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Socio-Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Workers: A Study on Jamuguri Tea Estate of Golaghat District, Assam

*¹Dipanjali Mudoj*¹Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Furkating College (Autonomous), Golaghat, Assam, India.

Abstract

The Tea industry play an indispensable role in the India's economy. Tea garden workers play a significant role in tea production of the State. The production of tea is not only confined within the county. India has been exporting tea to other countries which ultimately generate employment, foreign exchange and national income of the country. Tea garden workers play a significant role in tea production of the country. Without their hard toil, the tea industry would not been developed. Despite their hard toil, they are highly deprived in many respects such as socio-economic, cultural and political aspects. In most tea estate areas, they are not provided with the basic amenities. They have been facing enormous difficulties in their day to day life such as poverty, illiteracy, poorer health conditions, etc. Therefore, it is essential to study the socioeconomic conditions of this section not in general but specifically in connection with Jamuguri Tea Estate of Golaghat district. The present paper intends to study the standard living conditions of Jamuguri Tea Estate's tea labourers and also to suggest some policy measures for their improvement.

Keywords: Socioeconomic, standard of living, workers, tea estate

Introduction

After China, India is the second largest tea producer country in the world. A survey conducted by the Indian tea board reveals that most people of India i.e 89% consume tea as their habit, 8% for refreshing their minds and 3% for gratify hunger. During the British period, the greatest landmark happened in the economy of India is the establishment of tea industry in Assam. Assam is the largest tea producing state in India and has significant share in the world tea market. Assam produces approx. 630-700 million k.gs teas annually which account more than half of India's tea production. During the reign of Ahom King, Robert Bruce, a Scottish adventurer came to Assam. He discovered tea for the first time in the upper valley of Brahmaputra, Assam. Assam tea is famous for its unique taste, briskness and malty flavor.

Assam tea are not circumscribed to Indian sub-continent only but are exported to all over the world. Apart from its contribution towards India's economy, it has its scenic beauty. The tea gardens have become a great tourist attraction in Assam because of its striking view and tranquil environment. There are approx. 803 tea gardens in Assam. There are 74 large tea gardens in Golaghat which produces about 20,000 tonnes of tea per year. The garden labourers are considered as remarkable labour force in Assam. But their socioeconomic conditions are poor and are vulnerable to exploitation. Their poor socio economic condition is the main hindrance in their progress. Due to which they have lack of basic amenities,

educational facilities, health facilities, social isolation, inequality and poor living standard.

During 1860-90s, the Britishers brought people from poverty ridden areas to Assam as indentured labourers from Jharkhand, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh due to acute shortage of labourers in tea industry. Basically, the tea garden workers reside in village inside tea estates. These estates are basically located in interior places which further aggravate their condition. They are isolated from the main stream society and liable to exploitation. According to sources, the tea tribes are comparatively backward than the other tribes and are vulnerable to exploitation. They experience a sense of exploitation and deprivation in various fields. Several schemes have been initiated by the government for the welfare of the tea tribes which increases their participation in educational and professional fields. Tea industry is a labour oriented enterprise. The labourers make the land suitable for plantation by making manures and spray pesticides. The most crucial part is the plucking of leaves as the labourers have to pluck tea leaves for almost 7 to 8 hours continuously. Plucking involves repetitive hand movements, bending and standing posture which exposed them to physical and environmental health problems. That's why the labourers are needed at every phase of its work. Without them not a single tea industry can survive.

Jamuguri Tea Company private limited is a private company situated in Oating, Golaghat district of Assam. As it is a non-govt. Company so it is registered at Registrar of Companies,

Kolkata. Since 2012 it has been fulfilling customers' demand. The quality of tea of Jamuguri is superior which are certified as organic and bio-dynamic crops. The climate, the fertile soil and the varieties of *Camellia Assamica* are the key ingredients to produce such high quality teas. Jamuguri Tea Estate is certified as Fair Trade (FLO)

Objectives

The present paper is primarily concerned with the socioeconomic condition of the tea garden workers in the Jamuguri Tea Estate, Golaghat, Assam. The main objectives of the study are:

- i). To study the socioeconomic status of tea garden workers of Jamuguri Tea Estate in Oating, Golaghat
- ii). To study the health and hygiene conditions of tea garden workers of Jamuguri Tea Estate in Oating, Golaghat..
- iii). To suggest some policy or measures to improve the living conditions of tea garden workers of Jamuguri tea estate in Oating Golaghat.

Methodology

The present paper is based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data are collected through questionnaires and personal interaction with the respondents. A sample of 40 labourers has been taken for the study through random sampling method. Secondary data are collected from websites, journals, books magazines, newspaper, etc.

The Study Area: Jamuguri Tea Estate is located in Borua Gaon, Ghiladhari, Habichukia, Jamguri, Lakhbari, Oating area of Golaghat.

Total area-875(Hectors)

Total number of Workers

- i). Permanent-940
- ii). Casual-300 Aprox. Sometimes they appoint more labourers if the owners felt the need to do so.

Economic Status: Medium.

Housing Facilities: The govt. of India initiated a scheme Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana to provide affordable housing to people belonging to the economically weaker section of society. Under this scheme, the labourers are provided houses. There are Pucca and semi Pucca houses are built in the residential area of Jamuguri Tea Estate.

The relationship between the laborers and managerial staff is cordial.

The Tea Garden has its own Factory. Although they have their own factory, still they collect raw materials ie. green leaves from other Tea Estates. It has a labour union.

Medical Facilities: Jamuguri Tea Estate has a hospital within the estate with general ward for male and female, 30 beds, one full time medical officer, pharmacists, health assistant, GNMs and ANMs nursing attendances. As per the protocol of the government, they periodically conduct immunization camps there.

Health and Hygiene: It is observed that the new generation is concern about their health and gradually using sanitary pads during their mensuration by replacing cloths. However, it can be seen that the old generation is still using cloths during their mensuration.

Electricity Facility: The electric facility is good as it is provided to all the household residing in the garden. In the garden, laboures are facilitated by Anganwadi center, Club, Community Hall, Playground, etc.

- **Drinking Water Facility:** It is provided by the Assam Government.
- **School Facility:** There is a Government Primary school inside the garden and there is provision of mid-day meal.

Level of Schooling

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents on basis of attainment of basic education:

	Below H.S.L.C	H.S.LC Passed	H.S	Graduate	Post Graduate
Respondents	35	2	2	1	0
Percentage (%)	87.5	5	5	2.5	0

Source: Field Survey

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of respondents on basis of Monthly Household Income.

	Less than 5000	5000 to 10000	10,000 to 20,000	Morethan 20,000
Respondents	33	5	2	0
Percentage (%)	82.5	12.5	5	0

Source: Field Survey

Findings

- i). The study reveals that the daily wage of tea labourers have increased from 232 to 250. Though it has increased but it is not sufficient to satisfy the basic needs of the workers and their families. Their wage is not sufficient against their hard work.
- ii). It has been observed from the survey that only 12.5% people have studied till matriculation or above. Also only 17.5% people have house hold income of above 5000 rupees.
- iii). The study reveals that the workers have minimal interaction with the main stream society as they reside in the interior places of garden. As a result they are vulnerable to exploitation. Though there is minimal progression, but it seems that their conditions have become better comparatively to earlier times.
- iv). Tea plucking is one of the hardest jobs. This is mostly done by women. It involves continuous hand movements; they have to carry baskets on their backs and are on feet for hours which exposed them to both physical and environmental health hazards.
- v). The study reveals that although they have made progressed in the field of education but still the quality of education is comparatively not good enough. Often it is seen that the drop out rates are high in the tea plantation areas.
- vi). The study reveals that the older generation of tea estate consumes alcohol. Consumption of alcohol lead to various problems such as health issues, negative impact on the new generations, fights, emotional disturbance, etc.
- vii). The study reveals that Tea garden labourers mostly celebrate Durga Puja and Manasa Puja festivals with dance and music "Jhumur". They always preserve and protect their culture.

Recommendations

- Awareness programmes regarding menstrual hygiene and health issues related with poor menstrual hygiene such as reproductive and urinary tract infections.

- The wages of workers should be increased by the government for both permanent and casual workers of the garden.
- It is seen that the most workers are employed as casual workers and have no economic security. Tea authorities and the government must take measures to reduce the number of casual workers by converting them into permanent workers.
- The government as well as tea authorities must organize awareness campaigns or street play against problems like early marriage, impact of alcohol on family and child labour.
- Adequate water and electrical facilities should be provided.
- The government should take the initiative to provide more scholarship schemes for their education.

Conclusion

The Tea Tribes of Assam are among the backward and vulnerable to exploitation. They are the most exploited and deprived tribes in India. The production and cultivation of tea in Assam is increasing substantially over a period of time and contributing in the national income. Despite its progression, the conditions of tea garden labourers are miserable and deteriorating. The govt. schemes for the welfare and progress of tea labourers have not been implemented properly. Majority of them have no proper health facility, drinking water sanitation and electricity connection, etc. The tea labourers have to reside in villages inside tea estates constructed by the tea planters. These estates are located in interior places and further worsen their socio economic conditions. As they reside inside tea estates, they become estranged from the main stream society. The annual incomes of the families are very low. The tea planters provide basic amenities to workers which are not enough for their development. It has been seen that the labourers are not paid sufficient wages to lead out a standard living. The main constraints in their life are illiteracy, poverty, addiction of alcohol, poor health facilities. The tea planters exploit the labourers in every possible way. Assam Tea Industry Special Incentive Scheme, 2020 enhance subsidy of Rs. 12 per kg for production of orthodox tea and speciality tea. Special Relief for Tea Workers (Budget Allocation: Rs. 150 crore) Tax on agricultural income tax for next 3 years, development of tea plantation labor line infrastructure and as a one-time measure and waiver of electricity arrears of working families living. The amount of Compassionate allowance for pregnant women in tea plantation areas will be increased from Rs. 12000 to Rs. 15,000. Although the govt. implements schemes for the welfare of the labourers and NGOs are working for their progress but still they are lagging behind. The government should launch more new schemes to provide financial support to improve the conditions of tea labourers.

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