

TREND OF WAGES IN INDIA (1873-1900)

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1.1 The purpose of this paper is to show the trend of money-wages and real-wages in India during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The bulk of the data used here are those obtained in the official series of prices and wages in India issued from 1861.¹ Wage rates for three undermentioned categories of workers are available systematically from 1873 onward.

- (1) carpenter, blacksmith, and mason, representing skilled worker,
- (2) syce or horse keeper, representing domestic servant, and
- (3) agricultural labourer representing unskilled worker.

1.2 Commenting on the method of collection of the above-mentioned official statistics, Shri K. L. Dutta² said, "The official district return of wages dates from 1873. In that year, the Government of India directed that District officers should submit half-yearly returns 'showing the average wages per month of unskilled and skilled labour — an able bodied agricultural labourer, and a syce or horse keeper as representative of a domestic servant being taken as type of the former and a common mason, carpenter or blacksmith being taken as a type of the latter. Information collected by tahsildars, mamlatdars, or, as in Bengal, by police officers in charge of thanas, forms the basis of the returns submitted by Collectors, and these after examination in the office of the Director of Agriculture or as in Madras, by the Board of Revenue, are published in the provincial Gazette. From these half-yearly returns, a series of comparative figures for selected (but not typical) districts in each province have been published annually in the "Prices and Wages" since 1884 together with the rates in the initial year 1873". The limitations of the series under reference will be discussed later on.

2. *The all-India wage rate*

2.1 Table 1 below gives the average all-India wage rate from 1873 to 1900 for three categories of workers mentioned in para 1.1 and 1.2. Columns (3), (5), (7) show their money-wages at current prices.

* The author is indebted to some of his colleagues for assistance and advice in processing and interpreting the data at all stages.

¹ India, Prices and wages in India, 1861-1911.

² Dutta, K. L., Report on an enquiry into the rise of prices, Chapter III. Calcutta, 1914.