

Socio-economic Status of Tea Garden Women Workers of Assam: A study with special reference to Mohima Tea Estate in the Golaghat district of Assam

Dr Rousonara Begum

Dept. of English, Furkating College, Furkating Dist. Golaghat (Assam)

Abstract

The tea industry plays an important role in the economic well-being of Assam. Since the time of colonialism in India it has been contributing heavily towards the social and economic well being of its workforce. A large number of women workers are engaged in the industry who can be said the driving force of it. The present study has been design to know the socio-economic status of the Tea garden women workers of the Mohima Tea Estate in the Golaghat District of Assam. The major findings reveled that there were various drawbacks in the Tea garden women workers.

Key words: *Socio-economic status, tea garden, women worker in tea garden*

Introduction

The tea industry plays an important role in the economic well-being of Assam. Since the time of colonialism in India it has been contributing heavily towards the social and economic well being of its workforce. A large number of women workers are engaged in the industry who can be said the driving force of it. But they are the victim of circumstances and they are struggling for their existences. The tea garden women workers are not only deprived of various rights but also face various other problems inside the tea gardens. They are facing various social, economic and health related problems. Majority of women workers are illiterate and they are not aware of the minimum standard of living. They have been suffering from prejudice, superstitious beliefs, alcoholism etc. There are more than hundred sub castes among the Tea labour community in Assam, who were from various cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic heritages and have become a part and parcel of Assam.

So far methodology is concerned this paper is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected mostly by direct contact method. The interviews have been taken to carry out the whole investigation. All the information, based on primary sources have been collected from the selected people based on a number of major aspects of age, education,

marital status, living condition etc. Secondary information has been obtained from the books of different writers.

(a) Communities of the respondents:

The survey shows that respondents belong to the 'Tanti' community followed by the workers to the 'Munda' community. The study found that many workers belong to a diverse range of communities such as Manjhis, Bhumij, Kumars, Konds, Kurmis, etc.

(b) Educational qualification of the respondents:-

It is transparent that the most of the women workers are illiterate. The educational qualification of the women workers, 65% are illiterate, while, 20% are under metric, 5% are matriculate, 10% are under graduate and rest 5% is graduate. Therefore, it can be analyzed that the majority of the tea garden working women are illiterate.

© Occupation of the women workers:-

It is also found that the 72% of the respondents are permanent worker of the particular tea estate while 16% of the respondents are temporary and another 12% are housewife. Thus it can be concluded that, the majority of the women workers are permanent.

(d) Marital status of the tea garden women:-

It is observed that 83% of the respondents have been married, 8% of the respondents were unmarried and remaining 9% were widows. It has been seen that the marital status is high among the Tea Garden community due to early marriage. There is also the large percentage of widow among the women workers of this community because of strong addiction to alcohol by their husbands.

Discussion and findings:

(a) Type of housing facilities:-

It is clear that 65% respondents have their Pacca type of housing facilities while, 35% of them have Kaccha type of housing facilities in. The permanent workers have their own quarters allotted by the owner of that particular Tea garden. Thus, majority of the workers residing in Pacca types of houses in the study area.

(b) Average monthly income of the family:-

It is observed that, 85% women workers have their average monthly income of Rs. 1000 to Rs. 5000 while, 10% of them have Rs. 5001 to 10000 and another 2% have Rs. 10001 to 15000. Thus it is concluded that majority of the respondents have their average monthly income of Rs. 5000 or below to it.

(c) Toilet Facilities:

The report indicates a gloomy picture of toilet facilities in the tea gardens. It shows that majority of workers (70%) are found to have single toilets without water facilities. The study also shows that average 10% of respondents use open lavatory.

(d) Distance to Sources of Water:

It is found that 90.50% of workers walk less than a kilometer to collect water and 5% workers walk for one kilometer, while 2% of respondents walk for two kilometers.

(e) Division of Labour:

In the report it is tried to highlight the social construction of gender and daily activities. It shows that the works are varied depending on gender categories. It indicates that major portion of household activities such as cooking, nurturing and caring are done by the woman of the family. Other works fencing, repairing of house are done by the male member of the family.

(f) Monetary Management:

The report elucidate that although all the respondents (men/women) were wage earners, however, economic decisions within the family are predominantly controlled by men. Overall a majority of men (35.50%) within the category of 'husband' are found to be dealing and controlling monetary decisions within the family, followed by the category wife' (26%), while 22.30% elders within the family are found to be regulatin 24 and controlling the same. Further, 14.70 % respondents shared responsibility of monetary management between the spouses. Therefore, the report demonstrates an embedded culture of patriarchy that is contained in the social milieu of the studied tea gardens. The data, henceforth highlights that gender equality in the society cannot be achieved through a single-dimensional aspect of women's economic independent.

(g) Diseases Suffered:

The study finds the presence of various diseases and health problems in the selected tea gardens-anemia, fever, cold, cough, jaundice, high blood pressure, gastroenteritis, dysentery and diarrhea, stomach disorder, and body ache etc.

(h) Menstrual Health:

The survey highlights the lack of toilet facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, which henceforth poses a threat to the menstrual health and hygiene among women workers. Further, the survey found that most women workers use clothes instead of sanitary napkin as a measure to absorb menstrual blood, and that they are unaware of the fact that usage of unclean clothes might lead to serious health issues.

(i) Condition of medical care in the local medical center:

The primary health service is provided to the tea garden workers by the local medical center. Medicine of general diseases also provide in here. In the case of critical disease, they refer to Golaghat Kushal Konwar Hospital and other Medical College and so on. Tea gardeners said different condition about the service of medical center. But the quality of it is not good. They did not say well about this center.

Doctors or Traditional Healers:

The survey findings reflect that in case of any illness majority of workers consulted garden doctors (75.20%), while a minimal percentage of workers (8.20%) consulted garden doctors along with 'others' (traditional herbal medicine providers).

Delivery in hospitals or at home: The better place: Despite provisions of hospitals and other facilities provided by the management, many of respondents, especially the elder women were in favour of child birth at home with the help of local mid-wives. At present, with the introduction of ASHA workers under NRHM Schemes women workers of the tea Gardens have been encouraged to use the estate hospitals for child births and have been made aware of the various medical schemes provided by the government.

(j) Domestic violence and consumption of alcohol:

Due to excessive consumption of alcohol there seems to occur domestic violence in the families.

(k) Witchcraft:

Illiteracy and lack of awareness lead the women of this tea estate to the practice of witchcraft.

Recommendations:-

1. Education should be given importance among tea garden laborers at all levels.
2. The level of education can be improved by organizing literacy campaign in the tea garden. So the management should do the same.
3. Tea garden workers including the women should be made aware of their basic rights through proper training.
4. The women workers of this garden have been suffering from various health problems due to their unawareness of their food, nutrition and health.
5. The study highlights the lack of toilet facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, which henceforth poses a threat to the menstrual health and hygiene among women workers. Further, the survey found that most women workers use clothes instead of sanitary napkin, and that they are unaware of the fact that usage of unclean clothes might lead to serious health issues.

6. It has been seen that the superstitious beliefs are very prevailing among the women worker. They should be properly educated in order to remove this type of belief and to be person of scientific mentality.
7. Electricity, pure drinking water and scientific sanitation supply must be ensured.
8. Extensive socio-economic development programs need to be introduced by Governmental and Non Governmental organizations in the tea garden areas.

Conclusion:-

It is very much significant that the women of each and every society play a vital role for their families, societies as well as countries. From the above discussion, it is concluded that tea garden women workers are still lagging behind socially, economically and culturally. Most of them are illiterate and for that they are working only for their livelihood of their family. Most of them are innocent and illiterate for that they are working only for their livelihood of their family. It is the duty of the society, NGOs, Government agencies to make them literate, culturally reach, and economically secure so that they can live in this beautiful world happily.

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