

ABSTRACT

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF WOMEN IN TEA GARDENS: A CASE STUDY OF TERAJ OF DARJEELING AND JALPAIGURI DISTRICTS OF WEST BENGAL

Introduction: In west Bengal, there are two districts namely Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri are important for producing tea and officially known as ‘**Tea Districts**’ of West Bengal. There are three geographical areas such as Darjeeling hills, Terai, and Dooars where teas are mostly developed. Being a labour intensive industry, around 50.00 per cent women get opportunities to work because their soften hands and nimble fingers are suited for plucking with two leaves and one bud efficiently. The condition of tea garden workers is much worst in term of their social, economical and other related aspect of livelihood. They are deprived of provision of workers’ facilities i.e. (PLA, 1951) accommodation, electricity, day care facilities, Children’s educational facilities, social securities (i.e. Gratuity, Provident fund, Annual bonus, Pension.) and maternity benefits. Due to meagre wages they are economically deplorable and extremely vulnerable in all forms of exploitation. Their awareness regarding socio-culture, economic, political & outer exposure are very narrow to live in present day situation.

Objectives:

- I. To investigate the livelihood condition of the Tea garden Women of Terai region of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of North Bengal.
- II. To find out the Social condition of Women in Tea gardens of Terai region of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of North Bengal.
- III. To investigate the Economic condition of Women in Tea gardens of Terai region of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts of North Bengal.
- IV. To find out the Problems of Tea garden Women.
- V. To suggest the strategies for the upliftment of the Socio-economic condition of Tea garden Women of the study area.

Hypotheses:

1. Most of the families are nuclear
2. Most of women are engaged in Tea leaves plucking

3. Women get married even before 18 years
4. The literate women are more aware of family planning
5. Most women are aware of Government Health facilities
6. The Christian tribal women possess better social conditions.
7. Political awareness is more among the literate women

Database and Methodology: The stratified Random Sampling method has been adopted to fulfil the study taking 75 per cent Register tea gardens of the study area. For surveying, tea gardens have been selected purposively and finally 25 households have been selected randomly from each tea garden adopting Simple Random Sampling without Replacement (SRSWR) sampling method. To find out the livelihood condition as well as socio-economic condition the composite index related to Housing Quality Living, Standard of Living, Decadal changes in livelihood, their overall socio-economic condition have been executed.

Findings: The literacy scenario of the study area is very miserable, only 68.45 per cent people are literate and the educational attainment is very poor where only 30.58 percent and 6.07 per cent attain at Primary and Higher Secondary level. The occupational diversification is very poor, some of people engaged in constructional works, driving and petty business. The pattern of family expenditure is very low where most of their earning spends for fooding and rice beer drinking. People living in company quarters are mostly unhygienic and weak and not repaired regularly by garden authority. The source of drinking water is Dug-well and Tube-well, Pipe-line and Tap. Even people collect water from a distance of 0.5 km and sources of drinking water also unhygienic. So they are suffering from various water born diseases. Another way, most of women especially Christian women prefer to study their children in private nursery school and Christian missionary school at initial stages for their better education and punctuality. A few Respondents replied that their children benefitted from free studentship and material facilities. Since women are illiterate, so they are unaware in maternity, reproductive health where ASHAs, ANMs and Health workers take vital role to made awareness of women. They are lagging due to poverty and illiteracy although more or less, they aware in family planning and its preventive measures due to aware by health workers. Their visiting intensity in essentials places is (P.O, Bank, B.D.O, DM, Health Centre, Children Schools, Religious places, Police station and interested places) not

frequent. Their exposure to mass media is very poor. Most of people of Tea gardens believe in superstitions and traditional doctors. They also face some discrimination at work places, common gathering, hotel, shop, transport, religious occasion and festivals even in religious places due to poor occupation, illiteracy and birth in castes.

Although casual and bigha workers are more than permanents workers, casual workers engaged mostly in peak season and earn Rs. 132.50 per day and get almost Rs.3000 per month. The workers are paid in weekly and fortnightly at the day of periodic hat. Majority of them engaged in job after getting married (75.30 per cent). They are not satisfied on earning even mostly, reluctant to continue works. They also income from dairy farming at home by selling milk and its products. They also aware in saving in future and deposit in LIC, Bank, Post Office at peak season but not aware much in government saving policies. Being employment of organised industry, they support a trade union but did not know name of their trade union because of illiteracy where they know only political affiliation of their trade union and just satisfied with functions of the trade union.

Conclusion: Finally for the uplifting of women in tea gardens of the study areas, they should aware about different women development schemes and programme. To aware in different social and economical aspects regular awareness should be arranged where tea gardens authority and local communities may take a vital responsibility. There should be focused on child education, health and hygiene, alternatives income generating activities for their better livelihood. Finally it is necessary to fully implement the PLA, 1951 and 1956 (Amendment) and made aware to workers of the tea gardens about their basic rights in their working field. Finally government and Non government organisations should look and take necessary action for pushing these deprived and disadvantage tea tribes toward mainstream of society.