

## Socioeconomic Status of Tea Garden Workers in Theni District of Tamil Nadu

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**KEYWORDS** Educational Status. Employment Status. Saving Habit. Migration Status. Monthly Income

**ABSTRACT** The study's major goal is to determine the demographic profile and socioeconomic position of tea garden workers. The researcher used a descriptive survey method as well as stratified random sampling. One hundred and twenty tea garden workers were included as a sample for the study. The research technique for data collecting is a structured questionnaire. According to the research, forty-one percent of female workers and twenty-one percent of male workers are illiterate. The study also discovered that thirty-two percent and 15.8 percent of tea garden families cook with kerosene and firewood, respectively. According to the report, twelve percent of respondents do not have a savings bank account with any bank. According to the report, the government of India's Adult Literacy Program, continuing education, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, and Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana initiatives may benefit all tea garden employees.

### INTRODUCTION

People all across the world enjoy tea as one of their favourite beverages. Everyday more than two million cups of tea are consumed around the world. Tea plantations are one of India's most important industries, as they provide both jobs and foreign cash (Ansari and Sheereen 2016). "India is one of the world's largest tea producers, producing around twenty-seven percent of the world's tea. India produces both CTC (Crush, Tear and Curl) and Orthodox forms of tea" (Saikia et al. 2013). In India, CTC is the most popular form of tea. There are tea plantation industries in India's north-eastern and southern states. The tea plantation sector covers the most land in India's southern states, covering roughly 1,72,000 hectares (Hemasrikumar and Arthi 2019). The Nilgiris cover roughly 90,000 hectares in Tamil Nadu. Tea plantations are found in Tamil Nadu's southern districts, such as Theni and Tirunelveli. Tea plantations are one of the country's most important labour heavy industries. In terms of tea cultivation, the Theni district ranks rather well among Tamil Nadu's southern districts. More than 6,000 individuals rely on this industry to make a living. Thousands of people work on tea plantations, and many of them come from rural areas where jobs are scarce. The socioeconomic situation of garden workers remained inadequate in terms of salaries, hygiene, working, and living conditions for a variety of reasons (Binitha and Raj

2018). Several studies have been undertaken in India and overseas to examine the socioeconomic position of plantation workers in general and tea garden employees in particular. A few studies have been conducted in southern India, including Tamil Nadu. However, no systematic efforts have been made to study the socioeconomic status of tea garden workers in Tamil Nadu's southern districts. As a result, a thorough investigation in this geographic area is required, which will serve as a foundation for future research.

The phrase "socioeconomic status" refers to how individuals or families are classified based on their current circumstances. Socioeconomic disadvantages, social class, and other factors determine the socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic disadvantage is a measurable feature. Social class is a nominal variable influenced by economic factors. The major variables taken into account when assessing the socioeconomic standing of individuals or households are resources and prestige. Some examples of prestige-based socioeconomic status measures are access to services and consumption of products. Educational attainment, occupation, and income are additional important factors in determining an individual's or household's socioeconomic standing. When all three characteristics considered into account, a valid assessment of persons or families' socioeconomic level is possible. To be comprehensive, all three domains that is education, occupation and income are covered when constructing an instrument to evaluate

socioeconomic status. The functionalist hypothesis, which combines Marxist and Weberian ideas, claims that stratification, is required for society to progress. The relative relevance of the position determines its functional importance in society. If occupation is a predictor, social status and income are also important factors to consider about occupation. In industrialised countries, calculating income is simple since the labour market is well organised. Because a large section of India’s working sector is unorganised, trustworthy data on working class income is difficult to come by.

**Objectives**

- The following are the study’s objectives:
1. To investigate the demographic profile of tea garden employees in Tamil Nadu’s Theni District.
  2. To determine the socioeconomic status of tea garden employees in Tamil Nadu’s Theni area.

**MATERIAL AND METHODS**

For the current study, the researcher used a normative research design using a descriptive research method based on the study’s goals and objectives. “Descriptive research is concerned with existing situations or relationships, as well as held opinions, on-going processes, visible impacts, and emerging trends. It focuses on the present, while it frequently also evaluates past events and influences in light of contemporary circumstances” (Best and Khan 2013). In this study, the researcher employed a cross-sectional descriptive survey method to analyse the current socioeconomic position of tea garden workers. The field investigator gathered the necessary information through field visits. Personal interviews were conducted to acquire primary data from tea garden workers.

**Sample**

One hundred and twenty tea garden employees from three divisions of the Woodbriar Tea Estate, namely Highwayvs, Megamalai, and Upper Manalaru, were chosen as a sample using a stratified random sampling technique.

**Data Collection Methodology**

A structured and validated questionnaire was used to collect primary data from the respondents in this study.

**Research Instruments**

The investigator created a general information sheet to collect the demographic profile of tea garden workers. An investigator-created and validated structured questionnaire was also used. The dimensions of the questionnaire are parental educational status, economic position, health and sanitation, and children’s educational attainment. A panel of specialists examined the items mentioned under the dimensions to determine the research tool’s content and face validity. The essential improvements were carried out based on the expert’s remarks.

**RESULTS**

**Tea Garden Employees’ Demographic Profile**

The tea garden workers’ age ranges from 25 to 55 years old, according to row 1 of Table 1. There are no employees under the age of 25. According to the data, the tea estate authorities rigorously follow the Child Labour Act. Table 1 row 2 shows that males account for forty-nine percent of responses and females account for fifty-one percent.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of tea garden workers**

S. No.	Variables	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	
1	<i>Age in Years</i>	25-34	16	13
		35- 44	43	36
		45-54	35	29
		55 and above	26	22
		Total	120	100
2	<i>Gender</i>	Male	59	49
		Female	61	51
		Total	120	100
3	<i>Marital Status</i>	Married	95	79.2
		Unmarried	13	10.7
		Widow	12	10.1
		Total	120	100
4	<i>Community</i>	OC	19	15.7
		BC	12	10.2
		MBC	12	10.1
		SC	56	46.5
		ST	21	17.5
		Total	120	100
		5	<i>Religion</i>	Hindu
Christian	40			33.3
Muslim	18			15.1
Total	120			100
6	<i>Migration Status</i>	Tamilnadu	95	79
		Other than Tamilnadu	25	21
		Total	120	100

In the Woodbriar Tea Estate in Tamil Nadu's Theni district, the number of male and female workers is about equal. Row 3 of Table 1 shows that 79.2 percent of the 120 respondents are married, 10.7 percent are single, and 10.1 percent are widowed. Row 4 shows that 15.7 percent of tea garden employees are in the open category, 10.2 percent are in the backward community, 10.1 percent are in the most backward community, 46.5 percent are in the schedule caste, and 17.5 percent are in the scheduled tribes. According to the data, respondents from the schedule caste community outnumber those from other groups. According to row 5, Hindus make up 51.6 percent of tea garden employees, Christians 33.3 percent, and Muslims 15.1 percent. Hinduism is the religion that more than half of the respondents follow. According to row 6 of Table 1, seventy-nine percent of the respondents are from Tamil Nadu, whereas twenty-one percent have migrated to Tamil Nadu from other states. According to the data, approximately one-fourth of the respondents migrated to Tamil Nadu for work.

### Social Status of Tea Garden workers

The socioeconomic position of tea garden employees depicted is in Table 2. Table 2's row 1 shows that 40.8 percent of female workers are illiterate. Thirty-nine percent of female workers have completed primary school. Five percent of female workers completed secondary school, that is, classes VI to X, and 9.2 percent completed higher secondary school, that is, classes XI to XII. 5.8 percent of female workers have completed class XII and received their diploma. Table 2's row 2 shows that 20.8 percent of male workers are illiterate. 30.2 percent of male workers completed elementary school education (classes I through V). Secondary education, or a class VI through X completed by 15.7 percent of male workers. 17.5 percent of male workers finished higher secondary education, that is, classes XI through XII, while 15.8 percent of male workers graduated from class XII. Female tea garden employees had twice the illiteracy rate of male tea garden workers, according to the research. Row 3 of Table 2 revealed that 10.8 percent of the workers are permanent employees, 24.2 percent are temporary employees, and sixty-five percent paid on a daily basis. The bulk of the respondents work as either temporary or daily wage labourers, according to the data. 66.7 percent of male

respondents harvest tealeaves, 18.3 percent spray pesticides, five percent drive, and ten percent are unemployed, according to row 4 of Table 2. Table 2's row 5 shows that ninety percent of female respondents harvest tealeaves and ten percent of female respondents are unemployed. A tiny percentage of male and female responders are unemployed, which has an impact on their family's financial situation. Table 2 shows that 15.8 percent of tea garden employees use firewood for cooking, 31.7 percent use kerosene for cooking, and just 52.5 percent use gas for cooking. This will have a negative impact on the health of tea garden employees.

**Table 2: Social status of tea garden workers**

S. No.	Variables	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)	
1	<i>Educational Status of Female Workers</i>	Illiterate	25	40.8
		Primary level	24	39.1
		Secondary level	03	05.1
		Hr. sec. level	06	09.2
		Graduation	03	05.8
		Total	61	100
2	<i>Educational Status of Male Workers</i>	Illiterate	12	20.8
		Primary level	18	30.2
		Secondary level	09	15.7
		Hr. sec. level	11	17.5
		Graduation	09	15.8
		Total	59	100
3	<i>Employment Status</i>	Permanent	13	10.8
		Temporary	29	24.2
		Daily wages	78	65
		Total	120	100
4	<i>Occupation of Male Workers</i>	Plucking tea	39	66.7
		Spraying pesticides	11	18.3
		Driver	03	05
		Unemployed	06	10
		Total	59	100
		5	<i>Occupation of Female Workers</i>	Plucking tea
Unemployed	06			10
Total	61			100
6	<i>Fuel Used for Cooking</i>	Gas	63	52.5
		Kerosene	38	31.7
		Firewood	19	15.8
		Total	120	100

### Tea Garden Workers' Economic Situation

Table 3 depicts the financial situation of tea garden workers. 35.1 percent of female workers earn less than INR 3000, 18.2 percent earn INR 3001-5000, 36.6 percent earn INR 5001-7000, and 10.1 percent earn INR 7001 or more, according to row 1 of Table 3. Row 2 of Table 3 shows that 9.2 and 9.1

percent of male workers earn less than INR 3000 and INR 3001-5000 per month, respectively. Sixty-four percent of male workers earn between INR 5001 and INR 7000 per month, while 17.5 percent make more than INR 7001 per month. The majority of tea garden workers are paid on a daily basis. Only during the tea harvesting seasons do more workers find jobs. The fact that male workers earn more than female workers reflects the fact that tea estate authorities prefer to hire male workers. The tea garden employees' family savings are represented in row 3 of Table 3. 34.2 percent of tea garden workers' families save less than INR 1000 per month, fifteen percent save INR 1001-2000, 35.7 percent save INR 2001-3000, and 15.1 percent of tea garden workers' families save INR 3001 or more per month. Almost half of the sample tea garden employees' families can save between INR 1000 and INR 2000 per month. Workers in tea gardens do not have consistent employment options throughout the year. This is the primary reason for the tea garden workers' families' lack of money. Table 3's row 4 shows that eighty-four percent of

tea garden workers save, whereas sixteen percent do not. According to row 5 of Table 3, eighty-eight percent of respondents have a savings bank account, while only twelve percent do not. According to the research, a small percentage of tea garden workers have yet to open a savings account in a bank. According to the statistics, tea estate officials should undertake an awareness programme among tea garden workers to encourage them to open a savings bank account in any nationalised bank in order to take advantage of the Government of India's welfare initiatives.

### Findings of the Study

According to the findings of the investigation, the tea estate authorities obey the Child Labour Act. Sixty-four percent of the tea garden employees are from the Schedule Caste and Schedule Tribes. Twenty-one percent of the respondents are migrated from other States to Tamil Nadu state. An estimated forty-one percent of female tea garden employees are uneducated. Sixteen percent of female tea garden workers and twenty-one percent of male tea garden workers have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Kerosene is the fuel for thirty-one percent of the families whereas 15.8 percent of families use firewood as fuel for cooking. Permanent employees make up 10.8 percent of tea garden workers, while daily wageworkers make up sixty-five percent. Sixteen percent of workers do not save, and twelve percent do not have a savings account at a bank.

### DISCUSSION

According to the research, 40.8 percent of female tea garden employees are illiterate. The study's conclusions are in line with the findings of a number of other researches. Only forty-nine percent of tea garden employees are illiterate, according to Bhowmik (2011), and only twelve percent are functional literates. According to Bosumatari and Goyari (2013), despite different educational measures, a substantial percentage of illiteracy exists among tea garden women labourers. Adult literacy was only 33.6 percent, according to Nath et al. (2005). Women workers have a lower literacy rate than their male colleagues, according to Nath and Dipak (2014). Women's educational standing was likewise exceedingly low, according to Verma and Gupta

**Table 3. Economic status of tea garden workers**

S. No.	Variables		Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
1	<i>Monthly Income of Female Workers</i>	Less than Rs.3000/-	21	35.1
		Rs.3001-5000	11	18.2
		Rs.5001-7000	22	36.6
		Rs.7001 and above	07	10.1
		Total	61	100
2	<i>Monthly Income of Male Workers</i>	Less than Rs.3000/-	06	09.2
		Rs.3001-5000	05	09.1
		Rs.5001-7000	38	64.2
		Rs.7001 and above	10	17.5
		Total	59	100
3	<i>Monthly Savings of the Family</i>	Less than Rs.1000/-	41	34.2
		Rs.1001-2000	18	15
		Rs.2001-3000	43	35.7
		Rs.3001 and above	18	15.1
		Total	120	100
4	<i>Habit of Saving</i>	Yes	101	84
		No	19	16
		Total	120	100
5	<i>Having SB Account in Bank</i>	Yes	106	88
		No	14	12
		Total	120	120

(2015). According to Hossain et al. (2017), 68.8 percent of female tea garden employees are uneducated. Debnath and Debnath (2017) discovered that seventy-five percent of the respondents were illiterate. According to the findings, organising an adult functional literacy programme for tea garden employees is still important. The study also discovered that 5.8 percent of tea garden workers have a bachelor's degree or higher. The findings of the study are also consistent with those of Ahmad et al. (2015), who found that eight percent of tea labourers attended different institutions and that on average, five percent of tribal people had higher education, such as a high school diploma or above. The findings contradict those of Binitha and Raj (2018), who found that 33.4 percent of tea garden workers are undergraduates. These statistics indicate that only a small percentage of tea garden workers were educated. Workers have completed their school education and graduated by making use of the opportunities provided by this little section of the tea garden.

The study also discovered that 10.8 percent of tea garden workers are permanent employees, while sixty-five percent of workers are paid on a daily basis. The findings of the study are consistent with those of Verma and Gupta (2015). Casual labourers made up seventy-four percent of the workforce, according to the report. Because of the seasonal demand for labourers in the tea industries, the casual labour force exists. The study's findings contradict Debnath and Debnath's (2017) findings, which revealed that fifty-nine percent of respondents are permanent employees and forty-one percent are temporary employees, respectively. Tea garden workers' economic status depends on their occupation. The tea estate officials advised that an appropriate programme for permanently absorbing tea garden workers might be adopted. The survey discovered that all tea garden households are homes with sanitation and water services. The findings of the study contradict those of Khawas (2011). The tea industry's management found to be in violation of the plantation labour statute of 1951's standards for proper housing and cleanliness. Sharma and Bhuyan (2016) conducted a study that contradicts the conclusions of the current study. The investigation indicated that the households' hygienic conditions are poor and the workers provided the pit toilets.

## CONCLUSION

All of the tea garden homes in the examined tea estates offered dwellings with sanitation and water amenities. The roofs of the dwellings are made of tin. The assessed tea plantation strictly adheres to the Child Labour Act when it comes to the age of the tea garden workers. According to the findings, forty-one percent of female workers and twenty-one percent of male workers are illiterate. Illiteracy is still a problem in the tea garden communities. According to the findings, thirty-two percent of tea garden families and sixteen percent of tea garden families use kerosene and firewood for cooking, respectively. According to the report, twelve percent of respondents do not have a savings bank account with any bank. Despite the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, tea garden workers continue to face issues such as housing and sanitation. The tea plantation authorities might urge garden employees to acquire a habit of saving money and to take advantage of government aid programs when available.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To eliminate illiteracy among tea garden workers, adult functional literacy and educational awareness activities are required. The "Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana" scheme is a blessing for the underprivileged. All tea garden workers are eligible for the "Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana" scheme. The tea estate management and the government should help the tea garden workers to come under this scheme. For the tea garden workers group to become beneficiaries under the "Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana", an awareness effort on the programme is critical. The tea estate authorities should take the required steps to educate tea garden workers about government welfare programmes.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research piece is one of the results of an on-going major research project supported by the ICSSR titled, "Socioeconomic Status and Educational Attainment of Female Children of Tea Garden Workers in Southern Districts of Tamil Nadu" (F.No.02/57/2019-20/MJ/RP/dt.17.01.2020). The researcher would like to thank the ICSSR, the Ministry of Education,

the Government of India, New Delhi for their support and funding of the major research Project.

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**Paper received for publication in June, 2021**  
**Paper accepted for publication in September, 2021**