

## **Socio-economic Condition of the Tea Garden Labour in Assam - A Case Study with Special Reference to Jorhat District of Assam**

**By**

**Bosanta Kumar Borah**

Deptt. of History, Mariani College, Jorhat Assam, India

**1. Introduction:** Tea is a major industrial sector of Assam. The industry has yielded fame and wealth not only to the state of Assam but also to the nation. In the very beginning the planters had to face lot of difficulties in securing the necessary labour force for the plantation and it became necessary to bring workers from other parts of the country. A large number of poor people especially from Orisa, Bihar, Madhyapradesh and other part of India were brought by the Britishers with lucrative offer to work in the tea gardens in Assam. Since then the immigrated workers have been playing an important role in the development of tea industry of Assam. They are now part and parcel of the industry. In the course of time many of the immigrated workers settled down here permanently and became an important section of Assamese community.

**2. Socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers:** Though these immigrated workers came to Assam with a dream of prosperous life but they had to face completely reverse situation here under British exploitation and compelled to accept slave like bindings imposed on them by their employers. The socio-economic condition of these tea garden labourers unchanged till the independence of the country. The trade union movement started amongst the tea garden labourers simultaneously with the Indian Struggle for Independence, but unable to change the position of the workers till the year 1947 AD. After independence trade union movement started in organized way in the tea gardens of Assam which bring some momentum in workers of tea industry sector. The socio-economic life of the tea plantation workers numbering more than 8 lakhs can be understood from the nature of the provisions of various labour acts, which are formulated as a result of trade union movement. The 8 lakhs tea garden workers constitute one –seventh of the 80 lakhs total workers of the India but they can be said as most exploited section of workers in the organized sector of the country.

### **3.1. Objectives of the Study:**

1. To assess the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden labourers in the Jorhat district of Assam.
2. To assess the role of labour unions in promoting the welfare of the workers in the tea gardens (in the study area).

**3.2. Methodology:** The primary data collected are used for analyzing the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden population of Assam. The secondary data are used for analyzing the socio-economic condition and their legitimate right provides by the management and government. The study covering a period of 2000 to 2010 subject to the availability of data

refers only to the organized tea estates of Assam, which consists of private, public and government own tea estates of the district. However, one of the best methods of the study would have been to make a survey of all the tea estates of the district. But, since this is a very large and time consuming project, it is decided to use the case study method. Thus, a sample of three tea estates (selecting one from each sector) has been considered as the modest number from the point of view of feasibility of cost and time. The case study has been conducted in the following three sampled tea estates:

Public Sector: Hulong Goorie Tea Estates, Jorhat

Private Sector: Teok Tea Estates, Jorhat

Government own Tea Estates: Dhekiajuli Tea Estates, Jorhat

**3.3. Statistical techniques used:** The collected data is exposed to different statistical techniques like Percentage, Tabulation, Classification, Graphical presentation of different aspects of respondents etc. Thus, the data is analyzed and interpreted with the help of these statistical techniques and thus conclusions are drawn.

**3.4. Size of Sample:** 100 numbers of respondents of each tea garden is selected on a purposive stratified sample basis.

**3.5. Manner of selecting sample unit:** Then samples is selected keeping in mind the target group which will consist of education, health, employment, income, gender equality, access to and realization of opportunities of participation in various activities of general significance, command over means of well-being, feeling of security and integrity to the social environment.

**3.6. Communities and types of houses:** During data collection 20% household is considered to study on the communities and types of houses in the targeted area. Here an attempt has been made to see the nature of house types of the workers of various communities and tribes of the plantations.

**Table: 1.1: Communities and type of houses of the workers at the Jorhat district of Assam**

Sl. No.	Communities	Total Households	Kaccha	Percentage	Pukka	Percentage.
1	Karmakar(240)	40	16	40	24	60
2	Ghatuar(360)	72	42	58	30	42
3	Oraon(150)	30	20	67	10	33
4	Mridha(250)	50	25	50	25	50
5	Majhi(110)	40	14	35	26	65
6	Munda(240)	44	26	59	18	41
7	Bhumij(140)	24	20	83	04	17
Total (1500)		300	163	54	137	46

**(Source: Field study)**

It is transparent from the above table that 54% of the houses of the workers of the sampled tea estates are of *kaccha* type made of bamboo frame with thatched roof while 46% of the houses are of *pukka*. Comparatively, the workers have more *kaccha* houses in the tea estates. For instance, 58% of Ghatuar, 67% of Oraon, 59% of Munda and 50% of Mridha have *kaccha* houses. It is observed from the table that almost all the workers of the sampled T.Es have *kaccha* types of houses. From the discussion that follows here it is confirmed that the assurance of the planters to construct 8% new houses of the workers every year in the light of plantation labour act, 1951 is in paper only. Had it been done in reality than by 1990 all the houses for the workers would have been completed into *pukka* types. Discussing this problem with the concerned higher authority or owner of the respective garden, it is known that they do not want to invest substantial amount of money at a time in this aspect only. To them, 8% investment means the eight percent in total tea industry of the state. This view has also been shown adequately by the annual report of the Assam Branch Indian Tea Association since 1990. During this period, not a single house was constructed for the workers pretending that a huge loss had to incur by the planters in terms of production and productivity and profits. Again, it is also observed from the present study that majority of new houses are made for staff and sub-staff of the industry as the demands incorporated in Charter of Demands of Unions. The workers who have the *kaccha* houses, they do not have income earner outside the gardens. It is also observed that normally the workers employed in the tea garden very often made their houses up-to-date from their salary. Whereas, those, who manage their income outside the garden job, is seen to take care on the above mentioned matter. Therefore, it can be said that, money earned by family members from outside the

gardens makes a lot of difference in the living conditions of the workers in the sampled tea estates of Jorhat district of Assam.

### 3.7. Family structure of the tea garden workers:

In the present study, 'family' is one of the important aspects of our study. The term 'family' in this study, denotes a group of individuals who live together under a same roof. Considering the socio-cultural atmosphere of the tea garden area, the concept of 'family' is conceived as somewhat different in present scenario.

**Table: 1.2: Communities and type of families in Huloong Goorie Tea Estates of Jorhat district**

Sl. no.	Communities	Total Households	Join family	Percentage	Nuclear family	Percentage
1	Karmakar(140)	40	09	17	31	83
2	Ghatuar(360)	72	22	31	50	69
3	Oraon(150)	30	05	17	25	69
4	Mridha(250)	50	20	20	30	80
5	Majhi(110)	40	10	25	30	75
6	Munda(240)	44	09	20	35	80
7	Bhumij(140)	24	14	00	10	100
	Total (500)	300	89	30	210	70

**(Source: Field study)**

The table 1.2 shows that 17% of Karmakars have join families while 83% belongs to the nuclear families. Most probably the socio-economic condition of the tea industry has encouraged in formation of nuclear families for which the percentage of join families declined considerably in the Karmakar groups comparatively then in the past. On the other hand the percentage of join family is very high in case of Ghatuar (31%) and Majhi (25%) caste in the tea plantations of Assam. The Munda and Mridha (20%) group occupies the next position in join family category. By the term 'join family', it is meant that the parents, sons, daughter-in-laws, grandsons and granddaughters etc living in a house.

The percentage of nuclear family is very high in case of Karmakar caste with 83% and it is followed by Mridha and Munda (80%). On the other hand, the other caste have more or less similar picture in so far as the nuclear family structure is concerned in the plantations. This phenomenon happens normally because after getting married, the tea management authority allotted separate house to the couple in order to fulfill the terms of agreement of constructing 8% new house per year. The study reveals that the distribution of ancestral property amongst



the predecessors after their marriage is a driving force behind the separation from their original home which has also accepted by the social set up of plantation system. It shows that the nuclearisation of family got complete shape here also which is not found in any other industries of the country. On the whole, 70% of tea garden workers of the sampled tea estates have nuclear families with the separate house of their own.

**3.8. Households and working person in the family:** Economic condition of the families reflects important aspect of the society. Therefore, during the data collection some economic variables of the tea garden workers were also captured for the study. Of these economic variables, occupations of the workers are emerged as very important. Like other traditional working classes, some portion of the tea garden workers are employed in the tea garden sector and the rest earned money by working outside the garden. Therefore through the data collection emphasize was given to find out the total number of income generated working individual of the tea garden.

**Table: 1.3: Number of households and working person in the family of the sampled tea garden of Jorhat district of Assam:**

Sl. no	Name of the garden	Total households	Total family members	Independents		Dependents	
				Income holders	percentage	No income holders	percentage
1	Huloong Goorie.T.E	100	450	150	33	300	67
2	Teok T.E	100	400	120	30	280	70
3	Dhekiajoli T.E	100	480	100	21	380	79
Total		300	1330	370	28	960	72

**Source: Field Study**

The table 1.3 shows that 100 household are captured from each sector for the sample survey. Though the numbers of family members of the household are varied in these three tea estates but it clears the position of working persons. The sampled household at Huloong Goorie Tea Estates shows that 33% have earned money while 67% have no income at all. These non-income holders are the dependents of the family. Again of Teok Tea Estates, only 30% have the earning members while their non-income members are 70%. In the same line, 21% of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates have the earning members, in which case 79% have no income in the family. The table shows that only 28% members of the family of above mentioned tea estates have generated income while 72% of them have no income in their family and they are the dependents of their family. The table also clears a fact that among the three sampled tea gardens, Dhekiajoli Tea Estates (79%) has shown highest non-income holders or

dependents. Therefore it can be said that their socio-economic conditions are not good comparatively and employment only can change their socio-economic conditions.

### 3.9. Quality of the life of the tea garden workers:

Economic lives of the workers are determined by the quality of life that they have been enjoying in their particular employment sector. The tea garden workers of Assam are also not exception of it. In this sector it is seen that the qualities of life of the workers are supplemented by the style of life they have enjoyed in their household level. To know about it we have collected data regarding the use of some entertaining, luxurious and need based equipments that the workers have used in their day-to-day life.

**Table: 1.4. Quality of life of the workers:**

Sl.no.	Name of the gardens	Total households	Vehicle	T.V	Radio	Watch	Telephone/Mobile	Sofa set
1	Huloong Goorie T.E	100	20	60	10	100	60	25
2	Teok T.E	100	30	85	05	100	90	30
3	Dhekiajuli T.E	100	10	55	15	90	50	15
Total		300	60	190	30	290	205	70

#### Source: field Study

The table 1.4 shows that the life style or quality of life of the workers belongs to Teok Tea Estates is much better than the Huloong Goorie and Dhekiajoli Tea Estates. The quality of life, which is reflected in use of the modern equipments, is comparatively high among the workers of Teok Tea Estates than the rest of the two tea estates. This may be due to the fact that almost all the workers of Teok Tea Estates has either got regular wages or availed all the welfare facilities from the garden authority for which their socio-economic conditions are better than that of above mentioned sampled tea estates. The regular wages and better welfare facilities obviously help to lead a better quality of life. The study also reveals that in the tea plantation sector the quality of life is better where joint family system in labour class is practiced. Therefore the workers of Teok Tea Estates carry the highest percentage in enjoying the better quality of life. It is conspicuous that to bring awareness on 'quality issues' amongst the tea garden workers is a long drawn process. Basically, the extravagant nature of the workers must be stopped in order to develop the quality of life of the people in the tea gardens.

**3.10. Level of education:** It is an all known fact that the level of formal education also helps to know about the socio-economic condition of a society or group. Therefore to understand the socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers, data about formal education in different level of the tea garden labours were also collected under the study.

**Table: 1.5. Status of education of labourers:**

Sl. no.	Educational Status	Huloong Goorie Tea Estates		Teok Tea Estates		Dhekiajoli Tea Estates	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	Illiterate	38	20	39	25	45	15
2	Primary	06	06	11	04	13	07
3	H.S.L.C	16	04	12	05	08	02
4	H.S	06	02	02	01	05	02
5	Graduation	02	Nil	01	Nil	02	01
6	P.G	Nil	Nil	01	Nil	Nil	Nil
Total		68	32	66	44	73	27

**Source: Field study**

The level of formal education among the tea garden workers is very low in general. The table 1.5 focus that 58%, 64% and 60% workers of Huloong Goorie, Teok and Dhekiajoli Tea Estates accordingly have no formal school education. Again, it reflects that only 12% of Huloong Goorie, 15% of Teok, and 20% of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates workers had experience of school up to primary level. On the other hand 20%, 17% and 10% of them only had H.S.L.C level of education. Besides, only 8% of Huloong Goorie, 3% of Teok and 7% workers of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates had completed their education up to higher secondary level. Out of 300 respondents only 2% of Huloong Goorie, 1% of Teok and 3% workers of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates had completed graduation and only 01 out of them passed out post graduation level education. From the status of the table it can be analyzed that the socio-economic condition of the workers are very poor due to the lack of proper formal education. To overcome the present situation, the management and the trade union should take steps and held awareness programme for formal education among the tea garden workers which will enhance the life style and socio-economic conditions of the workers to a better position.

### 3.11: Findings:

1. 54% of the houses of the workers of the sampled tea estates are *kaccha* type made of bamboo frame with thatched roof while 46% of the houses are of *pukka* type in the plantation. It can be said that comparatively, the workers have more *kaccha* houses in the tea estates.
2. 70% of tea garden workers of the sampled tea estates have nuclear families with mostly the separate households of their own.

3. Out of the total family members, only 33% have earned their bread and butter while 67% members have no income at all of Huloong Goorie T.E.
4. Out of the total family members, 30% of Teok and 21% of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates have the earning members while 70% and 79% members of Teok and Dhekiajoli Tea Estates respectively have no income in the family.
5. Of the sampled three tea estates only 28% members have income in their family while 72% of them have no income in their family and are exposed as the dependent holders of the family.
6. In the field of formal education of the tea garden labourers the study reveals that 58% of Huloong Goorie, 64% of Teok and 60% of Dhekiajoli Tea Estates had no formal school education.

### 3.12: Suggestions:

1. The concerned tea management should emphasized in construction of more *pukka* houses according to Plantation Labour Act, 1951.
2. The concerned tea management should absorb more regular workers instead of seasonal workers in the plantation sector.
3. To overcome the present situation, the management and the concerned trade union should take steps and held awareness programme for promoting education among the tea garden workers to upgrade the life style and socio-economic conditions of the workers.
4. The management should appoint the local and educated people in the tea garden to minimize the unemployment problems.
5. The workers or the chief household should avoid the alcoholic habits which help them to improve the living standard of their family.
6. The trade unions and the management should organize training programmes for skill based development of the unemployed workers which will help them in generating income.

### Conclusion:

Tea plantation, though an oldest industrial sector of Assam, has facing lots of socio-economic problems right from its inception and the concerned authority must take care of it. On the other hand the concerned groups acting in interest of the plantation workers should also take right and unbiased steps to work for the tea garden labourers. In order to understand the socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in the region under study, it is essential to know the Assam plantation Labour Rules, 1956 which is framed in the light of Plantation Labour Act, 1951.



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