

ABSTRACT

ROLE OF WOMEN WORKERS, THEIR PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS IN THE TEA GARDENS OF DARJEELING DISTRICT, WEST BENGAL, INDIA

The role of women workers in the tea plantation of Darjeeling District holds the view that women should be studied in terms of role, function and attributes. In the tea plantation of Darjeeling District, women constitute a substantial proportion of the population. Apart from their work, women also look after their houses, perform the routine work meant for them, and supplement other economic activities. In this way, the multiple roles of women workers influence the garden society assertively.

Thirty tea gardens of Darjeeling, fifteen from Hill and fifteen from Terai, have been considered. Detailed study reveals that those gardens are in a good position which provides adequate facilities to their workers. Women workers are more committed and sincere to the garden work. So, motivational measures and skill-enhancing training should improve women workers' workability, directly affecting the production level. The economic role of women workers as wage labourers has some special significance for understanding the position in the garden society. Women workers enjoy more freedom than women outside the garden society in decision-making for purchases and expenditures. Nevertheless, hazardous situations influence the life and livelihood of women workers.

The plantation women workers, in general, are still primitive, ignorant and conservative by nature. They are afraid of change, unambitious, prone to violence, easily excitable and unresponsive to incentives. They prefer to pass a solitary life under a unique framework. Thus, the demographic pattern curved out from the development of tea plantations, and its labour settlement has invited many socioeconomic and political dimensional problems. It has had a far-reaching impact on the socioeconomic, cultural and political life of the women workers in the Darjeeling district. However; still, women workers show few positive gestures towards their work and the work culture of the plantation system. Women workers are sincere in their work. They only know the plantation work by heredity and ensure that they are the future workforce of the plantation system.

Production level reveals that more advanced gardens can provide the facilities to their women workers. Production of tea from 2000 to 2016 shows a regular growing pattern observed in the production of tea gardens. However, in the last few years, production has fallen in all of the tea gardens in the district. Tea gardens like Makaibari, Orange Valley, Badamtam, Gayabari & Millikthong, and Marybong produced good quality tea in remarkable quantity. Tea gardens like Kanchan View, Risheehat, Singbulli, and Sourenee are not remarkable with their regular production rate of tea. Kanchan View tea garden opened in 2012 and was closed in 2009; it had been closed due to some internal dissatisfactions. Thus, production was reduced than the surrounding tea garden of Darjeeling Hill. On the other hand, in the Terai region, tea gardens like Bagdogra, Atal, Lahagrh, ORD, Sukna, and Tarrinnaha are placed in an important position in tea production. However, tea production is fluctuating in the tea gardens of Gaya Ganga, Kamala, Kiran Chandra, and Sanyashithan.

Geographically Darjeeling district is divided into two brought categories of physiographic setup. One is the adjoining hills of Darjeeling, and another is the Terai plain area. Socio-economically also, these two regions are different from each other. Socially Darjeeling Hill area is dominated by the Nepali community, while the workers from the Chotanagpur plateau and adjoining area dominate the Terai plain. These two communities live their lives differently. So, socio-culturally and politically, Darjeeling Hill and Terai Plain play different roles. However, if we see the policies taken under consideration by different authorities of gardens and government, it is clear that policies are taken on a common platform. The garden authorities do not encourage any integrated or particular focused plan or strategies. However, this is very much needed to improve the garden society. Assessing the role of women in this context is essential, and it will be beneficial for an increase in production and smooth-running condition of the gardens.

The First Chapter, "**Introduction**", is the introductory chapter that deals with the statement of the problem, study area, significance, objective, hypothesis, literature review and methodology. Considering scopes of the study, the literature has been reviewed under aims and objectives. Three hypotheses have been taken into consideration. Different quantitative measures and techniques have been considered, which are discussed in the methodology part.

Chapter Two, "**Physical Background of the Study Area**", deals with the physical background of the Darjeeling District. The Darjeeling District is broadly divided into two major physiographic divisions. One is the Hill area and Terai Plain region. The

climate of the Darjeeling District is favourable for tea cultivation. Heavy rainfall and moderate to low temperatures are essential for the tea bushes. Darjeeling Hill area has a slope landform suitable for tea cultivation. Vegetations flourished according to the height of the landform. Tea bushes flourished above the height of four thousand feet. Various type of soil is found in the Darjeeling District. Mainly podzol-based soil is suitable for tea cultivation which is available in this soil zone. Thus, the physiographic conditions which are responsible for tea cultivation are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter Three, "**Historical and Cultural Background of the study area**", deals with the historical and cultural background of the study area. In the year 1841, tea plants were cultivated for the first time in the Hill of Darjeeling district. After its successful commercial cultivation of tea was taken into consideration, tea estates were established. Most of the tea gardens in the Terai region were established around the 19th century. The cultural background of the tea plantation is also taken into consideration. In this chapter, past accounts of workers have been taken under consideration to understand the labourer pattern.

Chapter Four, "**The Condition of Tea Plantation in Darjeeling District**", deals with the conditions of the tea plantation in the Darjeeling district. In this chapter, investment pattern has been taken into consideration. A detailed analysis of the production scenario has been discussed in this chapter. This chapter logically deals with the hypothesis. Tea plantation is a labour-intensive industry dominated by women workers. Women workers are the main driving force in the Darjeeling tea industry. Women workers are present at a sixty per cent rate, so a definite influence of women labourers can be observed in the tea industry. Thus, the Socioeconomic conditions of women workers directly influence the tea industry.

Chapter Five, "**Socioeconomic Status of Women Workers in Tea Gardens of the Study Area**", considers the socioeconomic status of women workers in the study area. Education, Income, Household, Health Status, Facilities provided to the women workers, Marital Status, Security Status of women workers, and Work Participation Rate have been considered to assess the socio-economic life of women workers in the study area. After discussing all the socio-economic aspects of the study relationship between production, yield, and socio-economic conditions of women workers has been taken under consideration. In this relationship, the Likert scale has been considered, having a degree of one to five specifically for the household amenities, household facilities, educational facilities and medical facilities. ANOVA calculations have been considered

to determine the relationship between women workers' socioeconomic conditions, production and yield.

Chapter Six, "**Problem Associated with the Women Workers in the Tea Gardens,**" deals with the problems of women workers face daily. This chapter focuses on major problems like geographical constraints, problems related to women's and nutritional health, worker's issues, lack of transport and communication, etc. Addiction is a significant problem in the tea garden areas both in the Hill and Terai regions. The condition of tea gardens is better where the problems are less. Life and livelihood are smooth in those gardens where managers are responsible to their workers.

Chapter Seven, "**Prospects of Plantation Women Workers**", deals with the prospects of plantation women workers. The most important part of the study is the findings, discussed in this chapter. Perceptions of women workers are also discussed in this chapter. The prospects of the women workers have been considered and logically discussed. Improved conditions for women workers can enhance the conditions of the tea industry.

Chapter Eight, "**Development Strategies and Recommendations for the Plantation Women Workers**", is designed for the developmental strategies and recommendations for women workers. Strategies have been considered depending on the two unique geographical areas of the district. In the concluding part, twelve recommendations have been taken into consideration. In the end, Bibliography and Appendices are attached for better comprehension.