

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF TEA GARDEN WORKER IN ALIPURDUAR DISTRICT WEST BENGAL

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Abstract

West Bengal is the second largest producer of tea in India contributing one fourth of India's tea productions. It has about 450 tea gardens, which employ about 6 lakh workers and it's estimated that more than 2.5 million people are dependent on the tea industry. The socio economic condition of tea worker and their dependent is very pathetic they lag behind the non tea worker on all socioeconomic indicators who are residing in the same district. Though the tea garden worker are permanent worker, but they are daily rated, they get the wages for the actual day that they work. Beside the wages of tea worker is Rs 122.50 which is below the minimum wages of agricultural labour, i.e. Rs 206. As the wages are very low the workers cannot afford even the basic needs of their life which result they are being caught in the vicious circle of poverty, illiteracy hunger, etc. The condition of tea workers becomes more vulnerable when tea garden is locked out or the work is temporarily suspended. As the worker doesn't have agricultural land and other source of earning. With the closure of tea garden, they are unable to feed themselves and many people died due to starvation. There. This paper deals with the socioeconomic aspect of the tea gardens of Alipurduar district.

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Introduction

Tea is one of the most favoured beverages in the world next to water. Every day more than two million cups of tea consumed by people around the world. China is considered to be the birth place of Tea. Tea plantation industry is one of the most important agro based industry in India in terms of employment generation, foreign exchange earnings and contribution to the national exchequer. The cultivation and brewing of tea in India has a long history, cultivation of tea is an agricultural activity where as the brewing of tea is an industrial activity, it provides employment opportunities to more than two million people. The Tea plantation Industry expand rapidly and achieved the number one position in the world producer of tea but, unfortunately in 2005 china attained the position of number one in producer since then it retained it. The decade of the 1999s witnessed the new changes in the tea industry, the farmer started cultivating tea in small holding earlier it was on cultivated by the big estate with huge investment The Establishment of BLF (Brought Leaf Factories) encouraged the small farmer to cultivate Tea in their small holding .The early 2000s hit by the emergence of crisis of tea industry in India due to the low price realization of tea in the market , several plantations were declared sick and many of them were closed down.

West Bengal is the second largest tea producing states in India producing one fourth of the nation tea production. In the recent year tea industry in west Bengal has facing several problems the crucial among them are low price realization of tea in auction houses, low yield of tea and the issues of labour. It is the most populous state, primarily dependent on agriculture and medium size industry although there are many heavy industry and services. The Tea plantation in West Bengal is concentrated in North Bengal.It has about 276 organised tea gardens, which employing about 6 lakh workers and it's estimated that more than 2.5 million people are dependent on the tea industry.

Alipurduar district is 20th district of West Bengal it was beaurificated from Jalpaiuguri district in 25th June 2014. The district is famous for three 'T', tea, tree and tiger. It has a population about 17 lakh and area about 3383 sq km. The district has international boundaries with Bhutan and national boundaries with Assam. Alipurduar district have 61 organised tea garden The tea workers in the tea garden are mostly the descendent of migrant workers from Nepal, Chota Nagpur (Jharkhand) and Santhal Pargana (Jharkhand) who came here a century ago and live in

the tea garden . More than 52 percent of the tea workers are women and $\frac{3}{4}$ of them are of tribal communities as Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Lohra etc majority of the worker reside in the quarter provided by the tea garden owner.

The socio economic condition of tea worker and their dependent is very pathetic as they lag behind the non tea worker on all socio economic indicators who are residing in the same district The tea industry particularly in Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar has been in crisis since 2002. The opening and closing of tea garden is now drama in the area. Presently 3 tea estates are closed down in the district creating problem to thousands of people dependent on tea garden for live hood.

Review of Literature

Socio economic background and consumption pattern of women worker in tea plantation industries in Munnar, Idukki district in Kerala were examined by Kurian (1990) he found that women workers were the main breadwinner of the family .The wages is so low that majority of them were spent on consumption of food items. The educational statuses among the workers were very low. Majority of the worker plucked leaves in the plantation; there were no provision of sanitation facilities in their work places. In a study on nutritional status if tea workers it was found that malnutrition exist on the entire garden surveyed. Schemes like mid day meal and Integrated Child development were irregular and inconsistent. The worker were Uninformed about their right under existing labours Law (Biswas, Chakraborty et.al) Khawas (2006) made a study on socio economic study of tea garden worker in the Darjeeling hills, in his study he found that most of the workers were migrant workers from the descendent of migrant worker from Nepal who came to the hills during late nineteenth century.. The villages were not connected will with the all weather road with the tea garden, majority of the houses were kutcha and simi pucca and most of them were not electrified. There were lack of health facilities most of the garden doesn't have hospitals .Mita Bhadra (1985) show the vivid picture of women workers in the tea plantation .the tea plantation industry only organized industry where the women labour participation were more than the men worker and it increasing steadily. The possibilities of the woman worker to be promoted were negligible in the industry. A case study made by Nair (1989) on the socio economic condition of labourers in the Ponmudi tea estate. He found that

despite of the plantation is lockout since 1973. The workers were still dependent on it as they do not have alternate.

Objective of the study

The major objectives are

- To study the socio- economic status of tea garden workers in the tea garden of Alipurduar district.
- To assess the workers' level of consciousness about their basic right.
- To find out the major problem faced by the tea garden worker.

Methodology

For assessing the socio-economic condition of tea garden worker, a survey was conducted in the tea Estates of Hasimara area in Alipurduar district. The survey covered the 125 respondent from the five tea estates from the districts. Self convenient questionnaire were used to survey. Besides survey some secondary data have been obtained from the government's reports, census, books and journals.

Table 1 Surveyed tea garden

S.No	Name of The Tea Garden	No of respondent	No of workers in the Tea Garden	Population of the Tea Garden As per Census 2011	Present status Of tea garden
1	Bharnobari Tea Garden	25	2034	16573	Open
2	Beech Tea Garden	25	2135	6898	Open
3	Subhasini Tea Garden	25	887	4225	Open
4	Satali Tea Garden	25	2762	12178	Open
5	Madhu Tea Garden	25	956	4540	Lock out

Source:Census 2011,Survey of Tea Garden(2014) North Bengal Labour Commisionarate.

The five tea gardens have collectively population about 44414 and they produced 4.86 million kilogram of tea in 2010. Presently out of 5 tea garden only one tea garden is closed. Most of the worker here dependent only in tea garden .In the tea garden there were two types of Worker Permanent worker and bigha worker (temporary worker in the peak season). The ward of permanent worker was entitled for temporary worker. In our research we surveyed the permanent worker

Table 2 : Age of the Respondent

Age group (in year)	No of worker	Percentage of worker
15-25	14	11.2
25-35	36	28.8
35-45	34	27.2
45 -60	41	32.8

Source: Primary Survey

The age composition of the tea garden workers in table 2 reveals that large segment of the worker belongs to the age group of 45-58 years. About 28.8 percent of the workers belong to the age group 25-35 years While 27.2 percent of the respondent belongs to the age group 35-45 years. The age group 15-25 constituted only 11.2 percent of the respondent.

Table 3: Gender of the Respondent

Gender	No of worker	Percentage of the worker
Male	30	24
Female	95	76

Source: Primary Survey

Gender the most important factors in socio economic analysis. In our study women workers dominated the plantation. Out of 125 respondents in the study area, the numbers of women workers are 95 and they constitute 76 percent and the numbers of men workers are 30 and they constitute only 24 percent.

In the tea garden women were more preferable than the men because of the nimble finger and their efficiency in plucking the leaves, as the plantation required huge number of labor force the

management preferred women for the plantation. The men were preferred for the hardworking job in the plantation and in the factories.

Table 4 :Marital status

Marital Status	No of worker	Percentage of the worker
Unmarried	10	8
Married	99	79.2
Divorced	1	0.8
Widowed	15	10

Source: Primary Survey

The table reveals that 79.2 % of respondent are married, 12 % of the respondent were widowed and all of them were women. And 8 percent of the respondents were unmarried. It's found that most of the married responded were married on adult. The reason behind the higher percent widowed of women worker is because the life expectancy of husband of worker is very low. They were very addicted to alcohols which resulted to illness and finally death.

Table 5: Educational Status of the respondent

Level of education	No of respondent	Percentage of the respondent	Male	Female
Illiterate	73	58.4	8	65
I-V	25	20	9	16
VI-X	25	20	7	18
XI and above	2	1.6	1	1

Source: Primary Survey

Its observed from the table 5 that 58.4 percent of the workers are illiterate, 20 percent of responded studied up to class V , 20 percent of the respondent studied class VI-X and only 2 1.6 percent of the respondent have qualification XI and above. Despite Tea garden are operating on Tea Plantation Act 1952 which has a provision that every tea garden should have school. Beside that there is higher rate of illiteracy in the tea plantation most of the respondent discontinued there education due to poverty.

TABLE 6 :Monthly Income of the respondent

Income	No of workers	Percentage of worker
Upto – 2500	30	24.0
2500-3500	32	25.6
3500-5000	43	34.4
5000 and above	20	16.0

Source: Primary Survey

Income is the important factor which influenced the most of the social factors. The workers in tea garden were permanent but beside that they are daily rated. The wage of the tea garden were fixed by the tripartite agreement between tea garden owner, government and the trade union for every 3 year, presently On 19 February 2015 the wages fixed for Rs 112.50 for first year Rs 112.5 for second year and Rs 132.5 for third year. But still it's in process the worker presently earning Rs 95 as a wages. The wages earned by the worker were lower than the government prescribed minimum wages rate. Besides working in tea garden some of the workers rear animals and have planted betel nut in their residential quarter which becomes the sources of income amongst the tea garden worker from the table 7 we can see that near one fourth of the worker earns below RSs 2500 per month. One third of the responded belongs to the income group of Rs 2500-3500 per month .38 percent of the responded earn income ranged between Rs3500-5000. Only 16 percent of the worker in the tea garden has income more than Rs 5000 a month.

Table 7: Monthly expenditure of the Respondent

Expenditure	No of workers	Percentage of worker
Less than 2500	38	30.4
2500-3500	39	31.2
3500-5000	38	30.4
5000 and above	10	8

Source: Primary Survey

Its observed from the table 7 that 30.4 percent of the respondent spend less than Rs 2500 per month. It is because of the fact that around 1/3 of the total worker earn less than Rs 2500 a monthly, while 39 respondent spend Rs 2500-3500. Almost 1/3 of the respondent spends 3500-5000. There are only 10 respondents who spend more than 5000 a month and there expenditure is high due to the education expenditure.

Table 8 :Expenditure on education

Monthly expenditure on education	No of worker	Percentage of worker
Nil	35	28
Less than 200	17	13.6
200-300	15	12
300-500	17	13.6
500 and above	39	31.2

Source: Primary Survey

Besides the fact that education is the key factor for the tea gardener to move from the darkness. The table shows that the expenditure on education is very low. About 28 percent of the respondent did not spend even a penny on education, 13.6 percent of the respondent spend less than Rs 200 on education. 12 percent of the respondents spend Rs 200-300 where as 13.6 percent spent 300-500 on education. Only about one third of the respondent spends more than Rs 500 on education.

Table 9: Migration of family member in search of job

Migration	No of migrant worker	Percentage of worker
Same state	10	8
Other state	7	5.6

Source: Primary Survey

As there is uncertainty in the tea garden about the job due to lock out and suspension of work and low wages many family member of the tea garden worker and even worker migrated to some other place for work. The data collected from responded show that 8 worker have been migrated from the tea garden out of which some working in the same state near by the tea garden and 5.6 to the other state.

Table 10 Housing

Housing	No of respondent	Percentage of worker
Pucca	40	32
Kutchha	85	68

Source: Primary Survey

As tea garden is guided by the Plantation Labour Act 1952 there is provision of housing facilities to the worker by the tea garden management and every year about 8 percent of the worker houses should be converted into pucca houses, but despite of that very least pucca houses are build, the table 10 show that only 32 percent of the responded have pucca house where as 68 of the worker reside in kutchha house made from bamboo and tin shed.

Health

As the wages of tea garden is very low, most of the worker doesn't have money to fulfill the balanced diet. Their intake of diet is very low, . Most of the workers children were malnourished.. As tea garden has provision of health under PLA. In Hasimara the all five tea garden have collectively have one hospital which having more than 50 beds but only have one MBBS who managed the hospital. Despite that all The garden have health centre. But the condition of health centre is not good there is shortage of good experienced doctors and medicines.as the madhu tea garden is presently closed down there hospital is also closed down.

Table 11:Family size

No of member	No of worker	Percentage of worker
1-4	64	52
5-8	56	44
9-12	5	4

Source: Primary Survey

The size of the family determined the standard of living in the family. Large family requires high income to maintain the standard of living where as small family required small amount. It is observed from the table that 52 percent of the respondent working in the tea garden have family member ranged from 1-4 while 44 percent of the worker have family member 5-8 where as only for respondent have 9-12 family member .large family require high income so with lower income and large family create a financial crisis in the family.

Table 12:Sanitation and Water

Sanitation	No of worker house	Percentage of worker
Sanitation available	53	90
No sanitation	72	10
Water connection	0	0

Source: Primary Survey

Sanitation is one of the basic human rights besides many government schemes 90 percent of the worker doesn't Have sanitation facilities, most of the worker practice open defecation. There no personal water connection to the worker only sub staff in the garden has personal water connection otherwise they get water grouply.

Major Findings of the study

- Around one third (32.8 %) of the tea garden workers are in the age group of 45-60.
- In the study are the number female workers are more than the number of male worker they comprises 76 percent of the workforce.
- 79.2 percent of the worker are married and 12 percent of them are widowed
- The numbers of illiterates are more than literates in the study area. 58.4 percent of the respondent are illiterate where as 20 percent are studied upto class V only 1.6 percent of the respondent have studied more than x standard.
- 30 percent of the workers earn less than 2500 a month where as only 16 percent of the worker earn more than 5000 a months.
- The worker with monthly expenditure range between Rs2500-3500 constitutes 31.2 percent of the worker. And the worker with monthly expenditure range more than Rs 5000 constitutes only 8 percent of the work force.
- 28 percent of the worker never spent a penny on education.
- 68 percent of the workers live in kutcha houses.

Suggestion

- There should be a proper implementation Plantation Labour Act.
- The wage of the worker should be increased as per the minimum wage.
- The government should open vocational course institution for the ward of tea garden worker to upgrade the skill workers so that they should be in better condition at the time of closure of tea garden
- The government schemes which are available for the rural area should be extended to the tea estate.

Conclusion

The Investigation about the tea garden workers socio economics condition reveals certain important fact .It is found that most important problem in the tea garden is the lower wages which is the major hinderence in the development of the tea garden worker, and led them to live a pathetic life. Majority of the workers are illiterate and despite that now they are encouraging their children to study. Despite the fact that the workers have lived for generation on the tea garden but they don't have any property right on the land they are living.

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