

# Migration of Labour in Indian Agriculture with Special Reference to Tea Industries in the Nilgiris' District of Tamilnadu

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## Abstract:

India is one of the fastest growing economies in the world with the total population size of 135 crores. Out of which 56.7 percent of the total population is still depending upon agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. With the growth of population size and increase in the size of urbanisation, it is evident that there are chances for migration of labour from one part of the country to other parts. It is estimated that the migrated population is around 139 million as per 2011 census.

Labour migration is also found in Indian plantation industry. It is even common in tea plantation also. It has its impact on the workers' life, the society, the concerned sector and the economy as a whole.

The researcher has taken up this issue to analyse the nature of and reason for labour migration in tea industry in the Nilgiris district of Tamilnadu. The research has used primary data with the sample size of 292 for analysis. Simple statistical and econometric tools are used to analyse data.

It is found that 46.57 percent respondents have migrated from other areas out of which 96.32 percent belong to Scheduled Caste and 3.68 percent belong to backward class. It is also found that the large number of the migrants are women. There are both inward and outward migration of labour found in the tea industry. It is suggested that in order to control this, there is a need for fixing up the nominal and reasonable wage rate for the workers and also there is a need for fixing up minimum support price for tea leaves as like rice, wheat, sugarcane by the government. There are still opportunities for further research work on other aspects of tea estate workers in the same industry.

**Keywords:** Labour migration, wage rate, large tea estates, small tea estates, minimum support price etc.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

India is the second leading populated country in the world next to China and even the recent data reveals that by 2038, India will overtake China and by that time China's population size would be declining and will become the second populated country in the world. It is the population explosion and density results in many economic issues and that lead to the migration of labour to many parts of the country.

The term "migrant worker" refers to a person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national." – **United Nations definition.**

"Labour migration is defined as the movement of persons from their home State to another State for the purpose of employment." - **Labour and Facilitated Migration Division, IOM International Organisation for Migration (IOM)**

Labour migration has become one of the important features of Indian plantation industry. Labour migration is even common in tea plantation. It is reported that 314.54 million people have moved from their native places to other parts of the country and among those 29.90 million or 9 % have migrated in search of a suitable work (Indian Labour Journal, September, 2014). It is again said that the interstate migration of labour has increased substantially over

the years in India. It has increased to 90 lakhs annually during the year 2011-2016 (The economic survey, 2016-17). The rate of migration is found to be high (more than double) among women workers when compared to the male workers. It is also reported that higher rate of migration is found from less affluent states and districts and move towards the rich metropolitan cities in search of jobs.

It is reported that more number of people migrate from the states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and which accounts for about 1/2 of total migrated population and the largest recipient are southern states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala, Gujarat etc. Delhi is said to be the largest recipient of the migrated population in India (The Hindu, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2017)

A study conducted on Tea Estate Workers in Kotagiri Hills, South India in 1985 suggests that the workers' economic status in their native places is one of the push factors for migration from the state to state itself (Heidemann and Mizushima, 1985).

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Heidemann and Mizushima (1985) studied the labour migration to tea estates in Tamil Nadu. The study used data from Provident Fund Record and the Employees' Register File. The study covered all permanent workers. The study found that each estate has particular areas of recruitment. The workers' native places are highly concentrated in certain areas, there are two main areas sending considerable number of workers irrespective of estates. The one is in the adjoining taluks to the Nilgiris hills, especially in the Coimbatore district and Palghat district and the other is in southern Salem – northern Tiruchirappalli area, the location of the first area indicates that the proximity of the estates from the workers' native places is one of the contributing factors in their choice of working places and the Kangany recruitment system was the determinant factor on spatial pattern of estate workers' origin. The study suggested that one of the

subject remain to be done is to gather detailed information on migration from all the villages in a certain locality.

Amol Dutta (2003) studied the Human migration in West Bengal. Human migration is one of the most important aspects of social sciences. Migration process has been an important factor in the areas of development and changes in the present day society. Migration appears and is recognised as one of the most important areas of contemporary research in population studies. It has immense importance in the context of North Bengal region. The existence of large number of tea gardens (plantations), forest plantations, considerable forest areas specially in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri district, abundant waste lands and ample empty spaces and, together with these the existence of three international borders, viz., Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan have contributed to a continuous flow of migrants to this region. The study found that economic factors indeed can never be the singular factor behind the occurrence of human migration. Other factors have also similarly been important in which the role of social factors is overwhelming to promote voluntary human migration.

Priya and John (2006) studied the rural labour market and migration for poverty reduction. The study was conducted as a part of World Development Report 2008 using the case study from five parts of India namely Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and Jharkhand and Bangladesh. The study found that seasonal migration has emerged as an important livelihood option for rural labouring household in low agricultural productivity situation. The study suggested that there is a need to recognize that livelihoods are multi – locational and provide people with an environment where they can make informed choices, and mobility must be supported through the development of migrant friendly services.

Horen (2012) studied the labour relations practices in tea industry of Assam with special reference to Jorhat district of Assam. The research has taken a total of 300 samples and 100 samples each in three tea estates. The research is based on primary data. The study has been conducted during 2000 to 2010. The study found that most of the workers have migrated from the neighbouring states like Odissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and other parts of India and were brought by Britishers to work in tea gardens in Assam. But the workers are dissatisfied with recruitment procedure, wage system and settlement of disputes. The analysis suggested that the estates should evolve and develop a mechanism to help labour relation activities.

Rymbai et al. (2012) studied the factors associated with labour supply for the plantation and productivity in Meghalaya. The study was conducted during the period 2004 – 2010. The study has taken 40 samples. The main source of data is primary data collected through pre-tested questionnaire. The study found that labour shortage has affected the production and productivity in the tea estate due to the migration of labour from rural to urban areas. MGNREGS has high impact on supply of labour in the tea estates. The study suggested that proper work calendar to be adopted for the MGNREGS programme and the programme should be undertaken during lean period to manage labour shortage.

Shymal (2013) studied the condition of tea garden workers of Jalpaiguri district in Colonial India. The study says that most of the tea garden workers were imported from Bihar and Nepal. As local workers are not enough to meet the plantation industries requirement, the English planters imported a huge number of workers from backward tribal areas to Bengal and Assam. The study found that low wages, over duty, deprivation of opportunity has affected the working capacity of the workers. The study suggests that there is a need for creating good

relationship among owners, Managerial staff and labourers.

RaneBehal (2013) studied the South Asian labour migration flows across the Bay of Bengal into South East Asia and within the subcontinent during colonial rule. The study says that the growing demand for raw materials and other tropical agricultural products in the west led to the establishment of large – scale plantations, for which a labour force was mobilised from different parts of the Indian subcontinent. The paper attempts to tell that the marginalised agrarian communities, who were economically depressed became an emigrant labour for Assam, Ceylon and Malaya plantations. The study has used both quantitative and qualitative secondary data through the documents of the British Empire. The study found that the Indian agrarian communities were mobilised and transported to distant localities of the British Empire to perform labour in plantations set up by British Capital. The tribal and peasants from Chotanagpur, Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and South India were transferred to Assam, Ceylon and Malaya as plantation coolies.

### **A. Research Methodology**

#### *Objectives of the study*

To find out the prominence of labour migration in tea industry.

#### *Research problem*

Tea estates have both inward and out ward migrationof labour. The native labour has the tendency to move out of Nilgiris for educational and monetary pursuits. The small tea estates are owner cultivated and employ mostly family labour. When cost of cultivation escalates and revenue dwindles, the smaller tea estates find tea cultivation uneconomical. Hence, labour from small tea estates migrate outward. On the other hand, larger tea estates employ labour for wages and the less fortunate labour from other states (particularly from North India) migrate to Nilgiris. Labour from other states migrate into Nilgiris for employment in tea

estates, as employment opportunities in their native states are meagre.

### Study area

This study is confined to the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu alone. There are four blocks of the district namely; Coonoor, Kotagiri, Ootacamund and Gudalur selected for the present study.

### Sampling data and method

The data for the present study has been collected from the workers working in tea estates belonging to the four blocks of the Nilgiris District of Tamilnadu .The present study is based on the primary data collected through structured sampling questionnaire method.

### Method of analysis

The researcher has applied basic econometric and statistical tools to analyze the data.

## III. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 4.1: Size of the sample

S. No.	Area	Number of Samples	Male	Female
1	Coonoor	93	23	71
2	Kotagiri	85	20	64
3	Ooty	67	16	51
4	Gudalur	47	11	36
<b>Total</b>		<b>292</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>222</b>

Source: Primary data.

The table 4.1 reveals that there are 292 samples taken for the study out of the total working tea estate population which is hardly 2% of the total working population in the district. Out of 292 samples taken, there are 70 male and 222 female workers found in the study which constitutes 23.97 percent and 76.02 percent respectively. It is again clear that the number of female workers are more than the number of male workers in the study area which concludes that the tea estates are employing more women

workers than male workers for various works like planting, plucking and weeding.

Labour migration is the integral part of Indian agriculture. It is happening regularly due to some reasons. The same is also found in plantation industry where it is common in tea industry. The study reveals that 15.38 percent of workers in small tea estates and 64.7 per cent of workers in large tea estates have migrated to the Nilgiris district from other districts of Tamil Nadu and the other states of India. Large tea estates are able to attract labour from outside Nilgiris because of better working conditions and assured income. Since the small tea estates practice crop sharing agreements, migrated labour are less attracted towards the small tea estates.

Table 4.2: The number of migrated workers details

S. NO	AREA	NUMBER OF WORKERS	CATEGORY	
			SC	BC
1	Coonoor	48	47	01
2	Kotagiri	22	18	04
3	Ooty	41	41	0
4	Gudalur	25	25	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>136</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>05</b>

Source: Primary data.

The table reveals that out of 292 samples taken for the study, there are 136 migrated labour found in the study area which constitutes 46.57 percent. The data from the other side of the schedule on workers category states that workers belonging to SC category are more in number when compared to the workers belonging to BC category. The SC category workers constitute 96.32 percent and BC constitutes 3.67 percent. It is clear from the above table that more number of SC category migrated workers are found in tea estates than the other category workers.

Table 4.3: Details on the origin of the workers

S. No.	Area	Other Country	Other States	Other Districts	Other Towns/villages	Number of workers
1	Coonoor	04	06	35	03	48
2	Kotagiri	01	02	18	01	22
3	Ooty	0	5	36	0	41
4	Gudalur	0	0	25	0	25
<b>Total</b>		05	13	114	04	136

Source: Primary data.

Table 4.3 depicts that more number of workers have migrated from other districts into the Nilgiris' district. The workers are mostly found entering into the district from Coimbatore, Namakkal, Tirunelveli, Ramnad, Chennai and Karur. The number of workers migrated into the district from other districts is 114 which constitutes 83.82 percent, from other states like Utter Pradesh, Jarkand, Bihar, Kerala and others are 13 which constitutes 9.5 percent, from other country in the sense that many people have

immigrated into Tamil Nadu and again into the Nilgiris districts from Srilanka due to national issue is 5 which constitutes 3.67 percent and the movement from other parts of the town and villages is 4 which constitutes 2.94 percent. It is clear that the number of workers who have migrated from other district is more which is due to the drought situation, low wages paid, family obligation, under employment etc.

Table 4.4: Reason for migration of workers

S. No.	Area	Good job	Good pay	compulsion	Number of workers
1	Coonoor	42	02	04	48
2	Kotagiri	21	0	01	22
3	Ooty	41	0	0	41
4	Gudalur	25	0	0	25
<b>Total</b>		129	02	05	136

Source: Primary data.

The table 4.4 depicts that there are few reasons behind the migration of labour from their own nativity to the Nilgiris' district. In general, agricultural labour migrate from one place to another place usually during off season (during scarcity of water and no cultivation is taking place) and some others due to overall failure of the same. As far as the tea industry is concerned, it is the failure of the industry has led to increase in outflow of workers towards Chennai, Coimbatore, Tirupur and some to Bangaluru in search of good job and to meet their

children education requirement. It is observed clearly from the present research that 94.85 percent of workers have migrated for job purpose, 1.47 percent for good pay and 3.67 percent out of compulsion on the part of the government due to change in policy.

### Findings and Suggestions

The following are the important findings of the research study.

1. It is found that out of the total number of respondents 292, 222 are female and 70 are male. It constitutes 76.02 and 23.97 percent which implies that more women workers are employed by the tea industry.

2. It is also found that 136 people out of 292 have migrated from other parts of the country to the Nilgiris' district which constitutes 46.51 percent. Among the number of people migrated into the district, 96.32 percent belong to SC community.

3. The origin from which the people have migrated is concerned, it is observed that more people have migrated from other districts than other states, other country and other towns and cities. The number itself is 114 out of 136 totally migrated which constitutes 83.82 percent.

4. As far as the reason for which people have migrated is concerned, it is understood that more people have preferred the option good job. The number of people have opted this option is 129 out of 136 which constitutes 94.85 percent.

Based on the findings of the study, the following important suggestions are made.

1. The large tea estates are comfortable when migrated labour from other places seek employment. Since most of the migrated labour are not educated, and have language and communication barriers the large tea estates are able to employ them at lower than market wage. (Study reveals that the migrated labour are paid only 60% as wages that are normally paid to 'local' labour).

2. In order to overcome the shortage of labor in tea industry, MGNREG Scheme should be extended to tea sector. This will ensure the availability of labour in the tea industry itself and also helps to avoid migration of workers to other places in search of suitable employment.

3. It is suggested that in order to control this flow, the tea estates should fix up high wage rates and also the government should fix minimum support price to tea as like rice, wheat, sugarcane and others.

4. Since labour mobility cannot be avoided at any cost, there are some chances for reducing the incidences through some measures. There are some possibilities for certain uncertain happenings when other people comes to the district. The chances are like criminal activities, stealing, spoiling the ecology etc. For all these, minimum punishment to be ensured.

#### IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The current study is restricted to a small geographical area. The researcher has limitation of time for carrying out research on a larger scale. Apart from that, the literature available on the topic is very limited, because the tea plantation workers especially in large tea estates are reluctant to provide information about their working and living conditions and their problems. Now – a – days, most of the large estates face severe problems and the data collected for various studies are even misused by the researchers. So many large estate owners are reluctant to give actual information. Some estate owners even do not give permission for data collection in their respective estates. Therefore, the selection of sample for primary survey was a tedious task. Tea plantations are very vast and situated in remote rural areas. It also made the primary survey very tedious and time consuming.

#### V. CONCLUSION

The plantation sector is dominating in almost all the countries of the world. Tea is cultivated in many countries irrespective of its size. Even the small countries in the world like Kenya, Sri Lanka and Uganda are dominating in tea cultivation as well as the production of tea. Workers in the Nilgiris district are moving to other parts of Tamil Nadu to find a suitable job with good salary and to provide quality education to their wards. The mobility of labour both inward and outward affect the productive capacity of the workers and the quality of tea leaves plucked and even it is not to the mark and worthy. There is a need for immediate effort on the

part of the Government and Tea Board of India to find a suitable solution to the problems faced by the workers in the tea industry.

There are many areas still left out for further studies in the tea industry itself. For any further research activities, the present work could be a source.

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