

## IS PATRON-CLIENT POLITICS CHANGING THE VOTING BEHAVIOUR OF THE UP-COUNTRY TAMILS?

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*Sri Lankan plantation workers have celebrated two centuries since their arrival in Sri Lanka. However, the plantation workers who migrated from India to this country are still showing negative values in the development index instead of positive values. These workers, who contribute to the successful maintenance of Sri Lanka's export economy and earn a large portion of the GDP, have been moving out of the plantation sector for new job opportunities for several decades. Although research has been conducted in Sri Lanka on this trend, it has not been linked to the patron-client politics. Therefore, there is a research gap in Sri Lanka that needs to be addressed. The research aims to fill it. Therefore, this research is important in terms of the implementation of state policies in Sri Lanka, socially, in terms of the problems and conditions of the social body of the plantation people, and academically, in terms of presenting new knowledge to the field of political science. The primary objective of the study was to explore whether there has been a change in the political behaviour of workers migrating out of the plantations for new jobs and workers traditionally employed in the plantation sector, despite the traditional dominance of political parties and trade unions in the plantation sector, through the theory of patron-client relationships. The research was conducted under the inductive method and hypotheses were formulated and qualitative data were collected to verify them. The research strategies used in it were focus group discussions, expert interviews, public participation programs and document review. The data collected using these strategies concluded that the implementation of patron-client politics in the plantation sector is limited. Although the ability to determine the political behaviour of the people in the plantation sector has shifted to some extent from political parties and trade unions, their dominance in the plantation sector still persists. Therefore, the research confirmed that the political behaviour of both workers moving out of the plantations and workers within the plantations has not been subject to very intense dynamics.*

**Keywords:** *Traditional plantation workers, workers migrating out of the plantations, Tamil political parties and trade unions, patron-client politics, political behaviour.*