

WOMEN, WORK AND ECONOMY: A STUDY OF TEA PLANTATION WORKERS IN ASSAM

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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

This chapter is a recapitulation and summary of the study presented and discussed in the preceding chapters. The chapter begins with a summary of the study. This will be followed by a discussion around the objectives that guided the study in the wider framework of patriarchy and capitalism. The fate of the tea industry in India would have been bleak if women had not been employed to pluck tea. They truly serve as the backbone of the tea economy which is a part and parcel of our everyday lives. Women workers constitute more than 50 per cent of the total workforce in the tea plantations. The vast majority of women workers employed in tea plantations work mainly as pluckers. Though male workers are also employed as pluckers in tea plantations but women are preferred and this has been the practice ever since the inception of the tea industry in India. All over the world plantation industries were started under European imperialism and tea industry is not an exception. The tea industry was also started by the British in the 1820's in Assam. So the relation between the labour and the owners of the tea plantations were like that of master and slave as in feudal mode of production. Initially local Assamese labourers were employed to work in the tea estates of Assam but they were in short supply and demanded higher wages. In order to solve the problem of labour shortage and to make profits by employing cheap labour in the 1840's large scale migration of labourers took place to the Assam Valley from Chotagapur, Bihar, Bengal and Orissa to work in the tea estates of Assam and it transformed the lives of these labourers. As Engels (1993) notes the strategy of setting up of "family units" of single men and women; conducting "depot marriages" were some of the coercive measures for recruiting men and women that enabled production and reproduction of labour in the plantations. Engagement of women's labour is higher in tea plantations because of their gendered attributes that are conducive to the task of plucking tea leaves in particular and for maintaining a steady social reproduction of labour. The colonial planters extracted maximum labour from the workers in order to gain more profits. The planters were not concerned about the health, hygiene or safety and security of the workers as they wanted only their labour. The labourers were also helpless as they were deceived by the recruiters who promised them a good life in Assam.

Although women workers play an important role in domestic tea production, their significant contribution to the industry has failed to gain recognition. Their work is also not considered skilled or specialised, despite the fact that they are highly committed and spend long working hours in the field plucking leaves. They are also exposed to numerous hazards at work but still their promotional prospects remain bleak and uncertain. They also play a marginal role in the family and community. In the patriarchal plantation society their labour is taken for granted and women are considered to be husband's property. They do not have much say in the decision making or matters relating to family. These women are usually meek and docile and seldom rebel for fear of physical violence from their husbands, as wife beating is common occurrence in their society. Besides doing eight hours of hard labour in the fields they have to spend their time in child rearing and domestic chores which renders them prone to debilitation and consequently they are generally found to be anaemic or in poor health. As they are illiterate and ignorant they are superstitious and believe in outdated customs and taboos and are slow in changing their outlook. Moreover the harrowing experiences of indentured labour under British rule have injected a deep-rooted sense of inferiority into their personality. From the colonial times the authority of the planter manager in the garden was absolute. To the migrant labourer he was a whip lashing patriarch. Chaterjee (2001) has used the term 'male plantocrat' or 'male plantocracy' to imply the particular work culture or gender dynamics that is exercised by the managers' vis-à-vis women workers. Consequently the successive generations of workers are generally found to be lacking in initiative, drive and ambition. Trade unions have also made late entry in the tea plantations of Assam. The trade unions are male dominated and women hardly participate or have any say in union matters. Moreover, post-liberalization, employment of casual women workers has increased in the tea estates. Thus the owners of the tea estates who are the true capitalists use the cheap labour of women as casual workers so that they are not given the social welfare and social security measures. Thus capitalism and patriarchy are working as forces to control the labour of women workers in the tea plantation industry.

Achabam tea estate and Modarkhat tea estate of Dibrugarh district in Assam were selected for this study. The ownership pattern of both the tea estates were different as Achabam tea estate was British owned now run and controlled by the Tata Tea while

the Modarkhat tea estate is native owned by an Assamese entrepreneur in the 1920's. The composition of the labour force, organization of work and management structure was similar in both the tea estates. The area of production and the architectural setting of the two tea estates were different. The British styled manager bungalows were absent in Modarkhat tea estate. Simple random sampling was used to select 300 women workers, 175 from Achabam tea estate and 125 from Modarkhat tea estate, both permanent and temporary from both the tea estates. In-depth interviews were conducted with these 300 women workers. The women workers in both the tea estates belonged to 18 different ethnic groups or tribes, with Tatti group being the numerically highest in Achabam tea estate and Mura ethnic group being the numerically highest in Modarkhat tea estate. Christianity and Hinduism both exist in tea plantations. In my sample population 74.33 per cent were Hindus while 25.66 per cent were Christians. As regards educational qualifications it was found that majority of the informants around 59.66 per cent in both the tea estates were illiterate. Tea garden workers cannot be blamed for lagging behind the mainstream society, because tea plantations are situated in very remote and isolated areas. Moreover most tea plantations are functioning in similar style as in the past, though a certain change has taken place in employer's attitude off late.

The first objective of the study was to examine the role, status and contribution of women workers in work, family and community at large. Unlike women in rural India caste-based society, women workers in tea plantations enjoy a relatively better social status because they enjoy economic independence as wage earners. This does not, however, mean that they have gained equality with men in all aspects of life. Many informants recalled that they enjoyed a carefree life before coming to the tea plantations in Assam. But the tight discipline, close supervision of day to day activities and isolation from the mainstream has made the workers meek and submissive. They also cannot run away from the plantations because for generations they are living in tea plantations and have no connection with their past native land. Moreover, lack of skill and education makes it difficult for the workers to find alternative employment elsewhere. Thus they have accepted their fate and considered the tea plantations as their homes and has maintained their tribal culture which includes singing and dancing with gay abandon.

Although women workers play an important role in production of tea, they continue to occupy the lowest ranks in the plantation hierarchy. There is no job mobility among women workers. Bhadra (1985) also in her study in Chadmoni tea estate in West Bengal also found that there was no job mobility among women workers. Besides long working hours, inadequate facilities in work place, low wages and hard labour of plucking leaves in rains or sun are borne by women workers. But after years of doing this work it has become a family tradition and women workers are very committed towards their work. Lack of education and isolation from the outside world curtails their aspirations and makes them happy with their work. Moreover as their residential quarters are within the vicinity of the plantations they can easily manage both work and home. Absence of upward job mobility the commitment to work among women workers was high due to economic necessity. The major part of the earnings of the women workers was spend on maintaining household expenditure while men workers generally spend their earnings on alcohol.

A distinct gendered division of ritual labour was found among the Hindu tea tribal community. Chaterjee (2001) has also talked about this ritual division of labour in her study of Dooars tea estate. Thus while performing some of their native religious rituals like *gaon puja*, *ghar puja*, *tusu puja*, *karam puja* etc a strict gender division of labour was maintained. The gendered separation is imperative. Women clean the courtyard, prepare rice beer for libations, and accompany their husbands in a procession, theirs is a pivotal labour. In certain rituals women are required to remain exempted from participation in the ritual sacrifices or pujas. Importantly this type of gendered ritual separation is not found among the Christian tea tribal community. Men and women equally participate in the religious rituals. Although plantation women are free to choose their spouse and elopement is a common form of marriage among them still inter-ethnic or inter religious marriage are not approved. Thus their cultural traditions are even today maintained and strictly followed.

As residential and working place are close to each other so the participation of women in plantation work does not affect the relationships between husband and wife. However, husbands are favourable to wife's employment. As women are economically contributing to the family income so the husbands approve of their wife's employment. Moreover around 70 per cent of the women stated that their husbands help them in domestic chores like bringing firewood, looking after cattle,

looking after children etc. Further 60 per cent of the women claimed that they played an important role in decision making. While it was found that a woman plays an active role in deciding on household expenditure as she spends all her income in managing daily household needs. The man generally spends his earnings in alcoholism and gambling. But important matters of family like marriages, children's education, employment etc are decided by men unilaterally without consulting their wives. Alcoholism has been a social evil in the tea plantations. In all their religious festivals '*haria*' (rice beer) is prepared and feasted. The feast is not complete without the preparation of '*haria*'. This has become a habit among them and the men workers after coming from work spend their evenings in consuming alcohol with their friends. After a back breaking day of 8 to 4 the women workers do not get help from their husbands in household work in the evenings. Moreover domestic violence has also been on the rise in them. If the wife objects to husbands drinking and refuses to give money for buying liquor she is invariably beaten up. The men drain their income and sometimes also sell some items of house like TV, furnitures etc on heavy drinking. The children from such families become vagrants and school drop outs. Even the labour unions or panchayats have done nothing to control domestic violence. So the women who are illiterate and ignorant of their rights have accepted this as their fate and have become meek and submissive. Wife beating and subjugation of women is an accepted and widespread way of life in their society.

It is far from the truth that tea plantation tribal women are equal with men although they have economic independence. Although they enjoy considerable freedom than their rural counterparts, their overall position in society has remained low. The plantation society is male dominated and they treat their wives as their private property. The inequality between men and women extends to every sphere of life in unequal occupational status as there is no job mobility among women workers. It is generally believed that the higher positions in plantations are of supervisory work and men will never allow women to supervise them. Hartmann (1997) has shown how patriarchy regulates the gender relation in both workplace and household domain. Patriarchy operates by controlling the women's labour power and sexuality in public sphere via gendered division of labour in the private sphere. In the public sphere women perform jobs in the lower category with fewer wages and in the private sphere they perform domestic labour without any wages. Hartmann (1984) argues that the

capitalist modes of production has segregated job in ways that has sustained the patriarchal relations and continues subjugating women. Thus women's work in tea plantations is highly valued but still they have been termed as unskilled labour in economic discourses. Moreover women's work has always been placed in the lower rung of the hierarchy which are low paid and devalued. This is justified by the capitalists as they link the inferior status of women's work to women's physical incapability. But women in the tea gardens perform physically straining activities like uprooting the old bushes, carrying loads of mud, pruning tea bushes in winters etc. In tea industry rudimentary machinery is used only in the factory and most of the physical labours are done by women. Thus in the patriarchal plantation society there is no special status for women. The women are socialised in such a way that they accept their fate and exploitation. Their lack of skill, assertive nature, illiteracy and ignorance has made them subservient in both family and work life. But recently Christianity has a positive impact on the life of Christian women workers which is reflected in many ways in their religious, social and moral values.

The second objective was to examine the social welfare and social security measures that are provided to the workers under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and its impact on the living conditions of the women workers. Social welfare and social security plays very important role in the life of women workers as it provides certain facilities and amenities with regard to health, food, clothing, housing, medical assistance, education, insurance, job security, recreation and so on in addition to wages and salaries. The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 was passed to regulate the conditions of life and employment in the plantations.

With regard to educational facilities it was found that in both the tea estates a primary school was established for the education of the worker's children. The condition in both the tea estates, however, suggests that the management was not at all interested in the education of the workers' children. Similarly Bhowmik et.al (1996) in their study conducted in tea plantations of Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu found that with regards to education the employers' commitment is perhaps the least. Besides poor infrastructural facilities the student to teacher ratio was also high. The study conducted by Bharali (2004) in Assam tea plantations also found that the poor infrastructural facility of the schools stands as the most important reason for children not attending schools. Very few schools have adequate furniture. Classes are often

held under a tree. The latrines were not repaired for long and as such children cannot use them. Thus Bharali (2004) found that infrastructure is a major element depriving the children and their parents of the motivation required to continue with their schooling. There were only three to four teachers in both the tea estates schools. Moreover the dropout rate among the students was very high especially for girl children. The recent addition to education in schools is the intervention of Sarva Siksha Abhiyan of the government of India for universalization of primary education in India. Free uniform, books and mid-day meals are provided to the students. In spite of this there was less enrolment of students in schools. Some of the students come to schools only to get mid-day meals and were not concerned with education. One of the important reasons for low enrolment in schools is the indifferent attitude of parents towards children's education. Only few years back child employment in tea estates has been abolished. Earlier children were employed in tea plantations as child workers and earn income for the family. This can be evidenced from the fact that a significant amount of women workers in both the tea estates were illiterate or were only able to read and write.

The poor state of education in both the tea estates has limited the social mobility and scope of alternative employment among the tea garden workers. Although Achabam tea estate is providing bus services for transport facilities to children of workers studying in nearby towns but only a minority are availing these services while the majority are illiterate. Bhowmik et.al (1996) has also talked about the problem of post primary education as the children of parents have to depend on the managements for transport to the schools in higher secondary levels. While this is provided in some gardens in Doars but in Darjeeling the employers do not provide transport. Thus the management of both the tea estates should take proper steps so that parents are made conscious of their children's education and if possible try to educate the workers also.

With regards to health facilities in both the tea estates it was found that both the tea estates have a garden hospital for providing health facilities to the workers. The Achabam garden hospital is well equipped with proper infrastructural facilities, proper staff and one resident doctor. While the Modarkhat garden hospital lacks proper staff and resident doctor. Besides the number of beds are less and separate ward for TB patients are absent in Modarkhat garden hospital. As the gardens are located in isolated regions far from towns and cities so most of the doctors are

unwilling to stay in the tea estates and because of this the workers suffers a lot. Because of lack of resident doctor the women workers suffers a lot and simple delivery cases are also not attended in the garden hospital of Modarkhat tea estate. Similarly the study conducted by Bhowmik et.al (1996) also found that the health services in the three states of Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu are not adequate and they do not meet the requirements of the Plantation Labour Act. The general problem in all regions, except Dooars, was the non-availability of doctors. Most of the hospitals in the tea estates do not have resident doctors and depend on part time or visiting doctors. Shortage of medicines and other trained staff are also added problems. Nurses and health assistants are few. In general the conditions are far below the minimum stated in the Act. Bharali (2007) in her study in the tea estates of Assam found that most the hospitals in tea estates are ill equipped with enough medicines and with untrained staff, inadequate drinking water, toilet and basic facilities.

But the recent development in health facilities in both the tea estates is the addition of Asha Karmi workers under the National Rural Health Mission. These Asha Karmi workers after selecting some volunteers from among the women workers visit the labour lines and engage in pre natal and post natal delivery of women workers. They educate the workers on how to take care of their health during pregnancy and encourage them to come for monthly check-ups. They also take the charge of full immunization of the new born infants.

For a working women living in a nuclear family the provision of crèche facility is very important. As per provisions of Plantation Labour Act, 1951, both the tea estates under study have crèches in the plantation. The Achabam crèche has good infrastructure, adequate and trained staff and proper food. Children aged 0 to 6 years are well cared for. But the Modarkhat crèche is just in name with a house named as crèche. There is no proper infrastructure, no trained and adequate staff and no proper food and care is provided to the children. Bhowmik et.al (1996) also found lack of proper crèches in all the three tea growing states of India. The crèches in Tamil Nadu have a better record in maintaining crèches. While the gardens in Darjeeling and Dooars have crèches but few were well maintained. In some of the gardens refreshments are not provided for the children and mothers have to leave work to feed their children. In most of the gardens crèches are few and unable to meet the requirements of all mothers. The situation in Assam is worse.

Labour quarters are provided to the permanent workers in both the tea estates. But the labour quarters are not repaired by the management for long and the quarters are in poor dilapidated condition. Barring a few exceptions most of the quarters have some problem or the other like broken windows and doors, or leaky roofs, etc. During rainy seasons the drains overflows causing many infectious diseases. The workers do not filter the water they drink and drink directly from the tube wells. Earlier the workers used to defecate in the open but nowadays in both the tea estates almost every house has a latrine. This is the effort of the Total Sanitation Campaign of the government of India under the Swatch Bharat Abhiyan. But still there is no bathroom facility for the workers and the women workers are the worst sufferers of this. The workers in Modarkhat tea estate do not have electricity facility in their houses. For this also the women workers are the worst sufferers because a woman gets up early in the morning in the dark and work till late time in the dark. While the study conducted by Bhowmik et.al (1996) found that the plantations in Tamil Nadu have adequate sanitary facilities where each house has a toilet or two houses are provided with a common toilet, the labour lines in Assam and West Bengal do not have these facilities. There were hardly any latrines in the labour lines in Dooars and Terai region in West Bengal. The situation in Assam was same and there were no toilets and women used enclosures in their houses to bathe. The situation in Tamil Nadu was considerably better. Houses had separate toilets or a group of houses share common toilet facilities which are adequate. The studies in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu show that water supply is adequate. But the situation was worse in Assam as water is scarce and taps are few.

The social security measures in both the tea estates were adequate with maternity leave of six months given to the permanent women workers. Besides these the workers are given provident fund and gratuity on retirement and 20 per cent bonus every year during Kali Puja time. According to Plantation Labour Act, 1951, every tea plantation needs to appoint a Welfare Officer to improve the quality of life of the workers. In both the tea estates under study the Welfare Officers were present. But the women workers were not happy with the Welfare Officers as they were not mediating the role between the worker and management but they were in fact in favour of the management. So they did not pay any heed to the complaints or other favours of the women workers.

Thus it can be concluded that the state of social welfare and social security measures provided under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 in both the tea plantations were adequate but needs improvement on the part of the management. But the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 needs to be more gender friendly. As most of the social protection schemes are often targeted without taking into account the intra household gender inequalities. For instance the ownership of the house should be given to women since they need most shelter to bring up children and enjoy privacy. However the usual practice followed in the tea estate is that one house is allotted to each family in the name of the senior member among permanent employees. In nearly all the cases, it was the men who qualified for this entitlement. Crèche facility is of utmost requirement for a working mother. This was also not properly functioning in Modarkhat tea estate as a result of which the women workers were suffering. Even in terms of sanitation facilities bathrooms are not built in the labour quarters for which the women workers in both the tea estates were facing difficulties. Even in the 21st century where information and technology has been part and parcel of our daily lives the tea plantation workers in Modarkhat tea estate do not have electricity facility in the labour lines and the women workers are the most affected because of this. Thus keeping in mind the vulnerabilities of the women worker the management should take steps to empower women and ensure more gender equitable outcomes through the proper implementation of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951.

The third objective was to examine the living and working conditions of the casual women workers under study. Before probing into the life of the casual women workers a link was established between neoliberal reforms and increased casualization of labour in all the industries and tea industry is not an exception. Globalization has lead to labour market flexibility and capital market restructuring. This labour market restructuring has led to worsening conditions of work and increase in flexible work regimes and casual jobs and a renewed surge of feminization of labour activity (Standing, 1999). There has been an increase in number of women in the labour force but mostly in the low paid informal sector. The women are used as reserve army of labour being employed and dismissed at the convenience of the capitalist employer and they are paid low wages with no welfare facilities. According to NSSO data the proportion of casual workers in the total workforce as a whole has been increasing over the years, from 23 per cent in 1972-73 to 30 per cent in 2011-12. The tea

industry in India experienced major crisis in the late 1990's with the introduction of the neo liberal reforms. First there was steep fall in domestic prices and second India's export of tea declined questioning the profitability of tea plantation crops. Thus the producers of tea plantations adopted a series of measures to counter the plantation crisis. One of the measures adopted by the planters was increase in employment of casual workers in the tea estates. This can be evidenced from the data from 1990 to 2010 which shows decline in permanent employment of men and women workers respectively. In order not to curb profits the planters started employing casual workers in bulk numbers as the casual workers are not to be provided with all the provisions as laid down by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951.

The working and living conditions of the casual workers were more vulnerable than the permanent workers which was evident from the interviews conducted with the casual workers in both the tea estates. The casual workers are entitled only to the prevailing money wages and not any of the provisions under the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Thus the employment of casual workers reduced the wage costs of the tea estates and they became a floating reserve army that can be engaged and laid off at will. Moreover the trade unions are also not paying any heed to their demands and neither concerned about their welfare and security.

Lately, the government has made inroads into the tea plantations. Different schemes are offered to help the workers. With the help of Indira Awas Yojana, for example, some of the workers in Achabam tea estate has build houses. The Total Sanitation Campaign has build latrines for workers, the Sarva Skiksha Abhiyan is helping in education of workers children and the National Rural Health Mission has been looking after the health of workers specially women and children. With these facilities the casual workers are also benefitting but corruption is rampant in tea estates.

The fourth and the final objective was to examine the ways and means of women's activism and resistance to exploitation. We have seen that there has been an increase in women's employment after the liberalization of the economy. But the bulk of the women work in the informal sector as casual workers with low pay, long working hours, inhuman working conditions and no social security and welfare measures. The neo liberal capitalists consider employing women workers of the third world countries as profitable. The image of the women worker is of meek, docile, dexterous, and

nimble fingered and cheap. Above all these women workers are also exploited in their homes as they live in patriarchal households. But this does not mean that women lack agency and does not resist. Earlier studies on tea plantations have talked about their plight but none of them has addressed the resistance showed by women workers. I have looked at the organised and active forms of protests of women workers and also looked at unorganised and passive forms of protests of women workers. In both the tea plantations the workers are members of Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha. But the participation of women in trade union activities was minimal as also discussed by Bhowmik and Sarkar (1999). There were many reasons for women's lack of participation in trade union activities. The executive members of the plantation level trade union do not have adequate women members. So the male members do not pay any heed to the special problems faced by women workers. Moreover as women are overburdened by housework and looking after children so they have no time to attend trade unions meetings which is generally held in the evenings and goes on till late night. Although some instances of strikes were reported to me by the workers but not any major instance of strike has taken place in both the plantations. The case of Munnar Plantation Strike in Kerala in 2016 is a landmark as it was one such instance in the history of plantation industry which was carried out by an all-female union called Pempilai Orumai with a demand in increase in bonus and better wages and living conditions. The strike attracted around 5000 women workers and lasted for around 16 days were able to achieve their demands. But this is a rare case and neither such incidences were reported from Assam. There is Mothers' Club in both the tea estates which was established with the objective of women empowerment in tea gardens of Assam. I found that the Mothers' Club in Achabam tea estate is more active and engages in different drives for the welfare of the workers which includes anti-alcohol drive. The women workers suffer a lot because of alcoholism of male workers. So picketing is done by women workers and children in the labour lines against the ill effects of alcohol. Thus in this way women are able to show their resistance to the consumption of alcohol collectively because if they individually resist against alcohol to their husbands they will be brutally beaten up. But efforts also should be taken by the management in curbing alcoholism in the tea estates.

Women workers also engage in everyday forms of resistance which are usually disguised. As already mentioned the life of the women workers is not easy in the

plantations. Although they play an important role in the tea production yet there is no job mobility among them. Moreover most of the workers are working as casual workers for their entire lives and are never made permanent. Their earning gives them little scope for better lives in their families and with their husbands. But still the husbands consider their contribution secondary to the family and women are also the victims of domestic violence. They do not have much say in the union affairs and neither can they resist openly in the public. So to keep their life going in the plantations they engage in different minute acts of resistance in their everyday lives in both their workplace and in homes which Scott (1990) calls ‘hidden transcripts’. These everyday forms of resistance may include foot dragging, evasion, jokes, whispers, gossips, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance etc which are minute acts of resistance which are usually disguised. Standing (1999) has talked about de-unionisation or less influence of trade unions due to casualization and informalization of labour. This is also the case in tea estates as the trade unions in the tea estates are less influential and most importantly they do not pay heed to the welfare and security of the women workers. Thus both capitalism and patriarchy are simultaneously working together to exploit and oppress women workers in the tea plantations and waged work in the tea plantations is not fully empowering for the women workers.

It is apparent from the study that the women workers by and large enjoy relatively low status. In view of this I recommend some of the measures that can uplift the status of women workers. We have already seen that majority of women workers were illiterate. So education is necessary to do away with the dependence syndrome and to make womenfolk more self-reliant, self-motivated and self-directed. Thus the plantation management, the state government, different women’s organizations and the various NGO’s should take appropriate steps in this regard. The state government should be more vigilant to see that the labour welfare measures incorporated in the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 are implemented properly by the plantation management and strict action should be taken against the management if they are not implemented. Similarly, NGO’s and the women’s organizations could initiate several programmes for adult literacy, health issues etc. for the overall welfare of the women and children. There is a negligible amount of women’s participation in trade union activities as they are not represented in the trade unions. Adequate steps should be taken to increase the representation of women in trade unions. Moreover the management, labour unions

and women's organizations should take steps to do away with alcoholism in the tea estates which is a big social evil in the tea estates of Assam. It is ruining the health and welfare of the workers, domestic violence and also the workers are in debt because of this. The Welfare Officers should be taking initiative in this regard only then the overall welfare of the women workers can be achieved. In my opinion it will be appropriate to bridge the gap in the wages of women workers in tea plantations across the country. In other words there is a need to develop uniform wage structure for the tea plantation workers. Most importantly with the increase of casual workers in the tea estates the government should bring out a separate welfare code for them as they are not entitled to get the benefits from the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. The national pension scheme Prime Minister Shram Yogi Mandhan Pension Yojana (PM-SYM) was launched by Narendra Modi for the workers of unorganized sector. The scheme was announced in the interim budget for 2019-20 and assures a monthly pension of at least 3000 after retiring at the age of 60. More stringent steps should be taken by the government to implement this scheme for the casual workers in the tea estates.

The present study may be treated as one step towards developing a holistic understanding of women workers in tea plantations. It could be used as a baseline for further research in the area especially on their agency as labour gets more and more commodified.