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Socio-Economic Condition of Upper-FAGU Tea Garden Workers

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Abstract:

In recent days, discussions about socio-economic condition of teagarden workers is a very relevant topic in the scenario of West Bengal. The present study has examined the socio-economic condition and the nature of gender inequality (if there any), of the tea garden workers of Upper Fagu Tea Garden village, under Gorubathan Block of Darjeeling District, which is a world renowned tea producing district of West Bengal. The study has been conducted mainly by the primary survey because of the unavailability of sufficient secondary data and to represents the real scenario or situation. In this village 423 population of two labour line named Gudamline and Gudamtar out of total 2000 population of 6 labour lines have been taken as sample. The study finds that workers socio-economic condition is medium, they have no complaints against their working condition, the main problems in this study area are lack of water availability, non- existence of H.S school, market, hospitals, health centres, healthcare etc. If we give a focus on education we can see the literacy rate among the female is enough lower than the male literacy rate which focuses on the gender inequality in education. Not only this if we compare the educational level of male and female population it will be shown that the percentages of female population are gradually declining from primary to higher studies level than the male population. Male work participation rate is also higher (54%) than the female work participation rate (46%) among regular workers.

Keywords: Gender-inequality, Socio-economic condition, Tea garden workers

1. Introduction

Plantation agriculture is well known for its intensive use of labour. For tea cultivation and manufacturing this becomes more relevant as labour engagement is the key factor that controls the production, manufacturing etc. In another words the dependency on the traditional human practice and local workforce that have inherited skill, ultimately helps to run the total system smoothly. Actually in recent days the research and discussion about the socio-economic condition of the tea garden worker is a very pertinent topic in the scenario of West Bengal more specifically for the districts lying at north. From the mid 19th century the tea plantation was established in Darjeeling. From then to till now the industries have faced number of fluctuations in its journey. At present Darjeeling district have 87 tea estates covering an area of more than 17000 hectares. The production is almost 10.01 million kg of tea annually (Thapa.N, 2012). Number of researches has been done to explore the educational status, social condition, nutritional status of the tea garden workers. More specifically the social condition of the women workforce has been highlighted. So the studies on the socio-economic condition and work participation help to reveal the actual status of the workers. Thapa.N (2012) supported the view of Joseph & George (2010) to explain the importance of the plantation agriculture and its labour requirement which is considered as “the major source of livelihood and employment for the population of a regional economics” (p.5). So it is expected that participation of the local people in the tea garden as workers should help to improve their employment status & standard of living. Actually in general terms two basic occupations are common in Darjeeling district one is tourism related and another is related with tea production and manufacturing. The seasonal dependency and variability of the tourist flow makes tea production and manufacturing as the most available, luscious and reliable occupation. Due to the vast extent and suitable environment it is very easy to realize that the engagement as a tea garden worker or tea manufacturing industry worker is an easy option for survival of specific social class population. A specific look on the labour types displays that the workers engaged in the tea industry are of three types. They may be permanent estate worker, casual estate workers and self employed small tea growers. However the nature of employment as tea garden or industry workers mainly shows intensive women labour engagement. In a report published by the Tea Board of India (2007) displays that in Darjeeling district there are almost 53000 people engaged as permanent worker in tea manufacturing industry, while extra 15000 people are employed specifically in the plucking season. Among these workforce more than 60% workers are females. In this context it becomes important to explore the socio economic status of the tea garden worker and also to find out if there exists any sort of gender inequality within the workers or not. Another aspect is if there lies any difference in the standard of living within the families those are engaged as tea garden worker and those who are not.

1.1. Objectives

The proposed study is mainly concerned with the assessment of analyse the socio-economic condition & nature of gender inequality of tea garden labourers in the Upper fagu tea garden in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal. The main objectives of the study are –

1. To find out the socio-economic status of the tea garden labourers.
2. To find out if there exist any gender inequality among the workers.
3. To compare the workers' level of consciousness about their rights and privileges.

1.2. Methodology

For the lack of sufficient and reliable secondary data this study is fully based on the information and data collected from the primary survey. 423 populations of 87 household were randomly selected as sample for the survey in which 231 populations are male and 192 populations are female. Primary data have collected by interview method with the help of a questionnaire designed for this purpose. Both quantitative and qualitative data has been collected. Qualitative data has been collected from the focussed group selected from the sample. By the use of data collected from primary survey it has been possible to represent the real picture of workers' condition. To assess the female workers' level of consciousness about their rights and privileges a separate questionnaire was formed. 50 female workers from the 87 household were chosen randomly for this purpose.

1.3. Study Area

The selected study area Upper Fagu tea garden is a census village of Gorubathan block of Darjeeling district. This village is well known for one of the tea estates among 87 tea estates of Darjeeling district. It is located approximate 42 km from Chalsa more and ... km from new mal junction. The Gorubathan town is situated opposite of the village more specifically on the opposite or right bank of the Chel River. Upper fagu tea garden village is located at the left bank of the Chel River at the vicinity of Darjeeling hilly tracts. The elevation of this village is ranges between 700 m at the north and north-west due to existence of the hilly tracts and then the elevation gradually decreases to 300m at the extreme south valley. A strong geological framework makes the physical set up more complicated one. The region is surrounded by structurally originated highly dissected valley. The depositional terrace exists on the western foot hills belongs to Pleistocene era and the rest part was evolved in Holocene era. These are surrounded by the Chalsa formation at south and Buxa formation and Sijua formation on the east and west. However the existing slopes of the surrounding hills vary from 28° to 3° and this hill slopes are used for intensive tea cultivation. The soil of this zone is basically red & yellow soil and rainfall varies from 280 cm to 300 cm in average annually. From the demographic point of view there are 780 families with almost 3587 population. Among them 1826 are males and 1761 are females according to census 2011 and according to census 2001 there was 616 households with 2986 population. The male population was 1500 where as the female population was 1486. 362 children contribute 10.09 % of the total population. Average sex ratio of this village is 964 more than sex ratio of west Bengal.

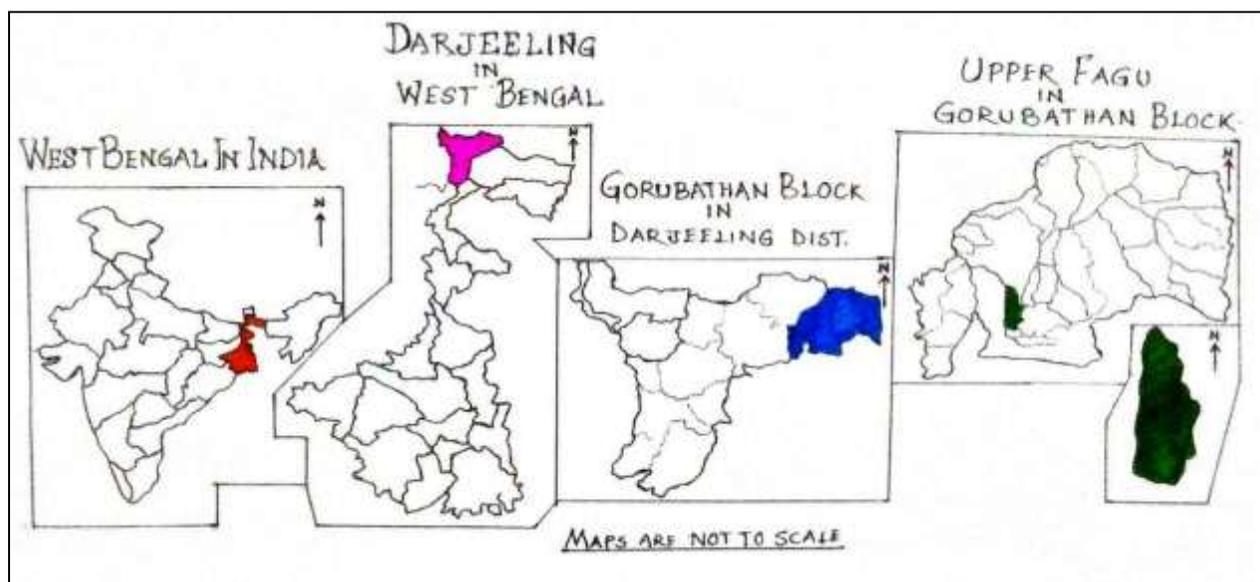


Figure 1: Location of the Study Area

2. Findings and Analysis

2.1. Social Characteristics

On the basis of its suitable physical environment, drainage system, soil characteristics the socio – economic structure of Upper Fagu tea garden has been formed. The studied villages are located at the advantageous location in this tea garden. Approximately 50% of the surveyed population are engaged in the tea garden in various works related to tea production. In general most of the families are dependent fully on the tea garden. The land where they live, the woods by which their houses are made of, electricity etc. all are

provided them by the tea estate or factory. In each and every family there is minimum one person who is working in the tea garden or in the tea factory. So it can be said that the economy of this area is fully depending upon the tea garden.

2.2. Demographic Characteristics

Demography is the statistical study of human populations which analyze any kind of dynamic living population, i.e., one that changes over time or space. It encompasses the study of the size, structure, and distribution of populations. It also focuses on spatial or temporal changes in population in response to time, birth, migration, aging, and death. The broader field of social demography or population studies also analyzes the relationships between economic, social, cultural and biological processes influencing a population. The identification of population and demographic characteristics will help to provide a better understanding of the community that is surveyed. The different characteristics that may be helpful in creating a community profile include: Population, age and sex distributions, race, and educational attainment, per capita income and percent persons below poverty. The primary survey has revealed the demographic characteristics by analysing age-sex composition, caste and religion structure etc. It has been shown that among the total surveyed population 67% belong to the Hindu religion, 18% belong to the Buddhist and 15% belong to the Christian religion. Out of 423 populations of 87 families 48% are of OBC category, 30% are of general category and 17% and 5% population are of scheduled tribe and scheduled caste population respectively. Most of the population has migrated from Nepal, so 87% people speak in Nepali language, 11.6% people speak in Hindi and only 1.4% people knows Bengali among the total population. Population are distributed in different age group. From the age-sex pyramid it has been revealed that maximum number of population is concentrated in the age group of 15-60 yrs. Approximately 71% out of total surveyed population fall under this age group so that the pyramid has a wider middle portion while the base and top of the pyramid is narrow which depicts the large ratio of independent people and the low dependency ratio which is a good sign for economic development.

2.3. Educational Level

The dimension, Activity, and other socio-economic and cultural characteristics, level of development, wellbeing of any population and society is directly related with the educational status of that population. In our study area there are only one primary and one secondary school. Other primary, secondary and senior secondary schools are situated approximately 20 kms. Away, located in Mull Bazaar, the only market area in this region. Students have to go and stay Siliguri for higher studies which is which is the only nearest town where colleges are situated. There is no college within 72 kms from our study area which is a great barrier to meeting the needs of higher studies for the inhabitants of this village. However, the study of educational status of the people of this area reveals that adult literacy rate among the surveyed population is 66.37 % among which 38.26 % is male literate and 28.11 % is female literate. The ratio reveals two matters one is that the educational status of this area is medium and the second is that the literacy rate among the female is enough lower than the male literacy rate which focuses on the gender inequality in education. Not only this if we compare the educational level of male and female population it will be shown that the percentages of female population are gradually declining from primary to higher studies level which (declination) is much greater than the male population. The causes behind this inequality in educational status and level between male and female population and behind the lower rate population in higher studies, which we guess after discussing with local people, are -1. Financial problem, 2. Ignorance, 3. Distance of H.S school and colleges from this area. The following table shows the educational level of male and female population :

Educational Level											
Illiterate		Primary		Secondary		H.S		Graduation		P.G	
M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
55	61	52	43	48	38	20	7	7	6	5	3
Total Adult Population 345 Among 423 Persons											

Table 1: Level of Education

Source: Primary Survey

2.4. Health Status and Health Facilities

Health status of population living in a society also reflects the socio-economic condition as well as human wellbeing and development of the society. In our study area due to the pollution free fresh air and atmosphere, health condition of the inhabitants is good. From the perception survey on health condition it has revealed that 66.66 % respondent said good about their health condition, 32.18 % respondent said moderate and only 1.16 % respondent said bad about their health condition. Health facilities are not sufficient enough. Not only this almost every villagers especially the young and children regularly take their physical exercise, jogging, rising at very early in the morning. But health facility is very poor in this village. It is very surprising that there is not a single dispensary in the village. Health care, health centres, hospitals, dispensary, medicine shop all are located in the mull bazaar market area. People living in this village used to take Ayurvedic medicines themselves which they collect from the forests in common diseases like cold, cough and fever etc. Although these are also occur rare. But in emergency they have to travel far in mull bazaar.

Respondents' Perception About Health Condition		
Good	Moderate	Bad
58	28	1

Table 2: Perceptions about Health Condition
Source: Primary Survey

2.5. Quality of Living

From the data collected it is clear that the general living condition of the labourers are moderate/medium. Private sanitary system (low cost latrine) are found in maximum houses (47%), septic tank is found in 27% household but rest of the people use open field for toilet which is unhygienic for their health and for the environment in which they are living. The condition of sewage system is very bad in this village. Only one drain is found in Godamtar labour line in the whole village. Otherwise no facility for waste disposal, provided by the government or the factory is found. The most common process for waste disposal that is found is solid waste are disposed by dumping on vacant land within the house. At the same time the only source of drinking water and water for daily other household works, toilet etc. is jhora (small stream in local language). There is no tap or tube well seen in the village. Only by a pipe from jhora, water is distributed in every houses. So, problem of drinking water and water for other household uses is one of the main problem of this village, mainly from mid-winter to mid summer season i.e. in between December to May. The area is politically stable and none of the people from our sample is directly involved in politics. All villagers use mobile phones for communicating. Television is found in almost 60 % of the houses, 62 % household use *chulla* for cooking and 34 % household has LPG connection. Besides this water purifier, bike, inverter, are also found in some houses. Electricity has found in all the houses of the village which are being provided by the tea factory.

2.6. Economic Condition

Economic analysis is very much important in determining all other socio-cultural attributes associates of a region. It has been stated earlier that occupational structure of this area is predominant with primary and secondary workers (91 %) where as only 9 % population among the earning population are engaged in tertiary services, and these 91 % primary and secondary workers are engaged mainly in the tea garden and factory. From the primary survey it has been revealed that Upper Fagu tea estate under Gorubathan block consists of six labour lines. We have surveyed only two labour lines namely *Gudamtar* and *Gudamline*, amongst them. It is seen that a large number of working population in this two labour lines, as mentioned above, are engaged in different works in tea garden like tea plantation, tea plucking and tea manufacturing etc..The female workers are mainly engaged in tea plucking and the male workers are engaged in all tea plantation, tea plucking and manufacturing, related works. Those who are engaged in tea plantation and tea plucking are employed only during the plucking season and for the rest of the years they remain unemployed. During this time many of them practice horticulture, vegetable farming, kitchen gardening etc. within their houses. Female members are also engaged in this work. However, almost 80 % of the household belong to the below poverty line which may be caused by low wages in factory, lack of other job opportunity, illiteracy and work culture which they inherited from their previous generation etc. From the data collected by the primary field survey about the family income it has been revealed that in 70 % families monthly income ranges between less than 1500 to 5000 rupees. There is no wage discrimination found among male and female workers in the tea garden, women labourers get the same wage for similar work as compared to the male workers.

Family Income (in Rupees)					
Less than Rs1500/-	Rs 1500-5000/-	Rs 5000-7500/-	Rs 7500-10000/-	Rs 10000-15000/-	Above Rs15000/-
11	50	12	8	3	3

Table 3: Family Income
Source: Primary Survey

2.7. Community Development Programme

No such community development programme run by the government or the factory authority has seen. There is only a community hall for all the labour lines under Upper Fagu tea estates wherein all the meetings regarding various issues or problems of the village has been discussed. A *anganwari* (I.C.D.S) is present in the village which remain open in 3 working days per week. Monday is considered as holiday as hut commences on that day on Mull Bazar, almost 20 kms. Away from the village, as stated earlier that it is the only the nearest market from the village. All works in tea factory are also remain closed for that day. However, working mothers put their children in *anganwari* during working hours in factory. A Play ground specially for volley ball has seen in this village. otherwise there is enough vacant place or field for playing. Hardly two or three grocery shops are present within the village. Even not a single dispensary has seen here. Besides this bank, hospitals, health centres, various govt. Offices like *Gram panchayet* office, B.D.O etc. all are situated in Gorurbathanbazaar area. A project work is pursuing which has been funded by NABARD under Rural Infrastructure Development Fund for the construction of road (6.57 kms.) in this village.

3. Conclusion

From the overall study of different aspects of socio-economic characteristics of Upper Fagu tea estate under Gorubathan block in Darjeeling district it can be said that the economy of this village is mainly depending upon the tea garden and the factory. In a word the socio-economic condition of this village is moderate to satisfactory. For solving the existing problems as revealed from earlier discussions here is some suggestions we have recommended :

1. 1. Proper management for regular water supply to each and every family in the village.
2. 2. Establishment of market or at least one day's hut in a week within the village.
3. Development of frequent and sufficient transport and communication system, and mode of transport.
4. Provide necessary medical facilities to all the villagers, establishment of health cares, health centres, dispensary, medical shop etc.
5. 5. Establishment of H.S school in the village and college at least within 20 kms.
6. Government should take necessary steps or implement programmes to increase the women's consciousness about their rights.
7. Literacy awareness programme should be run by the government in these villages.
8. Various necessary steps from government should be taken for overall development of socio-economic condition of tea garden workers.

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