

A neglected aspect of business: Human and social capital in the Sri Lankan tea plantation sector

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This paper examines idiosyncrasies of tea plantation culture and politics in relation to Sri Lankan national and popular cultural typologies, with special reference to female tea plantation workers. Tea production in Sri Lanka is heavily based on manual labour, and it is the largest industry that provides accommodation for employees and their families. In this paper, it is argued that politico-cultural production relations have dominated labour productivity in tea plantations. Ways in which female workers have been marginalized, through patriarchal politics, ethnicity, religion, education, elitism, and employment are explained. This culture of the plantation community operates negatively with respect to the management agenda. It is also argued that social capital development in tea plantations is important not only for productivity improvement, but also for reasons of political and social obligation for the nation, because migrant plantation workers have been working and living in plantations over 150 years.

Key words: Political economy; Underdevelopment; Strategic management; Tea plantations; Sri Lanka