

## Living Conditions of Tea Garden Workers: A study on Chabua Tea Estate of Assam

### Abstract

Tea Industry of India is one of the largest agro-industry in the world with over 13000 tea gardens and a total of more than two million workforces, both male and female involved either directly or indirectly with the industry. Tea garden workers of India play an important role in the growth and development of the economy. But in spite of their lion's share in the smooth working of the country's economy their living condition is vulnerable, they have been facing enormous problems and difficulties in their day to day life such as poverty, illiteracy, poorer health conditions etc. Therefore the present study makes an attempt to study their living conditions and also to suggest some policy measures for their improvement.

**Keywords:** living conditions, tea garden, vulnerable, workers

### Introduction

India is the largest tea producer of the world. Scottish adventurer Robert Bruce discovered tea for the first time in the upper valley of Brahmaputra during the reign of Ahom king. Assam Tea Industry accounts for more than 50% of India's total tea production. Tea industry of Assam has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment facilities to nearly half of a million populations over the years. During the colonial rule tea garden workers are recruited from various states like Bihar, West Bengal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh etc. Since the beginning of the plantation industry heterogeneous groups of tea garden workers have been living in Assam and accepting the state as their own homeland. But from the beginning till date these tea garden workers were the most exploited class in Assam. The living standard of these tea garden workers is miserable. Due to various problems faced by them such as illiteracy, poverty, early marriage, unhygienic living conditions, superstition etc. their life has become more deplorable as compared to the other habitats. In this paper an attempt has been to study the socio economic status of India's first tea planted estate i.e. Chabua Tea Estate.

### Review of Literature

H. Jyotimalain her research paper "Socio-Economic Development of Tea Garden Labourers of Assam: A case study of Golaghat district" (2015) identified that the houses of tea garden labourers are basically kutcha. During rainy season their houses become water logged and filled with mud, also the drainage system is very poorer. She also observed that the basic diet of the people consisting of rice, Atta, vegetables, meat, fish and eggs are taken only occasionally because of lack of purchasing power of the workers. In terms of education it was expressed that garden workers are either illiterate or has attained only the primary classes.

P. Nabarun and K. Pooja conducted a study on "Tea Garden Labourers and their Living conditions: A study on Borsillah Tea Estate of Sivsagar district of Assam" (2016). In the study they made an attempt to examine the economic condition of tea garden workers, their socio-cultural values and the relationship they maintain with the other people living around them. From the study they establish the conclusion that the tea garden workers are lagging behind from the society in terms of socially, economically and culturally.

B. Dipalliin her article, "History of Tea Industry and status of tea garden workers of Assam" (2016) explores the origin of tea cultivation in



**Lipika Jyoti Dowarah**  
Research Scholar,  
Deptt. of Economics,  
Dibrugarh University,  
Dibrugarh, Assam, India

Assam and the status of garden workers. From her study she concluded that tea garden workers are worst sufferers, their wages are not satisfactory and the medical facilities provided to them are very poorer also the houses they live are not proper. She also expressed that there is high incidences of maternal mortality and infant mortality in the tea gardens of Assam.

D. Sukharanjan, D. Prallad, in their study "Socio-Economic condition of Tea gardenworkers of West Tripura district with special reference to Meghlipara tea estate" (2017) expressed that tea garden workers of Meghlipara Tea Estate are socially and economically backward, and also they are deprived from the modern social life. These tea garden workers are illiterate and they have no idea regarding the welfare programmes introduced by the Government and the tea authorities. To them for the upliftment of the garden workers awareness programme against early marriage and education of a girl child should be introduced.

### Research Gap

After reviewing the existing literatures on socio-economic profile of tea garden workers it has been found that although there are many literatures on living conditions, household's income, education, health, nutrition, sanitation, hygiene etc. on garden workers of different regions but there are no such studies on the workers of India's first tea plantation estate i.e. Chabua Tea Estate. Therefore, an attempt has been made to study the living pattern and their conditions in the present study.

### Objectives of the Study

1. The present paper aims to study the socio economic status of tea garden workers of Chabua tea estate.
2. To suggest some policy measures to improve the living condition of the tea garden workers of Chabua.

### Methodology

The present paper is based on both Primary data and Secondary data. Primary data's are collected through self-structured questionnaire and by direct personal investigation with the respondents. A sample of 50 labourers has been taken for the study through random sampling method. Most of the sample population under study belongs to the age group of 20-45 years comprising of both male and female respondents. Secondary data used in the study are collected from journals, books, magazines, newspapers, websites etc.

### The Study Area

Chabua Tea Estate is the first successful tea planted area in India. The estate was founded in 1836 by Chabua Tea Company Limited and was taken over Tata Finlay in March 1983 and then by Amalgamated Plantation Private Limited in March 2007. Chabua Tea Estate is spread over 1309.76 hectares. It has a cultivation area of 777.28 hectares and a production area of 929.89 hectares. The Estate has the capacity

to produce 23.15 lakh kilograms of CTC & Orthodox tea.

**Table 1: Plantation Statistic of Chabua Tea Estate**

Total Tea area (Mature Area+ Immature Area+ Fallow for Replanting)	770.20 (699.17+ 57.54+13.49) hectares
Total Estate area	1309.76 hectares
Annual Production of CTC* & Orthodox Tea	23.15 lakh kilograms
Total tea production	15.82 lakh kilograms

**Source:** <http://amalgamatedplantation.co.in>

\*CTC: Cut, tear & Curl

### Analysis

To study the socio economic status of the workers of Chabua Tea Estate followings seven indicators are taken into account:

#### Housing Facilities

1. Health Facilities
2. Drinking water Facilities
3. Education Facilities
4. Toilet Facilities
5. Employment Status
6. Fuel used for cooking

#### Housing Facilities

Housing condition plays an important role in the maintenance of proper health of the garden workers. Poor housing facilities have an adverse effect on the health and efficiency of the worker. Different types of houses such as Kutcha houses, Pucca houses and semi pucca houses were observed in the residential area of Chabua Tea estate.

**Table 2: Percentage distribution of respondents on the basis of houses**

Nature of Houses	No. of respondents	Percentage
Kutcha houses	8	16%
Pucca Houses	13	26%
Semi-Pucca Houses	29	58%

**Source:** Field Survey

#### Health Facilities

Chabua Tea Estate runs a 62 bedded hospital within the estate with general ward for both male and female, maternity ward, minor OT, one full time Medical Officer, pharmacists, health assistant, GNMs, ANMs, nursing attendances. The tea estate hospital also conducts immunizations camps regularly as per the government's protocol. During the survey all the respondents responded that they were satisfied with the health facilities provided by the tea hospital.

#### Drinking Water Facilities

74 % of respondents responded that they have proper drinking water facilities and they use hand pumps for drinking water. It was observed that all of the labour lines have hand pumps provided by the government agencies within a distance of 4-5 families. On the other hand, 26 % of them have responded that since they do not have their own hand pump they face problem in generating drinking water. Labourers also expressed their dissatisfaction regarding sharing water with other families. During the survey it was observed that none of the respondent's

family used water filtration process to purify the drinking water.

**Table:3 Percentage distribution of respondents on the basis of proper drinking water facilities**

	Yes	No
<b>Respondents</b>	37	13
<b>Percentage</b>	74%	26%

Source: Field Survey

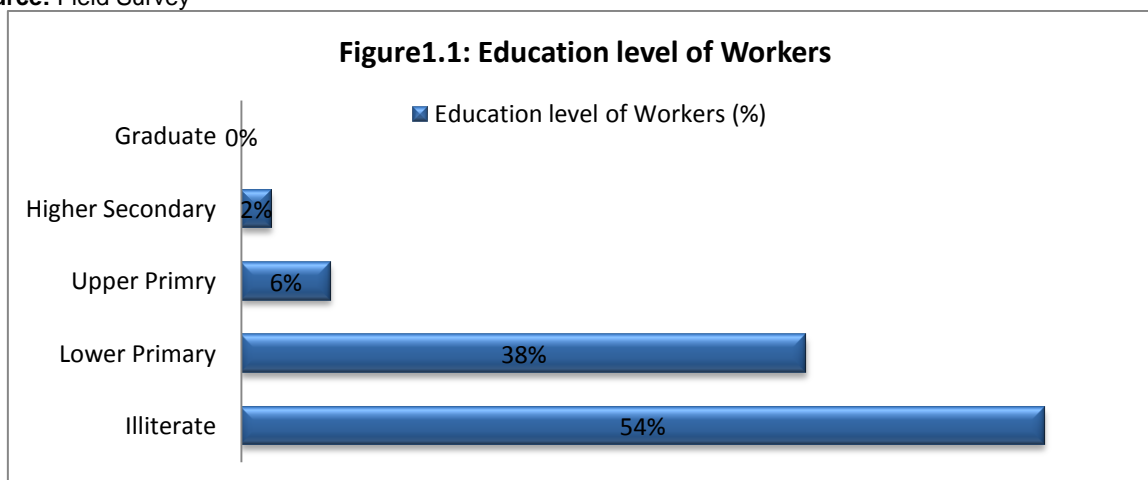
### Education Facilities

Chabua Tea Estate runs 3 lower primary schools within the estate and also provides vocational training programmes.

**Table:4 Percentage distribution of respondents on basis of attainment of basic education**

	Illiterate	Lower Primary	Upper Primary	Higher Secondary	Graduation
<b>Respondents</b>	27	19	3	1	-
<b>Total</b>	54%	38%	6%	2%	0%

Source: Field Survey



Out of 50 respondents during the survey 54% of them responded that they have not attained any education. 38% of them responded that they have studied the lower primary classes and there after left their studies. 6% of them responded that they were admitted in upper primary classes but they were not successful in completing it and only respondent said that he have studied till the higher secondary.

### Toilet Facilities

Toilets have a direct impact on the health of a person. Therefore presence of a proper sanitary toilet is very much essential for a healthy family.

**Table:5 Percentage distribution of respondents regarding attainment of toilet facilities**

	Yes	No
<b>Respondents</b>	7	43
<b>Percentage</b>	14%	86%

Source: Field Survey

During the survey, 86% of respondents responded that they do not have toilet facilities and only 14% of them have responded that they have set up sanitary toilets themselves without any help from government/ tea authorities. Absences of proper toilets have adverse effect on the health of the tea workers and the environment as well. This demonstrates that they were not aware of hygiene and healthy life.

### Employment Status

As like the other employment sectors of Assam, tea gardens of Assam also employs both regular and casual workers. Regular workers enjoy all the benefits of the tea authority even during the off seasons. But the casual workers are employed only on temporary basis and are deprived from the benefits provided by the tea authorities. Also they face the problem of unemployment during the off seasons.

**Table:6 Percentage distribution of respondents on the basis of employment status**

	Regular Workers	Causal Workers
<b>Respondents</b>	11	39
<b>Percentage</b>	22%	78%

Source: Field Survey

Out of 50 respondents, 22% of them were regular workers in the tea estate and the remaining 78% of them were casual wage earners. Regular workers responded that they enjoy all the benefits provided by the estate in terms of ration, free health service, LPG cylinders etc. Casual workers are employed either on daily basis or weekly basis and they are deprived of the benefits provided by the estate authorities.

### Fuels used for cooking

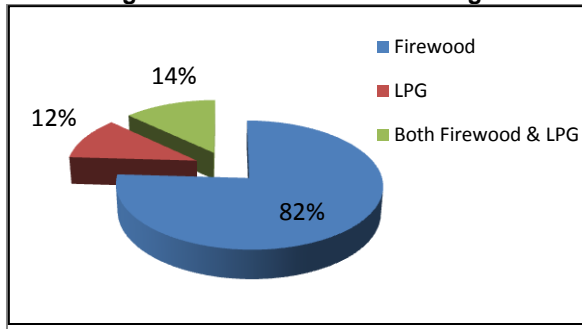
Tea garden workers mainly use firewood as a fuel for cooking purposes which they procure from the gardens.

**Table:7 Percentage Distribution of Respondents Regarding Fuel Used in Cooking Process**

	Firewood	LPG	Both Firewood and LPG
<b>Respondents</b>	41	2	7
<b>Percentage</b>	82%	12%	14%

Source: Field Survey

**Figure 1.2: Fuel used for Cooking**



The table and the figure above shows that out of 50 respondents 82% of them have said that they use firewood as a fuel for cooking purpose which they collect from tea garden itself. 12% of them responded that they use LPG cylinders and 14% of them responded that they use both firewood and LPG cylinders for cooking purpose.

### Findings

1. From the survey it was found that labour lines do not have proper sanitary facilities. 86% of respondents responded that they do not have any toilet. Only 14% of them have responded that they have set up sanitary toilets themselves without any help from government/ tea authorities. Therefore provision should be taken by the government and the tea authorities for setting up proper sanitary toilets for every family.
2. The study also reveals that 26 % of the respondents face problem in generating drinking water since they do not have their own hand-pump/ tap.
3. It was also observed that the educational attainment of the tea garden labourers is very low. Out of 50 respondents, 54% of them were illiterate and only 38% of them have attained primary classes.
4. The study reveals that more than half of the respondents (78%) were casual workers and only 22 % of them were regular tea garden employees. The regular employees enjoys all the benefits provided by tea authorities while the casual workers were deprived from the benefits
5. 82% of the respondents during the survey responded that they use firewood as a fuel for cooking purpose.

### Policy Measures

1. Elementary education should be made compulsory by the government / the tea authorities for the children of garden labourers. Girl education should be encouraged for the upliftment of the society.

2. Measures should be taken by the tea authorities for setting up of sanitary toilets in every families of the garden.
3. Government's financial inclusion scheme should be implemented in tea estates for strengthening the workers financially, especially the female workers so that they can be financially independent.
4. Tea authorities must take measures to reduce the number of casual workers by converting them into permanent workers.
5. Wages as well as basic amenities of life should be increased by the tea authorities for both permanent and casual workers of the garden.
6. Government as well as tea authorities must organize awareness campaigns against problem of early marriage for the mother as well as the child.

### Conclusion

The outcome of the study reveals that the living conditions of tea garden workers is pathetic in spite of the facilities provided by the government and the tea authorities. They continuously suffer from multiple problems and are still lagging behind as compared to mainstream society in terms of economically, socially and culturally. Almost more than half of the garden workers are illiterate, casual workers, ill health and were also not aware of the basic amenities of life.

### Reference

- B. Baruah (2000), "Assam Tea Industry: Its Past and Present" *Assam Economic Journal*, Vol. XIII, Department of Economics Dibrugarh University Assam
- B. Dipalli (2016), "History of Tea Industry and status of tea garden workers of Assam" *International Journal of Applied Research*
- D. Sukharanjan, D. Prallad (2017), "Socio-Economic condition of Tea garden workers of West Tripura district with special reference to Meghalpara tea estate" *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*.
- H. Jyotimala, (2015), "Socio-Economic Development of Tea Garden Labourers of Assam: A case study of Golaghat district" *South Asia- Past Present and Beyond* page 292-301
- K. M. Mishra, U. Vandana, S. Atul (2008), "Crisis in the Tea sector: A study of Assam tea gardens" *the Indian economic journal: the quarterly journal of the Indian Economic Association*, Research Gate.
- M. Supriyo, M. Bandita, S.Sangeeta, "Tea garden labours and their living conditions: a study on Sarusarai tea garden of Jorhat district of Assam"
- P. Nabarun and K. Pooja(2016), "Tea Garden Labourers and their Living conditions: A study on Borsillah Tea Estate of Sivsagar district of Assam" *International Journal of Advance Research*, Page 163-169.