

Tea Tribes are Far-Away from the Advantages of Urbanisation: A Case Study on Barchapari Tea Garden of Golaghat District, Assam.

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ABSTRACT

Assam is blessed with a high potential for development of resource based and demand base industries The tea industry of Assam is the single largest industry of the state playing a dominant role in the economy of the state. It does not only contribute a bigger share in state income but also contribute substantially to the national exchequer every year in the shape of foreign exchange earnings through its exports. Assam produces more than 50% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. About 17% of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry.

Tea is a labour-intensive industry and is heavily reliant on a large workforce. It is the only sector where majority of the workers are female. Majority of the tea garden workers are the descendants of those who were transported to Assam as slaves by the East India Company, primarily from Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Today, those slaves' descendants are known as tea tribes. These workers continue to live with the basic amenities that the tea planters or companies provide. The primary issues facing tea workers are a low standard of living and a lack of access to healthcare, education, and other resources. This paper will focus on how tea labourers, also known as tea tribes, live in precarious circumstances and are remote from the benefits of urbanisation. Here, an effort is made to assess labourers' urbanisation by their quality of life. The study aims to confine urbanisation to factors like women's empowerment, health status, and educational attainment, despite its wide-ranging effects. According to the study's observation of both primary and secondary data, tea garden workers continue to live in extremely poor conditions. They lead a solitary life and are distant from the urbanised world.

Keywords: Urbanisation, Education, Precarious, Benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Assam is blessed with a high potential for development of resource based and demand base industries The tea industry of Assam is the single largest industry of the state playing a dominant role in the economy of the state. Assam produces more than 50% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. About 17% of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry. The tea industry originated here in the late 1830s by the colonial planters after the annexation of Assam in 1826. The credit for the discovery of tea in Assam goes to major Robert Bruce who discovered the potentiality of growing tea in Assam in the year 1823. In 1839 the “Assam Tea Company” and in 1859 the “Jorhat Tea Company” was established. But as a tea estate the first plant was launched in Chabua (1837) of Dibrugarh district.

Tea is a labour-intensive industry and is heavily reliant on a large workforce. Tea plantations do not need many skilled workers as the main work of the tea plantations is plucking of tea leaves. Tea is the only sector where majority of the workers are female. Women workers account for more than fifty percent of the total workforce of the tea plantation industry in Assam. They have been employed in the tea industries of Assam almost from the inception. Besides plucking of tea leaves they are also employed in some other important tasks such as pruning, manuring, weeding, planting etc. Their role in the state's economy is very crucial. Despite their indispensable role in the tea production, their status in private as well as working fields is very poor. They work under certain limitations and hardships. The majority of women workers are illiterate so they are not aware of the minimum standard of living.

Majority of the tea garden workers are the descendants of those who were transported to Assam as slaves by the East India Company, primarily from Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal. Today, those slaves' descendants are known as tea tribes. There are different sub tribes within them and they are Munda, Chaotal, Kol, Khorla, Bhumij, Ghatowar, Baraik, Sabar, Gauda, Skandha, Baiga, Bhel, Saora, Bhuia, Paharia, Urang, Parja, Mali Teli, Dom, Rajput, Than, Mal, Kandapan, Hari, Sarban, Hoo, Nowar, Napit, Patra, Sero etc. The tea tribes are living in various districts of Assam. These Tea Tribes people are entirely known as "Tea Garden Community" (TGC), 'Tea Garden labourer' (TGL), Coolies, Adivasis etc

These workers continue to live with the basic amenities that the tea planters or companies provide. The primary issues facing tea workers are a low standard of living and a lack of access to healthcare, education, and other resources. This paper will focus on how tea labourers, also known as tea tribes, live in precarious circumstances and are remote from the benefits of urbanisation.

Statement of the problem:

This paper is attempted to study how the tea garden workers, also known as tea tribes, of Barchapari Tea Garden in Golaghat district of Assam are far from the benefits of Urbanisation. As we can see from the history, the tribes are people with their own unique religion, language, culture, ethnic makeup, etc. The formation of the Assamese tea tribes occurred around the specific economic activity, i.e., around the tea industry of Assam (Das 1). During the British colonial era, these people were brought to the tea gardens as bonded labourers, primarily from central and eastern India, by the British as "coolies" or "unfree labour," and they were settled within the confinement of the 'coolie line'. Their mobility was limited within the areas of the coolie line, which restricted their contact with the outside world (LaFavre25). The health condition of individuals residing in the worker's coolie lines was exceedingly inadequate. In fact, those lines were not places of habitat, therefore low nutrition, poor living conditions, lack of awareness, accessibility and their isolation from the mainstream people has all contributed to the unhealthy conditions of the people living in the tea gardens of Assam (Dowerah 522). Fever, cough anaemia, hypertension, skin irritation, and other common illnesses are seen in the tea gardens. Furthermore, the most common causes of people's poor health are severe superstitions and certain unhealthy behaviours, such as alcoholism (Medhi et al. 497-504). In tea garden areas the workers often lack access to good safe drinking water, health care, nutrition due to this there is higher mortality rate, higher risk of pregnancy related complications, low birth weight babies and higher prevalence of tuberculosis (TB), compared to the general population of the state (Rajput et.al 1). In Assam, there are more than 800 tea estates (Bezborah 2) and it is a huge and difficult task to include all the tea estates while studying the benefits of urbanization on the standard of living and health status of the tea tribes, so for that a particular tea garden Barchapari tea estate is selected for an intensive study.

Objectives: The main objectives of this study are----

1. To observe the benefits of Urbanisation enjoyed by the Tea tribe workers.
2. Suggest various measures to uplift the status of tea tribe workers.

METHODOLOGY

So far methodology is concerned the present study is descriptive and analytical. Both primary and secondary sources of data have been extensively used for the purpose of the study. The primary data have been collected mainly from the tea garden workers living in the tea garden area through the structured questionnaire, personal interview and observation. For the present study 100 nos. of sample are selected from the Garden on the basis of simple random sampling. Secondary data are collected from the management of the tea estate, various books, journals and websites. Both primary and secondary data was processed with systematic statistical procedure. Classification of data was done in proper way and it was presented in tabular form where ever necessary.

Study Area: The present study is in Barchapari tea estate which is located in Golaghat district of Upper part of Assam and is 31 kms away from the district headquarter.

Review of Literature: Some of the studies related to the standard of living and various conditions faced by tea garden workers are reviewed here --

R.K. Kar (2009) provides a detailed account of the history, migration, and settlement of tea plantation labourers in North-East India in his paper. The papers included topics such as socioeconomic and political issues, women's standing, eating habits, nutritional status, health and hygiene, and morbidity scenarios.

Nayana Borah (2013) who conducted a study on the rights of women workers in the tea gardens of Assam. He found that health care facility is not satisfactory in various tea gardens, maternal mortality problem faced by women workers in tea gardens; they are mostly superstitious and living in unhealthy environment.

In Kerala, Kurian (1999) conducted an evaluative study on socio-economic background, working and living condition, consumption pattern and physical quality of life of women workers in the plantation sector. His study indicates that the facilities provided to the plantation workers are not satisfactory. Their consumption pattern shows that major spending is on food and consumption of nutrients are very limited. The facilities provided for medical and child care are also not sufficient. The social interaction of women workers and their general awareness is found to be poor due to their low level of education.

The North Eastern Social Research Centre based in Guwahati (http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives/2008/struggles_of_tea_gardenworker1.html; see http://online.ministries.creighton.edu/Collaborative_Ministry/NESRC also) conducted a comprehensive study across 172 tea gardens in Assam along with numerous interviews and group discussions with workers and families. The study brought to light numerous violations of the Act, including inadequate or completely non-existent provisions for drinking water, creches, schools, proper health facilities, sanitation for women workers and shelter (Bharali 2004). Upon further investigation and discussions with workers, one learns that wages paid are much lower than prescribed minimum wage rates, no over-time payment is made, and occasional physical abuse occurs.

G. K Medhi, N.C. Hazarika, Shah, B., and Mahanta, J. (2006) conducted a study on health problems and nutritional status of tea garden population of Assam. They found that there are considerably more underweight female children than male youngsters whose parents work in tea gardens. When compared to those who do not use alcohol, the prevalence of hypertension is noticeably higher among alcohol users.

Sarma & Choudhary (2018) in their empirical study in Tinsukia district of Assam, attempted to investigate the socio-economic status of women's worker and the health condition of women workers in tea garden. The study highlighted that 95% of the women workers were found to be illiterate and the health scenario of the women workers seen to be worst, as they give more importance to their work instead of education and health care. The study further explained that the tea garden women workers are still lagging behind in term of socially, economically and culturally. Failure to attain adequate education is a major reason for lagging behinds in all the fields.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The process of concentrating people in a specific area or territory is known as urbanisation. Mitchell defines urbanisation as the process of relocating to a city, leaving agriculture behind, and engaging in other activities typical of urban areas.

Tea garden workers may benefit from urbanisation in certain ways, such as increased access to better healthcare, education, and job opportunities, as well as a wider variety of social services and infrastructure. Urbanisation can, however, also pose problems for tea garden communities, including rising living expenses, job competition, and possible eviction from their traditional way of life. Here, an effort is made to measure labourers' urbanisation by their quality of life. The study aims to confine urbanisation to factors like health status, education, family planning, women empowerment etc, despite its wide-ranging effects.

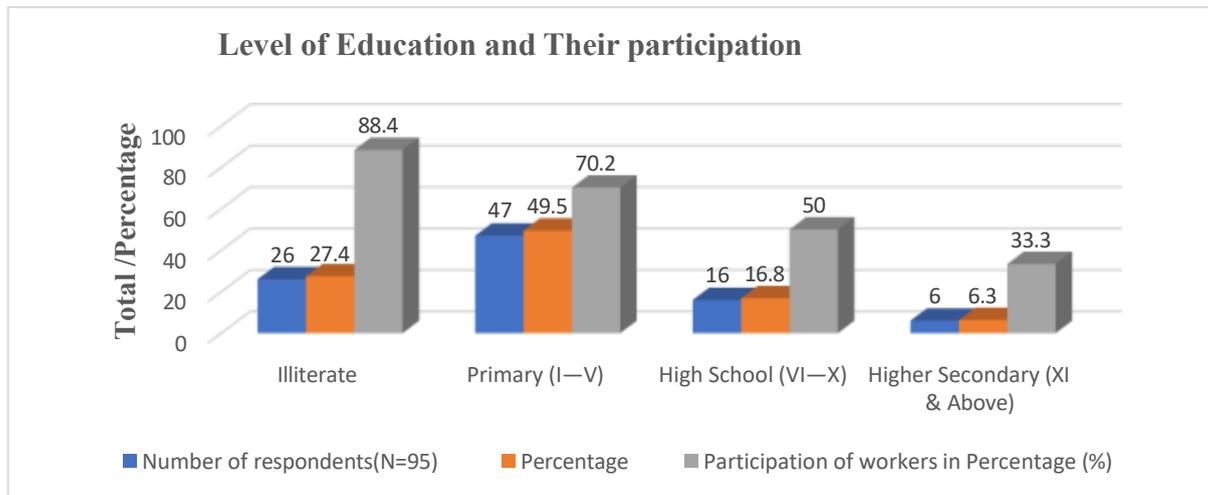
Table 1 shows that of the total respondent 27.4% are illiterate, while 49.5% respondent got

Table: 1: Level of Education of Tea Garden Workers

Educational Status	Number of respondents(N=95)	Percentage	Participation of workers in Percentage (%)
Illiterate	26	27.4	88.4

Primary (I—V)	47	49.5	70.2
High School (VI—X)	16	16.8	50.0
Higher Secondary (XI & Above)	6	6.3	33.3

Source: Field Survey

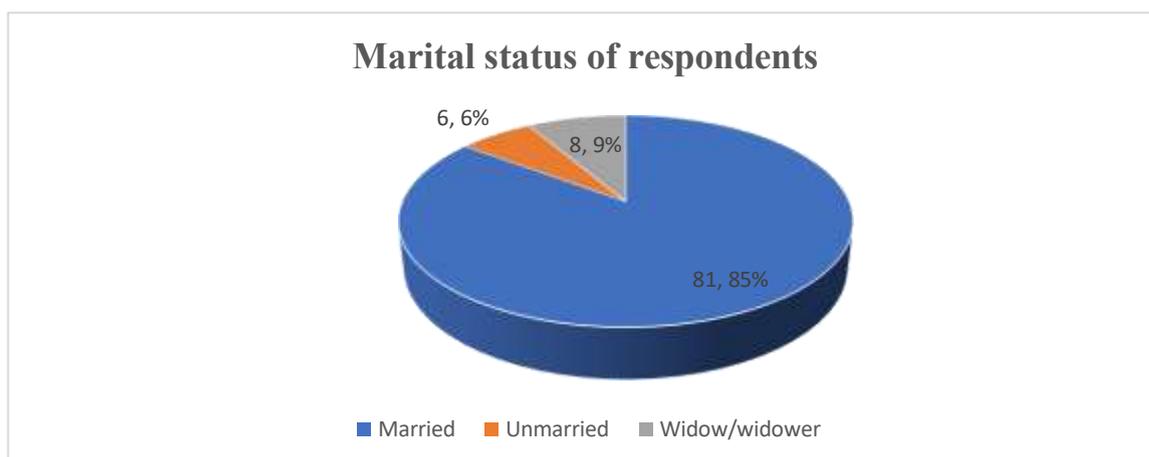


primary level of education and only 6.3% respondent got higher secondary level of education. While analysing the linkage between level of education and participation of workers in tea garden works it is found that literacy rate is positively related with participation of workers. In the table it is seen that 88.4% workers who are illiterate participate in the Garden workers, while at higher level of education i.e. at higher secondary level participation rate is 33%. According to those who are familiar with the situation, a critical issue that requires attention is the lack of awareness among the workers caused by limited educational opportunities. Surprisingly, the girl child in tea estates continues to receive a rough treatment despite the Sarva Siksha Abhijan Mission's intervention. The girl child must assist in managing the home from the moment she enters school, leaving little time for enjoying childhood. She would later find no time for her studies as the family grew and she had to look after her younger siblings while her mother was at work.

Marital Status: Table-2 indicates that majority of the tea garden workers (85.3%) are married while 6.3% respondents are unmarried and 8.4% respondents are either widow or widower

Table:2 Marital Status of Workers.

Marital Status	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Married	81	85.3
Unmarried	6	6.3
Widow/widower	8	8.4



Tea estates continue to have a high rate of early marriage, which is made worse by the fact that many women from the tea tribe have multiple children. One important obstacle that hasn't been overcome is the lack of adequate healthcare in the majority of tea gardens; while some tea Garden have set up well-equipped hospitals, hundreds of tea estates lack the infrastructure and medical professionals they need.

Number of Children per family: The employees of the tea garden are unaware of family planning procedures and do not believe they are necessary. To supplement the existing healthcare facilities, the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) has set up ties with a few tea estates. Table 3 shows that 7.4% household have only one child while 45.3% household have 3 children and 29.5% household have 4 numbers of children. The percentage of household who have 5 children is only 2.1.

Table:3 Number of children per family.

Number of Children	Number of Household (N=95)	Percentage
1	7	7.4
2	15	15.8
3	43	45.3
4	28	29.5
5 & above	2	2.1

Source: Field Survey

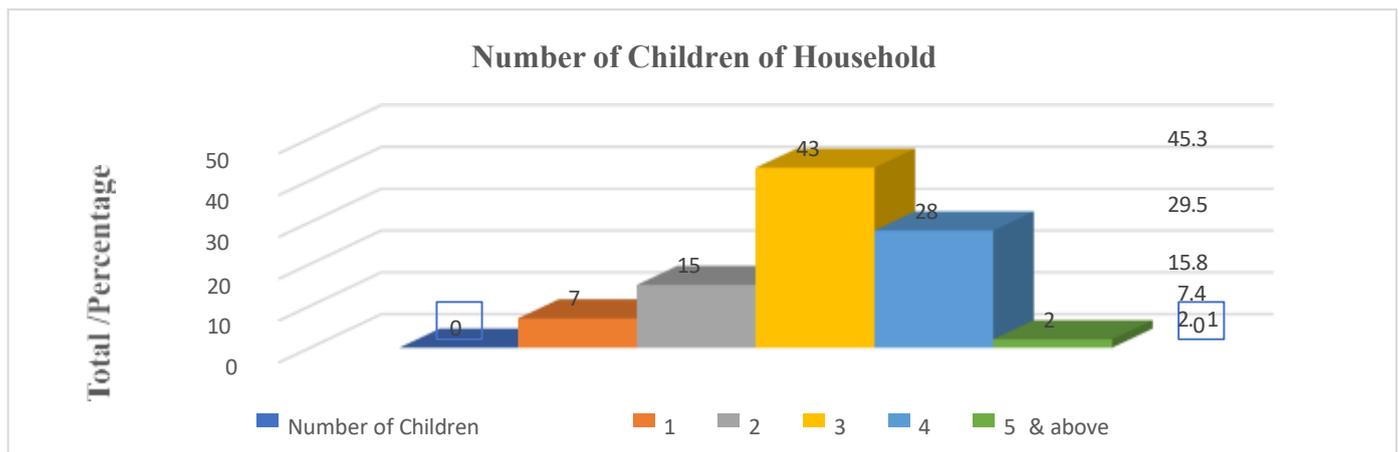


Figure 3:

Medical Facilities: Regarding the provision of medical facilities within the tea garden, the Tea Garden Authority operates a dispensary in both locations. The management provides free treatment; medicines and the indoor patients are given free food to the workers in the garden. For better treatment they need to go to the civil hospital situated in the district head quarter which is 6/8 km far from the tea garden. The management also provides 24*7 ambulance service to the patients to check up. For plantation workers, the distance from contemporary medical facilities continues to be an issue. Tea garden workers are the most economically deprived and therefore the most vulnerable to disease and ill health.

Table-5: Indicators of Standard of living of Tea Garden workers

SL. No	Indicators		Results(percentage)
1	House	Pucca	45.2
		Kacha	54.8
2	Electricity		65.2
3	T. V		54.7
4	Freeze		11.6
5	Educational Institution		Only Anganbadi and L.P. School

6	Music System		29.5
7	Smart Phone	Mobile	65.3
		Smart Phone	34.7
8	Bank Accounts		97.9
9	Nutritional Foods		Not able to effort
10	Water Facilities	Own Source	76.9
		Supplied at common place	23.1
11	Sanitation	Pucca	49.5
		Kacha	41.1
		Not Available	9.4
12	Financial Liability		9.5
13	Consumption of Alcohol		83.1

Decision making in the household is an important indicator of empowerment of tea garden women workers. So far decision making in the family is considered it is found that 51% respondent pointed that their family related decisions are taken by head of the household while 37.4% respondent said that their decisions are taken by the women(wife) and remaining 6.6% respondents pointed that the main decision of their family is taken by their adult son or daughter.

Main Findings of the Study:

1. Of the total respondents 27.4% respondents are illiterate. Out of illiterate respondents 88.4% workers participate in Garden works.
2. There is inverse relationship between the literacy rate and participation rate of workers in tea garden works.
3. Out of 95 respondents only 6 respondents studied up to Higher secondary level.
4. 85.3% respondents are married and 8.4% respondents are either widow or widower.
5. Only 7.45 respondents have one child while 45.3% respondents have 3 Children and 29.4% respondents have 4 Nos of children.
6. There are no proper medical facilities in the tea garden. Only one Dispensary is available in the Garden.
7. Of the total respondents 54.8% respondents live in Kacha house.
8. Electric facility is not available of 29.8% respondents.
9. There is no high school in the Tea Garden campus. Only Anganbadi and L.P school are available.
10. All respondents have mobile phone but only 34.7% respondents have smart phone.
11. No respondents are able to eat nutritional foods due to their low level of income.
12. Regarding water 23.1% respondents have no on source of water. They have to fetch water either from other family or from the common place where management provide water for a number of families.
13. 9.4% respondents have neither pucca toilet nor any kacha toilet, they defecate in open areas.
14. 9.5% respondents have financial obligation/Liability. They take loan to meet their urgent needs either from SHG or local lenders.
15. 83.1% respondents have habit to drink alcohol either regularly or irregularly.
16. Workers are not aware about hygienic living conditions and nutritious foods.
17. Workers in tea gardens are ignorant of the daily events in the outside world. Globalisation, liberalisation, privatisation, the current state of the economy, political ups and downs, new inventions, market prices, etc. are all very distant from them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study shed light on the living conditions of tea garden workers and how urbanisation has affected them. Despite the government's numerous efforts, it is discovered that tea garden workers lack empowerment. Though they are unavoidable part of the industry, their development is lagging behind. The benefits of urbanisation are far away from them. Undoubtedly, tea workers—especially women workers in India—face some of the most severe forms of exploitation in the modern era, particularly in the industry that generates billions of dollars in profits. To solve these issues for the workers, the government and the Tea Board must act decisively.

The majority of Indian tea producers do not receive a fair price for their tea in the market, and this results in wage reductions for the workers. One cannot imagine a successful tea industry without a robust and skilled labour force, so the underdeveloped working conditions of the employees have a negative impact on the industry. Therefore, the industry's future sustainability depends critically on labour welfare with suitable social security measures. We now reside in a town that has become more urbanised. But the tea garden workers have no idea what urbanisation is.

Therefore, we need to assist them in gaining a fresh perspective on the world moving out of the primitive tea garden life. This will increase their skill and productivity and ultimately the entire industry will develop. The government ought to pay particular attention to the education of tea garden workers. Open education system will improve their standard of living. Government and Tea Board must take proper steps for the all-round development of the tea tribe. Only then, they will give better return to the industry. The condition of the social security measures offered in the tea gardens should be routinely examined by the labour welfare department.

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