

Socio-Economic Condition of Tea Plantation and Factory Laborers in Gudalur Taluk of Nilgiris District, Tamil Nadu

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Abstract

Original Research Article

The poor socioeconomic status of the majority of the population is the foremost issue in the contemporary world especially in developing countries. Socioeconomic indicators provide insights on education, gender, poverty, employment, housing, and so on. The present study intends to examine the socioeconomic status of tea plantation laborers in the Gudalur taluk of Nilgiris district, Tamil Nadu. Gudalur is situated at the third junction of the three states Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka. Gudalur block geographically lies between 9°41', 9° 68' N to 77°27'E. Gudalur is the foothill of the Nilgiris district, 50 km west of Ooty. It has an area of 855.82 sq km and altitude of 1117mts above sea level. Nearly, one fourth of the area is covered by forest. The block is divided into two taluks –Gudalur taluk and Pandalur Taluk, and Gudalur is a major connectivity of the three states Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamilnadu. The entire study is based on primary and secondary data which is collected from taluk and village offices of Gudalur. The primary data were collected through the random sampling method. Total sample size of the study is 70 respondents who were interviewed by using a well-structured interview schedule. Graphical and statistical techniques were used to analyse the data and relative socioeconomic status. The study found that the socioeconomic status of the tea plantation laborers' is very poor due to geographical isolation, irregular job opportunity, and lack of education. Therefore, encouraging education and skill development of tea plantation laborers will help to achieve higher socioeconomic status.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Status, Tea Plantation Labor, Unorganized Sector, Unskilled Labour, Plantation Sector.

INTRODUCTION

The socioeconomic and working state of tea plantation workers is a subject of conversation worldwide. This sector, for the most part, tends to be a component of the larger area of the forest industry, which additionally incorporates logging and wood collecting exercises in common backwoods (Deepak, et al, 2012). The tea plantation industry is a mix of industry and agriculture. The production of the leaf is an agrarian movement, whereas its preparation is a modern action. The vast majority of the large bequests process crude leaves in their manufacturing plants. The tea industry is of extensive significance in the national economy of India as far as income generation, earning foreign exchange, employment generation, and commitment to the national exchequer (Merlin 2002). India is the second-largest tea-producing country in the world (Tea Board, 2014). The Indian tea industry recorded the highest ever production and export

rates in the financial year of 2018. The total production was 1325.05 million kgs, an increase of 74.56 million kgs from 2016--2017. In percentage, the increase is approximately 6% of the tea production. The total area of tea in the country has increased from 356,516 in 1971 to 434,294 hectares in 1997 (Bhowmik, 1994). In Tamilnadu, the total number of tea plantation laborers was 39,814 (Report on the working of the plantation labor act, 1951 for the year 2014). Tamilnadu is the third largest tea producer, accounting for 16 percent of the production and 11 percent of the labor force. (Bhowmik, 1994). Among the total 172,000 hectares under tea cultivation in South India, Nilgiris individually accounts for approximately 90,000 hectares, and it produces approximately 30 million kg of tea annually, which is nearly 60% of the total population (Gillsucha Sing, 1998).

Compared with general agriculture, the plantation sector, a key sector under India, which is inclusive of a growth regimen, is perhaps the most labor enterprise in

rural India (Susmitha, 2012). Tea plantation laborers are the poorest workers in the organized sector (Bhowmik, 1994). Tea estate laborers are economically and socially opposed and are denied the importance of cutting-edge public activity. The majority of tea bequest laborers are unskilled with the goal that they have no thoughts with respect to different types of government assistance and other standardized savings plans, which are actualized by the government (Hemasrikumar and Arthi, 2019). In southern India, the Nilgiris district has been producing tea as much as other districts in Tamil Nadu have. Changes in the population pattern and economic and political movement of people in the Nilgiris district have strongly improved the tea industry of this region (Prasennevari, 1984). A large portion of tea plantation laborers have a relatively low economic status. This has laid the foundation for the current investigation because the economic status of the tea plantation laborers in Gudalur Taluk in Nilgiri district is denied.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the present status of socioeconomic development among tea plant laborers.
- To analyse the level of education among tea plantation laborers
- To understand the occupational structure of tea plantation laborers and factory laborers

METHODOLOGY

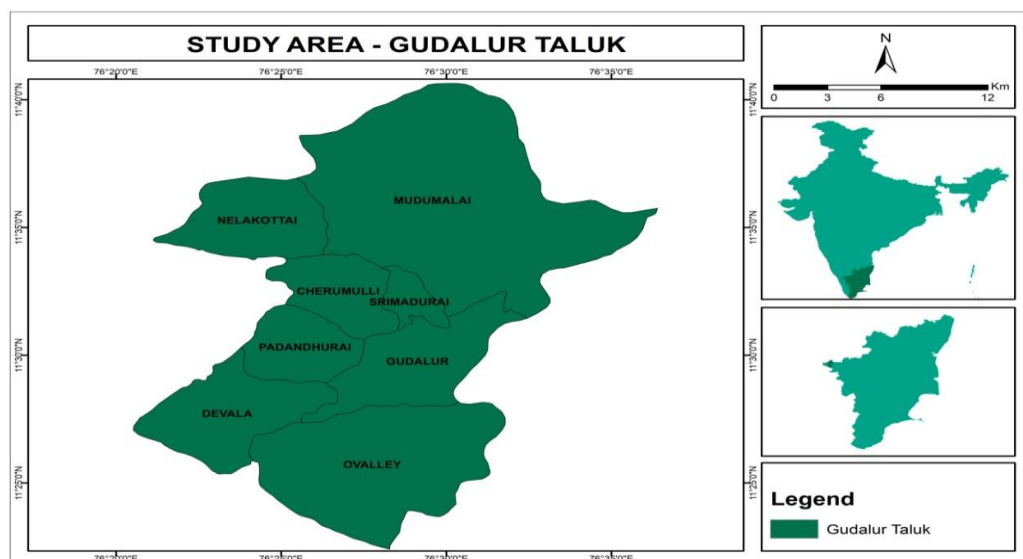
This study is largely based on primary data collected through a random sampling method from 70 tea plantations in Gudalur taluk. After the data are collected, they are arranged, tabulated, calculated, and analysed. The

collected information is further represented by a statistical diagram and maps, which are prepared in Arc-GIS 9.3. Moreover, the quartile method is used in this study.

SELECTION OF THE STUDY AREA

The study area is Gudalur taluk, which is located in the Nilgiris district, almost the southern region of Tamil Nadu. The Gudalur taluk is one of the most important taluks in the Nilgiris district. The Gudalur is situated at the third junction of the three states Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka of South India. The Gudalur block geographically lies between 9°41', 9°68' N and 77°2'7E. The Gudalur is the foothill of the Nilgiris district, 50 km west of Ooty. It has an area of 855.82 sq km and an altitude of 1117 m above sea level. Nearly one-fourth of the area is covered by forest. The block is divided into two taluks—Gudalur and Pandalur Taluk. Gudalur taluk has the connectivity of three states: Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamilnadu.

According to the Census India 2011, Gudalur taluk has 25,075 households with a population of 1,04,768. A total of 51,497 males and 53,271 females were included. The population of children between the ages of 0 and 6 years is 11,473, which is 10.95% of the total population. The sex ratio of Gudalur taluk is 1,034 compared with 996, which is the average of Tamil Nadu state. The literacy rate of Gudalur taluk is 77.23%, of which 81.05% of males are literate and 73.54% of females are literate. The total area of Gudalur is 507.09 sq km, with a population density of 207 per km. Among the total population, 7.96% of the population lives in urban areas, and 92.04% lives in rural areas. There are 26.53% scheduled caste (SC) and 6.31% scheduled tribe (ST) in the total population of Gudalur Taluk.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part of the study analyses the socioeconomic conditions of tea plantation workers. The data were collected through in-depth interviews to examine the correlation of socioeconomic variables with employment. The variables under consideration for analysis are age group workers, gender workers, family size, marital status, educational status, occupational structure, income status, type of housing pattern, availability of electricity, and source of drinking water. In addition to the percentage analysis, graphs and maps are used to represent the data.

AGE STRUCTURE

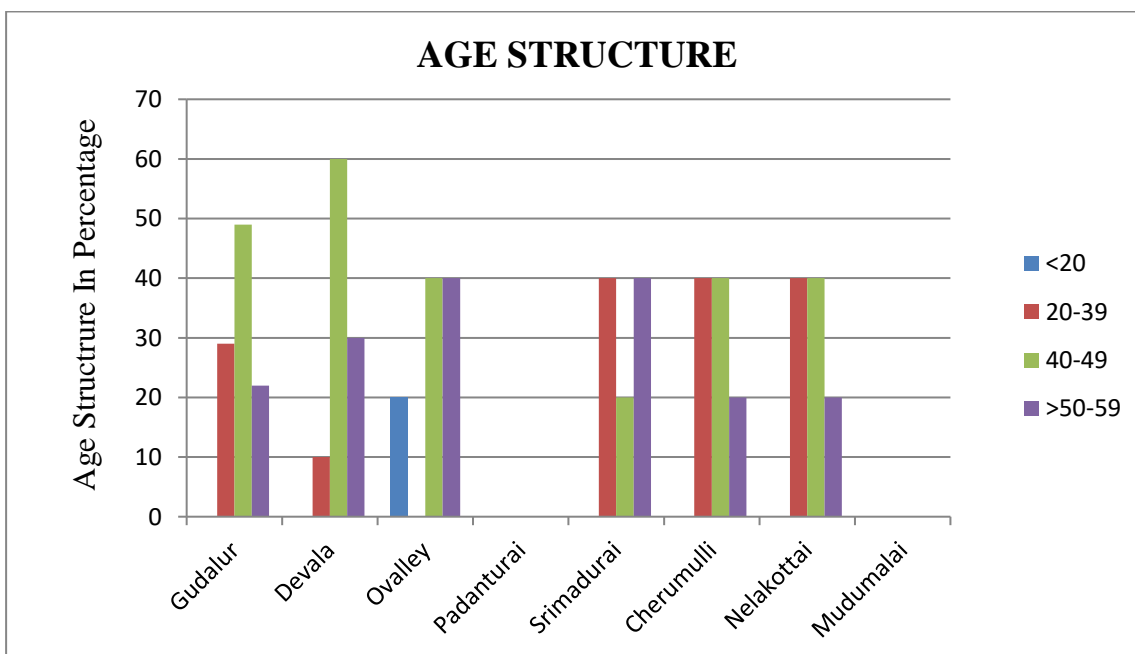
Age group is a major aspect of the socioeconomic condition of plantation labor. Age is one of the determining factors of employment. A family that contains several children and age-old people will suffer since their earning

capacity is low. The agewise compositions of the respondents are shown in Table 1. The tea plantation workers are classified into four age groups, varying from one village to another. Among the total number of plantation workers, most workers are engaged in plantation and factory labor. The majority of tea plantation workers are between 40 and 49 years of age. These workers are present mainly in Gudalur 49%, Devala 60%, Cherumulli and Nelakottai 40%, respectively. Among the total sample age groups, fewer than 20 are shown only for O valley village. The 20–39-year-old tea plantation workers represented 29% of Gudalur workers, 10% of Devala workers, 10% of Srimadurai workers, 40% of Cherumulli workers, and 40% of Nelakottai workers. Finally, the 50–59 year age groups of plantation workers are mainly concentrated in Gudalur (22%), Devala (30%), O valley and Srimadurai (40%). This table indicates that the majority of the tea plantation workers belong to the 40–49 years age group.

Table 1. Age of the respondents

| Village Name | <20 | 20-39 | 40-49 | >50-59 |
|--------------|-----|-------|-------|--------|
| Gudalur | - | 29 | 49 | 22 |
| Devala | - | 10 | 60 | 30 |
| Ovalley | 20 | - | 40 | 40 |
| Padanturai | - | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | - | 40 | 20 | 40 |
| Cherumulli | - | 40 | 40 | 20 |
| Nelakottai | - | 40 | 40 | 20 |
| Mudumalai | - | - | - | - |

Source: Primary Data



GENDER STATUS

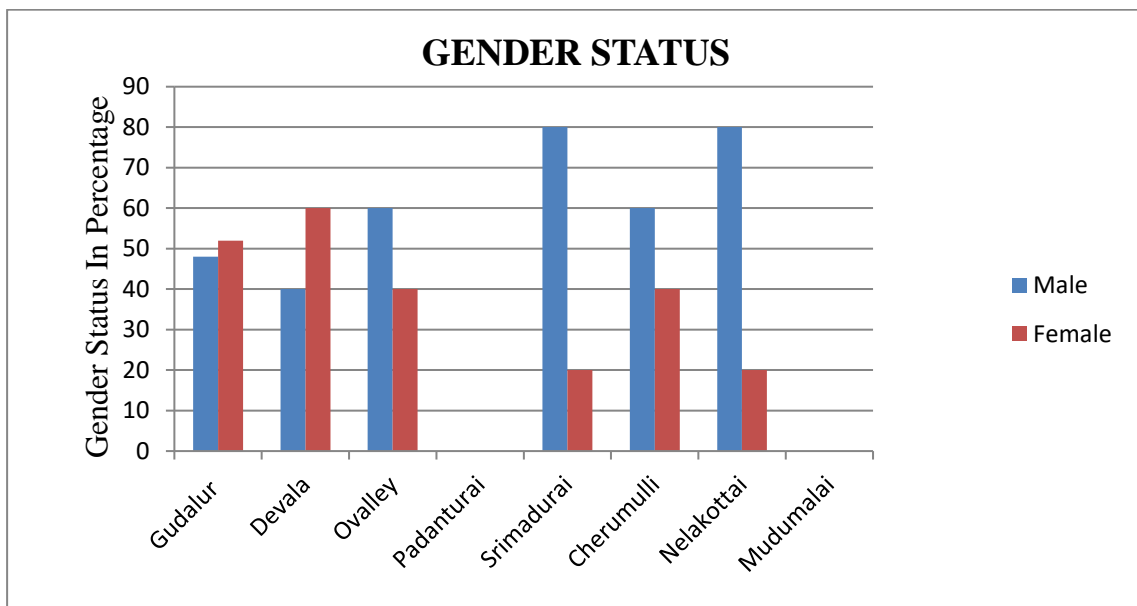
Gender is one of the important components used to measure the socioeconomic condition of tea plantation laborers. The table shows the gender status of tea plantation laborers in Gudalur taluk. Among these 8 villages, the majority of the workers are male workers. Male workers are engaged with most tea plantation jobs, such as plucking, spraying, loading, and fertilizer

spreading. It is evident that 80% of the male workers live in Srimadurai and Nelakottai villages. The percentages of Devala and O valley villages are 40% and 60%, respectively. Among these respondents, 60% of female workers are in Devala, and 40% of female workers are in Ovalley and Cherumulli. Finally, 20% of female workers in Srimadurai and Nelakottai are engaged in plantation and factory labor.

Table 2. Gender of the respondents

| Village Name | Male (%) | Female (%) |
|--------------|----------|------------|
| Gudalur | 48 | 52 |
| Devala | 40 | 60 |
| Ovalley | 60 | 40 |
| Padanturai | - | - |
| Srimadurai | 80 | 20 |
| Cherumulli | 60 | 40 |
| Nelakottai | 80 | 20 |
| Mudumalai | - | - |

Source: Primary Data



FAMILY SIZE

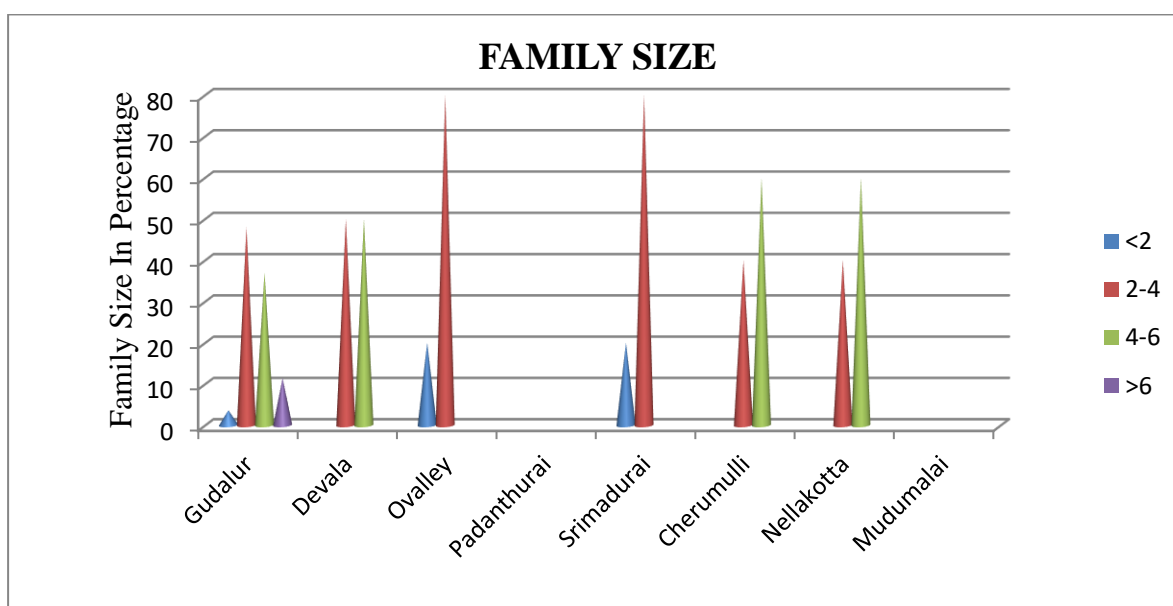
Family size is an important socioeconomic indicator, as it affects income, literacy, access to amenities, and so on. The households are broadly classified into two groups: nuclear and joint families. The tea plantation workers' family sizes are broadly classified into four categories. There are fewer than 2 members, 2–4 members, 4–6 members, and more than 6 members. Among the workers, the majority have a family size of 4–6 members. In Gudalur village, 3.6% of workers have fewer than 2 family members, 48% have a family size of 2–4, 37% have a family size of 4–6, and 11.4% have a family size >6. In

Devala village, none of the workers have a family size <2, 50% of workers have a family size 2–4, and the remaining workers have a family size 4–6. In Ovalley, 20% of workers have a family size of <2, and 80% of workers have a family size of 2–4. In Srimadurai, 20% of workers have a family size of <2, 80% have a family size of 2–4 members, and there are no workers with a family size of 4–6 and >6 members. In Cherumulli, 40% of workers have a family size of 2–4, and 60% of workers have a family size of 4–6. In Nelakottai, 40% of workers have a family size of 2–4, and the remaining 60% of workers have a family size of 4–6 members.

Table 3. Family size of the respondents

| Village Name | <2 | 2-4 | 4-6 | >6 |
|--------------|-----|-----|-----|------|
| Gudalur | 3.6 | 48 | 37 | 11.4 |
| Devala | | 50 | 50 | |
| Ovalley | 20 | 80 | | |
| Padanthurai | | | | |
| Srimadurai | 20 | 80 | | |
| Cherumulli | | 40 | 60 | |
| Nellakotta | | 40 | 60 | |
| Mudumalai | | | | |

Source: Primary Data



MARITAL STATUS

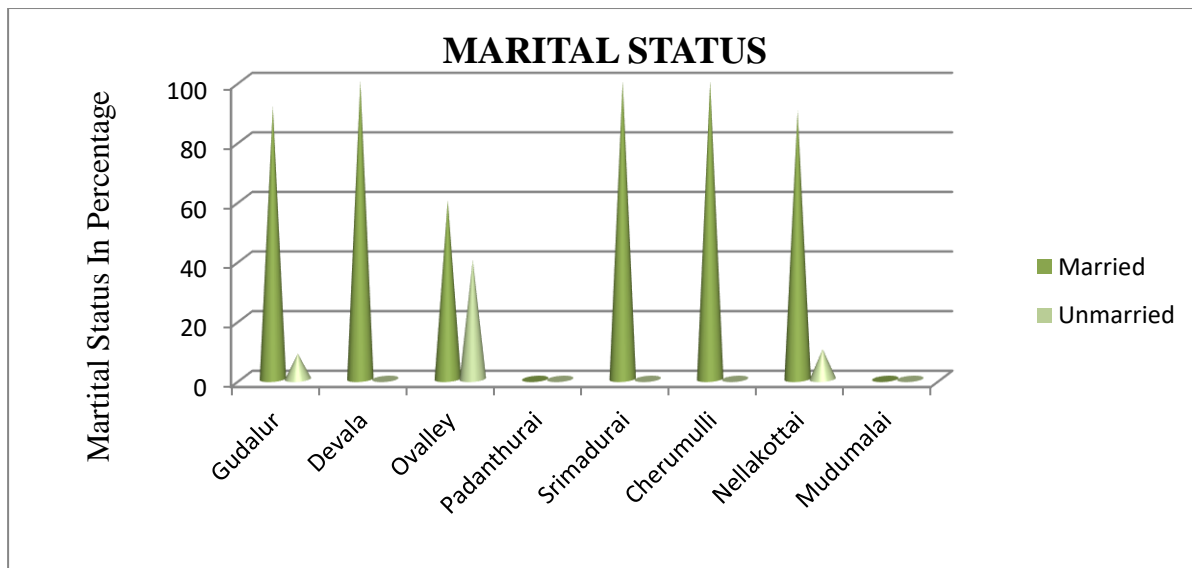
The above table shows the marital status of tea plantation workers. In Gudalur village, 91.5% of tea plantation workers are married, and 8.5% are unmarried. In Devala, all the tea plantation workers are married. In Ovalley, 60% of workers are married, whereas 40% are

unmarried. In Srimadurai and Cherumilli, all the tea plantation workers are married. In Nellakottai, 90% of workers are married, and only 10% are unmarried. Marital status has a one-way effect on working style and the nature of work. Workers who are married are more strongly correlated with family life.

Table 4. Marital status of the respondents

| Village Name | Married | Unmarried |
|--------------|---------|-----------|
| Gudalur | 91.5 | 8.5 |
| Devala | 100 | 0 |
| Ovalley | 60 | 40 |
| Padanthurai | 0 | 0 |
| Srimadurai | 100 | 0 |
| Cherumulli | 100 | 0 |
| Nellakottai | 90 | 10 |
| Mudumalai | 0 | 0 |

Source: Primary Data



EDUCATIONAL STATUS

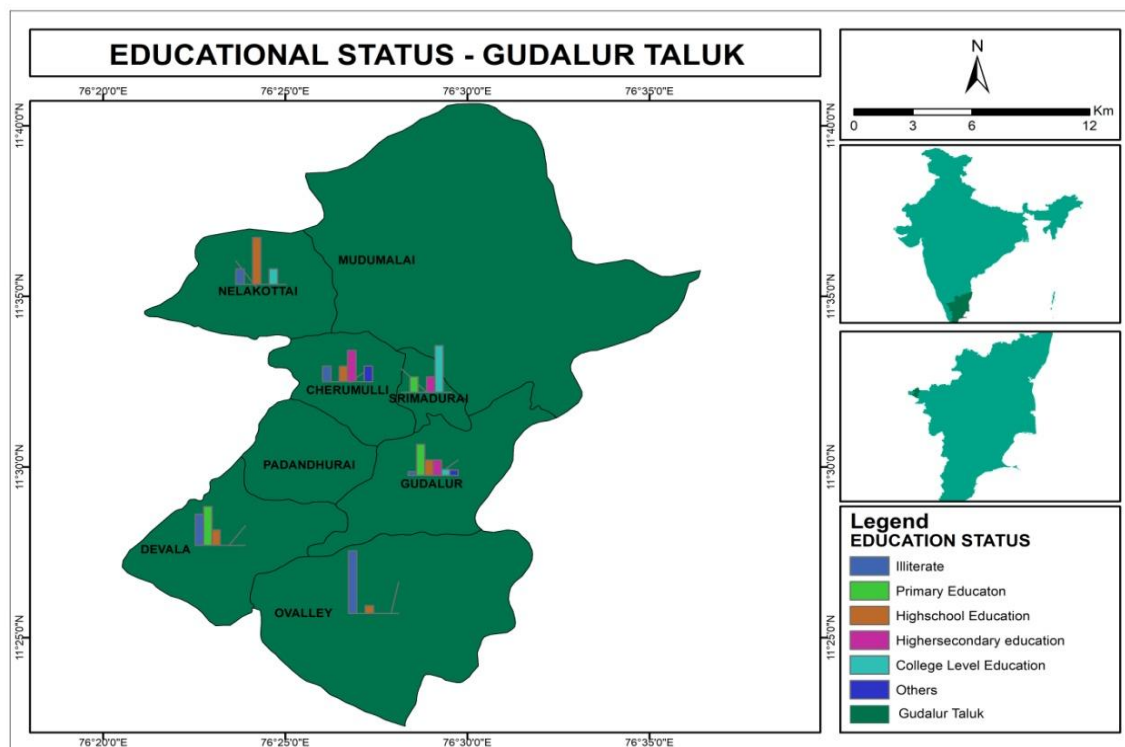
Education is considered the initial need of every human being, and it acts as the major source of other needs to live. The table shows the educational status of tea plantation workers in Gudalur Taluk. The educational qualifications are categorized into six categories: illiterate, primary, high school, higher secondary, college, and other. In Gudalur village, 5% of people are illiterate, 40% of workers are primary-level educated, 20% of workers have high school-level qualifications, 20% of workers have higher secondary education levels, and the remaining 8% of workers have college-level education. In Devala, 40% of workers are illiterate, 50% of workers have primary-level education, 10% have high school education, and none of the workers have higher secondary, college or other qualifications. In Ovalley, 80% of workers are illiterate, and the remaining 20% of workers have a high school level

education. In Srimadurai, 20% of workers have primary-level education, 20% have higher secondary-level education, and the remaining 60% have college-level education. In Cherumulli, 20% of workers are illiterate, 20% of workers have high school-level education, 40% of workers have higher secondary education levels, and the remaining 20% have other qualifications. In Nellakottai, 20% of workers are illiterate, 60% have a high school level, and the remaining 20% have a college level. Gudalur and Srimadurai villages have a high level of education because of the geographical location of the area and the economic condition of the plantation workers. The major compelling reason for inappropriate education is the lack of financial support. Moreover, the inadequate facilities for studying in the region, lack of attention from parents, and lack of encouragement from parents also play a significant role in the backwardness of education.

Table 5. Educational status of the respondents

| Village Name | Illiterate | Primary | High school | Higher secondary | College level | Others |
|--------------|------------|---------|-------------|------------------|---------------|--------|
| Gudalur | 5 | 40 | 20 | 20 | 8 | 7 |
| Devala | 40 | 50 | 10 | - | - | - |
| Ovalley | 80 | - | 20 | - | - | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - | - | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | - | 20 | - | 20 | 60 | - |
| Cherumulli | 20 | - | 20 | 40 | - | 20 |
| Nellakottai | 20 | - | 60 | - | 20 | - |
| Mudumalai | - | - | - | - | - | - |

Source Primary Data



OCCUPATIONAL STATUS

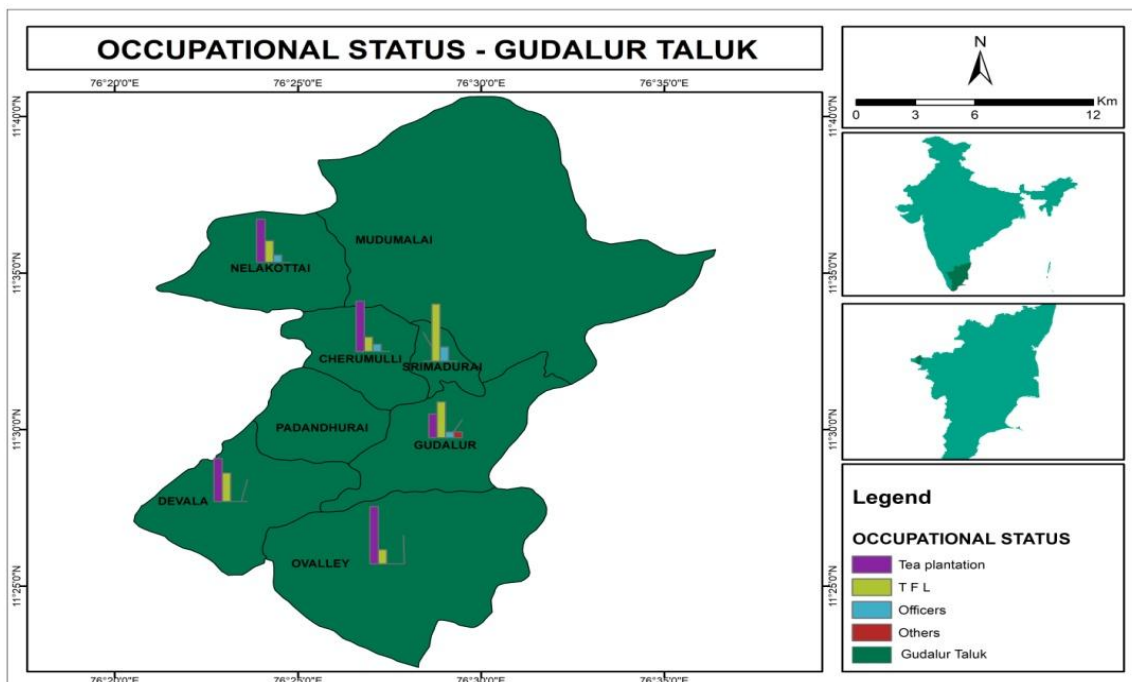
The occupation of an individual refers to his or her trade, profession, type of work, and so on. The occupational structure of a society is the product of a number of intimately related factors. Occupation is a major factor in determining the economic status of an individual, as a different type of occupation reflects different incomes. The above table shows the occupational status of tea plantation workers in Gudalur taluk. Tea plantation workers are broadly classified into four categories: tea estate workers, tea factory laborers, office workers, and others. In Gudalur taluk, the majority of tea plantation workers are tea factory workers. Among the total sample,

Gudalur village has 33.3% tea estate labor, whereas 50% of workers are tea factory laborers, and the remaining 8.3% of workers are officers and 8.4% of other workers. In Devala village, 60% of workers work in tea estates, and 40% of workers are engaged in tea factory work. In Ovalley, 80% of workers work in tea estates, and the remaining 20% of workers are engaged in tea factory work. In Srimadurai, 80% of workers are tea factory workers, and the remaining 20% of workers are office workers. In Cherumulli, 70% of workers work in tea estates, 20% of workers are tea factory workers, and the remaining 10% of workers are office workers. In Nellakottai, 60% of workers work in tea estates, 30% of workers work in tea factories, and the remaining 10% of workers work in offices.

Table 6. Occupational structures of the respondents

| Village Name | Tea Estate workers | Tea factory labours | Officers | Others |
|--------------|--------------------|---------------------|----------|--------|
| Gudalur | 33.3 | 50 | 8.3 | 8.4 |
| Devala | 60 | 40 | - | - |
| Ovalley | 80 | 20 | - | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | - | 80 | 20 | - |
| Cherumulli | 70 | 20 | 10 | - |
| Nellakottai | 60 | 30 | 10 | - |
| Mudumalai | - | - | - | - |

Source: Primary Data



INCOME STATUS

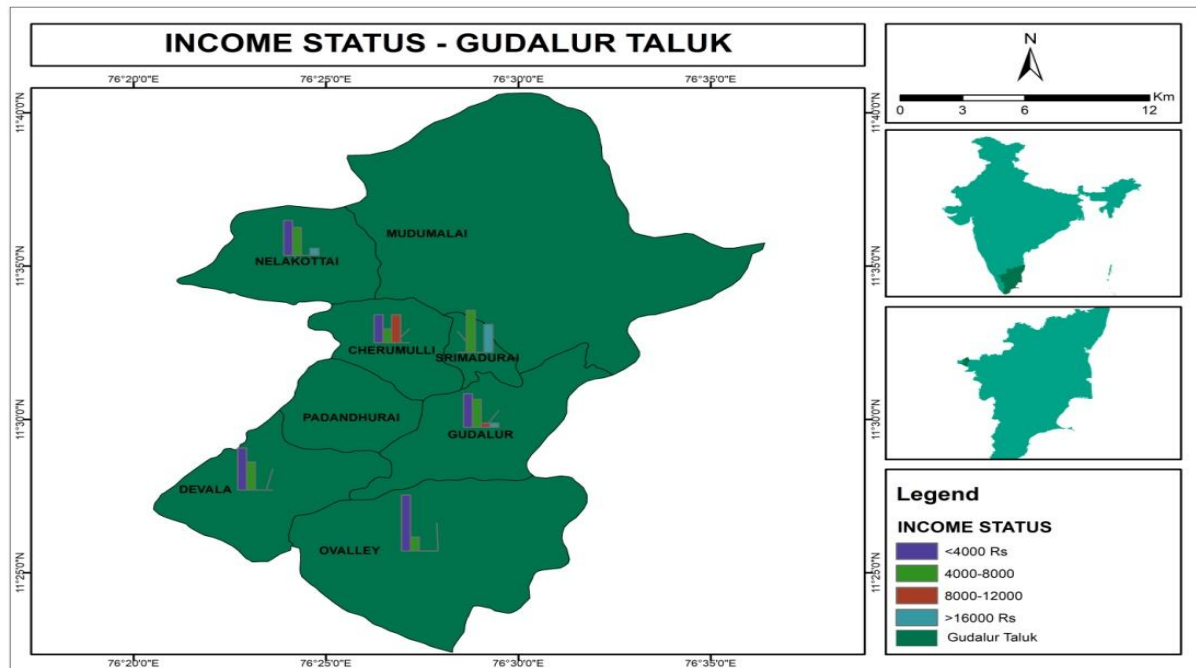
Income is the main factor that prevents people from quitting the industry apart from occupational attachment. The table shows the income status of tea plantation workers in Gudalur taluk. Among the respondents, fewer than Rs.4,000 was earned by plantation workers in Gudalur village (48%), Devala village (60%) and O valley (80%). The monthly income in the range of

Rs. A total of 4,000-8,000 are found in Gudalur and Devala villages for 40% of the respondents, but in Srimadurai, it is 60%. In Cherumulli, 20% earn income in the range of Rs. 4,000-8,000, and in Nelakottai, 40% earn income in the range of Rs. 4,000-8,000. Among these workers, those who earn Rs.8,000-12,000 earn 6% and 40% in Gudalur and Cherumulli, respectively. Finally, more than Rs.16,000 is earned by 6% of workers in Gudalur, 40% in Srimadurai, and 10% in Nelakottai.

Table 7. Income status of the respondents

| Village Name | <4,000 Rs | 4,000-8,000 | 8,000-12,000 | >16,000 Rs |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|------------|
| Gudalur | 48 | 40 | 6 | 6 |
| Devala | 60 | 40 | - | - |
| Ovalley | 80 | 20 | - | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | - | 60 | - | 40 |
| Cherumulli | 40 | 20 | 40 | - |
| Nellakottai | 50 | 40 | - | 10 |
| Mudumalai | - | - | - | - |

Source: Primary Data



HOUSE PATTERN

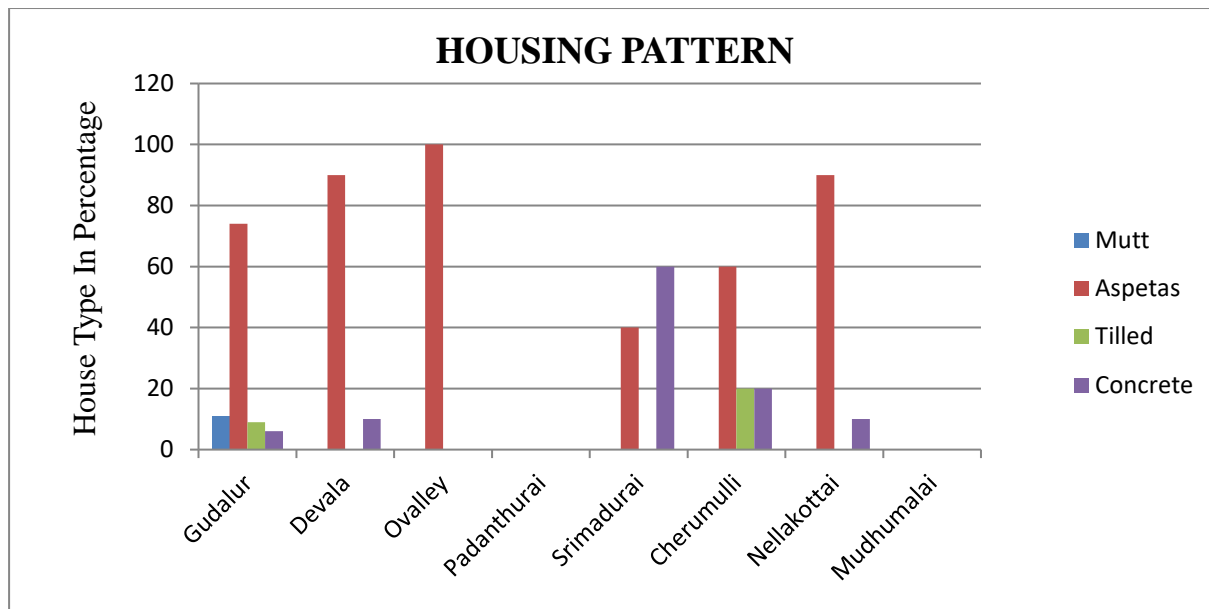
A house fulfils many important needs, especially the social needs of an individual. It is one of the critical assets to own, both for men and women. As a shelter, it fulfils basic needs and provides social security, a sense of identity, and self-esteem. The types of houses were classified into two main types: mut, asbestos, tiled, and concrete. Among the total respondents, most of the tea plantation workers were living in asbestos and concrete

houses. In Gudalur village, 11% had mutt houses. High concentrations of asbestos houses were observed in Gudalur (74%), Devala (90%), Ovalley (100%), and Cherumulli (60%). Among the total samples, high concentrations of tiled houses were found in Gudalur (9%) and Cherumulli (20%). In these taluks, the concentration of concrete houses is lower in Gudalur at 6% and Devala at 10%, whereas that of Srimadurai and Cherumulli is as high as 60% and 20%, respectively.

Table 8. Housing patterns of the respondents

| Village Name | Mutt | Asbestos | Tilled | Concrete |
|--------------|------|----------|--------|----------|
| Gudalur | 11 | 74 | 9 | 6 |
| Devala | - | 90 | - | 10 |
| Ovalley | - | 100 | - | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | - | 40 | - | 60 |
| Cherumulli | - | 60 | 20 | 20 |
| Nellakottai | - | 90 | - | 10 |
| Mudhumalai | - | - | - | - |

Source: Primary Data



AVAILABILITY OF ELECTRICITY

The table shows the availability of electricity for tea plantation workers. Among the respondents, the majority of the houses have electricity connections. In

Gudalur village, 94% of the houses have electricity, and the remaining 6% of the houses do not have electricity connections. For the remaining villages, the majority of the houses have electricity.

Table 9. Electricity connection of the respondents

| Village Name | Yes | No |
|--------------|-----|----|
| Gudalur | 94 | 6 |
| Devala | 100 | - |
| Ovalley | 100 | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - |
| Srimadurai | 100 | - |
| Cherumulli | 100 | - |
| Nellakottai | 100 | - |
| Mudhumalai | - | - |

Source: primary data

SOURCE OF DRINKING WATER

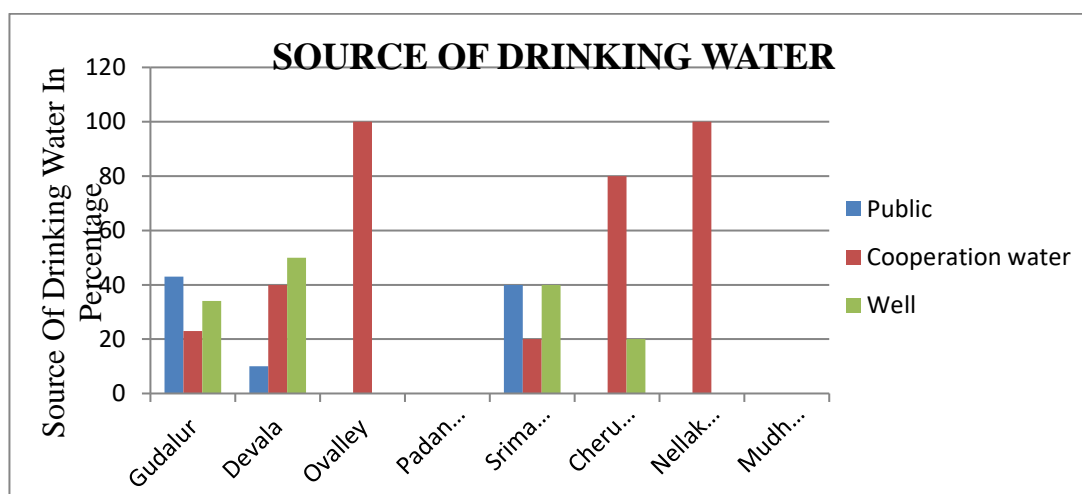
Water is the basic necessity for human existence, and it also represents the economic conditions of fishermen. The table shows the source of water used by the plantation workers. The sources of water have been divided into three categories: public tap water, cooperation water, and well water. The majority of plantation workers depend on cooperative water. Among the total

respondents, three villages of workers are dependent on public tap, which is concentrated in Gudalur (43%), Devala (10%), and Srimadurai (40% of workers), depending on public tap. The concentrations of cooperative water are 23% in Gudalur, 40% in Devala, 20% in Srimadurai, and 80% in Cherumulli. Good water availability is present in Gudalur (34%), Devala (50%), and Srimadurai and Cherumulli at 40% and 20%, respectively.

Table 10. Source of drinking water of the respondents

| Village Name | Public Tap | Cooperation water | Well |
|--------------|------------|-------------------|------|
| Gudalur | 43 | 23 | 34 |
| Devala | 10 | 40 | 50 |
| Ovalley | - | 100 | - |
| Padanthurai | - | - | - |
| Srimadurai | 40 | 20 | 40 |
| Cherumulli | - | 80 | 20 |
| Nellakottai | - | 100 | - |
| Mudhumalai | - | - | - |

Source: primary data



SUGGESTION

1. Providing better educational facilities will help them choose a better job that can lead to an improved standard of living.
2. Tea plantation management should provide proper health facilities to laborers.
3. Leave allowances should be initiated for workers
4. Provide better awareness of modernized machines that can be used in tea factories
5. The social welfare scheme should be implemented properly with a new pay scale, and it should be revised properly.
6. Provide proper intervals and reduce mental stress from overload work
7. To ensure a minimum salary package for all workers, they should be promoted at a specific time.

CONCLUSION

The living conditions of plantation workers play

an important role in the development of society. The development of a human being leads to a sustainable and healthy life with safety, security, sustainability, the participation of human rights for being creative and productive, and the enjoyment of self-respect. The tea industry is an important industry in India. India is the second-largest producer of tea in the tea industry and the largest consumer of tea in the world. This study revealed that the overall socioeconomic condition of tea plantation workers is poor. They are economically and socially backwards from modern living society. Most tea plantation workers do not receive proper education, so they are mostly involved in plantation-related activities. Climatic changes and the lack of employment opportunities make their problems much worse. Many factors, such as low social status, poor economic conditions, illiteracy, heavy indebtedness, a low production rate, and poor income, influence the socioeconomic conditions of tea plantation workers. Overall, the study revealed that the socioeconomic condition of workers is not well maintained and directly affects the standard of living and development of villages and a particular society.

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