

A Study on the Educational Status of Women in Tea Garden Area of Assam

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Abstract:

Education is frequently regarded as the key method for empowering women within society. It plays an essential role in human development, greatly influencing economic, cultural, political, and social advancement. In India, women's education is crucial for improving the overall living standards of the population. The tea industry in the nation plays a significant role in enhancing the socio-economic conditions of both the country and the tea garden regions. Importantly, female laborers represent an underexploited labor force in Assam's tea production sector. A significant number of these women are illiterate and lack awareness of basic living standards. Nonetheless, they manage their daily responsibilities in the tea gardens while also fulfilling their home duties, and they increasingly contribute to the labor market. However, they continue to face various socio-economic difficulties. Therefore, the present study aims to examine the social and educational status of women, the issues they encounter, and potential solutions for women in the tea estate areas. The researcher gathered data from both primary and secondary sources and employed a random sampling method for this study.

Keywords: Education, status, women, and tea garden.

INTRODUCTION

Women education in India plays a significant role in enhancing the living standards of the nation's populace. According to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, "If you educate a man, you educate an individual; if you educate a woman, you educate a whole family," and he asserted that women's empowerment equates to being empowered socially, educationally, politically, and economically. Thus, educated women tend to not only encourage the education of their daughters but also provide better guidance to all their children. Furthermore, educated women can assist in reducing the infant mortality rate and increasing population growth. India ranks as the second-largest tea-producing country globally, following China, with Assam being the largest tea-producing state in India. In Assam, approximately 800 tea estates exist, with 88 located in Jorhat and the highest total of 177 situated in Dibrugarh district. It is noted that there are no tea estates found in the Barpeta, Chirang, and Nalbari districts of Assam. The tea industry plays a crucial role in India's socio-economic landscape. Consequently, tea garden labor forms one of the largest segments of the organized workforce in Assam's economy. Approximately 17 percent of Assam's workforce is involved in the tea industry, and around 50 percent of the total workforce in tea plantations in Assam consists of women. Women workers represent a significant latent labor force within Assam's tea production sector. Tea garden women workers are not only generally illiterate but also unaware of the minimum standards of living. All tea garden women workers are engaged daily in their work within the

gardens, in addition to their domestic tasks. They are presently playing a significant role in the labor market.

History of the Tea Tribes of Assam

The majority of tea gardens were established in Upper Assam in 1839 by the Assam Company, with Robert Bruce being the first to discover the tea plant in Assam. The tea industry has a vital significance in the Indian economy, comprising 55% of the nation's overall tea production. As the tea industry has expanded in the state, a labor shortage has arisen. Initially, workers were recruited from various regions outside Assam; however, many were reluctant to work in the remote tea gardens, often due to insufficient transportation and communication facilities. As a result, tea planters began to recruit from the local tea tribes. They aimed to find diligent individuals from these communities, who were often disadvantaged and unfamiliar with their new environment. The workforce predominantly consisted of women, along with a smaller number of men from tribal communities such as Santals, Mundas, Khonds, Orangs, Lohars, Ghases, Turies, and Barris. Over time, many castes and tribes migrated to Assam from regions such as Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Santal Paragana, Gaya in Bihar, Mayurbhanj, Ganjam, and Sambalpur in Madhya Pradesh, Daltanganj in Uttar Pradesh, Vigiangram in Andhra Pradesh, and Nasik in Maharashtra. Despite their diverse origins, these groups merged under the identity of tea laborers, residing within the tea gardens and sharing a common lifestyle, status, culture, and traditions, while each community retains its own language.

Social Status of Tea Garden women in the tea garden Area of Jorhat, Assam

Social status generally refers to an individual or community's position within society, influenced by education, income, occupation, and lifestyle. It indicates how a person is perceived relative to others based on these characteristics. Moreover, social status incorporates not just economic conditions and educational accomplishments but also factors like poverty, unemployment, and low wage levels. Hence, it is important to comprehend the social circumstances of women, particularly in the tea garden areas of Jorhat, Assam. Most tea garden inhabitants belong to marginalized communities, including indigenous and tribal groups (Majumder and Roy, 2012; Sarkar, 2013). Women working in these environments encounter numerous challenges due to factors such as low literacy rates, social isolation, and limited awareness of their rights and available opportunities.

Education and tea garden Women Workers

The literacy rate among tea garden women remains disappointingly low, especially when contrasted with their male counterparts. Most women in these regions have attained only primary education, with a mere 13% achieving a high school level. During the initial development phases of tea gardens, educational provisions were non-existent, and neither planters nor companies showed interest in fostering educational chances for tea garden laborers. As a result, the majority of these workers remain illiterate. Education, a critical component for community and societal advancement, is foundational to the social exclusion faced by tea workers. Only a few schools, which were established by garden authorities,

functioned within the gardens. A limited number of government schools exists in the tea estate regions. Only a small proportion of progressive managers and companies made efforts to create a few primary schools in the gardens. With a population of 1,091,295 and a sex ratio of 912, Jorhat is rich in socio-cultural heritage and boasts an 83.2% literacy rate, with male literacy at 88.38% and female literacy at 78.22% (as per the census report 2011). Jorhat is equipped with numerous educational institutions, establishing itself as a key educational center in Assam. In Jorhat, there are 1809 primary schools, 9 upper primary schools, 253 high schools, 26 higher secondary schools, 13 colleges, 3 universities, 1 engineering college, 1 medical college, 1 Normal Training School, 1 DIET, 2 B. ed. Colleges, Toklai Tea Research Station, NEIST, the Rain and Forest Research Institute, the Coal Survey Laboratory, the National Institute of Eri and Muga Research, SCERT, etc.

Research Questions of the study

- What is the current social standing of women workers in the tea estates of Jorhat ?
- How do the educational opportunities for women in the Jorhat tea estates?
- Are tea tribe girls successfully completing their elementary education?
- Among the women of the sample tea estates, who pursues higher education?

To address these questions, this study, titled a study on the educational status of women in tea garden area of Assam has been formulated with specific objectives in mind.

Objectives of the study

- To study educational and social status of tea garden women in tea estates of Jorhat Assam.
- To study about the various socio-educational problems of tea tribe women.

Delimitation of the study

This study is specifically delimited in the following manner:

- 1) Chinnamora tea estate, 2) Lohpohia tea estates, 3) Kamarbonda tea estates, 4) Socklating tea estate, 5) Teok tea estate, 6) Tocklai tea estate, 7) Kakojan tea estate, 8) Sotai tea estates, 9) Rangajan tea estates, 10) Meleng tea estates of Jorhat district are selected for the present study.
- A total of 100 women from the sample tea estates have been taken for the study.

Review of Related Literature

The Government of India has introduced various educational programs, including the national literacy mission, district primary education project, and the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to tackle educational issues in Assam's tea garden regions. Hazarika M. (1999) observed that although the majority of women workers in tea gardens engage in economic activities, Bora S. (2002) examined the existing conditions of primary education facilities in tea gardens. According to a UNICEF report, there is a marked lack of thorough literature regarding the educational advancement of Adivasis in Assam, and a case study by Gogoi Diganta Kumar on the Rajgarh tea estate highlights the difficulties encountered by girls in these regions.

Basumatary D. and Goyari P indicate that the educational condition of women workers in tea gardens is alarmingly inadequate, marked by elevated illiteracy rates, premature marriages, and insufficient educational resources. Overall, while many studies have focused on the social and educational status of women workers in tea gardens, it is clear that there are still gaps in comprehending their current circumstances. Consequently, the current study is highly relevant in today's context.

Methodology

For this study, researcher employed the descriptive survey method to explore the social and educational status of women in tea estates area.

Population

For this study, the population consists of all tea workers women in these areas are considered the population for the investigation.

Sample

Random sampling method is employed in this present study. Out of 88 tea estates in Jorhat district 10 numbers of tea estates are selected for the study.

Research tools for data collection

For this study, the following research tools were employed for data collection.

Questionnaire

Researcher developed questionnaire with the help of expert, it is an effective method to examine various societal, economic, academic, and institutional aspects related to the tea garden women.

Source of Data

Primary source

Primary data were gathered through research tools, primarily constructed the questionnaire.

Secondary source

Published research documents from different libraries and websites, books, journal newspaper, government reports and departmental records are considered as the secondary sources.

Analysis and Interpretation of Data

After analysis and interpreted of the collected data, the researcher has found the following major finding of his study.

Major Findings of the Study

The major findings of the present study are -

- It has been observed from the study that 48% of the women are literate, 36% have the qualification of class I-V passed, 14% passed class VI-IX and while only 2% have the qualification of class X/ XI and above.
- Researcher has been observed that 100% higher education institute are situated in more than 15 k.m. away, 45% primary and 90% high school are situated in more than 5 k.m. distance, 22% primary and 10% high school are situated in more than 3 k.m. distance from the tea estates, and 33% primary school are situated on walking distance.
- Many families of tea garden workers face the struggle with very low income and limited resources, so, they reluctance to send their children to school.
- A lack of robust physical health among the women workers often contributes to poor mental health , problems of decision-making abilities, low confidence levels, unstable job performance, frequent illnesses etc. have created challenges in their children's education.
- Moreover, the consumption of alcohol within the tea garden community has further undermined the socio-economic status of these workers, compounding the difficulties they face in their daily lives.
- In the study it is observed that only 67% women workers are permanent workers while 25% of are temporary workers, 8% are housewife. So, all women workers are not permanent worker therefore they are not able to continue their children's education.
- The researcher found in the tea estates area that women workers have many problems like - Inadequate wages, lack of toilet facilities, shortage of protective gear for work, chronic back pain from extended periods of carrying tea baskets, cuts and rashes on fingers and palms from plucking tea leaves, long commutes between home and workplace, insufficient access to clean drinking water, poor working conditions, pressure from management to meet work targets etc.
- In the tea estates of Jorhat, Education is a challenging task due to low literacy rates and a lack of schools. In this regard, the government of Assam has announced to establish new schools in tea garden areas by upgrading existing schools.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study also recognized various common challenges such as - parental illiteracy, poverty, early marriages, and a high rate of alcohol consumption among women workers in tea gardens regarding their education. The researcher has proposed several important recommendations focused on improving education in tea garden regions. These suggestions stemmed from conversations with educators, parents, and women workers. It is essential to create additional schools at both educational levels to address the requirements of the local community. Tea garden management, along with relevant NGOs, ought to actively participate in promoting awareness among tea garden women and the community about the importance of education in their lives. In addition, immediate action must be taken to curb alcohol use, as this is crucial for dismantling the obstacles to social advancement in these regions. The Assam government has begun to set up 119 schools in the tea garden area of Assam with the

aim of overall development of the tea garden community. The government has already opened 97 of these schools in 2022.

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