did not pay their wages regularly or withheld them altogether especially when the coffee enterprise had slipped into a serious depression.

As explained at the FGDs conducted, during the colonial era, there was significant support from the British for cultural practices within the Indian Tamil community. They allocated even funds for establishing and functioning *kovils* and *thiruvizhas of the cultural event*, which played a crucial role in shaping the community's identity and experiences.

In particular, local Sinhalese were deterred from joining the plantation workforce by relatively low wages, the infrequent and irregular payment of wages, and the bias of officials towards planters. However, some Sinhalese performed piecework in the fields, transported goods, constructed buildings, and cleared forests, but they were not joined to the regular workforce on coffee plantations. More importantly, they could not with any certainty be available for coffee picking, which coincided with heavy labour demand in village agriculture. In 1840, the Colonial Secretary of State noted that the “scarcity” of the population to service the estates was “a great deficit.”⁴

Between the 1820s and 1930s, large numbers of Tamil labourers were brought to Sri Lanka, initially to work on coffee plantations. However, with the devastating coffee leaf blight issues in the 1870s, many plantations shifted to tea cultivation, leading to a significant increase in Tamil labour migration, because of the labour intensity of the tea plantations. These migrants were housed in estates under controlled conditions, which later evolved into the distinct plantation communities seen today.

2.2. Socio-economic conditions

The FGDs and KIIs were conducted to identify in what ways the colonial-era plantation system has influenced the socio-economic fabric of the Indian Tamil community. Accordingly, it was observed that the plantation system created a segregated society, with Indian Tamil labourers living in isolated estates separated from mainstream society. This segregation led to the development of distinct cultural practices, languages, and social norms within the Indian Tamil community, shaping its identity and sense of belonging. The plantation system was built on the exploitation of Indian Tamil labourers, who were brought to Sri Lanka as indentured workers to work on tea and rubber plantations. These workers were subjected to difficult working conditions, low wages, and little to no rights, leading to economic dependence and vulnerability within the community.

As explained by Chandrabose, A.S. (2020), Indian Tamils are the descendants of emigrants from South Indian districts who became engaged in the plantation economy in Sri Lanka. The plantation system was a new economic activity when compared to the traditional agricultural occupations of those Tamils who migrated from South India. Around sixty per cent of the Indian Tamil migrants from South India were able to cope with the new system of the plantation economy with its special characteristics such as its regimented type of work; wages for work; work on all six days⁴; living in line rooms⁴; and carrying out tasks dictated by the planters. The others went back to their original destination in South India. Nevertheless, certain traditional practices have continued among the social organisation of Indian Tamils (Balasundaram et al. 2009).

⁴ SLNA 4/193 Despatch, Ansthruther to Colonial Secretary of State, Nov. 24, 1840, London.

Tea plantations were introduced in Sri Lanka by the British during the early part of the 19th Century and rapidly emerged as a major economic force for development and also led to the

Development of a new social structure in Sri Lanka. The successive governments of Sri Lanka has introduced several changes in the industry after the independence. The tea plantation was owned by multinational companies such as ‘Sterling’ (the 5th International Symposium, 2015 – IntSym 2015, SEUSL p 413,) and ‘Rupees’ companies until it was nationalised under the land reform programme introduced by the coalition government of 1972-1977, led by Ms Banadaranayake (Peris, G.H., 1978)

The nationalised plantation sectors were handed over mainly to the Janatha Estate Development Board (JEDB) and the Sri Lanka State Plantation Corporation (SLSPC). The government has implemented several donor-funded projects (eg. Plantation Development Project, PDP, (2004-2008; ADB) for improving productivity, diversification, modernization, value chain promotion, social development etc. in the corporate plantation sector.

In addition, the rehabilitation of the nationalised tea plantation sector was also considered and discussed greatly in the development circles. However, the targets that were expected by the implementation of rehabilitation programmes were not sufficiently achieved and thus the financial problems reached a crisis point because of the proportions of heavy borrowing from the state banks and widespread corruption and mismanagement of the tea sector (Ranasinghe Sudatta:1982 and Shanmugaratnam.N:1997).

Subsequently, the government dissolved the management of the tea plantation and handed it over to private companies under the recommendation of the Plantation Restructuring Committee (PRC) in 1992. Accordingly, the tea sector was distributed amongst 23 Regional Plantation Companies (RPC) extent of 89,581 hectares under tea cultivation and it was roughly 42 per cent of the bearing tea land in the country in 2020 (Statistical Information on Plantation Crops-2020). Currently, the extent of tea land in the RPC has now declined and bearing around 85,000 hectares which is 40 percent of the total tea land in the country in 2023.

Harsh conditions and limited opportunities for social mobility marked life within the plantation communities. Labourers lived in line rooms, basic housing provided by the plantation management, which often lacked adequate space, kitchen, sanitation and healthcare facilities. The community's isolation from mainstream Sri Lankan society further compounded their socio-economic challenges. As an ethnic minority in post-independence Sri Lanka, the Indian Tamils lost their citizenship rights and a programme for repatriation to send a significant number of them back to India was initiated in the 1960s. One could argue that the “Untouchables” became “Touchable” within the

plantation economy as members of lower castes worked and lived side by side with higher caste people within the plantations (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014).

The estate plantation communities remain one of the most oppressed sections of the working class in Sri Lanka. Still relatively isolated, the people in these line-type rural slums continue to endure a deliberate set-up system that enforces servitude⁵. The system of indentured labour that evolved in the plantations shared many features with the caste system as mobility of labour was restricted. There was however some degree of replication of caste or even “an invention of caste” within the plantation economy as workers' hierarchy broadly conformed to the caste system and some services such as sanitary work, washing of clothes etc. were extracted on the caste basis. As explained by Ilyas Ahmed H, (2014), the *kanganis* came from higher and lower castes and chances of moving up or moving out were extremely limited. While ethnic barriers such as language, citizenship rights, poor health and poor education served to keep them within the plantation system, caste, class and to some extent, gender barriers reinforced their position as manual workers with limited rights and low dignity.

Many of the tea pluckers were women who had limited decision-making power at home as well as in their workplaces. As a cumulative outcome of these circumstances, Indian Tamil plantation workers recorded the lowest educational levels and life expectancy, the poorest quality of life and the highest mortality levels in independent Sri Lanka, despite the widely acclaimed beneficial outcomes of the Sri Lankan welfare state. In addition, there are serious social problems such as alcoholism, domestic violence, poor housing, lack of support in old age and widespread poverty in many of these communities, adding to their social marginality (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014).

2.2.1. Education levels in the plantation sector

Education is the main factor that determines the social status of the development process even for the up-country plantation community. It assists in transforming people psychologically, socially and culturally. The plantation community is one of the marginalized groups that are more vulnerable to educational achievements.

The literacy rates at the national level have shown that the plantation community was only 82.7% while the national average was 92.9%, and Urban 95.7% (DCS, 2019). Similarly, only 20.2% of the plantation population had a secondary education and only 2.1% of them

⁵ *This information has been taken from the American Institute for Sri Lankan Studies available at: <https://www.aisls.org/resources/teaching-about-sri-lanka/teaching-about-tea/tea-and-immigrant-labor/> and a report from the World bank group entitled “Sri Lanka, Ending poverty and promoting shared prosperity”. 2015.*

had a post-secondary education. The comparable figures for all islands are 52.2 and 20.7% respectively. Based on the national level data, more than half (55.9%) of the plantation population had only primary education. A few of them had entered into the university system. Education in the plantations is chronically underfunded and based on a curriculum lacking relevancy to the modernising job market in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, young people from the estates often face the issue of a lack of opportunities when seeking employment in the job market in Sri Lanka. This economic vulnerability perpetuated a cycle of poverty among successive generations within the community (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014).

2.2.2. Health status in the plantation sector

They were kept inside tea plantations within small rooms called ‘line rooms’, which could hardly accommodate a family and had no ventilation or privacy. These remain the major determinants of their poor health status even today. The indicators of health and nutrition are another dimension which reflects the backward and neglected nature of the plantation community. The percentage of undernourished children below the age group of five years in the plantation sector was 38.9% whereas the percentage of the rural and the urban sector were lower and they were 21.8 and 12.8% respectively. Infant mortality in the sector was 60.6% while the national rate was only 25.3% and the stillbirth rate was 20% in the plantation sector (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014). Further, the nutrition national aggregates in the plantation sector, in the category of children under 5 years of age are Stunting: 17.3 per cent; Wasting: 15.1 per cent; and Under-Weight: 20.5 per cent (DCS,2022). Improving nutrition outcomes for children in Sri Lanka’s estate sector is badly needed, compared with other sectors of the economy. The plantation health sector is integrated with the national health stream and it is not treated as a separate entity anymore. However, the national health policies and health programmes need to be fully integrated with the mainstream health system, covering the hill country communities. The main thrust areas of the Plantation Human Development Trust (PHDT) are Plantation Housing Development, Social Infrastructure Development, Economic Infrastructure Development, and Livelihood Improvement of the hill country communities. Accordingly, the PHDT needs to act as a true partner in the socio-economic development among the hill country plantation communities.

2.2.3. Housing development

The population serving in this sector consists of about 244,500 families of Indian Tamil origin and a population of 966,700 living in the plantation sector in Sri Lanka (UN-HABITAT, 2024). Further to UN-HABITAT, 2024, the small, attached houses called ‘line rooms’, constructed during the British period, are the common form of houses in these areas. Line rooms numbering about 160,000 in the estates are now in a state of disrepair. The line rooms are barrack-type structured with about two hundred sq. feet for an entire family, with hardly any ventilation, no privacy for grown-up children and overcrowding due to larger families with their dependent parents. The line rooms where they live are more

than 100 years old and seventy per cent of them live in dilapidated conditions. As explained by Ilyas Ahmed H (2014), the percentage of self-built⁶ houses among the plantation community is estimated to be as low as 10.2 per cent and others who live in the line rooms owned by the plantation companies. Nearly, 13,000 families do not have even line rooms they live in temporary huts. However, as a result of various housing programmes implemented by the different organizations 45,000 new housing units were constructed and some of the old line rooms were upgraded (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014). However, given the large number of unsuitable housing units in the plantation sector, the challenges behind the provision of decent houses for the plantation community are enormous.

As explained further, by Ilyas Ahmed H, (2014), the provision of 90% of drinking water and 62% of sanitation needs of the estate sector are met due to interventions made by Donors, NGOs and government organizations. But still, 74% of the estate households use common taps and 15.5% use common wells for getting drinking water. While nearly 25% of the households use latrines, another 25% do not have access to latrine facilities (Ilyas Ahmed H, 2014). After the re-privatization in 1992. Government Agencies and NGOs had an interest in improving the water supply and sanitation conditions in the plantation sector, but the problem still prevails at a higher level, compared to the other sectors of the economy.

Provision of adequate shelter with basic needs and access to healthcare are key factors that influence worker families to remain in the estates, ultimately leading to increased productivity. During the past two decades, the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) has provided approximately 25,000⁷ individual houses and some water and sanitation projects to uplift the living standards of these communities (UN-HABITAT, 2024). There is a clear requirement for housing in the plantation sector to address the large outstanding need. The 4th stage of the Indian Housing Project, 'Bharat-Lanka,' was planned and inaugurated to construct 10,000 more houses for plantation sector workers to improve their socio-economic status and livelihood development (Economy Next,- 14 July 2024). In this process, the PHDT and the Regional Plantation Companies (RPCs) assisted the Ministry in selecting suitable land for creating new plantation villages. The PHDT coordinated with

⁶ Some IOT communities, who have temporarily migrated to other countries for employment, have returned and built their own houses with the land obtained from the RPCs within the plantations. Though, they have built their houses, they do not have land ownership in the plantations.

⁷ Indian Housing Project in Plantation Areas (Completed) – Sri Lanka (2024), <https://fukuoka.unhabitat.org/en/projects/2626/>, This Project, aimed at constructing 4,000 housing units in the Central and Uva Provinces of Sri Lanka, is part of the overall commitment of 50,000 Government of India (GoI). The Project aimed to contribute to the sustainable resettlement of plantation worker families in newly created cluster villages or small townships.

RPCs and the Estate Worker Housing Cooperative Societies (EWHCSs) in the facilitation of individual beneficiary families. In addition, the PHDT was responsible as a partner in this process for obtaining the required approvals from the relevant authorities.

2.3. Cultural and social identity

As described by Chandrabose, A.S. (2020), when Indian Tamils came to Sri Lanka they had to nurture their own culture according to the needs of the situation of the host country's economy and the other social and cultural dynamics of the main society in Sri Lanka. In other words, the culture which is seen among Indian Tamil plantation workers in Sri Lanka today is a transformed version of the original Indian culture. Many things have been added and some elements of the original culture were given up leading to the formation of a distinct culture (Suryanarayan, 2001).

Politically motivated citizenship issues imposed on migrant Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka and the thirty years of ethnic conflict had a considerable impact on the cultural identity of Indian Tamils (Chandrabose, A.S., 2020). Despite their marginalized status, the plantation community developed a distinct cultural identity influenced by their Tamil roots and shared experiences on the estates. Cultural practices, such as language, music, dance, rituals, and religious customs, became integral to their identity and served as a means of resilience against the hardships they faced.

As explained by Chandrabose, A.S., 2020, most of the businesses of Indian Tamils have a distinct identity as a major group of Indian Tamils. They belong to various castes of this group like *Vellelas*, *Kallans*, *Kowndan*, *Chettyar*, *Nadar*, *Agamudaiyans*, *Naidus* and other non-Brahmin caste groups in Sri Lanka. The major business of the upper caste Indian Tamils are confined to the sale of clothes, groceries, jewellery, pharmacies, hardware and the supply of stationery in cities. A considerable number of them are running vegetarian restaurants elsewhere in the country. Most of the upper caste businessmen play a very important role in temple trusts in the cities notably contributing to retaining the cultural values of Hindus in the country. The establishment of the Hindu Cultural Centre in Kandy and a Hindu temple in Matale town are a few examples of landmark achievements of the middle of the plantation areas to promote cultural identity, diversity and ethnic harmony. The majority of Indian Tamils concentrated in the urban sector are involved mainly in family-based trade-related livelihood activities. Most of the trading activities are inherited from parents. The inherited trading communities are largely upper caste groups such as *Vellelas*, *Kallans*, *Agamudaiyans* and other non-Brahmin caste groups.

As further described by Chandrabos, (2020), a part of the generation of plantation workers also emerged recently as a trading community in the cities and they belong to *Adi Dravida* caste groups which collectively form the majority of the Indian Tamil population in the

country. The business community of Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka practices rituals and other cultural practices following their predecessors in South India. Among the upper castes, the *Vellelas* caste of the Indian Tamils is prominent in continuing the South Indian culture. Most of the *Vellelas* are from the district of Trichy and constantly go to their ancestral villages not only for matrimonial purposes but also to attend funerals and other cultural events.

The Indian Tamils who moved from the estate sector to the rural sector have a better social status than the Indian Tamils in the plantation sector. The Indian Tamils who moved to villages had the privilege of constructing their own houses and integrating into mainstream society. Based on FGDs conducted, the majority of the youth of the IOT who obtained teacher training certificates have moved out of the estate in major districts. Further, they obtained teaching appointments in government schools and settled in the nearby or outside the plantation sector. They also have their personal addresses along with street names and owned a piece of land and a house, etc. That is something which their predecessors did not possess.

Moreover, by being in a village community, Indian Tamils also have gained access to benefits given by the local government that are not available through the management of the estate sector and joined with the main village societies (Chandrabose, A.S., 2020). Further, based on FGDs, it was evidenced that in the down south districts of Galle, Matara, Colombo and Kalutara, the children of IOT households managed to go to schools, nearby and use Sinhala as a medium of instruction and even in the Galle district, some family members have changed their names even to integrate into the mainstream society. Accordingly, the IOT communities are in a better position to integrate with the mainstreaming societies which is a positive integration, however, in terms of the identity of IOT communities, they are at the losing end of their identity-building process.

Indian Tamils engaged in large-scale tea estates also continue their cultural identity within the country. Indian Tamils living in large-scale estates are either the third or the fourth generation of migrant workers from South India. The plantation system was a structure as far as the early migrant Indian Tamil workers were concerned. Many of the migrant workers did not have any experience in living in the cool climate in the hill country of Sri Lanka. The families were compelled to live in line rooms‘ which were non-existent in their ancestral villages in India. The leadership given by the chieftain called *Kangany* who had facilitated the migration in the early days was a new experience for the migrant Indian Tamils. Moreover, working for wages that linked them to a labour ordinance was also a completely new phenomenon of life in the plantation sector. They had to work six days a week and the involvement of not only both male and female workers but also the recruitment of children for the estate work also introduced them to a new world of work in the plantation sector (Jayaraman 1975 and Hollup 1994).

As Chandrabose (2020) further described, apart from Indian Tamils in the business community and those in the plantation sector, Indian Tamils also live in other parts of the country and are in the process of adapting to other cultures in the country. Indian Tamils who are living in the Southern province constitute around 20 per cent of the total Indian Tamil population while in the North and the Eastern provinces they constitute roughly 10 per cent and 4 per cent respectively. The concentration of Indian Tamils in the North and Eastern provinces is a new phenomenon whereas the concentration of them in the Southern province dates back to the inception of the tea industry in the country.

According to R. Jayaraman (1975), Holup (1994), and Chandrabose (2020), the Indian Tamil workers in the plantation sector continued their cultural activities similar to their ancestral villages in Tamil Nadu. The major festivals begin with the celebration of *Thai Pongal* in January every year which is a major festival among Tamils.⁸ Other festivals include the popularly known *Sami Kumpudu* which is the annual temple festival of plantation workers that is celebrated during March or April. The *Sami Kumpudu* is an appeal to the Goddess *Amman*, for sufficient rain and the elimination of diseases. Apart from the annual *Sami Kumpudu* the *MargaliBajan* from the middle of December up to the day of *Thai Pongal* in January is also celebrated in the estates.

As explained at the FGDs conducted, among the plantation communities, Indian Tamil plantation workers continue to perform their folk arts like *Kaman Koothu*, *Ponnar Sangar*, and *Arjunana Thavas* in the estates. *Deepawali* is popularly known as the festival of lights. This is also celebrated on a day which falls in October or the beginning of November every year. However, based on the FGDs conducted, it was explained by the community as ‘*We are now experiencing a 50% reduction in traditional customs, beliefs, traditional practice, rituals, and religious-based activities due to a variety of factors among community members such as modernization, internet and social media, phone usage, TV programs, education, and other factors that have influenced less cultural and traditional practice than previously*’ In this context, it is obvious that various factors have influenced to reduce the vigour.

However, several aspects influenced the cultural identity of Indian Tamils, among them were the repatriation scheme implemented under the Sirimavo-Shastri Pact in 1964 and ethnic violence which began in 1978 and was widely executed in July 1983. These were the major reasons which disturbed the continuity of their traditional cultural events. Indeed, the distribution of various castes is quite typical and persisted for a long time as analysed by R. Jayaraman (1975) and Hollup (1994). Accordingly, around 23 per cent of Indian Tamils in the plantation sector consisted of upper lower-caste Indian Tamils.

In addition, the majority of plantation workers performed some rituals in the family during

⁸ *Thai Pongal* is celebrated on the first day of the month Thai (January) of the Tamil calendar. *Pongal* is the preparation of sweet rice and is a thanks giving ceremony in which farmers thank nature, the Sun and farm animals for their assistance in providing a successful harvest.

their lifetime functions to get blessings from their maternal uncles. Particularly, they celebrated childbirth, the puberty ceremony, the marriage ceremony etc. Further at the death ceremony of the husband in the family, they usually practised certain rituals (the woman dressed like a bride, removing *thali*, *breaking bangles*, etc.)

According to Jayaraman (1975), the upper-caste Indian Tamil (mainly belonged to *Mottai Vellalas*, *Reddiyar*, *Ahamudiyar*, *Muthuraj*, *Ambalakkaran*, *Kallan*, *Naidu*, *Mudaliyar*, *Udaiyar*, *Padaiyachi* and *Kavundar*) estate workers played a prominent role in the estates. Apart from the *Kangany*, the trade union representatives of the estate committee were mainly from the upper caste community. The temple ceremonies were managed by them, and the night schools popularly known as *Irravu Palli*⁹ both for school-going children and adults were conducted by the upper caste people. There was a practice of reading the great epics of Ramayana and *Mahahaparatham* in the night school for adults. Major events like *Kamankothu*, *Ponnasangar*, *Archunanathavasau*, and *Margali Bajan* were mostly patronised by the upper caste workers in the estates. Most of the school-going children who continued to follow secondary education were either the children of the upper caste community or the children of Christian parents in the Indian Tamil estate community until the middle of the 1980s.

2.4. Role of *Kangany* in the plantation system

As explained further by Chandrabose (2020) and FGDs conducted, the involvement of the *Kangany* (chieftain)¹⁰ in the process of early migration and his later role in the plantation system occupies a distinct place among the Indian Tamils in Sri Lanka. As explained at the FGDs conducted, the *Kanganies* played a dual role, not only supplying workers/labourers to the plantations but also possessing them as the leader in the operation activities in the plantation. The *Kanganies* also thought of themselves as playing half the role of the British planter⁴ amongst the plantation workers. They also wore different kinds of clothes to distinguish them from the workers. They wore a coat with a long white sheet (*Vellai Vetti*), a white shirt, and a turban. The *Kanganies* wore the coat as part of the ceremonial dress of British planters. The style of wearing a coat has been harmonized with the traditional Tamil attire by *Kanganies* to project themselves as the other half of the British planter⁴ while dealing with workers. Indeed, the action of wearing the coat like a British man was initiated during the migration of Indian Tamils from Tamil Nadu and continued by the *Kanganies* until the British left the estates during the 1970s and 1980s. After the privatization of the nationalized plantations in 1992, the *Kangani* system was abolished and new private-

⁹ *Irra Palli* (in Tamil) is a night school that was popular in many estates until the estate schools were nationalised in 1989.

¹⁰ Majority of community members explained *Kangani* as '*Periya Kangani* (Chieftain) and once they died, plantation community has made a statue of *Periya Kangani* for worshipping him and celebrating a function each year. In some estates, *Periya Kangani*'s ancestors, who are living in South India, are visiting to Sri Lanka to commemorate annually.

sector-led management was introduced with the designation of Field officers, instead of *Kanganis*.

Accordingly, the majority of plantation community members have made great initiatives and efforts to preserve and promote this cultural heritage, leading to the establishment of community organizations and continuing to maintain their cultural heritage within the upcountry, mid-country and low-country plantations. These initiatives helped strengthen their position and solidarity among community members and fostered a sense of pride in their heritage and culture in the plantation sector in Sri Lanka.

2.5. Political mobilization and impact

The plantation community played a pivotal role in Sri Lanka's political landscape, particularly during the mid-20th century. As awareness of labour rights and social justice grew, plantation workers organized strikes, protests and agitation campaigns to demand better working conditions, wages, and citizenship rights by promoting to building of social capital among the plantation communities.

The landmark Bandaranaike-Chelvanayagam Pact of 1957 was signed to grant citizenship to the IOT plantation community, address a longstanding grievance and pave the way for their increased democratic political participation. However, the citizenship issue of IOTs was not resolved due to the mounting pressure built up by the then UNP led-opposition political parties in the parliament. Further, this longstanding problem of citizenship was resolved in October 2003, when the Sri Lankan Parliament passed the "Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act". As a result, all stateless persons of Indian origin who had lived in Sri Lanka since October 30, 1964, and their descendants were granted Sri Lankan citizenship.

Subsequently, generations of plantation workers continued to engage in political activism, advocating for broader social and economic reforms to improve governance and the economic and social well-being of the IOT plantation communities. In particular, strengthening trade unions, and other civil societies in the estates (*kovil* or church committees, school committees etc.) is also fostered to promote democratic governance by strengthening social capital among them.

2.6. Contemporary challenges and prospects

In contemporary Sri Lanka, the plantation community continues to face challenges related to economic inequality, inadequate infrastructure (housing, water, electricity etc.), lack of skill development programmes for youth and women and access to education and healthcare facilities. Efforts to address these issues have been hindered by bureaucratic

inefficiencies, political economy, and the broader economic conditions affecting the economy and the plantation sector.

Nevertheless, there are signs of progress, with initiatives focusing on education, health services, vocational training, and entrepreneurship aimed at empowering the community economically and socially. International attention and support for sustainable agriculture and fair labour practices have also contributed to improving the living standards of IOT plantation workers by building standards (Fair Trade labelling, HACCP and ISO certification).

In conclusion, the history of the plantation community in Sri Lanka reflects the broader patterns of colonial exploitation, socio-economic marginalization, cultural resilience, and political mobilization. While significant strides have been made towards addressing historical injustices, the journey towards full social and economic equity for the IOT plantation community remains ongoing and needs to develop further with protecting their cultural identity and integration of the mainstreaming societies even after nearly two decades.

Through a nuanced understanding of their history and contributions, there lies the potential for meaningful reforms that can uplift the lives of generations to come within Sri Lanka's diverse cultural tapestry.

Chapter 03 Profiles and Socio-Economic Development of the IOT Plantation Communities

3.1. Introduction

It is expected to analyse the demographic profile of the sample IOT plantation community, population distribution in selected districts, ethnic composition and diversity, and socioeconomic indicators of education, employment, and income of the sample plantation Tamil communities based on the sample survey carried out.

3.2. Demographic profile of the plantation community

As shown in Figure 3.1, the age distribution of the sample is varied and 71 per cent of the sample respondents are in between 16-55 years of age. It shows that the data has been collected from the respondents who are in the active workforce in the plantations.

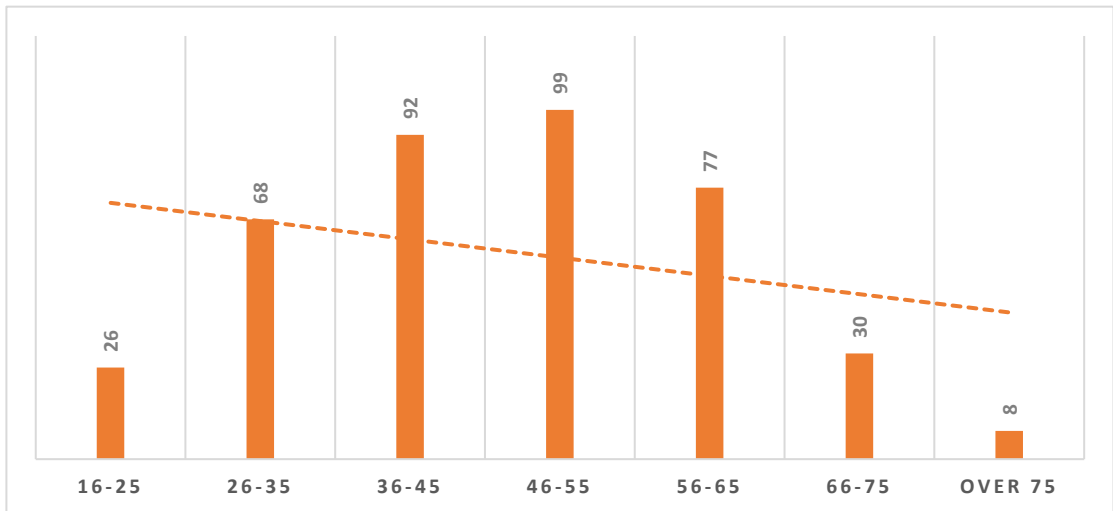


Figure 3.1: Number of respondents by age

Source: Field survey, (2024)

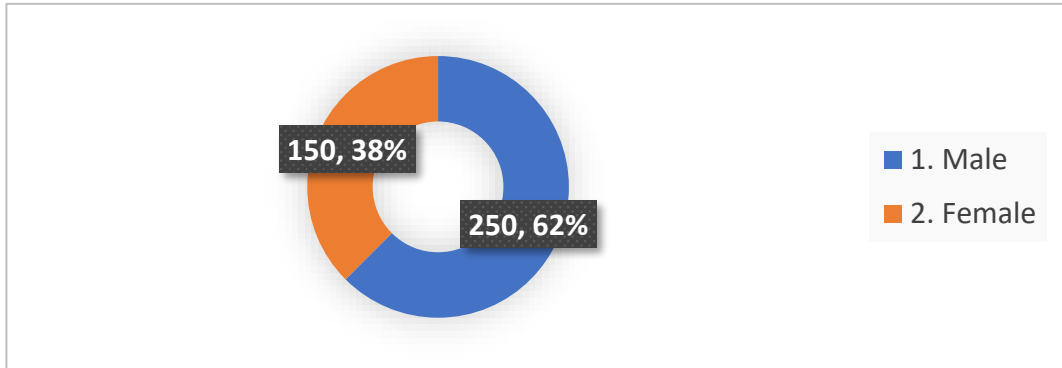


Figure 3.2: Number of respondents by gender

Source: Field survey, (2024)

The gender distribution of the 400-sample of IOT plantation households surveyed is explained in Figure 3.2. Accordingly, 62 per cent and 38 per cent of male and female respondents, respectively responded to the survey and provided the required information for analysis of the cultural identity and diversity and the mainstreaming process of the society.

As described in Figure 3.3, it has shown the distribution of marital status of the sample population. Out of 400 households surveyed, 328 (82%) household respondents have explained that they have got married. In addition, 9 per cent of household respondents have informed that they are widows of the family.

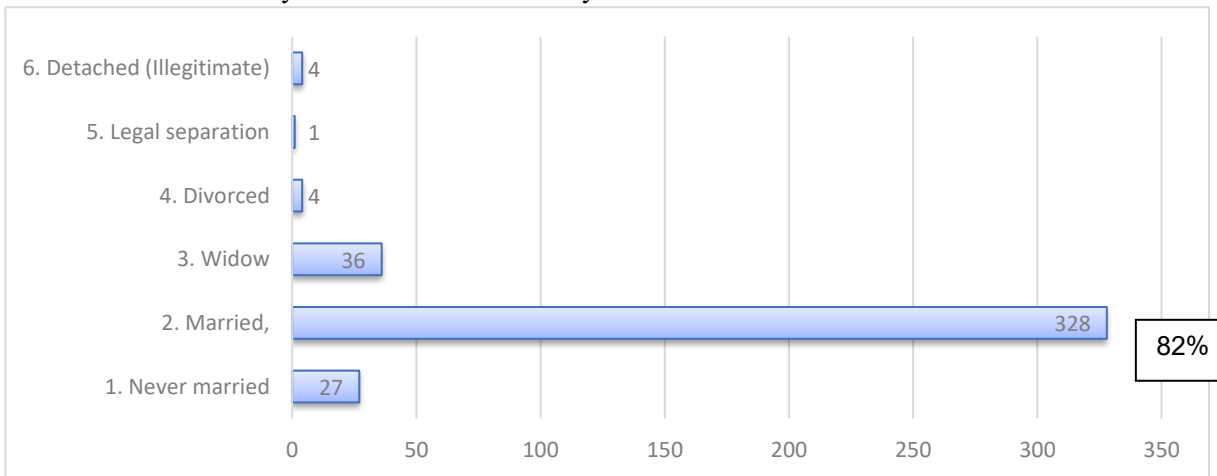


Figure 3.3: Level of marital status

Source: Field survey, (2024)

3.3. Education level of the respondents

In the case of the education levels of the respondents of the selected households for the sample survey, it was found that 12% of respondents have no schooling. In addition, 26% have followed up to the 5th grade, and another 26% have followed up to the 10th grade. Further, there are respondents with 1% of graduates, 11% of GCE A/L passed and 23% of GCE O/L passed, who are involved in the project activities (Figure 3.4).

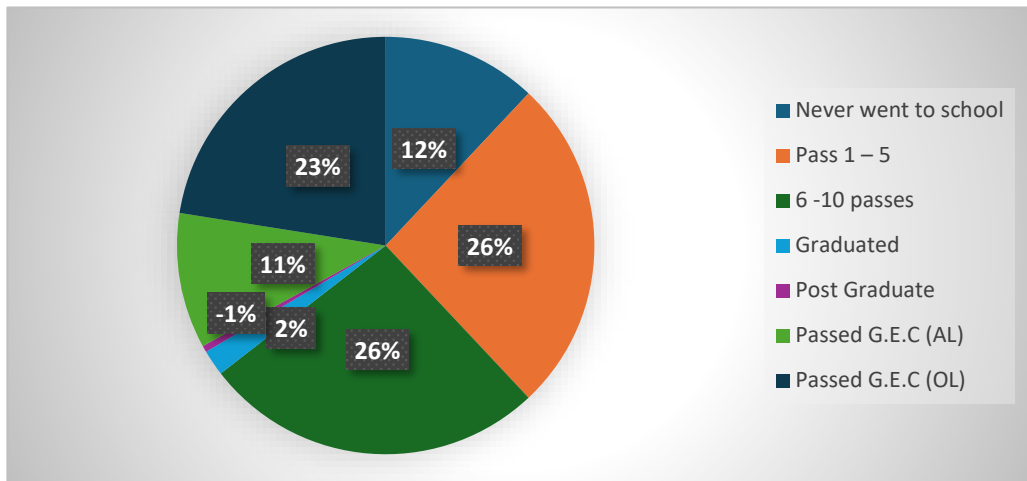


Figure 3.4: Distribution of education level of household respondents

Source: Field survey, (2024)

3.4. Current occupation and income levels of households

In the project operation districts, it has been identified, that the current occupation of the respondents of the selected households for the survey was varied and diversified. Accordingly, the majority (24%) of the respondents have not been involved in any of the economic activities. (ie. unemployed respondents). All others have been employed in diverse sectors of the economy to earn their income for livelihood development and economic well-being (Table 3.1). Further, it has shown that the greater majority of respondents of the households relied on working outside the plantation industries to maintain their livelihood due to the hardships they faced and the lack of opportunities available for them to be involved within the plantation sector to build decent and respectable lives.

Table 3.1: Current occupation of the respondents by category of jobs

Occupation Category	No	% Share
Not engaged in any economic activity (Unemployed)	97	24%
Plantation industries	82	21%
Other (casual work, seasonal work etc.)	78	20%
Plantation Labor	35	9%
Retired from the Job	27	7%
Industrial sector (SMEs)	18	5%
Masonry work	13	3%
Construction/Carpentry	11	3%
Administration	11	3%
Transportation	9	2%
Farming	7	2%
Clothing	7	2%
Trading (small retail shops)	4	1%
Mining and Quarrying	1	0%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As indicated in Table 3.2, it has been proved that the average monthly income per person of the surveyed households was diversified. According to the Census and Statistics Department (March 2024), Sri Lanka, the official poverty line at the national level for March 2024, was Rs 16619 per person per month (or. Rs 66476 per family per month¹¹). Comparing the household income of the sample respondents with the poverty line in the country, there are about 98% (392 HHs out of 400 HHs) of households with varied income sources were below the poverty line, which reflects the clear necessity of implementing livelihood development programmes through initiating income-generating and entrepreneurship development programmes to increase their income for covering living expenses (Figure 3.5).

¹¹ Average family size is 4 persons per family in the plantation sector in Sri Lanka (Department of Census and Statistics, 2023).

Table 3.2: Average monthly income (Rs/Month) of the households surveyed

Monthly Income Level (Rs)	Number of persons	% Share
Less than 5000	128	32.0
5001-10000	44	11.0
10001-20000	98	24.5
20001-30000	63	15.5
30001-40000	34	8.5
40001-50000	18	4.5
Over 50001	15	4.0
Total	400	100.0

Source: Household survey, (2024)

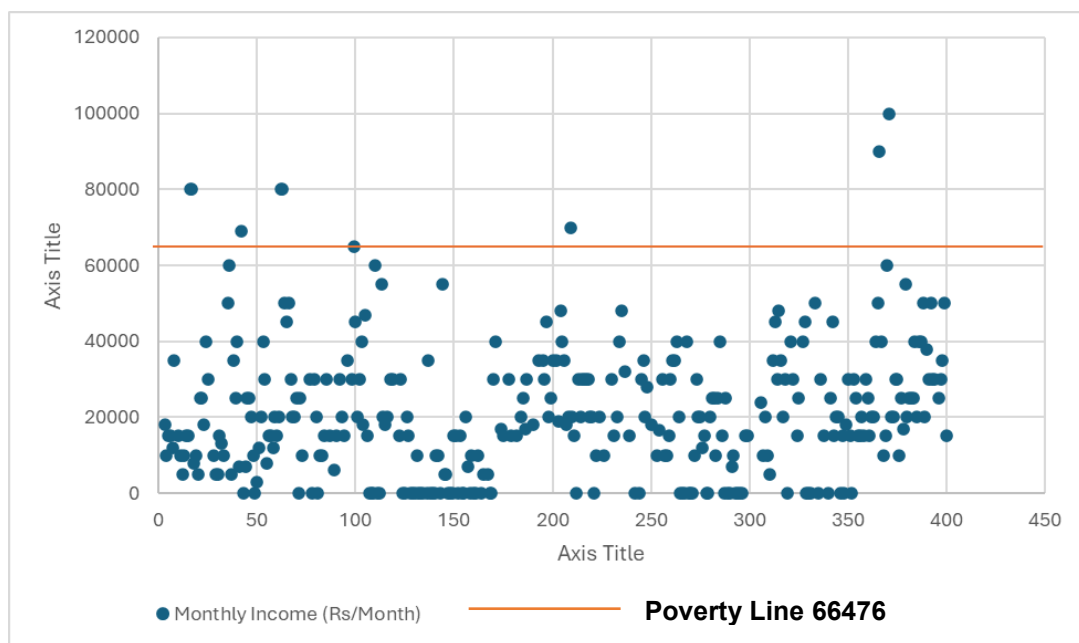


Figure 3.5: Distribution of monthly income (Rs/Month/HH) and poverty line

Source: Field survey, (2024)

3.5. Housing and living environment

As explained in Figure 3.6, the status of residences was 20% - permanent; 22% - Semi-permanent; and 57% - unauthorised residences. The unauthorised residences were higher than permanent residences. The unauthorised residences have no land rights or ownerships for the occupants but they have used the lands belonging to the RPCs. Estate housing is an acute problem for generations of IOT communities, who are living in the plantations.

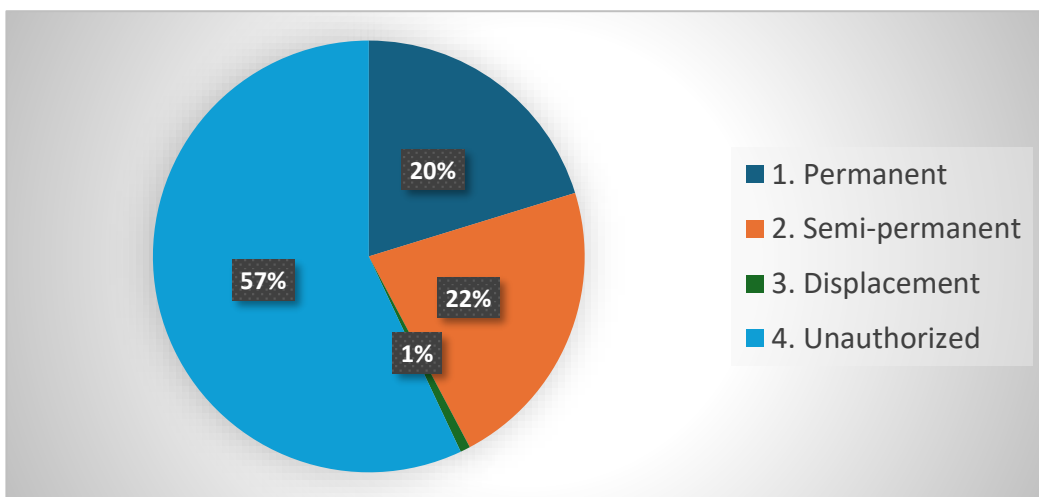


Figure 3.6: Residence status of the households

Source: Field survey, (2024)

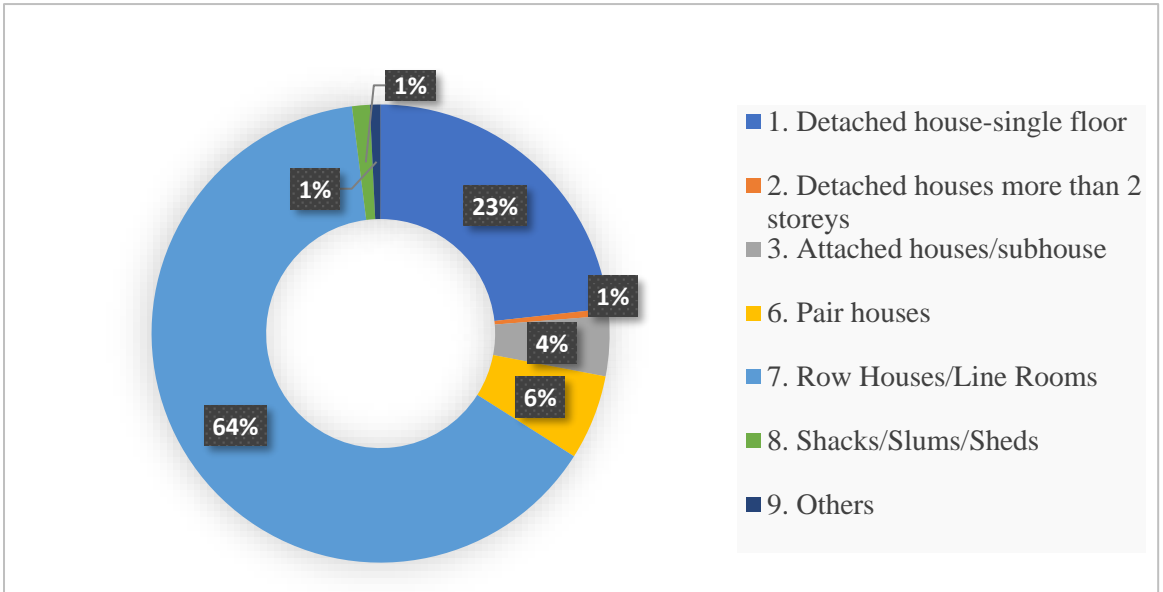


Figure 3.7: Type of the living housing units

Source: Field survey, (2024)

In the analysis, the major categories of houses were identified as Row houses or Line rooms (64%), Detached houses (single Floor) (23%), pair houses (6%), and attached houses (4%) (Figure 3.7). Accordingly, the majority of respondents in households are living in row houses/line rooms, which needs to invest to improve the facilities of houses (space, sanitary facilities, kitchen facilities etc.) to gain improved status in the economic and social well-being of the IOT plantation communities.

Figure 3.8 shows the ownership of the residential housing facilities of the Indian Tamil plantation communities. Accordingly, 60% of the residential facilities were given by the employer RPCs, 21% of housing was built on their own funds, and 10% was with shared or joint ownerships of family members. The rest (3%) was with rent/lease, and 2% was received as compensation and obtained as a government grant. Accordingly, most housing (60%) was provided by the employer or RPCs. In this context, whatever the housing forms are considered, employers play a pivotal role in providing housing facilities in the estate. Further, it is needed to provide financial and other assistance to improve the quality of the housing in the plantations.

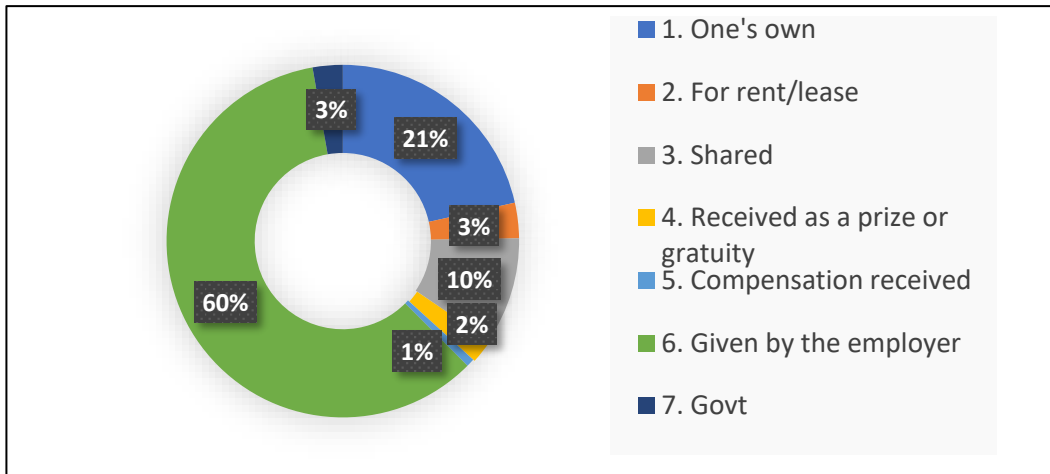


Figure 3.8: Ownership of the residential homes

Source: Field survey, (2024)

The size of the housing units is varied in the plantations. There were two sizes of housing units namely: (a) 342 - less than 500 square feet units (86%) and (b) 58 - more than or equal to 500 square feet units (14%), (Figure 3.9). It has shown that space is not enough for a decent family to live while maintaining healthy families with social life.

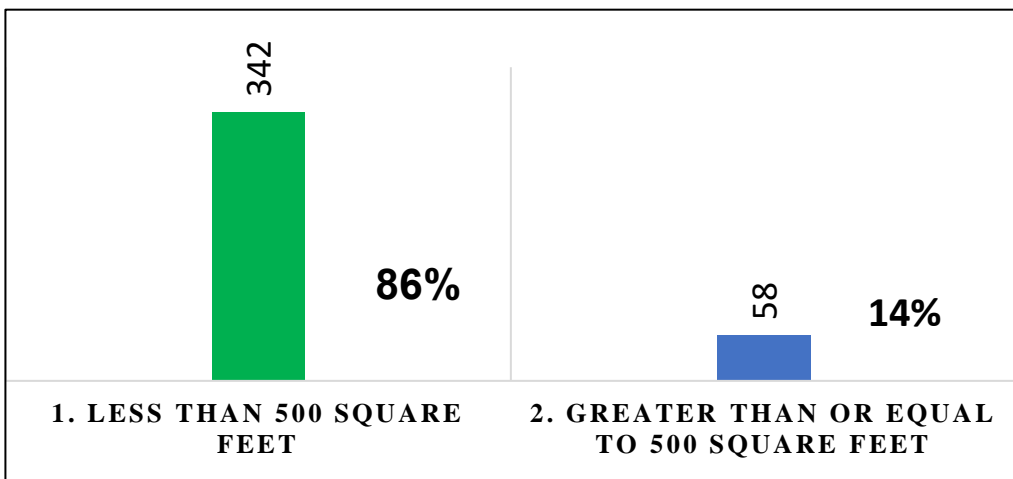


Figure 3.9: Distribution of the size of the housing units

Source: Household survey, (2024)

As indicated in Figure 3.10, the availability of toilet facilities among plantation communities was witnessed through various sanitary systems. However, there were only 7% of households, did not have sanitary facilities and they used open land or forests for toilet facilities. The other 93% of households have various toilet facilities to maintain their sanitary and health status among their families.

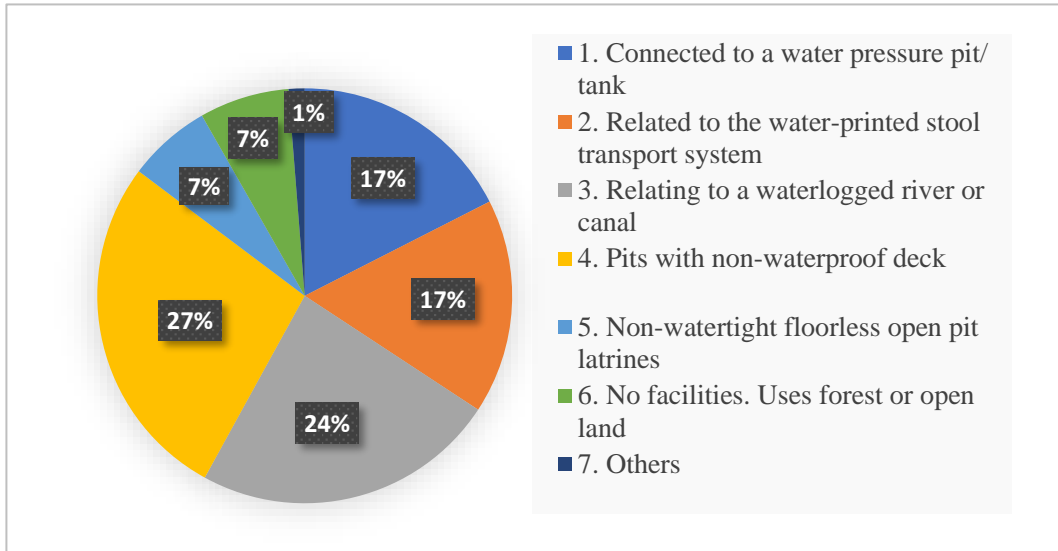


Figure 3.10: Availability of toilet facilities

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Figure 3.11 explains the source of energy used in the plantation households in the project operation districts. Accordingly, 98 per cent of households have electricity, the balance (1%) of households are using kerosene oil and the other 1% are using other sources of energy. In this context, plantation households have used electricity as the household's main energy source, which is equivalent to the national average availability of electricity in the households. The electricity is used by plantation communities for economic and social development purposes (eg. Children's education, lighting, heating, cooking, ironing etc.).

Figure 3.12 describes what sort of government-sponsored assistance or subsidy programmes have been received by the plantation communities. Accordingly, 66% of plantation communities do not receive any direct assistance for economic and social development. Only 34% of plantation households receive some sort of assistance programme directly (eg. allowances for elders; kidney patients, skill development programmes for youth, programmes for issuing birth, marriage, and death certificates, *samurdhi* benefits etc.) In addition, estate communities have indirect benefits from functioning and maintaining estate schools, dispensaries and inner road networks under the *pradesheeya sbabah* and the provincial government.

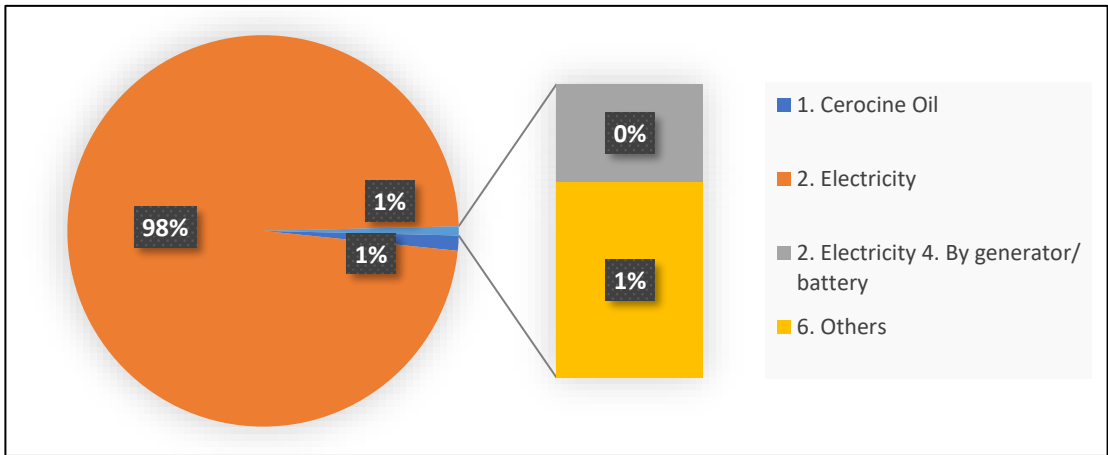


Figure 3.11: The main source of energy use in households surveyed

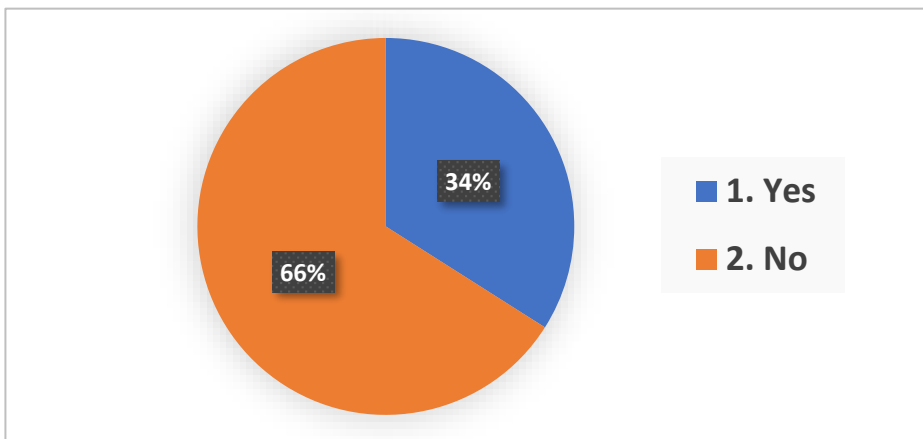


Figure 3.12: Members of the beneficiaries of government-sponsored social welfare programmes

Source: Field survey, (2024)

3.6. Employment opportunities and plantation communities

In the plantation sector, the IOT communities have managed to obtain employment opportunities for their family members in the various sectors, namely the tea sector (48%); service sectors (15%); rubber sector (6%); the construction sector (4%); and other sectors (28%) to generate income for the livelihood development (Figure 3.13). Accordingly, it has been shown that the IOT communities are involved in diversified income-generating activities for their families' livelihood development rather than confined to the plantation sector alone.

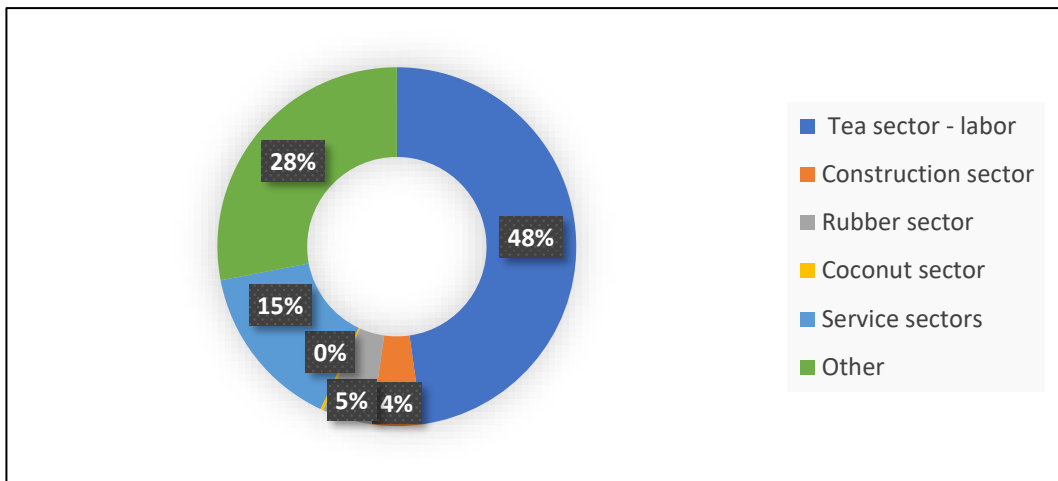


Figure 3.13: Sectoral distribution of employment for family members in the plantation households

Source: Field survey, (2024)

It has been responded by the IOT household communities that over time, changes in employment have taken place and it has been reported that 44% of households have shifted from the traditional plantation sector to new service-oriented jobs markets like retail trade, construction, and tourism etc. In addition, some vegetable and fruit farming, and livestock sectors like poultry farming, and dairy farming were the sectors that generated job opportunities for the IOT communities (Figure 3.14)

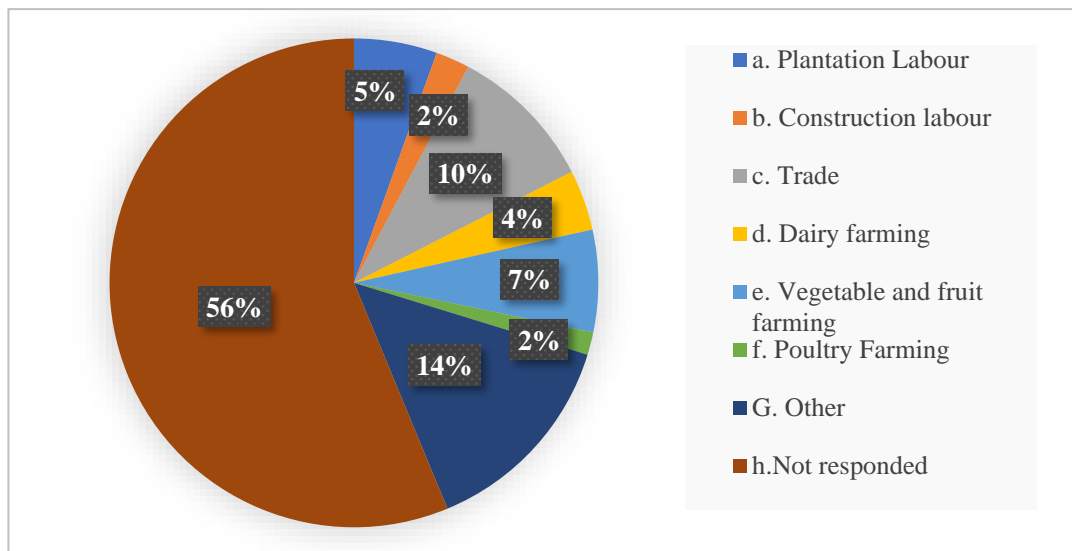


Figure 3.14: Shifts in the types of employment sectors reported

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Chapter 4 Culture and Traditions in Indian Origin Tamil Communities in the Plantations Sector

4.1. Introduction

The Indian Origin Tamil communities in Sri Lanka's plantation sector represent a vibrant picture of social and cultural heritage, deeply rooted in their historical migration and enduring presence. Originating from Southern India, particularly Tamil Nadu, these communities have contributed significantly to Sri Lanka's economy, primarily through their pivotal role in the plantation sector. Cultural heritage and traditions are integral to any society, encapsulating its history, values, beliefs, traditions and customs passed down through generations. They form the foundation upon which identities are built and communities are shaped. In the IOT communities in the plantation sector, cultural heritage manifests through rich pictures of rituals, arts, language, customs, and practices that reflect its people's collective experiences and aspirations. These traditions connect individuals to their past and serve as a compass for navigating the complexities of the present and envisioning the future. From vibrant festivals that celebrate harvests and seasons to sacred ceremonies honouring ancestors, every facet of Indian Tamil communities' cultural heritage carries profound meaning, fostering a sense of belonging and continuity among its members. As the IOT community in Sri Lanka evolves, its cultural heritage remains a dynamic force, adapting to modern influences while preserving the essence of its timeless traditions, ensuring they endure for generations to come.

4.2. Influences in the Historical Migration of Indian Tamils to Sri Lanka

As explained elsewhere IOT community has migrated to Sri Lanka since the 1930s, serving in the plantations of coffee and tea, in particular in the upcountry. Based on the community responses, the majority (65%) have expressed that there was a serious impact on the size and the structure of their families (Table 4.1). Accordingly, most people believe that cultural practices and traditions followed within their household have been passed down from generation to generation. Based on the FGDs, the IOT community has explained how the culture and identity have been maintained and passed on to the next generations. Accordingly, they have described further that *“e plantation system created a segregated society, with Indian Tamil labourers living in isolated estates separated from mainstream society. This segregation led to the development of distinct cultural practices, languages, customs, rituals and social norms within the Indian Tamil community, shaping its identity and sense of belonging. The plantation system was built on the exploitation of Indian Tamil labourers, who were brought to Sri Lanka as indentured workers to work on coffee, tea and rubber plantations. These workers were subjected to harsh working conditions, low wages, and few rights, leading to economic dependence and vulnerability within the community”*.

Table 4.1: Responses on influences of historical migration on the size and structure of the IOT families

Responses	Number of households	% Share
1. Yes	261	65%
2. No	139	35%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As shown in Figure 4.1, it has been evidenced that over the generations, changes in the demographic composition of the plantation Indian families have taken place and family size has been reduced from 5 members of their great-grandparents and grand-parents to 3 family members in present families now. As per FGDs,¹² it has been triangulated based on the ancestors’ knowledge, during the last two centuries, the average family size of the IOT households has been reduced from 5 persons to 3 persons, due to various reasons, namely, education levels, and family income, and economic hardships they faced and social issues with mainstreaming societies.

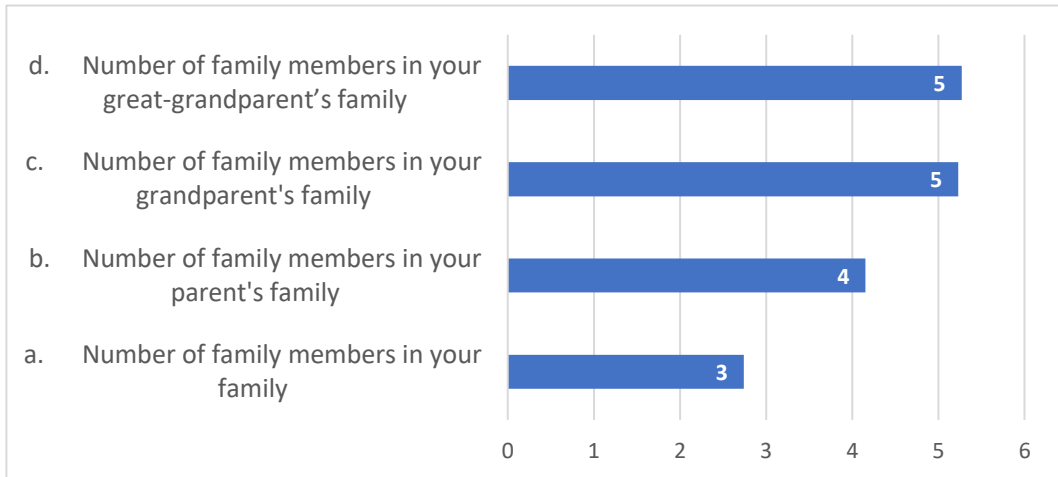


Figure 4.1: Average family size of the Indian-origin Tamil family in the plantation sector

Source: Field survey, (2024)

¹² Based on ancestors’ knowledge passed on to the present generations, the IOT community expressed that their family size has been reduced over the last two centuries.

4.3. Social and cultural aspects

The IOT communities in Sri Lanka's plantation sector represent a vibrant status in social and cultural heritage, deeply rooted in their historical migration and enduring presence. Socially, Indian Tamil communities in the plantation sector have forged resilient identities shaped by their unique history and experiences. From the early waves of indentured labourers brought by the British during the colonial era to subsequent generations who have established deep roots in Sri Lankan soil, their journey has been marked by challenges and triumphs. Culturally, these communities uphold rich traditions, customs, and practices that reflect their Tamil heritage. Further, language, music, dance, and religious festivities play crucial roles in preserving their cultural identity amidst the backdrop of a diverse Sri Lankan society.

Table 4.2: Social and cultural dimensions passed down through generations

Responses	Number of households	%
1. Yes	356	89%
2. No	44	11%
Grand Total	400	100.0%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As described above in Table 4.2, 89 per cent of total plantation households expressed that they are in a position to pass the all social and cultural aspects and all dynamics of the rich social and cultural dimensions of the Indian Tamil population to their younger generations. In this context, as indicated in Figure 4.2, the majority of Indian Tamil communities in the plantation sector have indicated that they have celebrated the following cultural events namely: Thipongal (76%); New year (6%); Dewali (4%); and Nawarthri (1%); and other festivals (13%). Accordingly, thaipongal is the main cultural event they practised almost everywhere among the IOT communities. According to FGDs conducted, the IOT community expressed as follows that ‘*we actively participate in and organize cultural events and celebrations within our community, mainly including thaipongal, new year, thiruvizha and church feasts*’.

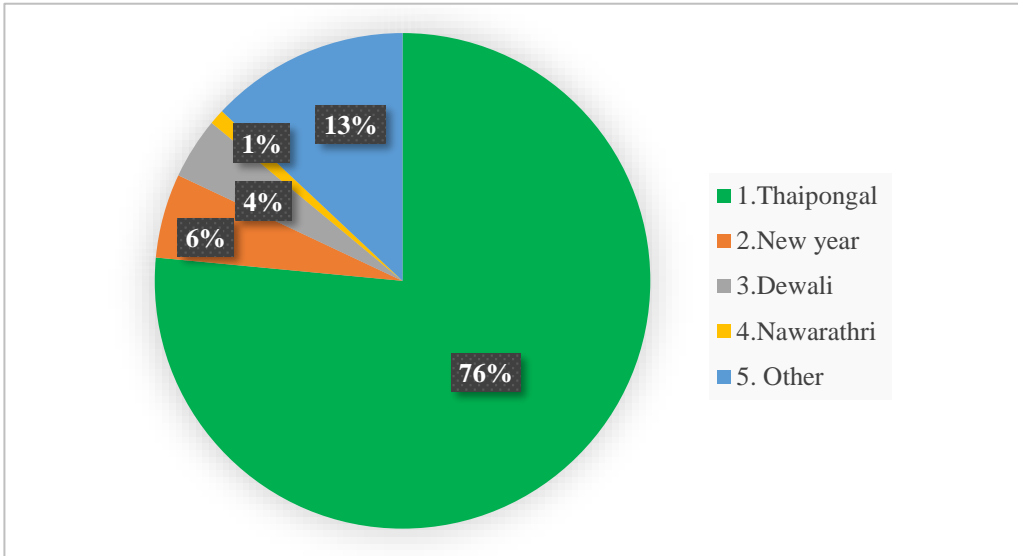


Figure 4.2: Major cultural events organized by IOT communities

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Table 4.3: Cultural practices performed by IOT family members

Cultural Practices Performed	Number of households	% Share
Check the auspicious time	287	72%
Check horoscope	31	8%
Change the colour of clothing	20	5%
Other	62	16%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

In the event of celebrating cultural practices of childbirth, puberty ceremony, wedding and death of family members (husband, or/and wife), the majority (72%) of the communities have checked the auspicious time for major events. In addition, they have performed other cultural practices, like checking the horoscope (8%); changing the clothing colour (5%); and other cultural practices (16%) (Table 4.3). In this context, it is obvious that based on the FGDs conducted among IOT communities, they have expressed that the following

traditional customs, rituals, cultural functions, traditions and social activities are performed as traditional cultural practices in the IOT households, and the society namely:

- **Postnatal Care:** After the birth of a child, the IOT household places great importance on the well-being of the mother. On the 7th and 30th days following delivery, special attention is given to the mother's diet, with an emphasis on nourishing foods that promote recovery and vitality. This tradition reflects a deep-rooted belief in the importance of maternal health and the need for proper care and support during the post-natal period.
- **Kaadhu Kuththu:** One of the significant rituals in the IOT household is the Kaadhu Kuththu ceremony, where the ears of the girl child are pierced. This ritual is not only a symbolic rite of passage but also signifies the close bond between the child and her maternal uncle, who traditionally assists in the piercing. It is a momentous occasion that underscores the significance of family relationships and cultural traditions within your household.
- **Coming of Age Rituals:** It was described that the IOT household observes various rituals to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, particularly for young girls. The ceremony that occurs when a girl experiences her first menstruation is a poignant moment, symbolizing her maturity and readiness for womanhood. This ritual involves the participation of seven women relatives who bathe the girl in turmeric water, followed by a period of isolation and purification. The girl is then reintegrated into the household through elaborate poojas, signifying her new status as a young woman. In addition, her maternal uncle makes a bathing spot (*Diya Nana Maduwa*) from polythene and after her ritual bathing, they destroy that bathing spot by burning. Moreover, as per the custom, her maternal uncle has to provide all the necessary materials (new clothes, jewellery etc.) for that ceremony.
- **Pre-Wedding Customs: Traditional pre-wedding ceremonies hold special significance in IOT households, symbolizing the union of two families and the beginning of a new chapter in the lives of the bride and the groom. The Nalangu ceremony, where close relatives of the bride and groom present them with gifts and blessings, is a joyous occasion filled with laughter and friendship. The Thaali tying ceremony, where the sacred wedding thread is tied around the bride's neck, is a solemn and auspicious moment that marks the formalization of the marriage bond.**

Parents are usually concerned about the selection of a partner from the same caste for their children's wedding. However, the most loving young couples are not concerned about caste and at present, 90 per cent of marriages are love marriages. In addition, once they agree to the marriage, the parents of the bride and bride-groom exchange fruit baskets to confirm the wedding (*Nichchayam*). After confirming the wedding, they plant the arecanut (*pakka*) tree and offer the Pooja seven days before the wedding day. So, the bride-groom should bring the wedding saree, *thali* (gold chain) and wedding ring to his bride. On the wedding day, they celebrate the custom of the Poruwa

ceremony and they share the saree and other pieces of jewellery (*tali pili*) and put the *Pottu* (red colour dot on the forehead of the bride) to the bride. Moreover, parents or close relatives put the wedding rings into a water pot, and after that bride and bridegroom must search for their wedding rings in the water pot. In this custom, parents and relatives believe that the new couple will build their lives with mutual help (*Sahajeewanya*) through that ritual (custom).

- **Aadi 18:** Another important tradition observed in IOT households is Aadi 18, which occurs after the wedding. This ritual involves adding more accessories to the Thaali of the newlyweds, symbolizing prosperity, longevity, and marital bliss. It is a time of celebration and joy as the couple embarks on their journey together, surrounded by the love and blessings of their families.
- **Valaigappu:** Before the birth of a child, the IOT household performs the *Valaigappu* ritual for the expectant mother. This ceremony is conducted to ensure the well-being and protection of both the mother and the unborn child. It involves prayers, blessings, and the tying of protective threads around the mother's wrist, symbolizing the community's solidarity and support during this important life transition.
- **Funeral Rituals:** In times of sorrow and loss, IOT households follow traditional funeral rituals to honour and remember the departed loved ones. These rituals include prayers, offerings, and ceremonies that symbolize respect, remembrance, and the journey of the soul to the afterlife. They provide comfort and solace to the grieving family members, reaffirming the importance of cultural traditions and community support during times of mourning. For example, after the death of the husband, his wife must remove the *thali* and all bangles during the funeral day. She can not wear that *thalli* and bangles during her lifetime by obeying the husband. According to the custom, after the husband's death, the wife can not participate in any ceremony as a wife'.
- **Kaamankuthu:** is a traditional ritual among the Indian Tamil community, particularly prevalent in rural areas and among agricultural communities. It is a ceremonial event that typically takes place during the harvesting season or other auspicious occasions. During *Kaamankuthu*, members of the community come together to perform folk songs, dances, and rituals to celebrate the bountiful harvest and to express gratitude to the gods for their blessings for the future. The atmosphere is with a festive mood, with colourful decorations, wearing traditional attire, and vibrant music filling the air. One of the central features of *Kaamankuthu* is the performance of traditional folk dances, such as *Kuthu or Kummi*, which involve rhythmic movements and synchronized steps. These dances are often accompanied by live music, including drums, flutes, and other traditional musical instruments. Another important aspect of *Kaamankuthu* is the offering of prayers and blessings for a prosperous future. Participants may visit temples or perform rituals at home to seek divine blessings for good fortune, good health for all family members, and abundance in the coming year.

However, further based on the FGDs conducted, the IOT communities explained as follows: *“We are now experiencing a 50% reduction in traditional customs, beliefs, traditional practices, rituals, and religious-based activities due to a variety of factors they faced among community members such as modernization of the society and life patterns, urbanization, mobile phone usage with social media, Indian and local TV programs, children education, and host of other factors that have influenced to function, bless cultural and traditional practices than previously”*. Accordingly, some gaps in views and some differences in ideas and thoughts were recognized among the younger generation of Indian Tamil communities.

However, in the surveyed districts, the IOT communities explained the methods they used to evolve the cultural identities within the family: the participation of elders with their younger generation for cultural events and functions (44%); they perform some cultural functions (*Thaipongal, Diwali, new year, weddings ceremony, death ceremony etc.*) commonly to educate younger generations (34%); and the younger generation follows up with the elders’ foot-steps (21%) (Table 4.4). It shows that elders have a pivotal role to play in educating their younger generations on their traditional customs, rituals, and religious ceremonies to build their identity as IOTs, living in Sri Lanka.

Table 4.4: Responses on How the Social Dynamics or Change Evolved within the Household

Responses	Number of households	% Share
Elders participate with their kids in cultural events	175	44%
Elders educate their younger generation	137	34%
The younger generation follows their elder's footsteps	85	21%
Others	3	1%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

It has been evidenced that the IOT communities follow the same cultural practices throughout their generations. Accordingly, the majority (89 per cent) of community groups have reported that they would follow their cultural dynamics and practices throughout their lifetime. Only 11 per cent of respondents have expressed otherwise, with changes in their mindset through television campaigns, social media, pressure groups, improved education of the younger generation etc.

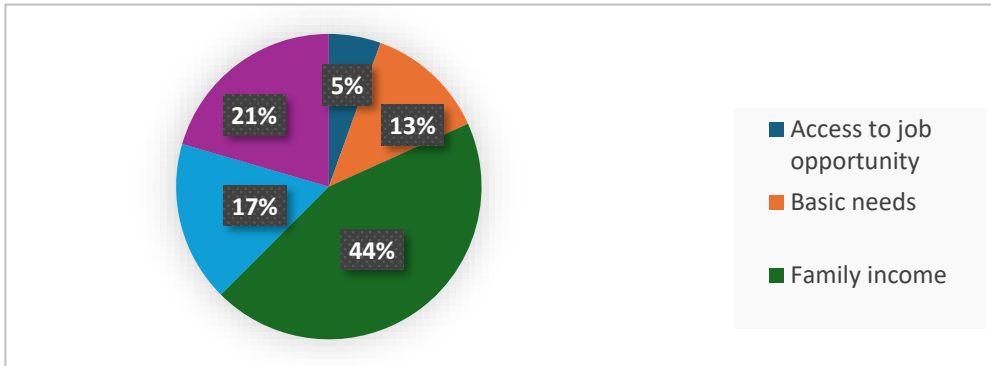


Figure 4.3: Impact of political changes on IOT family's daily life and well-being

Source: Field Survey (2024)

4.4. Community-level Political Engagement

Community-level political engagement is the bedrock of participatory democracy, where the vitality of local governance is shaped by the collective actions and voices of its residents. It may create architects of change, influencing policies that directly impact their neighbourhoods, schools, and daily lives through, grassroots campaigns, or advocacy groups, community-level political engagement fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens, forging pathways for inclusive decision-making and the realisation of shared aspirations, even for promoting cultural identity and its values for better social development.

The household survey gathered the community responses on their involvement in grassroots-level political activities. Accordingly, the majority (79%) of the households responded with negative involvement in political activities owing to previous political experiences, that they have lost their trust and faith in the majority of political parties and leaders, operating in the plantation sector (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: Community response on community-level political engagement

Community Response	Number of households	% Share
1. Participated	83	21%
2. Not participated	317	79%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

The IOT communities were inquired to get their feedback on how the political changes, especially during the post-independence period, impact their family's daily life and future well-being. As explained in Figure 4.3, political changes have impacted family income

(44%); livelihood development (17%); provision of basic needs (13%); and access to job opportunities (5%) mainly. Accordingly, there is a possibility through community empowerment to improve their daily life and the well-being of the communities. Based on the community responses to political changes and wage increases, the majority (73%) of IOT plantation communities have responded negatively and they do not have confidence in politicians to interfere with the plantation companies and the government to increase their wages (see Table 4.6).

Table 4.6: Responses on political changes and increasing wages in the plantations

Responses	Number of households	% Share
1. No	293	73%
2. Yes	107	27%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.5. Language use in the plantation households

It was understood that in the IOT communities in the plantation sector households, language use is gradually changing from the native language of Tamil to the language of Sinhala in the main society. The majority (78%) of households use Tamil only for their day-to-day communication. However, 18% of the households use both Tamil and Sinhala languages as the main commonly spoken languages in the household for communication purposes. In addition, 1% of the households use Tamil, Sinhala and English (Trilingual) for communication and 1% of the households use English as the learning language for their children at school (Table 4.7). According to FGDs, most southern plantation communities in Kandy, Matale, Galle, Matara, Kalutara, and Colombo districts use both Sinhala and Tamil languages as communication languages, whereas in Nuwara Eliya, and Badulla districts, very few people use both languages to communicate with each other. In this context, it has been recognized that the language used for communication has changed over generations and shifted gradually to the mainstream Sinhala language in society.

Table 4.7: Responses on Commonly Using Spoken Languages in the IOT Households

Responses	Number of households	% Share
a. Tamil only	320	80%
b. Both Tamil and Sinhala	72	18%
c. Tamil, Sinhala and English	4	1%
d. English only has been used for children’s education	4	1%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

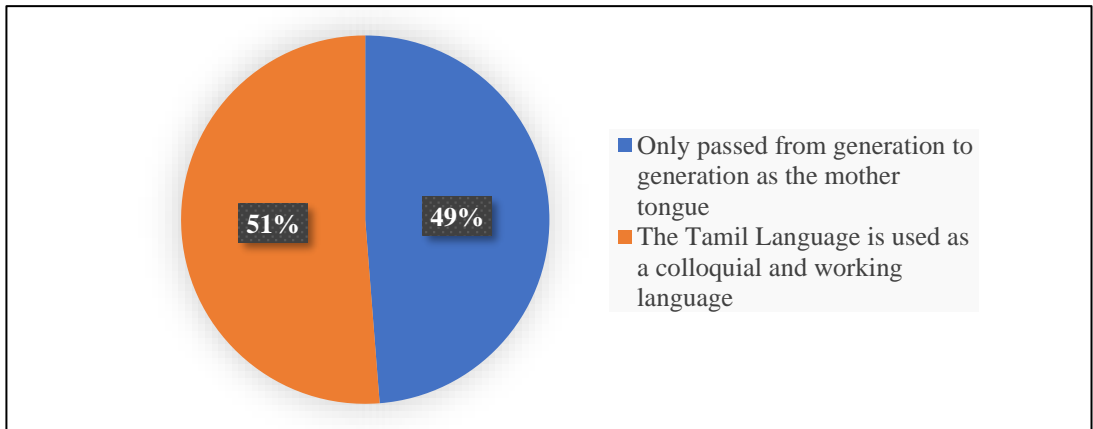


Figure 4.4: Methods used to pass the Tamil language on to the generations

Source: Field survey,(2024)

It was observed that the Tamil language was passed on to the next generation, using it for communication as a mother tongue (49%) and the Tamil language was used as a colloquial and working language at home and the office (51%) for day-to-day activities (Figure 4.4). It was obvious that the Tamil language was used through generations and passed on to the younger generation as a colloquial language for day-to-day operations and communications.

4.6. School Attendance by the Plantation Indian Tamil Communities

Education of the second generation of IOT communities is vital for the transformation of society. In this respect, 98% of students have gone to Tamil medium school; 3% to Sinhala medium school, and 2% of students to mixed schools respectively (See Figure 4.6). According to FGDs conducted, the feedback of the IOT community on education has been identified. What it said is as follows: “*n the past, few individuals in estates attended school, but now nearly all children are enrolled, and the schools operate effectively. The main obstacle remains financial constraints, as families may struggle to afford education expenses. In some areas, children have to travel more than 4-5 km to go to school, which is a bit difficult task, because no transportation facilities are available within the estate. Otherwise, no significant challenges have been noted*”.

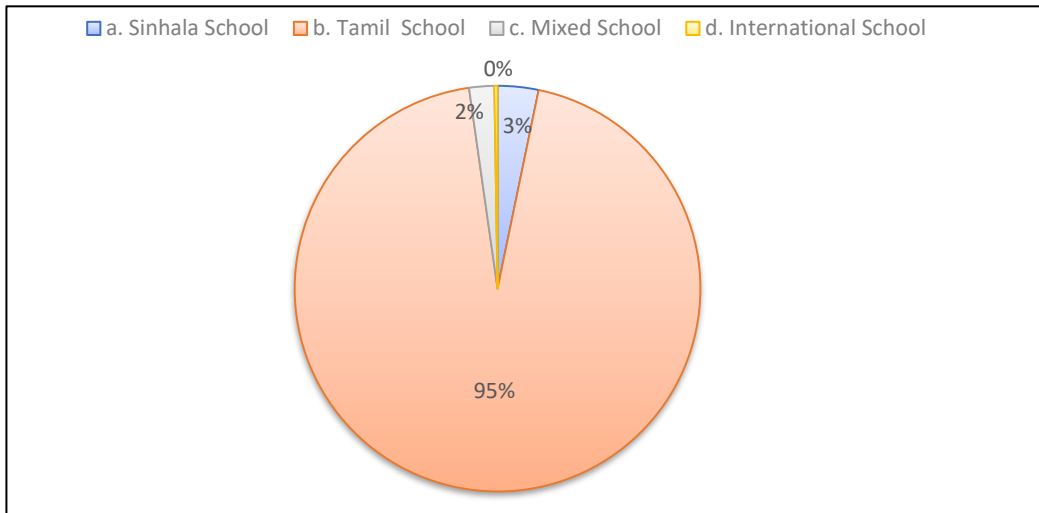


Figure 4.5: Responses on schools attended

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As indicated in Table 4.8, 89 per cent of households explained that they have Tamil medium schools within a radius of 2 Km for their children's education. However, in some districts, 11 per cent of them could not find Tamil medium schools nearby for their children's education. In this respect, their children have to go either to a far away Tamil medium school or arrange the children's education in Sinhala medium schools nearby.

Table 4.8: Responses on availability of schools nearby for children’s education

Responses	Number of households	% Share
1. Yes	356	89%
2. No	44	11%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024).

In the analysis of the community responses on the non-availability of Tamil medium schools for their children’s education, it was identified that only 28 out of 74 households in Badulla (38%); 3 out of 10 households in Kalutara (30%), 1 out of 10 households in Galle, (10%) and 6 out of 186 households in Nuwara Eliya (3%) districts have some difficulty in finding schools within the 2 Km radius (Figure 4.6). In Colombo, Matale and Kandy districts, the communities have Tamil medium schools within a 2 Km radius. Accordingly, the IOT communities have the facility to maintain and facilitate their identity by teaching their children in the native language of Tamil.

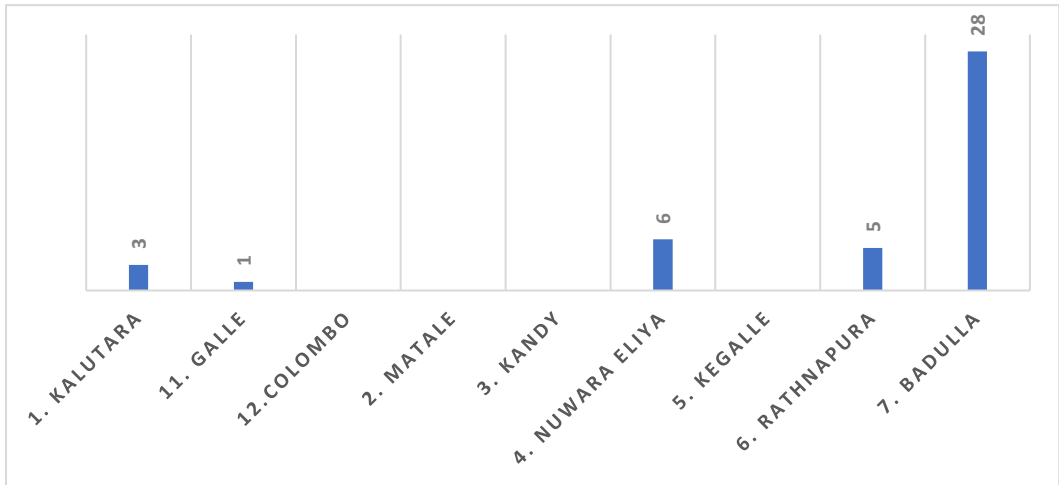


Figure 4.6: Responses on availability of Tamil medium schools within a 2Km radius

Source: Field survey, (2024).

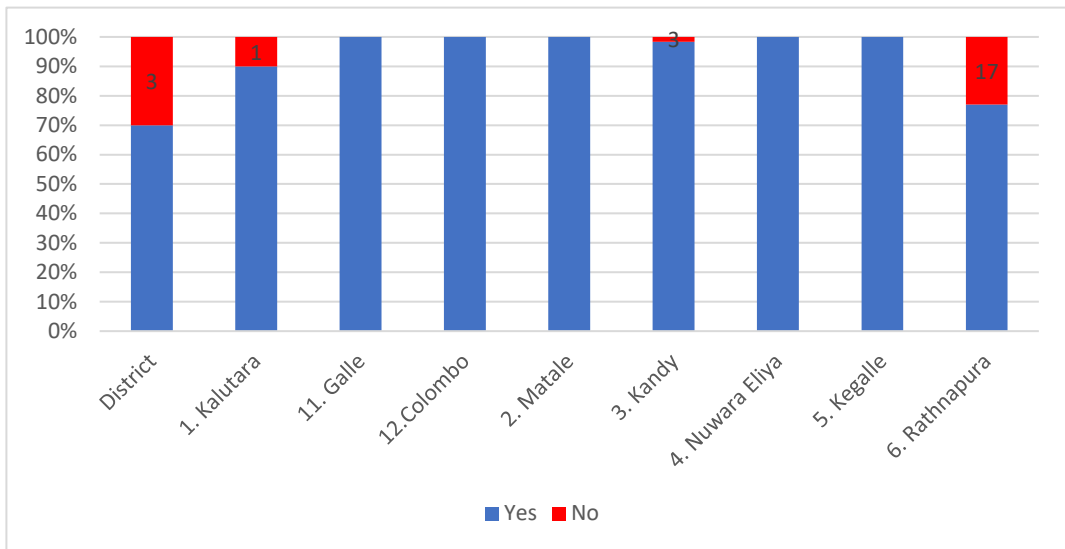


Figure 4.7: Responses on the availability of a church, temple or kovil nearby in the estate
Source: Field survey, (2024).

As discussed in Figure 4.7, all districts surveyed have churches, temples and kovil facilities for all communities to practice their religion, which facilitates and promotes the cultural identity among them.

The IOT community responses to the availability of infrastructure (roads, water services, electricity etc.) and mobile connectivity were analysed and found that the status of infrastructure and connectivity was poor (54%), good (33%), very good (12%) and excellent (1%). In the community empowerment process, the availability and connectivity of road networks, internet and wifi facilities, health facilities, transport facilities etc. are necessary conditions for reducing the transaction cost of communities and service their day-to-day activities while maintaining efficiency and effectiveness (Figure 4.8).

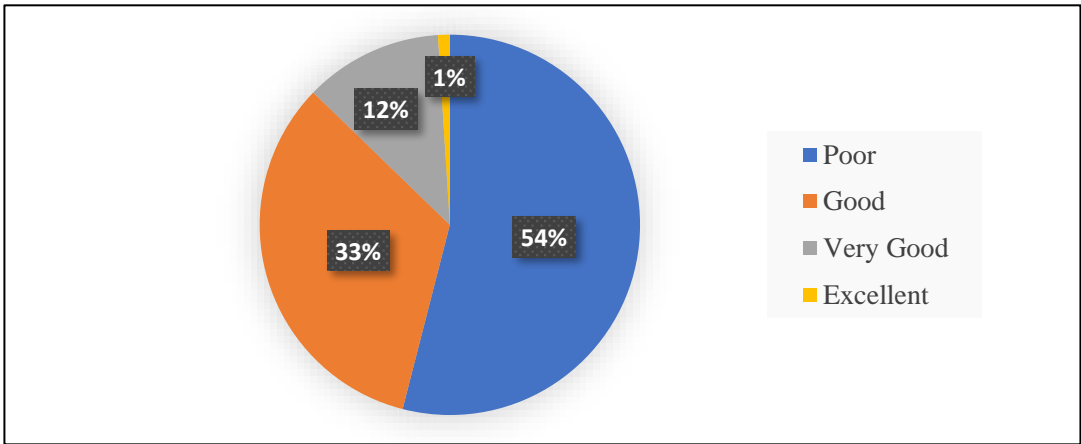


Figure 4.8: Responses on availability of infrastructure and connectivity

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.7. Land Ownership and Livelihood Development

As shown in Figure 4.9, the majority (97%) of the present IOT plantation communities have no land ownership in the plantations. They are living there and some are working in the plantations and the majority are working outside the plantations as casual laborers for maintaining their livelihoods.

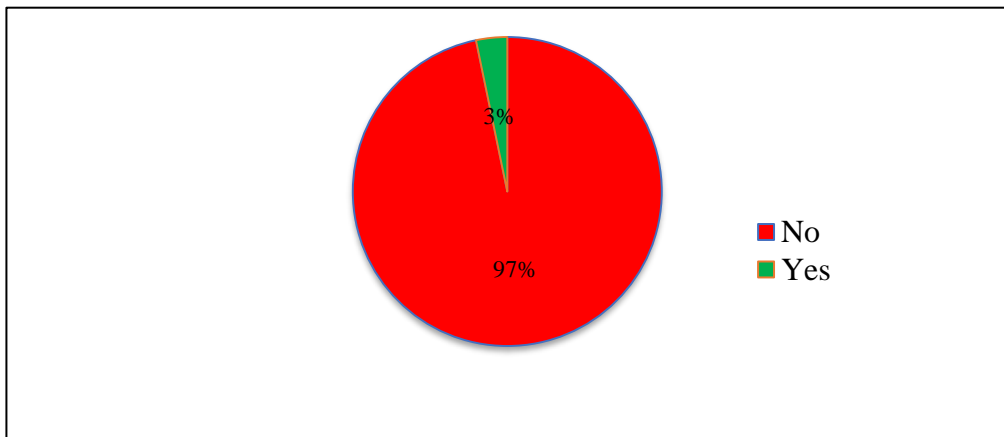


Figure 4.9: Present land ownership of the IOT communities

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Considering the land ownership of the IOT plantation communities by district, it has clearly shown that Kalutara, Galle, Kandy and Nuwara Eliya plantation communities have maintained some level of land ownership. In contrast, in all other districts, the land ownership of plantation lands belonged not to the communities but to the government. The IOT Community-level land ownership is maintained at a very negligible level (Figure 4.10). In this context, it has been shown that communities' feelings of insecurity are a long-felt need to be corrected for better integration of the national economy and society.

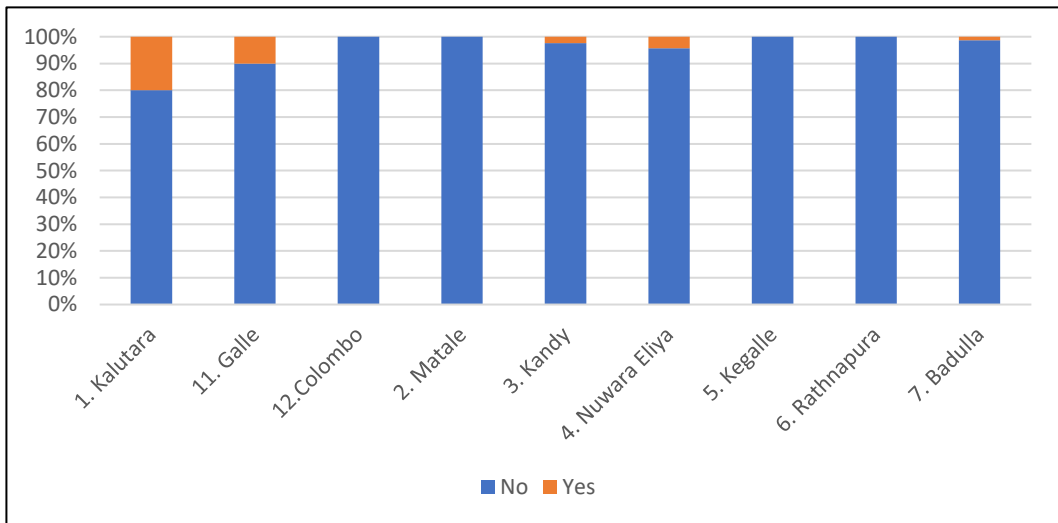


Figure 4.10: Land ownership of the IOT communities by district

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Table 4.9: Distribution of Crop Cultivation by IOT Communities

Cultivated Crops	Number of households	% Share
Vegetable Cultivation	24	6%
No Cultivation (i.e. Not enough space)	376	94%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

In Table 4.9, it has been explained that the majority (94%) of IOT households have no land to cultivate vegetables for family consumption and only 6 per cent of households managed to get a piece of land in the plantation sector to grow vegetables. Accordingly, the majority

of households entirely rely on the markets to buy their food items to maintain their food security.

As an income-generating activity for the plantation communities, the estate management has operationalized a new measure of revenue sharing model for increasing the productivity of the estate and opening up revenue-generation opportunities for IOT communities. Based on the responses, the majority (93%) of IOT plantation communities have not been involved with the revenue-sharing model (Figure 4.11). It is yet to be popularised among IOT communities to generate additional income for their economic well-being.

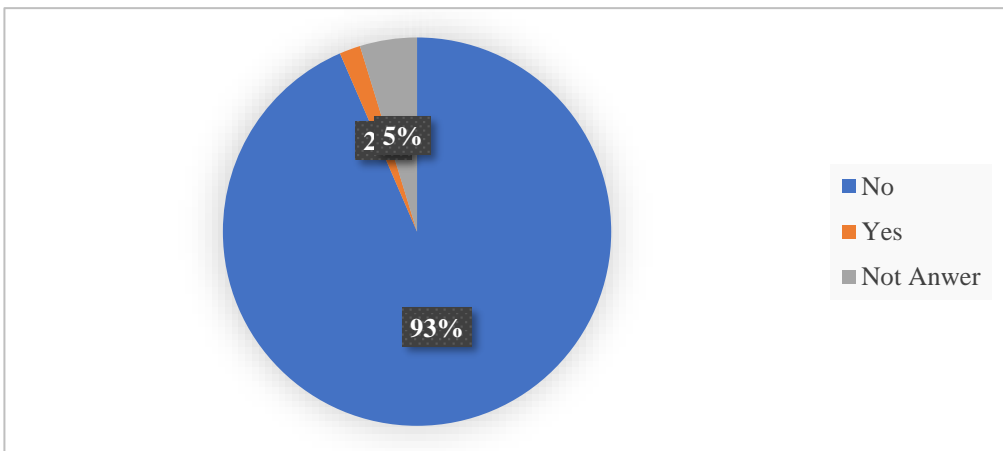


Figure 4.11: Responses on Operationalizing the revenue sharing model

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.8. Community involvement in the SMEs in the plantation sector

As described in Figure 4.12, the majority (95%) of the households have not been engaged in the implementation of SMEs. A couple of households have managed to maintain grocery shops (2%), farming of vegetables (2%), poultry farming (1%) and own accounting work (1%). In this context, the majority of households rely on non-agricultural activities, which are within and outside the plantation sector in surveyed districts.

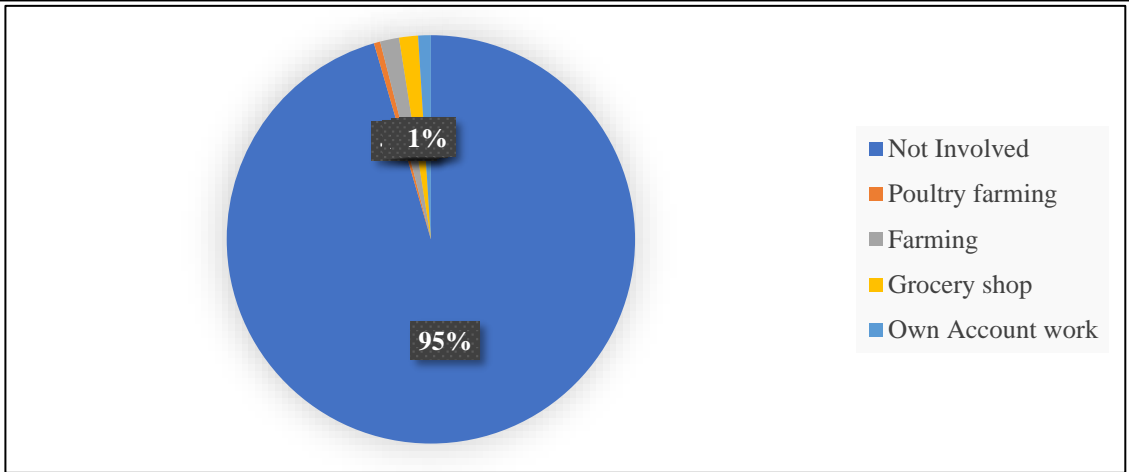


Figure 4.12: Functioning of SMEs among IOT communities

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.9. Building and Maintaining Social Capital in the Plantation Sector

As indicated in Table 4.10, though, 57% of households of IOT communities are non-members of any kind of social organization, 43% of the households are members of social organizations to improve their social and economic well-being. If they are members, there is a possibility to use such organizations to promote their cultural and social identity as a group.

Table 4.10: Responses on maintaining memberships in any social organization

Response on memberships	Number of households	% Share
1. No	227	57%
2. Yes	173	43%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As shown in Figure 4.14, 39% of IOT household communities are members of any social organization, 2% of them are functioning as Chairman; 1% of them are Secretary; 24% of members are office bearers of other organizations etc. Accordingly, the IOT community is servicing many social organizations and social networks by promoting building social capital in the plantation sector to promote their identity.

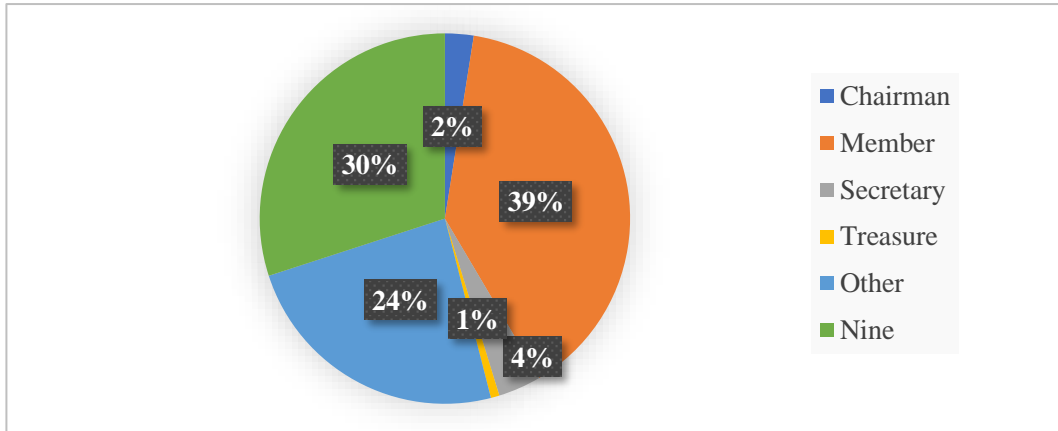


Figure 4.13: Roles played by social organizations

Source: Field survey, (2024)

The community-based social organizations are generating various benefits for society. Accordingly, capacity building (25%), financial support (9%), opportunities for livelihood support (2%) and other supports for economic and social development (27%) are generated by the social organizations (Figure 4.14). In this context, social organizations need to be strengthened to assist in generating more benefits for the community including promotion of cultural identity.

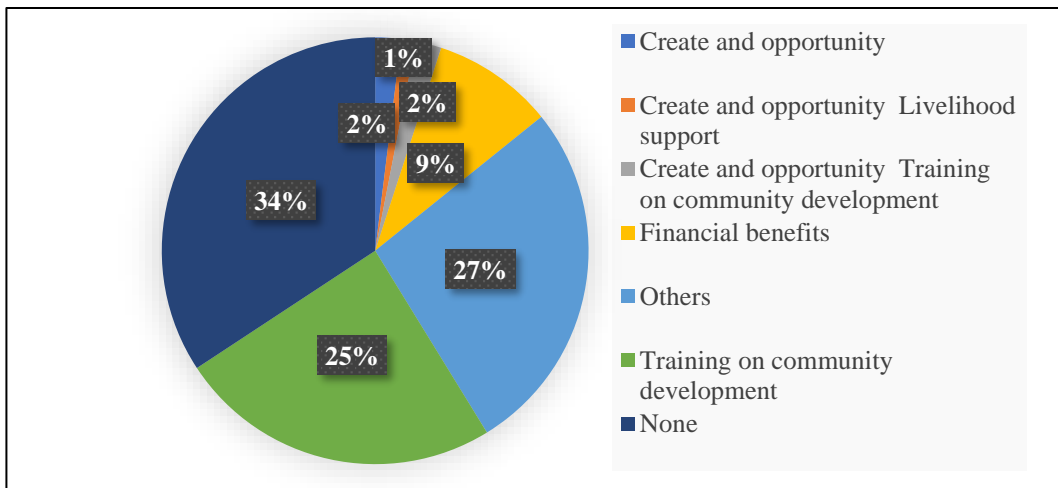


Figure 4.14: Social benefits generated

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.10. Civil conflict and aftermath

The civil conflict in Sri Lanka, spanning several decades, left a profound impact on its society and landscape. Characterized by ethnic tensions between the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority, the conflict resulted in widespread violence and displacement. Even after the 1989 civil unrest, the aftermath continues to shape political dynamics and social reconciliation efforts in the country. Understanding these complexities is crucial for comprehending Sri Lanka's contemporary challenges and aspirations for a unified future of Sri Lanka. In 1989, a civil conflict erupted in the country, damaging the entire economic and Social environment and its relationships. The majority of people identified the civil conflict as creating some issues as community displacement (26%) and facing economic hardships (27%) and social depression (26%). In this context, the IOT community in plantations suffered economically and socially (See Figure 4.15).

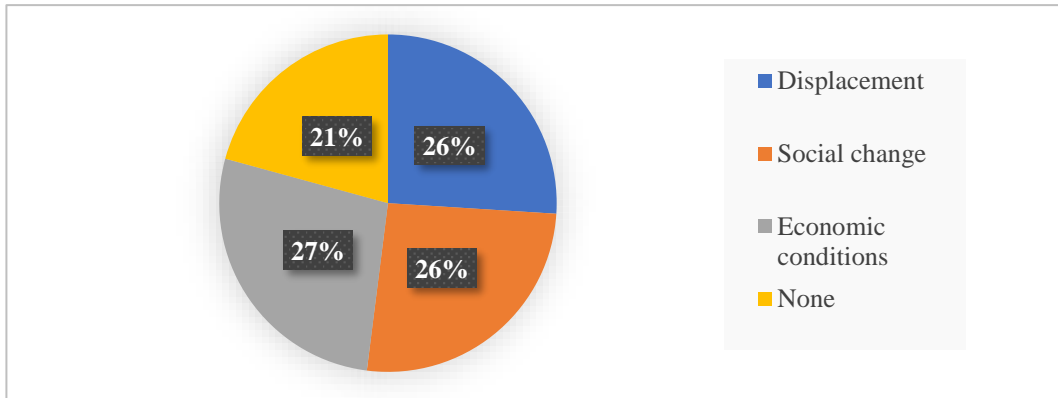


Figure 4.15: Civil conflict and its impact on the IOT community
Source: Field survey, (2024)

Table 4.11: The post-civil conflict and strategic options used for rehabilitation of IOT families

Strategies Used	Number of households	% Share
Advisory services	8	2%
Counselling programmes conducted	10	3%
Livelihood development programmes Implemented	28	7%
Capacity building programmes	33	8%
Cash or material grants given by the Government/the donors/INGOs/NGOs/CBOs/Others	75	19%
Other strategies Applied	94	24%
None	152	38%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

In the aftermath of the civil unrest in 1989, as identified by the minority IOT communities, the above strategies were used to make rehabilitation and reconciliation among the IOT communities in the plantations. In this respect, cash or material grants from NGOs (19%), capacity-building programmes (8%); livelihood development programmes (7%); and other strategies (24%) were applied to rehabilitation and reconciliation among mainstream and minority communities (Table 4.11). Further, the Tamil Communities have received various other assistance, namely: cash grants (13%); Labour donations (In-kind contribution); material grants (14%); other grants (24%) and no-grants received at all (39%). Accordingly, it was obvious that building and strengthening community partnerships are very vital to promoting community rehabilitation while promoting peace, harmony and cultural identity (Figure 4.16).

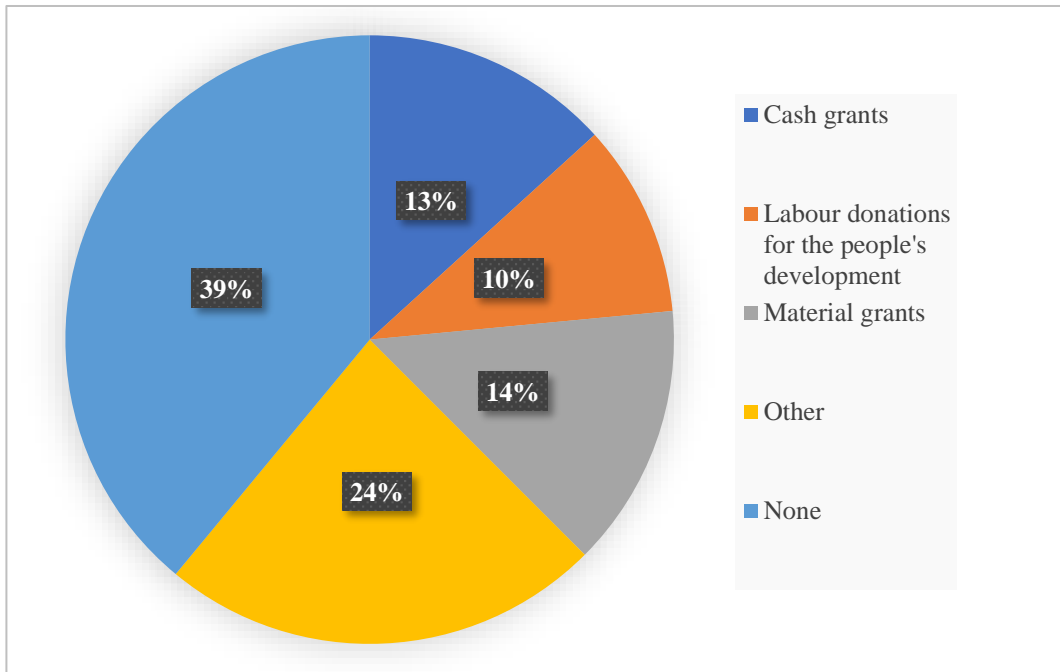


Figure 4.16: Assistance given by various organizations for rehabilitation

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.11. Community Aspirations and Hopes

In terms of present challenges and issues faced by the IOT community in the plantation sector, most of the community members are of the view that they are expecting new hopes even after nearly 200 years of migration from South India. Based on the community consultations, through FGDs conducted, most community members expressed their positive attitudes in joining the mainstream society for integration. Accordingly, they have proposed the following four major aspirations and hopes to achieve through community participation (see Table 4.12).

- Need to integrate with the main society (37%)
- Improve the infra-structural facilities and services (housing/drinking water services/ access roads, sanitary facilities etc.) in the residential areas (28%)
- Arrange good education facilities for their children (19%)
- Obtain good jobs outside the plantation (6%)

Considering the above community aspirations, the plantation Indian Tamil community has suggested the following suggestions (Figure 4.17).

- a. Assist students to gain knowledge through the provision of extra education facilities (37%);
- b. Establish a community-based organization to plan and execute to meet their needs and aspirations (35%);
- c. Establish various service links with the estates (market/banks/dispensaries/ambulance facilities etc.) (14%)
- d. Establish a death donation society for each estate (6%), and
- e. Provision of health facilities (2%);

Based on the community aspirations, it has shown how the future of IOT communities expects to build a pluralistic society with clear mainstreaming strategies among the IOT communities.

Table 4.12: Aspirations and hopes of the IOT communities for the future

Responses on Future Aspirations	Number of households	% Share	Rank
Arrange good education facilities for children	76	19%	3
Improve the infra-structural facilities and services (housing/drinking water services/ access roads, etc) in the residential areas	111	28%	2
Increase the HH income for the plantation communities	18	5%	5
Need to integrate with the main society	149	37%	1
Obtain good jobs outside the plantation	24	6%	4
Others	3	1%	8
Provision of health facilities	8	2%	6
Strengthening the social networks in the plantation and increasing the HH income for the plantation communities	6	2%	7
None	5	1%	8
Grand Total	400	100%	

Source: Field survey, (2024)

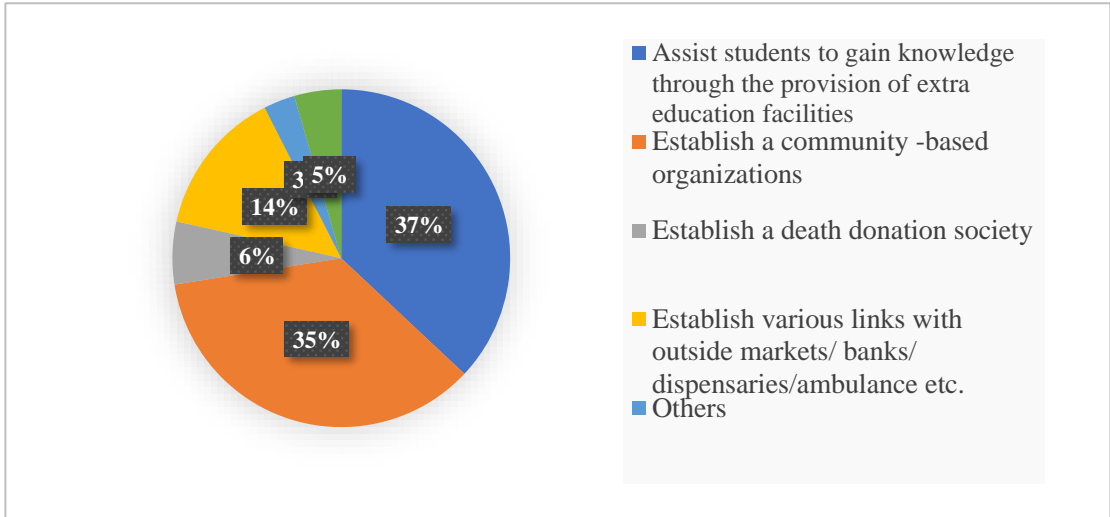


Figure 4.17: Suggestions for community development

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Box 4.1: Catholic Tamil Communities – Religious and Cultural Practices

- What practices as we are Roman Catholic, Daily prayers at home
- Every Sunday we go to church
- Astrological practices.
- Celebrations of National Festivals
- Daily prayers
- Emphasizing moral and spiritual techniques. Significant life events like Birth functions, weddings and Death rituals.
- Worship at temples
- Festival celebrations
- Gods believe in Astrology guidance
- Rituals for birth, wedding and Death Worship Celebrations for festival

Box 4.2: Hindu Tamil Communities - Religious and Cultural Practices

- Hindu cultural practices Prayers Believes Festivals Weddings and Death rituals
- Horoscopes, Numerology, Gods believe in Rituals for birth, naming, puberty, wedding and death.
- I am a Hindu and all in our family are only Hindus. We go to the temple on Poya days and every Friday.
- Morning and evening prayer, Kovil visit for special days especially Thiruvizha festivals
- Parent's daily prayer morning and in the evening.
- Emphasizing moral and spiritual teachings.
- Engaging in acts of Charity and services as a way of expressing compassion and fulfilling religious duties.
- Elders teach the younger generation about religious belief practices and Morrisville you to stories rituals and festivals to pass on culture and spiritual heritage.
- Respect parents and elders
- Temple visits Rituals for the day's first work (January 1st pooja) Festivals celebrations
- Rituals for birth and death
- Start our day with prayers and worship, offering gratitude and seeking blessings for the day.
- Very often consult astrologers to seek guidance based on horoscopes, especially during important life events like marriages.
- Actively participate in various festivals, performing special prayers, decorating homes, and exchanging sweets and gifts.
- Teaching children about religious beliefs, practices, and moral values through stories, rituals, and festivals to pass on cultural and spiritual heritage.
- Seeking guidance and blessings from spiritual leaders
- Temple Visit- Festivals, Viradham, Aadina Thiruvizha Rituals for birth, puberty, wedding and death.
- Astrological practices

Box 4.3: Christian Tamil Communities – Religious and Cultural Practices

- We are a Christian family, we prioritize love, forgiveness, and faith in God. They often emphasize the importance of unity, support, and moral values, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual growth within our family unit.
- We are Hindu, but we are celebrating all festivals. Respect all religions
- We give importance to Hindu festivals and fasts. We pay more attention to our worship practices. When we do any action, we predict the time and duration according to the horoscope system.
- Worshipping desires and observing special ceremonies.
- On special occasions like festivals offering flowers, lighting immense and reciting prayers.
- Rituals for birth, death and weddings.
- Wearing Traditional attire
- Worships Celebrations Rituals Astrological guidance
- Celebrate Eventually

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As explained in the above boxes (Box 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3), various religious beneficiaries have responded positively about how they practice religious and cultural practices to create an environment for spiritual development, promote mindfulness, avoid mental stress and guide their children as well-behaved and responsible persons with dignity in the society and facilitate and promote culture and identity of IOT communities.

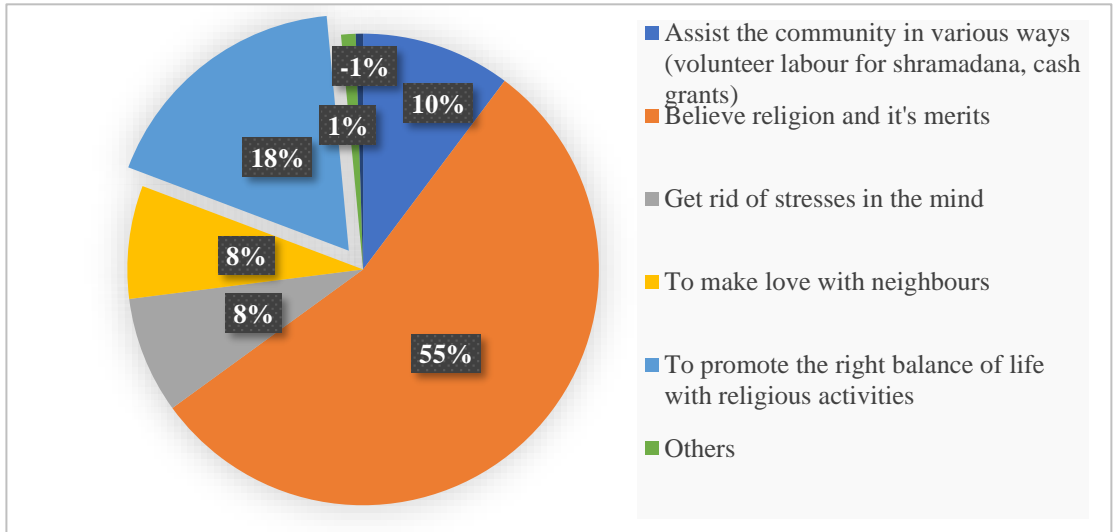


Figure 4.18: Impacts of religion on decision-making in the IOT communities

Source: Field survey, (2024)

In general, religious environments advocate and influence to creation of excellent, responsive, and generous behaviour among communities. Accordingly, cultural and religious norms have created various impacts within and outside the IOT beneficiary families of the project. Creation of faith in religion and its merits (55%); Creation of a balanced life (18%); Assist the community to perform their voluntary behaviour to create benefits to society (in-kind contribution-Shramadana, cash grants for needy people etc.) (10%); Get rid of personal stresses in their mind (8%) and making love with neighbours (8%) were some of the likely impacts identified through a religious environment (see Figure 4.18). Accordingly, religious practices promote culture and identity in the IOT society.

4.12. Community-Level Celebrations of National Festivals

The community festivals in Sri Lanka like Christmas, Navaratri, New Year (Sinhala and Hindu), Thai Pongal, and Deewali have a close relationship with the religions of Christianity and Hinduism. The majority of Indian Origin Tamil communities are followers of Hinduism and Christianity. In particular, Thipongal (77%), Christmas (14%) and Newyear (4%) are the major religious festivals performed by Indian Tamil communities in the plantations, which creates a conducive environment for social harmony, integration with main societies, and creating a peaceful environment for sharing their cultural and social values with other communities in the vicinity of the estates to promote culture and identity of the IOT communities (see Figure 4.19).

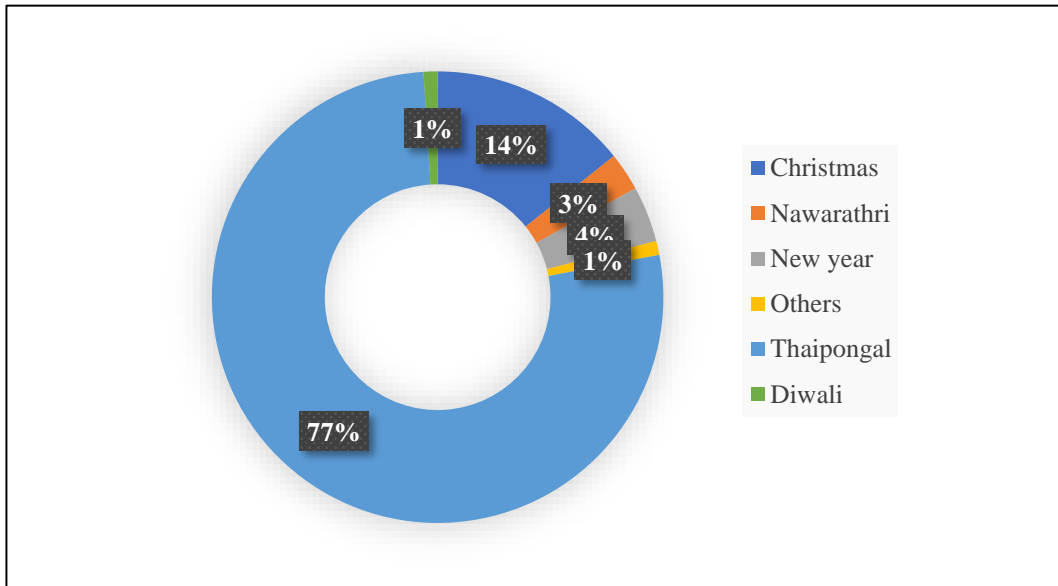


Figure 4.19: Community festivals and celebrations

Source: Field survey, (2024)

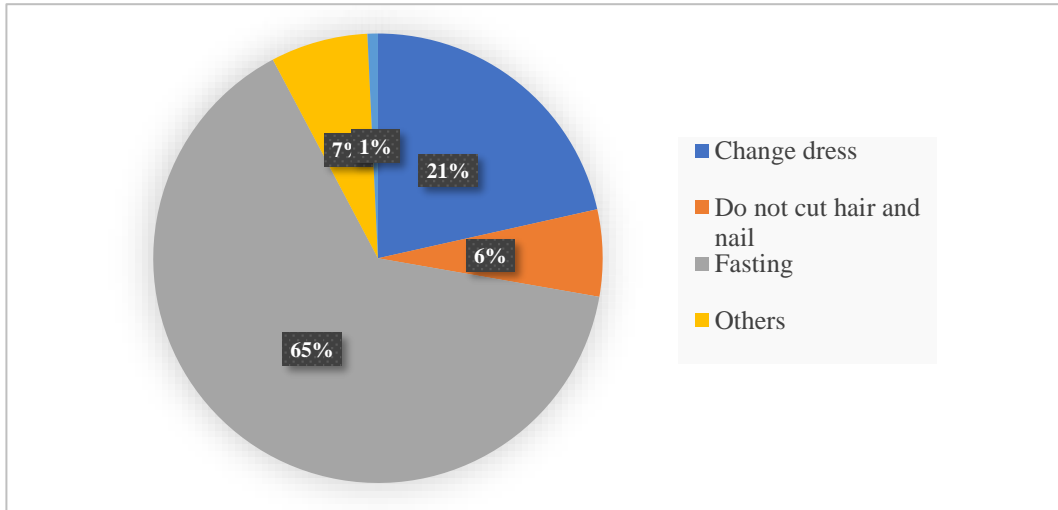


Figure 4.20: Participation in religious festivals and celebrations

Source: Field survey, (2024)

According to Christianity and Hinduism, before participating in or performing cultural rituals and events, the majority of IOT communities perform the following mix of rituals (either one ritual or a mix of all), namely: Fasting (65%); Changing the dress suitable to the rituals or cultural events (21%); do not cut hair or nails (6%) etc. It shows the total belief or faith in cultural rituals and participating in cultural events, which attract the younger generation to follow the rituals and cultural norms and events to promote their identity (see Figure 4.20).

Table 4.13: Responses on unique traditions and customs associated with specific festivals

Community responses	Number of households	% Share
1. Yes	361	90%
2. No	39	10%
Grand Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As explained in Table 4.13, the majority (90%) of the IOT community has responded positively that they followed the unique traditions and customs associated with specific festivals among the communities to prove that they are following unique customs to build their culture and identity.

Table 4.14: Responses on Wearing of Traditional Clothing During Cultural Events

Community responses	Number of households	% Share
1. No	163	41%
2. Yes	237	59%
	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Based on the community responses, described in Table 4.14, it was obvious that the majority (59%) of IOT Community members were wearing special traditional costumes just to show them the unique culture and identity of the community.

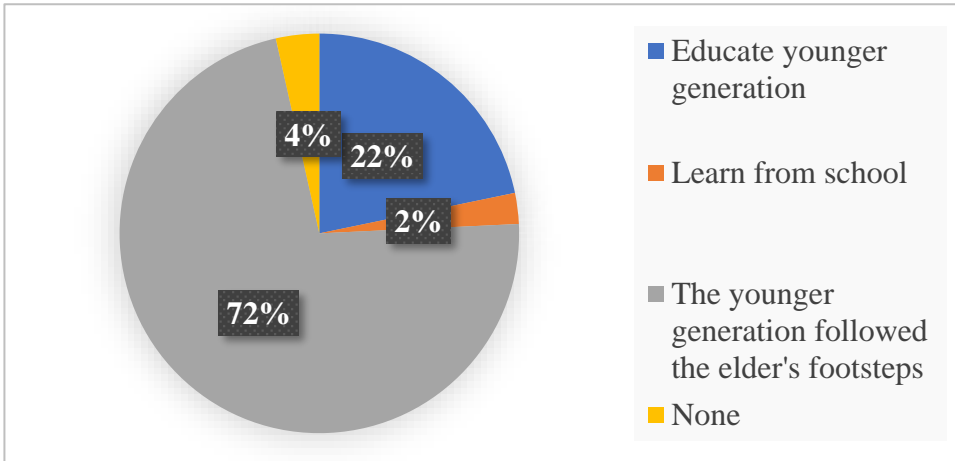


Figure 4.21: Methods of transferring traditional knowledge on cultural costume

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As shown in Figure 4.21, the knowledge of wearing a traditional costume, its colours, models, wearing methods etc. is generally passed through various means by generations to wear at the specific occasions, festivals or events when traditional clothing is essential. Based on the responses, and the FGDs conducted, the younger generation has followed the elder’s footsteps (72%); educated the younger generation about the necessity of wearing traditional costumes (22%); and learned from school (2%) were the major push factors for wearing traditional costumes by generations to build the culture and identity of the IOT communities.

The knowledge passed on to younger generations through traditional methods is explained in Figure 4.22. In addition, the community explained further that there are no specific occasions to wear the traditional costume (52%) (Figure 4.22).

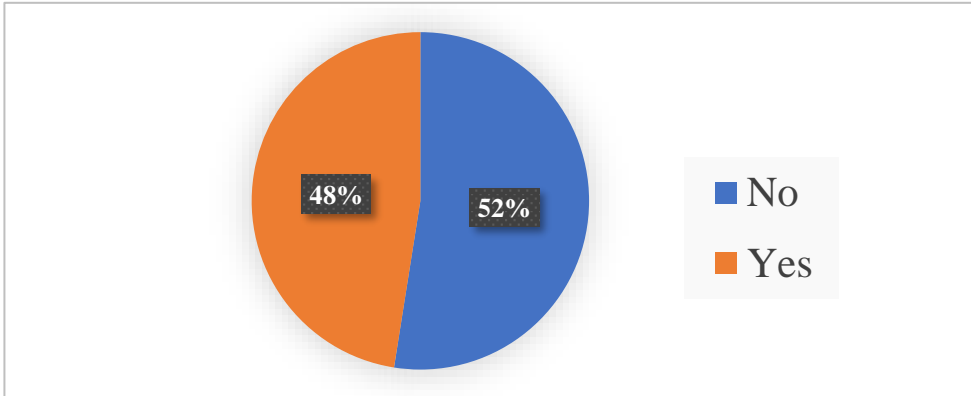


Figure 4.22: Responses on identifying important occasions for wearing traditional costumes

Source: Field survey, (2024)

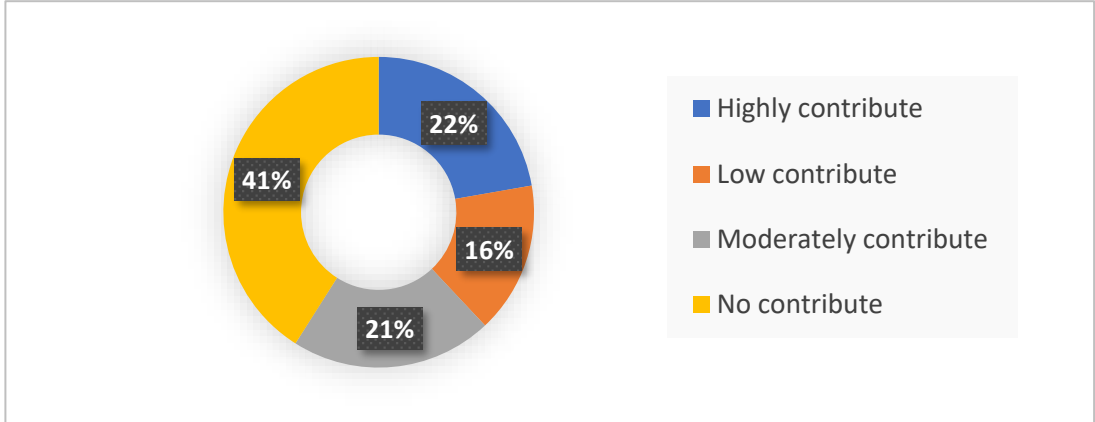


Figure 4.23: Status of the contribution of music and dance for cultural celebrations and family events

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Some of the IOT communities explained that music and dance contributed highly (22%) to cultural celebrations or family events to build culture and identity. Further, some have described that music and dance contributed moderately (21%). Also, some communities indicated that it has contributed very little (16%) and some mentioned that it has no contribution at all (41%) to cultural celebrations and dance (Figure 4.25) among the IOT communities to build the culture and identity of the IOTs.

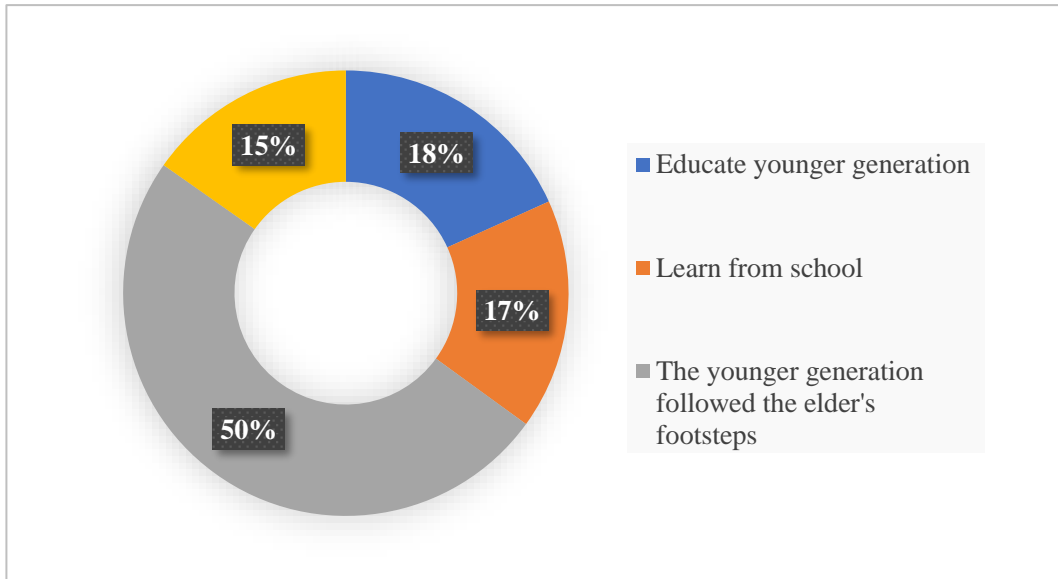


Figure 4.24: Knowledge of traditional music and dance passed onto IOT families by generations

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Among the families of Indian Tamil communities, they mainly allow the younger generation to follow in their elders’ footsteps to learn traditional dance, costume and music (50%); Some (18%) have educated their younger generation to pass the knowledge of traditional music and dance in their families. And 17% of them have learnt from their school. In this context, the majority (85%) of the Indian Tamil communities have used various methods to pass the knowledge of traditional dance and music to their family members (Figure 4.24).

4.13. Traditional Cuisine and Food Habits of Indian Tamil Communities

The IOT communities have a unique authentic cuisine and food habits. Based on the community responses and FGDs conducted, it has been identified various cuisines and traditional food products. According to Figure 4.25, 74 per cent of Household communities

have identified a mix of Indian Tamil community-based traditional cuisines and food items like *Grams*, *Kolkatta*, *Laddu*, *Wade*, *Pongal* etc. In addition, very few households (2-9 per cent) have suggested considering only single items like *Kolkatta*, *Pongal*, *laddu* etc.

In this context, there are very rich traditional cuisines and food items unique to the Indian Tamil community were identified, which assists in maintaining the culture and identity of the IOT communities.

Further, the majority (63%) of households prepare a special menu of meals and food items, considering the traditional event structured within the family, especially during festivals or any other special occasions (Table 4.15), which also assists in maintaining the culture and identity of IOT communities.

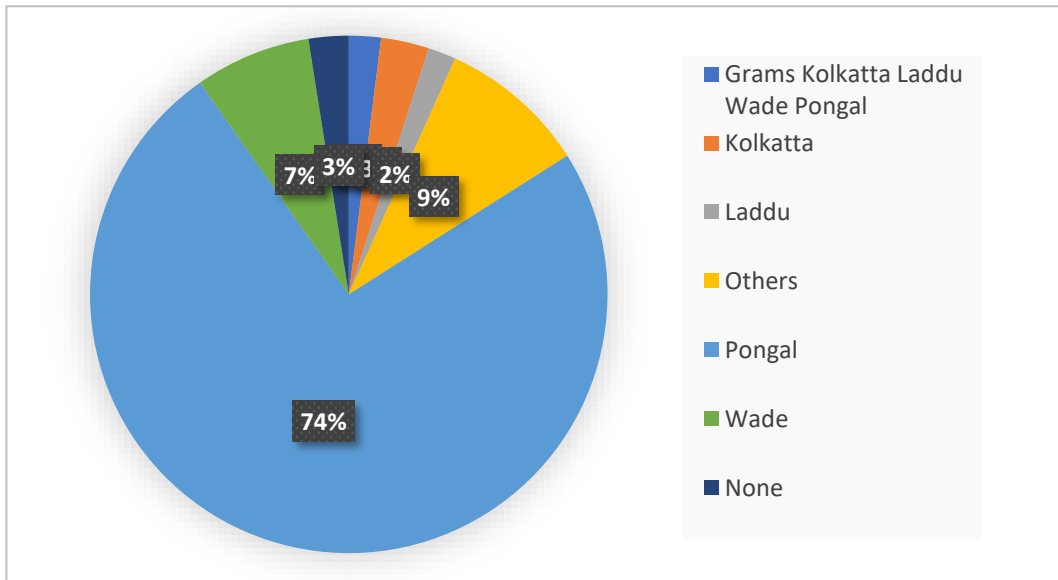


Figure 4.25: Identifying some IOT community-based cuisine and food items

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Table 4.15: Responses on Making Meals and Food Items in the Family during Festivals and Special Occasions

Responses	Number of households	% Share
No special menu	148	37%
Prepare a special menu considering the event	252	63%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.14. Traditional Customs and Rituals Associated with Wedding Functions

The traditional customs and rituals associated with wedding functions in the IOT community are explained in Figure 4.26. Accordingly, the main customs were identified as *Parbism* (64%), *Nichyadartham* (20%), *Arundathi* (4%), *Ponurukkudal* (2%) and *others* (9%). In this context, the community practising traditional culture means that the community is assisting in preserving the traditional culture and rituals associated with weddings in the IOT communities to preserve their cultural identity.

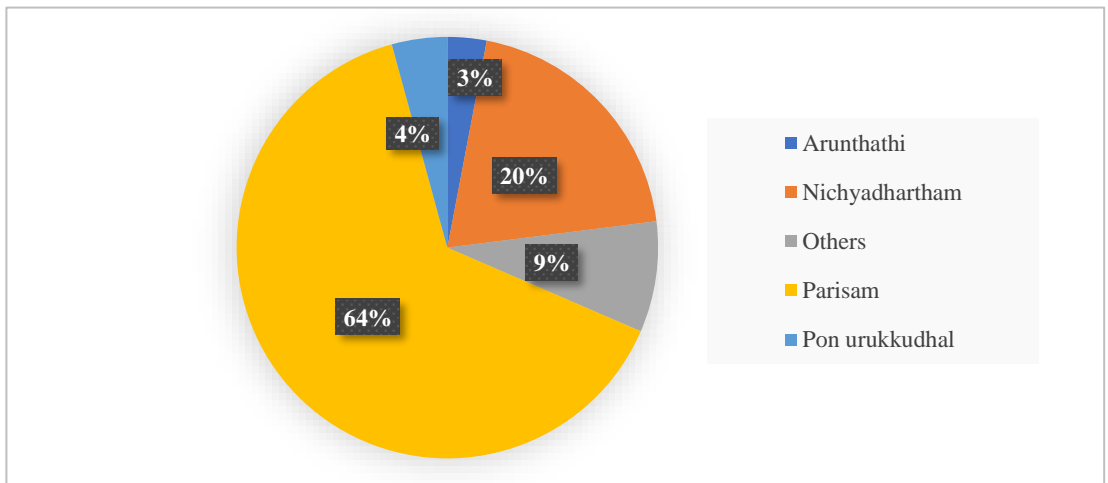


Figure 4.26: Responses on identifying traditional customs and rituals associated with weddings

Source: Field survey, (2024)

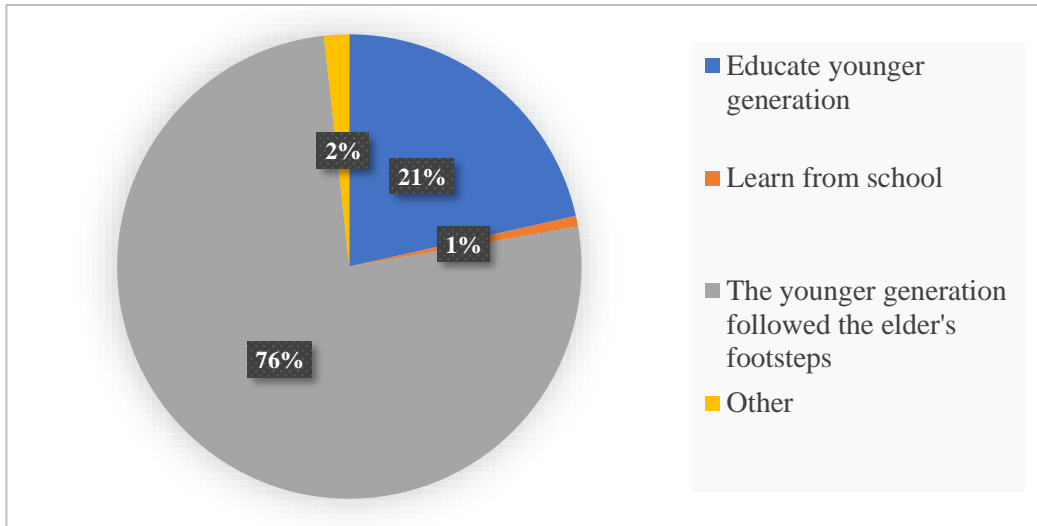


Figure 4.27: Responses on the evolution of cultural practices of weddings

Source: Field survey, (2024)

The practice of wedding customs evolved within the family over generations in the Indian Tamil communities in the plantation sector. As identified in Figure 4.27, based on responses, 76 per cent of the households expressed that the younger generation followed the elders' footsteps and learnt mainly about marriage customs and other associated rituals. In addition, 21 per cent of households explained that they have to educate the younger generation about marriage and wedding rituals and other customs. Further, only 1 per cent of households also explained that their younger generation has learned about wedding rituals from the school. In this context, the evolution was mainly based on following elders' footsteps through generations to learn wedding customs and rituals.

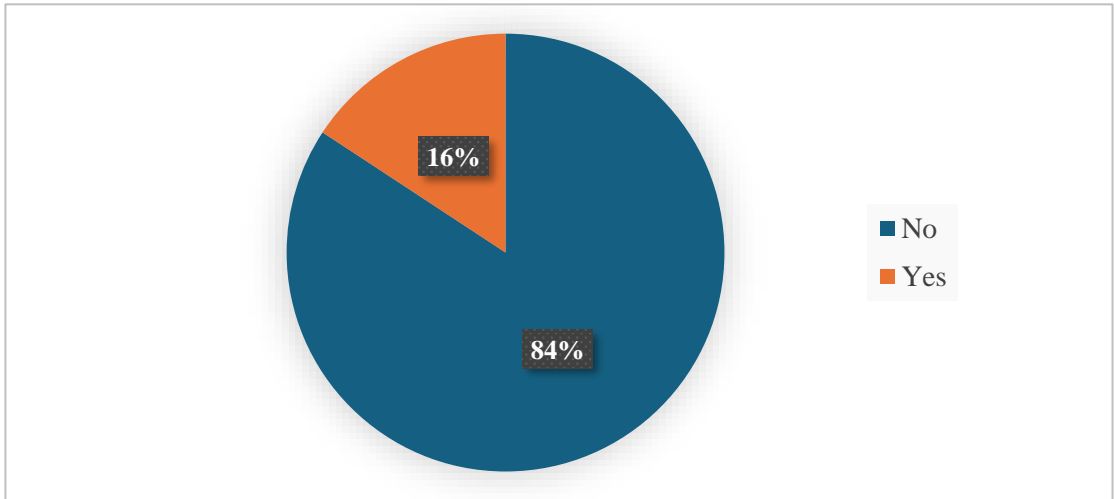


Figure 4.28: Responses on traditional art forms and crafts practised by the IOT families

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As described in Figure 4.28, 84 per cent of households are not appreciating or practising traditional art forms or crafts at the IOT household level. Only 16 per cent of households are practising traditional art or craft at the household level. Accordingly, it is obvious that at the household level, they have not been given prominence to maintain their identity with changing scenarios of cultural practises.

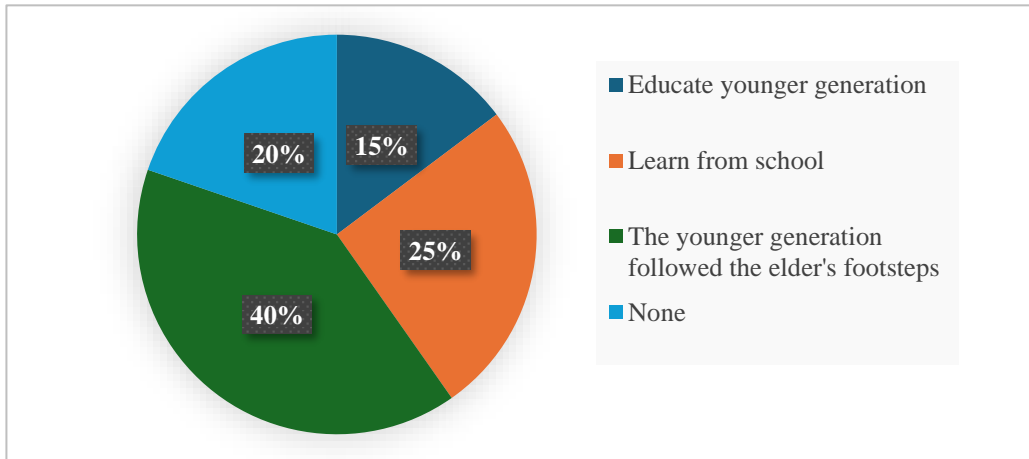


Figure 4.29: Responses on methods of passing down the traditional arts and crafting skills to the younger generations

Source: Field survey, (2024)

As discussed, skills for making arts and crafts in IOT families are passed down through generations. In particular, as described in Figure 4.29, 40 per cent of the households with the younger generations receive the skills and knowledge to make arts and crafts by following up the elders' footsteps, with traditional craftsmanship. In addition, at present 20 per cent of the households gained knowledge on making arts and crafts, through learning from school. Further, 15 per cent of households expressed that they learned the skills and knowledge by giving education to the younger generations to maintain cultural identity.

4.15. Cultural Performances

Cultural performances serve as vibrant expressions of heritage, tradition, and identity within societies worldwide. Exploring cultural performances unveils a gateway to understanding the diversity and depth of human creativity, fostering appreciation and respect for cultural heritage. As indicated in Box 4.4, based on household responses, IOT communities make specific pilgrimages to maintain and preserve their cultural identity by visiting specific pilgrimage sites, selected through the field survey conducted

Box 4.4: Specific pilgrimage sites - Anglican church visits

1. Iyappan Kovil
2. Kochchikadai temple
3. Kalwari
4. Madu Church
5. Katharagama
6. Marthaiviran temple
7. Matala Amma temple
8. Muneshwaram.
9. Sripada
10. Muneshwaram.
11. Nallur kovil
12. Pillaiyar Kovil
13. Amman Kovil
14. Hanuman Temple Ramboda
15. Rockhill Amman Kovil
16. Sri Angala Parameshwari Amman Kovil
17. Seetha Matha Kovil
18. Thalavila Temple
19. Thirukoneshwaram

Source: Household survey, (2024)

The responses given by the IOT communities on the frequency of making pilgrimages are explained in Figure 4.32. Accordingly, 53 per cent of Indian Tamil communities make pilgrimages usually. Mainly 24 per cent of households make a pilgrimage once a year. In addition, 16 per cent make a pilgrimage eventually. Further, 6 per cent will make a pilgrimage seasonally. However, 47 per cent of households mentioned that they do not make any pilgrimage a year. Through these pilgrimages, the household communities are of the view that they can promote and maintain their cultural identity, worship their faith and collect merits for their lives.

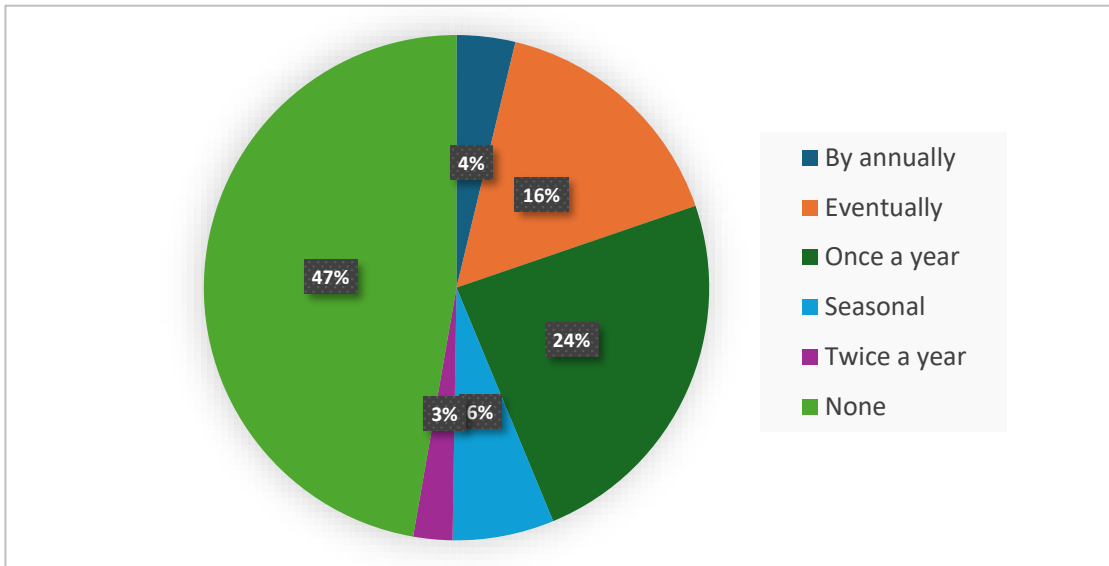


Figure 4.30: Responses on Frequency of making pilgrimages

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.16. Community Views on Discrimination

Community views on discrimination reflect a complex interplay of societal norms, personal experiences, and collective values. Discrimination, whether based on race, gender, religion, or other factors, profoundly impacts individuals and communities alike, shaping their interactions and perceptions. These views often highlight disparities in access to opportunities, justice, and social inclusion. Understanding community perspectives on discrimination and marginalization is essential for fostering empathy, promoting solidarity, and advancing efforts towards a more inclusive and just society.

Table 4.16: Responses of Community Experience on Marginalization and Discrimination based on their identity

Responses	Number of households	% Share
1. No	272	68%
2. Yes	128	32%
Total	400	100%

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Based on the household-level responses, 68 per cent of the community members have expressed that there was no discrimination, they have experienced. In addition, 32 per cent of households have explained that there were some levels of discrimination observed (Table 4.16).

As shown in Figure 4.31, at the IOT household level, it was identified the following various triggers of discrimination,

- 28 per cent of race discrimination,
- 22 per cent of language discrimination,
- 11 per cent of caste discrimination and
- 17 per cent of other discrimination

Accordingly, if discrimination is there at the household level, the IOT communities are not in a position to make their identity and work independently with due transparency. Further, such experiences create an impact on the sense of identity and belonging within the community.

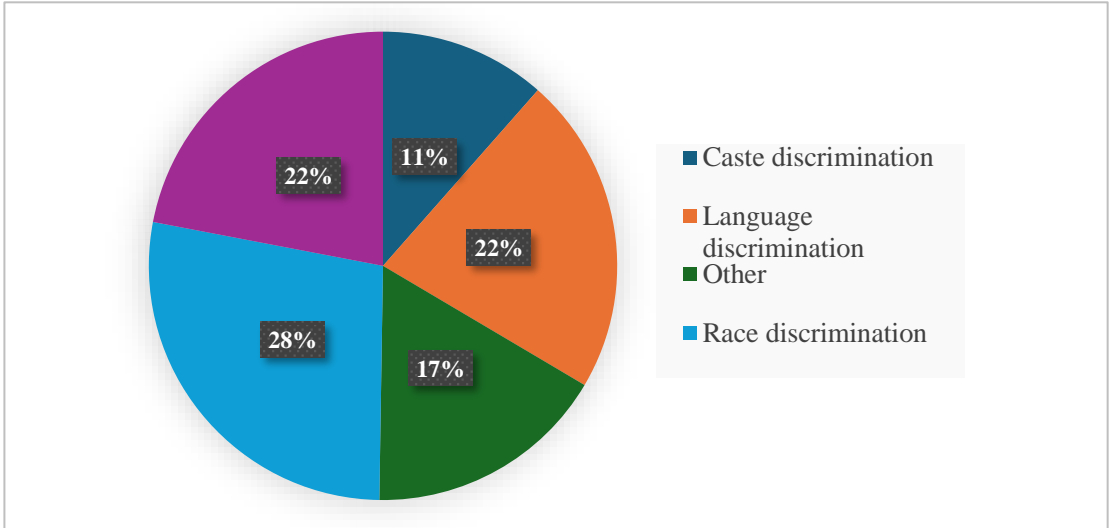


Figure 4.31: Responses on identifying the triggers in discrimination

Source: Field survey, (2024)

4.17. Integration and Assimilation

Integration and assimilation are two distinct but interconnected processes that shape multicultural societies globally. Integration refers to the incorporation of diverse individuals or groups into the social, economic, and political fabric of a society while respecting their cultural identities. It emphasizes mutual adaptation and interaction, fostering a cohesive and harmonious community. Assimilation, on the other hand, involves the absorption of cultural traits and practices of minority groups into the dominant culture, often leading to a shared societal identity over time.

These processes provoke ongoing debates regarding cultural preservation, identity formation, and societal cohesion. Understanding the dynamics of integration and assimilation is crucial for navigating the complexities of multiculturalism, promoting respect for diversity, and building inclusive societies where individuals can thrive while maintaining their unique cultural heritage.

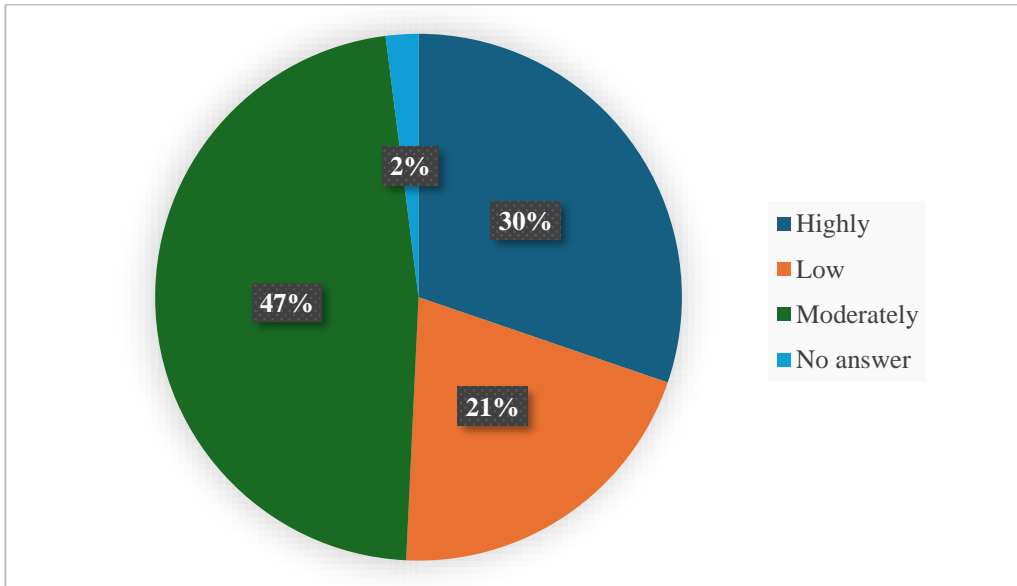


Figure 4.32: Responses on integration of the IOT families

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Based on members of the community feedback, and FGDs and KIIs conducted, family integration into a broader society was analysed, and household-level rankings were made. Accordingly, 30 per cent of communities expressed that they have highly integrated with the main society; 47 per cent of household communities mentioned that they have moderately achieved the target of integration with the mainstream society. In addition, 21 per cent of households explained that they have maintained a low-level integration. In this respect, household communities in general have managed to a greater extent with balancing of maintaining their cultural identity while integrating into the larger mainstream society (Figure 4.32).

In this study, members of the households of Indian Tamil communities responded with their suggestions on how to integrate with the main society (see Figure 4.33). Accordingly, 56 per cent of households expressed and suggested learning languages of other communities. In addition, 34 per cent of households indicated that it is necessary to participate in national events jointly as a common group to integrate with other communities. Further, 6 per cent of households says, it is required to learn other religions as well to share different thoughts to integrate with all Tamil and Sinhala communities. 2 per cent of minor groups proposed arranging common pilgrimage to understand different cultures. In this respect, all groups could integrate as Sri Lankans, by maintaining their cultural and social identity in Sri Lanka.

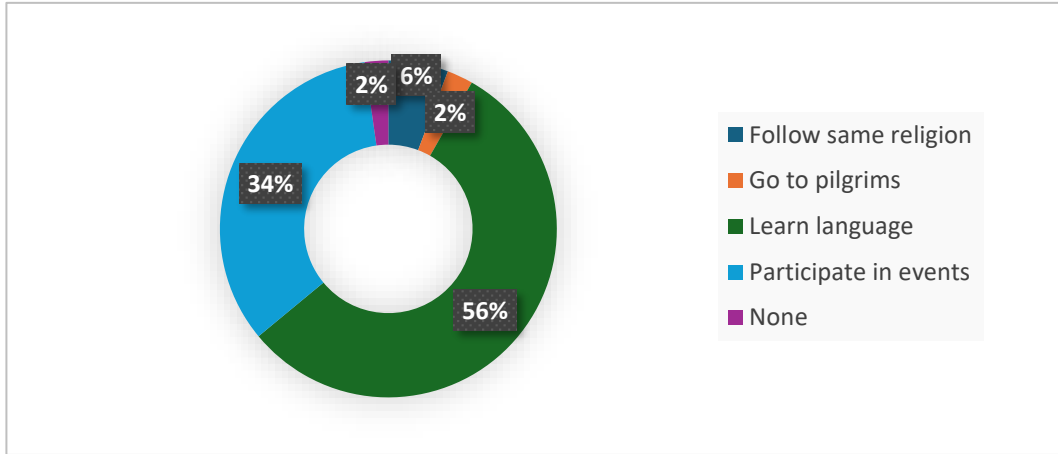


Figure 4.33: Responses on suggestions to maintain cultural identity

Source: Field survey, (2024)

Box 4.5 Intersectionality: Identifying Cross-cutting Themes for Community Integration

- a. Helping to resolve the problems of others
- b. Communication strategies and type of communication
- c. Cultural activities for community integration
- d. Decision-making power should be vested with both men and women (i.e. gender equality in the plantation sector)
- e. The economic conditions of the households need to be improved
- f. Generation differences need to be care of
- g. The health status of communities needs to be improved
- h. Adult education programme (eg. Languages, social mobilization)
- i. Economic empowerment (provide skills, open up micro-enterprises)
- j. Language barriers (English and Sinhala for filling official forms and documents)
- k. .Education facilities (language learning, children's education, adult learning, training)
- l. Improve basic amenities (transport, electricity, water etc.).

Based on the community consultations, and household surveys conducted, it has been identified what sort of cross-cutting themes we should address to maintain cultural and social identity in the IOT society in the plantation sector. Accordingly, 12 cross-cutting themes have been identified to integrate society (See Box 4.5).

The preservation and maintenance of language proficiency in the Tamil language are required to promote cultural and social identity in society. In this respect, the IOT community has identified various strategic options, namely: education as a must for all (54%); family-level interventions to teach and use the Tamil language (33%), provision of relevant books for promotion of reading, understanding and writing; and other interventions like conducting annual community-based common events (1%) (Figure 4.34).

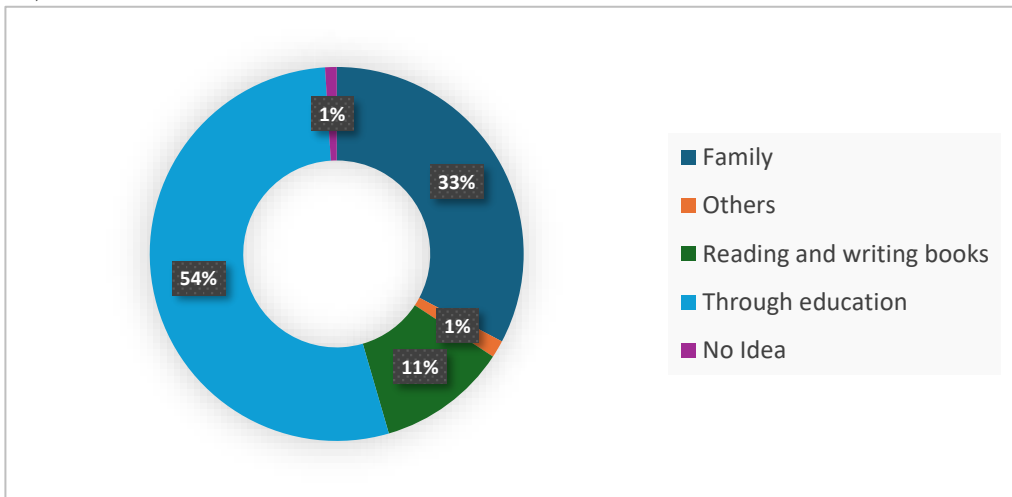


Figure 4.34: Strategies for the preservation of Tamil language

Source: Fied survey, (2024)

In terms of strategic interventions, improving language proficiency is a must at the household level for community communication and empowerment and maintaining cultural identity in society.

As indicated in Figure 4.35, it is required to improve the education system to create an enabling environment for identity formation among the younger generation. Based on survey results, 80 per cent of the respondents have stressed that Tamil students should learn Sinhala as a subject in all Tamil medium schools. In addition, 18 per cent of respondents are of the view that they should have the facilitation to follow Sinhala language courses.

In this context, it is clear that learning Sinhala for the younger generation is very important considering the changing policy environment.

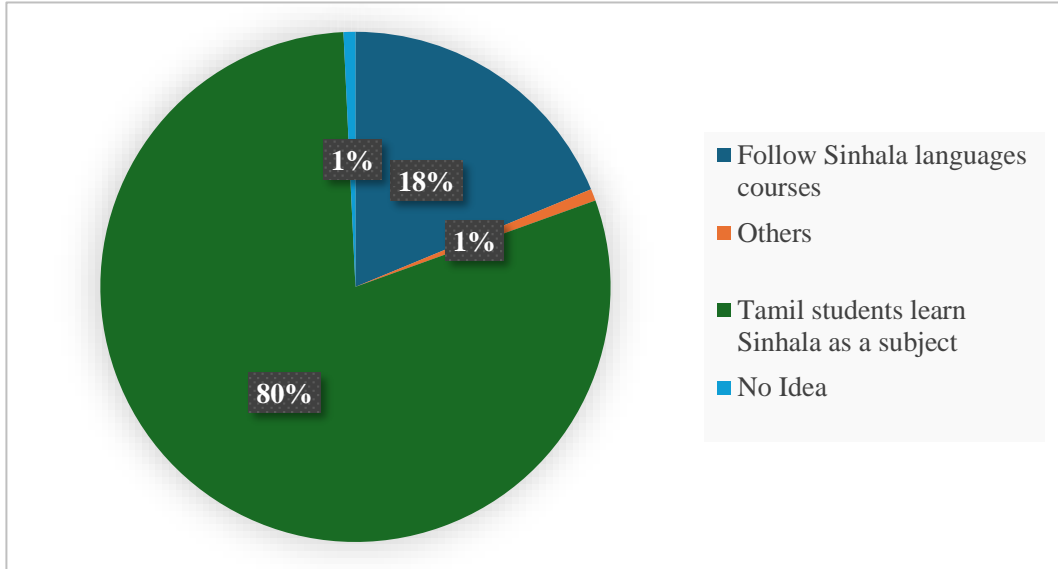


Figure 4.35: Responses on improving the education system for identity formation

Source: Fied survey, (2024)

This Chapter has convinced us that the cultural practices serve not only as expressions of their collective history but also as bonds that strengthen community cohesion and resilience. Despite facing socio-economic challenges, Indian Origin Tamil communities in Sri Lanka's plantation sector continue to navigate a path towards integration while safeguarding their cultural distinctiveness. Their story is one of resilience, adaptation, and contribution to the multicultural fabric of Sri Lanka, embodying the dynamic intersection of heritage and contemporary realities in the island nation.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

5.1. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In making concluding remarks, the research on the culture and identity of the plantation community in selected districts reveals a complex tapestry of historical influences, socio-economic factors, and evolving cultural dynamics. The plantation communities have maintained a distinct identity shaped by their unique heritage and the collective experiences of labour and resilience. Despite facing various socio-economic challenges and problems, these communities have preserved their cultural traditions and social structures, showcasing a rich blend of customs, languages, and other cultural practices.

The study highlights the importance of understanding these communities within the broader socio-economic and political context and recognizing their contributions and struggles. It also underscores the need for inclusive policies and initiatives that support their socio-economic development while preserving their cultural heritage. By appreciating the unique identity and culture of IOT plantation communities, we can foster a more inclusive and equitable society that values diversity and heritage.

Future research should continue to explore the dynamic interplay between culture, identity, and socio-economic conditions in these communities, ensuring their voices and experiences are integral to shaping policies and interventions. This holistic approach will contribute to the sustainable development and cultural preservation of plantation communities in Sri Lanka.

5.2. Policy Recommendations for Preserving and Promoting the Culture and Identity of the IOT Plantation Communities

The following macro and micro policy measures are proposed to create an enabling environment for protecting the culture and identity of the IOT plantation communities.

a. Inclusive Development Policies

It is necessary to formulate inclusive development policies that address the specific socio-economic needs of IOT plantation communities while respecting their cultural practices and social value systems. Further, it ensures that development projects and land use planning involve consultation with IOT plantation communities and take their cultural values into account for promoting sustainable development in the country.

b. Education and Awareness Programmes

Promoting the ‘Education for All’ concept and integrating the history and culture of IOT plantation communities into the national education curriculum to promote awareness and appreciation among all citizens to create an enabling environment for sustainability. In addition, the provision of scholarships and educational support for members of IOT plantation communities is necessary to pursue higher education and vocational training for creating employability for plantation youth in the mainstreaming job markets.

c. Advocacy Programme for Cultural Preservation Funding

It is required to develop an advocacy programme to convince the government that there is an absolute necessity to allocate dedicated funding for cultural preservation projects, including the documentation of oral histories, traditional practices for showcasing the rich Tamil culture, and the establishment of cultural centres for promoting IOT culture. In addition, it is necessary to create government support by offering grants and financial incentives for community-driven cultural initiatives and enterprises to preserve their cultural identity.

d. Recognition and Legal Protection

It is required to enact laws that recognize the unique cultural identity of IOT plantation communities and provide legal protection for their cultural heritage to link up with the enabling mainstreaming process of economic and social development.

It needs to identify and establish cultural heritage sites and monuments to preserve significant locations and traditions of plantation communities for future generations to understand the cultural diversity in Sri Lanka.

e. Economic Empowerment Programs

It is required to implement community-driven economic empowerment programs that support the livelihoods of IOT plantation community members, such as specific microfinance schemes, entrepreneurship development training, and SME training to convert them into partners in the economic empowerment process;

f. Promote Culture-based and eco-tourism.

There are possibilities to position the plantation communities, through their rich culture and identity and establish the tourism sites by promoting culture, traditional food, and dancing and singing, showing them the importance of the modern world. It needs to

highlight the heritage of plantation communities, ensuring that the economic benefits are shared with communities.

g. Health and Social Services

Ensure access to healthcare and social services tailored to the needs of plantation communities, recognizing the impact of socio-economic factors on their well-being in the plantations. In addition, it is necessary to develop community health initiatives that incorporate traditional knowledge and practices, for example, initiating regular mobile health clinics for infants and middle-aged and elderly populations in the plantations to identify their health issues early. Elderly people should be cared for through separate elderly social welfare and financial benefits packages;

h. Representation and Participation

It is necessary to guarantee representation of plantation communities in local, regional, and national decision-making bodies to ensure their voices are heard in policy formulation and implementation. Further, it is required to establish advisory councils comprising plantation community leaders to provide input on policies affecting their communities.

i. Cultural Exchange and Collaboration

The government and provincial authorities need to facilitate cultural exchange programs within and outside the country to promote mutual understanding and respect for the cultural diversity of plantation communities. For this purpose, it is necessary to encourage collaborations between plantation communities and cultural organizations, academic institutions, and non-governmental organizations.

j. Monitoring and Evaluation

Whatever the policies are formulated and implemented, it is required to set up mechanisms for the regular monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs aimed at preserving and promoting plantation community culture and identity. In addition, Whatever the policies are implemented, there should be a mechanism to conduct impact assessments to ensure that policies are effectively addressing the needs and aspirations of plantation communities and that there will not be any impact on the plantation communities (like in Malaysia).

k. Technology and Innovation

While establishing Indian Tamil cultural centres, it needs to leverage technology to document and disseminate plantation community culture, traditional documents, and artefacts, including digital archives, mobile applications, and virtual reality experiences, using digital economic applications. Further, it needs to encourage assistance for the use of innovative practices in traditional agriculture, craft production, and other traditional industries to enhance the sustainability and economic viability of the plantation sector and communities.

By adopting these policy recommendations, governments and stakeholders can create an enabling environment that not only preserves the rich cultural heritage of IOT plantation communities but also promotes their social and economic development respectfully and inclusively.

5.3 Recommendations for Preserving and Promoting the Culture and Identity of the IOT Plantation Community

To maintain the cultural identity of IOT communities and promote the mainstreaming processes with society, the following recommendations are made.

a. Economic Support and Development

It is required to implement economic development programs that empower community members, such as micro-finance initiatives, skill development training, SMEs and Livestock farming (dairy, goat, poultry, etc.).

In addition, promote eco-tourism and cultural tourism programmes to attract tourists to the plantation sector visits, which highlights the unique heritage of IOT plantation communities, ensuring benefits are shared with the local population.

b. Policy Advocacy and Inclusion

Develop a programme for advocacy **for inclusive policies** that recognize and protect the cultural rights of plantation communities. In addition, it is advisable to ensure the representation of plantation communities in local and national decision-making bodies like in Malaysia.

c. Cultural Festivals and Events

It is better to organize annual cultural festivals and events that celebrate the traditions, music, dance, and traditional or age-old cuisine of plantation communities. In addition, it is necessary to support the participation of plantation community members in regional and national cultural events.

d. Cultural Documentation and Archiving

In facilitating the cultural programmes, it is required to establish community-based projects to document oral histories, traditional practices, and folklore. In addition, create digital and physical archives accessible to both community members, researchers and the general public.

e. Educational Programs and Workshops

It needs to develop educational curricula in local schools that include the history and cultural heritage of plantation communities. It is necessary to organize a series of workshops and cultural exchanges to teach traditional crafts, music, dance, and languages in the plantation sector.

f. Community Empowerment and Participation

It is required to encourage active participation of community members in cultural preservation projects as community-driven projects; In addition, it is required to establish local cultural committees to oversee and manage cultural activities and initiatives with communities.

g. Collaboration with Academic Institutions

It is required to partner with universities and other research institutions to conduct further studies on the culture and identity of IOT plantation communities. Further, in the process, it is required to facilitate student **exchange programs and field studies** that provide in-depth learning experiences about plantation communities.

h. Infrastructure Development

Within the plantation sector, it has to invest in infrastructure that supports cultural activities, such as **community centres, museums, performance spaces and training centres.**

i. Media and Technology Utilization

In collaboration with the state and private media, develop programmes to use media platforms **to promote awareness about the IOT cultural heritage of plantation communities.** In addition, develop **mobile apps and online platforms** that provide information and virtual experiences related to plantation culture.

j. Inter-Community Dialogues and Networks

It is required to facilitate dialogues and exchange programs between different IOT plantation communities to share best practices and strengthen cultural bonds. Further, it is necessary to create networks that connect plantation communities with broader cultural and advocacy organizations in the country and abroad.

By implementing these recommendations, there is a possibility to ensure the preservation and promotion of the rich cultural heritage and identity of plantation communities, fostering a greater appreciation and respect for their unique contributions to mainstream society.

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Annex 01 Plantation Workers in Ceylon / Sri Lanka (*Chronological Order*)

- 1823** - Labourers from South India arrived in Ceylon/Sri Lanka to work in Tea, Rubber, Cocoa and Coffee plantations in the Upcountry. They came from the districts of Chenkelpettai, Coimbatore, Madurai, Thanjavur, Thiruchirapalli and other parts of India.
- 1920** - Mr.Natesa Iyer becomes the first Plantation Tamil representative to the legislative council in Ceylon.
- 1924** - Franchise was granted only to the elite. Indian Tamils represented 12900 out of 205,000 electoral college votes. Two Indians were nominated to the legislative council.
- 1931** - Universal adult franchise was introduced in Ceylon/Sri Lanka under the Donoughmore constitution. Plantation workers were granted franchises.
- 1936** - The registered voters of Plantation Tamil rose from 100,000 to 145,000.
- 1939** - Resolution introduced in the State Council to deport 15000 Indians. A second resolution was moved by Ceylon's 1st Prime Minister D. S Senanayake to deport all Indians appointed to government service after 1934 and to discontinue the service of all those with less than ten years of experience.
- The arrival of Jawaharlal Nehru on the advice of Mahatma Gandhi to unite all the groups. The emergence of the Ceylon Indian Congress - CIC.
- 1947** - Elections bring political strength to the Plantation Tamil community with the election of seven out of the 95-member Parliament. This was equal to the seven Tamil members elected from the North East.
- 1948** - The Ceylon Citizenship Act, though providing the qualifications to be a citizen, was designed to disqualify persons from Plantation Tamil of Indian origin.

The provision said that “only a person born in Ceylon prior to the date of the Act coming into force, of a father born in Ceylon could be recognised as a citizen”.

This decitizenized all persons of Plantation Tamils since proof of birth of two generations was necessary.

1949 - Enactment of Indian and Pakistani (Residents) Citizenship Bill. It laid down qualifications for citizenship as registered citizens. The qualifications inherent in the bill were designed to deny citizenship. **This act disenfranchised almost all Plantation Tamils in the upcountry.**

1951 - 237,034 applications requesting citizenship for 825,000 (90%) persons of Plantation Tamils of Indian origin were made.

The majority of applications were rejected as many were unable to produce evidence of birth in Ceylon/Sri Lanka, to provide proof of uninterrupted residency or to provide proof of an assured income.

1956 - Elections too proved negative to Plantation Tamils since they had no strength to field candidates because the majority of them were disenfranchised.

1960 - The government created a nominated representation for the people of Plantation Tamils and appointed S. Thondaman – the leader of the Ceylon Workers Congress to Parliament.

1964 – The government decided to solve the citizenship problem in keeping with the Sinhala thinking that persons of Plantation Tamils of Indian origin should return to India.

Indian delegation then led by Lal Bahadur Shastri agreed to accept 525, 000 back to India.

Ceylon/Sri Lanka had agreed to grant citizenship to 300,000 persons leaving the future of 150,000 people to be settled later.

1965 - The UNP government too nominated S. Thondaman to Parliament in return for his support to defeat the government of SLFP.

1974 - A further bartering was done under the Sirimavo-Indira Gandhi agreement, dividing the balance of people between the two countries.

1977 – S. Thondaman contested the NuwaraEliya–Maskeliya multi-member seat and was elected to Parliament as the third member.

After thirty years since 1947, a member from Plantation Tamils was elected to parliament by the people of Upcountry.

1978 to 1987 - Thondaman made several representations for the expeditious grant of citizenship under the two Indo-Ceylon Agreements. He also urged that persons who were left out of the two agreements be granted Sri Lankan citizenship.

Only 506,000 persons applied for Indian citizenship out of the 600,000 envisaged under the agreements.

1988 - Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act No. 39 of 1988 was presented to Parliament by President Premadasa and passed.

This was opposed by the SLFP who voted against it. The people of Indian origin who were until then deprived of the rights flowing from citizenship were overwhelmed by their achieving their long-dreamed goal.

07 Oct. 2003 - A bill to grant citizenship to 168,141 stateless Plantation Tamils in the Upcountry was passed in the Sri Lanka Parliament. Hundred and seventy-two (172) MPs who were presented out of two hundred and twenty-five (225) members in the Parliament voted for the bill to amend the Citizenship Act.

Annex 02 Timeline of Legal Reforms

1948

Citizenship Act, No. 18 of 1948

Passed on 15th November 1948 and withheld citizenship from the Indian Tamil Community

1949

Ceylon (Parliamentary Elections) Amendment Act, No. 48 of 1949

Stipulated citizenship as a requirement to vote. Indian Tamils, not considered citizens as per the 1948 and 1949 Acts, were disenfranchised

Indian and Pakistani Residents Citizenship Act No. 3 of 1949

Provided for citizenship by registration for Indians and Pakistanis residing in Sri Lanka for a certain number of years. However, it required proof of residence, and other stringent conditions

In practice, almost all applications were rejected on technical and often insubstantial grounds

900,000 remained stateless

1954

Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1954 (Nehru-Kotelawala Pact)

Indian and Sri Lankan citizenship were granted to a certain number of persons

Due to difficult conditions established by the Sri Lankan government, only 3,013 out of 49,145 applicants were granted citizenship

1964

Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1964 (Sirima-Shastri Pact)

Any person to whom the Agreement of 1964 applied to, could make an application to be granted citizenship of Sri Lanka, by registration

Indo-Ceylon Agreement of 1974 (Sirima-Indira Pact)

Intended to grant Indian citizenship to some and repatriate the rest of the Hill Country Tamil community to India

The 1964 and 1974 agreements aimed to end statelessness for 975 000 People



1974

However, provisions of the Act facilitating the 1964 Agreement were different to the initially discussed conditions, which resulted in



Problems in application



Forceful repatriation of persons back to India



The window to apply for citizenship (under both agreements) expiring in 1981

This left a portion of the Indian Tamil population stateless because they had not applied for Indian citizenship but were also denied Sri Lankan citizenship

1986

Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons Act, No. 5 of 1986

To grant citizenship to specific persons, including persons who were to be granted citizenship through the 1964 and 1974 Agreements, and their descendants



This Act was passed due to increasing tensions between the Tamils in the North and East, and the fear that Hill Country Tamils would join the militancy in the North and massive repatriation in the previous decades resulting in labour shortages in the plantations

1988

Grant of Citizenship to Stateless Persons (Special Provisions) Act, 1988

To grant Sri Lankan citizenship to all Hill Country Tamils who had not applied for Indian citizenship under previous agreements

2003

Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin Act, No. 35 of 2003

Grants citizenship to all persons who have been permanent residents of Sri Lanka since 30 October 1964 or is a descendant of a person who has been a permanent resident of Sri Lanka

2009

Grant of Citizenship to Persons of Indian Origin (Amendment) Act, No. 6 of 2009

To provide citizenship for up-country Tamils who were 'compelled to leave' Sri Lanka due to the armed conflict and were mostly living in refugee camps in India

Source: Verite Research (2019), Hill Country Tamils of Sri Lanka: Towards Meaningful Citizenship, Colombo



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