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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO ECONOMIC STATUS OF TEA GARDEN WORKERS. A CASE STUDY IN LOHPHIA TEA ESTATE OF JORHAT DISTRICT, ASSAM.

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Abstract

With the largest tea-growing region in the world and indigenous tea plants (*Camellia sinensis* var *assamica*), Assam, a major state in northeastern India, is acknowledged as the centre of the country's Rs. 1.5 billion tea industry. Assam's economy has benefited greatly from the tea industry, which employs almost half a million people and generates income and support for the growth of other service and infrastructure sectors throughout the year. Women make up the majority of the workforce in the tea industry, particularly on tea estates. One cannot overlook the role that women play in the tea industry. In addition to performing essential household tasks, they are actively involved in the tea industry to help the family make ends meet each month. Workers in tea gardens continue to lag behind in terms of their cultural, social, and economic advancement. The socioeconomic status of tea garden workers is examined in this essay, with particular attention to the Lohpohia Tea Estate in the Jorhat district.

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Introduction:

Assam's tea plantations, which account for 53.97 percent of the nation's total tea area, 49 percent of its workforce, and 52.04 percent of its total production, play a significant role in the state's economy, culture, and politics. Around the world, tea is a popular beverage. People of all ages and social classes drink tea. With the largest tea-growing region in the world and indigenous tea plants (*Camellia sinensis* var *assamica*), Assam, a major state in northeastern India, is acknowledged as the centre of the country's Rs. 1.5 billion tea industry. Assam's economy has benefited greatly from the tea industry, which employs almost half a million people and generates income and support for the growth of other service and infrastructure sectors throughout the year. Under the direction of Charles Alexander Bruce, a small number of tea nurseries were established in various locations throughout the present-day Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Upper Assam in 1835, marking the beginning of the commercial cultivation of tea in Assam. The entire Upper Assam districts—Dibrugarh, Tinsukia, Sivasagar, Jorhat, and Golaghat—have developed into important tea pockets in Assam and India overall as a result of the gradual expansion of the area under tea cultivation. This industry requires a lot of labour and is heavily reliant on a large workforce. It is the only industry where women make up the majority of the workforce. As the number of tea estates grows, it becomes impossible to run with just local labour. In addition, the majority of the local population had no interest in or desire to work on the tea estates. The planners must look for workers elsewhere in order to solve this issue. As a result of defrauding the

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people of middle India, the British brought many tea workers to Assam. The majority of them were from British-ruled Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamilnadu. The workers in Assam were forced to work as indentured servants due to their extreme poverty. But the reality of growing, harvesting, and processing tea leaves on plantations is one of exploitation and unspeakable suffering for the tea workers. The primary issues facing tea workers are a low standard of living and a lack of access to healthcare, education, and other resources. The goal of this study is to draw attention to the socioeconomic circumstances of Tea Garden workers.

Objective:

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

- 1 To investigate the socioeconomic status of tea garden workers.
- 2 Identify ways to improve tea workers' efficiency.

Methodology: The methodology used in this study is both descriptive and analytical. The data for the study were gathered from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were mostly collected through direct contact with respondents. Workers are selected at random as respondents for collecting information and data. For the present study 90 sample is selected (almost 10% of the total workers) using random method. The investigation was represented by both male and female respondents. A structured questionnaire was used to obtain information and data from respondents. Data are also collected from the tea estate's management, or secondary data is collected from the tea garden's official records, such as journals and magazines. Both primary and secondary data were processed using a systematic statistical approach. The data was properly classified and presented in tabular form where necessary.

Universe of the Study: Jorhat city is Located in Jorhat District of Assam, India. Jorhat is an administrative district located in Assam situated in the central part of the Brahmaputra Valley. The district lies in between 26o 20' and 27o 10' 3" north latitude and 93o 39' and 94o 36 '30" east longitudes. The district is bounded by Majuli district on the north, Nagaland state on the south, Sivasagar district on the east and Golaghat district on the west. The district covers total 1758 sq km area and the mean elevation is 116 meters (381 feet). In terms of area, the district is ranked 12th out of all the districts in the state of Assam. It has 648 villages spread across 5 Revenue Circles. Six Community Development Blocks are included. There are seven Census Towns and four Statutory Towns in the district. (2011 Census) There are 1092256 people living in the district overall. The population density is 383 persons per square kilometre. The district has a sex ratio of 962 female among 1000 males. (Census, 2011) Jorhat town is connected with other parts of the state by rail, road and air link.

This research was conducted at the Lohpohia Tea Estate in Jorhat district of Assam which is about six kilometres distant from Jorhat town. Lohpohia Tea Estate is under the Lohpohia Tea Company Private Limited. Lohpohia tea estate has a total area of 334.74 hector and a total tea garden area of 216.76 hector. The tea estate employs a total of 879 people, including 447 permanent employees and 432 casual workers.

Review of Literature:

A study on the socioeconomic status of tea garden workers in the Ponmudi tea estate, which has been closed since 1973, was conducted by Nair (1989). To illustrate the plight of workers in a sinking factory, he created a case study for this unit. The only reason the workers stay in the factory is because they have nowhere else to go. Due to unemployment, they are essentially living in poverty.

Goswami (1992) conducted an investigation on the tea tribe workers of Brahmaputra valley of Assam considering all aspects highlighted that their condition was not at par even with that of the workers of the unorganised sectors as well local peasantry. He found that if there were no socio-cultural barriers many of the garden workers would have come out of the plantation for good and joined the local peasantry even as land less peasants.

In his book "Socio-economic development of plantation workers in North-East India", Chakravorty (1997), examined how workers participate in socioeconomic development processes. The author placed a strong emphasis on education as a means of helping employees develop awareness, accountability, a sense of industry belonging, and discipline, all of which make workers more duty-conscious and cautious about showing up for work on time and on a regular.

In his study on Adivasis of Assam George Kandulna (1999) emphasises on nature of socio-economic conditions of them. In his view traditionally Adivasis were agriculturists. While they migrated to Assam, they were employed in a completely different profession that is greatly industrialised. Every Adivasi works in tea gardens on plantations. They have encountered the main obstacles to economic development in Assam. Their inability to adapt to the locals is the cause.

A study on the current socioeconomic environment that women workers in Assam have been exposed to since their immigration was carried out by Joseph (2001). Joseph (2002) discovered in another study that the tea worker

community does not have equal access to leisure and recreational facilities. Compared to their male counterparts, women have less access to recreational opportunities and free time. Additionally, it has been discovered that Christian women employees have a higher status than non-Christian women employees in every aspect of life.

An investigation made by Kurmi (2007), on socio economic aspects of tea tribe workers or tea workers of Assam. According to him, the tea tribes not only have contributed to the economic development of the state but they also have equally assimilated themselves and have become a part of the society. The main conclusions of his research include the history of how tea plantations first came to be in Assam, the hiring of local labourers from various Indian states, including the Nagas, Bodos, and Nepalis, Chinese immigrants, and finally the labourers from the tea tribes who come from different parts of the country and their socioeconomic status, their role in Assam's independence, the welfare association of the Assamese tea tribe, and laws pertaining to labourers in tea gardens, among other things. The study emphasises how, following years of assimilation, the Assamese tea tribes have integrated into Assamese society to the point where their ancestral culture is now significantly more different from Assamese society.

KangkanDeka (2010) in his study on socio-cultural life of the tea tribe workers focused that their society underwent a number of changes during the colonial period and their life in the tea garden greatly contributed to the growth of a composite Adivasi society.

Hazarika (2012) investigated the precarious living conditions of tea tribe workers in six large tea gardens of Assam. According to his research, Indian women workers go through some of the most severe types of exploitation in modern times. Productivity of the industry is badly affected by the wage cut policy of the employers.

Borah (2013) studied the socio-economic condition and income and expenditure pattern of plantation workers in Lepetkote Tea Estate in Assam. He found that majority of Indian tea producers are not getting adequate prices in the market for their tea and this is the reason of wage cut to the workers which substantially affects tea industry because of lack of a skilled labour force.

A case study was made by Sarkar et.al(2016) on socio -economic condition of tea tribe women workers of sub-Himalayan region of West -Bengal. They focused that Women in every society. They highlighted that Women in every society play important role for their families, societies as well as countries. Most of women workers are innocent and illiterate, and they work only for their livelihood and survival of their family.

The study on "Socioeconomic and Working Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers" by Dr. Hemasri Kumar and Arthi, R. (2019) focused on the Manjoor Block of the Nilgiris in order to analyse the socioeconomic and demographic profile and also to identify the determinants of earnings in the said region. The study found a high level of wage discrimination between male and female workers in the villages for the same job. Since it is evident that female employees suffer the most, the study recommended that discrimination based on gender be avoided.

Result and discussion:

The term socioeconomic status refers to the interaction of social and economic factors such as social position, income, health, rights, cultural and religious freedom.

The term is frequently used to refer to societal stratification without implying that these are distinct social classes (Bhusan, 1989). Socio-economic status describes how social processes influence and shape economic activity. Generally speaking, it examines how local, regional, national, or global economies cause societies to advance, stagnate, or regress. It focusses on how social behaviour and economic circumstances are related. A person's or a group's social standing or class is referred to as their socioeconomic status. It is frequently assessed using a mix of power, wealth, and education. A person's position in a community is indicated by their socioeconomic status, which includes their level of cultural possession, effective income, material possessions, social participation, and prestige.

Social Profile: The social profile of the respondents is influenced by ages, religion, place of origin, marital status, family types, and educational background of the tea tribe workers at Lohpohia Tea Estate.

Age group of Respondents: The following table 1 show that 41.1% of the respondents are from 25- 40 years age group and 37.8% of the respondents are belonging from 40--50 years age group. Beside these 12.2% are from 50-60 years and only 8.9% are of 16--25 years age group. So, it is found in the table that majority of the tea garden labourers are belongs to 25-40 years ages.

Religion of Respondents: It is seen in the table 1 that 90% of the workers of Lohpohia tea estate are Hindus, while the remaining o respondents (10%) follow Christian Religion.

Period of Living in Lohpohia Tea Estate: According to the tabulated data, 70% of the respondents have lived in the tea garden since birth, 15.5% have lived there for the period of above 40 years, 7.8% have lived there for the period of 20- 40 years, and only 6.7% have lived there for the last 20 years.

Table 1: Social profile of the respondent

SL. No	Social Profile		Of total (N=90)	(%) of Respondent
1	Age Group	16----- 25 Years	08	8.9
		25-----40 years	37	41.1
		40-----50 years	34	37.8
		50-----60 years	11	12.2
2	Religion	Hindu	81	90
		Christan	09	10
3	Period of residence in this Garden	Since Birth	63	70
		Last 20 Years	06	6.7
		20---40 years	07	7.8
		Above40years	14	15.5
4	Place of Origin	Orissa	22	24.4
		Uttar Pradesh	17	18.9
		Jharkhand	43	47.8
		West Bengal	08	8.9
5	Marital Status	Married	83	92.2
		Unmarried	07	7.8
6	Types of family	Nuclear	79	87.8
		Joint	11	12.2
7	Educational Status	No schooling	30	33.3
		Primary (I—V)	46	51.1
		High School (VI—X)	11	12.2
		Higher Secondary (XI & Above)	3	3.3

Source: Field Survey

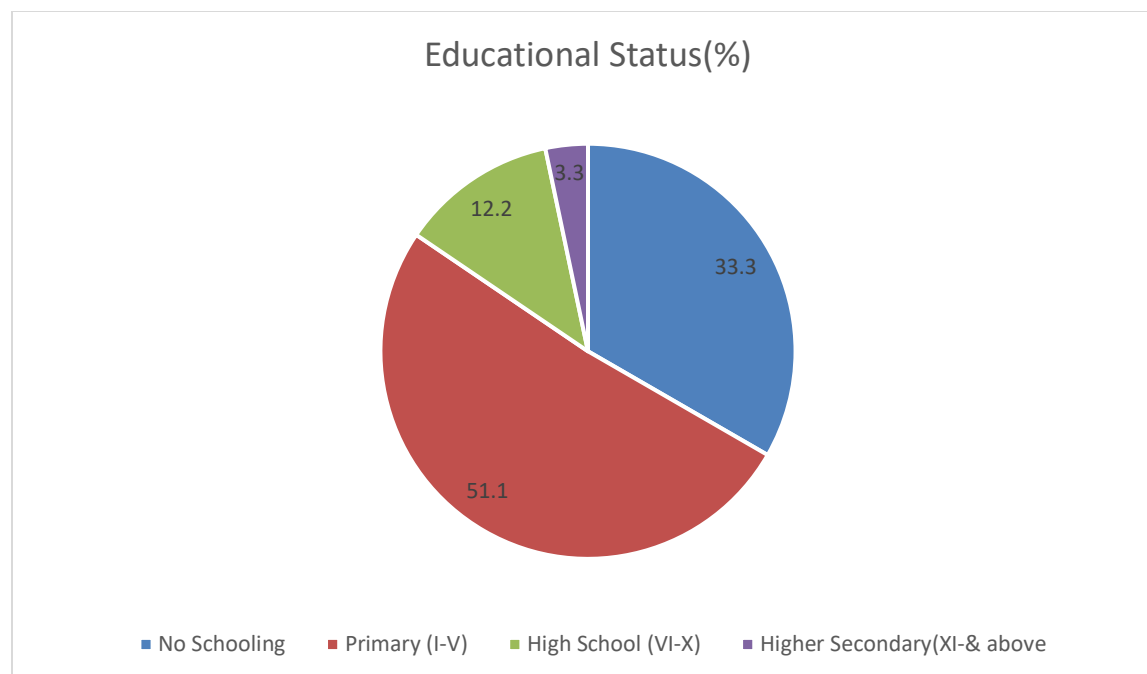
Origin of Respondents: According to the data, Jharkhand accounts for 47.8% of the labourers in tea gardens, with Orissa coming in second with 24.4%. 18.9% came from Uttar Pradesh, and the remaining 8.9% came from West Bengal. Therefore, it can be claimed that the employees of the Lohpohiatea estate are not Assamese natives. This tea estate was most likely the site of their ancestors' arrival and settlement during the British era.

Marital Status: Table-1 indicates that majority of the tea garden workers (92.2%) are married and remaining, 7.8% respondents are unmarried.

Family Types: A nuclear family is a group consisting of a husband, wife, and any unmarried children. In a joint family, members of several nuclear units reside together and share a hearth.

As can be seen from Table 1, 87.8% of respondents have nuclear families, while 12.2% would rather have joint families.

Literacy Condition: In the Lohpohia tea garden, the respondents' educational status has been deemed frustrating. According to the table, 33.3% of the respondents are illiterate, 51.1% have got primary level of education (grades IV), 12.2% have got high school level of education and only a small percentage, 3.3%, have got education up to the higher secondary level. Therefore, the educational attainment of tea garden workers can be considered inadequate. The primary cause of younger children's typical absence from school is the guardians' poor socioeconomic status. The literacy condition is shown with the help of following pie diagram.



Medical Facilities: The Tea Garden Authority offers a dispensary in relation to the provision of medical facilities in the tea garden. Free medical care, medications, and food are provided to indoor patients by the management and garden staff. They must travel to the Jorhat civil healthcare facility, which is 6 km from the tea garden and located in the district headquarters, for better care. Additionally, the management offers patients round-the-clock ambulance service for checkups. Permanent employees are paid while they are ill and can stay in the hospital for up to seven days to receive treatment. For plantation workers, the distance from contemporary medical facilities continues to be an issue. Because they are the most economically disadvantaged, tea garden workers are also the most susceptible to illness and disease. Malnutrition brought on by inadequate and subpar food is common.

Economic Profile: Economic profile of the respondents in Lohpohia tea Estate is determined by occupation, income, housing condition, sources of drinking water, number of earners in a family, saving habit, financial liability, Sanitation etc.

Occupational category: From table 2 it is seen that 53.3% of the respondents are permanent worker while 46.7% of the respondents are casual worker in the tea garden.

Table 2: Economic conditions of the respondents.

Sl. No	Economic Profile		Frequency	%
1.	Occupational Category	Permanent worker	48	53.3
		Temporary worker	42	46.7
2	Sole Earner	The Household's head	38	42.2
		Wife of Household	44	48.9
		Others (Son/Daughter)	08	8.9
3	Monthly Family Income	Below Rs 5000	11	12.2
		Rs 5000—Rs8000	27	30.0
		Rs 8001---Rs 12000	41	45.5
		Rs 12001--- Rs15000	07	7.8
		Above Rs 15000	04	4.4
4	The family's total earner	One	11	12.2
		Two	52	57.8
		Three	21	23.3
		Four	06	6.67
5	Saving Account	Yes	83	92.2
		No	07	7.78

6	Financial Liability	No	66	73.3
		Yes	24	26.7
7	Housing condition of worker	Pucca	47	52.2
		Kacha	43	47.8
8	Source of Drinking Water	Tubel(own)	33	36.7
		Ring/Well (Own)	27	30
		Supplied/At common places	30	33.3
9	Sanitation	Pucca	49	54.4
		Kacha	31	34.4
		Not available	10	11.1

Source: Field Survey

Sole Earner: According to Table No. 2, 42.2% of respondents' families are solely supported by their household owner, whereas 48.9% of households are led by their wife. The primary breadwinner in the remaining 8.9% of households is their son or daughter. The table makes clear that 48.9% of female employees are working as the primary provider for their families.

Monthly Family Income: Tea garden wages are the primary source of the respondent's family's income. Respondents to the survey stated that their daily expenses cannot be covered by the tea garden's wages. They are therefore not financially stable. Table 2 shows that 45.5% of the respondents have family incomes between Rs. 8001 and Rs. 12000 per month, and 30% respondents have family income from Rs 5000 to Rs 8000. 12.2% of the respondent's family income are below Rs 5000 per month. Beside these 7.8% are in the range of family income Rs 12001 to Rs 15000 per month and remaining 4.4% respondent's family income are above Rs 1500 per month.

Total Earner: So far total earner of the family is concerned the present study highlights, through the table 2, that as the daily wage of tea garden workers is very less than one non tea garden labour's wage, the income of one tea Garden worker is not sufficient to maintain a family. Therefore, in order to cover their daily expenses, multiple members work in the tea garden. Table 2 shows that 23.3% of respondents have three earning family members, while 57.8% of respondents have two or more earning family members. 12.2% respondents have single earner in their family and remaining only 6.67% respondents have four earners in their family.

Savings Account: A person's savings is determined by his income. Due to their relatively low daily wage, tea garden workers have a very low propensity to save. Table 2 reveal that majority of tea garden workers (92.2%) have saving account and only a few (7.78%) respondents have no saving account. As per information received from the respondent, during field survey, they have opened saving account in the bank only because of zero balance account and getting direct benefit transfer (DBT) to them by the Govt. or management and they are unable to make regular savings.

Financial Liability: According to Table 2, 73.3 percent of respondents have no financial obligations, while the remaining 26.7 percent have borrowed money from Non-Banking Financial Institutions (NBFIs) and Self-Help Groups to cover a range of expenses. Those who are financially liable have taken out loans for various purposes like marriage, their children's education, and medical bills.

Type of House: In a given family or community, the type of house is a significant indicator of the socioeconomic situation and how it has changed. The workers in the tea gardens live in different conditions. Depending on the nature of their type of job, the tea garden authority provides housing for its employees. According to the information in Table 2, 47.8% of respondents reside in Kuchta homes, while 52.2% of respondents own pucca houses in the study area. Due to their age, some of Kuchta's homes have deteriorated.

Source of Drinking Water: One of the main issues in the garden is the availability of clean drinking water. The most popular water supply in the tea garden is tubal. Table 2 shows that 33.3% of respondents do not have their own water source, 30% have their own ring or well, and 36.7% have their own tubal on campus. For many families, they must fetch water from a well or public tubal, or it may be provided by management at a shared location.

Sanitation: Although the employer is accountable for providing a fully hygienic garden, this is frequently not the case in practice. The Tea Garden Management lacks access to a suitable water supply and sanitary facilities. 54.4% of respondents use pucca latrines and bathrooms, compared to 33.4% who have kuchta latrines and bathrooms. The remaining 11.1% do not have either of these facilities and instead defecate in open spaces. This information is shown in Table 2. In the garden, the two most common unsanitary practices were using native latrines and defecating in public areas.

Conclusion and Recommendations: An essential component of any industry is the socioeconomic background of its workforce. To determine the socioeconomic circumstances of the tea plantation workers at Lohpohia Tea Estate, a

thorough investigation is carried out. It has been determined that the primary issue in the tea garden is the lower pay, which impedes the workers' growth and causes them to lead pitiful lives. Workers in tea gardens continue to lag behind in terms of their cultural, social, and economic advancement. Therefore, the government and the tea estate authority itself should make a variety of practical efforts with policy implications in order to raise the living standards of the workers. Some of the recommendations are stated below:

1. Enhancing the educational attainment of tea garden workers requires special attention. There should be a massive awareness campaign about the tea workers' right to an education. Such motivational campaigns should be a joint effort between the government and non-governmental organisations.
2. Salaries and other benefits for garden workers should be increased by the government or the tea garden authority. Workers in tea gardens should be paid a minimum standard wage, which should be reviewed on a yearly basis and raised.
3. Create a healthy work environment for the employees; basic amenities such as housing, water, sanitation, and other utility services should be provided in the workers' colony; the government and non-governmental organisations should propose specific plans to improve the colony's conditions;
4. Family planning, medical, and immunisation services should be expanded in the garden; and sports and recreational activities should be organised in the garden for both male and female employees in order to enhance their mental and physical well-being.
5. To preserve improved relations between employers and employees.
6. Ensure that all Tea Garden employees are trade union members.
7. Instead of socially excluding tea garden workers, steps should be taken to integrate them into society at large.

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