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An assessment of socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal

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Abstract

Tea is an aromatic beverage generally prepared via pouring hot or boiling water over cured leaves of the *Camellia sinensis*, an evergreen shrub local to Asia. After water, it is the maximum consumed drink in the world. India is the second largest manufacturer of tea in the world after China. West Bengal is the second largest producer of tea in India contributing one fourth of India's tea productions. The tea industry in India annually produces about 1283 million kg of tea (2020-21).

India earns Rs. 5385 crores (US\$692.1 million) every year from tea export. The basic aim of this paper is to highlight the conditions of tea garden labourers in Darjeeling Hills in the context of wide spread crisis in Tea Industry Sector in the country. At present there are approximately 276 tea estates in North Bengal, which employed about 6 lakh workers and it is expected that greater than 2.5 million people are dependent on the tea enterprise. The very destiny of tea gardens is greatly depending on tea people who spend most of their life in the tea gardens but, so to talk, they were residing in depressing condition from the very beginning of the establishment of tea gardens in India, The maximum ability labour force of tea enterprise is women workers, who constitute approximately 55% percent of total people.

Keywords: Socio economic, tea garden, garden workers, plantation

Introduction

Tea is the most widely consumed drink in the world. India ranks second in terms of production of tea after China. The tea gardens in India are generally spread over hill area of Himalayas and Western Ghats. There are about 276 tea estates in North Bengal and the livelihood of about 2.5 million people is dependent on tea industry. The very future of tea industry thus greatly depends on tea workers who spend most of their life in the tea gardens.

The global tea market is dwindling due to various inescapable forces. Consequently, tea industry in the country along with garden workers, particularly labourers, has been negatively impacted. Darjeeling Tea Industry has not been an exception in this respect. There has been frequent reporting in the leading news dailies that tea industry in Darjeeling Hills suffers from more than one problem. Sickness, closure and abandonment of tea gardens; issues with respect to crop yield, total production and degrading tea quality; wage, education, health and livelihood issues of the labourers; frequent violence and strikes across tea gardens; issues of intellectual property rights, competition from the tea coming from Nepal, Sri Lanka, African countries etc. are some of the major problems faced by Darjeeling Tea Industry in recent times.

Jalpaiguri is one of the districts of West Bengal which experienced an early growth of tea gardens. The growth of gardens and tea industries happened at the initiative of British planters in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the growth continued until 2000. Thereafter, one can see the much talked about crisis in the tea industry. There are 154 set gardens, which are large and registered, of which 13 have declared either closed or abandoned in Jalpaiguri district. In addition, there are 3,000 to 4,000 new gardens from small to medium size, ranging between 50 and 200 acres. In the last 60 to 70 years nearly 4000 new gardens have been opened. West Bengal generates a fifth of India's total tea production of 1,100 million kg. The majority of this tea comes from the plains of North Bengal in the Dooars and Terai region, but it is cultivated on the slopes of the famed Darjeeling highlands in the eastern Himalayas. West Bengal has 225 tea estates, with an estimated 23 of them currently closed.

The present study will provide a brief insight into the socio- economic status of the workers of tea gardens, in Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal. As a student, it would improve the research aptitude and will enable to implement the theoretical knowledge in the practical field to be precise.

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The study will help in identification of the problems and will also introduce possible measures thereby helping to overcome the prevailing limitations among the tea garden workers.

Research Methodology

The present study pertains to the “An Assessment of Socio - Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Workers in Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal”. This investigation was under taken to study the socio economic conditions of tea garden workers. Jalpaiguri is the largest district of North Bengal, covering an area 6,245 km². It is situated between 26° 16' and 27° 0' North latitudes and 88° 4' and 89° 53' East longitudes. The district was established in 1869.

Stratified multistage sampling procedure was adopted for selection of sample for the present study

1. First stage: selection of district
2. Second stage: Selection of block
3. Third stage: Selection of village
4. Fourth stage: selection of respondents

Analytical Tools: The following tools have been employed in analyzing the various aspects of the study to fulfill the objectives;

Anova: Analysis of variance, or ANOVA, is a strong statistical technique that is used to show the difference between two or more means or components through significance tests. It also shows us a way to make multiple comparisons of several populations means. The Anova test is performed by comparing two types of variation, the variation between the sample means, as well as the variation within each of the samples.

F = MST/MSE
 MST = SST/ p-1
 MSE = SSE/N-p

Where

- F = Anova Coefficient
- MSB = Mean sum of squares between the groups
- MSW = Mean sum of squares within the groups
- MSE = Mean sum of squares due to error.
- SST = total Sum of squares
- p = Total number of populations
- n = The total number of samples in a population
- SSW = Sum of squares within the groups
- SSB = Sum of squares between the groups
- SSE = Sum of squares due to errors = Standard deviation of the samples
- N = Total number of observations

Results and Discussion

Socio-economic conditions of the tea workers

In table1, it was observed that more than half of the tea workers were aged between 18-60 years (53.33%), followed by tea workers of age below 18 years (28.34%) and remaining of the tea workers belong to more than 60 years of age (18.33%) respectively. Among the tea workers, age group below 18 years only earns low level of income. Similarly, 38.24 per cent of the tea workers aged between 18-60 years, 32.35 per cent of the tea workers below 18 years of age and remaining 29.41 per cent of the tea workers with more than 60 years of age earns medium level of income. Eventually, a

higher proportion of the tea workers belonged to age group of 18-60 years (95%) and 5 per cent of the tea workers belonged to more than 60 years of age earns high level of income respectively.

Table 1: Distribution of tea workers according to their age

S. No.	Age	Categorization of income			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
1.	Below 18 years	12 (100)	22 (32.35)	0 (0)	34
2.	18-60 years	0 (0)	26 (38.24)	38 (95)	64
3.	More than 60	0 (0)	20 (29.41)	2 (5)	22

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

In table 2, it was revealed that majority of the tea workers were male (57.50%) and remaining of them were female (42.50%) respectively. Similarly, it was seen that among the male tea workers, 8.33 per cent, 61.76 per cent and 42.50 per cent of them earns low, medium and high level of income respectively. Eventually, among the female tea workers, 1.67 per cent, 38.24 per cent and 57.50 per cent of them earns low, medium and high level of income respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of tea workers according to their gender

S. No.	Gender	Categorization of income			Total
		Low (12)	Medium (68)	High (40)	
1.	Male	10 (8.33)	42 (61.76)	17 (42.50)	69
2.	Female	2 (1.67)	26 (38.24)	23 (57.50)	51

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

In table.3, it was revealed that most of the tea workers were illiterate (34.17%), followed by intermediate level of education (30%), primary level of education (14.17%), middle school level of education (11.67%) and remaining of the tea workers were graduate and above (10%) respectively. Meanwhile, it was seen that 58.33 per cent, 16.67 per cent, 16.67 per cent, 8.33 per cent of the low income earners were illiterate, had primary, middle school and intermediate level of education respectively. None of the graduates earns low level of income. Similarly, 36.76 percent, 19.12 percent, 14.71 per cent, 26.47 per cent and 2.94 per cent of the medium level of income earners were illiterate, primary, middle school, intermediate and graduate level of education respectively. Eventually, 22.50 per cent, 5 per cent, 5 per cent, 42.50 per cent and 25 per cent of the high level of income earners were illiterate, primary, middle school, intermediate and graduate level of education respectively.

Table 3: Distribution of tea workers according to their educational background

S. No.	Education background	Categorization of income			Total
		Low (12)	Medium (68)	High (40)	
1.	Illiterate	7 (58.33)	25 (36.76)	9 (22.5)	41
2.	Primary	2 (16.67)	13 (19.12)	2 (5.00)	17
3.	Middle school	2 (16.67)	10 (14.71)	2 (5.00)	14
4.	Intermediate	1 (8.33)	18 (26.47)	17 (42.50)	36
5.	Graduation and above	0 (0)	2 (2.94)	10 (25.00)	12

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

In table. 4, it was observed that majority of the tea workers had nuclear family (81.67%), followed by 18.33 per cent of them had joint family respectively. Among the tea workers,

83.33 per cent and 16.67 per cent of the low income earning tea workers had nuclear family and joint family respectively. Similarly, 80.88 per cent and 19.12 per cent of the medium income earners had nuclear family and joint family respectively. 82.50 per cent and 17.50 per cent of the high level of income earning tea workers had nuclear family and joint family.

Table 4: Distribution of tea workers according to their family type

S. No.	Gender	Categorization of income			Total
		Low (12)	Medium (68)	High (40)	
1.	Nuclear family	10 (83.33)	55 (80.88)	33 (82.50)	98
2.	Joint family	2 (16.67)	13 (19.12)	7 (17.50)	22

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

In table 5, it was identified that majority of the tea workers had medium size family (47.50%), followed by small size of family (42.50%) and few (10%) of the tea workers had big or large size family. Meanwhile, 41.67 per cent, 41.67 per cent and 16.66 per cent of the low income earning tea workers had small, medium and big size of family. 54.42 per cent, 41.18 per cent, 4.40 per cent of the medium level of income earning tea workers had small, medium and big size of family. Eventually, 22.50 per cent, 60 per cent and 17.50 per cent of the high level of income earns had small, medium and big size of family respectively.

Table 5: Distribution of tea workers according to their family size

S. No.	Family size	Categorization of income			Total
		Low (12)	Medium (68)	High (40)	
1.	Small	5 (41.67)	37 (54.42)	9 (22.50)	51
2.	Medium	5 (41.67)	28 (41.18)	24 (60.00)	57
3.	Big	2 (16.66)	3 (4.40)	7 (17.50)	12

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

In table 6, it was seen that highest proportion of the tea workers had high level of working experience (52.50%), followed by medium (40%) and low (7.50%) level of working experience respectively. Meanwhile, 75 per cent and 25 per cent of the low income earning tea workers had low, medium and high level of working experience. None of the low earning members had high level of working experience. Similarly, 39.71 per cent and 60.29 per cent of the medium level of income earning tea workers had medium and high level of working experience. Eventually, 45 per cent and 55 per cent of the high level of income earning tea workers had medium and high level of working experience respectively.

Table 6: Distribution of tea workers according to their working experience

S. No.	Working experience	Categorization of income			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
1.	Low	9 (75.00)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9
2.	Medium	3 (25.00)	27 (39.71)	18 (45.00)	48
3.	High	0 (0)	41 (60.29)	22 (55.00)	63

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

From table 7, it was identified that more than half of the tea workers had farming alone as their occupation (55%), followed by farming + service (25%) and farming + business (20%) as their occupation respectively. Meanwhile, cent

percent of the low income earning tea workers had farming alone as their occupation. 48.53 per cent, 30.88 per cent and 20.59 per cent of the medium level of income earning tea workers had farming alone, farming + business and farming + service as their occupation. Eventually, 50 per cent, 7.50 per cent and 42.50 per cent of the high level of income earning tea workers had farming alone, farming + business and farming + service as their occupation respectively.

Table 7: Distribution of tea workers according to their occupation

S. No.	Occupation	Categorization of income			Total
		Low	Medium	High	
1.	Farming	12 (100)	33 (48.53)	20 (50.00)	65
2.	Farming + Business	0 (0)	21 (30.88)	3 (7.50)	24
3.	Farming + service	0 (0)	14 (20.59)	17 (42.50)	31

Note: Figures in parenthesis indicates the percentage of the tea workers to the income earned by the tea workers

Conclusion

From the study, it can be concluded that majority of the tea workers were aged between 18-60 years (53.33%), male (57.50%), being illiterate (34.17%), possess nuclear family (81.67%), with medium size family (47.50%), and they had high level of working experience (52.50%) and farming alone as their occupation (55%).

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