



## Socio - Economic Status Of Tea Garden Workers In Assam: A Case Study Of Karimganj District

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### Abstract

Tea is a widely used most common and popular refreshing drink. Among Indian states, Assam is well known for its tea, which is one of the most important agro based commercial product of the state.. 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 (Sharma, 2013). This paper is an attempt to highlight the socio-economic conditions of this section of society not in general but specifically in connection with six tea gardens of Karimganj district of Assam. Simple random sampling methods were employed to select the sample of the study. The study reveals heart-touching scenery of living of this particular section.

**Key Words:** Socio-economic, labour, simple-random sampling.

**JEL:** D1, J01, Z13.

### 1. Introduction

*“Good leaf is good tea and this is where good plucking scores. The quality of leaf decreases from the bud downwards”*  
– Ali Zaman

Assam is the highest tea producer state in India (Medhi et al. 2006). It is one of the most important commercial agro-based commercial products of the state and contributes an important role in national economy. Tea is a labour oriented and agro-based industry. 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 (Sharma, 2013). But the working class in the tea gardens of India, specifically in Assam is perhaps the most exploited class in the organised sector of economy. As truly observed by Bordoloi (2013), though Assam Tea is a household name for most of the tea lovers, but the story behind the cultivation, plucking and processing of Tea leaves is one of exploitation and untold hardships for the toiling Tea Labourers all who are the singular reason that this Industry is one of the pillars of the Assam economy. Low wages, poor housing and lack of avenues for social mobility of the tea garden workers have been a recurring theme since its inception in the early 19th century. Since the very existence of the tea industry itself is because of the labourers, it is very much crucial in paying heed to the requirements of the workers by providing them good working conditions (Basistha, 2019). The tea garden labour lines have unique identity as it is neither an urban nor industrial nor a rural area. Among the total tea garden working labours in each tea garden only 30-40% of them are permanent employees. During the peak season, each garden employs casual labourers at same wage structure but less benefit than that of the permanent labourers. There is also no maternity benefit scheme for the tea garden workers. It has been observed that during pregnancy and post-natal period, women continue to engage in hard works. Besides poor socio-economic condition, illiteracy, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies makes tea garden populations helpless to various communicable diseases and underfeeding.

Given this background, the purpose of the study is to investigate the socio-economic status of tea garden labourers of six T.Es of Karimganj district, Assam, which is one of the live examples of backward and most exploited tribes in India. They survive in a distressed and painful life because of poverty, are illiteracy, ignorance about the minimum standard of living. Prejudice, superstitious beliefs, alcoholism etc. are high among this underdeveloped community. Socially they are less exposed, economically hard pressed and hand to mouth, educationally and culturally dwarf. Some suggestions are also advanced to improve their condition.

**2.1. Data and Methodology**

The study is conducted in tea garden of Karimganj district of Assam and total 324 households are interviewed. The sample has been constructed by taking both married and unmarried women labourer. A house to house survey is conducted for this purpose. Information has been recorded through personnel interview by preparing a scheduled questionnaire. For data analysis statistical and mathematical tools and techniques have been applied.

**2.2. Study Area**

As per the data of Directorate of Tea Tribes and Adivasi Welfare, Government of Assam there are 23 tea gardens in Karimganj district of Assam (<https://ttwd.assam.gov.in/frontimpotentdata/list-of-tea-garden-at-assam>) out of which the study is conducted on 324 households covering 6 tea estates namely: Baithakhal Tea Estate, Bidyanagar Tea Estate, Chargola Tea Estate, Goombhira Tea Estate, Longai Tea Estate and Patini Tea Estate, which are located in South Assam. This is one of the tea gardens established by the British in Barak Valley. During the British Period most of these gardens were managed by private company, but now it is managed by Assam Tea Corporation. These gardens have their own tea producing factory since the British period. The workers of the garden are from different states of the country in origin, as their forefathers were employed from different states of India. Even after so many years of independence residents of these garden areas, especially the tea garden labourers lack basic infrastructure facilities in the form of primary schools, primary health centre daily market, pharmacy and road transport system till for these facilities the inhabitants are to go to near villages.

**3. Results and Discussion**

This section contains the analysis of results where we are presenting the discussion of the estimated results in the form of tables and pie-chart.

**3.1 Socio- Economic Status of the Tea Garden Labourers:**

According to Segen’s Medical Dictionary (2012), socio-economic status implies the standing of a person or group in a community or society based on education, occupation and income which is often used as a benchmark for investigating health inequalities. Following Tables show some of these characteristics of the study area:

**Table-1** Distribution of the tea-garden population according to their socio-economic characteristics

Sl.No.	Characteristics	Age Group(years)	Percentage (%)	
			Male	Female
1.	Literacy	7-18	84.13%	88.89%
		19-30	79.41%	45.66%
		31-60	74.36%	26.67%
		Above 60	59.5%	0%
2.	Availability of Health care facility	Diseases Faced	Facilities available (yes=1, No=0)	
		Cholera	1	100%
		Malaria	1	50%
		Skin Disease	0	0
		Jaundice	0	0
		Secret Disease	1	30%
		Typhoid	1	100%
B.P.(high/low)	1	100%		
3.	Average Monthly Family Income (in Rs.)	Income Level (monthly)	Percentage of Population	
		1900-2000	5%	
		2000-5000	38.33%	
		5000-9000	28.33%	
		9000-10000	6.67%	
		10000-15000	18.33%	
Above 15000	3.33%			

Source: Authors’ calculation based on the Primary Survey

Table 1 above presents some important socio-economic characteristics of the population of Longai T.E., where Characteristic 1 is about age and gender-wise literacy rate. It is shown in the table that 84.13% of the male in the age group 7-18 are literate whereas female in the same age group are 88.19%. In the age group 19-30 years 79.41% male are literate compared to female literacy are 45.66%. Whereas, in the age group 31-60 years 74.36% male are literate compared to females which is 26.67% and in the age group above 60 years 59.5% male are literate but in the same age group 100% females are found illiterate.

For capturing the health care system of the T.E. we have included availability of health care facility in the table, it must be mentioned here though there is a public dispensary it is not able to provide minimum health care facilities of various diseases. Characteristic 2 of the above table shows the medical facilities of various diseases available in the garden along with accessibility in percentage. It can be said from the table-1 that for Cholera and malaria medical facilities are available in the garden and 100% of the population have accessibility to it so in the case of high B.P. and low B.P. It has seen that,

in case of typhoid there is facility but only 30% of them have accessibility, but in case of jaundice and secret disease there is neither medical facility available in the garden nor any accessibility.

The economic statuses of the tea garden labours are also very poor because of factors like low efficiency, low wage, wage differential between male and female etc. Though majority of the T.E. working age population are engaged as T.E. labourers some of their family members are also engaged in other activities like: carpentering, stone-breaking, outward migrant etc. Part-3 of the table-1 highlights the average monthly family income of the tea-garden workers for capturing economic status. It is shown in the table that 5% among the people have the income level Rs. 1900-2000, 38.33% have the income level 2000-5000, 28.33% in between 5000-9000, 6.67% people have income level between Rs.9000-10000, 18.33% have the income level 10000-15000, and rest 3.33% people have income level above Rs.15000.

**3.2. Housing Type, Sanitation and Electricity Facility in T.Es.:**

Following table represents housing type, Sanitation facility and electricity facility in the T.E.

**Table-2** Housing type, Sanitation facility, Electricity facility of the Tea Garden Workers

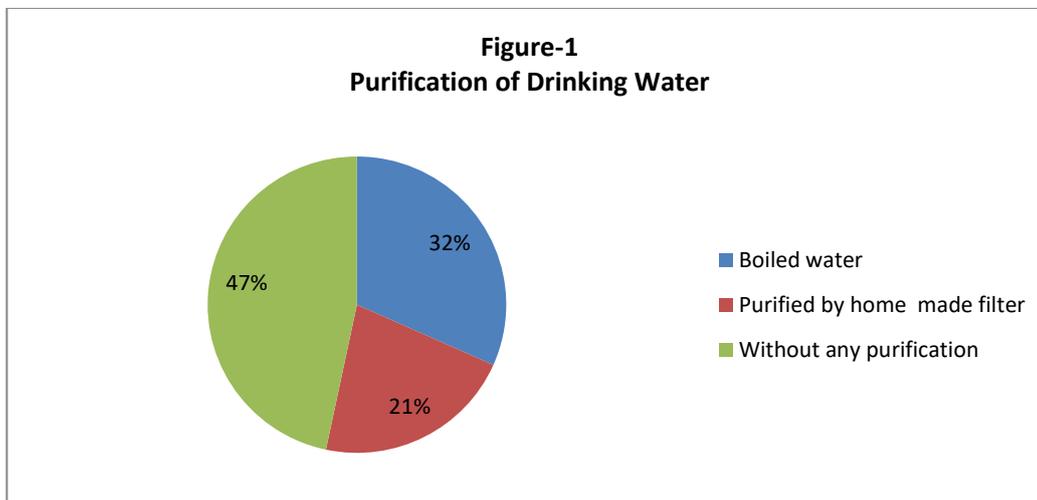
House type	Percentage of Households
Mud and sungrass	54.97%
Indira Awaas	5%
Bamboo and sungrass	15%
Tea garden given (old model pakka house)	3.35%
Pakka house	5%
Bamboo and tin	16.68%
Toilet Facility /types	Percentage of Households
Temporary	3.31%
Semi-sanitary	1.69%
Sanitary	5%
Nil	90%
Type of Electrification	Percentage of population
Electrified without paying bill	20%
Non-Electrified	80%

Source: Authors' calculation based on the Primary Survey

The above table-2 shows various types of house of the labourers and percentage of people living there. It is shown in the table that 54.97% people live in houses made by mud and sungrass 16.68% people live in houses made by bamboo and tin, 15% people are using houses made by bamboo and tin 5% people have own pakka house, similarly 5% people are living in Govt. Given Indira Awaas and only 3.35% people are living in tea garden given old model pakka house. It is clear from the table that 90% people do not have any sanitation facility, 5% people have sanitary toilet, 3.31% people have temporary toilet and only 1.69% people have semi-sanitary toilet facility. It is really shocking that 20% of the people have electricity facility but they do not have to pay for that and 80% among them really do not have electricity facility.

**3.3 Drinking Water Facility:**

People of the selected Tea Estates access drinking water from different sources like: old model common well, tube well, supply water, soil well and tara pump respectively. But very few of them have access to modern sources of purified water as shown in the following pie- chart (Figure-1).



Source: Authors' calculation based on the Primary Survey

The above pie chart shows the percentage of people using purified water and the sources of purification .It shows 46.67% people do not use purified water, 31.67% people use boil drinking water and 21.66% people purify water from home-made water filter.

#### 4. Discussion and Concluding Remarks

First and foremost, it is important to note that this is perhaps the first attempt to see the socio- economic status of tea-garden labourers particularly in Karimganj District of Assam. We found the living condition of workers of the tea garden is seen that the sketch of their social life is very different, unorganized and unusual rather than the normal and usual life of other inhabitants those are engaged in various sectors of economic activities. Their present scenario of social-economic life of tea garden workers are very pathetic and miserable, as they are deprived to have proper education, employment and other basic facilities of human life and as a result they are being regarded as a backward community. They are far behind from the light of modernization and completely detached and alienated from the mainstream of culture.

We can say that labour force engaged in tea plantation should be ensured the dignity of life along with minimum level of wage structure as international standard and other facilities too. But to achieve these, they themselves should take initiatives first. A multi-pronged strategy is therefore needed to emphasis on adult female literacy programmes, increase alternative scope of works or employment of female workers, support of legal codes about demands or claims of the women labourers etc. As a result, a large part of backward people would be progressed and practice the mainstream of culture overcoming their lacks and disabilities.

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