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**A STUDY ON PROBLEM FACED BY THE TEA PLANTATION  
WOMEN WORKERS  
IN WAYANAD DISTRICT**

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**Abstract**

The relation between nation's prosperity and women condition can be understood by the famous quote given by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru, "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women." India is a traditional country and there is diversity in religions, culture and customs. Role of the women in India mostly is household and limited to domestic issues. Female workers form the largest segment of India's unorganized workforce.

Majority of women work in unorganized sectors for low wages due to low level of skills, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour and thus face high level of exploitation.

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Key words: wage, conveyance, exploitation etc.,

### **Introduction**

“Empowering Women is a prerequisite for creating a good nation, when women are empowered, society with stability is assured. Empowerment of women is essential as their value systems lead to the development of a good family, good society and ultimately good nation” –

Dr.

A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

The National Commission for Women estimates that 94 percent of the total female workforce is to be found in the unorganized sector. The presence of a vast multitude of women as workers and producers in the unorganized sector, where earnings are low, employment seasonal and insecure, supportive services woefully inadequate or even nonexistent, growth opportunities few and collective organization weak, has brought into sharp focus the failure of the mainstream to alleviate their predicament. While it is true that workers, irrespective of sex, are exploited in the unorganized sector, women suffer more by the fact of their gender. The changing patterns of economic development in the liberalization era have put a heavy burden on women, which is reflected in their health status. The small farmers, landlessness, forced migration both temporary and permanent, have undoubtedly affected women's health, nutritional and emotional status. The growth of small and cottage industries has depended heavily on female labour. Women work in industries like tea plantation workers, tanning, tobacco, cashew, coir, textiles, garment, fish processing and canning, construction and domestic work, etc. In all these industries, they toil long hours at low paid, skilled or unskilled workers. As a result they face serious health problems related to work place, hazards of pollutants on women who work during adolescence, and pregnancy have serious consequences on women. Women work the most; paradoxically they earn the least in life.

The additional social responsibility shouldered by them, their subordinate status in society, patriarchal family set up, socio-economic backwardness, proneness for occupation in the unorganized sector with low productivity and marginalization in employment opportunities account for their poor or low earning skills, illiteracy, ignorance and surplus labour and thus face high level of exploitation. This hampers their bargaining power for higher wages and any opportunities for further development.

#### TEA PLANTATION WORKERS

The living and working conditions of the plantation workers especially women with low wages is very poor. Most of the workers in Munnar plantation are Tamil-speaking dalit migrants. In North East India, the workers are migrants from poor tribal families. Most of the workers are women. Many of them live in one room line houses with no sanitation and basic facilities like drinking water. Many families are left malnourished and are vulnerable to the communicable diseases. There are no medical facilities available. There are issues related to exposure to the chemicals used in plantation estates which may affect their health. There is little scope for the quality education to their children and in many cases children are employed for work. There is an absence of trade unions to represent their problems to the management. Even if there are any trade unions, they are male-dominated and ignored the issues of women workers. The absence of trade unions and the state on the one hand, and the exploitative management on the other hand resulted in miserable life for the workers. The plantation managements turned their estates into mini empires. They denied the minimum wages for the workers. In many cases, there are defaults in the worker's payment.

The tea plantation workers in India are covered by the Plantation Labour Act (PLA), 1951, which regulates the working and living conditions

of workers. It also prescribes standards for housing, healthcare and education, regulates working conditions including maximum working hours, overtime payments, child labour, paid leave, and sickness and maternity benefits. But there is an absence of state to implement the act.

#### **Scope of the study:**

i. If the Government is really interested in safe guarding the minimum interest and rights of the plantation workers, the findings in this research will suitably vouch a landmark achievement in their target. ii. The implementation of these research findings will uplift the plantation labour community in all status and it will be the great example for a Government which is really interested in democracy. iii. Democracy means equality in all aspects which will be proved by amending these findings which has to be supervised by a committee and the committee should have an administrative and judicial powers as the execution of Law is more important than the making of it. iv. The suggestions stated in this research were born after the great painful efforts and if the suggestions are amended in the plantation labour act and plantation labour rules with suitable provisions that proves that Law will sleep but never die. v. Many people will get job opportunity and the plantation labour community will also reach a good status in the society thereby proving all are equal before Law and in the society.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

There are many scholars who have done research on women working in different sectors. However, there are very few who have done research on problems of women workers in construction industry. Here is the gist of their work.

**Anand, (1998)** analyzed the characteristics of the construction workers, predominantly migrant workers and the intervention strategies adopted to facilitate the reach out services to these women workers along with awareness of their rights and utilization. He suggested that NGOs and other organizations can play a vital role through campaigning and active participation by creating awareness amongst these women workers and unionism and cooperatives

would yield results as far as struggle for better wages and working conditions are concerned.

**Rajasekhar D.,J.Y. Suchitra (2006)** conducted a study on Employment Security for The Un-organised Sector Workers in Karnataka. This study covered agriculture, construction and domestic workers of 4 districts of Karnataka. The objective of this study was to examine the requirement of employment security in unorganized sector and the problem faced by workers without employment security. It was found that inter and intra-sectoral heterogeneity among these occupational groups was the main factor for the policies aiming at ensuring their employment security. Results indicated that the same policy for all occupational groups of unorganized sector would not work as different groups have different problems.

**Kumar M. Dileep (2012)** conducted a study on Inimitable Issues of Construction Workers: Case Study. Construction workers are available everywhere in all countries. The percentage of construction workers is more in developing countries like India as employment intensity is much higher in lower income countries than higher income ones. This study was conducted in 82 construction sites. Migrated construction workers faced some major problems like poor health condition, arduous working life, harassment, inadequate and unequal wage structure, long working hours, poor housing facilities, and atrocities on women workers, lack of safety measures and proper education for children of construction workers. The study stressed on the need to create awareness of all labour rights and recommended proper intervention programme as well as proper implementation of labour law for this sector.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nowadays more rural and urban women were going for tea plantation works. The reason for such shift in occupation is reduced agricultural activities due to poor rainfall & cost hike. As the living cost is high to make ends meet women choose alternative jobs. She has to overcome at home,

workplace, health problem, family problems, sexual harassment and social issues. The researcher has noticed many tea plantation workers in hotspots like, Wayanad District of Kerala. These women seem to be in pressure to identifying the availability of works, distance to be travelled to new workplace, insecurity about work and reaching home late in evening. This influenced the researcher to do research about such women working in tea estates. So, the researcher wants to study the problems faced by the tea plantation workers in areas of occupation, social, family and personal aspects

### **The study objectives are**

To study the problems faced by the women tea plantation workers in Wayanad District.

### **Methodology of the study**

<b>Item</b>	<b>Description</b>
Research Design	Descriptive and Conclusive in Nature
Type of Population	Women employees employed in tea plantation women workers in Wayanad at Kerala
Population Source List	Obtained from the various tea estates records, pay roll etc.,
Sample source	Derived from the population source of selected tea plantation at in Wayanad at Kerala
Sampling Unit	Women employees working in Tea plantation estates
Sampling Method	Multi stage sampling. The entire Kerala state was divided into district wise and samples were obtained from the known population of women employees belonging to tea plantation women workers based on the method of cluster and from every tea estates the samples were drawn through random basis in a disproportionate method.
Sample Size	370
Sampling Plan	Tea plantation women workers
Sources of Data	Both Primary and Secondary Data
Sources of Primary Data	Obtained from the respondents of women employees from tea estates through structured questionnaire
Sources of Secondary Data	Gathered from the previous studies, government related gazette, census and periodicals
Nature of Questionnaire	A structured questionnaire with suitable scaling

Types of Questions	Open ended, closed ended, itemized ranking and Likert scale
Pre testing	The questionnaire was pre tested for its validity and reliability among the selected respondents, opinion leaders who are actively presenting in the industry. Based on their opinion some of the modifications were drawn and restructured questionnaire was used for the survey purpose
Testing of validity	Was done to check the content, criteria validity
Testing of Reliability	Cronbach alpha value (0.710 or 71%)
Statistical tools used	Friedman Rank Test and Chi Square test

**Limitations of the study:** In spite of detailed analysis made in the present study, this study is not free from limitations. The following are the important limitations: i. The study is purely based on the views of 370 respondents only and hence the results may not be universally applicable. ii. The geographical area of this study is confined only to Wayanad District. iii. The study is period specific. iv. The survey is collected from various tea estates and union selected using convenient sampling method. v. The limitations of this method are applicable to this study.

## ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETRATION

### vi) FRIEDMAN RANK TEST

The Friedman test ranks the scores in each row of the data file independently of every other row. The Friedman Chi-square tests the null hypothesis that the ranks of the variables do not differ from their expected value. For a constant sample size, the higher the value of this chi-square statistic, the larger the difference between each variables rank sum and its expected value

TABLE . NO. 4.33  
PROBLEM FACED BY TEA PLANTATION WOMEN WORKERS

S.No.	problem	Mean Score	Rank
1	Long Distance	4.48	7

2	Lack of conveyance	4.30	8
3	Health problems	4.52	4
4	Low salary/wage	4.59	1
5	Fringe benefits are inadequate	4.49	6
6	Away from play of stay	4.57	2
7	Low status job	4.51	5
8	Less freedom in work	4.54	3

Source: Primary Data.

This table lists the mean rank of each variable. High rank corresponds to the higher values of the variables. It reveals the ranking of reason for selecting the products. “Low salary/wage” was ranked first by the selected sample respondents with the mean score of 4.59. “Away from play of stay ” was ranked second with the mean score of 4.57. “Less freedom in work” and “Health problems” occupied third and fourth position with the mean score of 4.54 and 4.52 respectively. “Low status job” was ranked fifth with the mean score of 3.19. “Lack of conveyance ” occupied last position with the mean score of 4.30. It is evident that most of the respondents gave top priority to Low salary/wage as the first rank for reason for selecting the products. The Friedman test determines if the average ranking differs across variables.

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference between mean ranks for respondent’s problem faced tea estates in Wayanad District.

#### Friedman Test – Chi-Square test

No. of Respondents	Chi-Square value	DF	S/NS	Remarks
370	144.177	7	s	.000

Source: Primary Data.



This table lists the result of the Friedman test. For these rankings, the chi-square value is 144.177, Degree of freedom is equal to the number of values minus 1. As 8 options are ranked, there are 7 degrees of freedom. It is clear from the above table that significance level is 0.000 at one percent level of significance. Hence the hypothesis is rejected. At least one of the variables differs from the others.

### **SUGGESTIONS OF THE STUDY**

1. Since women workers lack in salary reasonable salary should be provided to them to enhance their skill level.
2. Women workers should be educated and make them aware about their rights and legislative provisions.
3. It is very much essential to create awareness among women workers about the institutional support available to them to protect their rights.
4. A comprehensive law is needed to protect the rights of women workers.
5. Any kind of exploitation including sexual harassment of women workers is to be prevented and stringent action needs to be taken against the wrong doer.
6. Mass media should be used to communicate the social message relating to women equality.
7. A separate women grievance cell headed by a woman should be established in every organization sector and in case of unorganized sector women to form self-help groups for their protection.
8. Necessary amendments are required to be made in labour laws. There should be proper regulation of unorganized sector industries, which ensure job security, healthy work environment and at least minimum wages, maternity and child care benefits.

### **Conclusion of the study**

Tea plantation falls under unorganized sector of an economy. Unorganized laborers refer to those workers who have not been able to organize themselves in pursuit of their common interest owing to certain

constraints like casual and uncertain nature of employment, ignorance and illiteracy, small and scattered size of establishment. They are working under unsecured environment or work culture. The scenario only can be changed with the government intervention, by implementing the policies strictly. Strict action has to be taken against all those who harass the employees. It is very necessary to all workers to know about Government Schemes. The status of the women only can be improved when major transition in the society occurs and that can be achieved by mind set transition. More research is required in this area to suggest solutions to existing problems and on issues like social security and positive impact of unions and labour Acts on the workers.

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