

TEA GARDEN LABOURER AND THEIR LIVING CONDITION: A STUDY IN MORNAI TEA ESTATE OF KOKRAJHAR DISTRICT, ASSAM

¹Premjith Mohendiar, (Researcher)

²Dr. Alam Ara, (Advisor)

³Dr. (Ms.) Jahanara

¹Master in Social Work (student)

²Assistant professor

³ Professor and Head

Department of Anthropology and Social Work

Sam Higginbottom University of Agriculture, Technology & Sciences, Allahabad (U.P)

Email – ¹pmohendiar@gmail.com ²Alma.shiats@gmail.com, ³jahanara@shiats.edu.in,

Abstract: Tea Estate labourers play an important role in the society. The society will never be complete without their involvement and contribution. Moreover, the main occupation of the Tea garden labour is wage labour. Therefore, it is essential to study the socio-economic condition of this particular section. 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. The study proposes to investigate the socio-economic life of tea garden labourers in Mornai Tea Estate. In this study researcher have randomly selected 120 respondents of Mornai Tea Estate. To collected of socio-economic data on random sample, household surveys were conducted in the selected tea estates.

Key word: Tea labour, Mornai Tea Estate, socio-economic profile of tea labour.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Tea is considered as the most important crop in Assam. It has been producing some of the finest teas in the world. Assam produces about 51% of the tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. The climate of Assam favours to produce sweetness and tangy tea in the region. The world's largest CTC tea auction centre is in Assam and the world's second largest in terms of total tea. Tea is a non-alcoholic beverage prepared by pouring boiling water over processed leaves of the tea plant. It is the second most consumed beverage worldwide after water (Martin, 2007). The processed tea leaves give astringent flavour and restorative properties to the drink which has made it quite popular than other drinks. Tea is processed from the selected leaves of Tea plant which is an evergreen shrub native to Asia, known as *Camellia Sinesis* scientifically, belongs to the *Camellia* family of plants and grows in loose, deep soil, at high altitudes, and in sub-tropical climates (Lajos Kovács, 2015).

The Mornai Tea Estate in Kokrajhar districts of Assam, India is a property of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). It is a charitable institution and held upon the Trust by (the Trust Association of) the NELC. The Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church is a protestant Christian Organization. It is a religious organization. It may be of one some interest to know how a religious organization, whose activities are supposed to be continued to spiritual and moral development through religion, came to acquire Mornai Tea Estate which is a business concern. Mornai Tea Estate is owned and managed by the Northern Evagelical Lutheran Church (Santal Mission) at Dumka in Jharkhand state. Dumka is also the head-quarter of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC), which is especially important among the santhal people in the district. This headquarter also administer a lot of property in West Bengal and Assam. Mornai Tea Estate in Kokrajhar District is a particularly important Estate for the economy of the NELC. Mornai Tea Estate was started in 1889 by Rev. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud. He was the pioneer Missionary of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Mornai Tea Estate had become the focal point of most of the social and economic activities. Mr. Skrefsrud was the first Manager of the garden. The labourers for the garden were recruited from the colony. It is recorded that in 1891, in Mornai Tea Estate, 200 acres of land was brought under tea cultivation. By the passing year the growth and development of tea estate have been increased up to 570 hectares its areas under tea plantation.

The study area

This study is carried out in Mornai Tea Estate which is located in Kokrajhar district of Assam. Mornai, a lone tea estate, is situated at the border of Assam and West Bengal, located by 26° N latitude and 90° E longitude. The estate is distributed over scatterd areas, represented by five divisions, viz, Mornai Main, Kalaghat, Paushpur, Thakurpur and Grahampur. However the scattered areas are in reasonably close proximity and, in general, the estate is of longitudinal shape, being restricted in width by two rivers namely, Mor-nai and Bao-nai skirting the estate is generally flattish in nature, aerially extended between the relatively lower river banks and the land owes its origin to the alluvial deposits in

the past. The name Mornai (In Assamese it is spelled as “MOR NOI”) came after the river “Mora Noi” which flows through Mornai Tea Estate, ends up at river “Bao Noi”. The low banks supporting tea are flood-susceptible.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Kar (1989) 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 19th 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.

Kisku (1991) views that after Rev. Riber, Indians were appointed as Manager of Mornai Tea Estate. Mornai Tea Estate has improved much. It is now managed by the Managing Committee appointed by the Synod of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. Mornai Tea Estate is one of the major income generating sources of NELC.

Eie (1991) reported that Mornai T. E. has constant aim is to make the workers healthy and happy as possible. With this end in view some sports have also been arranged and silver challenge cup was presented to the football club by G. Lochen Esq. who is the Norwegian Consul General of Calcutta and also managing agent of the garden. Better prices have been obtained for tea and it is hoped that the depression in the tea trade is over and that Mornai T. E. can look forward to brighter times again.

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

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Based on both primary and secondary data were collected in the research for extracting relevant informations to answer research questions. Primary data have been collected mostly by direct contact method. The Questionnaires and interview schedules have been taken to carry out the whole investigation. All the information, based on primary sources have been collected from the selected Tea Estates of Kokrajhar District of Assam with pre-structured questionnaires on a number of major aspects of age, education, marital status, living condition etc. Secondary information have been obtained from the magazines, newspapers, journals, books, theses and various other publications of Government of India and Government of Assam.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Social Profile

The social profile of the respondents is determined by 1.Age group, 2.Religion, 3.Place of Origin, 4.Marital status, 5.Types of Family, 6.Education Qualifications of the tea garden labourers in Mornai Tea Estate.

Table No. 1:- Distribution of the respondents by Social Profile of Tea Garden Labourer.

<i>Sl.No.</i>	<i>Social profile</i>		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1.	<i>Age group</i>	<i>20-35years</i>	30	25.00
		<i>35-50 years</i>	60	50.00
		<i>51 and Above</i>	30	25.00
2.	<i>Religion</i>	<i>Christian</i>	100	83.34
		<i>Hindu</i>	15	12.50
		<i>Others</i>	5	04.16
3.	<i>Duration of Residence in Mornai Tea Estate</i>	<i>Since birth</i>	50	41.67
		<i>For last 20 years</i>	40	33.33
		<i>For last 40 years</i>	20	16.67
		<i>For last 60 years</i>	10	08.33

4.	<i>Place of Origin</i>	<i>Jharkhand</i>	50	41.67
		<i>Ranchi</i>	50	41.67
		<i>West Bengal</i>	20	16.66
5.	<i>Marital status</i>	<i>Married</i>	80	66.67
		<i>Unmarried</i>	40	33.33
6.	<i>Types of Family</i>	<i>Nuclear</i>	90	75.00
		<i>Joint</i>	30	25.00
7.	<i>Education Qualifications of the Respondents</i>	<i>Illiterate</i>	36	30.00
		<i>Primary (1s to 4th)</i>	16	13.33
		<i>High school</i>	20	16.67
		<i>Higher secondary</i>	36	30.00
		<i>Graduate</i>	12	10.00

The above table no.1 show that majority 50 per cent of the respondents are from -35-50 years age group. It is observed that majority 83.34 per cent of the respondents of Mornai tea estate are Christian. Apart from that very few are from Hindu and other religion. Data indicate that majority of the respondents 41.67 per cent are residing in tea garden since birth. Data reflect that majority of the tea garden respondents both 41.67 per cent are migrated from Jharkhand and Ranchi. It is transparent that majority of the tea garden labourers 66.67 per cent are married and remaining only a few 33.33 per cent respondents are unmarried. Table show that 75 per cent of the respondents have Nuclear Family, while the remaining 25 per cent of the respondents prefer joint family. It seen that 30 per cent of the respondents are higher secondary and illiterate respectively followed by 13.33 per cent of the respondents education up to primary, while 16.67 per cent of the respondents got education up to high school level and only a little segment that is 10.00 per cent of the respondents got education up to graduate above. Thus, it can be said that educational level of tea garden labourer is satisfactory.

Economic Profile:-

The economic profile of the respondents is determined by 1.Occupation, 2.Income, 3.Main earner 4.Total earner 3.Housing condition of the tea garden labourer in Mornai Tea Estate.

Table no 2:- Distribution of the respondents by Economic Profile of Tea Garden.

Sl. No	Economic profile		Frequency	Percentage
1.	<i>Occupational Category</i>	<i>Permanent</i>	80	66.67
		<i>Temporary</i>	40	33.33
2.	<i>Main Earner</i>	<i>Self</i>	50	41.67
		<i>Father</i>	30	25.00
		<i>Husband</i>	40	33.33
3.	<i>Monthly Family Income</i>	<i>Below Rs. 3000</i>	40	33.33
		<i>Rs. 3001-5000</i>	50	41.67
		<i>Rs. 5001-70000</i>	20	16.67
		<i>Above Rs.7000</i>	10	08.33
4.	<i>Housing conditions of Tea Garden labour</i>	<i>Cemented</i>	110	91.67
		<i>Semi-cemented</i>	10	08.33

Table no.2 shows that 75 per cent of respondents are permanent worker and 25 per cent of the respondents are temporary worker in the tea garden. It is clear that the majority 41.67 per cent of the respondent is main earner are from the self earner of their family in the teagarden. Respondent's family income is mainly based on tea garden wages. It is observed that majority 41.67 per cent of the worker have their average monthly income of Rs. 5000 or below. 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 has been observed that majority 41.67 per cent of the respondent has two earning member in their family in the garden. 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. It is clear that almost of respondents (100%) have cemented houses in the study area. This is perhaps due to the role of Church and the management committee of the tea garden. Only few of the respondent have semi-cemented house. However, due to old age of the house some of those have become poor in quality.

5. CONCLUSION:

From sum up it can be concluded that labourers in Mornai tea estate live in a good condition. This is because of role of the church and the tea management committee. Perhaps, Mornai Tea Estate being a charitable institution, the object of the institution is to provide help to the religious institutions, hospitals, schools and many other religious and charitable works, done by the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). Thou, there was no transparency found in the previous administration which was run by the Bhutan Duars Copany Tea Association. Since it is now managed by the Tea Managing committee appointed by the Synod of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. Thus, the Mornai become transparency towards broker level to management level in the garden. Therefore, Mornai Tea Estate has improved much than before. It is been observed by the researcher that wage rate of the labourers has been constantly increasing in the garden. Not only that due to role of the Church rations and salary are getting on time. Mornai Tea Estate has become big an asset to the NELC and also is one of the major income generating sources of NELC. So long it has been a source of good local income for the church. Mornai is not for benefit, but for service. This principle has been maintained and Mornai want to maintain it always.

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