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A Case Study on Socio-Economic Condition of Tea Garden Labourers –Lohpohia Tea Estate of Jorhat District, Assam.

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Abstract

Tea Estate labourers play an important role in our society. Our society will never be complete without their involvement and contribution. Therefore, it is essential to study the socio-economic condition of this particular section. In our proposed study, I want to highlight the socio-economic conditions of this section not in general but specifically in connection with Lohpohia Tea Estate of Jorhat district. Accordingly, we have framed some objectives to study the socio-economic condition of labourers of that particular Tea Estate.

Key Words: Socio-economic, Labourer, Tea Estate.

Introduction: From time immemorial tea has been eulogized in so many ways. According to eighteenth century English poet William Cowper, “It is the cup that cheers but not inebriates”. And it is this very fact that has made tea such a wonderful beverage popularity of which never seems to diminish. To add to that it is also one of the cheapest beverages in the world. People right from the intellectuals, down to the ordinary manual workers in different fields of activities feel pleasure while sipping tea and get relief, relaxed and refreshed. In many a country like in India a day can only begin with a sip of tea. A survey conducted by the Indian tea board reveals that 89% of the people take tea as their habit, 8% for refreshing their minds and 3% for appeasing hunger.

Tea is a labour oriented enterprise as it is agro-based. It requires labour at every stage of its work right from clearance of

jungle, making the land suitable for plantation, work for the nursery, giving manure both in the nursery and in the plantation area, spraying of pesticides, drain cutting, path making, plucking, manufacturing and then finally dispatching it to different destinations. Hence labour is the heart and soul of tea plantation. Without labour not a single tea plant can survive as no baby can survive without mother.

But, unfortunately as far as life situation of the tea labourers are concerned, things are not as ideal as it should be in our country and especially in Assam. Here a tea labourer hardly gets a chance to lead a good life let alone a rosy one. As described by Wikipedia, the tea tribes of Assam are among the backward and most exploited tribes in India. Though their newer generation is comparatively educated and now it has intellectual and professionals in

various fields. The tea tribes, being basically labourers, live in village inside tea estates. These estates are located in interior places and this contributes to the backwardness and exploitation of them by the tea planters. The workers devoid of the basic amenities of life live in impoverishment and die in obscurity. The tea planters usually exploit the tea tribes in every possible way; Agitation of labor against the management is common. Non-education, poverty, addiction of male and some part of females to country beer, poor standard of living and health facilities are the immutable problems in their live. There are instances when tea-planters don't even supply the life saving drugs when workers are dying out of epidemics. 'Welfare officer' appointed in every tea-estate due to compulsion from govt. of India, are mostly showpiece than of any good.

Objectives of the study:

The proposed study is primarily concerned with an assessment of the socio-economic condition of the tea garden laborers in the Lohpohia tea estate in the Jorhat district of Assam. The main objectives of the study are:

- To study the causes of poverty , ignorance and illiteracy of labourers in our proposed tea garden (Lohpohia Tea Estate)
- To study the socio-economic backwardness of labourers of our proposed tea garden.
- To study the awareness and involvement of the laborers in common social and political aspects.

The study area:

Jorhat is one of the districts of Assam and which is known as the 'Tea capital of the World'. For our study we select the Lohpohia tea estate of Jorhat district, which is 7 k. m. away from Jorhat District.

Methodology:

Not much information is available from secondary sources to prove or disprove as to indifference or difference of the community in the study area.

The proposed study therefore would build upon the information collected from the primary sources, although it would use secondary information wherever available. The primary data will be also collected from the structured questioners' administrated at the household level.

Delimitation of the study:

In our study we select only a single tea garden and we take only twenty samples randomly from the labourers. This is very much complicated to draw a conclusion from these limited sources. Apart from this we consider the socio-economic condition only of the tea garden laborers. In spite of these delimitations we try our level best to draw some conclusions of socio-economic condition of tea garden laborers in general and particular in the Lohpohia tea estate of Jorhat district by our limited samples.

Findings and Analysis:

FINDINGS FROM THE GARDEN

Name of the Tea Estate: -
Lohpohia Tea Estate

- Total Area:- 337.34 (Hector)
- Total Number Of Labourers:- 449
- Where 260 is the number of male labourers.
- 189 is the number of female labourers.
- Economical status: - Medium
- Daily Wage for the labourers:- Rs 66.50 Per labour (Male or Female)
- There is a good relation of the labourers with their managerial staff.
- The Garden has its Own Factory.
- Having their own factory they still collect raw material, i.e., green leaves from other Tea Estate.
- The other factory charges them for their green leaves at an increasing rate of price which was Rs 15 at 2008. Rs 17 at 2009 and Rs 20 at 2010.
- The garden has a labour union.
- It has also a primary health center.
- Children's were properly vaccinated.
- There's no facility of pharmacy in the garden.
- Ambulance, Nurse/Doctor facility is provided.
- For the better treatment the labourers has to travel 7 kms away from the garden to Jorhat Town.
- There's a proper electricity facility in the garden and it is provided to all the household residing in the garden.
- There's a primary school situated inside the garden with 2 total numbers of

teachers, where mid-day meal is provided.

- For further study the labourers has to move 4 kms away from the garden for middle and high schools.
- The student's studying at college travel 7 kms away from the garden to the Jorhat Town.
- In the garden labors are facilitated by :-

Anganwadi Center, Club, Community Hall, Playground.

- Distance from the national highway :- 1 km.
- Distance From Railway Station:- 2 km.
- Festival arranged by the laborers:-
Durga Puja, Jhumur, Charak Puja, Bihu, Kali Puja, etc.
- Steps Taken By the managerial staffs For Welfare:-
D.D.T, Free Medicine, Umbrella, Aprons, Blanket, Shoe, Chappal, etc.
- Approx Budget for different welfare schemes is 2 Lacs.

Findings and analysis from the households of the Tea Estate.

As human society is dynamic, its socio-economic and political landscape go on changing constantly, due to physical, socio-cultural and political forces.

- In our randomly selected 20 household samples, altogether there are 110 family members. Out of which 57 males and 53 females.
- Tea Garden labourers enjoy most of the puja festivals. Durga Puja, Manasa Puja (Bishashari Puja) are the most common ones in all the tea Estates. In our proposed tea garden they also enjoy the common puja festivals held in Assam. Each festival in the tea garden is celebrated with dance and music. Jhumur is the most outstanding tune of tribal culture in the tea estate. Though the income is very much limited but they spend Rs 3000(Three Thousand) on an average per annum for various festivals.
- Among the sports and games, football, cricket and kabaddi are the most common games in the Tea Estates. Apart from these outdoor games, carom and cards are mostly played in common places. Sometimes they play cards for recreations, but sometimes with cards they are deep into gambling.
- From the data available it is clear that the general living conditions of the labourers are poor and unhygienic. Most of them are living inside their huts. They also use open space for toilet in the present economic reforms era. At the same time they also use river water for drinking. On one side they are very poor but on the other side they are using or purchasing liquor and intoxicants. They are, infect, victims of their own habit.
- Most of them have their saving habits. For save their money they

basically use Bank, LIC and Provident Fund. For the permanent labourers Provident Fund is almost compulsory. At the same time on emergency they take loans from Provident Funds, shopkeepers or from relatives. But, they suffer because of a very high rate of interest when they take loans from shopkeepers. In spite of this high rate of interest they can't ignore these. Because, these types of loans they have easy access to.

- In our proposed study Tea Estate Public Distribution System(PDS) is available. Basically kerosene, rice, sugar are distributed under the system.
- From our survey we find that electricity is available almost all the households.
- For fuel they use wood and kerosene; only three families have LPG connections.
- In our limited sample of the proposed Tea Estate there is no maternity death or infant mortality. This is very much welcoming. Child labour also not found in our samples.
- Literacy can be considered as acid test of socio-economic and cultural improvement of a society. Education is considered as the major component of human resource development and socio-economic and political development of the society. In our limited sample out of 120 persons almost 40 are illiterate, i.e., around 34% are illiterate. This is not a very bad sign. Most of the illiterate are aged persons. But in the present generations,

the number of illiterate decreases. Among the present generations schooling habit increases. Some factors like mid-day meal, Sarva-Siksha are to some extent effective in this regard. But, in the present situation there are also some drop outs.

- Most of the households are living below the poverty line. From our field study we have seen that the root cause of poverty is basically inheritant in nature. As their parents are poor the next generations also face the same problem of poverty. Apart from this inheritant cause, some other causes, like, low wages, lack of job opportunity and work culture of the people are highly responsible for their poverty.

- If we study their political awareness and their involvement in politics most of them are not aware of it. None of them from our sample directly involved in any political party. Only three females are the members of local Mahila Samiti. But, all the persons who have their voting rights

they usually use their voting rights in different elections. This is a very good sign in respect of political participation.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion it may be said that, the Tea community are highly deprived in all respects of socio-economic and political aspects. Therefore, it is a high time for the government as well as the owners and management to come forward and uplift this particular society. Otherwise this section of our society remains static. Now a days, though some facilities are provided by the government and as well as by the management, but, this is not enough for all round development of the society. Some undesirable incidents are taking place in different Tea Estate in the state in present situation. Therefore, it is highly essential to create a good relationship among owners, managerial staff and labourers. For this, owners, managerial staff and labour union must come forward and through proper negotiations they must solve their problems. Otherwise some bad incidents will continuously affect the Tea Estate.

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