

CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN PLANTATION WORKERS: A CASE STUDY BASED ON ELKADUWA PLANTATION

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Abstract

Surrounded by natural resources, Sri Lanka is still considered an important platform for global trade. Plantation crops such as tea, rubber, cocoa, cloves are the major income earners in Sri Lanka's economy. People who were brought from India around 1823 with the aim of carrying out coffee making, were settled in the Central Highlands of Sri Lanka. The upcountry peoples have been a community that has contributed massively to Sri Lanka's economy for over 200 years. However, these upcountry people are still living without any basic facilities. In such an environment, women plantation workers take care of their families and go to pick tea due to economic problems. Thus, this study explores the challenges faced by women working in tea plantations in the hill country of Sri Lanka in their daily lives. The women plantation workers who currently working in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala, those are choose as a sample of this research. In addition to using quantitative and qualitative approaches and conducting interviews with women plantation workers and Field study, the researcher conducted a content analysis. The results show that the women workers working in tea plantations have to work all day, due to this they suffer from many physical diseases, Psychological Effects, Lack of clean place to eat food in tea hills. Lack of toilet facilities. There is no leave during menstruation. Lack of employment salary, Challenges such as bio-threat caused by insects in tea plantations have been identified by the researcher as results.

Keywords: Challenges, Matale, Plantation workers, Tea plantation, Women plantation workers

Introduction

In today's world, women are equally as talented as men in all fields. Women are contributing in all important fields like economy, education, politics and law. Female slavery seen in the early days is largely reduced today. The development path of women has started to the extent that the rituals that earlier women should not be educated and their first duty should be to take care of their husband, child and family by doing cooking and housework. Based on this, while the progress of women is being talked about globally, even in this 21st century, most of the women living with

their husbands, children and families are in the hill country. In 1823, people brought from India with the intention of producing coffee settled in the central hill country of Sri Lanka. The hill country people have been a community that has contributed massively to Sri Lanka's economy for over 200 years. Number of Nationalities in Sri Lanka Basically they are considered fourth (Census Report, 2012). The area where hill people live is the plantation area. Their number is 4 percent of the total population. Areas where crops like tea, rubber and coffee are grown are called plantations. Among these, tea is one of the

most important crops in the world. Tea production is widespread in countries such as Kenya, China, Turkey, Indonesia, Vietnam, Uganda, Malaysia, Tanzania, Malawi, India and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka is the leading producer of tea and the leading recipient in the international market.

In Sri Lanka, tea is cultivated in districts like Kandy, Nuwara Eliya, Badulla, Matale, Ratnapura, Kegalle, Kalutara, Monaragala, Hambantota, Kurunegala, Galle, Gampaha. Tea is seen as a 60-66 percent foreign exchange earner for Sri Lanka. The income from tea and the income it generates boosts Sri Lanka's economy. However, the living conditions and economy of the people working in the tea hills for 200 years have not changed. Plantation people are seen as only able to do daily chores and unable to fulfill their higher desires. Many hill country people, the area remains unchanged from the early days with electricity, clean drinking water and houses built in ancient times. The places where hill people live are often far away from the city. Due to this there will be no transport facilities. There will be no bus facility. School students have to walk about 20 kilometers to get education.

Thus, students go to work at an early age without the desire to get an education. Due to economic problems, people of all ages living in the hills are engaged in industries to improve their livelihood. Most of the women are engaged in tea plantation work. Among the hill women there are very few women who are educated and work in government jobs and in urban areas. Many women who do not know the modern trend of the world are still living their lives in the tea hill and at home. They have to work all day in the tea hill. Due to this, they face great suffering physically and mentally, also some go abroad to work as maids. Thus, in many villages under Elkaduwa plantation in Matale district, tea cultivation is

mainly found. Both men and women belonging to hundreds of families living in those villages work in the tea hills. Families who have been working from generation to generation in the tea hills for 200 years are also living here. In this case, the women plantation workers who have been working in the tea hills all their lives in Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala are facing many challenges.

Literature Review

A number of books, journals, research papers and articles have been reviewed in order to carry out the researcher's study on the topic 'Challenges faced by women plantation workers: A case study based on Elkaduwa plantation'.

A study titled 'Socioeconomic Issues Facing Tea Plantation Workers: A Sociological Study Based on Haidri Village Servant Division' was presented by Ponnai Murugan (University of Jaffna) in January 2018. This study clearly examines the social and economic problems faced by the tea plantation workers, the steps taken to reduce the problems, and the steps to be taken in the future. Through this, problems such as residential problems faced by tea plantation workers, health problems, social conflicts, opportunities for education of workers' children have been pointed out. At the same time, low income in economic terms, less opportunities for self-employment, lack of own land, and lack of formal assistance from the government. The study also analyzes issues such as continued dependence on wage labor.

'Gender, Women and Work in the Tea Plantation: A Case Study of Darjeeling Hills' by Mamta Gurung (Mizoram University) and Sanchari Mukherjee (North Bengal University), presented at Indian Journal of Labor Economics 61 in 2018. This research deals with the participation of women in the workforce and the impact on their socio-economic life. It also

examines the ways in which women workers are marginalized on multiple fronts that casualization of the workforce, upward occupational mobility and political space of trade unions. This research indicates that despite the dominance of the tea industry, women workers and their role in tea plantations have received relatively little attention in plantation literature and women's studies. The study also found that women workers still earn meagre incomes, experience low levels of health and personal well-being, live in poverty and remain disconnected from the mainstream.

'Outgoing labor and its impact on the tea plantations sector in Sri Lanka' by A.S.Chandrabose, presented at Department of Social Studies, The Open University of Sri Lanka in 2015. This research examine that the registered Workers move from estates and estate administration encourage temporary workers to engage in estate work. Also in this study, the researcher argues that in tea plantations, young laborers and youth are not willing to work and poor housing and low wages are not attractive factors. This research studying the nature of labor in the tea plantation sector in Sri Lanka and examine the opportunities and possibilities of non-estate jobs in the vicinity of tea producing areas in Sri Lanka. The study also draws an outline of the strategy adopted by the large-scale estates to mitigate and overcome issues of labor for their task in the country.

In his book 'Intraiya malaiyakam'(Today's Upcountry), (1995), M.S.Mookhaiyya talked about the issues related to education, economy, industry, land distribution and development related to the hill country people and their impact and contribution to the life economy of the hill country people. This book points out the overall problems of the hill people and suggests solutions to the problems. The objectives and implications of this study can be briefly explored

through the challenges and issues faced by upland women plantation workers mentioned in this book.

In his book 'Malaiyaka Tamil Literature' (Upcountry Tamil Literature), (1994), K. Arunachalam explores the lifestyle and history of upland plantation workers and the physical, social and economic problems faced by those people. He has also explained the Tamil literary scholars who lived in that area and their contribution. Although the problems of the people mentioned in this book are not mentioned in detail this book helps a lot to know the cause of the problem.

The book written by Saral Nathan titled 'History of Malaiyaka Tamils' (2003) is seen to explain the society of the hill country people and their life style of the plantation people under the title of education, houses and lands. The writer has also indicated the future development of the hill people. Although the book deals with the problems of hill country people in general, it helps to understand the educational and residential challenges of hill country women plantation workers.

Thus, various studies have been conducted on issues related to lifestyle, education, economy, industry, land distribution and development and their impact on the hill country plantation workers in Sri Lanka and around the world. Based on this the researcher's study titled 'Challenges Faced by Women Plantation Workers: A Study Based on Elkaduwa Plantation' is different from the above-mentioned studies and literature. This research is a new initiative based on the problems and challenges faced by women plantation workers who are still working in tea plantations in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central

Province, which plays an important role in tea cultivation in Sri Lanka.

Research Problem

Even in the 21st century when women are achieving globally, the hill country women plantation workers still face many challenges for their family and economic needs without adequate basic facilities. Ignorance of the physiological and psychological implications those challenges can have on women plantation workers. The problems such as the failure of relevant authorities and management to solve the obstacles to the development of the lives of hill country women plantation workers were presented by the researcher and the researcher tried to find solutions through a systematic study.

Research Objectives

- To find out the problems and challenges faced by women plantation workers in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province.
- To bring out the basic health, economic, educational and living needs of women plantation workers working in tea plantations.

Significance of the Study

In today's economic crisis in Sri Lanka, even if both husband and wife go to work in the government, people can only live a normal life due to the increased cost of goods and taxes in the country. Living a life that aspires beyond basic needs is challenging. In such an environment, those who work in the tea estates in the hill country faced great difficulty in meeting their basic needs with less than 1000 rupees per day. These people who work all day in the tea hills do not get salary for their hard work. Basic facilities such as clean drinking water and toilet facilities, roads, transport, school facilities, hospital facilities, banking activities, postal

requirements are not properly provided to the hill people. Based on this, the challenges faced by women plantation workers who working the whole days in the tea hills in an environment without basic facilities is an area of study that needs to be explored in today's context. In this case, the life of women who have lost their husbands become more challenging. In this era where women's achievements are becoming the talk of the town, the challenges and problems faced by women plantation workers for their basic needs revealing the study 'Challenges Faced by Women Plantation Workers: A Study Based on Elkaduwa Plantation' is an important topic to be researched nowadays.

Research Methodology

A field study was carried out by the researcher in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province. During the field study, the researcher observed the problems and challenges faced by the women plantation workers who are still working in the tea plantations in those areas. Interacting with the women plantation workers working in the tea plantations, and based on the information obtained by the researcher, conducted interviews with the women plantation workers working in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala regarding the issues and challenges. Content analysis has been carried out by the researcher to find out the problems and challenges faced by women plantation workers through the data collected through interviews.

Sample Design

Women plantation workers who are currently working in each of the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in Matale District, were randomly selected by the researcher as samples and subjected to the study.

Materials and Methods

Data collection

A field study was carried out by the researcher in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province. During the field study, the researcher observed the problems and challenges faced by the women plantation workers who are still working in the tea plantations in those areas. Interacting with the women plantation workers working in the tea plantations, and based on the information obtained by the researcher, conducted interviews with the selected women plantation workers. The questions were prepared by the researcher for interview to find out basic health, economic, educational and life needs of women plantation workers. Through the interview the researcher finds the qualitative data as primary data.

In this study, the data obtained from the book, research paper, journal and news published about the problems and challenges faced by women plantation workers and the basic health, economic, educational and living needs of the of women plantation workers have been used as secondary data by the researcher in order to continue the study.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The study has been conducted based on qualitative and quantitative data obtained through conducted interviews with selected women workers who are currently working in tea plantations in the villages of villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province. Thus, based on the quantitative data obtained for the study 'Challenges faced by women plantation workers: A case study based on Elkaduwa plantation', The plantation laborers living in the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province are

Tamils of Indian origin who were came from India 200 years ago.

More than 100 families were found in each of the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala and Hunugala during the researcher's study period. However, except for about 6 families who lived in a village called Couradi, all the families migrated to other estates. Villagers have been displaced from their own villages due to lack of proper basic facilities. The young men and women, including their parents, from about 6 families who lived in the village called Couradi, worked as plantation workers. Of the more than 100 families in each of the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala and Hunugala, 85% of the youth, including parents, working as plantation workers. Others are often found working in cities and working abroad. At the same time, school-going students and some young school-leavers live at home. Based on the research problem, information about how many women plantation workers is employed in each village under the study area was collected by the researcher.

Table 1: List the number of plantation workers employed in each village under the study area

No	Estate Name	Women Plantation Workers	Male Plantation Workers
01	Elkaduwa	12	12
02	Sembuwatta	24	27
03	Dottala	13	10
04	Couradi	07	09
05	Hunugala	32	13

Source: Elkaduwa Estate Office

As plantation laborers in the surveyed villages based on numerical data, Females are relatively more present in three villages. Other villages have equal number of women plantation workers to men.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected and analyzed through interview and observation based on the samples chosen by the researcher as the primary data collection method for the study.

Results and Discussion

When observed based on the feedback obtained through interviews of all the samples, according to the opinion majority of the samples, "The workload of women plantation workers increases as they have to maintain homes and focus on work. They said that they wake up early in the morning to fulfill family needs, after taking care of their children and family members, they go to work in the tea hill and work for more than eight hours. Often the tea hills are seen as dangerous.

The tea hills are not easy to work and are covered with grasses and bushes. Dangerous insects are found in those mountains. But the management does not pay attention to the safety of workers. Lack of clean place to sit and eat in the tea hills. Lack of clean drinking water. Working conditions in the hill place in rainy or hot weather. Deducting money from women plantation worker salary for taking short breaks in the working place. Giving women jobs that are sometimes done by men. Supervisors are biased towards some women only. sometimes Supervisors taking revenge when women plantation workers talking about their rights.

A long walk from the houses to the tea hills. Carrying around 20 kg of tea from long distances. Due to the weight of the tea, falls on the paths, injury to the body, dizziness, headache etc. Decreasing wages due to late arrival at the tea factory due to distance and weight of tea. women plantation Women plantation workers not only work in the tea hills but also work in the tea factory. Weighing of tea leaves, cleaning, loading of tea bags in lorry etc. Must work from 7 am to 5 pm. However, the corresponding salary

is not paid properly. Plantation workers from the villages of Elkaduwa Estate, Sembuwatta, Dottala, Couradi and Hunugala in the Matale district of the Central Province are did many protests demanding a salary of 1000 rupees. Due to the protests, some plantation workers lost their jobs and it affected their financial needs. It is difficult to take leave from work even if the women plantation workers suffering from ill health and family problems. Inability to focus on children's academic activities and the entire day's salary shall be forfeited on days when leave is required." such opinions have been presented by women plantation workers. Thus, women plantation workers face many problems and challenges at the workplace.

Women plantation workers working in tea plantations are facing many health, economic and family related challenges. During menstruation, women who are plantation workers suffer from many pains like stomach ache, body ache, dizziness, nausea, back pain, leg pain. If leave is taken in such occasions, as the monthly salary decrease, some women go to work despite the pain and are found exhausted. Amidst such problems, they may need to change their pads during menstruation. But they go to work in the tea hill in the morning and return home in the evening. Due to this working hour women plantation workers facing many health problems. There are no toilet facilities at The Hill. They do not even have any facility to wash their hands with clean detergent and there are people who don't know how to use pads during menstruation.

Due to financial constraints, some plantation workers use their own clothes and they are exposed to health-related diseases. Such restless work and depression can take a toll on them psychologically. A toilet at home is essential for a healthy lifestyle. But in hill country houses these conditions are seen as worrying. Even if toilet is found, they cannot be set up safely and

have many disadvantages. Also, about 40 percent of hill country dwellings do not have any toilet facilities, which is a challenge for the health of hill women. Drinking water facilities conditions are not satisfactory. It is said that approximately 60 percent of the houses have piped water. But the water supplied through this pipe is not purified. It has been said that due to unsanitary drinking water and toilet are causing disease in children.

Meanwhile, women plantation workers have said that they face many economic challenges. It is not possible to get full 15000 rupees as monthly salary even if plantation workers work full time. Basic amenities include food, clothing and shelter. Food adequate nutritious food with three meals a day as appropriate not available for hill country people. Increase in price of goods. Due to financial problems, it is not possible to buy and eat healthy food items. Women's health deteriorates without nutritious food. Going to work in the tea hills despite not being physically strong. Financial problem due to husband's drug addiction. Expenditure heavily on children's educational activities. Hospital expenses. Difficulty in meeting expenses other than food. Debt problems. Electricity charges. Due to such economic challenges, women plantation workers face many problems in meeting their basic needs. Also, a drug addict husband can create violence in the family. It affects the children's mental health and being humiliated in front of the neighbors. Widowed women are likely to experience sexual abuse and an unsafe environment. Discontinuation of children's education and sending to work on holidays. Women plantation workers also face many families related challenges like early marriage and early pregnancy. Child labor is still prevalent in rural areas due to poverty, it's lead to child abuse

and sexual abuse in some places occur. Many people live without asking for their rights or not knowing what their rights are. When women talking about rights, gender equality is said to be violated. Depriving women of their freedom of expression without giving importance to their opinion. Stopping the education of girls and sending them to pick tea leaves the dream of many women unfulfilled. They fall into poverty by marrying young and having too many children. As a result, women are unable to function independently in small settlements.

According to the data analysis carried out by the researcher, the women plantation workers thus face various challenges and problems in their daily life. They also face many health, economic, social and family related challenges. Attention should be given to the problems faced by the women plantation workers in the highlands and find appropriate solutions for them.

Conclusion

In today's world, women are contributing in all fields. They help to develop the economy of the country through their labor. Women are employed like slaves amidst great challenges without any basic facilities and a good example of this is the women plantation workers who work in the tea estates. People living in Sri Lanka especially in the plantation areas face various challenges. The most affected are women plantation workers. Women plantation workers working in plantations face many challenges and problems. Also, women plantation workers face many challenges not only in the workplace but also health, economic and family related. The women plantation workers have to work in the house and tea plantation for a whole day. However, the corresponding salary is not paid properly. Insecurity in tea plantations. Lack of clean space in tea plantations. Drinking water and toilet Inconvenience. Women plantation workers have faced problems such as menstrual

difficulties, biased and retaliatory action by supervisor, sexual harassment and unsafe environment. It is the duty of plantation management to address these issues and challenges. Thus, employing women without basic facilities is tantamount to depriving them of their rights.

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