
Sustainable Livelihood and Economic Status of Tea Labourers in the Nilgiris District

Dr.M.Raja¹, Dr.C.Mythili²

¹Guest Lecturer, Government Arts College, Udumalpet,,

²Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Providence College for Women, Coonoor.

Corresponding Author: Dr.M.Raja

Abstract: 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. Hence, the researcher has taken up the topic to analyze the sustainable livelihood and economic status of workers in the tea industry with special reference to Nilgiris district.

Key Words: Tea Labour, Livelihood status, Education, Occupation.

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I. Introduction

The study is aimed at evaluating the socio-Economic problems of the Tea Labours in the Nilgiris. Tea is an-agro based export good, which plays an important role in India's export market. It brings additional foreign exchange for the country and provides employment to a large number of people specially the unskilled labours and women. Out of total 172000 hectares under tea cultivation in South India, Nilgiris individually accounts for about 90000 hectares and these results in produces tea of about 30 million kg of tea annually which is nearly 60% of the total population¹. As per the recommendations given by the plantation enquiry committee in 1956 about the benefit of the small growers, the Tamil Nadu government implemented the recommendations as suggest by the committee and placed cooperative tea factories in Nilgiris. This taken into account about the existence of the Industrial Co-operative Tea Factories (INDCO) in Nilgiris and the first INDCO tea factory was launched at Kundah in the year 1962 and currently there are 17 INDCO tea factories in Nilgiris district. The total earning of the foreign exchange through Tea Industry is equivalent of Rs.2300 croes but it is regretted that the tea plantation workers are still getting below the minimum wage of Agricultural workers. The wage of the tea industry labour has increased numerically since 1947, there has been no increase in real wages.

The work timings in the tea estates are from 8 am to 5 pm in standard Indian time. The legally permissible lunch interval is 12 – 1 pm. But during the season of high growth of tea leaves, the workers are ordered to report for work nearly 12 hours from 6 am to 6 pm or even sometimes it exceeds to 7 pm with a very short lunch break without any rest intervals. The legally permissible temporary leave and medical leave are not granted. In some places, if leave beyond the granted leave are taken due to ill health without medical certificate, then 5 days wages are deducted from the salary. Every year hundreds of tea plantation workers are affected from water-borne diseases, like Gastro-Enteritis. There is no drinking water facilities and drainage systems is most of the plantations. Most of the workers are suffering from Anemia and Tuberculosis, where malaria is widely spread. It affects the children and the women mostly. Leech bite and Snake bite are the major problem in the plantation field but no proper medical treatment and prevention measures are totally out of clutch. Wild animals are often seen in the plantation field and no proper security measures are provided. The death ratio due to the above said bites and the wild animals is consistent. The health system is not effective.

Most of the tea workers are tribal, schedule castes and repatriates. So they are not able to protect against the atrocities and to enjoy the special status as they are crushed. For a tea plantation workers whose forefathers were indentured immigrants and where born and brought up inside the tea gardens and dismissal means not only the loss of livelihood but threat to their general existence. Even though the plantation workers are considered to Tea labor and Ex-tea working community, their children are compelled to join the Tea Labour work force as unskilled workers after passing from the lower primary schools of gardens. In addition, the children not receive any educational and alternative employment opportunity; of late certain slight exemptions are happening in this district.

II. Objectives

The main objective of the study are following

- 1) To know the socio – economic back ground of tea labour in the Nilgiris District.
- 2) To Analyse the livelihood improvement status of the Tea Labour.
- 3) To assess the relationship among the socio – economic characterise of the Tea labour with their livelihood improvement status.

III. Methodology

Multistage random sampling technique was followed in the selection of the sample households. In the first stage Nilgiris district was selected. In order to reach the objectives of the study, a sample survey was conducted inside the tea plantation estates in Nilgiris District and the responses were collected from the workers of the tea plantation estates in Nilgiris District. The source of data is primary which has been collected from the workers through structured questionnaire method. The sample size is restricted to 300 comprising of four taluks of the district.

Table 1
SAMPLE SIZE IN THE SELECTED TALUK

Name of the Taluk	Number of respondents
Coonoor	75
Kotagiri	75
Ooty	75
Gudalur	75

To analyze the primary data the researcher has used different statistical tools like percentage method, frequency analysis, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), correlation, Regression analysis, t test and Chi-square method.

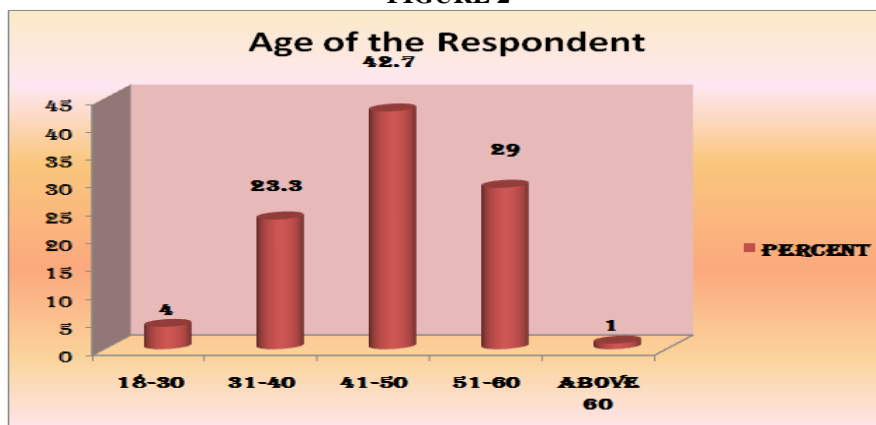
IV. Results And Discussions

FIGURE 1
Educational Status of the Respondent



The above diagram represents the literacy level of the labourers. Majority of the respondents have only school education. The main reason for this low literacy is because the members are from an economically poor family background which is the obstacle for them to pursue higher education.

FIGURE 2



About 4 percent of the respondents who are working come under the category between the age group of 18-30, 23.3 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 31-40, 42.7 percent of the members belong to the age group of 41-50, 29 percent of the respondents belong to the age group of 51-60 and 1 percent of the respondents belong to the age group above 60. Out of the total 300 respondents, the highest number of respondents belong to the age group of 41-50.

**TABLE 2
OCCUPATION OF THE RESPONDENT**

Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Plucking	260	86.7
Pruning	2	.7
Factory labour	38	12.7
Total	300	100.0

Source: Computed values

The above table shows the occupation of the respondents. The labourers involved in plucking constitute about 86.7 percent, in pruning, 7 percent and as factory labourers 12.7 percent. Majority of the labourers are engaged in plucking tea leaves.

**TABLE 3
INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS**

Income	Frequency	Percent
4000 to 5000	12	4.0
5000 to 6000	1	3
6000 to 7000	129	43.0
7000 to 8000	45	15.0
8000 to 9000	56	18.7
10000 to 15000	57	19.0
Total	300	100.0

Source: Computed values

This table clearly represents the monthly income of the respondents. The respondents earning an income between Rs.4000-5000 is 4.0 percent, 3 percent of the respondents earn an income between Rs.5000-6000, 43 percent earn an income between Rs.6000-7000, 15 percent between Rs.7000-8000, 18.7 percent earn an income between Rs.8000-9000 and 19 percent of the respondents earn an income between Rs.10000-15000. Majority of the respondents earn an income of Rs.6000-7000.

**TABLE 4
EDUCATION AND MONTHLY INCOME OF THE RESPONDENT**

	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.872	2	1.436	.536	.585
Within Groups	795.128	297	2.677		
Total	798.000	299			

Source: Computed values

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant difference between monthly income and education of the respondents.

Alternative hypothesis: There is significant difference between monthly income and education of the respondents.

To estimate and compare the respondents monthly income and education, analysis of variance is performed. From the table it reveals that, there is no significant difference between monthly income and education of the respondent. Those who are completed school education are earning a higher monthly income than the other respondents. Hence null hypothesis is accepted.

Saving Behavior

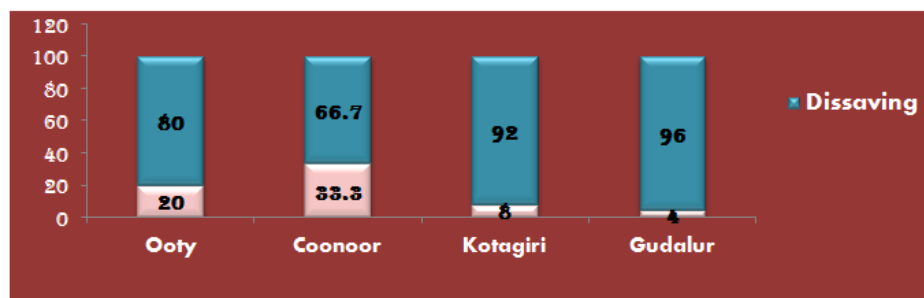
**TABLE 5
RESPONDENT FOR THE SAVING HABIT**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Yes	26	8.7
No	274	91.3
Total	300	100.0

Source: Computed values

The above table explains the respondent's saving habits. It shows that 91.3 percent of the respondents have no saving habits, only 8.7 percent of the respondents have saving habits. This is because of low income and no awareness.

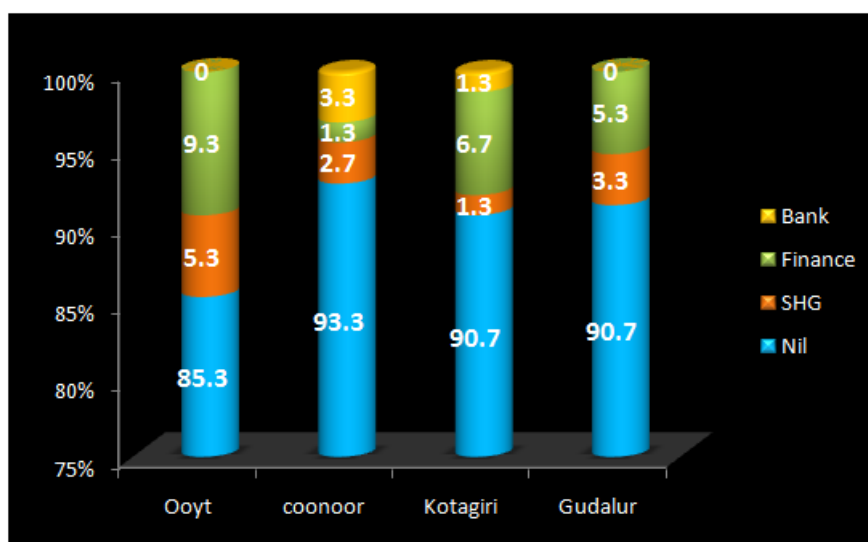
FIGURE 3
Saving Habits of the Respondents



Incidence of indebtedness

Poverty and indebtedness generally go together. Low income coupled with lack of proper employment also induces these households to borrow money to meet both current expenditure and also unforeseen expenses.

FIGURE 4
Source of Debt



The above figure shows the various sources of debt of the respondents. Out of the total 300 respondents, 90 percent of the respondents do not depend on debt for their survival, 6 percent of the respondents depend on finance, 3.3 percent depend on self-help group and 2 percent of the respondents depend on the bank as a source of debt. Majority of the respondents do not get loans. Others depend on Self-help group and finance due to easy availability and low interest rate.

TABLE 6
IMPACT OF EDUCATION, OCCUPATION AND AGE ON TOTAL INCOME OF THE RESPONDENTS

Model Summary			
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.527	.278	.268	.37753

ANOVA ^a					
Mode	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	16.151	4	4.038	28.330	.000
Residual	42.045	295	.143		
Total	58.197	299			

Source: Computed values

Coefficients					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.419	.196		12.331	.000
Education of the respondent	.059	.052	.059	1.141	.055
Occupation of the respondent	.007	.013	.025	.503	.015
Age of the Respondent	.007	.027	.013	.249	.004
Assest Owned	-.694	.066	.524	-10.498	.140

Source: Computed values

Null Hypothesis: There is no significant contribution of Education, occupation, Age and Asset owned by the respondent with their total income.

Alternative hypothesis: There is significant contribution of Education, occupation, Age and Asset owned by the respondent with their total income.

The regression analysis is used to find out the contribution of education, occupation, age factor and total asset owned by the respondent with their total income. From the table it reveals that the variables like Education, Occupation and age factors plays an important role on the respondent total income and the remaining variable asset owned doesn't cause any impact on total income. So the null hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Employment details

**TABLE 7
CASUAL OR PERMANENT LABOUR**

Name of the Taluk	Casual or Permanent Labour		Total
	Casual Labour	Permanent Labour	
Ooty	30 (40 %)	45 (60%)	75 (100%)
Coonoor	26 (34.7%)	49 (65.3%)	75 (100%)
Kothagiri	23 (30.7%)	52 (69.3%)	75 (100%)
Gudalur	37 (49.3%)	38 (50.7%)	75 (100%)
Total	116 (38.7%)	184 (61.3%)	300 (100%)

Source: Computed values

The table shows that among 300 labourers who are working in the taluk, there are a total of 116 casual labourers and 184 permanent labourers. The number of permanent labourers is high since the permanent labourers income is high.

V. Conclusion

Sustainability standards have not had an impact upon workers income in India, because of the wide reach of unions and the collective bargaining agreement on wages and incentives for factory workers and pluckers on tea estates. There is traditionally, a relatively high level of unionization. Further, a shortage of labour means that workers' rights are relatively well respected with most having permanent contracts. Temporary workers are paid social security, for example, not because of certification to a standard, but due to the labour shortage, which means that estates to retain their labour force. This shortage of labour has led many estates to recruit migrant workers from Northern India, who are treated on a par with local workers – there is no obvious discrimination in employment opportunities. Soil management and conservation measures have been instituted, and these are contributing to healthier ecosystems upon which the estate (and ultimately worker livelihoods) depends, but not immediate short-term poverty impacts for workers. According to the management they have experienced financial problems, which have led to employee-employer tensions. The estates say that the documentation and measures required by the sustainability standard systems are a burden, but also bring benefits in terms of ensuring that the issues in question are treated systematically and are written down.

Although the estate management reported rising input costs, they say they have weak bargaining power and the prices they receive from their buyers have not kept pace with these rises and do not allow them to raise workers' wages. As well as profitability challenges, there are very serious labour shortage issues ahead, as the workforce ages and the children of workers obtain employment elsewhere.

VI. 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.

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