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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### TEA GARDEN LABOURER AND THEIR LIVING CONDITION: A STUDY IN BORSILLAH TEA ESTATE OF SIVSAGAR DISTRICT, ASSAM.

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Tea garden labourer, Borsillah Tea Estate, Socio-economic life, Poverty, Illiteracy.

#### 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. Most of the tea garden labourers are backward in all aspects of their life. The economic condition they live in, the socio-cultural values and institutions they cherish and the kind of relationship they maintain with the other people living around them and in the adjacent areas need to be understood in the light of the present-contemporary society. They have been facing enormous problems and difficulties (poverty, homeless and illiteracy) in their day-to-day life. The study proposes to investigate the socio-economic life of tea garden labourers in Borsillah Tea Estate and how poverty affects in day to day life of labourers in Borsillah Tea Eastate.

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#### Introduction:-

The Assam Tea Industry, which accounts for more than 50 percent of India's total tea production. The tea industry developed by British planters brought in labourers from Bihar and Orissa. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment to nearly half a million population, contributing revenues and support to develop other infrastructure and service sector over the year. Among the total tea garden working labour in each tea garden, only 30 percent of them are permanent employees. During the peak season, each garden employs casual workers at wages much lower than the actual minimum wage. And poor socio-economic conditions, ignorance due to illiteracy, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies make tea garden population helpless to various communicable diseases and underfeeding. There may be some also specific health problems, which may be related to their occupation. Most of the tea garden labourer in Borsillah tea garden is migrated from different states. In different agrarian states in India such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, famine, drought, flood and epidemics coupled with excessive exploitation of poor peasants and landless labourers by landlords and zamindars was common. These factors led to migration of huge bulk of population to Assam in search of livelihood. Apart from these 'push factors', certain 'pull factors' like false assurance regarding easy work, ideal condition of work, better pay and unlimited land available cultivable land were given to the workers which motivated them to migrate to Assam. Motivating by this 'pull factors' a numbers of labourer came and settled down in tea garden as wage labourers during the British period. Work and employment possibly introduced them to leave their ancestral property as they migrated to different regions and especially in Assam. Due

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poverty, illiteracy, ignorance their life becomes more miserable than their original habitats. Till today they were deprived in different circumstances and faced numerous problems like poverty, homeless, illiteracy instead of their hope of economic prosperity for which they leave their home land.

### **Review of literature:-**

R. K. Kar (2009) in his study offer discrete description on the history and migration of the workers in the tea plantations in North East India and their settlements there. The articles included demographic characteristic; food habits of populations; nutritional status; health and hygiene and morbidity scenario; status of women; socio-economic and political problems etc.

Sir Edward Gait (1926; 2008) viewed that rural society of Assam has numerous self-sufficient village communities. People used to cultivate their own land and naturally they preferred independent and self-sufficient position of cultivator. Because of its self-sufficient nature of village communities of Assam, there was scarcity of labourers particularly for working in tea plantation. Tea planters, at very early stage of plantation in Assam, faced hurdles in getting workers. To meet growing demand of plantation work tea garden coolies were brought from elsewhere and in 1853 Assam Company started to import labourers from Bengal. For which legislation was made by British policy makers and from 1863 to 1903 a series of enactments were passed regarding hiring labourers from outside Assam.

Amalendu Guha (1977) studied of the region's plantation economy the imperialism of opium cultivation and workers struggle. He links up the political development with economic problems and exploitations by the tea planters in Assam. Guha analyses of the opium issue, agrarian problem and the question of the indentured tea labourers exposes this exploiting conduct of the European planters and capitalists at the conscious patronage of the colonialists.

R.K Kar (1989) studies and views that tea labourers in Assam consist mostly of tribal communities drawn from different parts of the country. They started migrating to Assam tea plantation since about the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Through his study he makes an appraisal of general condition of life of tea labourers, changes that have occurred in their way of life, their commitment to the industry and problems they confront because of conflict between traditional and emerging pattern of social structure.

Mita Bhadra's (1999) study reflects development of tea plantations of West Bengal in the light of historical process of migration of labourers from other states outside West Bengal. Their migration from different states and regions, setting down within the multi-ethnic community in the tea plantations, occupational mobility from agriculture to industry etc. has brought certain changes in their socio-economic life. Her study traces development of West Bengal plantation system in the light of the past and forces to which it has been subjected and has responded over time.

George Kandulna (1999) in his study of Adivasis of Assam emphasises on nature of socio-economic conditions of Adivasis of Assam. In his view traditionally Adivasis were agriculturists. After migration to Assam they were engaged in a completely different profession that is highly industrialized. All Adivasis are engaged in plantations as tea garden workers. The major constraints in the economic development have been faced by them in Assam. It is due to their lack of adjustment with the local people.

Ranjit K. Bhadra (1999) says wider social-economic background of tea plantation workers in north-east has considerable importance for understanding their social change. A large number of labourers were brought from Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh during British period to work in tea gardens. These labourers belonged to the various ethnic groups like Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Baraik, Kharia Ghasi, Gond, Mahali, Sabar, Khond, etc. There have been many changes in the life due to their migration and adaptation in the plantation industrial environment. This study seeks to understand the process of migration and its consequent effects on socio-economic life of migrant workers.

Gadapani Sharma (2007) his study it is highlighted the economic condition of tea community of Lahpohia Tea Estate, and how to failed to provided the facilities to labour at epidemic time. Agitation of labour is common against management. Non-education, poverty, addiction of male and health facilities are the immutable problems in their lives.

Pallabi Devi (2014) in their study has been design to know the socio- economic status of the tea garden women workers of the Sonitpur District of Assam. Women can play an important role in the upliftment of the society. Without economic, political and social participation, the human society could not be developing.

Achyut Krishna Borah (2013) studied the socio- economic condition and income and expenditure pattern of plantation workers in Lepetkota tea estate in Assam. The study found that majority of the Indian tea producers are not getting fair prices in the market for their tea and this passes to the workers as wage cuts and it further affects the tea industry without a strong and skilled labour force and there are lack of educational facilities for the children of the tea estate workers in the study area.

Robert Kerketta (1999) views about why and how the tribes from Chotonagpur in Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh came to Assam to work in the tea gardens. Many Adivasis from Chotanagpur were recruited to work in the tea gardens of Assam. After coming in this region the labourers partially lost their original identity and partially maintained it under different aspects. They were completely uprooted from their places of origin and landed in an unknown region where they met people and tribes of different cultures, speaking different languages and the assimilation process started. Gradually they lost their culture, language, songs and dances etc and they are deprived of their educational, economic and political privileges.

Thomas Pulloppillil (1999) says that North-East is a mosaic of various cultures and peoples. It is situated in one of the greatest routes of migration of mankind. The migration process began with Bodo tribes in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is not finished phenomenon. The tribes of Chotonagpur unlike the rest were unwilling migrants to this land of blue hills and green valleys. Sixty one tribes and forty castes in the tea plantation in Assam. Their migration started from mid nineteenth century and continued up to about mid-twentieth century. This study is intended to offer a panorama of Adivasi life-in particular, the tribal of Jharkhand in the North-East. The papers on the tribal's of Chotanagpur in the plantation of Assam are from the social, cultural and religious point of view.

S.C.Daniel (1999) mentions about the problems of language and culture of Santhals of Chotanagpur since their migration to tea plantation of Assam. To him Santhals in tea gardens of Assam constitute an ethnic group since they fulfill the core or necessary factors of the concept of ethnicity. They share certain aspirations of which language and culture are very crucial. In term of their religion many Santhals in the tea gardens of Assam have become Christians. And Christian Santhals are facing criticism that Christianity and modernism has destroyed their culture.

George Kandulna (1999) through a modest attempt emphasizes on the nature of socio-economic conditions of the Adivasis of Assam. In his view traditionally adivasis were agriculturists. After migration to Assam they were engaged in a completely different profession that is highly industrialized.

From these reviews, it is apparent that studies related to tea garden labourers are conducted in large-scale, have far-reaching effects. The scholars have taken immense interests and pains to study and unearth many notable points. Almost all kinds of approaches have related to tea garden labourers. But studies relating to the problems of tea garden labourers and the effects of the socio-economic and cultural processes in which they live in are rather rare.

#### **Universe of the Study:-**

This study is carried out in Borsillah Tea Estate which is located in Sivsagar district of Assam. Sivsagar is located at 26<sup>o</sup> 45'N and 27<sup>o</sup> 15'N latitudes and 94<sup>o</sup> 25'E and 95<sup>o</sup> 25'E longitudes. Borsillah Tea Estate is under the Atmaram & Company. The Sub-division of Borsillah Tea Estate is Borsillah, Namti, Ladaigrah, Boruah and Deopani. The total grand area of Borsillah tea estate is 1121.46 hector and the total tea garden area is 625.46 hector. The total number of workers in this tea estate is 2628. There are 1478 permanent workers and 1150 casual workers (*Source: As per tea garden report 2016*).

#### **Methods and Data:-**

So far methodology is concerned this study is based on both primary and secondary sources. Primary data have been collected mostly by direct contact method. Interview schedules have been used to carry out the whole investigation. Secondary data was collected from books, journals, census, periodicals etc. Total sample size 40. The sample selected by using random sampling methods. Both male and female respondent was representation of the study. Data was analysis through descriptions and explanations method. Both primary and secondary data was process with systematic statistical procedure. Classification of data was done in proper way and it was presented in tabular form where ever necessary. MS Excel and SPSS used for data processing.

## Results and Discussions:-

### Social Profile:-

The economic profile of the respondents is determined by Age group, Religion, Place of Origin, Marital status, Types of Family, Education Qualifications of the tea garden labourers in Borsillah Tea Estate.

**Table no 1:-** Social Profile of Tea Garden Labourer.

Sl.no	Social Profile	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	<i>Age group</i>	<i>20-30years</i>	6	15%
		<i>31-40 years</i>	22	55%
		<i>41-50 years</i>	10	25%
		<i>51-60 years</i>	2	5%
2.	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Hindu</i>	36	90%
		<i>Christian</i>	4	10%
3.	<i>Duration of Residence in Borsillah Tea Estate</i>	<i>Since Birth</i>	29	72.5%
		<i>For last 20 years</i>	7	17.5%
		<i>For last 40 years</i>	3	7.5%
		<i>For last 60 years</i>	1	2.5%
4.	<i>Place of Origin</i>	<i>West Bengal</i>	3	7.5%
		<i>Orissa</i>	32	80%
		<i>Jharkhand</i>	5	12.5%
5	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Married</i>	37	92.5%
		<i>Unmarried</i>	3	7.5%
6	<i>Types of Family</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	34	85%
		<i>Joint</i>	6	15%
7	<i>Education Qualifications of the Respondents</i>	<i>Illiterate</i>	12	30%
		<i>Primary</i>	15	37.5%
		<i>High School</i>	12	30%
		<i>Higher Secondary</i>	1	2.5%

Source: Field Study

### Age group of the Respondent:-

The above table show that 55% of the respondents are from 31- 40years age group and 25% of the respondents are belonging from 41-50 years age group. Beside these 15% are from 20-30 years and only 5% are of 51-60 years age group. Therefore it is clear from the data majority of the tea garden labourers are from of 31-40 years age group.

### Religion followed by the Respondents:-

It is observed from the table 1, that 90% of the labourers of Borsillah tea estate are Hindu, while the remaining 10% of the respondents are Christian.

### Duration of Residence in Borsillah Tea Estate:-

Data indicate that majority of the respondents 72.5% are residing in tea garden since birth. 17.5% of the respondents are residing for last 20 years, 7.5% are residing for last 40 years and only 2.5% of the respondents are living in this tea garden for last 60 years.

### Place of Origin:-

Data reflect that majority of the tea garden labourers 80% are migrated from Orissa. Remaining these 12.5 % is from Jharkhand and 7.5% of the labourers are migrated from West Bengal. Thus it can be said that labourers of Borsillah tea estate are not original inhabitants in Assam. Most probably their forefathers come and settle down in this tea estate during British period for economic development.

### Marital Status:-

It is transparent from table 1 that majority of the tea garden labourers 92.5% are married and remaining only a few 7.5% respondents are unmarried.

**Types of Family:-**

Nuclear family refers to a group consists of husband, wife and their unmarried children. While in joint family members of more than one nuclear unit stay together and have a common hearth. Above table show that 85% of the respondent have Nuclear Family, while the remaining 15% of the respondents prefer joint family.

**Education Qualification:-**

From the above table it seen that 30% of the respondents are illiterate, 37.5% of the respondents education up to primary, while 30% of the respondents got education up to high school level and only a little segment that is 2.5% of the respondents got education up to higher secondary. Thus, it can be said that educational level of tea garden labourer is not satisfactory.

**Economic Profile:-**

The economic profile of the respondents is determined by occupation, income, housing condition of the tea garden labourers in Borsillah Tea Estate.

**Table no 2:- Economic Profile of Tea Garden Labourer.**

Sl.no	Economic Profile	Frequency	Percentage	
1.	<i>Occupational Category</i>	Casual worker	9	22.5%
		Permanent worker	31	77.5%
2.	<i>Main Earner</i>	Self	25	62.5%
		Father	1	2.5%
		Husband	14	35%
3.	<i>Monthly Family Income</i>	Below Rs. 3000	10	25%
		Rs.3000-5000	21	52.5%
		Rs. 5001-7000	6	15%
		Above Rs.7000	3	7.5%
4.	<i>Total Earner of the Family</i>	One	2	5%
		Two	30	75%
		Three	5	12.5%
		Four	3	7.5%
5.	<i>Housing conditions of Tea Garden Labourer</i>	Pucca	40	100%
		Kacha	0	0%
6.	<i>Saving Account</i>	Yes	1	2.5%
		No	39	97.5%

Source: Field Study

**Occupational category:-**

Table no 2 shows that 77.5% of respondents are permanent worker and 22.5% of the respondents are casual worker in the tea garden.

**Main Earner:-**

From the table no 2 it is clear that 62.5% of the respondent is the sole earner of their family while 35% of the respondent's Husband is the main earner and only 2.5 % respondent's father is the main earner of their family.

**Monthly Family Income:-**

Respondent's family income is mainly based on tea garden wages. Respondent's view that wages of tea garden is not adequate to meet their daily expenses. Hence, they are not financially solvent. From the above table it is indicate that 52.5% of the respondents have low family income with range Rs.3000-5000 and 25% respondent income very low, below Rs 3000. Beside these 15% of the respondent income are medium Rs 5001-7000, and only 7.5% of the respondent family income relatively high with Rs Above 7000 per month.

**Total Earner:-**

Tea garden labourers are generally dependent on wage of the tea garden to maintain their livelihood. Their daily wage is so less than one person's wage is not sufficient to maintain a family. That is why more than one member is engaged in tea garden work to meet their daily expenses. It is observed from the table 2 that 75% of the respondent

have two earning member in their family and 12.5% of the respondent have three earning member in their family. Remaining 7.5 % have four earners and only 5% respondent's family depend on only one earner.

#### **Type of House:-**

House is the indicator of socio-economic condition and its change in a particular family or community. The housing conditions of the respondent are not the same. The tea garden authority provides the house for their labourers. From the table 2 it is clear that the entire respondent (100%) have pucca houses in the study area. But due to old age of the house some of those have become poor in quality.

#### **Saving Account:-**

Table 2 reveal that majority of tea garden labourers (97.5%) have no saving account and only a few (2.5%) of respondent have saving account.

#### **Development schemes for tea garden labourers:-**

After independence government announced a series of welfare scheme for development of tea garden labourer. Despite of formulation of plan and policy by government, labourer of Borsillah tea Estate are deprived of minimum facility. Government made provision for economic and educational improvement of tea labour of Assam but condition of labourer is very deplorable in the study area. Labourers are ignorant about facility provided to them by government. Their illiteracy and ignorance are used as weapons by tea garden management to deprive them from basic amenity provided to them by government. Their school going children do not get pre-matric scholarship. School in tea garden inhabited locality lack infrastructural facility and shortage of teacher. In Borsillah tea estate tea community as a whole are deprived of all government amenities. Condition of road, school, house, electricity in tea labourer inhabited localities is worse till today. Tea community suffers from numerous health problems but government hospitals even sub-centers do not attend to health related problems. No facility is available to them to maintain sanitation and hygiene. Tea labourer childrens as well as pregnant and lactating mothers suffer from mal-nutrition and deficiency. ASHA, AWC and ANM are there only in official records but practically they do not work in this locality. Thus, it can be said that tea garden labourer are deprived of all government aid and facility. Poverty, illiteracy and ignorance are being capitalised by government officials to deprive them.

#### **Recommendation:-**

Following recommendations are made from the study.

1. Government should make regulation to safeguard tea garden labourers from exploitation of authority.
2. Tea garden authority should increase salary as well as basic amenity of life for workers.
3. Special attention needs to be given to improve educational attainment of tea community in the Borsillah tea garden.
4. Government plan and policy should be implemented properly for development tea community in the Borsillah tea garden.
5. Tea garden authority should look after problems of labourer and try to solve their problem in a concrete manner.
6. Tea community should not be socially excluded rather measures should be taken to include them in wider society.

#### **Conclusion:-**

From sum up it can be concluded that labourers in Borsillah tea estate live in poor condition. They suffer from multiple problems. Economic life of majority of them is in bad shape. Tea garden labourers are still lagging behind in terms of socially, economically and culturally. It is the duty of the society to make them literate, culturally reach and economically stable so that they can live in this beautiful world happily and peacefully.

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