



# ROOTS OF MALAIYAGAM

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







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

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# INTRODUCTION

Roots of Malaiyaga is a cooperative, story-driven board game developed as a transformative learning resource that brings to light the often-overlooked history of the Malaiyaha Tamil community in Sri Lanka. Spanning six eras and more than 200 years, the game guides players through historical narratives of migration, indentured labor, marginalization, resistance, and cultural resilience. Designed for educators, learners, and community facilitators, it invites deep reflection on the themes of justice, identity, and inclusion in postcolonial contexts.

This tool aims to foster critical historical understanding while also cultivating values of empathy, solidarity, and intercultural dialogue. By engaging with stories grounded in lived experiences, players are encouraged to analyze structural inequalities, challenge dominant narratives, and explore what it means to be a global citizen committed to justice and dignity for all. Through a mix of storytelling, resource strategy, and collective reflection, Roots of Malaiyaga supports the development of key global citizenship competencies such as critical thinking, civic responsibility, and the ability to hold multiple truths.

The game was co-created through a participatory and respectful process, drawing on the wisdom and contributions of Malaiyaha community members, local knowledge holders, traditional artists, and educators. Feedback from co-creating workshops and community validation sessions played a vital role in shaping the final design and ensuring the tool is not only accurate, relevant and inclusive, but also meaningful and engaging to diverse audiences. At its heart, Roots of Malaiyaga is more than a game - it is an invitation to learn, unlearn, and reimagine together.



ROOTS OF  
MALAIYAGAM


# FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

FACILITATION RESOURCE 01: ROOTS OF MALAIYAGA - A GAMIFIED LEARNING TOOL




# PURPOSE OF THE GAME


"Roots of Malaiyaga" is a cooperative, story-driven board game designed as a transformative learning resource. It brings to life the untold and often overlooked history of the Malaiyaga Tamil community in Sri Lanka, spanning over 200 years of migration, labor, resistance, and cultural resilience. The game invites learners to explore this history through a lens of justice, empathy, and critical reflection. It engages players in historical understanding, encourages analysis of structural inequalities, and promotes transformative dialogue among diverse participants.



Deepen historical understanding of the Malaiyaga Tamil community, their journey, and systemic marginalization.




Develop critical thinking about colonialism, identity, power, and citizenship in postcolonial societies.



Encourage empathy, solidarity, and the recognition of multiple historical narratives.



Strengthen global citizenship competencies including intercultural awareness, civic engagement, and human rights understanding.



Provide a safe, reflective space for transformative dialogue on justice, dignity, and social change.

## HOW TO USE THE GAME AS A LEARNING TOOL

1

### Pre-Game Preparation

- ✦ Briefly introduce the community's background using visual timelines, short videos, or stories – or a community representative or a resource person.
- ✦ Create a safe space by establishing ground rules around listening, respect, and openness.
- ✦ Share the intention of the game: learning through collective exploration, not competition.

2

## During the Game

- Each story tile opens a chapter of the community's history.
- Players collectively read aloud each tile, engage with the challenge, and decide how to respond (using points or reflective tasks).
- Encourage players to take on the perspective of community members, build empathy and see through diverse lenses than what they are used to.

3

## Reflection Pauses (Optional)

Use these moments after each Era to debrief and deepen learning. This will also be specifically useful if you are playing the game one era at a time, completing in multiple sessions. You can use these as learning reflections for each session break, aiming to wrap up each session after completing one era.

### ERA 1: THE ARDUOUS JOURNEY

- What forms of structural injustice stood out to you in the early era?
- How does migration under coercion differ from voluntary migration?

### ERA 2: PLANTATION RAJ

- What does it mean to build identity under conditions of control and inequality?
- How do small acts of cultural resilience challenge dominant power structures?

### ERA 3: INDEPENDENCE & DISENFRANCHISEMENT

- How can law be used to exclude? Can something be legal but still unjust?
- What does statelessness reveal about the meaning of citizenship?

### ERA 4: REPATRIATION & LABOR STRUGGLES

- What emotions did you experience hearing about forced family separations?
- How can unions and collective organizing serve as forms of resistance and healing?

### ERA 5: CONFLICT & VIOLENCE

- How did the community endure being caught in violence they didn't start?
- What does safety and security mean in a society where you are always questioned?

### ERA 6: RECLAIMING IDENTITY & POST-WAR TRANSFORMATION

- What role does cultural expression play in reclaiming voice and dignity?
- How do communities move from survival to shaping their own narratives?

After completing the six historical eras, invite players to shift into visioning mode using the “Beautiful Future Cards.” This is a creative and hopeful transition that allows learners to reimagine the future for the Malaiyaga Tamil community, other marginalized groups, and themselves as active global citizens.

#### INSTRUCTIONS:

Set up the five Beautiful Cards on the play area.

Ask each player or group to take one card that resonate with them and spend 3–5 minutes reflecting individually.

Invite them to share what they envision based on the prompts in the card. They can respond creatively, in words, sketches, roleplays, or short group shares. Envision the future you want to see, connecting your current realities with those you may not see yet.

#### BEAUTIFUL FUTURE PROMPTS:






- 🌱 Imagine a future where schools and public spaces tell the full, honest stories of all communities, including Malaiyaga Tamils. What does a classroom or public memorial look like that connects learning, healing, and justice?
- 🌱 Visualize a local economy based on care, fairness, and dignity. What workspaces or opportunities exist for youth and marginalized workers? How are resources shared?
- 🌱 Imagine climate action that protects both land and people. What farming or labor systems support workers and nature? What is your role in this just green future?
- 🌱 Picture political participation as part of daily life—not just voting. How do different voices shape decisions? What systems ensure that all are heard?
- 🌱 Think of a future where Malaiyaga Tamil culture thrives. What stories, media, and arts are celebrated? How do you listen, support, or contribute to these expressions?








**THIS FINAL STEP INVITES PLAYERS TO MOVE FROM REFLECTION TO IMAGINATION - AND FROM IMAGINATION TO AGENCY.**

5





### Post-Game Dialogue

-  What moments in the game were hardest to process? Why?
-  How has your understanding of Sri Lankan history changed?
-  What is your understanding of the concepts of Dignity, Resilience, and Community Power after playing this game?
-  How does this history connect to other global stories of labor, migration, and identity?
-  What does solidarity look like for you after playing this game?

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

-  Allow emotions to surface. Validate discomfort as part of the learning.
-  Encourage multiple truths and perspectives without forcing consensus.
-  If players opt out of some challenges, invite them to reflect on why and support them to find alternatives, gain support or come to collective solutions.
-  Use art, poetry, or journaling as alternative expression modes for those who prefer non-verbal processing.
-  Highlight voices from the community; use audio clips, quotes, or guest facilitators where possible.

## SUGGESTED SETTINGS

-  Secondary and tertiary educational settings
-  Community learning centers
-  Teacher and youth facilitator training programs
-  Peacebuilding and DEI workshops

## FINAL THOUGHTS

**This is more than a game. It is a doorway into a history that has long been erased or minimized. Facilitators have a vital role in ensuring the experience invites curiosity, compassion, and critical reflection. The aim is not only to learn about Malaiyaga Tamil history, but to explore what it means to belong, to be excluded, and to reclaim identity with dignity.**

**As the players journey through time and story, they are also invited to examine their own worldviews and consider how justice and solidarity can become part of their everyday commitments as learners, educators, and global citizens.**



ROOTS OF  
MALAIYAGAM

# INSTRUCTIONS ON HOW TO PLAY

FACILITATION RESOURCE 02: ROOTS OF MALAIYAGA  
- A GAMIFIED LEARNING TOOL



# ELEMENTS OF THE GAME

## 1 TYPES OF CARDS

### A. STORY TILES



### B. RESOURCE CARDS

#### ♣ DIGNITY CARDS:



#### ♣ RESILIENCE CARDS:



#### ♣ COMMUNITY POWER CARDS:

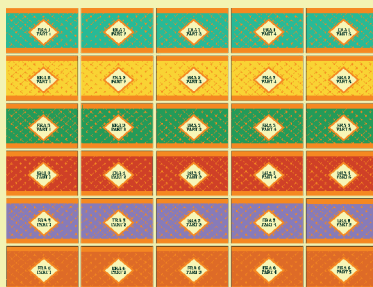


### C. CONTRIBUTION CARDS



## 2 STORY TILES GRID

The main play area where the Story Tiles are displayed in a chronologically cascading pattern. This is a 5x6 grid that indicates 06 Eras which has a 05-part storyline.



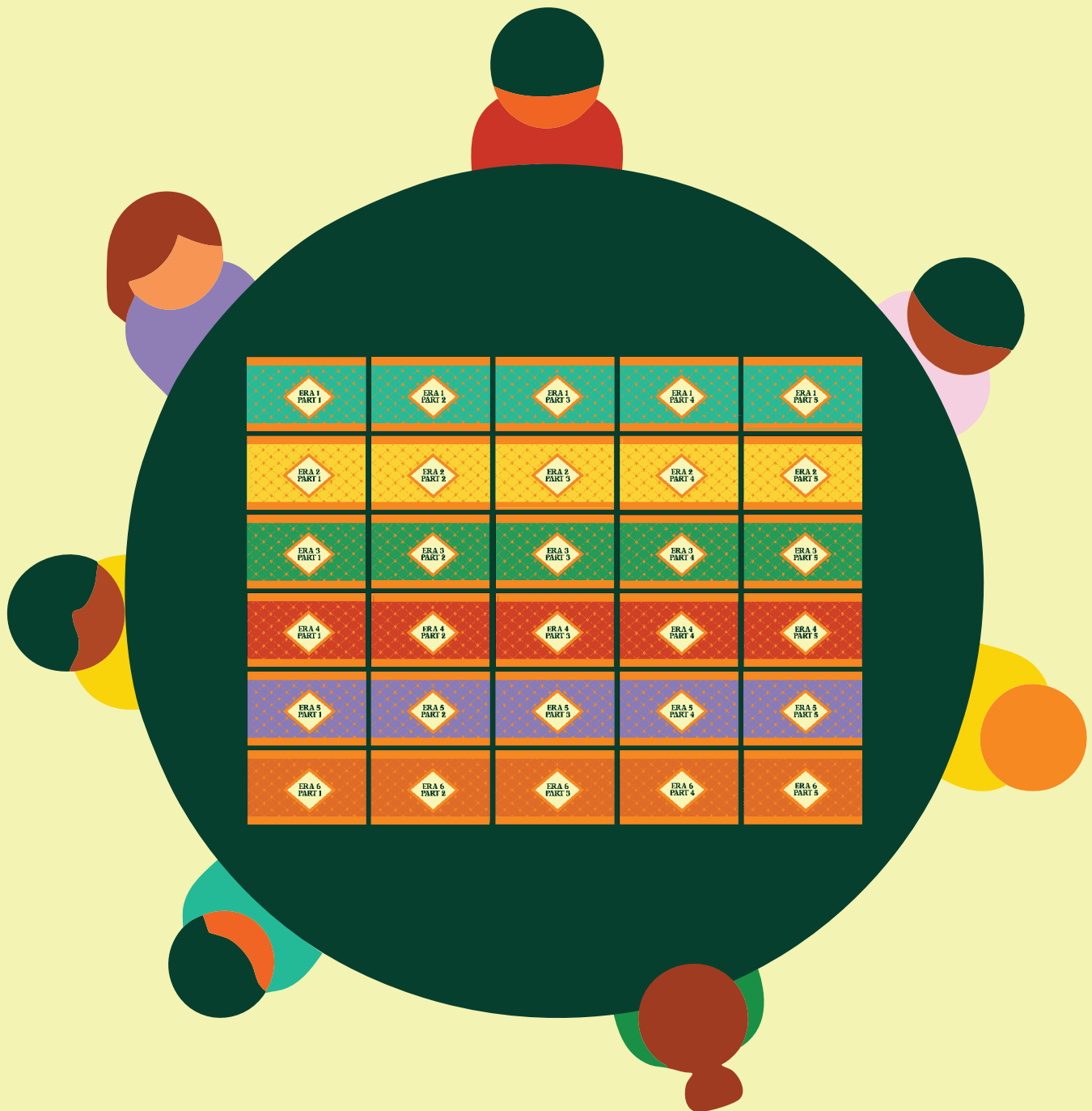
## 3 CENTRAL PILE



## 4 DISCARD PILE



# THE SET-UP



- ✦ The gameplay experience works better with groups around 3-8 people gathered in a circle with a table in the middle.
- ✦ Arrange the Story Tiles from in the correct order from Era 1 to Era 6. Each Era has 5 parts which should be arranged in the same line horizontally. Keep the cards facing down with Era and Chapter indicators facing up. If placed correctly, you will end up with a grid of 5 cards horizontally and 6 lines vertically, parallel to each other.
- ✦ Decide which player goes first. You can use a simple condition to choose who the first player is by asking "Who came to this space first?".

# THE RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION



- 1 At the beginning of the gameplay (or a continuation of a halfway completed game), you are going to create a Central Pile by mixing your Resource Cards (Dignity, Resilience and Community Power Cards) and Contribution Cards.
- 2 Make sure the pile is properly shuffled and distribute 03 cards to each player. If you only have 3 players or less, feel free to distribute 04 cards each.

- 3 Players can decide to keep their Hand (cards in their possession) as open or as a secret to other players.
- 4 You can collect more cards to your Hand by completing Story Tiles to make your hand Stronger. However, as a rule you cannot keep more than 08 cards in your hand. If you have more than 08 cards in your hand, you have to discard extra cards in your possession immediately to the Discard Pile.

## BEGINNING OF THE GAMEPLAY

- 5 The first player picks the Era 1-Part 1 card and turns it around and read aloud the text on the card.
- 6 The facilitator will read out the associated story narration afterwards where the players need to listen actively. At the end of the story narration, the facilitator will also give a challenge which the active player needs to carry out, either by providing an indicated number of resources or performing an alternative activity by themselves or with other players. These narrations and challenges can be found in the ROOTS OF MALAIYAGAM: FACILITATION RESOURCE 03 - Narrations and Challenges Sheet.
- 7 Once the challenge conditions are met (this is usually decided by the facilitator with the input of the other players), the active player completes their story tile and collects a card from the Central Pile as their reward.
- 8 The next player begins their round by turning the next card in the Story Tiles Grid and reading out the associated text.
- 9 **IMPORTANT:** If any player who is supposed to go next has a Contribution Card in their hand, they must play it first. Do this by reading the card in its entirety and placing it somewhere around the Story Tiles Grid (Do not put in the discard pile). As a reward, they can collect a card from the Central Pile, but they will not complete the Story Tile by performing the challenge. Instead, pass it on to the next player.
- 10 Continue this until all the Story Tiles in the Grid are turned over and completed.  
**OPTIONAL:** You can also do a Reflection Pause at the end of each Era. The Reflection Pauses Prompts can be found in the ROOTS OF MALAIYAGAM: FACILITATION RESOURCE 01 - FACILITATOR'S GUIDE.

# GAME BREAKS AND CONTINUATIONS

- ☛ The game is designed in a way that you can pause the gameplay at the end of any of the Eras. This means you can have the same group play the 1st Era and come back in another time to finish the 2nd Era and so on. (To complete 01 Era, it will take roughly around 30 minutes).
- ☛ When you pause the game, remember the Era(s) you completed. You can recollect all the resources cards and Un-played Contribution Cards and pack them away.
- ☛ You will have to remember the already Played Contribution Cards and keep them marked so the next time you continue, you can pull them out and place them around the Story Tiles Grid.
- ☛ When you restart the game, set up the Story Tiles Grid as it was when you paused the game and place the Played Contribution Cards around the grid as it was in the last time. Reshuffle the Central Pile and distribute 3 (or 4) cards for each player.
- ☛ Begin the game as usual and continue as before.

**NOTE: IT COULD BE QUITE USEFUL TO HAVE A QUICK RECAP OR COLLECTIVE REMINDER OF THE STORY SO FAR WHEN YOU RESUME A PAUSED GAME TO REMIND EVERYONE OF WHAT HAPPENED AND GET THEM ON THE SAME FOOTING.**





# GAMEPLAY NARRATION AND TASKS SHEET

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



# 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.

## 5

## CULTURAL RENAISSANCE AND IDENTITY AFFIRMATION

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.



# **PRINT MATERIALS 01: PLAYING CARDS**

1 - Front

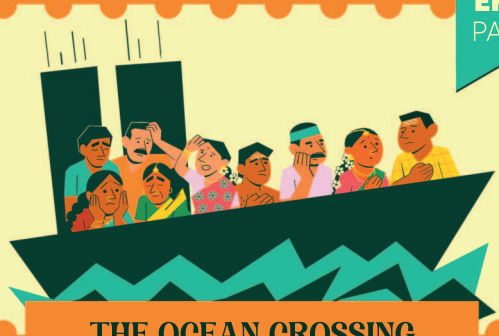
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DOUBLE SIDED (BACK TO BACK)

ERA 1  
PART 1



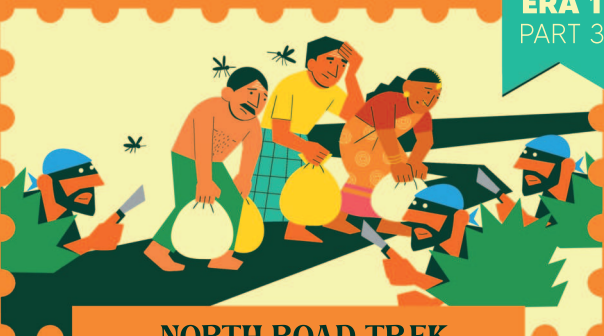
THE ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

ERA 1  
PART 2



THE OCEAN CROSSING

ERA 1  
PART 3



NORTH ROAD TREK

ERA 1  
PART 4



FIRST PLANTATION SETTLEMENTS

ERA 1  
PART 5



COMMUNITY FORMATION

ERA 2  
PART 1



PLANTATION RAJ - THE COLONIAL  
PLANTATION STATE

ERA 2  
PART 2



LIFE IN THE LINE ROOMS

ERA 2  
PART 3



LABOR CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

**ERA 1  
PART 2**

**ERA 1  
PART 1**

**ERA 1  
PART 4**

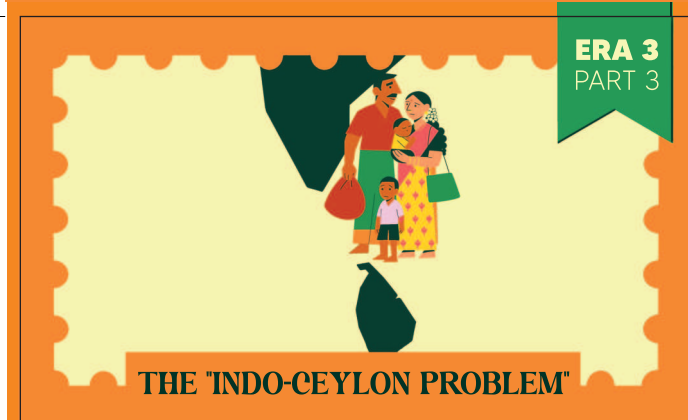
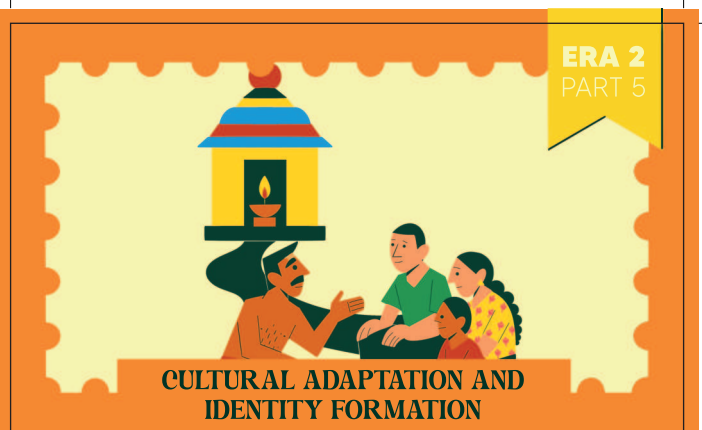
**ERA 1  
PART 3**

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**ERA 3  
PART 2**

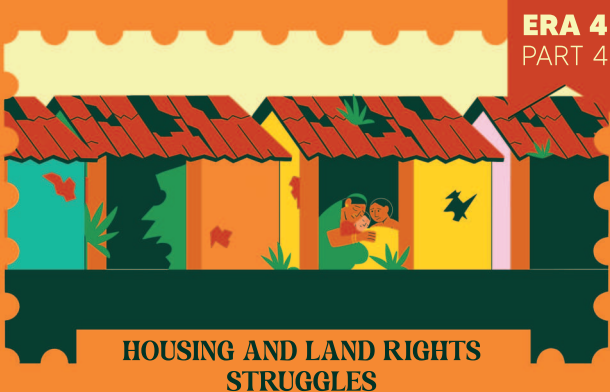
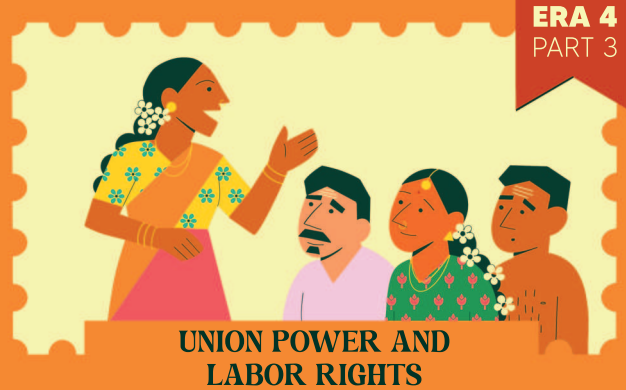
**ERA 3  
PART 1**

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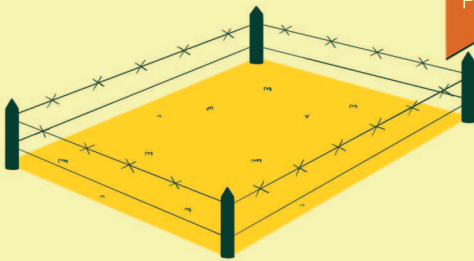
**CITIZENSHIP RESOLUTION AND  
POLITICAL REINTEGRATION**

**ERA 6**  
PART 1



**POST-WAR RECONCILIATION  
AND JUSTICE**

**ERA 6**  
PART 2



**LAND RIGHTS AND HOUSING  
TRANSFORMATION**

**ERA 6**  
PART 3



**ECONOMIC RIGHTS AND  
LABOR CONDITIONS**

**ERA 6**  
PART 4



**POLITICAL REPRESENTATION  
AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

**ERA 6**  
PART 5



**CULTURAL RENAISSANCE AND  
IDENTITY AFFIRMATION**



**ERA 6  
PART 1**

**ERA 5  
PART 5**

**ERA 6  
PART 3**

**ERA 6  
PART 2**

**ERA 6  
PART 5**

**ERA 6  
PART 4**

### BEAUTIFUL FUTURE: PART 2

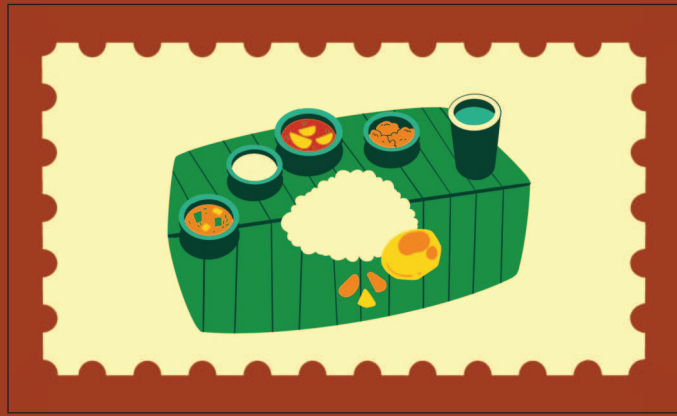
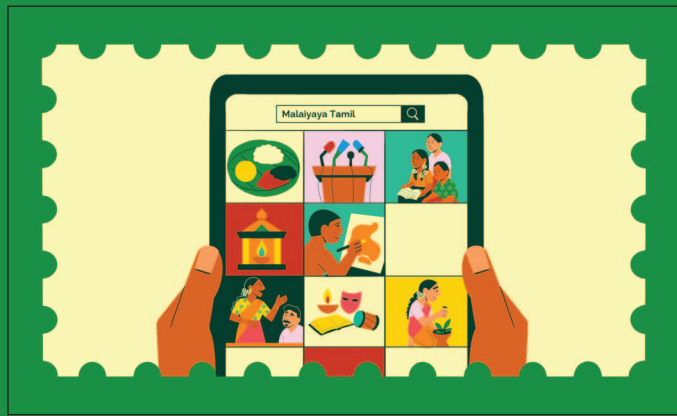
Visualize a local economy in the future that values care, fairness, and dignity, especially for those from historically marginalized communities like plantation workers. What kinds of opportunities exist for young people?

What do workspaces, training centers, or cooperatives look like? How do people share resources, knowledge, and wealth? What role could you play in shaping this economy?

### BEAUTIFUL FUTURE: PART 1

Imagine a future where schools and public spaces work together to tell the full, honest stories of all communities, including Malaiyaga Tamil people. What does a classroom look like where empathy, solidarity, and historical truth are central to learning?

What kinds of public memorials or commemorative events exist in your community that help people reflect, remember, and move forward together? How do these spaces connect learning, healing, and justice?



**BEAUTIFUL FUTURE: PART 4**

Picture a world where political voice is not limited to voting but woven into everyday life. How do people from all backgrounds, regardless of class, language, or location, participate in shaping policies and decisions?

What spaces or systems help ensure everyone is heard and valued? What makes you feel politically included in this future?

**BEAUTIFUL FUTURE: PART 3**

Imagine a future where climate action protects both the environment and the people who live and work on it, including those in plantation and rural communities. What kinds of farming or land-use practices exist?

How are workers cared for in times of drought, heat, or floods? What role do you play in linking local struggles for justice with broader environmental movements?

**CEYLON TEA: GLOBAL BRAND BUILDER**

The meticulous tea plucking techniques perfected by Malaiyaga Tamil workers created Ceylon Tea's global reputation for quality.

By 2017, when Sri Lanka celebrated 150 years of Ceylon Tea, the industry they built had become the country's largest employer and second-largest export, generating billions in revenue.

**BEAUTIFUL FUTURE: PART 5**

Think of a future where Malaiyaga Tamil cultural expressions, from traditional arts to modern media, are fully valued alongside all other forms of creativity. What stories, performances, or digital content are being shared?

Who tells them, and who listens? How do these expressions challenge stereotypes and build shared understanding? How do you support or create this space?

**KOVIL TRADITIONS AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY**

The plantation Kovil festivals, particularly Thai Pongal and Mariamman Theru (chariot) festivals worship traditions, developed unique Sri Lankan characteristics over generations.

Many estates saw Sinhalese Buddhist neighbors participating in these celebrations, creating intercommunity and interfaith bonds through shared spiritual experiences embracing diversity and common humanity.

**HIGHLAND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPERS**

The railway network extending to Nuwara Eliya and other highland areas, built and maintained through Malaiyaga Tamil labor since the 1870s, opened up previously inaccessible regions for development.

This infrastructure network continues to serve all communities and supports the tourism industry that would later become a major economic sector.

**RHYTHMS OF RESISTANCE: DRUMMING AND DANCE**

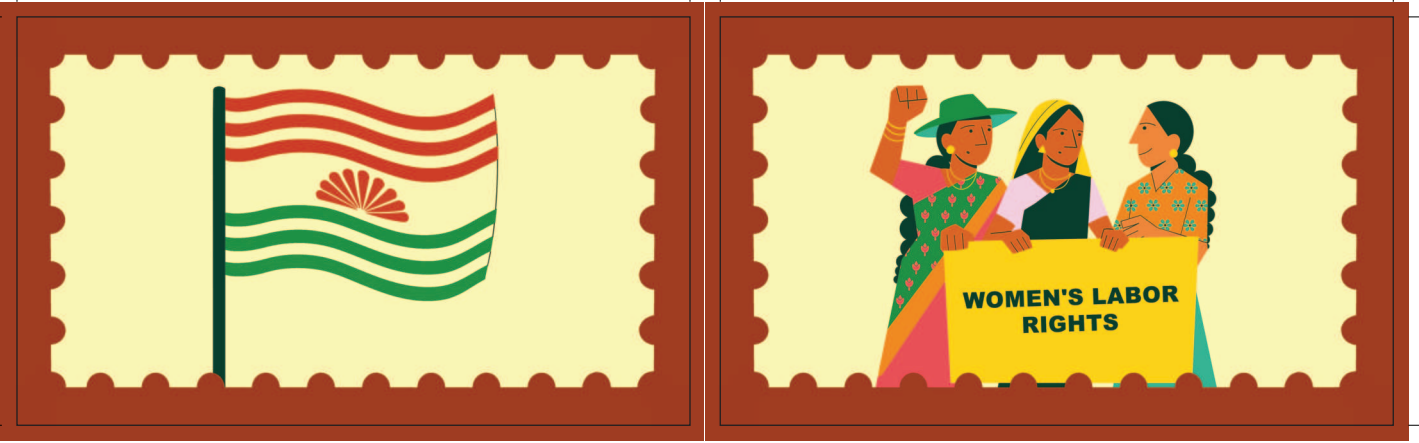
The rhythmic patterns of the Parai drum and the athletic movements of the Karagam dance were preserved and adapted on the plantations, developing distinct Sri Lankan variations. While Kummi dances were practiced as a cultural expression of identity, Kavadi dances were offerings to gods with a deep spiritual meaning.

Additionally, the Kooththu performances carried out a form of storytelling that inspired community theatre and drama. These art forms not only maintained cultural identity but also influenced broader Sri Lankan performance traditions, particularly in central highland regions.

**CULINARY HERITAGE: BEYOND THE PLANTATION**

The distinctive vegetarian cooking traditions developed in plantation communities—featuring techniques for preparing root vegetables in the cool highlands and creating spice blends using locally available ingredients—gradually influenced surrounding communities.

Dishes like 'estate potato curry' and specific dhal preparation methods were adopted into mainstream Sri Lankan cuisine.



### WOMEN'S LABOR LEADERSHIP

Women plantation workers pioneered female labor activism in Sri Lanka through their central role in tea production and participation in strikes and negotiations.

Their collective actions helped establish maternity benefits, protections against harassment, and recognition of women's labor value that would later benefit women workers across all sectors and communities.

### TRADE UNION PIONEERS

The formation of the Ceylon Indian Congress (later Ceylon Workers' Congress) in 1939 by Malaiyaga Tamil leaders Peri Sundaram and G. R. Motha can be seen as a pioneering labor organizing movement in the history of Sri Lanka. Their organizing models were later adopted by workers throughout Sri Lanka.

Their persistent campaigns for basic rights like maternity leave, maximum working hours, and injury compensation set standards eventually extended to all Sri Lankan workers.

7 - Front  
5 Copies

+ 1



+ 1

-- COMMUNITY POWER --

SPEND TO ORGANIZE RESISTANCE, OVERCOME CHALLENGES, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS.

+ 1



+ 1

-- DIGNITY --

SPEND TO WITHSTAND DISCRIMINATION, MAINTAIN CULTURAL PRACTICES, AND ASSERT RIGHTS.

+ 5




+ 5

-- DIGNITY --

SPEND TO WITHSTAND DISCRIMINATION, MAINTAIN CULTURAL PRACTICES, AND ASSERT RIGHTS.

+ 1




+ 1

-- RESILIENCE --

SPEND TO RECOVER FROM SETBACKS, SURVIVE CRISES, AND DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES.

+ 5



+ 5

-- RESILIENCE --

SPEND TO RECOVER FROM SETBACKS, SURVIVE CRISES, AND DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES.

+ 5

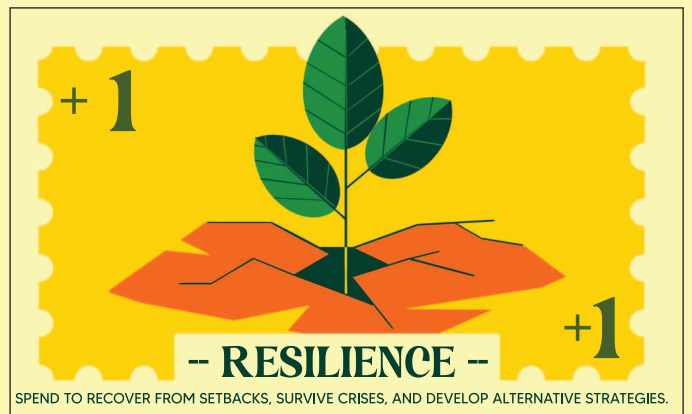


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-- COMMUNITY POWER --

SPEND TO ORGANIZE RESISTANCE, OVERCOME CHALLENGES, AND STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS.

7 - Back  
5 Copies



# PRINT MATERIALS 02: PACKAGING

PRINT ON A4 (210 X 297 MM)



## ROOTS OF MALAIYAGAM

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



**CONCEPT:**  
OSHAN M. GUNATHILAKE

**ILLUSTRATIONS:**  
CHAYA WEERASINGHE

CO-CREATED, IMPROVED, AND  
REVIEWED WITH COMMUNITY

**PUBLISHED BY**  
**EUROCLIO**  
EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR  
HISTORY EDUCATORS AS PART OF  
THE PROJECT HISTORIES THAT  
CONNECT SRI LANKA II

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**"LEARNING OUR FORGOTTEN HISTORIES,  
IDENTITIES AND COLLECTIVE HUMANITY  
THROUGH PLAY AND STORYTELLING"**

Transform your understanding of Sri Lankan history  
through this innovative cooperative card game.  
Roots of Malaiyaga brings to life the untold stories  
of the Malaiyaga Tamil community, inviting players  
to navigate historical challenges while building  
empathy, critical thinking, and community solidarity.

**PLAYERS WILL:**

- ✓ Understand structural injustices faced by  
marginalized communities.
- ✓ Develop empathy through perspective-taking  
and role-playing.
- ✓ Practice collaborative problem-solving and  
decision-making.
- ✓ Connect historical experiences to  
contemporary social issues.
- ✓ Build Global Citizenship Education  
competencies and critical  
consciousness.

**EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATIONS  
& ENDORSEMENTS**

- ✿ ALIGNED WITH UNESCO  
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP  
EDUCATION FRAMEWORK
- ✿ SUPPORTS UN SDG 4  
(QUALITY EDUCATION) & SDG  
10 (REDUCED INEQUALITIES)
- ✿ REVIEWED BY PEACE  
EDUCATION PRACTITIONERS
- ✿ COMMUNITY VALIDATED

**CONTENTS**


- **78 Illustrated Cards:**  
Story tiles, contribution cards  
and resources cards
- **Extended Digital Resources:**  
How to Play, Facilitation Guide,  
and Gameplay Narration Sheet

3-8  
PLAYERS


60-90  
MINUTES

AGE  
14+

ENGLISH



COLLECTIVE FOR  
HISTORICAL  
DIALOGUE &  
MEMORY



EuroClío  
European Association for  
History Education



SCOPE  
Strengthening Social  
Cooperation and  
Peace in Sri Lanka



German  
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