

# Paradigm shift on coffee Plantation labour and Small Growers in Tamilnadu

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## Introduction:

India is one of the largest producers of the plantation crops in the world. About, three fourth of the export earnings are from the agricultural sector and one fourth of the earnings from oil exports, it clearly indicates that the plantation sector is crucial to the Indian economy. The direct employment in this sector is more than 2 millions. Coffee plantation alone contributes the employment of nearly 5.94 lakhs workers directly and indirectly.

The transition impact has been made in coffee Plantation in Globalized Era; in particular, Indian coffee Growers were facing a number of bottlenecks (price fluctuation, labour shortage, wild animals towards cultivation, marketing, maintaining lands (estate), etc. This trend is continuing and drastically changing their existing cultivation pattern till now. Karnataka and Kerala states are safer side in cultivation due to sufficient monsoon supports for mass production.

Moreover, their crops have been highly considered as cash crops which lead to export earning Zone from the plantation. In this decade 2005-2007, this sector had undergone from export and marketing issues among small growers. During 2001- 2003, 2011-2012 Monsoon failure has occurred in major parts of India. Coffee Plantation is also not an exempt case. Subsequently, this crops (coffee) growth was gradually even sometimes drastically increased with the support of sub-divisional crops - viz; orange, pepper, beans, banana, turmeric, Cardamom, etc. The fluctuating trend of coffee market in worldwide was another reason. Whenever the mass production has occurred in Brazil and Colombia, automatically our export becomes lower than the previous year and our demand also attaining low. These effects would cause into paradigm shift where there is agrarian communities, labourers who dwelling in hills & semi hill areas after 3 to 5 years. Because capitalist who trying to buy the Plantation areas (required and selected places) from plain regions, particularly industrial areas in order to expand resort, guest house, clubs, etc. Furthermore, frequent tree cutting also happened in these regions due to low income from plantations. Therefore, they are expanding the vegetable cultivation instead of plantation crops. Hence, afforestation is adversely affected.

## Present Scenario

Past 15 years back *Robusta* was the premier of export quality and major preferred by the buyers from Indian Coffee Planters. But, in recent years *Arabica* has dominated for export value and choice preferred by the planters. The open market system is followed for selling coffee beans. Whereas, coffee board was controlled market system in past seven years back. During that time, the price was fixed by the Coffee Board. Besides, it has offered some benefits to the Small Growers. At the same time some of the private traders who offered a higher price to coffee beans rather than coffee board. So, many of the grower's willingness towards open market for more profit. As a result, too much fluctuation was occurred when consumption became low or mass production or sometimes nature of trade affairs due to Global Policy. In this context, how can responsible for market controlled by Coffee Board?

Secondly, mismatch and failure of monsoon were disappointed the coffee cultivation by Growers. They were unable to cope up with fewer prices. During that time (currently also) they adjusted livelihood with sub -Divisional crops such as, pepper, Banana (lower panels and Nilgiris only) and turmeric (Yercaud only). In the meantime, labour charges and maintenance also high. Despite, they adjusted or compensated for labour charges and no labourers available in their locality while harvest season. Sometimes NREG Programme is severely affected (lower pulneys).

Third, wild animals are devastating horticulture crops includes coffee. Forestry is not concentrating for wild animals while invading of coffee estates as well as other crops. Instead, it disturbed the growers in terms of Tree Cutting for sale of legalized tree cut even though they got permission and license. This effort or condition is the reason that the growers are growing the additional trees where there is a large gap between shade trees or sub divisional crops. But these trees are allowed to cut whenever they (growers)

required. Thus 1 acre is eligible and reasonable for 700 coffee plant (4ft to 5 ft) along with 400 Silver Oak (10 ft to 10 ft) , 300 (10ft to 10ft) other trees. Among these additional trees, Growers would preferably go to cut around 100 trees per annum. They plant the trees 4 months in advance before tree cutting.

Sometimes, unnecessary penalties imposed to Growers like, any death cause of wild animals in their boundary of land, buried bushes for removal of wastages for which land is going to plant trees or make ready to cultivate. These are the constraints of practical and genuine incidents faced by the Growers. Therefore, 40% of the growers have kept idle their land and at least 20% of the growers are allotted for leased to someone who willing to plant for some duration like 10 years. If this condition continues, the total sector will decay soon. It causes on an endangered environment due to removal of trees. They are looking forward to replant or alternative action for their livelihood ex; floriculture (rose) herbal, new varieties of additional trees etc.

About 13% of the Agriculture export occupied under coffee plantation. Second, if a coffee estate would be expanded, afforestation and ecosystem value have properly sustained. Semi hill areas will get good employment avenue. The organic farming method will be engaged by growers. Multi type trees would preferably plant by smaller growers in the regions of Salem, Dindigul ,Theni Districts.

### Coffee Cultivation in Dindigul and Salem Districts

Based on baseline survey, we identified the majority of Coffee Plantation areas which were not properly cultivated or idle of land in Lower Pulneys and the growers were unwilling to engage plantation in Yercaud. Therefore, Dindigul and Salem districts of Tamil Nadu State have been selected for our study purpose.

#### DINDIGUL DISTRICT (PULNEYS Region )

S.No	Area	Number of Growers
1	Thandikudi	650(250)
2	Pannaikadu	670(300)
3	Perumal malai	550(170)
4	Aadalur	1400(850)
5	KC Patti	1870(680)
6	Sirumalai	178 (37)

Source: Baseline survey June-July 2016 (Figures in brackets are idle lands of small growers, Despite the potential of cultivation)

#### SALEM DISTRICT (YERCAUD Region)

S.No	Area	Number of Growers
1	Nagalur	245(20)
2	Manjakuttai	350(84)
3	Muzhuvi	440(62)
4	Vazhavanthi	180(NA)
5	Madamangalam	436(70)
6	Thalaicholai	370(N.A)

Source: Baseline survey July-August 2016 (Figures in brackets are idle lands of small growers, Despite the potential of cultivation)

### Labourers' Perspective

Coffee industry is one of the largest employment providers in Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamilnadu. Paradoxically, after globalization policy had emerged in various sectors, plantation sector was also much affected in the form of labour layout practice by the large size tea and coffee estates. Despite, we have secured provisions by various welfare schemes by the ministry of labour and plantation labour Act 1951; we are unable to fulfill the basic needs of plantation labours. Tremendous changes have occurred in tea, coffee and cardamom plantations.

Tea Plantation involves labour intensive with whole year. But, coffee estate is providing seasonal work. It has abnormal labour intensive during harvesting time. The labourers engage themselves with other type of horticulture work like orange, Banana, etc. in remaining days. The major work is handled by the coffee Estate are berries plucking, processing, trenching, spraying, etc. According to the coffee board of India in 2010-2011, 5, 94, 708 workers were involved in coffee Plantation.

Coffee is a highly labour intensive crop requiring about 400 man days / hectare per year for Arabica and 300 man days / hectare per year for Robusta. The Parliamentary Standing Committee was

informed that in recent years there has been a serious shortage of workers in plantation areas due to employment opportunities generated by MNREGS and also due to migration of workers to urban areas for better avenues. This has adversely affected the timely completion of certain critical operations which is having an impact on production, productivity and quality of coffee. The Committee has noticed two issues pertaining to problems of shortage of labour, one is the decreased availability of labourers willing to work on the coffee estates and the second one is the poor quality of the work force which is willing to work. Besides, the labour wages have also gone up sharply during the last five years which drastically increased the cost of cultivation of coffee especially that of Arabica variety which is highly labour intensive. Many growers have started replacing Arabica coffee with Robusta coffee, which requires less labour, to tide over the labour constraints. The Committee notes that the Coffee Board has adopted two-pronged approach to address these two issues of availability of labourers: 1) A scheme of mechanization of farm operations has been introduced in the financial year 2010-11. The scheme is intended to reduce the requirement of labour at one hand and tackle the problem of skill deficit on the other as various operations are being performed using machines. 2) Conducting Skill Building Workshops for the workers working in Coffee Estates. The Coffee Board proposes to intensify this activity under a newly proposed scheme viz., "Strengthening of Transfer of Technology and Capacity Building" in the XII Plan. The Committee finds that the use of machinery in carrying out farm operations is in its infant stage in India and there is a need to give major impetus during the XII Plan. The Committee has noted in detail the efforts being made by the Coffee Board in earlier parts of this Report and appreciates the spirit of the Board. Never the less, the Committee is of the considered view that we still have to go a long way before being satisfied. It is learnt that no substantial savings of labour has been found from the existing machines that have been released in coffee sector. More machines will have to be developed and primarily the focus should be on harvesting machines. (Rajya Shaba Report-102, August 2012)

Thus, institutional supports are effective and suitable to the labourers and Growers. But, the labourer's contribution and willingness towards industrial work in urban areas.

#### Average Daily Number of Persons employed in Coffee Plantations of Tamilnadu

S.No	District	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-2013
1	Pulneys	18159	18159	18159	18159	18159
	Nilgiris	3281	3281	3281	3281	3281
	Salem	3471	3941	3941	3941	3941
	Coimbatore	2049	2049	2049	2049	2049
	<b>Total</b>	<b>26960</b>	<b>27430</b>	<b>27430</b>	<b>27430</b>	<b>27430</b>

Source-Horticulture Report-2014

The structural changes have emerged to the plantation labourers in various categories of each estate, such as permanent, contract, regular (casual) labourers, and seasonal labourers. During 1995 the coffee Plantations faced a crisis on price and sales performance (drastic fluctuating trend). Subsequently, most of the coffee estates were closed. A large number of labourers lost their work. In the mean time the trade union of Plantation was unable to protect the labourers and amicable solution with owners, particularly Coffee Estates. Therefore the coffee plantation is separated from other major Plantations (Tea) as a large number of the coffee estates are occupied by small growers.

The Trade Union is also unable to take proper decision as well as collective bargaining for wage agreement and settlement of disputes due to the intervention of political issues. A large size companies adopted the approach of multinational companies. It means, the nature of work is specified by the owners. There is no provision of choice for labourers. The practice of labour-lay out was adopted. Most preferably, they had tried to hire minimum number of workers based on their willingness and contractual basis. Here, the structure of existing labour practice has changed in the way of collective forming approach (some times small growers also formed as a group of labour with performing work to one growers and getting wage during peak seasons. Besides, the features of Plantation Labour Act and its provisions are diversified. The present situation of the labour practices in the sector is not uniform. The average daily wage is Rs 350 to 450 for men and Rs 200 to 300 for men per day.

#### Conclusion:

The labour practice of Coffee Plantation is the abolition of contractual work in the plantation as prescribed by the Act 1951. But, it has practiced in the way of indirect method. The labourer could do more work on the basis of additional quantity produced. They are engaged only when there is work based on

which additional remuneration is paid. There is no time limit for regularize to the labourers. Ultimately, the owners who try to engage the cheap labour practice in their estates instead of actual wage they got. Most of the Southern part of large size Coffee Estate owners engages contractual cheap wage practice. But, small Grower's practice is differentiating from large size Growers.

Sometimes, small growers of coffee plantation who preferred contractual work to the labourers. Once the task has completed by the labourers (based on the season like pruning, beans picking, cutting, cleaning of bushes) they pay for them. This much of wages are not negotiable by both labourers and Growers. In case, large size estate owners, they arranged labourers from Northern States to complete their work for seasonal basis. The wage and work environment is not affecting the labourers who belong to outsiders. But, the structure has changed from the actual provisions by the Plantation Labour Act, like Health check up by women labourers, Plantation Inspector Visit to the field etc. By and large, according to the work produced by the labourer they can get wage from the Coffee Growers. Besides, most of the Growers who are willing to Fruit and Timber type of Tree Planted in their Estates. In this respect, they are practicing for labour engaged by the way of contractual basis. Economic contribution is less due to migration of Growers and Labourers. From this situation, some of the Growers are willing sale of land to the industrialist from plains in order to construct the resort, club and Hotel. Therefore, it leads to deforestation and further migration of small growers and labourers. If small growers have retain this sector, labour movement also sustained in Coffee Plantation. Otherwise it leads to increasing of tree cutting in existing land and which also leads to environmental degradation in the forthcoming year.

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