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Tea Garden Women, Issues of Socio-Economic Status A Study on Tea Garden Women of Assam

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ABSTRACT

In India since historic times the socio- economic status of women has been a matter of great discussion. But with the passage of time people began to understand that women play a very vital role in the overall development of society, family, state as well as country.

In the case of Assam, as we know Assam is well known for quality of tea. Assam is considered as the world's largest tea growing region. So, most of the workers are engaged in tea-estate as formal, semiformal, and in informal sector. In Assam women workers are the major labour source in various tea gardens of Assam. Women plays a significant role in the establishment of tea industry in the region.

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine the socio- economic states of tea garden women and to suggest effective measures for the improvement of socio- economic condition of the women of the tea garden.

Keywords: women, socio-economic status, Tea garden.

I. INTRODUCTION

Role of women workers in tea garden is of great concern. They are considered as an asset and backbone of the tea industry and despite their contribution women workers have always been relegated to the bottom strata and considered as the most abundant and cheapest labour force rather than as a source of specialised labour. Because most of the women are illiterate due insufficient provision of educational service on the estate. This limits their ability to access work in other location because they could not effort to travel long distance and it also limits their access

to information. They also struggle with ongoing health problems, Mal nutritional, poor working condition an insufficient health services on the tea estate combined with their inability to pay for health service outside of the estate and the difficulty and cost of travelling to farway towns where hospitals are located. So women workers worked under lot of hardship and struggle both at home as well as in the field.

This existing knowledge is not sufficient to have a comprehensive idea of the social economic status of the tea garden women so an attempt is

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made to investigate in depth about the life and status of tea garden women in Assam.

II. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Women workers in tea plantation

Tea plantation industry is a labour intensive one which employs lacs of women workers in almost all facets of tea production like planting, plucking leaves, pruning, spraying pesticides, to transferring, packaging and others. The tea plantation provides largest Avenue for the employment of women workers. The study of economic and social status of women workers in India (1953) stated that plantation offered the largest employment of women. Women had to work throughout the year except the holidays. In the tea plantation work generally begins at 7 a. m. this is however no hard and fast rule regarding the commencement of the work but they have to finish the allotted work on time before the sunset.

Average daily wage of women worker.

Workers in tea garden get wages on daily basis but we have heard about the principle equal pay for equal work for both men and women is not implemented in the true sense in the tea garden. Study shows that the wage rates of women workers as compared to male workers were relatively less. Women workers get daily wages less than those of males. Apart from the regular wages the workers in tea garden also receive yearly bonus in cash during September and October or just before the Durga Puja festival.

Health of workers

Health is an important aspect of human development. The major issue which lead to the

ill health of the tea garden workers are lack of income, education, poverty and medical facility. Health has been given least priority because of the challenges they faced in their day-to-day survival. Their conditions are being ignored by the authorities and the government machinery. The tea workers have a very poor bad habit.

In tea gardens, women workers are the worst sufferers as compared to the men. In present time women are still suffering from various health issues. They are overburdened with the household works and the tea garden works. Many of the women workers do not have mid-day meal at all. Women suffer from various physical health issues because of their poor socio-economic factors like proper like lack of proper living condition, poor sanitation. Thus, their health status is worse than rest of the people.

Education

Assam tea industry is its biggest source of revenue as the state is the largest producer of tea in India. However, despite of building a dedicated economy from tea the condition of local labourers has also worsened. They are deprived of the most basic amenities like the education. As local communities are dependent largely on labour their ability to find growth and opportunity is very limited. As their parents face ill health and poor financial position and children are forced to join as workers to generate their livelihood.

As a result of which lot of children leave the school at a very early age. Girl child in tea garden do not even attend primary education as they do not have access to schools within proximity of the state. Girls tend to dropout more than boys

and tend to work more at tea plantation.

The reason for widespread of illiteracy in tea garden are due to the ignorance of their parents who fails to understand the need of education and as a result prefer their children to work in the garden and help them to solve the financial problem of the families.

Conservancy

As there is no proper latrines and urinals in tea garden so the women workers have to suffered a lot, sometimes they have to do toilets under the bushes or sometimes they have to walk long distances which causes them infection.

So, provision should be made that there should sufficient number of latrines and urinals separately for both male and female, it should be convenient and it should be easily accessible to all the workers employed therein.

Leave

As far leave is concerned, three different types of leave is granted to the tea worker such as annual leave, sick leave and maternity leave. Annual leave is granted with wages and it shall be allowed at the rate of one day for every 20 days worked to each adult worker. Under Assam rules, sick leave is to be granted with full salary. However sick leave is to be granted only after the production of medical certificate from authorised medical officer.

The maternity benefit Act 1961 provides for payment for maternity benefit at the rate of average daily wage for the period of actual absence immediately preceding and including the day of a delivery and for 6 weeks immediately following the day. A woman who has worked

at least for a minimum of 160 days in 12 months immediately preceding to the date of expected delivery become eligible to avail maternity leave. However it is observed that pregnant women in tea garden avail maternity leave only a few days before the expected date of delivery it may be due to the fact that leave is more useful after the birth of the baby.

III. SOCIAL STATUS OF TEA GARDEN WOMEN LABOUR

A report of bias was reported by women labour in comparing position of men with that of women the view was that women's opinion was off no concerned while men were free to shape and choose their roles, whereas women's role was only confined to their plantation labour and labour in the private domain i. e housework, children and elderly care.

Even in the hands of management women were neglected. Women labourers think that we are small people and they are big people and they will only speak with big people. The women labour also feared of speaking about Quantum of wage deduction as they were the laborers and not the staff.

Some women also reported that even they were equal contributors in the household earnings they could not raised their opinions nor at home nor in public discourses.

IV. PROBLEMS FACED BY WOMEN WORKERS OF TEA GARDENS

Women are not only deprived of their basic rights but they face lot of social economic and health related issues like-

1. Early marriage
2. Superstitious belief
3. Illiteracy
4. Poor health care facility
5. Maternal mortality.

V. MEASURES TO BE TAKEN

1. The tea garden workers should be informed about awareness benefits provided by some of the NGOs.
2. Efforts should be made for better working condition and availability of more welfare amenities are necessary to ameliorate the hardworking life of the tea garden labourers in general and raise the status of the labour women in particular.
3. Community awareness through Street plays, seminars should be conducted.
4. Emergency health services in hospital should be increased specially for tea garden female labourers.

VI. CONCLUSION

This report is the study of the deteriorated situation of women worker in tea garden. Their socio-economic condition is vulnerable. Most of them are deprived of their duties and also the rights. This group of labourers of Assam been the victim of poverty, ignorance literacy has become part and parcel of Assam. Tea garden women workers are facing several daily problems and still behind in terms of socio-economically, culturally and educationally. Most of them are innocent and illiterate for that they are working only for their livelihood and survivality of their

family. So it is our duty to literate them and give them moral support to established as a socio-economically sound people.

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