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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Rubber, Tea, Coffee and Cardamom are the important plantation crops cultivated in Kerala. Kerala hold long tradition in the cultivation of plantation crops. Now Kerala accounts for 45 percent (6,26,000 hectares) of the total area of plantation crops in the country. At present out of the total area of plantation crops in Kerala, the percent of tea is estimated to be 5.88 (36,821 hectares). Tea Industry accounts for more than 10 percent of India's exchange earnings. It provides direct employment to over one million people and indirect employment to another one million through ancillary occupation. Nine percent of total cultivation area and work force of tea in the nation is represented by Kerala.

The development of plantation industry in South and South-East Asia is complementary to capitalistic growth. Plantation required more labour per unit of land than peasant agriculture. Plantation owners met this high demand for labour from subsistence economies. The initial low productivity of their untrained labour lead the planters to fix their wages at a very low level, sometimes below the real income they formerly obtained in the subsistence economies. This wage policy provided little incentive to migrant labour. Distinct patterns of controlling and managing the labour force were adopted to coerce the labour to remain in the plantation and maintain the requisite level of productivity. The condition of labour in plantation Economies have always been below par with meager wages.

1.1 Short History of Tea Cultivation

Cultivation of Tea, Rubber and Coffee started in India during Colonial period. Plantation crops developed only in the North eastern areas and Western Ghats in south India. Tea Plantations in India were also a product of colonialism and the production was aimed at the World market. Since India's Independence, the ownership of tea estates in India has changed hands.

The first Plantation crop came in Kerala was coffee. Decline in coffee economy due to diseases in 1870's, the coming of Brazil coffee and consequent fall in the price of coffee in international market etc. forced coffee cultivators in India and Cylone to prefer to Tea cultivation in Travancore. Thus British Citizens, especially missionaries and retired persons, came to hilly areas of Peerumade for tea cultivation.

In India, the tea plant was firstly introduced in North - East Assam during the early 1820's. It was East India Company, which initiated the possibility of

growing tea. India's tea plantations can be largely grouped into two regions with regional specifications - North East India and South India. Assam and West Bengal are Important States in North East India; Tamil Nadu and Kerala are the important southern states. India is the largest producer and consumer of tea in the world. It represents 31 percent of world products of tea.

Large plantations accounting only 0.5 percent of the total number of estates represent 25 percent of tea production. These planters are most dominant and influential determinants in the field of tea.

Tea was Firstly Introduced in Travancore in Calvyooni coffee estate Kollam. The First tea estate in Travancore ,Penchurst estate ,was started by F.M.Parker in 1875.

During the initial periods, the total area of tea cultivation was 200-500 acres. Since the coming of planters from Cylone the area of cultivation increased tremendously. In 1900, Kannan Devan Tea Company alone had 19 estates. The area of cultivation jumped from 3352 acres (during 1885-90) and 34,555 acres in 1914.

Liberal steps taken by royal families and Revenue - Forest authorities to allocate forest and wastelands for plantation crops. suitable climatic conditions, the availability of workers at low wage and strict controlling rules to them, the company act of 1862, starting of banking Business, the coming of roads connecting plantations and ports etc. accelerated development of tea and other plantation crops, in Kerala. Now Nine percent (36,821 Hectares) of the total cultivation area of tea in India is in Kerala

1.2 Crisis in Tea Industry

India is the largest producer and consumer of tea in the world .At Present the total turn over of the Indian Tea Industry is around Rs.10,000 crores. The total net Foreign exchange earned by the industry per annum is around Rs.1,800 crores.

The Indian Tea Industry is facing serious crisis. The decline in the price of Indian Tea, unhealthy practices in auction centers, low productivity, mismanagement, insufficiency in value added products, phenomenal impact of small growers and Bought leaf factories and the trade liberalization polices of Government of India have contributed to the crisis.

The primary factor behind crisis is the unprecedented fall in prices from Rs.76.43 per kg. in 1998 to Rs. 51.60 per kg in 2002. In south India this figures are Rs.68.79 and Rs.42.14 respectively. Oversupply situation is pointed out as a major reason behind fall in price. 1997 -98 tea import saw a four times increase

that has continued then .There was a fall of 18million kgms in tea exports in the year 1999. The availability of this surplus tea affects price .

Auction system has been the primary marketing mechanism for tea in India . Big brokers in auction centers are trying to consolidate themselves by breaking the price determining mechanism . Thus the brokers become able to buy tea at very low price and then sell at higher prices to the foreign buyers.

Mismanagement and lack of product diversification are evident in majority of tea plantations.

The failure of the tea industry, institutions related and the state to control the declining tendency of tea price has made the crisis the worst that the economy has ever seen. It seriously affects tea producing states of Kerala, Tamilnadu, West Bengal and Assam. The news of abandonment of estates by management or closure become common.

The crisis has not affected all regions in the country uniformly. In Kerala, tea estates in Central Travancore and Ponmudy areas are worst affected. Even in the same area, impact of crisis is not uniform. Some plantations in Munnar and Central Travancore are relatively unaffected. In West Bengal the impact is more serious in Dooars region than in Terai and Darjeeling . Big tea companies like TATA Tea , Hindustan Lever Limited, Goenkas etc are not apparently affected by the crisis. Hindustan Ltd representing 20 percent of world tea production, Tata Tea Company, running 50 estates in India are remain unaffected. The crisis does not affect the profit rate in the field of value added or packaged tea. So some plantations managed to over come crisis

1.3 Importance of Study

The Impact and consequence of the crisis in tea industry are multidimensional in nature. The process of abandonment or closure of estates become common. Plantations are main stay of Kerala's economy, particularly in rural sector.

The closing down of estates and tea factories adversely affect the overall performance of economy of tea producing states . Crores of tax revenue to government from tea industry under different heads like agricultural income tax, plantation tax, land tax, factory's license fee, Building Tax has been pending for years. The financial position of local bodies in the tea areas is seriously affected.

Since plantation workers are highly dependant on management for water, electricity, firewood, health, education etc , most affected group of people or direct victims of disaster in tea industry are the workers there. Tea estates being enclave economies, workers there lose employment, wages and statutory benefits like health , education , safe drinking water, sanitation etc.

The plantations employ permanent workers of over 85,000 and temporary and casual worker of over one lakh . Incidences of starvation induced deaths and suicides are coming to estates. Management try to over come crisis by raising

work load, downsizing labour force ; cutting down wage, keeping pending retirement benefits and contribution to Provident Fund account of workers and cutting down statutory welfare measures .

The deep crisis in the tea industry has severely affected the standard of living of estate labourers, employment opportunities, and level of trade union activities. So it is fruitful to study the impact of the crisis in tea on the socio - economic condition of the workers and their responses and surviving strategies.

Among organized industries tea employs the largest number of females in the primary sector. Male labourers perform marginal tasks. This is also reflected in gender relation in the labouring community. On the one hand plantations provide examples of an extremely oppressive situation for labour but on the other hand, are in some cases found to contain possibilities for a degree of sexual equality. Around two-third of total number of working days in plantations is ordinarily devoted to plucking.

In Kerala, as the premier agro asset, tea industry is female labour intensive and occupies an important place among plantations as one of the largest organized employers of women. They have to under take routine hard work in estates and household works.

Two thirds of the total number of labour days in tea plantations is ordinarily devoted to the most important job plucking. Generally, plucking of tea is the exclusive occupation of women, because a skilled leaf picker is usually a woman needing little supervision in her work. This crisis is seemed to have severely affected women, both physically and mentally, because the burden of most of the household affairs is on the shoulders of housewives. So study of plantation workers invite special attention from women workers .

The organization of work in Plantations is similar to industrial work, which involves a rationalized system of production with capitalization and some mechanization. This helped the growth of trade unions in Plantations.

Now, it is worthwhile to observe the role and bargaining power of trade unions in the background of decline in tea industry.

1. 4. Review of Literature

Plantation cultivation expanded in Kerala due to the encouraging policy of the government, at least in the southern region. Dr.S. Umadevi¹ analyzed the supply and demand conditions of Plantation workers during the early stages.

"Similarly, labour was made available for Plantation production and related activities by the government policy of abolishing slavery, abolishing the viruthy tenures and by allowing the import of labour from contractual basis from the neighboring territories of the Madras Presidency".

Plantation sector is highly labour intensive. Among the plantation crops, tea is the most labour intensive. Sunil Mani² in his research paper proved the comparatively better position of Plantation agriculture-to-agriculture sector as a whole regarding employment generation and wage rate.

According to Planters³, the labour cost of Kerala Tea Plantation is the highest in the nation where as the productivity is the lowest. They blame trade union leaders for not allowing a cut down in wage. "The Tamil Nadu experience is an eye-opener, which the Kerala trade union leaders should try and emulate. In the current scenario, the employment is more important than the wage level.

¹.Umadevi.S , *Plantation Economics of Third World*, Himalaya Publishing House,1989

².Sunil Mani, 'Plantations in Kerala: An analysis of its role, constraints and labour conditions', Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, June, 1992.

³'The Draft of white paper', The Association of Planters of Kerala,, January 2003

Therefore the workers and trade union leaders cannot close their eyes to what is happening across the border. A state like Kerala should learn from past mistakes of having long and protracted strikes or lock outs which has ultimately forced the industries to close down. This should not happen in the plantation sector, which is labour intensive and located in rural areas where alternative employment is just not there. Plantation sector is the largest single employer in Kerala".

The trade union leaders⁴ do not agree with it. According to them, "all crops tea, coffee, rubber and cardamom made substantial increase in yield despite huge cut in man power. The 'A P K' in the representation to the Parliamentary Committee agreed that average yield during 2000-2001 is increased to 114 percent in Rubber and 116 percent in coffee and 266 percent in cardamom and 26 percent in Tea, compared to the crop positions of 1980-81. The production per labour is substantially increased in major crops of plantations in Kerala which kindly note.....tea production per labour in kilograms in Kerala plantations is comparatively much higher than other tea growing areas except Tamil Nadu.....Kerala stands second in the productivity per labour.....The fact that productivity of tea bush adversely affected by age related deteriorations more than anything else".

Though Women form significant share of work force, their involvement and participation in trade union activities is low. But there are incidences where women workers played noted roles in movements and agitations. "The choice of joining a trade union and low level of participation in trade union activities, discussed earlier might lead one to believe that women workers are totally submissive to the dictates of the males. This is not entirely correct. They can be more militant than the men where provoked. In many mass movements of trade unions, women have taken the lead."⁵

There is no difference of opinion with the prevalence of a crisis in tea industry and consequent impact on the living conditions of workers. Different groups put forward different remedies. Centre for Education and Communication (CEC) has published a report of Fact Finding Team, which visited the Tea Plantations of Kerala. The team consisted of eminent Trade unionists, and experts in Labour and Industry. According to them, the reasons for the crisis in the Kerala tea are changes in the trade policy, low productivity, failure in keeping quality, mismanagement, problems with respect of auctions etc.⁶

⁴ Submission by Highrange Estate Labour Union (AITUC), before the Parliamentary Committee on Commerce at its Camp at Peermade, 2002

⁵.Kanchan Sarkar, Sharit K.Bhowmik, "Trade Unionism and Women Workers in Tea Plantations," *Economic and Political weekly*, December 26,1998.

⁶ A report, Crisis in Tea Industry, Centre for Education and Communication, New Delhi, P-87, 2003

Their recommendations are,

- 1.Government should provide immediate relief to mitigate the distress to workers through free ration of food, medical facilities, drinking water, assistance to the school going children.
- 2.Accountability and liability of planters in payments of wages, PF, Gratuity etc.
- 3.There should be action against mismanagement of plantations.
- 4.Cost of production should be reduced and productivity should be raised by replanting age old tea bushes. There should be quality up gradation schemes.
- 5.Unhealthy precedents and formation of cartels in tea auctions should be avoided for better price.
- 6.There should be step for the betterment of export.

7. Workers co-operatives may be made to manage closed plantations.

The challenges faced by South Indian Tea Industry due to various reasons, both national and international, are aggravated by low productivity in these regions⁷. "The cost escalation in South Indian Tea Plantations and low productivity has been responsible for the decline in the Industry". This problem is more serious in Kerala. When the productivity of Tamil Nadu is 1658 Kg. per hectare and Karnataka 1950 per hectare, the productivity of Kerala is only 1142 Kg. per hectare.

Sankara Narayanan and Karunakaran⁸ consider the peculiar feature of agricultural sector of Kerala. On account of a large number of valuable cash crops, the agricultural sector of Kerala is more commercialized than any other state in India.

Various publications of UPASI provide information about labour in plantations. These publications discuss the origin and growth of plantation crops in Kerala, nature and recruitment of labour, wages and other welfare facilities provided by the Plantation Labour Act etc. (UPASI, Glenview, Coonoor)

Certain problems are common to women workers. A comprehensive approach to the problem of women is put forward by A.K.Sen⁹. "While differential wages or payment rates constitute an important part of gender inequality in most societies, there are many other spheres of differential benefits, eg; in the division of labour within the household, in the extent of care or education received, in liberties that different members are permitted to enjoy. Indeed in the context of intra household divisions, it is not easy to split up the total household income in to the incomes going respectively to different members of the family. The sharing may take an unequal form, especially in relation to needs, but this is hard to translate in to income differentials, which would be an odd concept to use in examining intra- household divisions."

7. Thomas Issac T.M, The Trend and Pattern of External Trade of Kerala.

8. Sankara Narayanan.K.C, Karunakaran.V, Kerala Economy, New Delhi, Oxford 1985.

9. Sen , A.K, Inequality Reexamined, Oxford University Press, 1992.

There are general studies regarding the problems of women workers in the Plantations as a whole. A study conducted by Dr.Tessy Kurian¹⁰ titled ' A study of Women Workers in the Plantation Sector of Kerala' provides valuable information regarding working conditions of women workers in plantation sector as a whole. But the period of study did not allow considering the impact of present decline in plantation crops, especially tea.

Using secondary data with respect to workers in the Tea Plantation of South India, West Bengal and Assam, Padmini Sen Gupta¹¹ had made attempt to study

about the socio-economic background and consumption pattern of workers in Tea Plantations.

In the case of closed down estates, it may be, sometimes, fruitful to consider workers co-operatives as an alternative. Sharit Kumar Bhowmik¹² has analysed the ideology, gains, practical problems etc of two such experiences in tea namely, Saongaon workers Co-operative in West Bengal and Workers Co-operative in Tripura. "These co-operatives have tried to evolve new methods, formal and informal, for involving the general workers in the decision making process..... Infact the experiences of the workers in these co-operatives show that even illiterate and backward workers are capable of managing their own affairs when given the opportunity and the ideological motivation."

The Picturesque and Lush green Hills, with their numerous rivulets and deep valleys in Idukki District's Peermade in Kerala are a facade. They hide poverty, a reality the State refuses to acknowledge or accept. Here the 40,000 workers of tea plantations cannot remember when they last had their three square meals a day.¹³ This is a reflection of number of news and touching stories picturing the deplorable situations of tea workers in Idukki District. There may be some little shades of exaggeration in these words.

In spite of political freedom and changes in macro economy, the organizational set up of tea plantations hesitate to cope up with changes. "Historically owned by the British the tea plantations in India were also a product of colonialism and the production was aimed at the world market. Since India's independence, the ownership of tea estates in India has changed hands. Nevertheless, some multinational companies hold the ownership rights of large tracts of plantations. Exports as a percentage of production has also come down; 78.7 percent of total production was consumed in the domestic market in 1995. However, what has 'not changed substantially is the organization of work, the social relations and to a certain extent the production relations at work.'¹⁴

10. Tessy Kurian, "A Study of Women Workers in the Plantation sector of Kerala," *PhD Thesis*, Mahatma Gandhi University, June-1999.

11. Padmini, Sen Gupta, "*Women in Plantations*", *Social Welfare*, Vol:1, No: 6, P-12, 1954.

12. Sharit K Bhowmik, " Ideology and Co-operative Movement; Worker Co-operatives in Tea Industry", *Economic and Political Weekly*, December 17, 1988.

13. Sreedevi Jacob, "A Bitter Brew in the High ranges", *The Hindu Daily*, September 28, 2003.

14. John J, "editorial note", *Labour File*, July -September, 1999.

The report submitted by a team of trade union leaders and scientists after a fact finding visit to the crisis-ridden tea gardens of Kerala and Tamil Nadu has highlighted the fallacy of putting the entire blame for the present crisis on

labourers for their low productivity and has correlated the present break down to a host of reasons including the efforts of big players to break the present system, the unprecedented fall in the auction price, the phenomenal impact of small growers and the bought leaf factories and the failure of tea auctions as a price determining mechanism.¹⁵

There may be difference of opinion regarding the reasons behind the disastrous situation in tea industry as shown above. But no one can close eyes to the deplorable living conditions of affected workers.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The study is mainly focusing on the impact of the decline of tea industry in the study area. The study purports

- (a) to assess the living conditions of workers in the tea industry in the study area.
- (b) to analyse the problems of women workers of tea estates.
- (c) to assess the role of trade unions in the background of decline in tea industry.

1.6 Study Area

Idukki district represents 67.50 percent of total tea plantation area of Kerala. The tea plantation area of the district is spread over Peermade, Udumbanchola and Devikulam Taluks out of the total 154 estates of Kerala, central Travancore has 36 estates covering 10,100 hectares (29.1 percent of total tea area of state) of area and employing 26,000 workers. An equal number were also enlisted in these estates as temporary workers. These estates owned by 16 companies are located in Peermade Taluk. These estates are spread over Peermade, Vandiperiyar, Elappara and Upputhara panchayats. The companies running these estates are

1. Peermade Tea Company
 2. A V Thomas Company
 3. Alampally Estates
 4. Pullikanam Estate
 5. A V George Company
 6. R B T I and II
 7. Churakkulam Estates (MMJ)
 8. Periyar Connemara
 9. Mlamallai Estate
 10. Haileyburia Estates
 11. M.M.J Plantations
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15. News Report, *The Hindu Daily*, May 5, 2003.

12. The Karimthuruvi Tea Estate Ltd.

13. Aban Loyd Ltd.

14. Chidambaram Estate

15. Harrison Malayalam Ltd.

16. Hope Plantations

Out of these, only estates under companies shown as item numbers 2,3,5,8,10, 12, and 15 are functioning and others are closed down or abandoned. Only AVT Company provides full wage to workers. All other functioning estates are giving part of statutory wage as store cash. Here lies the reason for selecting Upputhara Panchayat as study area. It consists of all types of estates namely 'closed down' functioning normally' and estate struggling for survival.

The Panchayat is situated in the bank of river Periyar which separate the Panchayat from Ayyappancoil Panchayat of Udumbanchola Taluk. Other boundaries are Elappara Panchayat of Peermade Taluk and Arakkulam Panchayat of Thodupuzha Taluk. The geographical area of the Panchayat is 135sq. kilometer. Total population in the Panchayat is 31642 and number of households is 7650.

Three estates are fully and one estate is partially located in the panchayat. Only a part Karintharuvi estate is located here and the rest is in Elappara Panchayat. Other three estates are Peer made Tea Company (technically two estates Peermade estate and Lonetree Estate, but functioning as one. Therefore considered as one estate. Here in after mentioned as ' Peermade Estate' or ' Peermade Tea Company'), A.V. Thomas Company (AVT) and Alampally Estate. The management in December 2000 abandoned the first one. Here Workers unite for their livelihood and divide tea bushes among them with the leadership and initiative of trade unions. They pluck the green leaves illegally and sell them outside. The second one is the only estate in the central Travancore providing the statutory wage. The third one comes under the category of estates providing only a part of the statutory wage as store cash.

The area of Peermade Tea Company is 1029 hectares and that of AVT is 281.24 hectares. The area of Alampally is 173 hectares. The number of permanent workers in Peermade estate is 1131 at the time of closing down and that of AVT is 240. There are 167 permanent workers in Alampally estate.

Major classes of people in the Panchayath are small scale and middle class farmers migrated from neighbouring districts, and Tea workers migrated from neighbouring districts and Tamil Nadu state. The crisis in the plantation affects not only the living conditions of workers but also different fields of the entire Panchayth. The building tax and professional tax from estates to Panchayth are pending. The traveling and Transportation through estate roads become impossible. Commercial establishments and shops in the Panchayaths are notably affected.

1.7 Methodology and Source of Study

The proposed study is a micro level study at Panchayath level. The period covered by the study is 1995-2003. The living conditions and employment opportunities in the study area are closely examined. The land area, personal data, family background, working conditions, job satisfaction, housing conditions and household management, per capita income, educational status, medical facilities, household debt, savings, consumption pattern etc. were taken as the indicators of the general living conditions of tea workers. The role and activities of trade unions and their bargaining power in the background of crisis in industry and problems of women workers are analysed.

The study is primarily based on the primary data, which was collected from Upputhara Panchayath. Comparative study is conducted with respect to different categories of estates like those 'functioning normally', 'already closed' and 'those struggling to survive' This study takes households, trade unions and management as units for empirical investigation. As there is notable area of agricultural sector of other crops along with plantations in the study area, workers who lost their job ~~due to the crisis in plantation have got chance to depend on such fields for their~~ livelihood. This tendency can also be analysed .

The present study is primarily based on the primary data.

Three estates were selected from the study area namely, A V Thomas and Company (AVT), Peermade Tea Company and Alampally Estate. The number of sample households from each estate was determined considering total strength of workers in each estate. A total of 110 sample households were selected on a random basis. Out of these 50 units were from Peermade Tea Company, 20 from AVT and 10 from Alampally Estate. The remaining 30 is represented by selected women workers of these three estates.

Selected tea workers were interviewed with a structural questionnaire. A separate interview schedule was formulated and used exclusively for women workers.

To understand the problems of tea workers we have conducted discussions with various experts, Trade union activists, Tea Board Officials management staff and related institutions. Observation at the time of survey helped some extent to generate some aspects relating to workers living conditions and socio-cultural impact, which are not fully quantified.

To analyse the socio-economic status of tea workers, we have used various popular statistical tools.

Important sources of secondary data are various publications of Tea Board, Planters Association, UPASI and various statistical publications. Various reports published by the Department of Economics and Statistics, Department of Labour, Planning Board, Census Reports, National Sample Survey Reports etc. were referred for the study. Secondary data is also important to conduct comparative study with pre-decline period of plantation industry.

1.8 Scheme of Study

The study consists of **five chapters**. The **first chapter** is an introduction chapter where a brief account of the relevance of tea economy of Kerala abstract of the present crisis in tea industry and its impact, the importance of present study, review of literature, objectives of the study, description of study area and methodology of study are given. An analysis of primary investigations conducted in Upputhara Panchayath is presented in the **second chapter**. The nature of labour market of women tea workers, nature of their work and intra household inequalities are analysed in **chapter three**. The historical background of Trade unions, its origin and development, its role and drawbacks etc are discussed in **fourth chapter**. The **fifth chapter** gives the summary and conclusions of the study.



CHAPTER II

Socio- Economic Conditions of Tea Workers Households : Findings and Analysis

The Study Area covers wards 6 and 12 fully and wards 7,11 and 15 partially in Upputhara Panchayath. Details regarding history, ownership and management of sample estates are given below.

Peermade Tea Company

Cheenthalar estate, part of the present Peermde Tea Company estate was established by British planters in 1830. The other part, Lonetree estate was established only after 85 years. Most of the workers were brought from Tamil Nadu. The rest were migrated from nearby districts of Kerala. Then decades of plantation history was the history of exploitation of workers by British planters, slave like life of workers, increasing profit of planters etc. Peermade Tea Company is divided into four divisions namely, No. 1, No.2, No.3 and lonetree.

Britishers (Aspinwal Company) handed over the estate to Veeramony Sarma, Thiruvanthapuram. Now his eldest son, Rama Krishna Sharma, is the Managing Director of the company. His brothers and sisters are members of director board. They aha some more Tea and Rubber estates in various part s of the state. Travancore Rubber and Tea Company Ltd. [TR&T], in Mundakayam

valley in the boundary of Idukki district, is run by them. This is the largest Rubber estate in the state.

In spite of countless exploitations, tortures and restless hardworking, faced by workers, the British planters were very efficient, dynamic and punctual in management strategies. Even after the handing over of estate to Veeramony, the mode of management continued for a few years. Then managerial inefficiency started and its gravity increased slowly. Mismanagement reaches its extreme level in 1990s. The impact of general decline in Tea industry and mismanagement jointly led to the closing down of the estate in 2000. Draw backs in mode of management of Peermade Tea company can be shown as below.

- * It is said that there are some differences of opinions among members of director board which adversely affect smooth functioning.
- * The management especially members of director board, has always had a feudal approach.
- * This feudal approach discouraged them to introduce better techniques of production. After 50 years, the productivity of tea bushes declines. A significant share of the bushes of the estate are more than 50 years old. All types of care and maintenance like manuring, spraying etc. decreased. The owners become interested only in revenue. They question, local management only when there is a reduction in revenue.

AV Thomas and Company

The founder of AVT estate was Mr.A.V.Thomas, the father of present owners. He had already had the experience as a manager in tea estates in southern districts of Kerala. He came at Pasupapri in early years of 1940s and started planting of tea in the waste land there. He collected shares from workers and refunded the same during their retirement. Originally he belonged to Nadar Community of Tamil language. He converted to CSI. Even now majority of middle management staff and a significant share of workers belong to Nadar or CSI Community. It has got a modern management set up. The management has always been innovative. The head office is at Cochi. Along with this estate, they have Tea and Rubber estates in various parts of the state. Arnakkal tea estate, Karadigudy tea estate (both are in Vandiperiyar panchayat. Idukki district), Rajagiri Rubber estate in Kollam district etc. are some among them.

- * The management is modern. It does not like to be tied always with tea alone. It cultivate other crops also. Recently they have cultivated 'Vanilla' in acres of their land in tea estates in Vandiperiyar pannchayat.

- * A major reason behind decline in tea Industry is the unhealthy practice in auction center by larger brokers. The price fixed in the center is very low and not remunerative. AVT has been successfully making 'packet tea' with a remunerative price fixed by them. They give importance to product diversification, introduction of value added products etc.

Alampally Estate

One Mr.E.K.Joseph, Alwaye, is the owner of Alampally estate. Now it is managed by Sri.Ashok, his son and the president of Association of planters of Kerala (APK). Father of E.K.Joseph came here in 1930s and started planting tea in waste land here.

- * The estate is small in area and has always been managed directly by the owner. The owner knows each and every family. The management is able to control each and every aspect of estate. Any labour problem emerged in the estate is settled by the owner himself. Petty law and order problems among population in the estate are sometimes, settled by the management.
- * Management has always been able to avoid the grip of TUs. TU activities are nominal. TUs do not interfere in the affairs of the estate.
- * The estate is located in a valley and the office, factory and major portion of lines are located there. It provides the estate a characteristics of so called 'enclave settlement' in plantations. Along with this nature, the consequent inconvenience to contact with rest of the world and personal attachment with management are became advantageous to management in shaping their life style and attitude towards work favourably.
- * Since the estate is managed directly by owners, the expenditure can be reduced that much.

The major strategy the management follows is to compensate the loss caused by decline in price, by raising the workload of labour, keep a part of wage pending, reducing the welfare measure etc.

2.1 Socio-economic Background of Sample Households

2.1.1 Family Size, Age and Sex Status

The survey revealed that there are 368 members in the 80 households investigated. Out of these 221 are in Peermade Tea Company, 101 in AVT

Company and 46 in Alampally estate. There are 190 males and 178 females. Female – Male ratio is higher than one only in Peermade estate. Out of the total 80 households, 46 have got Malayalam as mother tongue and 34 household members are of Tamil.

he distribution of sample members on the basis of age is shown below. (Table 2.1)

Table-2.1
Age Distribution of Sample Population

Age Group	No. of People	Percentage
Below 1	10	2.70
1 to 15	91	24.72
16 to 60	244	66.30
Above 60	23	6.28
Total	368	100.00

members belong to the age group 16-60. Sum of the percentages of age groups below 16 and above 60 (33.70) becomes crucial in the present tendency of declining purchasing power of households. These members consume more or less similar as other earning members. But at the same time they are unable to contribute to the income of family. So these non-earning income groups may not get adequate care and attention as before.

CHAPTER II

Socio- Economic Conditions of Tea Workers Households : Findings and Analysis

The Study Area covers wards 6 and 12 fully and wards 7,11and 15 partially in Upputhara Panchayath. Details regarding history, ownership and management of sample estates are given below.

Peermade Tea Company

Cheenthalar estate, part of the present Peermde Tea Company estate was established by British planters in 1830. The other part, Lonetree estate was established only after 85 years. Most of the workers were brought from Tamil Nadu. The rest were migrated from nearby districts of Kerala. Then decades of plantation history was the history of exploitation of workers by British planters, slave like life of workers, increasing profit of planters etc. Peermade Tea Company is divided into four divisions namely, No. 1, No.2, No.3 and lonetree.

Britishers (Aspinwal Company) handed over the estate to Veeramony Sarma, Thiruvanthapuram. Now his eldest son, Rama Krishna Sharma, is the Managing Director of the company. His brothers and sisters are members of director board. They aha some more Tea and Rubber estates in various part s of the state. Travancore Rubber and Tea Company Ltd. [TR&T], in Mundakayam valley in the boundary of Idukki district, is run by them. This is the largest Rubber estate in the state.

In spite of countless exploitations, tortures and restless hardworking, faced by workers, the British planters were very efficient, dynamic and punctual in management strategies. Even after the handing over of estate to Veeramony, the mode of management continued for a few years. Then managerial inefficiency started and its gravity increased slowly. Mismanagement reaches its extreme level in 1990s. The impact of general decline in Tea industry and mismanagement jointly led to the closing down of the estate in 2000. Draw backs in mode of management of Peermade Tea company can be shown as below.

- * It is said that there are some differences of opinions among members of director board which adversely affect smooth functioning.
- * The management especially members of director board, has always had a feudal approach.
- * This feudal approach discouraged them to introduce better techniques of production. After 50 years,the productivity of tea bushes declines . A

significant share of the bushes of the estate are more than 50 years old. All types of care and maintenance like manuring, spraying etc. decreased. The owners become interested only in revenue. They question, local management only when there is a reduction in revenue.

AV Thomas and Company

The founder of AVT estate was Mr.A.V.Thomas, the father of present owners. He had already had the experience as a manager in tea estates in southern districts of Kerala. He came at Pasupapri in early years of 1940s and started planting of tea in the waste land there. He collected shares from workers and refunded the same during their retirement. Originally he belonged to Nadar Community of Tamil language. He converted to CSI. Even now majority of middle management staff and a significant share of workers belong to Nadar or CSI Community. It has got a modern management set up. The management has always been innovative. The head office is at Cochi. Along with this estate, they have Tea and Rubber estates in various parts of the state. Arnakkal tea estate, Karadigudy tea estate (both are in Vandiperiyar panchayat. Idukki district), Rajagiri Rubber estate in Kollam district etc. are some among them.

- * The management is modern. It does not like to be tied always with tea alone. It cultivate other crops also. Recently they have cultivated 'Vanilla' in acres of their land in tea estates in Vandiperiyar pannchayat.
- * A major reason behind decline in tea Industry is the unhealthy practice in auction center by larger brokers. The price fixed in the center is very low and not remunerative. AVT has been successfully making 'packet tea' with a remunerative price fixed by them. They give importance to product diversification, introduction of value added products etc.

Alampally Estate

One Mr.E.K.Joseph, Alwaye, is the owner of Alampally estate. Now it is managed by Sri.Ashok, his son and the president of Association of planters of Kerala (APK). Father of E.K.Joseph came here in 1930s and started planting tea in waste land here.

- * The estate is small in area and has always been managed directly by the owner. The owner knows each and every family. The management is able to control each and every aspect of estate. Any labour problem emerged in the estate is settled by the owner himself. Petty law and order problems among population in the estate are sometimes, settled by the management.

- * Management has always been able to avoid the grip of TUs. TU activities are nominal. TUs do not interfere in the affairs of the estate.
- * The estate is located in a valley and the office, factory and major portion of lines are located there. It provides the estate a characteristics of so called 'enclave settlement' in plantations. Along with this nature, the consequent inconvenience to contact with rest of the world and personal attachment with management are became advantageous to management in shaping their life style and attitude towards work favourably.
- * Since the estate is managed directly by owners, the expenditure can be reduced that much.

The major strategy the management follows is to compensate the loss caused by decline in price, by raising the workload of labour, keep a part of wage pending, reducing the welfare measure etc.

2.1 Socio-economic Background of Sample Households

2.1.1 Family Size, Age and Sex Status

The survey revealed that there are 368 members in the 80 households investigated. Out of these 221 are in Peermade Tea Company, 101 in AVT Company and 46 in Alampally estate. There are 190 males and 178 females. Female – Male ratio is higher than one only in Peermade estate. Out of the total 80 households, 46 have got Malayalam as mother tongue and 34 household members are of Tamil.

The distribution of sample members on the basis of age is shown below. (Table 2.1)

**Table-2.1
Age Distribution of Sample Population**

Age Group	No. of People	Percentage
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Total	368	100.00

Majority of members belong to the age group 16-60. Sum of the percentages of age groups below 16 and above 60 (33.70) becomes crucial in the present tendency of declining purchasing power of households. These members consume more or less similar as other earning members. But at the same time they are unable to contribute to the income of family. So these non-earning income groups may not get adequate care and attention as before.

al Status

ne of the determinants of physical quality of life. Majority of plantation workers especially tea workers are migrant labourers, with different mother tongue, customs and educational level. The percentage of illiterates comes to 13.40. Illiterates are more in Tamil families. Majority of the members have dropped their study at Secondary Level. (Table2.2). Though 10.10 percentage of members passed secondary level, only a few become lucky to step foot at College level. The remaining part either fail or drop out at Pre -degree or Plus Two classes.

Table-2.2
Educational Status of Sample Family Members

Level of Education	No. of People	Percentage
Below age 5	27	7.30
Illiterate	49	13.40
Primary	65	17.60
Secondary	190	51.60
Above 10	37	10.10
Total	368	100.00

s willing to provide better education to their children. But education is a long-term process and any interruption will cause serious repercussions on the trend of the students. The financial difficulties of parents, the ignorance of parents with respect of education, the remoteness of place of residence and long journey needed for better education are reasons behind the educational backwardness of these areas.

, there are two Lower primary schools, one at Puthukkada, in Peermade Tea Company and another in Alampally estate. The Grama Panchayat of Upputhara runs the first one and the second one is by Alampally Estate. An Upper primary school at Pasupparai, run earlier by AVT company was later handed over to private management. There is a

Government high school at Kattadikavala, in Peermade estate. The entire parents, except a few, send their children to these schools, for Primary education.

But after the primary education majority of students depend on high schools at nearby by towns - Elappara and Upputhara. Though the parents wish to send their children in schools in these towns, even in the primary level, they can not do so due to the fact that children below the age of 10years can not walk 5 to 8 Kilometers to reach there. Any way parents do not have good opinion on schools operating in estates.

2.1.3 Community wise Distribution

Prominent communities of sample households are Ezhava and CSI. But a notable factor is that majority of households, both Malayalam and Tamil, belonged earlier to different schedules caste groups have converted to different Christian communities as CSI, Latin Catholic, Pentecost etc. (Table 2.3)

Table-2.3
Community wise Distribution of Sample Households

Community	No. of Families	Percentage
Ezhava	18	22.5
CSI	18	22.5
Latin Catholic	5	6.25
Marthoma	4	5.00
Nadar	3	3.75
Nair	3	3.75
Pentacost	10	12.5
Pulayar	3	3.75
Roman Catholic	2	2.50
Sambavar	5	6.25
Parayar	3	3.75
Thevar	6	7.50

While 34 households are of Tamil languages, out of them only 9 households remain with their own original caste namely Nadar, Thevar etc.

2.1.4 Residential facilities

The Plantation Labour Act has laid down rules regarding housing, drinking water, sanitation, drainage and sewage arrangements. During the period of emergence of tea industry, the employers faced the problem of scarcity of workers. The recruitment was very difficult. Therefore

the employers were forced to provide residential facilities to the workers recruited from distant places, even in the absence of any statutory provisions. It is unavoidable for ensuring the availability of employees. Later with the coming of Plantation Labour Act 1951, it became statutory

Table-2.4
Distribution of Residential Facilities Provided by Management

Facilities	Peermade Tea Co.	AVT	Alampally
Plinth Area	400	500	360
Rooms Including Kitchen	3	3	3
Roof	Tiles	Tiles	Tiles
Wall	Stone	Stone	Stone
Floor	Soiled	Cement	Cement
Latrine	Septic Tank	Septic Tank	Septic Tank
Bath Room	Common	Attached	Common
Drinking Water	Well	Tap and Well	Tap

Out of the 80 sample households, 5 from Peermade and 4 from AVT are residing at houses built at their own land nearby places in the same Panchayath. The remaining 71 households are living in the houses provide by management. These houses or row of 5 or 6 quarters are known as 'lines'. The features of them can be shown as above (Table 2.4)

The plinth area of house is the highest in AVT company because bathroom is attached to each quarter there. There is uniformity among three estates regarding number of rooms, nature of roof and latrine. The rooms of Alampally estate are comparatively less spacious. Separate latrines are provided to each houses in all estates. They are not attached to houses, but situated in a distance of 5-10 meters, from houses. Bathroom is provided only in AVT. A common bathroom for a 'line' including 5 or 6 houses is provided in Peermade Tea Company, but not in use. Here workers themselves made temporary extension in the backyard as bathroom. Others depend on open place or latrine or ponds or nearby streams for bathing.

All the households depend on facilities provided by management for drinking water. Drinking water supply through tap is prevailed in AVT and Alampally.

Twenty years back a well-developed drinking water supply system had prevailed in Peermade Tea Company. Water was supplied from taps and each 'line' was provided with each tap. Now this system is extinct and people

bring water from the wells, made earlier for providing water through taps, tube wells and ponds. The developed system was collapsed even before the starting of crisis in tea industry due to the lack of timely and proper maintenance.

The floor of sample houses in AVT and Alampally estates is of cement where as in Peermade Tea Company it is soiled.

All the houses in AVT and Alampally estates are electrified. In Peermade Tea Company management was not ready to take initiative in electrifying workers houses. The electricity charge is recovered from the wage of workers.

Distribution of Sample households on the basis of household amenities is shown in the following table (Table 2.5)

Table-2.5
Distribution of Household Amenities (Percentage in Brackets)

Items	Peermade Tea	AVT	Alampally
TV	5(10.00)	14(70.00)	10(100)
Radio	44(88.00)	9(45.00)	6(60.00)
Fan	3(6.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Fridge	0(0.00)	2(10.00)	0(0.00)
Tape Recorder	0(0.00)	4(20.00)	3(30.00)
Mixy	2(4.00)	6(30.00)	4(40.00)

2.1.5 Medical and hygienic facilities

According to Plantation Labour Rule, there shall be two types of hospitals-garden hospitals and group hospitals. The first one is meant for dealing with patients not requiring any elaborate diagnosis and treatment where as group hospitals have to deal efficiently with all types of cases normally encountered but shall not be used for routine treatment

Twenty years back an advanced hospital facility had been prevailed in Peermade Tea Company. Peermade Tea Company had a group hospital at NoII and a garden hospital at Lonetree Division. More than hundred beds were available for inpatients. Separate wards were provided in the premises of hospital to doctors, nurses and other hospital staffs. A comparatively better canteen was attached to the hospital from where free food to patients, as

prescribed by the doctor was given. Since 1985 the management has not given adequate attention to maintain the hospital properly.

The downfall of the hospital facility need not be associated with the present crisis in tea industry. There has been irresponsibility on the part of management. Initially, the management took away the service of Doctors there. Then the responsibility of diagnosis and treatment came on the shoulder of a compounder and the fund allotted for the purchasing of medicine became nominal. Normally, workers moved to private hospitals in the nearby towns namely Elappara and Upputhara. The higher reference hospitals of Peermade Tea Company are Medical Trust Hospital, Mundakkayam and Medical College Hospital, Kottayam. Medical reimbursement was available to workers referred to these hospitals.

The survey shows that 80 percent of sample households in Peermade estate depend on Government hospital situated near Upputhara town, about 9kms. from the group hospitals, 60percent of sample households resort to private hospitals along with Government hospitals. Rise in the dependency on Government hospital is due to the closing down of estate hospitals.

The AVT Company runs a hospital for workers with 15 beds. Once in a week the service of a doctor is available there. A compo under and a nurse are working there. Serious patients are referred to Medical College Hospital, Kottayam. Now the fund allotted to the hospital is seemed to be reducing. Workers also complaint of hurdles in reimbursement of expenses incurred in treatment at Medical College Hospital, Kottayam. All the households in the estate depend primarily on estate hospital for treatment. Along with this nine households depend on private hospitals and one on Government hospitals also.

The clinic run by Alampally estate is insufficient. Any way all the households depend on estate hospitals and no one depend on Government hospitals situated 8-10kms far from home. But three households depend on private hospitals also.

The decreasing purchasing power of workers, escalating expenditure on medical treatments, closing down of estate hospitals in the closed down and abandoned estates, tendency of management to cut down the fund allotment to estate hospitals the inconvenient distance of Government hospitals from estates and insufficiency the re are seriously affecting the treatment of tea workers in the study area.

The physical quality of a society is determined also by the environmental hygiene. There are so many drawbacks in this respect. Proper drainage system of wastewater in the premises of 'lines' was lost in Peermade Tea Company even before closing down. The insufficiency of water causes problems in maintaining latrine and bathroom properly. Even though water is supplied through taps in AVT and Alampally estates, only one tap is allotted more than five houses.

In the early days of tea plantations, the management had taken utmost care to keep the premises of workers residential area clean. A large pit for depositing waste could be seen in the premises of each 'line' of quarters. Later redeploying them in other general works or not filling the vacancies originated by the retirement of sweepers reduced the number of sweepers. In Peermade estate, these pits, made for the disposal of waste materials in an outside the houses became heaps of waste materials, even before the closing down of estate. In the case of AVT, the number of sweepers has been reduced from 8 -3 and the number of times they visit the premise for cleaning is also reduced proportionally. Now so many households throw waste materials carelessly here and there.

2.1.6 Employment

The total work force in the sample households is estimated to be 188, which consist of numbers coming with the age group 16-60, except students and housewives. Out of this total work force, 173 persons are employed causing unemployment of only 7.90percent (Table 2.6)

Table-2.6
Occupational Distribution

Occupation	Peermade Tea (Postclosing)	AVT	Alampally	Total	Percentage	Peermade Tea (preclosing)
Plantation	74	31	22	127	67.10	74
Agriculture	2	1	0	3	6.80	2
Casual Labour	22	3	0	25	13.45	6
Agricultural Labour	2	0	0	2	1.10	0
Business	0	1	0	1	0.55	0
Animal Husbandry	2	0	0	2	4.20	1
Others	10	3	0	13	6.80	4
Total	112	39	22	173	100.00	87

Here the situation in Peermade Tea Company should be analysed separately. Workers of various closed down estates of Kerala unite for their livelihood and divide tea bushes among them with the leadership and initiative of trade unions. The workers pluck the green leaves illegally and sell them outside. The tea bushes of Peermade Tea Company are also shared among permanent workers in such a manner that each worker gets number of bushes ranging from 1200-1500. About 50percent of households have two or in some rare cases three permanent workers, and they get share of bushes proportionally. The workers pluck leaf once in fifteen days. Therefore the actual monthly working days of a worker in the closed down Peermade Tea Company became 5–12 days. In the above table they are also considered as employed as before. Out of these 74 workers 16 persons engage in fields such as agriculture in their own land or animal husbandry for additional earnings. Therefore under employment is crucial among tea workers of Peermade Tea Company.

A comparative study of occupational pattern of Peermade Tea Company- households between pre-closure and post- closure periods is fruitful. The number of members engaged in casual labour before the closure of estate was only two. Now it became 22. The number of persons engaged in driving, sales man ship, automobile workshop etc, shown, as 'others' in table, was only four. It jumped to ten after the closing of estate.

The occupational pattern of households of Alampally is notable. The entire work force is employed and all are engaged in plantation. This phenomenon is closely associated with some peculiarities and features of management and living nature of workers. This is a small estate near to AVT estate Pasupparai. Other tea estates are the boundaries of this estate. The geographical features, the type of management, the small size of 'estate', the low number of workers there, the low trade union activities and consequent low level of political awareness provide the estate the character of an 'island'.

The factory and lines of quarters of workers and all allied offices of estate are situated in a 'valley'. A person can enter the residential area of workers only after crossing the premises of factory and other offices. More over the main gate is always closed. An outsider can enter the premises only after the permission of gatekeeper.

The nature of management in Alampally has its own specialties comparing to neighbouring estates. Since the area of estate and number of workers are low, the management is able to control each and every aspect of estate. The owner has personal contact with each and every labour. Any problem emerged in the field is settled by the owner himself. Petty law and order problem in the estate is settled there itself by the management.

Actually the management shapes here the life style and attitude of workers towards job. Trade union activities, like in other estates, have not been allowed. There is an understanding between management and trade union. Accordingly, trade union does not try to interfere in the affairs of estate. There has not been any strike in the estate. Trade union leaders of that estate say that the management had been ready to provide all the remuneration and benefits to workers till the coming of crisis. So there was not the need of any strikes. But it is a fact that the management has been succeeded to curtail conventional trade union activities there.

Since the workers have not usual contacts with 'rest of the world' they are forced to confine their life and dreams within the boundary of the estate. So all the grown up members of the family like to be part of estate by enlisted as a worker, whether permanent, temporary or casual. The scope of alternative sources of income is rare. That is the reason why all the employed persons are engaged in tea. Now there are only 130 permanent workers, instead of more than 200 earlier periods. There are 60 temporary and 150 casual workers in the company. They are eager to be enlisted as permanent workers. The decision in this respect is to be taken by the management, especially, in the absence of trade union activities. So the temporary and casual workers are always be 'good servants' of management.

2.1.7 Earnings of Sample households

The annual earnings of households consist of income obtained from different sources such as earnings from plantation, agriculture, animal husbandry, casual labour, agricultural labour, business and other sources.

Income from plantation has got separate meaning in Peermade Tea Company and other two sample estates. In the first case income from plantation means earnings obtained by selling tealeaves collected from the

share of bushes appropriated by them. In the second case, plantation income simply means the wage given by management.

Agricultural income means the income obtained from agricultural land owned by some workers, very often, in the nearby places or out of the agricultural land owned by management and temporarily used by workers with the permission of management. There are some rare cases where the ownership of land temporarily enjoyed by workers or others are legally transferred from the management to the workers themselves through court judgement.

The relative share of different source of income is shown in the following table. (Table 2.7)

Table-2.7
Relative Share of Different Sources of Income(in Percentage)

Sources	AVT	Alampally	Peermade Tea (pre-closing)	Peermade Tea (post-closing)
Plantation	87.84	100.00	86.40	56.43
Agriculture	1.10	0.00	6.50	11.80
Animal Husbandry	0.00	0.00	0.30	4.58
Casual Labour	4.46	0.00	3.00	16.04
Agricultural Labour	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.82
Business	0.79	0.00	0.00	0.00
Others	5.81	0.00	3.80	9.33
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

In Alampally estate, the entire income is coming from the plantation as wage, the reason of which has been discussed under the topic employment. The share of plantation is more or less same in AVT and in Peermade Tea Company before the closing down of the latter. After the closing of estate the share of plantation, naturally, is reduced from 86.40 percent to 56.43 percent. Share of all other sources increases. Notable increase is in the share of agriculture and casual labour. The share of casual labour in the total income showed more than five times increase from 3.00percent to 16.04 percent.

After the closing of Peermade Tea Company, the unemployed members were forced to be earning members of the family to compensate the reduction in the family income caused by the absence of plantation wage. Some of them are absorbed in the nearby places as casual labourers. Moreover, casual labour is the easiest possibility for an unskilled person. (Figure -1&2)

The share of agricultural labour has not shown notable increase after the closing down of Peermade Tea Company. There are two reasons for the static nature of share of agricultural labour. Only a few members of tea workers' family are aware of agricultural works. Small holding farmers in the Panchayath are not ready to employ untrained people. Moreover, most of the male tea workers have not the experience of doing works for a continuous period from 8.AM to 5.PM. In Peermade Tea Company, most of the male plantation workers were deputed for general duties in the estate, other than plucking. These duties could be completed within five or six hours. So, normally, plantation workers may not like to go for agricultural labour, the remuneration of which is less than that of casual labour.

The share of agriculture is nominal (1.18percent) in AVT. It was 6.50 percent in Peermade Tea Company before the closing. Now it is 11.80 percent. Only 23 households in Peermade tea and seven households in AVT have land under possession. In Peermade tea, twenty percent of land areas in the hands of workers are belonged to the tea company as mentioned earlier. The average area of land possessed by workers of Peermade Tea Company is 74 cents where as it is 70.28 cents in AVT (only households having a piece of land are taken in to consideration for estimating average).

After the closing of Peermade estate, land-possessing workers get enough time to engage in agricultural works. Moreover, they are forced to do so to compensate financial crisis. That may be the reason for rise in the share of agricultural income. In almost all cases, the tea workers, rather than other members of family, give additional attention to agricultural works. All other unemployed members try to be absorbed in other fields. More over, the earnings from agriculture are annual in nature and it may become less attractive to meet day-to-day expenditure.

In Alampally, two sample households have their own land, but not cultivated. The survey shows that land possessing households of AVT are not interested in agricultural works. Total land area possessed by workers of AVT is 492 cents [seven workers at an average of 70 cents]. Four households have a land area of one acre each. But the monetary share of agriculture in annual income of total sample households of AVT is only Rs.10,000/- which shows the underutilization of land.

After the closing down of Peermade Tea Company, the unemployed youth of workers' family has been trying to assist the family by obtaining any occupation. Some of them became salesmen in shops and other enterprises in nearby towns, some turned as assistants in automobile work shops. Some others went to other districts for livelihood. A number of persons, below the

age 22, are ready to go out of the estate as casual labourers in construction works. These are the reasons behind the rise in the share of 'Others' in the total income as shown in table.

The distribution of sample households on the basis of level of annual income is shown in the following table. (Table 2.8)

Table-2.8
Distribution of Sample Households on the Basis of Level of Income
(Percentage in Bracket)

Income Group	Peermade Tea		AVT	Alampally
	(pre-closing)	(post-closing)		
Below 20000	0(0.00)	26(52.00)	0(0.00)	2(20.00)
20000-30000	20(40.00)	11(22.00)	5(25.00)	8(80.00)
30000-40000	3(6.00)	9(18.00)	3(15.00)	0(0.00)
40000-50000	15(30.00)	2 (4.00)	4(20.00)	0(0.00)
Above 50000	12(24.00)	2 (4.00)	8(40.00)	0(0.00)
Total	50(100.00)	50 (100.00)	20(100.00)	10(100.00)

There is not a single household below the annual income level of Rs 20,000/- in AVT or pre-closed Peermade Tea Company. After the closing down, the annual income of 52 percent of households in Peermade Tea Company declined below the level of Rs.20,000/-. It is noteworthy that two households of Alampally estate came in the group of lowest level of income. Moreover, there is not a single household above the annual income level of Rs.30,000/-. It is interesting to see that 26 percent of households in the closed down estate of Peermade Tea Company have got an annual income of more than Rs.30,000/- each. The reasons for this difference between Peermade Tea Company and Alampally estate are:-

- a) The 'Island' like nature of Alampally estate as discussed earlier and consequent inconvenience to depend on alternate sources of income.
- b) Even though, the Alampally estate is not closed down, only half of the wage (Rs.40/- per day) is disbursed. The management says that the rest will be disbursed later as arrears with the revival of the industry. This reduction in wage rate will reduce annual income to half the original amount. At the same time there is less possibility of alternate sources of income.

c) In the case of Peermade Tea Company, the financial setup of majority of households was collapsed. At the same time there are households who try to keep their income level without much affected, through resorting to alternate sources of income.

In AVT the highest number of households are in the income group Rs.40,000/- – Rs.50,000/- while in the case of Peermade Tea Company that income range shifted from Rs.20,000/- – Rs.30,000/- to below Rs.20,000/- after the down fall. The households of income more than Rs. 30,000/- will have more than one tea worker or have the possibility of income from other sources.

The percentage distribution of households by yearly per capita income is shown in the following table. (Table 2.9)

Table-2.9
Distribution of Sample Households on the Basis of Per capita Income

Per Capita Income Group	Peermade Tea (pre-closing) (post-closing)		AVT	Alampally
Below 3000	0	12	0	1
3000-60000	2	23	4	7
6000-10000	32	11	9	2
Above 10000	16	4	7	0
Total	50	50	20	10

Out of the 50 sample households of Peermade Tea, 12 are coming below the annual per capita income level of Rs.30,000/-. In the pre-closing period, 96 percent of households had annual per capita income above Rs. 6,000/-. Now 70 percent are below the level Rs.6,000/-. Naturally AVT shows a comparatively better position. Out of the 10 sample households in Alampally only two became able to cross the level Rs.6,000/-.(Chart-1)

The average per capita annual income of sample households of Peermade Tea Company before closing down is estimated to be Rs.9,223/- where as it became Rs.5,044/- after the crisis. The average per capita income of sample households of AVT is Rs.8,930/- and that of Alampally is only Rs.4,786/-.

2.1.8 Assets and Liabilities

The distribution of sample households on the basis of level of assets is shown below. (Table 2.10)

The assets are in the form of Land, Jewels, Bank Deposits, Provident Fund, Insurance etc. Out of the 50 sample households of Peermade Tea Company, five have not got any assets, and 28 percent of households have got assets of value below Rs.25,000/-. After the

Table-2.10
Distribution of Sample Households on the Basis of Assets
(Percentage in Brackets)

Range of Assets(inRs.)	Peermade Tea.	AVT	Alampally
Nil	5(10.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Below 10000	1 (2.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
10000-25000	13(26.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
25000-50000	7(14.00)	2(10.00)	3(30.00)
50000-100000	8(16.00)	11(35.00)	4(40.00)
Above 100000	16(32.00)	7(35.00)	3(30.00)
Total	50(100.00)	20(100.00)	10(100.00)

Downfalls of estate, so many households are forced to sell their gold ornaments, withdraw deposits etc. Majority of households withdraw their provident fund partially or completely. Out of the 50 sample households 18 have withdraw significant share in their provident fund account and five workers have already closed the account. Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) deposits have been completely withdrawn by 10 workers. These are the reasons why some households of Peermade Taluk came in the 'Nil' group of assets.

In all the sample estates, the major sources of assets are Land and Provident Fund. But only 17 households of Peermade Tea Company, seven households of AVT and two households of Alampally estates have land as asset . The per capita asset in Peermade estate is Rs.18,330/- in AVT, it is Rs.23,515/- and in Alampally it is Rs.19,634/-.

The distribution of sample households on the basis of liabilities can be shown in the table below. (Table 2.11)

Table-2.11
Distribution of Sample Households on the Basis of Liabilities

(Percentage in Brackets)

Range of Liabilities (in Rs.)	Peermade Tea.	AVT	Alampally
Nil	0(0.00)	3(15.00)	0(0.00)
Below 10000	13(26.00)	3(15.00)	6(60.00)
10000-25000	24(48.00)	9(45.00)	4(40.00)
25000-50000	8(16.00)	3(15.00)	0(0.00)
50000-100000	4(8.00)	2(10.00)	0(0.00)
Above 100000	1(2.00)	0(0.00)	0(0.00)
Total	50(100.00)	20(100.00)	10(100.00)

The table shows that there is not a single household without any liability in Peermade Tea Company and Alampally estate. Out of the 20 sample households in AVT, three are free from any kind of financial liability. The peculiar nature of households of Alampally is reflected also in liability. In spite of financial difficulties, they adjust or cope up with limitations, thereby limiting financial liability below Rs.25,000/-.

Various sources of liabilities of sample households are shown in the table below (Table 2.12).

Table-2.12

Relative share of Different Sources of Liabilities (in Percentage)

Sources of Liabilities	Peermade Tea	AVT	Alampally
Loans	35.35	38.62	16.90
Land Mortgage	0.00	36.54	0.00
Chitties	2.18	0.66	3.48
Others	62.47	24.18	79.62
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00

The major source of liability in the case of Peermade tea estate and Alampally estate is shown in the table as category 'Others'. This category consists of indebtedness of the household to friends, relatives and shopkeepers. This is a reflection of the inability of households of Peermade tea estate and Alampally estate to meet day to day expenses. The second largest source of liability is 'loans and advances' from Commercial Banks and Co-operative Banks, generally by pledging gold.

The per capita liability in Peermade tea estate is Rs.5,171/- where as this amount is Rs.3,739/- in AVT and Rs.2,186/- in Alampally. In all the cases asset value is higher than liability.

2.1.9.a) Expenditure Pattern

The consumption pattern of sample households is given in the following table (Table 2.13)

The share of food expenditure is the highest in all the 3 estates within the range 55-60 percentage. The share has declined by 2.10 percent in Peermade Tea Company with the closing down of estate. The share on expenditure on fuel and light is the lowest in Peermade Tea estate due to the lack of electricity. More than 20 percent of expenditure on this category is electricity charge in Alampally and AVT.

‘Cloth and washing’ includes the expenditure on purchasing of cloth, tailoring charge and the cost of washing soap and powder.

Table 2.13
Relative Share of Items of Expenditure (in Percentage)

Items of Food	Peermade (Pre-closing)	Peermade (Post-closing)	AVT	Alampally
Annual Total Expenditure (in Rs.)	1878494	1538549	976203	361436
Food Materials	59.30	57.20	60.08	55.65
Fuel and Light	2.50	2.57	6.73	8.77
Clothes and Washing Expenses	7.18	6.57	7.67	5.70
Donations and Gifts	3.47	4.05	4.71	3.35
Entertainments	0.99	0.54	1.30	2.70
Smoking, Betel and Liquor	2.84	3.47	1.81	8.40
Festivals	3.03	1.84	2.72	2.93
Education	2.44	2.98	3.82	3.22
Treatment	10.80	13.19	2.28	1.03
Miscellaneous	7.45	7.59	8.88	8.25
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

The head ‘donations’ means expenditure on donations and assistance provided to marriages, house warming, funeral ceremony, donations to religious activities and trade unions. It is notable fact that the crisis in Peermade tea estate has not reduces the share of these expenses, but slightly raised. Nowadays, estate labour families are becoming more and more spiritually organized. The expenses in this respect are also increasing. The donation to trade union includes monthly subscription and in rare occasions additional contributions for special programmes. In AVT and Alampally, the monthly subscription per worker is Rs.10/- for almost all unions. In Peermade tea estate, with the closing down, the monthly subscription disappeared. Now average of Rs.25/- per month per worker is collected by trade unions for meeting the current expenses.

The expenditure on entertainment is comparatively low in estates. Sometimes the male younger people may go for seeing movies. Others seldom go for cinema. Comparatively higher share in AVT and Alampally is due to the expenditure on monthly fee towards cable TV. According to the survey, 70percent of households in AVT and 100percent of Alampally are subscribers of Cable TV. The quarters of Peermade tea estate is not electrified. Only five sample households who reside their own houses in nearby places have TV.

The expenditure on smoking, liquor and chewing betel is notable. The share is least in AVT. The share of this expenses in Peermade tea estate is seemed to have increased slightly. But the actual expenses in money terms remain more or less similar or slightly lower. When there is a reduction in total expenditure, the share, increases. The share of this head in the total expenditure is the highest in Alampally. The habit of taking alcohol is comparatively higher in Alampally. There cannot be seen cases where family members avoiding smoking or liquor due to financial difficulties. But there are cases where people shift their choices from costly cigarette and brand of liquor to cheaper ones. It has also led to the increase in the illegal production and selling of cheaper alcoholic drinks in estates.

The share of expenditure on festivals has been reduced by 50 percent in Peermade Tea Company. In AVT and Alampally also people are not so enthusiastic, as earlier, in celebrating festivals. This is due to the reduction in income. The average share of this in total expenditure is only around three percent.

The share of expenditure on treatment is the lowest in Alampally and the highest in Peermade Tea Company. After the closing down of estate, family members of Peermade Tea Company have to depend on sources other than estate hospital. Even before the closing, people had been depending on

other hospitals, due to the insufficiency of estate hospitals. But they had depended on it for minor diseases.

The category of miscellaneous expenses consist of expenses on foot wear, bathing soap, cosmetics, hair dressing, postage, newspaper, traveling expenses, hotel expenditure etc.

The family members in Peermade Tea Company have reduced their traveling expenses.It is higher among some Tamil families who like to visit their relatives in Tamilnadu state, once in an year.

There is no difference in expenditure between pre -closing and post closing periods in Peermade Tea Company regarding items postage, hairdressing and toilet soap.

The number of newspaper subscribers in Peermade Tea Company among the sample households has been reduced from 15 to 4 due to the financial difficulties. So many persons read newspaper daily, though are not subscribers. Only one household is subscribing newspaper among sample households of AVT; no one subscribes newspaper among sample households of Alampally.

Hotel expenditure, expenditure on cosmetics and footwear have been reduced proportionally to the reduction in the total expenditure of sample households of Peermade tea estate.

b) Food Expenditure

Analysis of food consumption of sample households can be done with the help of following table. (Table 2.14).

Table 2.14
Relative Share of Items of Food Expenditure (in Percentage)

Items of Food	Peermade (Pre-closing)	Peermade (Post -closing)	AVT	Alampally
Annual Total Food Expenditure(in Rs.)	1113983	880178	586535	201171
Rice	24.00	29.45	18.48	22.98
Wheat	1.50	0.94	2.17	0.60
Atta	5.50	6.09	6.30	4.10
Tapioca	4.12	3.87	5.15	4.30
Cereals	8.65	9.52	9.95	8.61
Vegetables	14.30	12.82	13.88	15.84

Meat	8.38	4.78	8.92	2.93
Fish	7.85	5.76	5.93	7.08
Egg	0.11	0.09	0.75	0.33
Coconut oil	5.04	5.34	3.01	6.77
Nallenna	0.46	0.55	0.21	0.52
Other Cooking Oils	2.04	2.27	2.18	3.12
Milk	2.14	1.57	5.65	0.40
Fruits	0.31	0.10	1.50	0.42
Sugar	3.48	3.90	3.03	3.76
Coconut	4.20	4.32	3.15	3.94
Others	7.92	8.63	9.74	14.30
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

The purchasing of rice represents major share in the total expenditure on food. The share is seemed to be inversely proportional to the level of income. When the income decreases, sample households try to compensate it by cutting down expenditure on comparatively costly food items like meat, fish, egg, milk, fruits, to some extent vegetables etc. At the same time, they try to compensate the reduction in the consumption of these costly items by consuming larger quantities of less expensive items such as rice and atta. Comparative study between the consumption pattern of sample households in Peermade Tea Company in the pre-closing and post –closing period (Table 2.15) proves this fact. The expenditure on meat is reduced by more than 50 percent after the closing.

Frequency of usage of fruits, milk and egg among households of sample estate is shown in the following table. (Table 2.15)

Table 2.15
Distribution of Sample households on the basis of Frequency of Milk, fruits and egg

Name of Estate	Milk	Fruits	Egg
Peermade(pre closing)	14	10	4
Peermade Tea(post closing)	9	5	3
AVT	6	11	4
Alampally	19	3	4
Total	48	29	15

Out of the 50 sample households only 10 in the pre-closing Peermade Tea Company had purchased fruits at least 2 or 3 times yearly. Even this number has been reduced to five with the downfall of the estate. Out of the 20 sample households of AVT and 10 sample households of Alampally, 16 and 6

households respectively buy and consume milk. But only nine households in Peermade Tea Company are using milk even in insufficient quantity.

The income - expenditure analysis shows that 71 households out of 80 have annual income below annual expenditure. All the sample house holds of Alampally estate and 17 out of 20 in AVT and 44 out of 50 samples in Peermade have got an annual income below the annual expenditure. The sample households, obtaining income more than expenditure, have earnings of significant amount from sources other than plantation.

The per capita income in Peermade Tea Company (pre-closing), post-closing, AVT and Alampally are Rs.9,223/-, Rs.5044/-, Rs.8930/- and Rs.4786/- respectively (Table 2.17). The per capita expenditure in these estates are Rs.8500/-, Rs.6961/-, Rs.9665/-and Rs.7857/- respectively. The per capita shortage of income with respect of expenditure is Rs.1917/- (post closing Peermade Tea Company), Rs.735/- (AVT) and Rs.3071/-(Alampally). These shortages will naturally become part of liabilities.(Chart-2&3)

So the study reveals that even the households of AVT, running more or less normally, are unable to cover their expenditure with limited income. Any way they manage to cope up with this situation, to some extend, by tightening the dhothy.

But the situation is different in Peermade tea estate and Alampally. The households of Peermade tea try to balance their budget by cutting down expenditure and depending on alternate sources of income. These measures are not sufficient to survive. So they are leaving their assets like jewels, land, provident fund,etc; obtained through decades of hard work. Even though, three years have passed since the closing down of estate, the households have succeeded, to some extend, to survive both financially and physically. Certainly, it will not be the scene,if the situation continues.

2.2 Conclusion

The study shows that crisis in the tea industry has severely affected the living conditions of tea workers' families. The level of residential facilities including drinking water availability becomes deteriorated in Peermade Tea Company. The effect varies with the present status of different estates. The standard of living of workers of AVT is comparatively better than that of Peermade Tea Company and Alampally. AVT is the only estate in the Central Travancore region providing wage rate fixed by last settlement.

But it is interesting and fruitful to note that percapita income of households in Peermade Tea estate is better than that of Alampally. This

phenomenon is associated with the presence of features of so called ‘enclave’ settlement model in Alampally .The scope of alternate employment opportunities are comparatively higher in Peermade estate due to its geographical location, better contacts of workers with the rest of the world etc. So the situation of AVT and Alampally would have been more deplorable than in the present Peermade estate, if those had been closed down. Even after the closing down of Peermade Tea Company, per capita shortage of income with respect to expenditure is higher in Alampally than Peermade Tea.



CHAPTER III

Women Tea Workers: Problems and Issues

Women represent half the resources and half the potential in all types of societies. Therefore the empowerment of women and rise in their status are indispensable for the sustainable development of mankind. Employment of women is an index of their status in society. They are working in different sectors of the economy as agricultural labourers, casual labourers, domestic servants, doctors, engineers, lecturers and white collared executives.

Among organized industries tea employs largest number of females. On the one hand, plantations provide examples of an extremely oppressive situation for labour, but on the other hand, in some cases found to contain possibilities for a degree of sexual equality. Tea industry is female labour intensive and two third of total working days are spent for plucking.

The reason shown by employers for the higher employment percentage of women is that work in plantation is gender specific. Women are seemed to be very efficient in plucking of tea leaves. It is better to specialize men in other general works regarding maintenance of plantation. It may not have any scientific base. The higher rate of women employment can be associated with the nature of labour market and family based employment system prevailed in the earlier stages.

The employees of tea plantation are migrant labour. All members of the migrated family were enlisted as workers. This tradition continued. Actually, the employers cunningly continued this system to keep the wage rate at a low level. If all the members of family are employed, the problem of low remuneration per worker may not be noted. Employers wanted cheap labour, as families rather than individuals, to be settled in estates permanently. During the early stages of scarcity of labour, such a system was highly helpful to planters. The family settlement reduced the gravity of problem of recruitment in the future also.

More than 50 percent of total tea workers are women, because plucking is a continuous activity and women usually do the plucking. The impact of crisis in tea industry is more on women. The scope of alternate employment opportunities is low to them. Since the household affairs including preparation of food are on the shoulder of women, mentally and physically they become tired. They are always under high pressure. So it is important to give much attention to the problems of women workers in any study of plantation labour.

This study tries to analyse the socio-economic conditions of women tea workers, intra-household inequalities and other problems faced by them. The socio-economic life of women in tea estates is peculiar in nature. Discrimination and inequalities in society can also be noted in families.

The study area consists of 1538 permanent workers. Out of this 957 (62 percent) are women. The socio-economic conditions of tea workers have already been analyzed in the earlier chapter with the help of data collected from 80 sample households. Therefore, here we try only to analyze the peculiar problems of women workers and their status in the society and house. Hence only 20 women workers were interviewed.

3.1 Age, Employment and Income

The study shows that the average age of sample women workers is 45. The average age of women workers at the time of joining is 22. Three workers joined estates at an age below 18. The joining age of one of them is 13.

Most of the women workers joined plucking not only to support their family budget but also as a part of the custom or convention. This can also be associated with educational background. Most of the workers above the age of 40 discontinued formal education on the primary level or before. The women workers who completed secondary education are rare. Women, after discontinuation of education considered plucking as an engagement also. The ignorance of some parents regarding the scope of education during the early stages has also contributed to this tendency. When their unmarried daughters bring some money to the family as wage, naturally, they became happy.

After the early stages of 'slavery' like period, the attitude towards education changed. The parents began to provide much attention to the education of children. This trend was first noticed among Malayalies than Tamil families. Here also the study of daughters is given lesser priority. If a girl failed in a particular class, the parents would decide to stop her study. on the contrary, a son in the same situation was allowed to continue. At that time the parents think that the daughter recalled from school, will be a supporting hand in household works. Sometimes, the taking care of younger children will become the responsibility of those daughters. Ultimately they will become part of labour force in estate. The girls are also happy to escape from the monotonous work in the home.

Now a days, parents in tea estates, having comparatively better financial background, are reluctant to send their daughters to plantation job. They consider plantation labour as a job of less dignity. After the education, girls are married, if

possible, to a person outside the plantation. The dream of most of the parents are not materialised in the light of crisis in industry.

In spite of all the financial difficulties, it is notable that, a few girls are continuing their studies even in college level. Malathy and Soman have three daughters. The eldest one is a Post Graduate student in a famous College in Thiruvananthapuram. Even after the closing down of the estate, the parents are very alert in the continuation of her study. The younger daughters are in plus two classes. The family on account of education incurs an additional expenditure of Rs.1,500/-. Even though there are a few graduates among girls in these estates, there cannot be seen a single woman in Government service or Public sector enterprises.

3.2 Nature of Work

The plucking of tea leaves is the exclusive occupation of women. It is the harvesting of tea leaves by snapping of tender shoot using finger. It is the plucking of a bud and two tender leaves below it. It is a simple job. But it requires some skill and attention. These qualities are expected from women rather than men.

The workers have to report for duty in the field before 8.00 AM. She has to work continuously upto 5.00 PM, except one hour lunch break. The place of work will be some distance away from home. The workers have to leave their home at least before 7.30 AM. The average time at which they reach home after duty is 5.15 PM. So they have to complete the household works including preparation of breakfast and lunch by 7.00 PM. The average time of getting up of workers in the morning is 5.00 AM. After reaching home in the evening, she has to carry out the remaining household routine works such as preparation of supper, washing cloths, collecting firewood, drinking water, cleaning home and premises etc. This highly tightened work schedule makes them tired physically and mentally.

3.3 Intra – Household Inequality

Gender discrimination in the society and in the household affairs is evident among tea workers family. The time period of women workers extends up to 5PM. But male members become free in the afternoon due to the nature of their work. The general duties carried out by male workers are manuring, weeding, spraying of pesticides and weed killers etc. All these duties will be completed by four or five hours. In the afternoon the male members become free and they get enough time to take rest. The female members have to work up to 5PM to obtain a remuneration equal to that of male members. So there is a relative disparity in the wage rate with respect to duration of work.

Women workers started their span of hard work at 5AM. In spite of their unbearable work load, the assistance on the part of other members in the family is

not significant. The household works are carried out more or less completely by women workers themselves.

There is a belief that participation of women in paid employment results in individual independence and active participation in family decision making. But this study shows that the level of improvement among women tea workers, in this respect, is not appreciable. Even in cases where the main contributor to the family income is a women, husband and other male members of the family dominate in the decision making in household affairs.

In almost all families, kitchen work is exclusively meant for women workers. In some cases, other female members in the family join with them. The average distance from where the drinking water is brought is 200meters in Peermade Tea Company. It is 10-30 meters in AVT and Alampally estates. In most of the households, the family members bring water jointly, whether male or female. Such participation can also be seen in the collection of firewood also. Only one female worker, out of the total interviewed, go for shopping. Shopping is exclusively meant for men. In most of the households, the women workers have to undertake the duty of washing dresses of family members. In some cases, other female members assist her.

Majority of women workers think that their present workload of plucking and household works is too much and unbearable.

Their husband receives even the wage of female workers. They determine the way in which family income is spend. But seven, out of the 20 sample women workers, are not satisfied with the way of spending family income. Some express their disagreement in family.

3.4 Attitude of Women

The attitude of women workers towards the nature of work, wage rate,

Table 3.1
Distribution of Sample Women Workers on the basis of Attitude

Items	Satisfied	Not satisfied
Nature of work	20	0
Wage	14	6
Task of work	12	8
Medical facilities	8	12
Leisure time	7	13
Residential facilities	9	11
Creche facilities	7	13

work load, availability of medical facility, leisure time, residential facility etc. can be shown with the help of above table. (Table 3.1).

All the workers are satisfied with the nature of work. But six, out of 20, are not satisfied with wage rate. Only 40 percent are unsatisfied with the task of work. Majority of women workers are not satisfied with medical facilities provided, leisure time, accommodation and facilities of caring children.

Contrary to the average, most of the sample female workers of AVT are not satisfied with wage rate and task of work. The workers of Peermade Tea Company and Alampally, in the midst of crisis, wish to have at least the prevailing wage rate and task as per provisions.

The drawbacks in medical facilities, facilities for caring children, residential facilities and leisure time are affecting female workers rather than male workers. The level of these facilities, except caring of children, has already been discussed in earlier chapter.

There is crèche in AVT and Alampally for taking care children of working women, in the day time. These crèches consist of around or below 25 children. Peermade Tea Company also ran crèche before closing. However, the attention of management to these facilities in all estates has been decreasing. Most of the workers depend on their grand mothers or elder daughters or neighbours for caring their children in the day time.

The continuous heavy work in the field and home make women workers physically weak. In most of the families, they take food after satisfying all other family members. So there is the possibility of mal – nutrition and under nutrition among female workers. Some of them are suffering from chest pain, back pain, headache etc. But some of them do not believe that this type of illness is due to nature of work.

Incidence of violence or sexual harassment or physical torture has not been observed in the study. There is an incident of sexual harassment ending the death of person who attempted. The women worker was 30years old at that time (Now she is 35). The person residing in the adjacent home or quarter in the same line entered her quarter in an evening. He tried to rape her. As a defence, she wounded that person using kitchen knife. Later he died. This is a rare incident.

All the workingwomen, except some in Alampally, are members of trade union. Women workers simply join the trade union where her husband or father has membership. Actually she is not joining, her husband or father joins her. We

can see a worker of trade union among females, rarely or very rarely. Women workers do not participate in general bodies but they will participate in strikes, demonstrations etc as a custom. Therefore the role and involvement of women in trade union movement is mechanical rather than creative. This issue is discussed in Chapter IV.

Around 50 percent of women tea workers have the habit of reading. But only rare persons read newspapers. All of them read low standard weeklies, published mostly from Kottayam . Their sense of art and literary background are moulded by these publications.

In spite of all criticism, the role of these publications in retaining the reading habit and intimacy to letters should be admitted. It is a consolidation in the midst of misery; it is a recreation in the absence of actual recreation. But this reading habit is comparatively lower among women workers of AVT and Alampally where television governs the free time of family members, especially women.

The women workers are tied to the household affairs. Therefore the scope of alternate employment opportunities is very low to them. The women workers in the Peermade Tea Company can not engage in alternate occupation, after the closing down of estate.

A noted phenomenon in recent years is the formation of "Ayalkkootom" and "Kubumbasree" units. A large number of "Kudumbasree" units can be seen in Peermade Tea Company and AVT. These units are organized independently under the guidance of Kudumbasree officials and "Grama Panchayath" committee. These are meant for women empowerment and for raising the standard of living of financially backward people. In Peermade Tea Company, these units or "Ayalkkootom" play twin roles. On the one hand it raises the decision making power, leadership quality and status of women in the society. On the other hand, it stands as a supporting element to the financially collapsed families. Almost all the units concentrate on buying food materials and other tiny household materials and selling among themselves. So the members of this units are able to purchase food materials at a lower price than that charged by the shopkeepers in the estate.

A drawback of Ayalkkootoms in estates is their inability to form a productive unit providing employment to women. This is highly significant in a

closed-down estate where it is very difficult for women to identify alternate employment opportunities.

3.5 Conclusion

Women tea workers are a major part of labour market of our state. They are engaged or have engaged in gainful employment contributing to home, to state and to the nation. So the society should ensure continuously that they are given due respect and status. In tea plantation, women represent half the share of total work force. The development of that society and locality highly depends on the status and empowerment of women.



CHAPTER IV

Role of Trade Union Movement in Tea Plantations

The geographic features and alienated structure of plantation are reasons behind the slow growth of trade unions in early stages. The inconvenience faced by trade union leaders of urban area to reach there, the nature of migrant workers, greater share of women in the total number of workers etc are some other reasons. The unity developed among workers by working and living side by side on similar conditions, rationalized system of production with capitalization as in industrial work are some catalytic factors behind the emergence of trade union movement in plantation.

4.1 Nature of Labour Market

The tea industry is the second largest employer in India. Most of the plantations are in geographically isolated areas. These structures have always been criticized as 'enclaves'. Plantation needed larger areas of land and labour force. But the areas selected for cultivation of plantation was less populated due to the peculiarity of geographical nature. Therefore, during the initial stages, the employers faced serious shortage of labour force. They depended on migrant labour.

Recruitment of workers in the early stages was family based. Employers resorted to such a strategy for two reasons. Firstly, they wanted permanent settlement of labour force in plantation. Here the migration of family rather than individuals is most suited. Secondly, labour force could be reproduced in family settlement there by the problem of recruitment in the future period could be solved.

Another strategy taken by employers is associated with high rate of employment of women. Employers justified this action by picturing works in plantation, especially in tea as gender specific. Plucking was exclusively left for women and male members were deputed for other general duties in the field. This division of labour has not got any scientific justification. On the contrary, the employers became able to keep the wages at a low level by high rate of employment among women.

This system of family employment and greater involvement of women in tea industry still continue as a custom. In order to ensure the continuity of family settlement, employers provided residential facilities, basic services and recreation, cultural facilities etc in the estate itself. So the consumption pattern, life style,

attitude etc. of plantation workers have been determined and designed by employers.

The tea workers of Kerala are also migrant labourers, mostly from TamilNadu. Idukki District is not an exemption. Majority of the workers came here from TamilNadu. Idukki is one of the districts in the state where linguistic minority exist. Migration to this high land region started at the end of 19th century. Tamil people migrated as plantation workers of British planters in Peermade, Udumbanchola and Devikulam Taluks . Malayalies were migrated mainly from neighbouring districts of Eranakulam, Kottayam and Alappuzha.

All the features of labour market mentioned above are applicable to the study area also. The nature of labour market with special reference to women, the relation of employment to education have already become discussed in Chapter II

4.2 Origin of Trade Union

The Trade Union movement (here in after TU movement or TU) came in tea Industry of Kerala only in 1940's. Workers had been unaware of the scope of bargaining power till then. Present Peermade Taluk, including study area, was part of Kottayam District then. Trade union activities started here by K.V.Mathew, Pottankulam at Mundakkayam in 1948. Now Mundakkayam is the boundary between Kottayam and Idukki districts.

Trade union Leaders were coming from neighbouring districts namely Kottayam and Alappuzha . TU leaders of this area in the early stages were .K.V.Mathew , P.P.Wilson , Sreekandan Nair Prakkulam Bhasi ,M.M.Sundharam, P.A.Chandy etc. During that period British capital was dominating plantation sector . Management and Police tried to suppress T U activities with cruel attacks on leaders and workers .

4.3. Labour Welfare Legislations

The awakening TU movements, strikes , fierce attack of management and police etc. compelled Government to form an enquiry commission in 1948 .As per the recommendations of the commission, The Plantation Labour Act (PLA) came in to existence the act laid down various provisions to raise the welfare of workers inside and out side the work place .There were provisions for housing facilities .The coming of the act raised the momentum of TU Movement. By that time, the major central Trade Unions had started their unions in the tea plantation of the study area .

Until 1952, there had not been unanimity in wage rate. Minimum wage committee, constituted by the state government of Travancore – Cochin, recommended for a uniform minimum wage for the industry as a whole. Accordingly, a uniform wage rate was fixed on 1952. The wage rate for an adult member was Rs.1.60 per day , consisting of basic wage of Rs. 0.94 and Dearness Allowance(DA) of 0.66.The DA was to vary with the variation of cost of living Index published for Ernakulam .But the decision for variable DA was not implemented.

Later a committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Mamman Tharakan to decide the demand raised by TUs in this respect .As per the recommendations of the committee, a tripartite committee was constituted by state Government, which later became 'Plantation Labour Committee ' (PLC). Accordingly, conciliation settlement was entered in to in 1958 by adopting same wage rate as in the madras state for the workman in Travancore - cochin area. There after, there has been a chain of settlements , Strikes , awards . Along with these TU movement spread rapidly and at present there is hardly a tea estate where workers are not under the influence of TU .The central TUs namely, INTUC,CITU,AITUC , UTUC, BMS etc have their own unions here .

Plantations were the first industry where Equal Remuneration Act 1976 was enforced .The disparity in wage rates until then between male and female workers was abolished .The last wage settlement was expired on 31.03.02 where the daily wage was fixed as Rs.77.26/- (Basic pay + DA). Meeting of PLC, discussions at various levels and even demand or strikes on the part of workers became immersed in the back ground of crisis and closing down of so many estates .out of the three estates in the study area , there is no question of wage in Peermade Tea which was closed .In Alampally estate only 50 percent of the wage fixed in the last settlement is provided . The actual monetary wage as per last settlement is provided only in AVT.

4.4 Role of Trade union in a period of crisis

During the initial stages of plantation ,the style and attitude of workers were moulded and handled easily by management ,both British and Indian .Later with the emergence of TU movements workers began to know their rights , different from those taught by management . Since then there have been a competition between management and TU movement in determining and shaping the identity of tea workers . TU movement can be proud of in the success, in this respect ,to an extend . TU movement is the major factor in elevating the socio-political life of workers . But this role of TU is shaded often by the financial gains obtained by workers through TU.

4.5.TU Movement and Socio - Political life

TU movement raised political and social awareness of workers . It developed leadership quality, organisational capacity , sense of unity etc. In so many areas in Kerala , plantation workers or their leaders become able to interfere in the socio - political arena of the areas .In so many cases these leaders become the leaders of all mass of locality .

It is very interesting and fruitful to analyse the socio - political life of the Upputhara Panchayath , correlating TU Movement .The degree and intensity of TU movement was higher in Peermade Tea Company; in AVT it is lower and in Alampally,it is the lowest. These variations are reflected in the life style, outlook, and political empowerment etc. of workers.

The political awareness of workers of Peermade Tea is very high. So many leaders emerged from the workers or workers' family became the leaders of the Panchayath in various fields including politics. Middle class farmers in the Panchayath have been keeping a superiority complex to the tea workers. But the interference of tea workers or their leaders in the general sphere of the Panchayath has broken down this attitude of other classes of people, to some extent. So many members of tea workers' family became recognised in the parliamentary fields, art, culture and sports and games of the taluk or district.S.R.Jhanayya, member of a tea worker family became President of Upputhara Grama Panchayath. All the classes of people had to recognise him as their leader.

Beena, house wife and wife of a permanent tea worker, once became the District Panchayath member by obtaining votes even from middle class farmers and merchants.

In the case of AVT, the role of workers in the in the general sphere of the locating or panchayath is nominal, where as the workers of Alampally are not in the picture. The contribution of geographical location, especially of Alampally, is not forgotten here. The favourable geographical location of Peermade Tea Company with more convenience to contact with the rest of the world is also underlined. However, the contribution of TU movements stands in the forefront.

4.6 TU and Cultural Activities.

The four divisions of Peermade Tea Company have been dynamic in arts, culture and sports and games for decades. There were a number of clubs in the estate, other than the official labour club run under the guidance of management. These clubs celebrate their anniversary regularly with competition in arts, sports and games. People of different class and of different parts of the taluk, sometimes

district, came there to compete. Actually these clubs provide stages even to other classes of people in the area to express their talents.

In almost all the cases, these clubs were organised by trade union leaders directly or indirectly. The operation of these cultural establishments and TU movement are complementary to each other. The persons expressed their abilities in cultural activities are, most probably, recruited as worker of TU.

After the secondary education, Sureshababu had nothing to do. It was not the time to be enlisted as a worker. A trade union leader appointed him as the secretary of a club in Lonetree, in Peermade Tea Company. Seeing his organisational capacity, he was given another charge in the youth organisation. Then he became convenor of that union in that division. Now he is one of the office bearers of a major trade union in the taluk.

Such a kind of cultural dynamism cannot be seen in AVT or Alampally estates, where trade union activities is low or nominal respectively.

This order of variation among sample estates can be seen in the involvement of peoples' plan also. When 46 out of the total 50 sample households, participate in Gramasabha in Peermade Tea Company only 16 out of 20 households tried to participate in Gramasabha. It will become still a lesser percentage in Alampally, only seven households out of 10 participated.

At least one member participates sports and games in 14 households, out of the 50, in Peermade. It is only two out of 20 in AVT and one out of 10 in Alampally. No one in the sample from Alampally participate in cultural activities.

The variation in the number of subscribers of Newspaper is not an exemption to the above-discussed pattern. In the pre-closing Peermade Tea estate, 13 households, out of 50, were subscribers of Newspaper. After the closing down the number has been reduced to four due to financial difficulties. Only one out of 20 spends money for newspaper in AVT; and no one in the sample households of Alampally subscribe newspaper. The availability of TV in almost all houses may be an additional reason for low circulation of newspaper in AVT and Alampally.

4.7 Challenges faced by TU movement.

Actually the TU movement is searching for a strategy to tide over the present deplorable situation in tea plantation. Sometimes, it is seemed that they have not got concrete ideas regarding the role to be played in the crucial stage. The

declining trend in the industry is in a novel form, entirely different from those seen before. The problem is multidimensional in nature.

The problem cannot be solved in a particular estate alone. But at the same time there are estates functioning normally. Some estates provide remuneration of workers ; some others do not do so. The crisis is associated also with the policy decision of state and central governments. This complex situation necessitates a deviation in the conventional trade union activity. In the early stages, most of the movements were against the authoritarian attitude and unwillingness of management to provide better wage and welfare measures. So the arrow of agitation could be pointed towards a specific area. Since the problems are multidimensional, the interference of TU should also be so. Since the problems become complex, role of TU also becomes complex. To be frank, the TU movement should be elevated to such a level, in all aspects, to satisfy the needs of changing times.

Inspite of the golden age of TU in Plantation and its role in the over all development of workers, TU activists may admit that there are some drawbacks in the functioning of TU. These drawbacks are theoretical as well as organisational. They can be classified as below.

(a) Lack of Professional Touch and Comprehensive Approach

Since the problems are complex, TU leaders should study each and every aspects of industry such as productivity, wage rate, profit and loss, administration, drawbacks in management etc. TU should also be well aware of the impact of external factors like trade policy, government policy etc. Now a days so many leaders are well aware of general matters, but do not try to go in to the micro level. As part of their political activity they obtain some knowledge regarding the problems of plantation as a whole. But do not try to study the implications in detail. So they cannot effectively participate in conferences with management and Government. Micro level interference in affairs of industry is a pre- requisite for macro level movement. In brief, 'professionalism' in TU activity should be maintained.

(b) Unhealthy Competition of Trade Unions

The number of TUs may be reduced. TUs should be freed from "party politics", unwanted interference of political parties adversely affect the creativity of TU. Actually, this process seriously affects creative politics or long-term healthy political development.

(c) Inadequate Commitment to the development of Industry

Economists and TUs have proved the argument of management for a wage cut to overcome crisis as baseless. State level TU leaders extend their full co-operation to raise the productivity of tea, without a cut in wage. But they do not try to spread this idea to the grass root level. The earnest involvement of workers is needed for the survival of industry . The TU should teach each and every worker that it is the duty of a worker to protect the industry, along with protecting rights.

(d) Declining democracy in TU

Along with unwanted ' party politics', the lack of democracy, may also be avoided. Trade union leaders themselves accept that the degree of democracy and as the same time discipline is deteriorating . It adversely affects the process of mass mobilisation. It also leads to bureaucratic trends in TU, which is enemical to workers, industry and the general political movement. The confidence of workers in TU looses due to the lack of democracy. The number of general bodies in the grounds level has been reduced.

(e) Discarding Non- Economic Factors

A comprehensive TU movement should consider all the aspects of workers, both economic and non-economic. The non-economic factors such as welfare measures and cultural affairs have been discarded by TU for years. This is a sharp deviation from the initial trend .So the TU - worker relation also becomes economic or monetary. Workers become disappointed with the tiny monetary loss. They cannot be mobilised for a long-term movement in a crisis .

(f) Marginalisation of women workers.

Women workers represent more than 50 percent of total workers. But they are remained marginalised in TU . The labour market features of women have been discussed in the previous chapter. Involvement of women is limited with membership and in some estates participation in rallies or demonstrations. The concept that women are totally submissive to the dictates of the males is not real. There are occasions in the study area itself where so many women workers activity participated even in organizational level. But there is the lack of integrity and hard work on the part of TU leaders to accommodate them.

Majority of the sample women workers say that the TU centers are not ready to accommodate them in organizational level. How can a trade union act as the present day demanded, if more than 50 percent of workers do not participate in their general bodies?

Majority of sample women workers are of the view that TUs do not give adequate attention to the problems of women. How can a trade union address women workers sincerely, if they are not adequately accommodated in higher organizational level?

Certainly, women do have the potential for leadership. But it is not developed and nourished by TU. The TU can be proud of the findings of the survey that majority of sample households of Peerumad Tea Company are still ready for any movements called for the TUs, even in the midst of misery. But Majority of workers in AVT is against any strike in the coming future. The entire sample workers of Alampally are afraid of a strike due to the possibility of closure.

(g) In sufficient Support from Masses

The crisis in the tea affects not only the workers, but also the surrounding non-plantation areas. The remedies to the problems are to be come from different corners. So, a mass mobilization including all the classes of people in the panchayath or district or state may be necessary to pressure on variety of fields. Some times there can surely be a coalition with management also. Now the solidarity of other classes of people to the the tea workers is insufficient.

It is very fruitful to start a discussion regarding the scope of co-operative movement in the tea industry. If such a situation arises, the TU movement should be well equipped, theoretically as well as organizationally to bear the responsibility. The experience in West Bengal and Tripura provide scope of study, in this respect.

4.7 Conclusion

The remedial measures for the revival of tea industry are to be originated from various corners. TU movement has a greater role in the revival and sustainability of the industry. The depth and width of TU should be increased to satisfy the needs of changing times. Certainly, TU has got two roles. On the one hand it has to play its own part in the process of revival of the industry. On the other hand it has to consider livelihood and grievances of workers, especially those in closed or abandoned estates.



CHAPTER V

Summary and Conclusions

The development of plantation industry in South and South-East Asia is complementary to capitalistic growth. Plantation required more labour per unit of land than peasant agriculture. Plantation owners met high demand for labour from subsistence economies. Distinct patterns of controlling and managing the labour force including family settlement were adopted to coerce the labour to remain in the plantation and maintain the requisite level of productivity. The condition of labour in plantation Economies have always been below par with meager wages; illegality and social seclusions denying an alternate source of employment.

India is the largest producer and consumer of tea in the world. It represents 31 percent of world production of tea. The Indian Tea Industry is facing some serious challenges and even its survival is being questioned. The decline in the auction price of Indian Tea, low productivity, mismanagement, insufficiency in value added products and the trade liberalization polices of Government of India have contributed to the crisis. The impact and consequence of this deep crisis are multi-dimensional in nature. The processes of abandonment and closure of estates become common. Tea workers lose wage, employment and all other statutory welfare measures. It has severely affected the standard of living of estate labourers, employment opportunities, and level of trade union activities. Hence is the importance of this micro level study.

Vayanadu, Palakkadu, Idukki, Kottayam, Pathanamthitta, Kollam and Thiruvananthapuram are the major tea growing districts in Kerala. Idukki is the most important district as far as area under cultivation; production and work force are concerned.

The study is mainly focusing on the the living conditions of tea workers in the study area, the problems of women workers of tea estates and the role of trade unions in the background of decline in tea industry.

The study is primarily based on the primary data, which was collected from Upputhara Panchayath. Comparative study is conducted with respect to different categories of estates. AV Thomas & Company('functioning normally'), Peermade Tea Company('already closed') and Alampally Estate('those struggling to survive')are selected as sample estates. The management in December 2000 abandoned the second one. Here Workers unite for their livelihood and divide tea bushes among them with the leadership and initiative of trade unions. They pluck

the green leaves illegally and sell them outside. The first one is the only estate in the central Travancore providing the statutory wage. The third one comes under the category of estates providing only a part of the statutory wage as store cash.

The living conditions and employment opportunities in the study area are closely examined. The land area, personal data, family background, working conditions, job satisfaction, housing conditions and household management, per capita income, educational status, medical facilities, household debt, savings, consumption pattern etc. were taken as the indicators of the general living conditions of tea workers. The role and activities of trade unions and their bargaining power in the background of crisis in industry and problems of women workers are analysed.

The Study Area covers six wards (ward 5,6, 11, 12, 14 and 15) in Upputhara Panchayath. Findings and analysis of the important socio-economic characteristics of the selected households as revealed by the survey are presented below.

The survey revealed that there are 368 members in the 80 households investigated. There are 190 males and 178 females; 46 have got Malayalam as mother tongue and 34 household members are of Tamil. Majority of members belong to the age group 16-60. The percentage of illiterates comes to 13.40. Illiterates are more in Tamil families. Majority of the members have dropped their study at Secondary Level

Workers are always willing to provide better education to their children. But education is a long-term process and any interruption will cause serious repercussions on the trend of the students. The financial difficulties of parents, the ignorance of parents with respect of education, the remoteness of place of residence and long journey needed for better education are reasons behind the educational backwardness of these areas.

Prominent communities of sample households are Ezhava and CSI. But a notable factor is that majority of households, both Malayalam and Tamil, belonged earlier to different scheduled caste groups have converted to different Christian communities.

Now the Planters do not give adequate attention to maintain residential facilities. In the closed down estate of Peermade Tea, the situation is deplorable. All the households depend on facilities provided by management for drinking water. Drinking water supply through tap is prevailed in AVT and Alampally.

Twenty years back a well-developed drinking water supply system had prevailed in Peermade Tea Company. Now this system is extinct.

The decreasing purchasing power of workers, escalating expenditure on medical treatments, closing down of estate hospital in the closed down estate of Peermade Tea, tendency of management to cut down the fund allotment to estate hospitals the inconvenient distance of Government hospitals from estates and insufficiency there are seriously affecting the treatment of tea workers in the study area.

Proper drainage system of wastewater in the premises of 'lines' was lost in Peermade Tea Company even before closing down. Even though water is supplied through taps in AVT and Alampally estates, only one tap is allotted more than five houses.

All the houses in AVT and Alampally estates are electrified. The electricity charge is recovered from the wage of workers. In Peermade Tea Company management was not ready to take initiative in electrifying workers houses.

The total work force in the sample households is estimated to be 188, which consist of numbers coming with the age group 16-60, except students and housewives. Out of this, 173 are employed causing unemployment of only 7.90percent Here the situation in Peermade Tea Company should be analysed separately. The workers pluck the green leaves and sell them outside. The tea bushes of Peermade Tea Company are shared among permanent workers in such a manner that each worker gets number of bushes ranging from 1200-1500. The workers pluck leaf once in fifteen days. Since the actual monthly working days of a worker in the estate became 5-12 days, under employment is crucial among tea workers of Peermade Tea Company.

The occupational pattern of households of Alampally is notable. The entire work force is employed and all are engaged in plantation. This phenomenon is closely associated with some peculiarities and features of management and living nature of workers. This is a small estate near to AVT estate Pasupparai. Other tea estates are the boundaries of Alampally estate.. The geographical features, the type of management, the small size of estate, the low number of workers there, the low trade union activities and consequent low level of political awareness provide the estate the character of an 'island'.

Since the workers of Alampally have not usual contacts with 'rest of the world' they are forced to confine their life and dreams within the boundary of the estate The scope of alternative sources of income is rare. That is the reason why all

the employed persons are engaged in tea. Now there are only 130 permanent workers, instead of more than 200 in earlier periods.

The annual earnings of households consist of income obtained from different sources such as earnings from plantation, agriculture, animal husbandry, casual labour, agricultural labour, business and other sources.

Income from plantation has got separate meaning in Peermade Tea Company and other two sample estates. In the first case income from plantation means earnings obtained by selling tea leaves collected from the share of bushes appropriated by them. In the second case, plantation income simply means the wage given by management.

In Alampally estate, the entire income is coming from the plantation as wage, the reason of which has been discussed above. The share of plantation is more or less same in AVT and in Peermade Tea Company before the closing down of the latter. After the closing of estate the share of plantation, naturally, is reduced from 86.40 percent to 56.43 percent. Share of all other sources increases. Notable increase is in the share of agriculture and casual labour. The share of casual labour in the total income showed more than five times increase from 3.00 percent to 16.04 percent.

After the closing of Peermade Tea Company, some of them are absorbed in the nearby places as casual labourers. Casual labour is the easiest possibility for an unskilled person. The share of agricultural labour has not shown notable increase after the closing down. The attitude of workers to agricultural labour and the unwillingness of small-scale farmers to employ untrained persons are the reasons behind this phenomenon. In almost all cases, the tea workers, rather than other members of family, give additional attention to agricultural works. All other unemployed members try to be absorbed in other fields.

In Alampally, two sample households have their own land, but not cultivated. The survey shows that land possessing households of AVT are not interested in agricultural works.

After the closing down of Peermade Tea Company, the unemployed youth of workers family has been trying to assist the family by obtaining any occupation. Some of them became salesmen in shops and other enterprises in nearby towns, some turned as assistants in automobile work shops. Some others went to other districts for livelihood. A number of persons, below the age 22, are ready to go out of the estate as casual labourers in construction works.

There is not a single household below the annual income level of Rs 20,000/- in AVT or pre-closed Peermade Tea Company. After the closing down, the annual income of 52 percent of households in Peermade Tea Company declined below the level of Rs.20,000/-. It is noteworthy that two households of Alampally estate came in the group of lowest level of income. Moreover, there is not a single household above the annual income level of Rs.30,000/-. It is interesting to see that 26 percent of households in the closed down estate of Peermade Tea Company have got an annual income of more than Rs.30,000/- each.

The 'Island' like nature of Alampally estate consequent inconvenience to depend on alternate sources of income, the cutting down of their wage by 50 percent, the tendency and ability of workers of Peermade Tea Company in searching alternate sources of income are the reasons behind the variation in income between Peermade and Alampally.

In AVT the highest number of households are in the income group Rs.40,000/-- Rs.50,000/- while in the case of Peermade Tea Company that income range shifted from Rs.20,000/--Rs.30,000/- to below Rs.20,000/- after the down fall.

Out of the 50 sample households of Peermade Tea, 12 are coming below the annual per capita income level of Rs.30,000/-. In the pre-closing period, 96 percent of households had annual per capita income above Rs. 6,000/-. Now 70 percent are below the level Rs.6,000/-. Naturally AVT shows a comparatively better position. Out of the 10 sample households in Alampally only two became able to cross the level Rs.6,000/-.

The average per capita annual income of sample households of Peermade Tea Company before closing down is estimated to be Rs.9,223/- where as it became Rs.5,044/- after the crisis. The average per capita income of sample households of AVT is Rs.8,930/- and that of Alampally is only Rs.4,786/-.

The assets are in the form of Land, Jewels, Bank Deposits, Provident Fund, Insurance etc. Out of the 50 sample households of Peermade Tea Company, five have not got any assets, and 28 percent of households have got assets of value below Rs.25,000/-. After the downfall of estate, so many households are forced to sell their gold ornaments, withdraw deposits etc. Majority of households withdraw their provident fund and LIC partially or completely. These are the reasons why some households of Peermade Taluk came in the 'Nil' group of assets.

In all the sample estates, the major sources of assets are Land and Provident Fund. But only 17 households of Peermade Tea Company, seven households of

AVT and two households of Alampally estates have land as asset.

There is not a single household without any liability in Peermade Tea Company and Alampally estate. Out of the 20 sample households in AVT, three are free from any kind of financial liability. The peculiar nature of households of Alampally is reflected also in liability. In spite of financial difficulties, they adjust or cope up with limitations, thereby limiting financial liability below Rs.25,000/-.

The share of food expenditure is the highest in all the 3 estates within the range 55-60 percentage. The share has declined by 2.10 percent in Peermade Tea Company with the closing down of estate.

The share of expenditure on treatment is the lowest in Alampally and the highest in Peermade Tea Company. After the closing down of estate, family members of Peermade Tea Company have to depend on sources other than estate hospital. Even before the closing, people had been depending on other hospitals, due to the insufficiency of estate hospitals. But they had depended on it for minor diseases.

The category miscellaneous expenses consist of expenses on foot wear, bathing soap, cosmetics, hair dressing, postage, newspaper, traveling expenses, hotel expenditure etc.

There is no difference in expenditure between pre-closing and post closing periods in Peermade Tea Company regarding items postage, hairdressing and toilet soap.

The number of newspaper subscribers in Peermade Tea Company among the sample households has been reduced from 15 to 4 due to the financial difficulties. Hotel expenditure, expenditure on cosmetics and foot wear have been reduced proportionally to the reduction in the total expenditure of sample households of Peermade tea estate.

The purchasing of rice represents major share in the total expenditure on food. The share is seemed to be inversely proportional to the level of income. When the income decreases, sample households try to compensate it by cutting down expenditure on comparatively costly food items like meat, fish, egg, milk, fruits, to some extent vegetables etc. At the same time, they try to compensate the reduction in the consumption of these costly items by consuming larger quantities of less expensive items such as rice and atta. Comparative study between the consumption pattern of sample households in Peermade Tea Company in the pre-closing and post-closing period proves this fact.

The income- expenditure analysis shows that 71 households out of 80 have annual income below annual expenditure. All the sample house holds of Alampally estate and 17 out of 20 in AVT and 44 out of 50 samples in Peermade have got an annual income below the annual expenditure.

So the study reveals that even the households of AVT, running more or less normally, are unable to cover their expenditure with limited income. Any way they manage to cope up with this situation, to some extent, by tightening the dhoty.

But the situation is different in Peermade tea estate and Alampally. The households of Peermade Tea try to balance their budget by cutting down expenditure and depending on alternate sources of income. These measures are not sufficient to survive. So they are leaving their assets like jewels, land, provident fund,etc; obtained through decades of hard work. Even though, three years have passed since the closing down of estate, the households have succeeded, to some extend, to survive both financially and physically. Certainly, it will not be the scene,if the situation continues.

This study tries also to analyse the socio-economic conditions of women tea workers, intra-household inequalities and other problems faced by them. The socio-economic life of women in tea estates is peculiar in nature. Discrimination and inequalities in society can also be noted in families.

Among organized industries tea employs largest number of females. Tea industry is female labour intensive and two third of total working days are spent for plucking. On the one hand, plantations provide examples of an extremely oppressive situation for labour, but on the other hand, in some cases found to contain possibilities for a degree of sexual equality.

The higher rate of women employment can be associated with the nature of labour market and family based employment system prevailed in the earlier stages. During the early stages of scarcity of labour, family settlement system was highly helpful to planters. The family settlement reduced the gravity of problem of recruitment in the future also

More than 50 percent of total tea workers are women, because plucking is a continuous activity and women usually do the plucking. The impact of crisis in tea industry is more on women. The scope of alternate employment opportunities is low to them. Since the household affairs including preparation of food are on the shoulder of women, direct impact of shrinkage in income is on them. They are

always under high pressure. So it is important to give much attention to the problems of women workers in any study of plantation labour.

Out of 1538 permanent workers, 957 (62 percent) are women. Most of the women workers joined plucking not only to support their family budget but also as a part of the custom or convention. This can also be associated with educational background. After the early stages of 'slavery' like period, the attitude towards education changed. Here also the study of daughters is given lesser priority.

In spite of all the financial difficulties, it is notable that, a few girls are continuing their studies even in college level. Even though, there are a few graduates among girls in these estates, there cannot be seen a single woman in Government service or Public sector enterprises.

The plucking of tea leaves is the exclusive occupation of women. It is the harvesting of tea leaves by snapping of tender shoot using finger. It is the plucking of a bud and two tender leaves below it. It is a simple job. But it requires some skill and attention. These qualities are expected from women rather than men.

Gender discrimination in the society and in the household affairs are evident. The working time of women extends up to 5PM. But male members become free in the afternoon due to the nature of their work. The female members have to work up to 5PM to obtain a remuneration equal to that of male members. So there is a relative disparity in the wage rate with respect to duration of work.

Women workers started their span of hard work at 5AM. In spite of their unbearable work load, the assistance on the part of other members in the family are not significant. The household works are carried out more or less completely by themselves.

There is a belief that participation of women in paid employment results in individual independence and active participation in family decision making. But this study shows that the level of improvement among women tea workers, in this respect, is not appreciable. Even in cases where the main contributor to the family income is a women, husband and other male members of the family dominate in the decision making in household affairs.

Majority of women workers think that their present workload of plucking and household works is too much and unbearable.

Contrary to the average, most of the sample female workers of AVT are not satisfied with wage rate and task of work. The workers of Peermade Tea Company

and Alampally, in the midst of crisis, wish to have at least the prevailing wage rate and task as per provisions.

The drawbacks in medical facilities, facilities for caring children, residential facilities and leisure time are affecting female workers rather than male workers.

The continuous heavy work in the field and home make women workers physically weak. Women workers do not participate in general bodies but they will participate in strikes, demonstrations etc as a custom. Therefore the role and involvement of women in trade union movement is mechanical rather than creative. Around 50 percent of women tea workers have the habit of reading. All of them read low standard weeklies, published mostly from Kottayam . But only rare persons read newspapers. Their sense of art and literary background are moulded by these publications. But their reading habit is comparatively lower among women workers of AVT and Alampally where television governs the free time of family members.

A noted phenomenon in recent years is the formation of "Ayalkkootom". In Peermade Tea Company, these units on the one hand raises the decision making power, leadership quality and status of women in the society and on the other hand, it stands as a supporting element to the financially collapsed families. A draw back of Ayalkkootoms in estates is their inability to form a productive unit .

Women tea workers are a major part of labour market of our state. They are engaged or have engaged in gainful employment contributing to home, to state and to the nation. So the society should ensure continuously that they are given due respect and status.

Geographical features and alienated structure of tea plantation are the reasons behind the slow growth of Trade Unions. The unity developed among workers by working and living side by side on similar conditions, rationalized system of production with capitalization as in industrial work are some catalytic factors behind the emergence of trade union movement in plantation.

The trade Union movement came in tea Industry of Kerala only in 1940's. TU activities started here by K.V.Mathew, Pottankulam at Mundakkayam in 1948. Trade union Leaders were coming from neighbouring districts namely Kottayam and Alappuzha . During that period British capital was dominating plantation sector . Management and Police tried to suppress T U activities with cruel attacks on leaders and workers .

Awakening of TU movements, strikes, fierce attack of management and police etc. compelled Government to form an enquiry commission in 1948. As per the recommendations of the commission, The Plantation Labour Act (PLA) came into existence. The act laid down various provisions to raise the welfare of workers inside and outside the work place. The introduction of the act raised the momentum of TU Movement. By that time, the major central Trade Unions had started their unions in the tea plantation of the study area.

Later a committee was constituted under the Chairmanship of M. Mamman Tharakan to decide the demand raised by TUs in this respect. As per the recommendations of the committee, a tripartite committee was constituted by state Government, which later became 'Plantation Labour Committee' (PLC). Thereafter, there has been a chain of settlements, strikes, awards. Along with these TU movement spread rapidly and at present there is hardly a tea estate where workers are not under the influence of TU.

During the initial stages of plantation, the style and attitude of workers were moulded and handled easily by management, both British and Indian. Later with the emergence of TU movements workers began to know their rights, different from those taught by management. Since then there have been a competition between management and TU movement in determining and shaping the identity of tea workers.

TU movement raised political and social awareness of workers. It developed leadership quality, organisational capacity, sense of unity etc. The political awareness of workers of Peermade Tea is very high. In the case of AVT, the role of workers in the general sphere of the panchayath is nominal, whereas the workers of Alampally are not in the picture.

The four divisions of Peermade Tea Company have been dynamic in arts, culture and sports and games for decades. In almost all the cases, these clubs were organised by trade union leaders directly or indirectly. The operation of these cultural establishments and TU movement are complementary to each other. Such a kind of cultural dynamism cannot be seen in AVT or Alampally estates, where trade union activities is low or nominal respectively.

Unhealthy competition among Trade Unions, unwanted interference of party politics, low degree of democracy, the lack of effort on the part of TU to develop the commitment of workers to industry, discarding non-economic factors, marginalisation of women in the organization, less alert on the part of leaders to study the various aspects of industry etc are major drawbacks of TU movement.

TU movement has a greater role in the revival and sustainability of the industry. The depth and width of TU should be increased to satisfy the needs of changing times.

This study in Upputhara panchayath reveals that the impact of crisis in tea industry on the socio-economic conditions of tea workers, especially women, is severe. The residential facilities of workers of Peermade Tea Company, which was abandoned three years ago, became miserable. In AVT and Alampally estates, the attention and responsibility of management is seemed reducing, in this respect.

The impact of crisis varies with the present status of estates. The standard of living of workers of AVT is comparatively better than that of Peermade Tea Company and Alampally. AVT is the only estate in the Central Travancore region providing wage rate fixed by last settlement. But it is interesting and fruitful to note that percapita income of households in Peermade Tea estate is better than that of Alampally. This phenomenon is associated with the presence of features of so called 'enclave' settlement model in Alampally.

The scope of alternate employment opportunities is comparatively higher in Peermade estate due to its geographical location, better contacts of workers with the rest of the world etc. So the situation of AVT and Alampally would have been more deplorable than in the present Peermade estate, if these estates had been closed down. Even after the closing down of Peermade Tea Company, per capita shortage of income with respect to expenditure is higher than that of Alampally.



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