

Marginalization and poverty: A study of the social status of tea garden labourers of Badla Batá tea estate in Tinsukia district and its impact on children

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Abstract-Assam's tea industry is a substantial contributor to its economy. It is despite this that the tea Plucker's/tea garden labourers in Assam continue to languish under appalling conditions of marginalization and poverty. The objective study is to study the social status and living conditions of tea garden labourers at BadlaBata Tea Estate of Tinsukia district, Assam, and its effects on their children. The research design is descriptive qualitative and quantitative research. The primary and secondary sources of data were the following. The information was gathered from 100 Tea Garden labourers. Poverty inducing factors have been ascertained to be the set of circumstances that labourers of Badla batá Tea Estate lived below poverty line, poor wages, lack job security and have no access to proper primary health care and education facility. It was found that most tea garden labourers at the Badla Batá Tea Estate are below the poverty line, receive inadequate pay, have unstable work schedules, and have little access to quality primary healthcare and education.

Keywords- Marginalization, Poverty, Tea Garden laborers, oppressed community, primary health and systematic neglect.

Introduction-Poverty and social marginalization are two of the most complex and prevalent problems in the world today, affecting millions of people globally. Even though they are commonly addressed together, they are distinct but closely related problems that contribute to an unending cycle of injustice and inequality. Poverty is the result of not having enough money or material possessions to cover one's basic needs, which is a fundamental violation of human rights. It makes it impossible to get basic needs like food, shelter, clean water, and healthcare. Conversely, social exclusion refers to the methodical exclusion of individuals or groups from the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres of their respective countries. A person may be excluded based on a variety of factors, including race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, disability, or religion. Poverty and marginalization combine to form a potent feedback loop. Because those without

resources are denied a voice and a seat at the table, poverty can lead to social exclusion. Furthermore, social marginalization can lead to poverty because it frequently denies excluded groups opportunities for education, employment, and personal development. " In addition to financial solutions, addressing these problems requires dedication to social justice, resistance to the power structure that creates and sustains inequality, and ensuring that everyone can lead a life of dignity and purpose. Since the time of colonization, Assam's tea plantations have been a key component of the state economy. It accounts for about half of India's tea production, and thousands of workers are employed in different estates. Of these, the Tinsukia district's Badla Bata Tea estate represents the everyday struggles of a marginalized group that still faces poverty, deprivation, and slow social progress. Originally brought from Central India's tribal and Dalit communities as bonded laborers by the British in the 19th century, the ancestors of the Tea Garden labourers still face social and economic hardships today. The primary causes of poverty and marginalization are historical exploitation, structural neglect, and insufficient government action. Marginalization is the term used to describe the social and economic segregation of Tea Garden labourers, which leads to their insufficient access to political representation, healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The plantation ownership system has historically created system dependency due to its high levels of control, where labourers are obligated to the estate through subpar pay, subpar accommodations, and restricted rights. Despite efforts to address welfare issues through labor laws such as the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, their implementation remains inadequate. As a result of the never-ending cycle of poverty, Tea Garden labourers not only faced financial hardship but also structural challenges like hunger and low literacy, which limited their opportunities for upward mobility.

Historical background of the study-The study's

historical backdrop is the mid-19th century establishment of commercialized tea plantations in Assam by the British East India Company. There was a severe labor shortage because the Assamese people in the area did not want to work in the harsh conditions of the plantations. To meet this demand, the British funded a massive labor recruitment drive from underprivileged, tribal, and impoverished regions of central and eastern India, including what is now Jharkhand, Odisha, and West Bengal. The study of Assam tea garden labourers' poverty and marginalization, especially at the Badlabeta Tea Estate in Tinsukia, is based on the history of British colonial exploitation. The systemic discrimination that this history established still affects these labourers' ancestors. Over many generations, Tea Garden labourers and their descendants from diverse linguistic and ethnic backgrounds came to form a single, cohesive, but marginalized group known as the "Tea Tribes." Their common identity, which served to distinguish them from most of Assamese society while simultaneously serving as a source of cultural pride, kept them socially excluded. The colonial system had established their poverty and dependency to maintain it. They were in debt because the plantation owners gave them insufficient money, usually in the form of rations and a small cash payment. Due to a lack of economic mobility and an effective policy of isolation from the outside world, they were confined to the plantations for the duration of their lives. The historical injustices of this system have a direct and lasting impact on the socioeconomic status of tea garden labourers and their children, which is the focus of this study. Poverty and Economic Stagnation: The historical legacy of low wages has perpetuated a cycle of poverty. Due to low income, many families are unable to pay for necessities, which leads to malnutrition and poor health. Educational Deprivation: As a result of earlier conservative policies, there were either insufficient or no educational facilities. Due to the historical lack of access to education, which is still evident in the high rates of illiteracy and low school enrollment, children are stuck in the same low-paying jobs that their ancestors were forced to work in. Social Exclusion: The public still frequently perceives the "Tea Garden labourers" as a "other" community in Assam, despite their presence for more than 150 years. This social marginalization can lead to discrimination and restricted access to government opportunities and benefits.

Review of Literature

Kurmi.P (2014) The present study's main objective was to investigate the socioeconomic factors that affect household demand for children's education in the neighborhoods surrounding the tea garden. Data for this study came from 59 houses that were randomly selected from the Derby Tea Garden. The following findings are the

result of the estimation: i. Mothers' education enhances children's education and is crucial in guaranteeing that youngsters in tea-garden environments acquire the education they are supposed to. ii. Family size has an impact on children's educational achievement as well. Regarding children's educational attainment, family size is negatively correlated, unlike "mother's education." iii. Research has discovered that children's academic achievement is influenced by household income.

Bhowmik.S.K(2011) The conditions of tea plantation workers are discussed in this article within the context of marginalization and ethnicity. It addresses the issue of tribal tea plantation laborers in the Indian state of West Bengal, who have long been neglected mostly because of their ethnic status and seclusion on the plantations. The paper starts off by analyzing the characteristics of the plantation system and demonstrating how the methods of labor management led to relations that were not free. Labor is part of the formal, organized workforce in the majority of nations with plantations; employment and working conditions are governed by legislation, and positions are stable and permanent.

Medhi. G.K (2006) According to the study, children of tea garden workers in Assam had a marked growth disadvantage because their average height and weight were lower than those of both wealthy Indian children and international norms (NCHS). A high prevalence of malnutrition, both recent and chronic, was found when nutritional status was evaluated using WHO markers, indicating continuous and long-term nutrition problems. The degree of malnutrition among these children was demonstrated by the specific prevalence rates for malnutrition markers such as wasting, stunting, underweight, and thinness that were given for various age groups.

Borkakoty.B (2024) This study aims to investigate the perceptions of tea garden workers in the Golaghat District of Assam on their children's higher education. The tea industry in Assam contributes significantly to the nation's economy. The establishment of tea plantations in Assam dates to the British colonial era. Various social projects have been periodically launched by the Assam government to improve the socioeconomic status of these people. Despite these efforts, the educational status of the Tea Tribe community is still far lower than that of other Assamese communities. Parental attitudes on their children's education may be a hindrance to the tea-tribe group's educational attainment. It was shown that attitudes regarding their children's higher education did not significantly differ between literate and illiterate parents, or between single and co-parents. Furthermore, 72 percent of tea garden workers had a negative attitude toward their children's further education, compared to 28 percent who had a positive view.

Banerji.S and Willoughby.R(2019) The rights of tea plantation workers in the Indian state of Assam to a livable salary and respectable living and working circumstances are often violated. ration cards from the Assam government, which entitles them to 5 kg of rice per family each month. In addition, tea workers face challenges in accessing clean drinking water, timely and high-quality healthcare, and a proper education for their kids. deeply embedded in the history and development of the Indian tea business are the underlying causes, which have resulted in a widespread power imbalance between the brands and supermarkets that sell tea to customers and the women and men who make it. Tea companies and supermarkets take a significant cut (up to 95% in some circumstances) for each kilogram of packaged Assam tea sold, while a little fraction (less than 5%) stays on tea plantations to pay workers.

Sarma.N(2025) According to this survey, 47% of the employees are men and 53% are women. It presents a picture of the empowerment of women through raising their financial standing and highlighting the important role that female employees have played in the tea garden. However, it has been discovered that 69% of the workers lack literacy, meaning they do not know how to read or write, 26% have completed elementary through high school, and only 5% are pursuing higher education after passing the 10th board exam. Due to financial difficulties, most respondents stopped their education, and it is a known fact that children of girls typically drop out of school. Additionally, it reveals that 70% of the employees were married, 16% were single, 8% were widowed after their husbands passed away from a variety of causes, including high fever, leprosy illness, smoking, malnutrition, etc., and 6% were split up because they were unable to support their families. The tea community is in a backward condition as a result of the workers' tendency for early marriage. They are unable to fully understand the different developmental programs offered by the state and federal governments at various times due to a lack of adequate knowledge. Just 26% of male employees marry after the age of 21, compared to 74% who do so before. When they reached 18, 22% of the female employees got married. However, 78% of women report getting married before turning 18. For the young women who work in tea gardens, the negative consequences of early marriages have become an international matter. 21% of the tea workers are contractual or temporary employees, while 79% are permanent employees of the chosen workplace. Temporary employees are denied access to all government-provided facilities, but permanent employees enjoy all of them. Only 9% of workers made more than ten thousand rupees a month, while 63% made less than five thousand, 21% made between five and seven thousand, and 7% made between seven and ten thousand. Only 9% of workers made more than ten

thousand rupees a month, while 63% made less than five thousand, 21% made between five and seven thousand, and 7% made between seven and ten thousand. Just 22% of all respondents are above the poverty line, while 78% of them are below it. Because of this outcome, poverty is a major issue among workers, indicating that their economic situation is still worrying. 89% of workers get their drinking water from tube wells, which are operated by hand pumps; only 11% of respondents depend on ponds, dug wells, or even neighboring streams. One major problem is that there have been major health concerns brought up as a result of drinking groundwater without testing. The research makes it evident that despite the numerous initiatives aimed at raising the community's level of living, they still have a need for clean drinking water.

Dutta.P and Goswami.G(2018) A total of 263 samples has been collected for the purpose of the study. Of the overall sample, 48.29 percent are men and 51.71 percent are women. About 40% of sample respondents are between the ages of 26 and 35, 27% are between the ages of 26 and 45, and 17% are between the ages of 46 and 55. Regarding the respondents' housing type, almost 72% of the sample resides in homes that their employers supply. Of the samples, 46.39 percent lack illiteracy. Just 14% of the samples have studied above the lower primary level, 23% have studied up to the middle primary level, and 17% have studied up to the lower primary level. 3. This indicates that the tea garden workers have extremely low levels of education. The percentage of women who lack literacy (64%) is more than twice that of men, who have an illiteracy rate of about 28%. Just 14% of the samples have studied above the lower primary level, 23% have studied up to the middle primary level, and 17% have studied up to the lower primary level. 3. This indicates that the tea garden workers have extremely low levels of education. The percentage of women who lacking literacy (64%) is more than twice that of men, who have an illiteracy rate of about 28%. It is discovered that 21% of the samples lack a bank account. Insufficient revenue is cited by many employees as the primary reason they do not have access to a bank account. Other reasons for not having a bank account include challenging working hours and a lack of required documentation. A few employees also express their lack of knowledge regarding the account opening procedure.

Research methodology- The descriptive methodology is used in this study. Both primary and secondary sources were used to gather the data. Books, periodicals, research papers, newspapers, and statements from different public servants are examples of secondary sources. The primary data collection in this study is

done using basic random sampling techniques. One hundred is the sample size, and Data was gathered using a series of questionnaires.

Objectives of the study

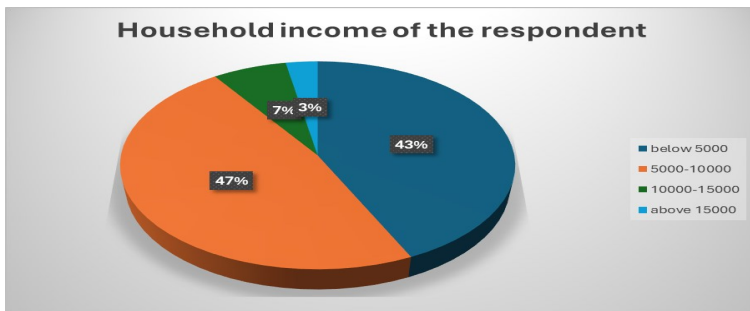
- 1.To examine the poverty and marginalization faced by Tea Garden workers.
2. To investigate the impact of poverty and marginalization on children

Analysis

Table 1-

Household income of the respondent	frequency
below 5000	45%
5000-10000	50%
10000-15000	7%
above 15000	3%

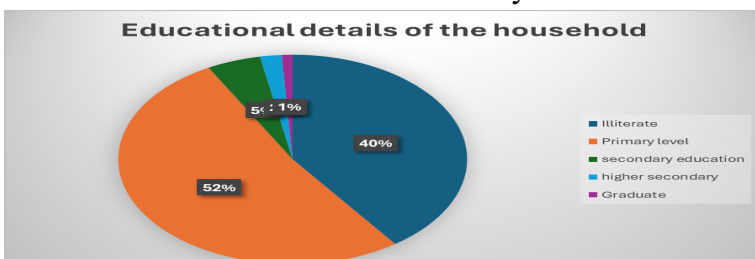
Source-Field survey



From the above table it shows that 43% respondent household income is below 5000 in Badlabata Tea estate of Tinsukia district. And 47% tea garden labourers of Badlabata tea estate earn 5000-10000rs monthly. 7% of Tea Garden labourers earn between 10000-15000rs monthly. And only 3% of labourers earn above 15000rs monthly. It reflects that inadequacy of wages in the Tea Estate, where Garden labourers are primarily paid daily wages far below living wage standards.

Educational details of the household	Frequency
Illiterate	40%
Primary level	52%
secondary education	5%
higher secondary	2%
Graduate	1%

Source-Field survey

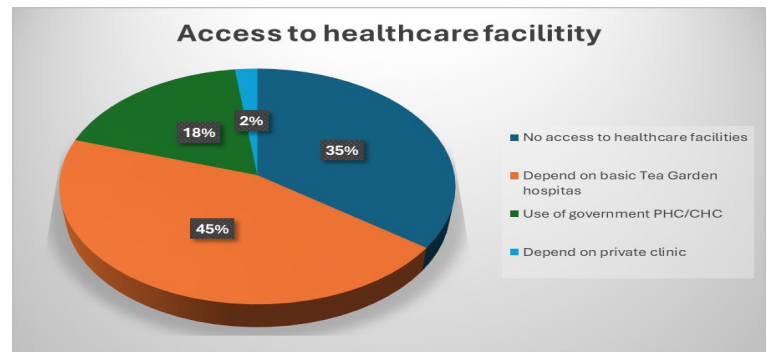


From the table 2 it was found that 40% of the household heads have no formal education in Badlabata Tea Estate. 52% of the household heads of Badlabata Tea Estate completed the primary level. And 5% of the respondent completed the secondary education. Only 2% respondent completed the higher secondary education and 1% respondent completed the graduation .

Table 3-

Access to healthcare facility	frequency
No access to healthcare facilities	35%
Depending on basic Tea Garden hospital	45%
Use of government PHC/CHC	18%
Depending on private clinic	2%

Source-field survey



This pie diagram shows that 35% of the respondent of Badlabata Tea estate no access the healthcare facilities provided by the tea garden management. 45% respondent accessing the tea garden facilities. There are total 18% respondent who use of government PHC/CHC. And only 2% respondent depend on private clinic.

Findings-Lack of social security and insufficient income are both components of poverty. The respondent reports that although they receive their ration on a regular basis, it is insufficient for them. Amartya Sen's "capability deprivation" theory defines poverty as the absence of basic freedoms that enable one to live a dignified life rather than merely possessing wealth. Low wages are the root cause of poverty. The living conditions of the Badlabata Tea Garden respondents are sub-par. They don't own any land. Additionally, poverty breeds anxiety and despair. Employees at Badlabata Tea Estate Tea Garden frequently abuse alcohol and other drugs as a result of their stress. Poverty impacts children's social, mental, physical, and educational development. Children who live in poverty often drop out of school in order to provide for their families. The financial situation of the parents of the Badla Batá tea estate is extremely dire. Physical disability is a result of poverty. Due to poverty, a large number of children in the Badla Batá Tea Estate suffer from malnutrition. In

addition to impairing the proper development of every bodily part, malnutrition also lowers IQ. The mental health of the kids at Badla Batá Tea Estate is also impacted by poverty. This indicates that children living in poverty experience stress and anxiety in addition to inadequate food and housing. Due to social stigma, many kids from extremely low-income families feel inferior. Additionally, social exclusion is a result of poverty. A country's children are its future. The state or country will not develop if the nation's future is not safeguarded. Social exclusion is a result of poverty. Due to poverty, many children in the Badla Batá tea estate were unable to purchase toys or clothing, which hindered their ability to engage in social activities and separated them from their peers in other communities. Additionally, it was discovered that the majority of Badla Batá Tea Estate respondents were illiterate. Tea Garden labourers and their kids are affected by illiteracy. Labourers who lack literacy are vulnerable to exploitation, unable to understand their rights as employees, and unable to bargain for better pay. As a result, they are ignorant of the negative effects of alcohol and tobacco as well as the Adivasi or Tea Garden labourers' welfare programs. Respondents' low literacy levels make it impossible to assist kids with schoolwork and homework and to support higher education. Early school withdrawal is also caused by parents who are illiterate. because the vast majority of respondents are unaware of the value of education. Respondents' lack of literacy also contributes to their children getting married young.

The majority of respondents do not use the healthcare facilities, it was also discovered. This raises the risk of newborn babies in the Badla Batá tea estate and contributes to the high rate of maternal death. They are superstitious and rely on herbal remedies. The death ratio is high as a result.

Conclusion and suggestion

Assam tea labourers receive lower wages than other tea garden labourers in India, even though they support a lucrative industry. Tea garden labourers purposefully stayed with bonded residents in accordance with colonialism's practices, and low pay has persisted. Even now, a lot of families make extra cash by doing unapproved tasks like gathering firewood or doing housework, but these profits are still quite small. And poverty and marginalization are the results of all of these. In this sense, poverty encompasses both the lack of social security and a sufficient source of income.

The people's reports of uneven access to financial aid, such as pensions or ration reimbursement, revealed administrative exclusions. Among Assamese communities, the Tea Garden labourers have the lowest literacy rates. Existing research indicates that the literacy rate of respondents is extremely low. Compared to the state, residents of the Tea Garden usually have worse health ratings. Mother

mortality, infant mortality, and the percentage of dehydration are all extremely high. The primary causes of malaria, tuberculosis, and anemia are inadequate nutrition, unpurified drinking water, and improper cleanliness.

The following steps may mitigate this systemic issue:

1. Improvements in living standards and the economy. The underlying causes of the problem are poverty wages and economic vulnerability.

Implement and Evaluate Minimum Wages: Implement the legally required minimum wage for plantation labor right away, making sure it is at least as high as the minimum wage for unskilled agricultural labor in the region. It should be assessed annually to ensure that it is a true living wage that covers essentials like housing, food, healthcare, and education. Several Revenue Sources: Encourage laborers and their children to enroll in vocational and skill-development courses (like computer skills, weaving, driving, and tailoring), especially for women, to create alternative, higher-paying livelihood options outside of the tea garden economy. Micro Finance and Financial Access: To make formal financial services like bank accounts, low-cost loans, and micro-loan programs more accessible, as well as to help families break free from debt cycles and set up small businesses. As soon as possible, laborers who have resided on tea estate land for generations should be granted the right to own their property. They will gain safety, security, and a higher social standing as a result.

2. Improving Education and Child Welfare: The impact on children's safety, education, and health is the most significant indicator of marginalization. Fight Child Trafficking and Child Labor: Pay special attention to and deal with any child labor that occurs on tea estates. Get people to learn about child rights, the dangers of child marriage and human trafficking, and the illegality of child labor. Create and strengthen Child Protection Committees (CPCs) in tea communities to act as first responders. Enhance the infrastructure and facilities of schools in and around tea garden areas to improve the quality and accessibility of education (e.g., appropriate classrooms, clean water, proper sanitation). Verify that teachers are regularly present in class and choose instructors who can collaborate effectively with a diverse group of students. For students attending college outside of the garden grounds, they provide additional dorms. Provide creche or childcare facilities for working mothers' children as mandated by the Plantation Labour Act. This will free up women for work or training and lessen the need for older children to look after their siblings.

3. Strengthening Social Status and Legal Protection: Addressing marginalization requires an understanding

of and commitment to the community. Effectively Putting Labor Laws into Practice: Oversee and closely monitor the tea garden administration's adherence to the 1951 Plantations Labour Act's housing, healthcare, water, and sanitation provisions. Violations must be followed by severe penalties. Getting to Government Plans and Documents: Launch extensive campaigns to ensure that all tea garden laborers and their families have identity documents (Aadhaar cards, ration cards, voter IDs) and caste certificates (OBC/MOBC status) needed to access welfare, health, and social security programs. Empowerment and Awareness: Support and fortify community-based organizations and trade unions (like the Adivasi Women's Association) to advance rights and collective bargaining. Run legal literacy and awareness programs about labourers' rights, health, sanitation, and family planning. Boost Essential Amenities: Fill in the gaps in the tea estate residential communities' access to clean drinking water, electricity, and suitable restroom and sanitation facilities by using public funds (government, CSR, or NGO).

4. Multi-Stakeholder Coordination: All parties involved in the tea production chain need to work together to find answers. Inspection and Coordination by the Government: Create a dedicated Tea Garden Welfare Cell at the district level (Tinsukia) with representatives from the local government, the Labour Department, Social Welfare, Education, and Health to facilitate the coordinated implementation and oversight of the program. Industry and Consumer Accountability: Encourage domestic and international tea brands and retailers to commit to a more equitable distribution of the final tea price in order to ensure that the industry can earn a living wage. Consumers must be informed and encouraged to choose tea that is sourced responsibly. NGO and Civil Society Partnership: Apply their expertise in community mobilization by working with international organizations like UNICEF and Oxfam, as well as NGOs like PAJHRA and Nazdeek, to implement grassroots programs on health, education, safety, and awareness for children.

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