

A STUDY ON THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WORKERS IN LARGE TEA ESTATES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE NILGIRIS DISTRICT OF TAMIL NADU IN INDIA

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Abstract: *India is one of the leading Economies in the world. Agriculture sector is playing a major role in the economy. This sector is not only feeding the masses of the economy but also provides the valuable employment to many people either directly and indirectly.*

Tea industry occupies an important place in the plantation sector. Tea is cultivated in many states of our nation and it contributes a lot for the economic progress of the nation. In tea industry, both men and women actively participate in the cultivation, production and processing of tea. The role of women in tea sector cannot be ignored.

The researcher has taken up the topic to analyze the economic status of workers in the tea industry with respect to women in the industry.

The current study uses primary data for the analysis.

The research found that the female workers are more in number than male workers, the saving habit as well as the capacity of the workers is very low and many workers are in debt due to insufficient income to meet their various ends.

There is a need for policy framework both at the central and state level to protect the tea industry and the betterment of the working groups in the tea sector.

Keywords: *Plantation sector, tea industry, women workers, economic status etc,*

INTRODUCTION

India is one of the leading Economies in the world both in terms of area and size of population in the world. The country is rich in many aspects like size of population with 1.27 billion next to China and with the work force of about 486.6 million and with the growth rate of around 5 per cent, with efficient policy makers and others. The performance of the economy is determined by many sectors. Among the various sectors like primary, secondary and service sector, the primary sector or the agriculture sector plays a major role in the overall performance of the

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economy. This sector is not only feeding the masses of the economy but also provides the valuable employment to many people either directly and indirectly. Its contribution to the national GDP is 18.1 per cent.

Plantation sector is one of the leading sectors in the economy. In many parts of our country, plantation crops like tea, coffee, rubber etc. are cultivated and it plays a major role in the economic progress of the economy. Tea production in India has increased from 853.7 Million Kgs. in 2001 to 1111.76 Million Kgs. in 2012 and the area under tea has also increased from 509,806 Hectare in 2001 to 578,000 hectares in 2011.

India is one the leading tea producing country next to China. The production, consumption, the area under tea cultivation and employment and income generation all are at tremendous height. Tea is cultivated in many states of our nation. It contributes a lot for the economic progress of the nation. India is one of the leading exporters of tea and it earns valuable foreign exchange by exporting the same to many nations. India exported about 182.6 Million Kgs. of tea in 2001 and the same has increased to 201.08 Million Kgs. in 2012.

Tea industry employs many workers for various processing activities. Both men and women actively participate in the cultivation, production and processing of tea. Tea is cultivated both under small and large scale. The small scale tea production is usually carried out at the family level itself and the large scale sector is owned and managed by the big giants.

Tea industry in India is considered to be the largest employer of men and women as well as the oldest in the plantation sector. It employs about 12 lakhs casual, seasonal and permanent workers throughout the sector. Most of the workers in the tea sector especially in tea estates are women. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of the women workers are tea pluckers. The role of women in tea sector cannot be ignored. Apart from doing the crucial house hold works, they are also actively participating in tea sector to support the monthly income of the family.

The researcher has taken up the topic to analyze the economic status of workers in the tea industry with respect to women in the industry.

STUDY AREA

The study area is the Nilgiris district, which is located in Tamil Nadu state. It is elongated in the east - west direction and bounded by 11°30' and 11°15' north latitude and 76°45' and 77°00' east longitudes. 57 per cent of the surface of the Nilgiris hills rises over 1000 meters above the mean sea level (MSL) and 47 per cent of that towers over 1800 meters with the pinnacle formed by the big mountain at 2670 meters. The total areal extent of the district is around 2551 Km² and is one of the smallest districts in the state. The district is bounded by the states on the

west by Kerala, on the north by Karnataka and on the Southeast and South by Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. The Nilgiris district comprises four taluks viz., Udthagamandalam (1199 Km²), Gudalur (726 Km²), Coonoor (229 Km²) and Kotagiri (397 Km²). There are 55 revenue villages and 640 hamlets in the district. Nilgiris is mostly hilly district located on the fragile environment of Western Ghats with an elevation ranging from 300 m in the Mayar Gorge to 2634 m above MSL at Doddabetta peak.

Major part of the district is under forest cover (56%) and 26 per cent of the district is under plantation crops such as tea, coffee, vegetables, areca nut, coconut etc., out of which tea plantation dominates and is found at all slopes. (1)

OBJECTIVES

The following are the important objectives of the study.

1. To study the composition of workers in tea industry.
2. To study the educational scenario of women workers in tea industry.
3. To study the income and expenditure pattern of workers in tea industry and
4. To study the saving capacity of the workers in the tea industry.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The researcher has selected the Nilgiri's district of Tamil Nadu for his research. The source of data is primary which has been collected from the workers through structured questionnaire method. The study comprising of four tea estates located in four blocks of the district. The sample size is 158 collected from all four tea estates. The researcher has selected four major tea estates from the study area. They are Pandiar tea estate, Gudalur, Deversola tea estate, Ootacamund, Non Such tea estate, Coonoor and Shanthi tea estates, Kotagiri. The researcher has used the basic statistic tools like simple average, per centage and other for the analysis purposes.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Socio-economic conditions of the South Indian tea plantation workers were examined by Raman (1986). Historically, colonization paved the way for the formation of plantation system in India During the early period, standard of living of workers in plantations was very poor. They were ill-fed, ill-housed and ill-treated, the researcher observes. Since independence, the constant protest of these labourers resulted in the introduction of Plantation Labour Act 1951. Raman also analyzed the labour market In Kerala and Tamil Nadu there are two types of workers, permanent and temporary. But in Karnataka, in addition to these permanent and

temporary workers, casual/contract workers are also engaged. An important factor noted by the investigator is that productivity of women workers is high. Living conditions of workers are poor with inadequate drinking water, poor housing facility and insufficient medical care.

Kurian (1990) made a study on socio-economic background and consumption pattern of women workers in tea plantation industries in Munnar, Idukki District in Kerala. The study was focused on the personal and family background of women workers their economic and living conditions, income and expenditure pattern, standard of living, social status, working conditions, welfare facilities and security. The tea industry is labour intensive and majority of workers are women. Information on households of the workers revealed the fact that women are major income earners of their family. Their educational status is very low. The workers get housing facility, electricity, day care facility, and social security benefits such as gratuity, family pension and maternity benefits. Despite all these facilities given by the companies, their socio-economic status is found to be very poor. They spend much of their income on food items. Their consumption of nutrients is found to be low. Medical care provided by companies, in general, is poor in quality. The women workers are facing many problems. Even though they are provided with housing facility, they have to travel by foot to distant places of work. In the work place, they are not provided with latrine facility; and they do not have any resting sheds. Leaf pluckers have no promotion and they do not have any recreation facility. The workers are not satisfied with the existing leave facilities and job security. The study suggests that the State, the management, and the trade unions have to give more attention to the problems of women workers.

Tea plantation industry is a labour intensive one and majority of workers are women. Concentrating on the role of women workers in trade unions Sarkar and Bhowmik (1988) made a study on West Bengal tea plantation industry. They found that participation of women in trade union activity is low, and the major reasons, according to them, are inequality, low literacy rate, low political consciousness and burden of the household duties.

Shyamal Chandra Sarkar (2013) studied the condition of tea garden workers of Jalpaiguri district in Colonial India. The study was conducted with the help of secondary data available from district gazettes. His study found that the situation of children and women workers in the tea gardens of Dooars is considerably worse in some areas. They are persecuted by the managers, watchmen and others in the tea garden. The workers were paid low wages and bound to do over - duty without bonus money. The garden workers had to borrow money at high interest from money lenders and they could not pack back with interest and they had to sell their children for relief from abysmal poverty. Most of the workers suffered from the lack of nourishment and proper medical treatment. There was no school for children and lack of safe drinking water. The workers could not maintain their

family smoothly. The study suggested that there is a need for creating a good relationship among owners, managerial staff and labourers. There is a need to set up a department to look into the welfare of tea garden labourers.

Kakali Hazarika (2012) studied the vulnerable living conditions of tea tribes and labourers under urbanized culture. The main source of data collected for the study are books, published literature of plantation companies, associations, journals, reports published by different organizations etc. Apart from that primary data collected from 1500 workers in six big tea gardens of Assam. It is found that women workers in India are facing one of the worst forms of exploitation in modern times. Wage cut policy of the employers affect productivity of the industry. His analysis suggested that measures must be taken to prevent availability of alcoholic beverages and gambling in and around tea garden areas. Women empowerment is urgent need for the tea garden workers and special value based education should be introduced.

Achyut Krishna Borah (2013) studied the socio - economic condition and income and expenditure pattern of plantation workers in Lepetkota tea estate in Assam. The study uses both primary and secondary data sources. The secondary data was conducted through journals, books and internet. The study found that majority of the Indian tea producers are not getting fair prices in the market for their tea and this passes to the workers as wage cuts and it further affects the tea industry without a strong and skilled labour force and there are lack of educational facilities for the children of the tea estate workers in the study area. The study also suggested that every worker must have bank account and deposit a few per cent of his income in the respective account, infrastructure facilities should develop in the study area so that the workers residential environment will improve and labour welfare department should regularly investigate the status of social security measures available in the tea gardens.

The literature reviewed above is centered about women workers in tea sector and their social and economic position. Taking this as a base, the study on the status of women workers in tea industry in the Nilgiris District has been done.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Human factors play a major role in the progress of a society and a nation. The role of workers in any economy cannot be ignored. India with a huge work force even attracts many nations to bring their capital also. Indian work force is not only efficient but also hard working. Plantation workers belonging to different categories of work specializes in different activities, especially in tea sector, male part specializes in all the works other than plucking of leaves and female part specializes in tea leaf plucking. The study on workers in tea industry has many characters. Some of the important features are given below.

Table 1
Sex of the Respondents' Area Wise

S.No.	Area of the respondents	Sex of the respondents		Total
		Male	Female	
1	Coonoor	3 (7.5)	37 (92.5)	40
2	Kotagiri	6 (15)	34 (85)	40
3	Ooty	12 (30)	28 (70)	40
4	Gudalur	4 (10.53)	34 (89.47)	38
	Total	25 (15.82)	133 (84.18)	158

Source: Primary data.

The table 1 reveals that out of the total number of workers from all the study areas is concerned; the number of female workers overtakes the number of male workers. Out of 158 respondents in the study area, the number of female are 133 and it constitutes 84.18 per cent and the number of male workers are 25 and it constitutes only 15.82 per cent. From all the study areas are considered, tea estate from Coonoor has highest number of female workers as compared to other tea estates. It constitutes 92.5 per cent which is the highest among the study areas. The study area with least number of female workers is in Ooty which has 28 workers and it constitutes only 70 per cent.

The reason for excess of female workers over male workers in tea estates is the female workers are preferred to male workers because the female workers are efficient in plucking tea leaves and male workers are preferred for other estate works like digging, pruning, manuring and others.

Table 2
Education Status of the Respondent

S.No.	Sex of the respondent	Education status of the respondent		Total
		Literate	Illiterate	
1	Male	24 (96)	1 (4)	25
2	Female	95 (71.42)	38 (28.58)	133
	Total	119 (75.31)	39 (24.69)	158

Source: Primary data.

Table 2 reveals the fact that out of total number of respondents, about 75.31 per cent of respondents are literates and 24.69 per cent are illiterates. Among the male and female workers, about 96 per cent of male and 71.42 per cent of female workers are educated. The male workers are dominating over female workers in education.

Table 3
Educational Qualification of the Respondent

<i>Sex of the respondent</i>	<i>Educational qualification</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Primary</i>	<i>Secondary</i>	<i>Higher secondary</i>	<i>Graduates/ Post graduates</i>	
Male	4 (16.66)	16 (66.66)	4 (16.66)	0	24
Female	36 (37.89)	54 (56.84)	4 (4.21)	1 (1.05)	95
Total	40 (33.61)	70 (58.82)	8 (6.72)	1 (0.84)	119

Source: Primary data.

Table 3 depicts the fact that out of the total number of workers educated; about 40 workers are qualified with primary education and it constitutes 33.61 per cent. The number of workers educated with secondary education is 70 and it constitutes about 58.82 per cent. The number of workers educated with higher education is about 8 and it constitutes 6.72 per cent and the number of graduates and post graduates are concerned, their number is 1 and it constitutes about 0.84 per cent. As far as women workers education is concerned, the highest number of workers educated with secondary education is more and it constitutes about 56.84 per cent.

Table 4
Annual Income of the Respondent

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Income Range</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1	Rs. 25,000 - Rs.50,000	157	99.4
2	above Rs. 1,00,000	1	.6
	Total	158	100.0

Source: Primary data.

Table 4 depicts that out of the four ranges of income of the respondents in the tea estates, majority of the workers are falling the income category of Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000. The number of respondents under this income category is about 157 and it constitutes 99.4 per cent. The next income category is about Rs. 1, 00,000 and the number of respondents are falling this income category is 1 and it constitutes about 6 per cent. This is because of the reason that as most of the family members belongs to the same profession and the wage they get is not very high and sometimes only one member of the family works and the remaining members depend on the same income for the entire family.

Table 5 reveals that out of the four categories of expenditure range of the respondents, the highest number of respondents belong to the monthly expenditure range of less than Rs. 5,000 category. The number of respondents belong to this monthly expenditure range is 79 and it constitutes about 50 per cent. The next highest monthly expenditure range is Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 7,500. The number of

Table 5
Monthly Expenditure of the Respondents

<i>S.No.</i>	<i>Expenditure range</i>	<i>Number of respondents</i>	<i>Per cent</i>
1	less than Rs. 5,000	79	50.0
2	Rs. 5,000 - Rs. 7,500	70	44.3
3	Rs. 7,500 - Rs. 10,000	5	3.2
4	above Rs. 10,000	4	2.5
	Total	158	100.0

Source: Primary data.

respondents belong to this category is 70 and it constitutes about 44.3 per cent. This is because of the reason that the estates itself provides quarters facilities, school facilities and other recreation facilities. The number of respondents belong to the next category are minimum in number i.e., 5 and 4 respectively. This is because of the reason that some children of the respondents do their higher studies in private schools and colleges and the annual education fee and other expenditure covers the major portion of the expenditure and the next reason is that in some of the families the number of members are large enough and all the members to be fed and looked after.

Table 6
Saving Position of the Respondent

<i>Saving Account</i>	<i>Per centage</i>
Yes	49 31.01
No	109 68.99
Total	158 100

Source: Primary data.

Table 6 reveals that out of the number of respondents interviewed about 49 respondents said that they have saving account and they save money either with bank or post office. It constitutes 31 only per cent and the number of respondents do not have bank account is about 109 and it constitutes 69 per cent. It is clear from the above table that since the income of the respondents is low, they cannot save money. Even if they save, they can save up to Rs. 2,000 only. Out of the total respondents who save money, about 47 prefer to save with banks and 2 with post offices 1 with both the banks and post office. The respondents who save money with banks constitute about 95.91 per cent. The reason is that saving with banks is considered as safe and respondents can also use ATM for their financial transactions.

Table 7
Debt Position of the Respondents

<i>Area of the respondents</i>	<i>Debt position of the respondents</i>		<i>Total</i>
	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>	
Coonor	38(95)	2(5)	40
Kotagiri	33(82.5)	7(17.5)	40
Ooty	34(85)	6(15)	40
Gudalur	23(60.52)	15(39.48)	38
Total	128(81.01)	30(18.99)	158

Source: Primary data.

Table 7 depicts that it is a common feature found among the estate workers that most of the workers in the estates say that they are in debt. In total, it is 128 workers out of 158 are in debt and it constitutes about 81.01 per cent. The block wise data reflects that about 38, 33, 34 and 23 respondents are in debt in Coonor, Kotagiri, Ooty and Gudalur block respectively. In per centage terms it is about 95, 82.5, 85 and 60.52 per cent respectively. It is found that in Coonor block the number of respondents in debt are higher than the other blocks. The common reason found are likely; low wages, higher studies of children of the family, medical expenses, higher inflation and others.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The following are the major findings of the study.

1. The number of female workers are more in number than male workers in all the blocks of the study area. The per centage of female workers in the study area is 84.18 against the per centage of male workers with 15.82.
2. The number of literates is more than illiterates in the study areas. Male workers are more literate than female workers in all the study blocks with 96 and 71.42 per cent respectively. The number of male and female workers educated with secondary school is more in all the study blocks with 66.66 and 56.84 per cent respectively.
3. The workers with the annual income range of Rs. 25,000 to Rs. 50,000 constitute about 99.4 per cent and the workers monthly expenditure range of up to Rs. 5,000 constitutes 50 per cent are more in all the blocks of the study area.
4. The study found that the saving capacity of the workers in the study area is very poor. Some of the workers are having bank account only but they do not have any saving amount. Only 31 per cent of workers are capable of saving money with banks and post offices. Even the debt position of the workers is high. It is about 81 per cent.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are made for the betterment of the working conditions of the working population of the estates.

1. The wage of the workers is very low. There is a need for policy measures to increase the wage of the workers in the estates.
2. The workers are met with the basic health problems in the health centers run by the management. So, there is a need for measures to cover even the complicated health issues to increase the efficiency and standard of the workers.
3. The workers should be motivated with the saving habit. The present saving habit of the workers will help them to meet their various obligations in the future.
4. To prevent the health of the workers, disease preventive instruments like rain coats, umbrella, rain shoes etc., should be supplied to them.

CONCLUSION

Despite certain difficulties faced by the Indian tea industry, it is still performing very well in terms of production, export, employment and foreign exchange earnings. There is a need for renovation in the Indian tea industry. One of the reports says that in north India, many of the tea factories were shutdown due to various issues. The effort is being taken by the Tea Board of India and UPASI in respect to tea industry is not enough to strengthen the working of the tea industry and concerted effort is needed to improve the progress of tea industry as well as the welfare of the working groups.

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