CHAPTER - V I

PROBLEMS OF

WOMEN PLANTATION WORKERS
CHAPTER - VI

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The labour market has never been gender neutral. Whether in terms of working conditions or wages, men have always had a better deal than Women. Barring the organised sector of economy, in nearly all other forms of economic activity women suffer from numerous work related disabilities. They have to struggle very hard as workers as well as in their familial roles of daughter, wife, mother etc., in running their families. Women plantation workers, inspite of being considered as belonging to organised sector of economy, experience a number of difficulties both in the work situation and on the home front. This Chapter makes an effort to throw light on the problems being faced by women plantation workers vis-a-vis their family and work. We begin by analysing the day-to-day problems faced by women plantation worker in their family situations which, in turn can have a bearing on their general development as well as work performance.
FAMILY AS A SOURCE OF PROBLEMS FOR WOMEN

Familial obligations, including motherhood are seen as a chief source of women's exploitation by many feminist scholars. It is one thing to dwell at length on the ideals of the family and the glorification of the concept of motherhood. It is yet another thing that, in reality, the family is one of the most exploitative institutions as far as women are concerned. Be it house work, Child bearings and rearing or allocation of resources, it is the women who receive the brunt of discrimination. As daughters, wives and mothers, most women are exposed to a continuous round of exploitation, which may only vary in its form and extent. This exploitation assumes a serious form when the woman happens to be poor, vulnerable and dependent. Domestic work which involves an endless round of performing numerous odd jobs is itself the first greatest disability for women's development. It is true that both men and women work outside, but once they return home most men stop working. In the case of women, however, the work continues, but this time it is 'unpaid' labour. In view of this, domestic work as involving endless labour is first taken up for discussion.
DOMESTIC WORK—THE ENDLESS LABOUR

The Task Force on Health aptly brought out the monotony and drudgery of domestic work when as discussed in Chapter V., it has been pointed out succinctly. that female labour at home is associated with all possible jobs related to the reproductive, rearing, upbringing and sustaining functions. This double burden of working not only at productive and reproductive side, but also as bread winner for the family puts women in the exploitative situation wherein they work on an average, for much longer hours than men.

Such a situation seems to be a general phenomenon, for way back in 1980 a United Nations report had observed that "Women perform nearly two-thirds of work hours in the world".¹ Whether the extent of physical and mental strain a woman may have to undergo when she works outside for a livelihood she has to take the sole responsibility for household work and childcare. In all societies where division of labour is based on gender "Women have been regarded as those responsible for all

work and labour necessary for the upkeep of people in the family, in the home. The concrete details of this work and the labour and effort needed, depend upon the class, caste and situation of the family and the status of the women within it". ¹

For a large majority of rural women domestic work means performing the following tasks—fetching water and firewood, looking, washing utensils and clothes, tending to cattle, if any, care of children, sick and the old and a host of other odd jobs. Our sample of women plantation workers too did almost all the jobs mentioned above.

Even urban women are not generally spared from the compulsions of domestic labour. But they have the benefits of labour saving gadgets such as mixers, grinders, washing machines, vaccume cleaners etc.. These gadgets are beyond the reach of poor rural women. Hence they toil from dawn to dusk all by themselves.

In order to know whether our subject received any assistance in domestic work they were asked a question on who among their family members performed domestic work. Their response have been presented in table Number 6.1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 6.1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PERSONS DOING THE HOUSEHOLD WORK IN THE FAMILY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person doing the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>house hold work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent does all</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the work by herself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respondent does with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>some help from other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>members of the family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data in the above table are quite interesting as well as surprising. While most studies show that women do all house work almost by themselves, our study data showed that 43 percent of the respondents received some kind of help from their family members. This is not without reasons. Plantation labour generally live in scattered settlements where there are hardly ten to fifteen households. The kind of opportunities that men
and children living in large settlements get, for intermingling with others are not generally available to men and children of plantation labour colonies. Hence this may be one of the reasons why our subjects receive some kind of help from the members of their families. There are certain items of work such as carrying firewood, fetching water, catching fish and also in child care, that about 43.22 percent of subject received help from family members.

It was not surprising to find that a majority of subjects (about 57 percent) do all the house work by themselves. Domestic work has never been recognised as productive labour; it is thrust upon women whether they like it or not and neither social nor economic value is attached to it. It is this situation which Minton described when he wrote "We have lived for a long time with a zero-value approach to the women as home worker. No matter how many hours she puts in each week on the essentials of running a household, her pay at the end of the week is zero. Her pension rights are nil. Her sick benefits are nonexistent. She has no days off, with or without pay, over time forget it. Double time for week
ends and holidays? Do not be silly? Unemployment insurance? Never heard if it. Disability benefits or workmen's compensation? Not even in the small print".  

The Committee on the Status of women in India also expressed a similar view when it observed that the low status attached to manual labour and the cultural value associated with women's confinement to home result in a very low status being according to women's work at home.  

It is true that neither the family nexus nor the wider economic system can survive without the labour that women put at home. Yet this labour is hardly recognised as useful or valueable. After a hard days work in the plantation women barely get any time to sit or relax. The dual roles which they play as worker

"Outside the home and workers inside the home" puts severe mental and physical stress on their well being and development.

INCIDENCE OF ALCOHOLISM IN THE FAMILY

Addiction to alcohol is a trend growing in dangerous proportions among the poorer sections of our society. While alcoholism, in general, puts a severe strain on the meagre resources of a poor family, it has particular consequences on women's wellbeing and development. Addiction to alcohol puts severe strains on a women's paltry resources. It also makes her extremely vulnerable to violence by men. This is especially true of married women, who on the one hand have to run their families and, bear the brunt of male violence on the other. The effect of male addiction to alcohol on women was aptly described by Puttaswamy when he wrote "depending on the amount of money spent on drinks the wife and the growing children, in particular have to forego many basic necessities. If the husband's drinking becomes very serious he is likely to return home in a drunken state. The women and the children in the family can only expect harsh physical treatment from
him. At such times the family's rest both literally and figuratively is destroyed by the drunker husband.

There are also other serious consequences of the incidence of heavy drinking on the part of the menfolk in the family. During the day they tend to become indifferent workers. This reduces their daily income. More and more they look to snatching the women's wage to buy their liquor or the men slowly sink into debt as they borrowed money not for the family's benefit but for drinks. Ultimately the helpless wife is left working very hard to clear the debts of a drunken husband. All this is every likely to result in the disintegration of marital and family life. That is why the incidence of drink especially in the lower fragments of society is the main factor that brings about the economic and social collapse of the family as an institution. Invariably the worst sufferers are the women who are deserated but saddled with the responsibility of the family"^1.

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Our respondents were asked to give information about the extent of alcoholism in their families. Data on addiction to alcohol cannot always be taken on their face value because, it is a sensitive issue and women may not always be forthcoming with the truth. Some of our married subjects felt rather embarrassed to talk freely about the extent of alcoholic addiction in their families.

An interaction with our subjects revealed that in nearly 75 percent of the families alcoholic addiction was prevalent. Not having much money to spare the men drank arrack, a locally available product. The largest number of respondents reported that the men folk in their families drank two to three times a week. The incidence of alcoholism was highest on the day wages were paid. It was not an uncommon phenomenon to see many men spending their entire earnings on drinks and snatching the money that the women folk earned. There is an increasing incidence of alcoholism among women in the poorer section of society today. Such a trend is very commonly noticed among women plantation labour. Driven by the sheer monotony and drudgery of their
lives, lack of any other outlet for expressing their latent feelings or emotions and not having enough resources to make use of any other forms of recreation, women plantation workers take to drinking alcohol.

Alcoholic addition among men has disastrous effect on the family in general and women in particular. Where men drink women suffer in two ways. First, they have to go through the agony of running the house on a very meagre budget. Not all the family earnings are spent on constructive purposes. Secondly, women in families of alcholoics are almost always exposed to the threat of physical violence. Our sample of women plantation workers were initially hesitant to talk about the extent of violence in their families. But after persuasion and probing it was revealed that in nearly three-fourths of families of alcoholics, women were being subject to physical harassment by the menfolk.

Alcoholism also throw so many families into the debt trap. Our data on indebtedness as discussed in Chapter IV revealed that in almost all the families indebtedness was prevalent. The extent of indebtedness
was greater in families where men were addicted to alcohol.

Alcoholic addiction thus, acts as hindrance to the development of men, women, children and families in general. It has a specially debilitating effect on women because it tears the very fabric upon which women depend for their survival and sustenance.

THE PATRIARCHAL NATURE OF THE FAMILY

Patriarchy or the system which upholds male values is often said to be the root cause of gender discrimination in our society. A large number of women who work outside their home do so not because of an inner urge to free themselves from the bondage but, because of economic compulsions that have arisen within the frame work of the patriarchal family structre. Though employment for women is said to be liberating them from economic defendence, it does not give them the kind of freedom that is required for women's overall development. Even where women earn their livelihood and also the livelihood for their families their earnings are mostly subject to male control.
It is also true that it is the men who generally decide how and on what a woman's earning must be spent. It is not uncommon for men to keep a part or some times whole of their earnings but, inspite of the fact that women often work harder at jobs than men, have considerable domestic responsibilities and handle finances, it is very rare for women to have a private allowance. Women are also often made to work when the family needs extra resources. As Karlekar puts it when money runs out women are encouraged by men to look for extra work, ask for advances or approach money lenders. "It is clear then that women were given the responsibility of handling money purely because men did not want to take the responsibility of making two ends meet. However, when it came to major decisions either financial or non-financial, men pleyed a dominant role"\(^1\). Men also generally take major decisions relating to the family. Such practices are a direct byproduct of the patriarchal norms that characterise Indian family life.

\(^1\) Karlekar, M. *Poverty and Women's Work*, op.cit. p.118.
It was sought to be known from our respondents how much of freedom they enjoyed in matters such as spending their earnings and taking important decisions in the family. First they were asked to state how they spent. Their responses are presented in Table 6.2.

**TABLE 6.2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern of spending</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hand over the entire earning to male members</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>97.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending as per their wish</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from above data that an overwhelming majority of the subjects hand over their entire earnings to the male members of the family. This is in keeping with the situation prevailing in most Indian families.

Decision making is a very important area that is to be discussed in any study on women. Even in middle class and upper class families where women earn
considerable sums of money, decision making is by and large left with men. The concept of the male as the decision maker and woman as the follower has persisted for several centuries. Data relating to the decision making pattern in the families of our respondents are presented in Table number 6.3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Person taking decision</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Men take all the decisions</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>92.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both men and women take decisions</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only women take decisions</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>400</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data about decision making as revealed in Table-6.3 point out to a very grim situation that exists in the families of our respondents. Though they work from dawn to dusk and virtually spend all their earning on their households, when it comes to matters relating to the family it is almost always the male members who seem to hold the control. This situation was most aptly
described by Karlekar when she wrote "The majority of the world's employed women combine working for a salary with innumerable unpaid household chores. Men perceive of themselves primarily in the role of bread winner; they undertake a minimum of domestic work and when necessary, expect their womenfolk to earn as well as assume full responsibility for balancing budgets and nurturing the entire family. This, by and large, is the allocation of roles accepted in most societies and among nearly all socio-economic groups. At the same time, while there is overwhelming unanimity on a woman's obligations, there is little to be heard on a woman's rights. On the other hand, whether at his place of work, in the home or in society at large, the man is fully conscious of his rights. Poverty may take the edge of what he regards as his legitimate dues; yet at the first opportunity a man will assert himself".¹

¹ Karlekar,M, Poverty and Women's Work, op.cit. p.102)
WORK RELATED DISABILITIES

Though women plantation labour are classified as organised workers, their conditions of work are not as conducive as those prevailing in many other sectors of organised employment. The social setting in which the plantation labour work is not very much conducive to their development, either as workers or as women. Their work related disabilities stem from factors such as immobility, gender biases inherent in the nature of plantation work and health problems which are caused on an account of what they do. Each of these may be taken up separately.

IMMOBILITY

All Indian's poor women workers suffer from the problem of immobility. Women have always worked but, till the time the Indian society moved from the traditional agriculture and household economy to organized industry and services, almost all their activities were centred around their household. When production was homebased they play an effective role in managing not only their labour but also their life. In the subsistence economy, a woman was neither considered
a non worker nor was her labour considered value less, but, once the subsistence economy was replaced by modern modes of production and distribution, the traditional skills of women became meaningless and their access to skilled knowledge was drastically cut. Women were left with no choice to work but had to be confined only to such occupations that were unskilled or semi-skilled. Their ignorance of the complex modern economy further marginalised them and they virtually became inmobile. The factors that lead to such a situations were well analysed by Mazumdar, when she wrote: "In the traditional economy women had played integral and protected roles in agriculture, industry and services. Development with increasing complexity of markets and production techniques and technological change has been the relentless force which displayed large masses of working women with their traditional occupations, made their productive and professional skills obsolete, and reduced them to the status of unskilled unwanted workers. The alterative opportunities that have opened up as a result of development in services or new industry, or for a different class of women educated and with the new type of skills. They cannot absorb the
displaced women, who are mostly illiterate, rural and with restricted mobility".

Illiteracy coupled with their ignorance of modern modes of production compels many women to remain within confines of their vicinity. Strong patriarchal norms also come in the way of women's mobility. Just as their working for a livelihood is inevitable, it is also imperative that they work in the proximity of their dwellings. Not only do familial obligations confine them to their homes or the immediate neighbourhood, but also the absence of alternate sources of employment render them virtually immobile.

It has been stated in Chapter V that all our respondents live within a radius of 0.5 to over 6 kms around the plantations where they work. They have been living there for the past few decades. Most of the plantation labour in the area where the study was

conducted are migrants either from other states or different parts of Karnataka. The only mobility which has taken place in the lives of women plantation workers is their migration from one place to other if they happenend to me married to a man from a different area. A majority of our subjects were born into the families of plantation labour. A good number of them also seemed to be married to male plantation labour. Moving from one plantation to the other can be hardly considered as any mobility. Either out of choice or compulsion plantation women workers tend to remain virtually immobile for most part of their lives. As observed by the Committee on the Status of Women in India the "Voluntary decision on the part of women to remain in the villages springs not only from their family responsibilities but also from a socio-psycological reluctance to move out of the familiar habitat"¹. Men are generally prepared to move out in search of employment opportunities and women are saddeled with family responsibility. They also have to work to eek out a living. Where as a men have the

choice to be mobile women have the compulsion to be immobile. This dichotomy has been well brought out by Mies when she writes "If one considers all development process in terms of their effect on the sexual division of labour, one can see that men were first and foremost linked to the money economy, whereas the women stayed behind as subsistence producers. Wherever wage work (outside agriculture) was available it was given to men, and men migrated in to the city where they tried to find wage employment. Although hardly any of the male worker got an income which was sufficient to feed his family, he was nevertheless treated by the planning authorities as "the bread-winner", hence he was held to be more important than the women and the children who also worked to maintain the family".

SEX BASED DIVISION OF LABOUR

Agricultural activity the world over is characterised by sex based division of labour. However,

the nature and intensity of this division varies from one agricultural operation to the other. There are large number of agricultural operations which are exclusively done by women and hence low paid. Infact, even where men and women perform the same kind of jobs, women are inevitably paid less than men.

Sexual discrimination at work can be defined as providing men and women differential rewards and facilities in work situations. When women are being kept away from achieving their full measure of rewards on the basis of their sex this treatment constitutes sex discrimination. Of specific concern here is occupational sex discrimination, the differential allocation of rewards or facilities to female and male workers.

The problem of discrimination can be examined from two angles namely,

a. Problem of access discrimination
b. Problem of treatment discrimination.
Access discrimination refers to the discrimination that women face in terms of availability of jobs for them. Treatment discrimination refers to the discrimination that women confront once they have obtained jobs.

Sex discrimination at work is at its highest in areas where machines are involved. Men are almost always given the opportunity to learn new skills but women are always confined to jobs involving manual labour. Women often face double discrimination in the sense that they work harder than men but always are paid less. Chakravarthy has rightly observed that "Men will prefer to stay on the farm if it is fully mechanised. To drive tractors and to harvest and thrash with a combine are prestigious operations. Moreover, the women are not trusted with machines which require skilled manoeuvering. They are not exposed to new skills. Men have still the fixed idea that women's ealibre is inferior to mens in the matter of acquiring mechanical skill. When it is hand threshing it is

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mostly done by women, but when it is the operation of
power thresher, mostly men do it with the help of women.
Driving of bullock carts by women is not a traditional
practice. Since some farmers have the proud privilege
of driving tractors, driving of bullock carts has become
a low status symbol. The spectacle of women driving
bullock cart is not rare in Haryana villages. Women
have to take to it when it becomes less prestigious”¹.

Almost all plantation operations mostly involve
manual labour and hence this may be one of the reasons
why women are prepared in large numbers to carry out
plantation work. This is also perhaps the main reason
for women not being discriminated in the payment of
wages. Had there been a preponderance of machine over
human labour in plantation work, male workers would have
gained advantage over women. In the few exclusive male
jobs such as climbing big trees or digging large pits
even now men have the advantage of earning higher wages
than women. Though not in our study, wage differential

¹. Chakravarthi, S. "Farm Women Labour: Waste and
have been reported by other studies in many areas.¹

**SEXUAL ABUSE OF WOMEN PLANTATION WORKERS**

Wherever women work under extremely insecure conditions there is always a danger of sexual abuse either by male co-workers or employers or their agents. This is not to be interpreted to mean that all men tend to exploit women but, cases of sexual abuse of women workers is not at all an uncommon phenomenon. When it is true that even in offices, business establishments and other service institutions there is an increasing incidence of sexual harassment of women, one can easily imagine the vulnerability of women who work in unskilled or semi-skilled occupations.

Plantation work can easily expose women to sexual abuse. Plantations are remote areas where there are not many people around and this in itself is a situation women. Secondly, the managerial cadre in plantation is

¹ See the National Commission of Self-Employed Women, 1988 and Reports and Studies: Study on Socio-Economic conditions of Women Workers in Plantation-A summary of the report, 1981.
that can be made use of by unscrupulous men to exploit
almost always comprised of men and they can easily hire
and fire women if they tend to incur their displeasure.
Often managers and their subordinate staff tend to make
sexual advances towards women, which, due to various
reasons, many of them are forced to tolerate. When
women resist such moves strongly they are sacked or
threatened with ouster. It is also true that women
rarely have any kind of security against such attacks.
They have hardly anybody to complain to or look up to
for protection. In a society where dual standards of
morality prevail, women bear the brunt of public
criticism and are even threatened with social boycott.
It is for these reasons that many women do not make an
issue out of sexual advances by men. The fact that
their being poor, landless and dependent makes their
situation all the more vulnerable. Burnad brings out
this point very well when he says "Since the girls have
to seek work from these men, they often cannot but accept
unwelcome sexual advances as a necessary evil. In
occasional cases the husband may even be aware of the
extramarital relationship".

Our sample of women plantation workers were asked if they encountered the problem of sexual abuse. Most of them were extremely hesitant to discuss this issue with the researcher. Such a situation was quite natural in that the question related to a very sensitive and personal area. However, after much persuasion a few respondent came out with some facts. It appeared that most of the women workers were often verbally abused by the supervisory staff. At times their language bordered on vulgarity. Though there was no direct reference to sexual abuse, discrete enquiries revealed that there were a few incidence of sexual abuse as well. The women who were subject to this kind of treatment did not seem to have taken any effort either to report this matter or initiate any action. Sexual abuse of workers indeed is an area where little action has been initiated either to safe guard the women or to protect their rights.

HEALTH PROBLEMS OF WOMEN PLANTATION WORKERS

Occupational health is an area where not much work has been done are being under taken in India. There is indeed a tremendous ignorance about the health hazards involved in different occupations. Though the contribution of women's work to social development is greater
than that of men, as measured in terms of the quantum & quality of work they put in both at home and outside, even the bare necessities of the female labour force including health care are not often taken care of. That women are house workers as well affects their health adversely. "A low self perception of women as the culture of silence in which they are brought up makes them endure physical and mental suffering they experience and this further reduces their access to health care".

Women in plantation are exposed to a number of health problems such as lung infections and bronchial problems; physical stress; malnutrition; helminthic infections; dysenteries; Contact dermatitis and other contact diseases; heat stroke; high incidence of maternal and child mortality.

There is an increasing use of pesticides in agricultural occupations. Work in plantations is no exception to this. Pesticides can be a source of severe and chronic health hazards the effects of which can be either long range or immediate. There have been a number of studies which have highlighted the dangerous consequences of pesticides on agricultural workers. According to an estimate by World Health Organisation, India amounts for "About a third or more of all cases (5,00,000 cases) every year of pesticide poisoning in the under developed countries. 70 percent of the total Agro-chemicals used in India are either banned or their use is severly restricted in the developed countries"\(^1\). Deaths of agricultural workers due to pesticide poisoning have been reported by various studies. An article published in Deccan Herald reported that "10,000 people die every year in the Third World because of pesticide poisoning. Annual cases of pesticide poisoning is 7.5 lakhs and annual deaths around 14,000. Of these roughly 10,000 deaths are in the Third World and 3.75 lakhs cases of pesticide poisoning.\(^1\)

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poisoning in the Third World. This incidence increases by 5 per cent per annum because of increased use of pesticides. These figures are said to be very conservative\(^1\).

It may be specially mentioned that pesticides have disastrous consequences on women's health. The Report of the Task Force on Health referred to studies on effect of pesticides on Women's health and noted that "There have also been instances and studies which have proved the presence of BHC (Benzene Hexachloride) a widely used pesticide in an overriding proportion of cow’s milk as well as breast milk (Linean 1986). In Coimbatore it was found that 70 per cent of the breast milk samples studied contained BHC and 29 percent contained hepta chlor. Similarly Dieldrin, a powerful pesticide, chemically related to DDT, has been detected in breast milk, the only nutrition for infants and children in most of the rural areas\(^1\).

Pesticides, herbicides and organic solvents are also known to seriously affect the reproductive functions and organs in women some of which are indicated below:

Dioxanes = Abortion, birth defects, still birth.

Polychlorinated biphenyls = Retarded growth, natural depression.

Pesticides = Birth defects, mutation, neural alteration, ovarian dysfunction abortion.

Herbicides = Still birth, birth defects, menstrual dysfunction, anaemia.


In the background of this general discussion on the occupational health issues pertaining to plantation women workers we may now take up an analysis of the health status of our subjects. Almost all women plantation workers covered by this study suffered from
backache which was natural result of working in a bent posture for a longtime. Another common problem was anaemia. This anaemic condition was basically due to malnutrition, frequent child-bearing and rearing. The fact that most child births even to this day take place at home under the supervision of untrained Dias or elderly women in the family and often under hazardous condition further affects their health status adversely. We may here quote Kishwar who wrote "The bias against women's health care in the family is strengthened by government policy. Maternity beds constitute only 17 percent of the pitifully small number of hospital beds available despite the fact that complications during and after child birth take a very heavy toll of women's lives. More than 90 percent of all child births never receive even the dubious-services of the few available primary health care centres". It was quite heartening to see that atleast 60 percent of our sample workers were able to get the services of the doctor who visited their estates once a

The doctor generally carried out a routine checkup and prescribed medicines. The plantation workers told this researcher that their medical expenses were not met by the employer but were deducted from their wages. However, the owners claimed that they met the medical expenses of the workers. It was only in the company-owned estates that small scale medical expenses of the workers were being met by the employers.

The remaining 40 per cent of our sample workers did not have any access to health care facilities. In view of the fact that primary health centres are not within easy reach of most plantations, a large number of plantation workers have no access to even primary health care. In view of the fact that our subjects do not make use of any local medicine they have to depend entirely on near by hospitals for medical care. Most of the cases of minor ailments are just ignored by these respondents who do not have the facility of a visiting doctor. Only in the event of major health problems do these people seek the services of hospitals or private medical practitioners.
Women's health has never been a priority especially among the poorer sections of society. Poor women neither have the resources nor the support structures to guard their health. Inspite of the fact that women are said to be biologically stronger and capable of withstanding hardship, Indai's poor women often succumb to serious health problems because of heavy burden of work resultant low-level of immunity and social neglect. This is often coupled with ignorance and superstition. The situation with regard to women's health was well explained by the Task Force on Health when it wrote "Inaccessibility of health care services, substandard and often downright negative treatment from the medical functionaries, the apathy of society towards women's health and her over-worked and over-burned situation, contribute to a situation, where even the minimum of health services needed in emergencies, leave alone preventive care, is further divorced from the people who most need them, the vast majority of women agricultural workers in the country".

In the preceding section we have discussed at length some of the important problems being encountered by women plantation workers. Inspite of the fact that plantation workers have been categorized as organized labour force, they are not definitely enjoying the kind of advantages that workers in most organized sector jobs enjoy. This is especially true of women plantation workers. The problems of women plantation workers basically stem from their poverty, powerlessness and rootlessness. That they are poor is a factor that has been well established by the data in Chapter IV. Inspite of working very hard both at home and on the plantation they have barely any control over the events of their lives. It is true that in some respect their working conditions are slightly better than those of agricultural labour. But they neither have any opportunities to improve their living standards or those of their children, nor the over all quantity of their life. The fact that a sizeable percentage of plantation labour are migrant makes it difficult for them to establish their roots in any given place. Our subjects are also a in case in points.
A study of the native place of our respondents revealed that three-fourths of the respondents belonged to places outside the district of Chikamagalur where the area of present study is located. The data in Table 6.4 give the details.

**TABLE 6.4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of origin</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chikamagalur Dist.</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>24.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka but not</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chikamangalur Dist.</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>48.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside the State of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>26.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>100.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As has already been observed, a little more than three-fourths of our respondents do not even belong to Chikmagalur District where the study was conducted. This is a clear indication of the fact that most of the plantation labour are migrant in nature and had their roots elsewhere. The fact that they have no alternate sources of livelihood or places where they could go in search of better employment prospects makes them more
powerless and rootless. Many "theories of economic development teach us that migratory characteristics of a population is a contributing factor for progress and development. Census reports reveal considerable migration in our population. In the one-third of population who are enumerated outside their place of birth, women are preponderant over men. But this migration does not contribute to development since much of this is marriage and associational migration. Female migration which is more than double of that of male migration is a cultural factor consisting mostly of rural-rural migrants"¹.

In this chapter a study of the major problems faced by women plantation workers is presented. Plantation workers inspite of being considered as belonging to the organised sector of economy, experience a number of difficulties both in the work situation and at home.

A majority of our respondents take the role responsibility for doing all the household chores. But

¹. Shanmugasundaram, Y. Women Employment in India, op.cit. p.241.
it is quite interesting to note that 43.22 percent of respondents receive some help from other members in their family in running the household.

Alcoholism among men in their families is a problem with which three-fourths of our subjects have to reckon with. As compared to men very few women took alcohol.

An overwhelming majority of our subjects do not have the freedom to spend their earnings as they wish neither do they have a very significant role in taking important decisions relating to their life and family. The concept of men as the decision maker and women as the follower prevails even among our subjects.

An attempt has also been made to study work related disabilities such as immobility, sex-based division of labour, sexual abuse and ocemptionation related health problems. The immobility of the workers stems from the fact that their educational attainments are very low and that they have no altercate sources of employment. Like in many other forms of agricultural work, there is not much of a sex based division of labour in Plantation
work. Infact there is a marked preference for women workers and they take part in practically every type of plantation work. This is also the reason why there are no wage differentials.

Being a sensitive area women plantation workers were not prepared to discuss the issue of sexual harassment at the work place. But it was evident that there was verbal abuse of women workers. There were also indirect evidences to argue that sex-related harassments are not uncommon in the plantations although not reported often.

Most of the health related problems of women plantation workers were related to the type of jobs they performed chief among them being back ache.