



A study on the living conditions of Tea Workers in perspective of Globalization with special reference to Dibrugarh District of Assam

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is opening up of the economy for world market by attaining international competitiveness. India is a labour many problems are associated with them. The study focused on the problems facing by the tea workers of Assam related with housing, health and educational problems of their children. This study aims to analyze the living conditions of the tea workers by comparing the wage structure of workers at the global level. A primary survey is conducted on 140 permanent workers both male and female working in 14 tea estates operating in Dibrugarh district of Assam. The study reveals that the condition of the tea workers is very pathetic although they avail the facilities under the provision of PLA from the garden authority. The results of this study would help to better understand the conditions of the tea workers and may throw light for further upliftment of their living conditions.

KEYWORDS : Globalization, Living conditions, Tea Workers, The Plantation Labour Act.

Introduction:

India is one of the leading producers of tea in the world. Tea Plantations are predominantly located in North-Eastern States of India, particularly Assam and Southern States of India. Assam produces 51% of tea produced in India and about 1/6th of the tea produced in the world. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam. About 17% of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry and is one of the biggest contributors to the organized workforce of the economy. (The Govt. of Assam, official website).

Globalization:

By the term globalization we mean opening up of the economy for world market by attaining international competitiveness. Thus the globalization of the economy simply indicates interaction of the country relating to production, trading and financial transactions with the developed industrialized countries of the world. Accordingly, the term globalization has four parameters:-

- Permitting free flow of goods by removing trade barriers between the countries.
- Creating environment for flow of capital between the countries.
- Allowing free flow in technology transfer.
- Creating environment for free movement of labour between the countries of the world.

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951:

A legislation known as the Plantations Labour Act, 1951 was passed in October, 1951 which came into force with effect from 01.04.1954. In the case of tea plantations, the British rulers had made some limited provisions for labour welfare. The Government of India revised them in the *Plantation Labour Act of 1951 (PLA)*, thus entrusting the responsibility for the welfare measures including health to the management.

Statement of Problems:

The working conditions of workers employed in plantations are governed by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and the rules promulgated by the State Governments. The Plantation Labour Act inter-alia requires the employer to provide to the workers and their family members medical, housing, sickness and education facility and various other social security benefits. Though, the implementations of this Act, is mandatory for all plantations, but the living conditions of tea workers are beyond the expectation even after 65 years of enactment of the aforesaid Act.

Scope of the study:

The scope of the study is restricted to assessing the working and living conditions of tea workers working in tea industry in Dibrugarh district of Assam under the provisions of 'The plantation Labour Act, 1951. The study compared the wage structure of tea workers provided by the tea authority in the states of India as well as at the global level. However, in view of the importance of the labour force the present study focused on the permanent tea workers because the PLA covers only the permanent workers.

Objectives of the Study:

More specifically, the objectives of the study are-

- To analyze the living conditions of the tea workers in Dibrugarh district of Assam by comparing the wage structure with other states in India and abroad.
- To understand the conditions in improving the quality of life of tea workers.
- To offer suggestions in the light of the study.

Research Methodology:

The present study is a descriptive study depending upon reflecting views, experience and ideas from the selected groups of the tea estates. The required information for the study collected from the respondents with the help of questionnaires. For the purpose of analysis, statistical tool like 'Simple Arithmetic Percentage' is used to draw the inferences.

Sample unit:

The researchers adopted "**Sampling with Probability Proportional to Size**" method to select the sample tea estates and 'Simple Random Method' for the determination of sample permanent workers for the study. Total **140** permanent workers are randomly drawn as sample out of total **10,983** permanent workers from **14** sample Tea Estates for the study keeping in view that they would become representative and a cross section of all the **95,543** permanent workers working in all the **137** tea estates in the selected area of study.

Period of study: The study covered the period from 1st December 2015 to 31st May 2016.

Sources of Data:

- Primary Sources:** Field Survey, Using questionnaire to

accumulate data from the respondents.

b. Secondary Sources: Reading books, visiting garden hospitals & dispensaries, collecting information from internet sources etc.

Wage Structure:

The wage structure of tea workers in all the tea producing states in India is not uniform. The minimum wage rate of workers in India is Rs. 150. But it also not strictly followed particularly in Assam and West Bengal. The wage structure in different states in India is indicating from the table given below:

Table: 1 Daily Rate of Wages of Tea Workers in major Tea producing states in India Up to 2014

Name of States	Daily Rate of Wages
Assam	Rs. 94
West Bengal	Rs. 95
Tamil Nadu	Rs. 209.27
Kerala	Rs. 216.53
Karnataka	Rs. 228.35

Source: Indian Tea Association & the United Planters' Association of Southern India

It is evident that daily wages in Assam and West Bengal is significantly lower, not even 50% of the wages that prevail in the tea plantations of Southern States. The survey results reveal that the average daily earnings of the workers employed as plantation labour works out to be at Rs. 94 irrespective of permanent and casual and male and female labours. The current minimum wages of workers in the top 10 tea producing countries in the world is shown below:

Table: 2 Current Minimum Wages of Workers in Top 10 Tea producing countries in the world

Sl. No.	Countries	Annual Minimum Wages (in US\$)	Annual Minimum Wages (in Rs) 1 \$ (Dollar) = Rs.67.44
1.	China	1,661	1,12,017.84
2.	India	767	51,726.48
3.	Kenya	742	50,040.48
4.	Sri Lanka	689	46,466.16
5.	Turkey	9031	6,09,050.64
6.	Indonesia	1,112	74,993.28
7.	Vietnam	1,362	91,853.28
8.	Japan	13,606	9,17,588.64
9.	Iran	2,835	1,91,192.40
10.	Argentina	9,584	6,46,344.96

Source: <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/list-> accessed on 31st May 2016.

From the table it is clear that the minimum wages of workers in Japan is Rs.9,17,588.64, which is much higher comparatively than other top 10 tea producing countries. Whereas, the minimum wages of workers in Sri Lanka is Rs. 46,466.16, which is much lower comparatively than other top 10 tea producing countries.

Medical Facilities:

The existing dispensary provided by the tea planter is under- staffed and not fully equipped and do not store the required medicines for which during medical emergencies they have to rush to the nearest Primary Health Centres or to the Civil Hospital.

Educational Facilities:

However, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for the tea tribes is 67.04 against 84.97 for the State, the percentage of children never enrolled is 21.35 against 19.26 and percentage of currently not-

enrolled is 51.99 against 33.37. This clearly reflects the poor status of primary education in the tea garden areas.

Housing Facilities:

The management of tea estates has to provide housing facility to its workers under the provisions of PLA and look after health and sanitation in their residential areas. The level of satisfaction of tea workers regarding housing facility provided by tea estates is shown in table – 3.

Table: 3 Satisfaction Level of Sample Tea workers regarding Housing facility provided by Tea Estates

Satisfaction Level	Number of Workers	Percentage
Highly Satisfied	0	0%
Moderately Satisfied	14	10%
Averagely Satisfied	23	16.43%
Less Satisfied	34	24.29%
Not Satisfied at all	69	49.28%
Total	140	100%

Source: Primary data compiled from the field survey

From the table it is seen that 49.28% of the sample tea workers are not satisfied at all, 24.29% of sample tea workers are less satisfied, 16.43% of sample workers are averagely satisfied, 10% of sample tea workers are moderately satisfied and none of them is highly satisfied from the housing facility provided by the tea estates.

Key Findings:

1. The pay period of the plantation labours working in tea garden is on 12 day basis where daily wage is Rs.94/- irrespective of gender.
2. Tea workers of Assam aren't getting the minimum wages i.e., Rs. 150 per day.
3. The average monthly salary of tea workers of Assam is Rs.2250/- which is very nominal and almost 2.5 times less than the average monthly salary of the tea workers of southern India.
4. The current annual minimum wages of tea workers in India is Rs. 51,726, which is almost 18 times less than the minimum wages of tea workers of Japan.
5. The rate of school drop-out of the tea workers children is high due to poverty although GER is high. This is a very pathetic scenario.
6. The medical facilities provided to tea workers are also not satisfactory.
7. They do not have proper sanitation facility and water supply facility.
8. They live in an unhygienic environment without basic amenities.

Suggestions:

There should be proper labour development programme covering various aspects like the following:

1. Minimum wages are not adequate to meet basic needs, so increase of labour wage and labour compensation is most essential.
2. Tea garden schools are providing only primary education to the children's of tea workers, these schools should be upgraded upto Secondary level.
3. School drop-outs and the reasons for the same should be monitored by the officials of the education department.
4. The condition of garden hospitals should be improved, adequate number of doctors, nurses should be appointed and medicines should be available in the hospital dispensaries for maintaining

good health of the tea workers and their families.

5. Provision of sanitation and proper drinking water facilities.

6. Raising awareness about good nutrition, health and sanitation practices through education programs.

7. The government of Assam should create a new department exclusively for tea labour welfare to regulate all the tea gardens in Assam for the improvement of living condition of tea workers.

Conclusion:

India is the second largest tea producing country in the world. Tea industry of India is labour intensive. But the tea workers of Assam have been exploited by the employers. Their living condition is very pathetic. Due to the globalization and liberalization policy adopted the government of India as well as the foreign countries of the world free movement of workers from one country to another country is becoming easier. So, the employer/management of tea estates should try to maintain a good industrial relation with the workers by providing more facilities for the improvement of their living condition, otherwise labour turnover will become a serious problem for the tea industry in the coming days.

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