

Child worker and child marriage among tea working class communities in Assam: Scheme for engagement

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Abstract: *The present research on child labour and child marriage among tea labour communities of Assam : Strategies for intervention, is an attempt to analyse the reasons of child labour and child marriage practiced by tea labourers correlating with the socio - economic conditions of their families. A descriptive research design was adopted for the purpose of the study. A sample of 300 households was surveyed to study the incidence of child labour and child marriage from tea communities of Dibrugarh District of Assam. The primary data was collected by administrating the personal and socio-economic information schedule developed by the researchers. The result of the present study clearly demonstrates that bigger family size, subsistence family wage, illiteracy of the parents and labour policies have all contributed towards prevalence of child labour and child marriage among tea labourers. It also shows that the child labourers are not satisfied with the working conditions prevailing in tea industries and quality of work life and. The study suggests social work intervention strategies to minimise the incidence of child labour, child marriage and improve the quality of life of the child labourers in the tea estates of Assam.*

Key Words: *Child labour & tea worker communities.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Tea is a very common beverage which is consumed by all irrespective of caste, creed, class, status, income and age. Tea industries in India not only earn precious foreign exchange but also accounts for employment of millions directly and indirectly. It is directly responsible for economic and social development in far flung areas where almost no other economic activities exists. It also plays a significant role in fostering community development and it has a unique dimension as it contributes significantly to the finance of government both at centre and states.

In India plantation accounts for 0.8 percent of the total cultivable land. There are about 25,000 tea estates and the total area under cultivation is 4, 37,851 hectares. They contribute 5.1% to the national income from agriculture. Besides, they provide more employment per rupee in investment in the country than agriculture or industry. Tea industry employs per acre about 5 times man days, compared to agriculture. It employs the highest percentage of women workers compared to any industry. Women constitute 50% of the workforce which is 15.8% of the total workforce in the organised sector. The industry being labor intensive directly employs over one million workers. It employs 2.5 persons per hectare compared to 1.38 persons engaged in agriculture sector. The tea industry also generates income and livelihood for more than 10 million people over and above its own workforce. Its impact is multidimensional in terms of employment, revenue to government and creation of eco-friendly environment.

Tea is an international commodity widely traded over the world and India today is the world's leading producer of Tea. The tea crop involves both agricultural and industrial operations. Agricultural operations like cultivation, plucking, manuring, irrigation, weed control, disease control, pest control, transportation of green leaves and uprooting are undertaken for growing tea. The final product of tea comes through various processing and manufacturing stages like withering, rolling, fermenting, drying, weighing and sorting etc that place it under industry.

In India, tea growing regions are located in the monsoon belt- Assam, West Bengal and the Himalayan foothills in the north and the moist slopes and the plateaus of the Western Ghats in the south. The tea districts of North East India take the shape of a triangle, the apex of which is Sadiya in Assam. They could be divided into 5 districts/regions viz Assam Valley, The Surma valley or Cachar, Darjeeling, Dooars and Terais, and Tripura. In Surma Valley, the tea

areas of Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj are covered with small hillocks or Tillas intercepted with low lying bits of flat land which are often water logged.

The working conditions and conditions of work in the tea gardens were far from satisfactory in the initial days. Each group of workers has distinct ethnic background as they are mostly migrant laborers. The workers were provided settlement in a labour lines under the strict supervision of Sardars. Unhygienic work surroundings in which workers lived were full of epidemics, hook-worm; katcha houses of thatched roofs made by workers themselves, absence of drainage system, latrines and urinals, transport and communication etc. were the conditions of plantation work life. Workers had no voice nor any options open to them. Whatever management thought proper was to be accepted. Naturally therefore, commitment to work, job satisfaction, safety, productivity etc that characterise quality of work life were conspicuous by their absence. Such type of quality of work life continued in Tea Industry till the eve of independence.

After independence the things started changing. The workers were covered under the Tea Plantation Labour Act -1951. Labour welfare officers were appointed. There was a mechanism for grievance redressal. The tea gardens were allowed to have trade unions. Collective bargaining, safety, health and welfare were given due thrust. In some tea estates minimum wage was given for unskilled work. The workers were classified as unskilled, semiskilled, and skilled. The workers were provided with housing facilities. Several schools were opened in the tea estates. Clean and portable water supply was provided to them. Wage was paid both in cash and kind. Doctors and nurses were placed in the clinics. This gave a further impetus to the tea industries.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

As discussed above Tea industry in Assam not only employs men and women but also adolescent girls and boys. Over the years the tea industries have acquired the status of family based occupation. The whole family is engaged in some or other form of tea activity. The children are brought up in such an atmosphere that they do not have the opportunity to see the outside world. They spend their childhood in the enclaved economy of the tea estate and their education is limited mostly up to secondary level. The schools are located within the boundary of the tea estate or in the periphery of the tea estates.

As of census report 2011, there are a total of 2918176 working children in Assam. A survey commissioned by Assam Sarva Sikhsha Abhiyan Mission (ASSAM) during 2018 shows that 25% of children in the age group of 6-14 are out of school in entire Assam, while 43% are among the tea garden. Out of 2, 46,843 children in the tea garden areas in the age group of 6-14 years of age, 42.87% of the total constituting 1, 05,821 children are out of school.

According to the report on "Profiling Dibrugarh Children 2008-2009" a significant number i.e 10647 children out of a total sample of 49939 children from all areas of the district has mentioned talking up some form of occupation or the other. As per Child Labour Prohibition and Regulation Act, 1986, no children should be employed in hazardous industry during tender age below 14 years of age. However the profile exercise as cited above has reported that a considerable percentage i.e 17.71% of the children below 14 years are engaged in some sort of regular occupation which is a serious matter of concern. Moreover, a large majority i.e 56.85% of the children between 14 to 18 years is engaged as adolescent workers which also need to be looked at critically.

As per the report of children profiling exercising in Dibrugarh, 2008-09, there were 1478 reported incidences of early marriages among children (mostly girls) in the age group of 11-18 years. Moreover, it was observed that incidences of early marriage is also prevalent in all the locations from where the data was collected during the said exercise with the highest occurrence rate (19.28%) in Dibrugarh circle and lowest (0.94%) occurrence rate in khowang block.

Thus, there was an urgent need to conduct a research based study on these two child protection issues (i.e. child labour and child marriage) as discussed above so far to understand the economic and cultural principles underlying in it and thereby, utilize social work approach in tackling these issues.

Kulshreshtha J.C in *Indian Child Labour* (1994) considers the child labour problem of India as an enigmatic problem. He has attributed the cause of child labour, inter- alia to low wage of the adults, unemployment of the adult workers, lack of social security schemes for poor families, bigger family size, rural-urban migration, high rate of illiteracy, traditions and absence of compulsory education. He elaborately deals with the legal provisions extended to Indian children and confesses their futility. He appraises the role of voluntary organizations in creating awareness about the evil of child labour and securing social justice for them.

Another survey titled "Study of health problems and nutritional status of tea garden population of Assam" concludes that a high magnitude of under nutrition and infectious diseases exist among the tea garden population of Assam. Nutritional problems like underweight among children (59.9%), thinness among adults (69.8%) and

micronutrient deficiency disorder like anaemia (72%) are widespread. Common infectious diseases are worm infestation (65.4%), respiratory problems (6.7%), diarrhea (1.7%), filariasis (0.6%) and pulmonary tuberculosis (11.7%). This study also registered a significant burden of hypertension (45.9%), senile cataract (25.3%), epilepsy (7.3%) and back pain (8.7%). Thus, the study has shown acute problems of health of the tea garden labour in Assam.

The children are also made to manually remove shrubs harmful to the tea plants. As tea gardens use pesticides extensively, the removing of shrubs with naked hands generally affects the health of the child. A 1992 report on child labour on tea plantations in North East India described the employment status of children as casuals. Children are found to do strenuous work like plucking under very severe climatic conditions, nursery work, fertilization, carrying of heavy loads and other household work.

3. The problem:

In 1990, the Government of Assam estimated that there were 96,535 children employed on tea gardens in Assam, making up over 14 per cent of the total workforce. According to 2001 Census, there were 1.26 crore working children in the age group of 5-14 years in India. Out of them about 12 lakh were working in the hazardous occupation covered under the Child Labour Act. The data given by the National Sample Survey Organization for 2009-2010 says the number of working children were 49.94 lakh. It makes no reference to children working in hazardous jobs. The child Labour (Abolition & Regulation) Act, 1986 says, a child is a person who has not completed 14 year of his age. The law indicates hazardous jobs where a child is not to be employed. The hazardous jobs, according to law, where children have not to work include areas of pesticides, chemicals, firecrackers, carpet making, mining etc. A number of occupations also have been specified where a child shall not be employed; not to work overtime nor in night shifts. However as the facts show, this law is mostly observed in its breach.

The Plantations Labour Act of 1951 regulates against the use of child labour, and in fact the amended Act in 2010, completely deletes the word child from the Act but teenage girls and boys belonging to the family of tea labourers end up working in the tea estates. Poor children below the permissible employment age of 14 are reportedly being made to work in the tea gardens of Dibrugarh. The workers who are regular employees are paid a meager amount of Rs 85 only per day, and this forces their children to work in the tea gardens. Tea estate owners and managers prefer child workers as they are made to work nearly as much as an adult, but for a much smaller wage. Often the names of children are not reflected in the muster rolls. These children are deprived of their school education as the tea garden management doesn't take active interest for furtherance of their education. The child labourers work at daily wages almost half of the regular employees and the money tempts these children to continue working at the tea estate. In the wake of poor socio-economic conditions of the labourers and compelling conditions, the children of these workers are forced to seek employment to supplement their family income. This trend is becoming quite visible in numerous tea estates of the region.

This is an anomaly in a country where education is a constitutionally guaranteed right,' the civil society organizations (Save the Children) estimate that approximately 40 million kids are engaged in child labour in the country. However, government sources consider these figures highly exaggerated. Though the Union Government officially banned child labour in 2006, many state governments haven't taken stringent actions to stop the widespread practice. India is only among a handful of countries left to ratify the ILO convention 182 which concerns elimination of worst forms of child labour, and convention 138, which seeks to fix minimum age of employment as 18 years. The Indian government has said that increasing the minimum age of employment from 14 to 18 years could further push poor families into poverty while explaining why ILO conventions were not ratified in the country.

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 on any plantation, but permitted and regulated the employment of children between the ages of 15 and 17. The Act requires a "certificate of fitness" from a certified medical practitioner. The reports, however, show that thousands of children continue to be involved in such risky operations. The authorities themselves are not serious about implementation of this law. The serious imbalance between crime and punishment in child labour cases points to the lack of commitment on the part of authorities responsible for enforcing the law. As stated earlier, employment of children in a numbers of jobs is prohibited and treated as a punishable offence under the law. This makes it obvious that poverty of vast majority of tea garden workers coupled with weak law and poor commitment of implementing administration together create situation for continued employment of child labour. Increasing unemployment in the country and ever growing prices of essential goods further aggravate situation for impoverished families which keep pressure on child labour too. The survey of G.K. Medhi and others conclude that high magnitude of under nutrition and infectious diseases exist among tea garden population. Nutritional problems like underweight among children (59.9 per cent), adult (69.8 per

cent) and micronutrient deficiency disorder like anaemia (72 per cent) were widespread. Common infectious diseases among them include worm infestation (65.4 per cent), respiratory problems (6.7 per cent), diarrhoea (1.7 per cent), skin infections, filariasis (0.6 per cent) and pulmonary tuberculosis (11.7 per cent). Thus, the study has shown acute problem of health of the tea garden labourers.

In the plantations, there are "comparatively few non-working dependents in a working family. Temporary engagement of children and adolescents boys or girls contributes substantially to the family-wage. It is asserted that for purpose of comparison; in tea plantation by employing men, women and children the workers family earn a much higher 'family-wage' than in other major industries in the organised sector. The effect of this on the standard of living is important, for, even with low individual earnings, the total family income is relatively better to prevent the worker from feeling the pinch of extreme poverty.

4. The study area:

Dibrugarh is considered as one of the focused district of Assam especially in the context of child labour and child marriage. Henceforth, UNICEF has initiated studies on all the components of human development like health, nutrition education, sanitation HIV/AIDS and child protection. Besides these, UNICEF also initiated projects on child protection but these programs didn't yield desired impact on children because the programs were confined mainly for awareness generation and lacked qualitative intervention. Apart from UNICEF, SSA- a special programme of ministry of Human Resource Development, Govt. of India, is also operating in Dibrugarh to ensure universalisation of elementary education (for 6-14 year olds). SSA has established ALCs (Alternate learning Centers) to reach children who are out of formal schools and has even established HTR (Hard to Reach Children) centers too but much remain to be done in terms of coordination and sharing of information with other concerning organizations for maximum coverage.

As far as labour department of the target district is concerned, though it has been attempting to address issues regarding protective issue of children engaged as child worker but failed to yield any concrete outcome so far. Also the NCLP (National Child Labour Project) which aim to withdraw children engaged in hazardous occupation and enrolls them in special schools that provide non-formal and vocational education is yet to be implemented by the department.

5. Operational terms used:

Child: UNCRC defines a "child" as every human being below the age of 18 years; it allows the minimum age to be set, under different circumstances, balancing the evolving capacity of the child with the state's obligation to provide special protection. Accordingly, Indian legislation has minimum age defined under various laws related to the protection of the child rights.

Child Labour: The concept of child labour should be restricted to the protection and services which interfere with the normal development of children as defined by the CRC. According to the ILO, "Child labour includes children permanently leading adult lives, working long hours for low wage under conditions damaging to their health and their mental and physical development, sometimes separated from their families, frequently deprived of meaningful educational and training that could open up for them a better future."

Child Marriage:

"Child marriage means a marriage to which either of the contracting parties is a child". Contracting party in relation to a marriage, means either of the parties whose marriage is or is about to be thereby solemnized.

6. Objectives of the study:

- To analyse the situation of children with special reference to child labour and child marriage in Dibrugarh district of Assam.
- To understand the prevalence or magnitude of child labour and child marriage among tea communities of Dibrugarh district in Assam.
- To explain the socio economic indicators of the families practicing child labour and child marriage.
- To analyse the effectiveness of social work intervention on prevention, care and support for addressing the issues of child protection.

7. Research design:

The research design used in the present study was descriptive in nature. The 25 tea gardens spread in five circles namely Dibrugarh, Panitola, Naharkatia, Tingri, Moran of Dibrugarh district of Assam were selected purposively as the universe of the study. Among them 300 Male and Female children of the tea communities were selected purposely as the respondents by using purposive sampling method.

8. Tools and Techniques Used for Data Collection

The study was based on both primary as well as secondary data. Primary data of oral nature was collected from the boys and girls who are mainly working in tea estates located in Dibrugarh District of Assam and are married before the age of 18 years for girls and 21 years for the boys. The secondary data was collected from UNICEF Office of Assam. Latest NFHS report pertaining to the state of Assam and 2001 census report was also consulted. In the present study interview schedule was used as the main tool for data collection. Along with interview schedule, observation and discussion methods were also used.

The data was collected from 300 child workers below the age of 18 years from 25 tea gardens spread across five circles namely Dibrugarh, Panitola, Naharkatia, Tingri, and Moran of Dibrugarh district of Assam using purposive sampling.

9. Results and discussion:

The present section deals with analysis and interpretation of data. Simple percentage techniques have been used for discussing the result obtained from the field study.

Table 1.: Marital status based on gender among the tea child labourers

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Marital status	Married child workers	117 (82 girls and 35 boys)	39
	Unmarried child workers	183 (79 boys and 104 girls)	61
	Total	300	100

Out of 300 child workers surveyed, 117 child workers constituting 39 percent of the total were married at the time of survey. Out of 117 child workers 82 (27.33%) were girls and 35 (11.67%) were boys. Again 183 child workers were reported to be unmarried out of which 79 (26.33%) were boys and 104 (34.67%) were girls.

Table 2 : Age at the Time of Marriage (Both Boys and Girls)

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Age at the time of marriage	15-16yrs	25	21
	16-17yrs	30	26
	17-18 yrs	62	53
	Total	117	100

Table 2. reflects the age of marriage of the child labourers working in the tea estates located in Dibrugarh. It was found that 21 percent of the sampl child labourers get married in between 15-16 years, 26 percent get married between 16-17 years and 53 percent get married in between 17-18 years.

Table 3 : Reasons for the child marriage

Reasons	variables	Frequency	percentage
Reasons for child marriage	Poverty in the family	57	49
	Protecting the girls or boys sexuality	09	08
	Dowry	13	11
	Family size	33	28
	Culture	05	04
	Total	117	100

The reason for child marriage was asked to one of the parents. According to the response obtained it was found that 49 percent of the adolescents get married because of either to settle debts of the family or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty, 8 percent get married for protecting the girls and boys sexuality , 11 percent for dowry related reasons, 28 percent get married because of large family size and 4 percent get married because of their culture.

Table 4 : Socio- Economic and Demographic Information of Child Labourers

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Education	Illiterate	07	02
	Primary	40	13
	Middle	106	54
	Matric	93	31
	Above Matric	00	00
	Total		300
Family size	2-4	12	04
	4-6	66	22
	6-8	165	55
	Above 8	57	19
	Total		300
Working Hours	0-4hrs	174	58
	4-8hrs	87	29
	More than 8 hrs	39	13
	Total		300
Access to subsidized ration	Yes	115	39
	No	185	61
	Total		300

The above table reflects the socio economic indicators of the child labourers. With regard to their educational qualification, it was found that only 2 percent of them were illiterate, 13 percent completed their primary level, 54 percent passed middle and 31 percent completed their matriculation. With respect to the family size, it was found that 4 percent of the child workers belong to family size of 2-4 members, 22 percent were having family size in between 4-6 members, 55 percent of them were having 6-8 members and 19 percent were having above 8 members in the family. Regarding working hours these children are engaged from 4 to 8 hours per day and some even work more than 8 hours per day. It was found that 58 percent of the children work between 0-4 hours for supplementing the income of the family, 29 percent work in between 4-8 hours and 13 percent work for more than 8 hours per day. However it is pertinent to note that working hours for the child labourers are not fixed throughout the year. They are engaged for more number of hours in peak seasons of the year.

It was found that 69 percent of the child labourers are school dropouts. The reason for school dropouts are attributed to failure to cope up with the studies, less interest on the part of the parents, low economic conditions of the family and self disinterest in the studies. These children have no other option but to work in the tea estates to supplement the family income. Mostly the children studied up to the middle level and the family size varies between 6-8 years of age. The working hours mostly vary from 0-4 hours and nearly 40 percent of them get free and subsidized ration from the management.

Table 5 : Leisure time activity, Interest in education, and reasons for working as child labour

Variable	Leisure time preference/ mostly engaged in	Frequency	Percentage
Leisure time activity	House hold work	89	30
	Playing	47	16
	Watching T.V	35	11
	Listen Radio	23	07
	Visit neighbors	40	13
	Work in miscellaneous activity	69	23
	Total	300	100
Interest in further education	Formal	186	62
	Non-formal	73	24
	No interest	51	14
	Total	300	100
	Respiratory system	05	01
	No problem	59	20
	Total	300	100
Reasons of child in the labour market	Poor economic condition of the family	138	47
	Self independence	27	09
	Aged family members	31	10
	To supplement t the family income	85	28
	To get a permanent job in the tea estates	19	07
	Total	300	100

It was found from the data that 30 percent of the child labourers spend their leisure time activities in household work, 11 percent prefer to watch TV, 7 percent prefer to listen radio, 13 percent visit neighbours in the tea community and 23 percent are engaged in other miscellaneous activities. With regard to Interest in furtherance of their education, It was found that 62 percent of the child labourers are interested in formal education given the scope, 24 percent are interested in non formal education and 51 percent have no interest for furtherance of their study. With regard to the reasons for child working in the tea estates, it was found that 47 percent of the child workers because of poor economic condition in the family, 9 percent work for their self independence, 10 percent work as their parents have become old, 28 percent work to supplement the income of the family and 7percent work to get a permanent job quickly in the tea estates

10. Main findings:

- The data reveal that the incidence of marriage among child labourers working in tea estates of Diburugarh was 39 percent out of which 11.67 percent were adolescent boys and 27.33% were adolescent girls. So it was safe to conclude that the incidence of child marriage among the girls was more than that of boys.
- The data clearly reflects that both boys and girls working as labourers in the tea estates get married before the age of 18 years in contravention to the statutory age of marriage of 18 years for girls and 21 years for the boys.

- Clearance of debt, large family size, prevailing culture, and protecting the sexuality of both boys and girls are some of the reasons opined by the parents for the marriage of their children. 49 percent of the adolescents get married because of either to settle debts of the family or to make some money and escape the cycle of poverty, 8 percent get married for protecting the girls and boys sexuality, 11 percent for dowry related reasons, 28 percent get married because of large family size and 4 percent get married because of their culture.
- It was found that 69 percent of the child labourers are school dropouts. However 31 percent of the adolescent working in the tea estates was matriculates. The reason for school dropouts are attributed to failure to cope up with the studies, less interest on the part of the parents, low economic conditions of the family and self disinterest in the studies. A majority of 53 percent adolescent get married in between age of 17-18 years.
- It was found that 58 percent of the children work between 0-4 hours for supplementing the income of the family, 29 percent work in between 4-8 hours and 13 percent work for more than 8 hours per day in the tea estates.
- Nearly 30 percent of the child labourers spend their leisure time activities in household work. It was also found that 62 percent of the child labourers are interested in formal education given the scope.

11. Implications of the study:

- Child labour is caused by parental poverty, socio-economic-cultural background and the living pattern of the parent's working in the tea estates in Dibrugarh district of Assam. Poverty and illiteracy, inter alia have been identified as the main determinants of child labour in the district. Parent's illiteracy is positively linked with child labour. Illiterate and ignorant parents have been found to prefer their child learn a skill or a vocation at his/her early childhood so that the child becomes a skilled worker at the age of 18 or more.
- It is also observed that employment of their children in the economic activity has not substantially improved the financial condition of the parents except giving a temporary relief. Bigger family size has come to be identified both as cause of child labour, continuation of child labour practices and determinants of family poverty.
- Many of the child workers work over seven hours a day especially during peak seasons. It is found that most of the child laborers are not satisfied with their life style of doing work under existing socio-economic conditions/compulsion. It is found that the minimum wage act has been found violated in different categories of child labour in the district.
- Most of the child laborers have not even completed middle school level education. Lack of supportive measures for the poorest families constituting the perennial source of child labour supply to the tea estates has been observed to be responsible, inter alia for increasing trends of child labour supply in the district.
- It was observed that tea estate managers out rightly deny that existence of child labour below 18 years of age. They claim that only adolescent in the age group of 15-18 years are recruited as worker in gardens, and that their employment complies with the rules of the plantation labour Act, 1951, which allows for a maximum of 27 hours of work in a week, after being certified for fitness by relevant officials.
- High magnitude of under nutrition and infectious diseases exist among tea garden population. Nutritional problems like underweight among children, micronutrient deficiency disorder like anemia were widespread. Common infections diseases among them include worm infestation, respiratory problems, diarrhea, and skin infections.
- The study shows that mostly adolescent girls from tea communities' faces economic and cultural pressure to get married at an early age in between 15-18 years once they attain puberty. These girls don't get opportunity to participate in community events and other matters that may affect their lives.

12. Recommendations for policy measures:

- There is a need for launching vigorous awareness campaigns among the parents about the rights of children to education, care, and well being and also about the duties of the parents towards the children.
- Provide food security and other subsidies to poor families prone to having working children, so that they can afford their children's schooling (income subsidies, nutritional supplements).
- Secondary level education to be made free, compulsory and cost free in the tea garden community. So by making education compulsory and cost free up to secondary level would help to reduce the school dropout.

- For action for abolition of child labour practices, NGOs are observed to be the most suitable organizations. The NGOs operational at Dibrugarh District should be entrusted with the responsibility to identify the children working in different sectors and take appropriate measures to rehabilitate them in the main stream life. There should be networking of NGO's in this regard.
- The proper and effective implementation of Acts such as Minimum Wage Act 1948, and the Plantation Act 1951 etc. should be ensure in all the tea plants.
- To support the tea garden families, some more social security schemes/measures should be introduced by state government in the tea estates of Assam. Some more additional income generation programme should be started by the government in the tea estates.
- The evidence shows that education interventions play a key role in reducing child labor and should play a key role in its eventual abolition. But other interventions are also needed, including legislative action, appropriate labor market policies, fertility interventions, and better job opportunities for youth.
- To provide food relief the Public Distribution System (PDS) should be activated and strengthened in the tea estates.

13. CONCLUSION:

The problem of Child Labour in tea estates of Assam is neither easy to comprehend nor has any easy solution. Poverty and the subsistence economy among the tea garden labourers compel families to force their children to work. The tea garden management employs these children without any fear or hesitation. These children have no voice or choice but to work in the enclave subsistence economy of the tea estates for supplementing the income of their families. The Government claims that with the help of its National child Labour Project (NCLP), it has been able to rehabilitate children rescued or withdrawn from hazardous occupations. It is said that so far 8.52 lakh children have been rehabilitated under NCLP. These children have been withdrawn from work in the country's 266 district; then they were enrolled in special school where they were given education, vocational training; they were also provided other facilities before they could be mainstreamed into formal education system.

All concerned have to realize that the problems related to child labour are the outcome of impoverishment of poor families themselves suffering from lack of employment opportunities and rising cost of essential goods. In this backdrop, unless serious efforts are made by the rulers also to deal with problems of poverty, unemployment and rising living costs, it will be well neigh impossible to get over child labour problems. There has been an increased commitment shown particularly by International organizations, CSR wings of tea companies and district administration to combat issues of child protection such as child labour and child marriage. Having said that, there still is a lacunae in regards to information sharing, coordination, absence of focused studies on children at difficult circumstances leading to continuous incidences of child marriages, illegal birth registrations and last but not the least less significant participation by district administration that has prevented a realistic assessment of the vulnerability of such children, the cultural pressure and a commitment to action. On contrary, emergencies such as insurgency and annual floods further increases the vulnerability of children mostly residing in tea communities vis-a-vis socio economic stagnation has been contributing to the lack of basic services for women and children.

In spite of a dozen of legislations and rules there under and a network of govt. administrative protective machineries protecting the interests of the children, exploitative child labour practices are growing fast and incidences of child marriage also prevail in the stats. The practices have become so much serious and harmful that many of the children, who would have been the progeny of future civilization, are at a risk of being miserable in their adulthood. Such practices are the gross violation of 'human rights' So sincere and honest efforts should be made by the government in the fields of Education - that helps children learn skills that will help them earn a living. Social services - that help children and families survive crises, such as disease, or loss of home and shelter.

The role of social worker in relation to child labour and child marriages is very crucial. Social workers can be involved in prevention and aftercare, in addressing the circumstances that cause children to be exploited, and contributing to the research and subsequent solutions to addressing root causes of the problem. There is a universal need for the rehabilitation of these children, their families and their communities. This is the purview of social workers. Social workers can be involved on the local level in affected or at risk areas in many ways as well. Education, report writing, social integration, and working toward conflict resolution are important roles for social workers in affected communities. The various proactive roles the social workers can play in the effort to reduce child labour and incidence of child marriage is:

- As an enabler, enable the tea garden community members to get benefit from the govt. schemes and help them to improve their socio economic condition.
- As an educator can help in creating raising consciousness and awareness of child labour and child marriage, its forms and impact on children.
- As a guide, help to carry out integrated actions involving the family, the school and the community in the tea estates.
- As a mediator, create networks for intervention and prevention between NGOs, schools, institutions, social workers and the communities.
- As a resource locator, the social worker can generate conditions enabling institutions and other social workers to fight against child labour.

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