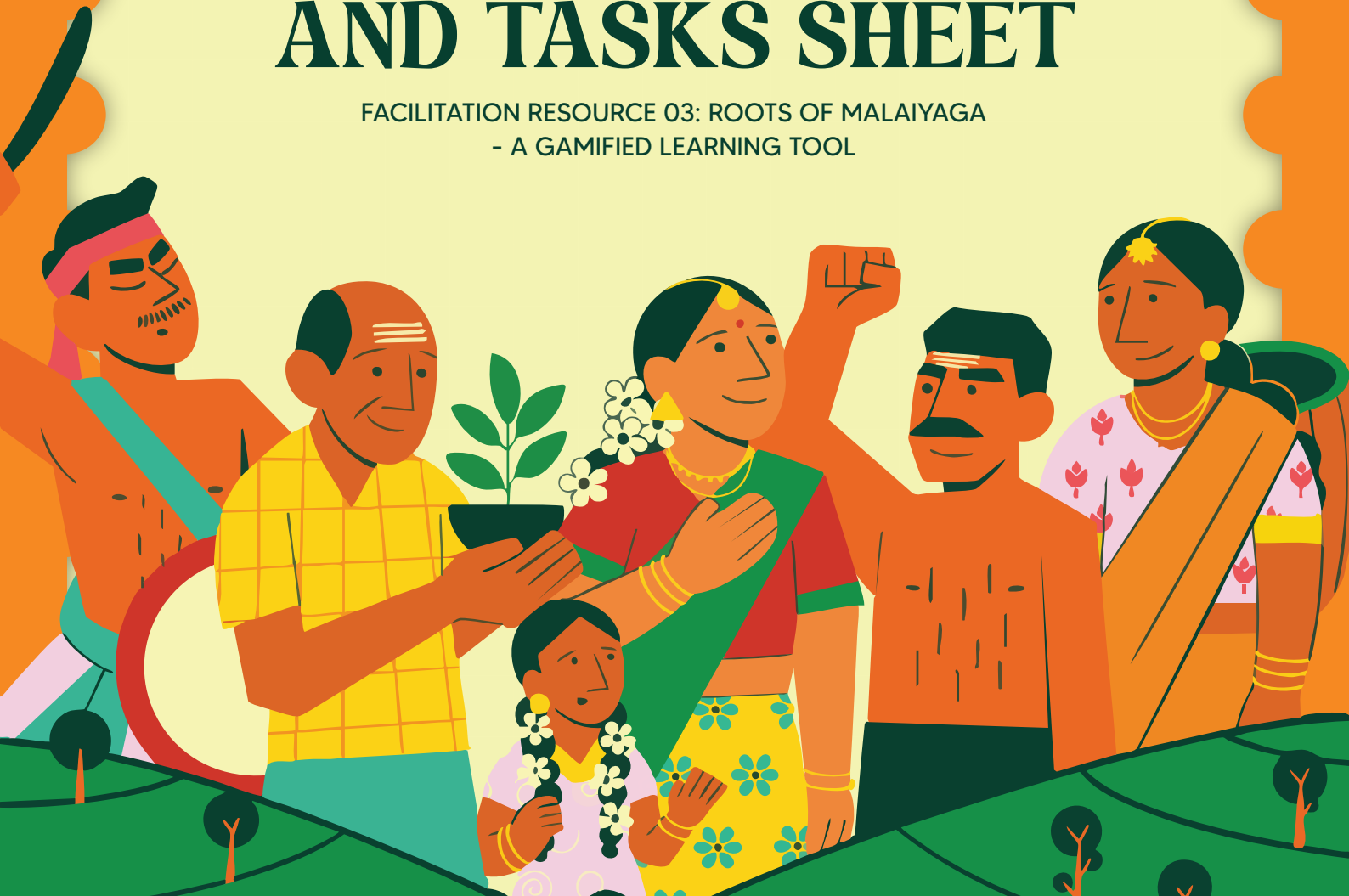




ROOTS OF  
MALAIYAGAM

# GAMEPLAY NARRATION AND TASKS SHEET

FACILITATION RESOURCE 03: ROOTS OF MALAIYAGA  
- A GAMIFIED LEARNING TOOL





## A COOPERATIVE GAMIFIED LEARNING TOOL EXPLORING THE FORGOTTEN HISTORY OF THE MALAIYAGA TAMIL COMMUNITY

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# ERA 1

## THE ARDUOUS JOURNEY

1

### THE ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

In 1820s South India, many future plantation workers came from landless, lower-caste communities already suffering under caste oppression, British taxation, and climate disasters like the 1833 famine. Exploited by both colonial and caste hierarchies, they were left with few choices. British recruiters (kanganyas) took advantage of this desperation, falsely framing plantation labor in Ceylon as opportunity. The 1833 Slavery Abolition Act ironically increased demand for this “free” but coerced labor.



Challenge:

To proceed, either pay 2 Resilience points OR do a 30-second reflection on the oppressive colonial structures you notice in the environment explained.

2

### THE OCEAN CROSSING

Crossing the Palk Strait was not just a journey—it was a traumatic break. Many workers had never seen the sea and faced overcrowded, unsafe ships run by profit-driven British agents. Cultural taboos around sea-crossing added spiritual distress to physical suffering. Lacking rights or safeguards, many died en route, their lives dismissed as collateral damage in the colonial economy.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 1 Dignity point and 2 Resilience points OR Partner with someone and reflect for 1 minute: What would it feel like to be forced to leave home by sea, not knowing where you're going?

3

### NORTH ROAD TREK

The 150-mile (241.5 km) trek from Mannar to the hill plantations exposed Tamil workers to harsh terrain, disease, and violence. Labeled as “coolies,” they were denied proper shelter, safety, and medical care. Local hostility, linguistic alienation, disease spreading mosquitos, and bandit attacks marked their journey. Colonial narratives blamed their suffering on personal weakness rather than systemic abuse.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Resilience points and 2 Dignity points OR take a 30-second silent walk around your table or play area while imagining you're traveling somewhere unfamiliar, unwelcome, and uncertain. Then return and share

## 4

## FIRST PLANTATION SETTLEMENTS

On arrival, Tamil laborers entered a tightly controlled world of debt bondage and surveillance. Temporary shelters gave way to basic communal housing, positioned below European supervisors. Work was harsh, gendered, and punishable by law under oppressive contracts. With the “Thundu” system and Master-Servant laws, resistance was criminalized, and plantation managers held unchecked power over daily life.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Resilience points OR Turn to a neighbor and name 2 things that might make a living environment feel unfair or unsafe for someone forced to work under someone else's control and constant

## 5

## COMMUNITY FORMATION

In the face of systemic control, workers built resilient communities. Women preserved cultural traditions; shared rituals, healing, and stories created new identities. Despite loss, families formed kinship through memory and mutual support. The early 1840s saw the rise of plantation Tamil dialects and hybrid identities—rooted in both trauma and collective strength.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 1 Resilience point and 2 Community Power points OR as a group, take 3 minutes to name one way people can keep culture or connection alive even when far from home. Try to share one ritual or symbol you know that can help build belonging.

# ERA 2

## PLANTATION RAJ

### 1 COLONIAL PLANTATION

The plantation economy in Ceylon became a state within a state, built on land seized from Kandyan villagers under laws like the 1840 Wasteland Ordinance. British planters gained power through associations and colonial ties, while tea replaced coffee, increasing labor demands. Big companies like Lipton's standardized control, creating layered inequalities among workers. When tea prices dropped, workers suffered most—wages fell, conditions worsened, and the government prioritized exports over their welfare.



Challenge:

To proceed, either pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Community Power points OR in 3 minutes, point out ways that economic systems today still prioritize profit over people's wellbeing. If unsure, name one question this tile makes

### 2 LIFE IN THE LINE ROOMS

Line rooms—cramped one-room homes built by planters—housed entire families with poor sanitation and constant surveillance. Illness was common, and facilities were minimal. Yet families found ways to create culture and belonging: home shrines, food rituals, storytelling, and evening gatherings. These shared struggles slowly built a sense of community and identity among people from different castes and villages, giving rise to early forms of Malaiyaga Tamil solidarity.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 1 Resilience point, 1 Dignity point and 2 Community Power points OR Pair up with another player. Each of you name one small ritual, activity or shared moment from your community that can turn a harsh space into a place of comfort or community.

### 3 LABOR CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

The colonial labor system used laws, physical punishment, and the kangany system to control workers. Kanganies—often from dominant castes—enforced order and took wage cuts. Workers resisted escape, absence, slowdowns, and collective actions like “hooting” protests. Religious events became covert organizing spaces. Though met with suppression, this resistance helped shape political awareness and solidarity in the community.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Resilience points, 1 Dignity point, and 1 Community Power point OR as a group, take 5 minutes: Name one form of resistance (small or big) people still uses today when facing unfair treatment—and one way it brings people together.

## 4

## HEALTH AND MEDICAL GOVERNANCE

Plantation healthcare was minimal and unequal. Workers, especially women, were denied proper care or blamed for being “unhygienic.” After pressure from India, some basic services were introduced—but they mostly served management. Workers relied on community healers, herbal remedies, and knowledge passed through generations. Women became midwives and health leaders in spaces colonial medicine ignored.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Resilience points and 2 Dignity points OR individually reflect for 30 seconds: What might it feel like to be unwell and not trusted to know your own body? Then, all the group members will engage in a 5-minute dialogue sharing ways that community wisdom can be powerful in challenging/ oppressive situations and how we can conserve it for future generations.

## 5

## CULTURAL ADAPTATION AND IDENTITY

As generations passed, the plantation Tamils built a new collective identity. Village gods evolved into shared deities, and a new dialect blended Tamil, Sinhala, and English. Festivals were adapted to plantation schedules, and Kooththu performances, Karagam, Kummi dances, and Parai drumming, began reflecting their new lives. Children born on the plantations embraced both Indian roots and Ceylonese belonging—naming themselves Malaiyaga Tamils to mark this evolving identity forged in struggle and adaptation.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 1 Dignity point, 1 Resilience point, and 2 Community Power points OR as a group, take 10 minutes: imagine you are a community, and the group members are the community members. Come up with a name for your community identity, a symbol that could represent your community, a language, and one unique holiday/ festival for this community. Also, reflect on what values and practices you will collectively adopt as a community.

# ERA 3

## INDEPENDENCE & DISENFRANCHISEMENT

### 1 THE CITIZENSHIP CRISIS

Independence in 1948 brought disenfranchisement for Malaiyaga Tamils. The Ceylon Citizenship Act redefined belonging based on paternal descent (proof of father being a citizen, or grandfather and parental grandfather being born in Ceylon), requiring documents plantation workers never had. Over 800,000 people were made stateless—despite generations of life and work in Ceylon. This legal exclusion stripped voting rights, property access, and state services, weaponizing law to engineer a Sinhala-majority nation.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Dignity points, 2 Resilience points OR as a group, take 2 minutes: How can documents or legal structures be used to deny belonging and fundamental rights of people? Share your opinions on how laws can

### 2 POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The 1949 Elections Amendment Act removed voting rights from Malaiyaga Tamils, erasing their political representation and power – leaving with no voice to represent them. With no vote, they lost representation, visibility, and voice in critical national decisions. While formal politics shut them out, parties like Ceylon Workers' Congress led by Saumiyamoorthy Thondaman, strategically pivoted from political party to trade union emerged as new spaces for organizing and political education through labor and culture.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Community Power point and 1 Resilience point OR pick a partner: Share ways in which communities can stay politically active even when denied official participation. You can also consider doing a role-play.

### 3 THE "INDO-CEYLON PROBLEM"

Ceylon's state-led statelessness became a diplomatic issue, treated as a problem between India and Ceylon rather than a human rights crisis. Pacts like Nehru-Kotelawala divided people between countries without their consent. Malaiyaga Tamils were treated as outsiders despite deep roots in Ceylon, caught in a limbo where neither state truly claimed them.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Resilience points and 2 Community Power points OR individually reflect for 1 minute: What would it feel like to not belong to any country? Then in your group, name one right you think should never depend on your citizenship.

## 4

## PLANTATION NATIONALIZATION DEBATES

After independence, the future of plantations became a national issue. While British companies still owned most estates, debates emerged about transferring ownership—some calling for nationalization, others preferring local control by elites. For Malaiyaga Tamil workers, these talks were deeply consequential—but they were excluded due to their stateless status. Many reformers saw plantations as economic assets, not as homes to a laboring community. The 1958 Paddy Lands Act gave land rights and protections to Sinhalese farmers but offered no such support to plantation workers. As British companies withdrew investments, conditions worsened on plantations, but no policies protected the workers left behind; being present in the economy, but invisible in policy.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 3 Community Power points and 1 Dignity point OR with all the players: Imagine you are workers during that time. Design one fair reform that includes stateless plantation laborers.

## 5

## COMMUNITY FORMATION

Citizenship loss also meant educational exclusion. The limited Tamil-medium schools on plantations, previously operated under minimal colonial oversight, faced new restrictions under Ceylon's education policies. The 1956 "Sinhala Only" Official Language Act further marginalized Tamil speakers, creating additional barriers for the Malaiyaga community who predominantly spoke Tamil. The plantation schools were underfunded, with few trained teachers. Girls often missed school due to family labor demands. Despite this, the community sustained learning—through evening classes, cultural stories, and emerging writers who voiced plantation realities.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Resilience points, 2 Community Power points OR imagine yourself as a student in a plantation school during this time. Reflect on the changes that are happening in your school/ community. Explain how you are feeling as you witness these changes.



# ERA 4

## REPATRIATION & LABOR STRUGGLES

1

### THE REPATRIATION PROCESS

The Sirima-Shastri Pact (1964) forced Malaiyaga Tamils to "choose" between India and Ceylon—but quotas, inaccessible forms, and broken families exposed this as coercion. Over 500,000 people were sent to unfamiliar India, many arriving to refugee camps and rejection. Those who stayed remained stateless. Families were separated by bureaucratic decisions, and literacy barriers made even letter-writing a shared struggle. This era saw the state's direct intervention into family life and identity like never before.



Challenge:

Either: Pay 2 Dignity points, 2 Resilience points OR with a partner, imagine your family is split between two countries. Each of you say one thing you'd try to do to stay connected, or one fear you might have.

2

### PLANTATION ECONOMICS AND MANAGEMENT

As foreign companies withdrew, plantations were handed over to state corporations—but worker conditions didn't improve. The same managers stayed, structures remained exploitative, and economic instability worsened life for those left behind. Repatriation was framed as "economic rationalization," reducing people to numbers. Stateless workers faced a double exclusion: from citizenship and from protection under new economic reforms.



Challenge:

Either pay 3 Community Power points and 1 Resilience point OR as a group: Identify one real-life situation today where a system or business treats people as replaceable. Share briefly what changes could affect human dignity in that context.

3

### UNION POWER AND LABOR RIGHTS

Even while stateless and under pressure, Malaiyaga Tamil workers organized. The CWC, along with other unions, led strikes for wages and dignity, winning important victories including the establishment of Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) benefits (1966), which represented one of the first formal recognitions of their long-term employment rights. Yet many active unionists were repatriated to weaken organizing. Women stepped up, often filling leadership gaps on estates. The movement proved that even without full rights, collective resistance could still secure small but vital victories.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Community Power points, 2 Dignity points OR Think of a time when people came together in your own life or history to demand something fair. Share one key ingredient of what made that action possible with your group.

## 4

## HOUSING AND LAND RIGHTS STRUGGLES

Line rooms that were occupied for generations were lost during repatriation, erasing the only homes many had ever known. Those who stayed tried improving their spaces by adding small room extensions or gardening plots to personalize their living spaces and identity but lacked legal ownership. The 1973 Rent Exemption Act stopped wage deductions for housing but gave no land rights. Land reform redistributed plantation lands—but mostly to Sinhalese farmers, not to the people who lived and worked on them. Statelessness remained on the wall blocking true belonging and security.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Community Power points OR as a group, discuss briefly: What makes a space feel like home? Name one way a system can support people's right to belong where they live.

## 5

## EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND CULTURAL

Though schools were nationalized, plantation education stayed underfunded and unequal while further deepening language gaps and barriers. Most children, as young as 14 years of age, dropped out of school to contribute to their families' work on the estates. But non-formal education rose, led by unions and community groups. Cultural learning, too, became resistance: through arts, stories, and youth organizations that centered a distinct Malaiyaga Tamil identity. Some university-educated youth returned as teachers and leaders, beginning to rewrite the narrative from within.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Resilience points and 2 Community Power points OR each player briefly shares: A way you've learned something valuable outside a classroom. Then, collectively name some cultural activities that teach identity or pride.

# ERA 5

## CONFLICT & VIOLENCE

### 1 DISPLACEMENT AND MIGRATION

During riots in 1977, 1981, and especially Black July 1983, Malaiyaga Tamils faced targeted attacks. Isolated line rooms were burned, people were beaten or killed, and hundreds of families were forced to flee. Many lacked the citizenship needed for state protection, and some security forces were complicit in violence. Women often hid children in tea fields, and informal self-defense groups formed. These events deepened a sense of betrayal, loss, and abandonment by the state.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Community Power points and 2 Resilience points OR as a group, everyone should reflect and share one word that reflects how the story made them feel or what it made them think about. End with a moment of

### 2 ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND TARGETED

After 1983, over 50,000 Malaiyaga Tamils fled to the North and East or left Sri Lanka entirely. Displacement broke generations-long ties to plantations and created new hardships, living as refugees, finding work in urban slums, or migrating abroad for survival. These experiences fractured community identity but also strengthened broader Tamil solidarity and created transnational support networks. Cultural distinctions between Malaiyaga and Ceylon Tamils sometimes created tension even in shared spaces of refuge.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Dignity points and 3 Resilience points OR Pair up: Imagine you've been displaced to an unfamiliar place. Each of you names one challenge you might face and one small act of kindness that could help you feel a little safer or seen.

### 3 CAUGHT IN THE CIVIL WAR

During the civil war, Malaiyaga Tamils were caught between all sides. Those who fled to conflict zones faced forced recruitment by the LTTE, while those on plantations were harassed at checkpoints or treated with suspicion by the military. Their link to India made them targets of anti-Indian sentiment. Militarization disrupted life and limited mobility, schooling, and organization. Despite being mostly distant from the war's center, their daily lives were shaped by fear, surveillance, and restriction.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Resilience points, 1 Dignity point, and 1 Community Power point OR as a group, reflect for 5 minutes: What does it mean to be treated with suspicion just for who you are or where you're from? Then share one way people can support those unfairly targeted.

## 4

## ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION AND PRIVATIZATION

In the 1990s, the state privatized plantations, prioritizing profit over people. Workers lost jobs, housing became insecure, and permanent positions were replaced with casual contracts. Global tea markets and policies from institutions like the IMF worsened conditions. Although companies were meant to protect workers' housing rights, this was rarely enforced. Privatization added economic precarity to a community already coping with violence, displacement, and marginalization.



Challenge:

Pay 3 Community Power points and 1 Resilience point OR Turn to a partner: Think of a time or place in your life where profit was put before people's needs. Share how you felt and what justice would have looked like to you at that instance.

## 5

## CITIZENSHIP RESOLUTION AND POLITICAL

After decades of struggle, two laws in 1988 and 2003 finally granted citizenship to most remaining stateless Malaiyaga Tamils. This hard-won success opened access to voting and public services and shifted the community's political role. However, getting ID documents remained difficult, and violence continued despite legal recognition. Still, this era marked a major shift, from demanding recognition to building power as citizens.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Community Power points OR as a group: Reflect for 5 minutes. What does it mean to move from being excluded to being recognized? Name the things recognition allows, but also things that must follow legal inclusion to make it meaningful.

# ERA 6

## RECLAIMING IDENTITY & POST-WAR TRANSFORMATION

1

### CITIZENSHIP RESOLUTION AND POLITICAL REINTEGRATION

After the war ended in 2009, national reconciliation efforts focused more on military victory than healing or justice. For Malaiyaga Tamils, especially those displaced during the conflict, this meant continued exclusion. Many faced poor resettlement, military surveillance, and no acknowledgment of past traumas. However, the 2016 Consultation Task Force marked a turning point. For the first time, their community's long history of structural discrimination, statelessness, displacement, economic exploitation, was documented in an official process. Participants insisted reconciliation must go beyond the war and include 200 years of historical injustice. Parallel to this, community-led projects began preserving oral histories and lived experiences, including violence often left out of official records. These efforts led to new public expressions of memory and identity, like the #Malaiyagam200 campaign in 2023. This movement reframed the community's history as not only one of labor, but also of resistance, contribution, and belonging - claiming space in the national memory where they had long been excluded.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Community Power points OR as a group: Reflect on this question for 5 minutes; What does reconciliation look like when justice is delayed?

2

### LAND RIGHTS AND HOUSING TRANSFORMATION

Post-war rebuilding opened new conversations about land and housing justice for the Malaiyaga Tamil community. The colonial line room system that were never meant for dignity began to be replaced through housing programs like the "1000 Houses Project" (2012). Though not reaching everyone, these efforts gave some families private homes and improved living conditions. But the deeper demand was for land ownership: the right to the soil their ancestors had lived on for generations. A major shift came with a 2016 proposal to grant seven perches of land per family, acknowledging this claim. Still, implementation lagged - plantation companies resisted losing control, and bureaucratic delays blocked progress. Meanwhile, displaced families who had lived in the North and East during the war faced another issue: without documents, they couldn't prove ownership or claim assistance. Land was not just about shelter; it meant security, identity, and intergenerational continuity. Activists also pushed for land dedicated to schools, temples, and community spaces, controlled by the people, not the companies, marking a shift from dependency to autonomy in defining what home meant.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Dignity points and 2 Resilience points OR Pair up and answer: What makes land or a home more than just property? Share why you think having secure land or housing is essential for a community's dignity.

## 3

## ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND LABOR CONDITIONS

After the war, the plantation sector continued to face instability: from global market changes, climate impacts, and declining profits. Plantation companies, now privatized, moved toward casual daily labor to reduce costs, eroding long-standing job security and worker rights. But the community fought back. The “1000-rupee campaign,” led by women and youth, became a landmark struggle. It brought over 2,000 protesters to Colombo’s Galle Face Green in 2018 and used social media to tell their stories, reaching far beyond the plantations. These actions redefined what visibility and protest looked like for a community often sidelined. At the same time, families diversified, seeking jobs in cities, construction, factories, and overseas. Remittances became a key survival strategy, especially as women began migrating as domestic workers and earning more financial power at home. These shifts complicated traditional gender roles and created both new opportunities and new precarity. Yet through it all, the demand remained the same: dignified work, fair pay, and recognition as skilled contributors - not just remnants of a colonial past.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Resilience points, 2 Community Power points OR as a group reflect on: how can workers today challenge unfair conditions? Name examples (from a story or real life) where visibility or solidarity helped change economic injustice.

## 4

## POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The return of citizenship opened space for new forms of political participation. While the Ceylon Workers’ Congress remained influential, younger Malaiyaga Tamils began forming new political groups and contesting local elections. Their demands included more administrative units in plantation areas (like DS and PS divisions) to improve service access. Civic groups also grew, tackling education, environment, and women’s rights through legal advocacy, research, and international human rights forums. Hashtag campaigns like #wearenotcoolies and #1000wagenow challenged deeply rooted stereotypes, making digital activism a key tool for awareness and pressure. Strategic voting also emerged: rather than pledging loyalty to one party, the community began negotiating for concrete gains in exchange for support. Identity politics shifted too. Malaiyaga Tamils pushed for official recognition as a distinct ethnic group - not just “Indian Tamils” - and continued to fight for Tamil language access in public services, especially in hill-country districts. This era saw the move from simply being allowed to vote to actively shaping public discourse on their own terms.



Challenge:

Pay 2 Community Power points and 2 Dignity points OR Turn to another player and ask: What’s one thing a community needs to fully participate in society? Then each of you can share and discuss ways people today can use their voice to make change; even without being in power for 5 minutes.

In this period, Malaiyaga Tamils began not just preserving their culture, but powerfully reclaiming and evolving it. Writers like Saaral Naadan and C.V. Velupillai published works that captured plantation life, trauma, and pride, reaching Tamil and global readers. Traditional arts like Kooththu performances, Parai drumming, and ritual dance were updated to tell contemporary stories, including those of migration and resistance. Youth used TikTok and Instagram to share oral history, recipes, fashion, and music rooted in plantation life. Museums and community centers began preserving household objects and work tools, not just as relics, but as testimony to resilience. Spiritual life remained dynamic, blending traditional deities with newer expressions of faith. Even fashion became political celebrating “plantation identity” with pride rather than shame. Most significantly, the term “Malaiyaga Tamil” took root, no longer defined by where they came from, but by what they had built. Culture became a way not just to look back, but to step forward with dignity.



#### Challenge:

Pay 1 Dignity point, 2 Resilience points, and 2 Community Power points OR as a group: engage in a discussion sharing creative or cultural acts or symbols (song, dress, ritual, story) from your community that can help people reclaim their identity with pride. Name something you’d preserve to showcase your community’s identity if your community’s story was told in a museum.