

# Present Status of Workers in Kalchini Tea Garden: Socio-Economic Perspective



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**Abstract-** Tea plantation in India has been developed and flourished in regions like Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of West Bengal state, some districts in Assam, Mysore and Nilgiris in Karnataka. The Tea industry of India has provided employment for a large number of people. In West Bengal, the Adivasi and Nepali workers all along formed the majority of the work force of this industry. The present paper deals with the socio-economic condition of tea-garden workers in Kalchini Tea Garden of Kalchini block in newly formed Alipurduar district of West Bengal state. Based on mainly primary sources of information, this study explores the problems faced by the workers and suggests some measures to improve their condition socially and economically. For the primary survey, about 110 workers of Kalchini tea garden were interviewed during the May-June months of 2021. The study reveals that workers are lagging behind in terms of education, per capita income, health conditions, and opportunities for employment generation in different sectors of this area. As the northern part of the state of West Bengal is getting more importance in tourism map of India due to tea, forest, mountains and scenic beauties, thus there is huge scope for the Kalchini tea garden to attract tourists and develop as a major tea tourism center of the country which will create more possibilities to increase the economic condition of local people.

**Keywords:** Tea garden, workers, condition, problems, development

## I. INTRODUCTION

Tea is the most common and popular refreshing drink and as one of the world's popular beverages, it has spread its flavor across the world. This fact leads to more scope and opportunities in work as tea garden workers. According to the Tea Board of India, 2016, India is the second largest tea producer in the world after China. Tea plantation in India has been developed and flourished in regions like Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar districts of West Bengal state, some districts in Assam, Mysore and Nilgiris in Karnataka. The Tea industry of India has provided employment for a large number of people. The state of West Bengal is the second largest producer of tea in India. The Assam valley, Cachar, Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai comprise the tea producing regions in North Indian tea industry. Assam valley, Cachar come under Assam region, whereas West Bengal covers Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai regions. Most of the workers in this industry were migrant laborers who came to the plantation estates during the 19th century. The Adivasi and Nepali workers all along formed the majority of the work force of this industry. Regarding the living conditions of tea plantation workers in India, it is not given much importance by the tea estate administrators.

The present paper deals with the socio-economic condition of tea-garden workers in Kalchini Tea Garden of Kalchini block in newly formed Alipurduar district. Based on mainly primary sources of information, this study also explores the problems faced by the workers and suggests some measures to improve their condition socially and economically.

## II. OBJECTIVES

The study aims at-

1. To examine the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden workers.
2. To find out the major problem faced by the tea garden workers and suggest some remedial measures.

The entire study is based on the primary survey. Primary data have been collected through personal meetings at the household level. Although secondary data is also obtained from- Tea Board of India, Census of India, 2011 and different journals. Some statistical tools and techniques have been used for the calculation of data and diagrams were prepared by using computer cartography. The whole work is done through analysis of the surveyed data.

## III. STUDY AREA

The name of Kalchini is derived from the river Kal-jani, which flows through the region and is the home of various rare herbal plants. The study area covers an area of about 892.57 square kilometers over the foothills at Raimatang and Buxa fort, and beneath the hills, ridges and deep valleys of the lower Himalayan belt along the Lepchakha, Chunabhatti and Adma. The Terai portion of Kalchini is a low lying belt, traversed by numerous rivers and streams rushing down from the hills of Bhutan and by the upland ridges which mark its courses. The Kalchini block is bounded by Bhutan in the north, Alipurduar-II and Kumargram block to the east, southern portion is bounded by Alipurduar-1, west portion is bounded by Madarihat and Torsa river and Falakata block is situated at south-western portion of the block. About 20.43 per cent of this block is covered by tea gardens.

## IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

North Bengal was one of the first parts of Bengal to have been identified as large-scale capitalistic plantation agriculture introduced by foreign capital investment in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. But still this part of Bengal is still backward (Xaxa, 1985). According to Gayathri and Arjunan (2018), India is the second largest producer of tea plantations and biggest consumer of tea. Majority of Indian tea garden workers are descendants of tribal communities in some places while scheduled castes in other gardens. These workers were brought from various states as bonded or forced labor during India's colonial period. Gurung and Mukherjee (2018) in their work on women workers of tea gardens in North Bengal states that, women workers in tea industry forms an asset and backbone, but their contribution remains referred to the bottom strata and considered the cheapest labor force rather than as a source of specialized labor. These women earn meager incomes, suffer from low levels of health care and personal well-being, live below the poverty line and are cut off from the mainstream. Due to poor levels of education,

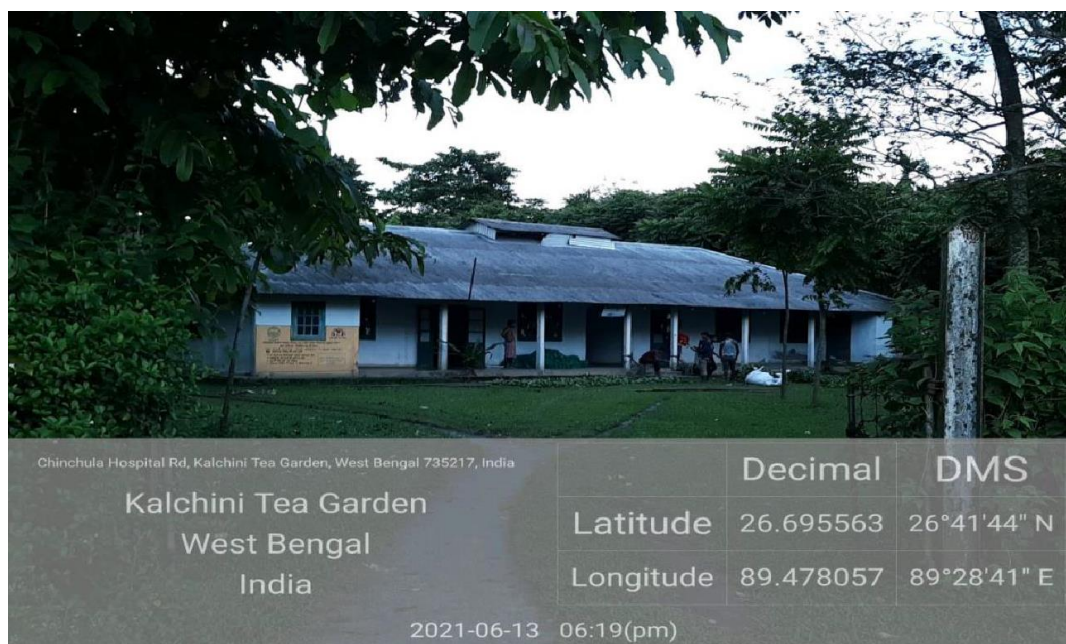
training, health, cultural and social considerations, women workers are in the most vulnerable condition in tea gardens. Since the inception of tea industry in North Bengal during the colonial period, women work participation is in various sectors of this industry. But their lives and experiences have not received adequate attention since then. Using various conventional and non-conventional sources of data, Priyanka Dutta (2015) attempted to trace the historical past of the women tea plantation workers of North Bengal, looking into the neglected aspects of gendered space in labor related issues. Social scientists are of the opinion that, marginalization of women workforce in the tea industry of North Bengal in contemporary times has their roots in the various systems and practices of the colonial past. Banerjee (2017) worked on the condition of women workers in tea gardens and states that, the plantation hierarchy is divided into four categories: manager, staff, sub- staff and workers. However, these hierarchies mapped on certain social orders, e.g. in India, the labor force joins in tea gardens are not only from the economically lower strata but also socially they were mostly in low hierarchical position including castes or tribal people. The impact of the plantation economy on the society and economy of the Doers region is a typical feature of the colonial pattern of development. Here, the natural based economy has been converted into a capitalist economy through structural change during the British Period. The commercialization of local agriculture, infrastructure development, and plantation development schemes helped the development of the plantation industry. Sarkar and Lama, 1986, stated that the labor force in the plantations of the North-east region is characterized by a marginalized labor force, low level of literacy, poor health conditions and less suitable habitation. The author Tushar kanti Ghosh (1987) on his book entitled 'The gardens of West Bengal: A critical study of land management', has highlighted the history of tea gardens in India especially in Darjeeling, Dooars, Terai in West Bengal, land management policies tea garden land revenue pattern and management problems of sick and closed tea garden. A study on 'family welfare among tea plantation workers of West Bengal'. Chakraborty (1997) to highlight the knowledge, attitude, and practice among tea garden workers in family welfare. He pointed out several aspects like maternal and child healthcare practice, knowledge and adoption of family planning methods, the spacing of birth, preference of children and size of the family. He observed a positive attitude among the tea plantation workers with respect to modern concepts and methods of family welfare.

## V. DATA ANALYSIS:

### **VILLAGE-KALCHINI TEA GARDEN**

Kalchini tea garden comes under Latabari gram panchayat in Kalchini block. Located at the Northern part of the Alipurduar district, it is surrounded by Raimatang, Dima, Mechpara tea gardens. Kalchini is located at a distance of about 30.6 km from the district headquarter, Alipurduar and around 4.3km away from sub- district headquarter Hamilton ganj.

According to the 2011 census, the total population of Kalchini tea garden is recorded as 22072, out of which male population is 11143 and female population is 10929 inhabiting 4942 households. Out of the total population, 8561 (i.e., about 39 percent) are recorded as workers (both main and marginal).



**Photo 1: Primary School, Kalchini Tea Garden (Source- the author)**

## **PRIMARY SURVEY- DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF RESPONDENTS**

As per the recorded figure in PF office of the Kalchini tea estate, there are a total number of 1410 workers in this tea garden including out division and main division. Among these, 564 are male workers and 846 are female workers. No temporary or bigha workers are here. There are more than 15 staff and 102 sub staff workers (PF officers of the Kalchini tea estate). In Kalchini tea garden, there is a rural hospital for tea garden workers with 30 beds. Although the number of doctors is less, medicines and treatments are available free of cost from the hospital. Workers go to the hospital for their general treatment. There are some child education centers or SSKM schools and some Anganwadi schools. There are also three tea garden based primary schools. For the Higher secondary schooling, students go to the nearest higher secondary school of the blocks.

Among total 1410 workers in this tea garden, 110 were surveyed during May-June 2021. The sex composition of respondents are shown in table 1.

**Table 1 - Demographic distribution as sampled households**

Total households surveyed	25
Total family members surveyed	110
Total male respondents	57
Total female respondents	53

### **Age-Sex distribution and Family Size**

The study reveals that the highest concentration of population in the age group of 35 to 59 which is 39.19 per cent followed by 34.54 per cent in the age group of 20 to 35 and the population

count of below 20 age group is 19 per cent. Rest of the population is in the age group of above 59 which is a comparatively less number of the whole population and it is only 7.27 per cent. The study stated that the size of most of the households in this tea garden are small, comprising about 56 per cent of the total respondents. The number of households with 5-8 members is about 40 per cent and remaining records more than 8 members in the household. Majority of the population are married in this garden and have nuclear families.

### Primary Survey- Socio- Cultural Setup

**Educational status-** The study reveals that about 55 per cent of total respondents have completed elementary education followed by 13.82 percent of the population having their secondary education and 4.5 percent having their higher secondary education. Remaining about 26.36 per cent of the population is illiterate. Very insignificant number of respondents has completed or is pursuing their higher education.

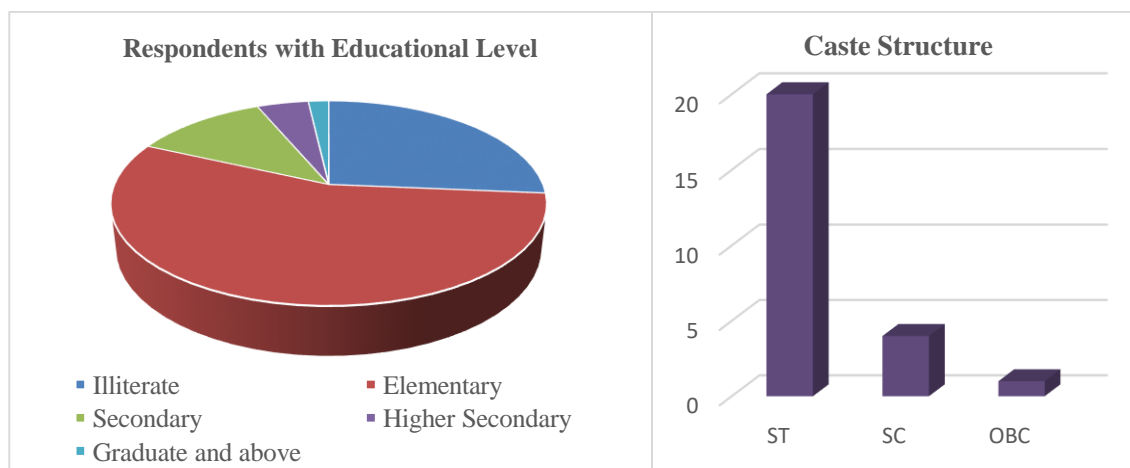


Figure 1: Educational Structure (Source: primary survey) Figure 2: Caste Structure (Source: primary survey)

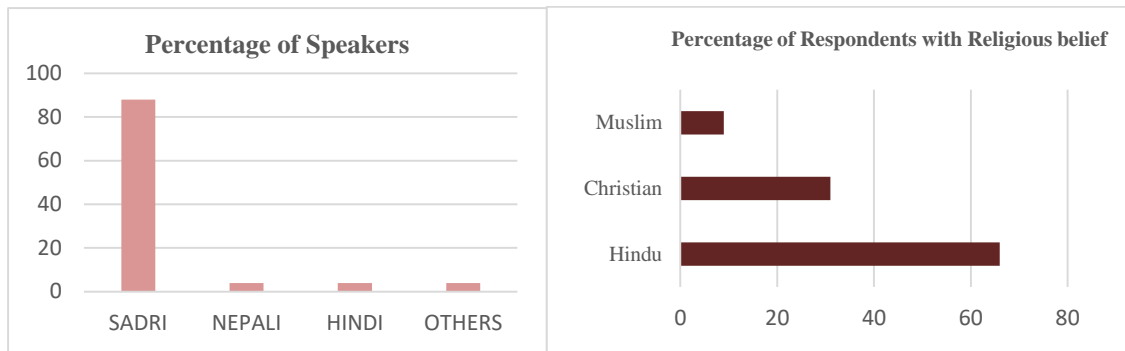
**Caste Structure-** Among the total population majority of the population is Schedule tribe (73 percent). Remaining population consists of both SC and OBC (14 and 13 percent respectively). There are no general category people in the sampled population of this garden.

### Religion Structure

Among the sampled population, high concentration belongs to Hindu religion (60 percent) followed by Christian (31 percent) and a very less number of population from Muslim religion (9 percent).

### Language

Among the whole population 88 percent people speak in Adivasi or Sadri language. Remaining people speak Nepali, Hindi and other languages.



**Figure 3- Linguistic Structure** (Source: primary survey)**Figure 4- Religious Structure**(Source: primary survey)

### Primary Survey- Other Amenities

**House condition-** The study region is mainly dominated by semi pucca houses, which reveals the poor economic structure and low income condition of tea garden workers. Only about 32 percent of houses are pucca.

**Cooking provision -** The majority of the households using fire wood for their cooking purposes. Forest is the main source of their fire wood.40 percent of households has the LPG gas connection.

**Water supply-** The study stated that 40 percent of the households have a good water supply as they receive the water from the company, 48 percent of households have received a satisfactory amount of water supply. They have their own tube well or mutual tube well of some households. The rest of population experience bad quality and quantity of water.

**Sanitation-** Proper sanitation is very essential for every household. Many latrines were constructed under various government schemes, that is why about 73 percent households have their own latrine while the rest use the open area.

**Drainage condition-** About 84 percent households have good drainage conditions. Some high drains have been constructed by the government and by the tea garden administration and thus the problem of water logging is comparatively less in major parts of the Kalchini tea garden. However, about 16 percent have moderate drainage conditions and they suffer from the problem of water logging mainly during the rainy season.

**Electricity-** Almost all the households have their own electricity line and according to these respondents, the supply and condition of electricity is satisfactory. Only 4 percent of households do not have an electricity connection.

**Transportation-** Study reveals that the majority of the respondents in this tea garden enjoys good transportation facilities because our division of the garden is very near to Hamilton ganj railway station. This location facility leads to proper development of road connectivity. On the other side, those workers who live in the core area suffer from the problems of transportation and communication.

**Economic condition** - Income is the most important factor of livelihood for every human being. The daily wage of the workers is fixed. In this garden, the income ranges between 3000 to 6000 rupees per month. Some people earn a monthly salary of about 15,000 rupees or above. The primary survey reveals that, majority of workers (about 36 percent) have been working in this garden for more than 30 years. About 32 percent of workers are working for 10-20 years in this Kalchini tea garden. On the contrary, many people, mainly young generation males have migrated to some other parts of the country. Maximum out-migration occurred in Delhi followed by Mumbai, Kashmir and Kerala.

### **PROBLEMS FACED BY THE WORKERS IN KALCHINI TEA GARDEN**

The different type of problems are faced by tea garden workers –

- ❖ Though the majority of workers in these tea gardens earn an average but fixed amount of income per month, there still exists illiteracy or low literacy rate, widespread poverty, ignorance, malnutrition and the existence of various diseases.
- ❖ Educational status is very poor and most of the workers are only educated up to the elementary level.
- ❖ No worker possesses the skill in technical and non-technical fields.
- ❖ Workers lack the proper working hours with pre-mentioned breaks and weekly holidays.
- ❖ Separate and good condition washrooms are not there in work stations
- ❖ No regular medical check-up for workers in general and women workers in particular is there.
- ❖ Proper drinking water facilities are lacking in different parts of the tea garden where workers work in different seasons.
- ❖ Health insurance benefits are needed for the plantation workers and their family members.
- ❖ Workers live in unhygienic and exhausted houses in their residential colonies, where no renovation work has been done till today.
- ❖ Due to poor living conditions and humid climatic conditions as well as elongated rainy season for the location of Kalchini tea garden (Himalayan foothill), workers are vulnerable to various diseases. The major health problems that are found among workers are worm infestation, fever, respiratory problems, stomach problems, various types of skin infections and so on.
- ❖ Human trafficking is an important problem of tea garden areas.

### **Type of Benefits Available to Plantation Workers**

Following are social security schemes for tea plantation workers-

1. Old age
2. Employees provident fund,
3. Gratuity.
4. Loss of employment Retrenchment compensation as per provision act, 1947.
5. Medical care as per provision of P.L.A act, 1951
6. Maternity As per provision of maternity benefit act, 1961

## VI. CONCLUSION

Workers of Kalchini tea garden of Kalchini block are lagging behind in terms of education, per capita income. The respondents of primary survey mentioned about their unemployment situation and due to low opportunity in this tea garden, they are forced to out-migrate in search of job. Lack of proper educational institution, students are either leave their study or they are forced to move to other places for getting admission in any school and colleges. The medical facilities are also not very satisfactory, as they explained that, except for one health center, there is no other medical center near the tea garden. The safety condition in the workplace is also not satisfactory as per the female respondents. The tea industry has been playing an important role in the development of the Dooars region as well as in Indian economy. It is the most important economic sector of this region besides agriculture. In recent years, this industry is also attracting tourists (both domestic and international) who are spending a good amount of money to stay at the center of the tea garden. Thus, skilled and trained local people may get more facilities in this industry and help in the regional development. For this some measures should be taken by local tea garden administration and also by the State as well as the Central government-



Photo 2: Kalchini Tea Garden (Source- the author)

- The wages of the plantation workers should be increased.
- The houses of the workers need to be improved.
- The tea estate company should take steps to provide the quality of education facilities.
- Sufficient toilets should be constructed for every household and for every workstation.
- Separate toilets for women should also be constructed.
- The government schemes which are available for the rural areas should be extended to the tea garden areas.
- Institutes for training should be established for people of this region.



- Medical centers should be equipped properly and permanent medical officers should be appointed.
- For developing the region as a major spot of tea tourism, Kalchini tea estate should be properly developed with suitable Resorts, Restaurants, Home stays, and transportation and communication facilities.
- Local youngsters should be properly skilled to engage in the tourism industry.

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