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STUDY ON THE LABOUR WELFARE OF TEA PLANTATIONS IN NORTH BENGAL REGION

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Abstract

Labour is one of the most important assets in any organization for the enhancement of productivity. The concept of 'labour welfare' is dynamic. Multifarious dimensions of labour welfare enable labourers to maintain a partly and a comfortable life. Consequently, it leads to higher productivity of labour and proficiency of an enterprise. It also amplifies the value of the existent labourers by circuitously release the compulsion on their purse. The Plantation Labour Act enshrines the welfare of the labourers by way of ensuring facilities such as canteens, crèches, transportation, recreation, education for the children, suitable house accommodation of plantation workers and for their families in and around the work places of plantation, etc. In the present study, a deliberate effort has been drawn up to showcase the existing scenario of labour welfare facilities among the tea estates owned by different tea companies located in the North Bengal region of West Bengal. For the purpose of the study, 33 tea estates have been selected scientifically from the study region. ANOVA technique has been used to analyze the collected data. The study has found the significant imparity based on the labour welfare expenses among tea estates of the study region.

Key Words: *Labour, Welfare, Plantation Labour Act, Productivity, North Bengal region.*

1. Introduction

According to legend, the Queen of Beverage (tea) was discovered first in China by the fabled Chinese monarch cum herbalist, Sheh Nung, in 2737BC. Tea industry in India may trace back by 1823 while discovering of homespun tea plant in Assam by Robert Bush, a Scottish adventurer

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(Gangadhar and Srijeet, 2009). According to the recent report published by Tea Board of India (TBI) in 2017, India occupies the position of the second largest tea producer which is just after China. India produced 22.68 percent of global production of tea in 2016. India also occupies the third largest position as exporter of tea and exported 12.19 percent of tea export in the world market by 2016 (Tea Board of India, 2017).

In India, as per the geographical location, tea industry get divided; tea industry of north India and tea industry of south India. Northern part of Bengal and Assam are the major tea producing areas of the north Indian tea industry. Dooars, Terai, Darjeeling, Cachar, Darrang, Dibrugarh, Sibsagar, etc. are the prime tea producing regions of north India. Out of the entire tea production in India, the north Indian tea industry produced 1 008.56 million kilograms, where the total production of North Bengal, which comprises of Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling regions were 329.70 million kilograms in 2016.

2.0: Brief Profile of North Bengal Tea Industry

Tea industry of North Bengal lies under the Himalayan foothills and covering the districts of Alipurduar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling and few parts of Coochbehar in West Bengal. Technically, the entire tea producing region of Bengal has been termed into Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling. Terai covers the area of Siliguri sub-divisions of Darjeeling districts and a part of Uttar Dinajpur district. Darjeeling covers Kurseong and Kalimpong sub-divisions of the Darjeeling district. Dooars widely covers Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and a part of Coochbehar district. Dooars is the biggest tea producing region in Bengal and even in north India. A total of 276 organized tea estates of the North Bengal plays monumental role in the economy of this region. The industry provides 262 426 employments directly and several millions indirectly. There are seven employers' associations and 22 trade unions registered under the banners of different political parties.

2.1: Labour Welfare

The word 'welfare' means as per the dictionary meaning, the status of well-being, happiness, good health, comfort, protection, safety, etc.

In general, the term implies that the deliberate efforts made for the advancement of the individuals or community (Ajit Kumar, 2006). Betterment of individuals or group of individuals somehow relates with physical, mental, emotional, etc. The efforts may be shaped by the government, NGOs, business organizations and the like (Das, 2009). On the other hand, the recipients of such efforts may be the individuals or group of individuals or class. Specifically, labour welfare means that the efforts made by the employer,

government, trade unions, and other agencies for the upswing of the social conditions of labourers (Flippo, 1984).

The Plantation Labour Act, (PLA) 1951 provides guidelines for the plantation labourers to the planters regarding welfare facilities. The Act guides that the employer has to provide housing facilities of all permanent workers and their families, educational facilities for their children, medical facilities for workers and families, effective arrangements of drinking water for the workers, canteen facility, crèches facility and recreational facility.

Besides these statutory welfare measures for the plantation labourers, there are certain other non-statutory welfare benefits are also to be given by the employers. These non-statutory benefits are mainly based on the demand that workers submit through the unions to the employer. Such non-statutory benefits are concessional/ subsidized food grains, fuel (fire wood), umbrella, slippers, tarpaulin, kambal (blanket), etc.

3. Statement of the Problem

The tea industry of India has been passing through crises since completion of the last century. Due to the emergence of globalization, Indian tea industry has been facing a tough competition in the world market due to several factors; free trade agreement is the most important one. So, to remain in a competitive position, tea planters especially in the North India have adopted cost minimization strategies. Notable cost minimizations have been made on labour cost which results in irregular payments of wages, non-payment or reduction of bonus, gratuity, provident fund, etc. In addition to these fuels, subsidize food grains, education facilities, health services, drinking water, house accommodations, etc. i.e. welfare facilities for the workers have been eroded.

In this background an endeavor has been drawn up to observe in details about the pattern of treatment of the labour welfare of the tea plantations which are situated in the North Bengal region.

4. Review of Literature

Several studies have been conducted on various aspects of Indian tea industry. A notable and relevant research works in connection with the statement of problem have been referred below to frame the objectives in our present study.

Asopa (2007) has highlighted that the demand has declined in the global market of Indian tea. Thus, the industry needs to be competitive in production, marketing, logistics and product forms. The study further reveals

that for being one of the chief producers of tea, India needs thoroughly organized production and marketing systems where small tea growers could be able to trace sufficient space in the world market.

Mitra (2010) studied on globalization and industrial relations in tea plantations of Dooars region. The study focused on comparison of variety of parameters of industrial relations relating to tea industry. The study used paired sample t-test. The study finally concludes that globalization has an ill effect on the tea plantation industry that has made the industry vulnerable in Dooars region.

John & Monsingh (2013) studied on the Plantation Labour Act (PLA) and social cost with reference to tea industry of Dooars. The aim of the study was to find out the rationale and source of argument that the legislation intends to trace the needs for welfare of workers. The study further aimed to investigate that whether PLA has really empowered the worker and how much for the inclusive outreach. Study concluded with that the provisions of PLA did not significantly lead to empowerment of workers.

Goowalla (2014) conducted study on the corporate social responsibility for workers in tea industry in Assam. The study aimed at sustainable development, responsibility and roles of tea industry towards its workers. In the study, twenty respondents were selected randomly. The study only used graphical methods for its analysis. The study concludes with that the industry playing a vital role for the sustainability of the workers. The study further reveals that workers are unaware regarding the benefits which are available for them.

Baishya (2016) studied on the history of the tea plantation industry and the position of tea labourers in Assam. The study emphasized on the root of tea industry in the state and to showcase the condition of tea labourers in Assam. The study was descriptive in nature. The study concluded with that the workers are suffering from getting the different welfare facilities for example- medical facilities, house, etc. The study also concluded that high rate of mortality in case of maternal and infant are the most serious issues.

Pachoni (2016) studied on labour welfare practice of Harmutty tea estates in Assam. The study focused on how to enhance the better health and life, to make them happy, efficient and satisfied by improving the intellectual, material and cultural conditions of the workers. The study concludes that the worker are still unaware about the different schemes of welfare facilities, otherwise the study has exhibited that a significant satisfaction on the part of workers.

From the extensive review of the available existing literature it has found that not a single study has been focused on the labour welfare of tea plantations located in the North Bengal region of Indian tea industry. Thus, our present study entitled ‘study on the labour welfare of tea plantations in the North Bengal region’ is relevant.

5. Objectives of the Study

From the review of literature, the following objectives have been framed:

1. To showcase the labour welfare measures adopted by various tea plantations of North Bengal region.
2. To make a comparative picture of labour welfare practices on the basis of ownership pattern of the tea plantations of North Bengal region.

6. Methodology

Sample Size: With the aid of Raosoft software, we have determined the sample size in our study. The calculated size of sample is 31 tea estates. Intentionally we have added 2 more sample i.e. total sample is 33.

In the study area, the size of population (tea estates) is 276 (Labour Department of West Bengal, 2014). Therefore, our sample size is 33 which is around 12 per cent of the target population.

Sampling Techniques: Stratified random sampling strategy has been used in the study. Stratifications have been done based on the ownership of the tea plantation. There are mainly four types of tea plantation companies exist in this region. They are Partnership Company, Public Limited Company, Proprietorship Company, and Public Sector Undertakings.

Table1: Identifications of Sample

Ownership	Public Limited Company	Proprietorship Company	Partnership Company	Public Sector Undertakings	Total
Number of Tea Estates	142	116	10	8	276
Sample Size	16	13	2	2	33
Per cent	11.26	11.20	20	25	11.95

Source: Authors own calculation.

Sources of Data: In the study, primary as well as secondary data have been used. Analysis has been done using various statistical tools to draw appropriate conclusions and recommendations.

Collection of Data: With the aid of well-structured questionnaire, the required primary information has been gathered. The questionnaire has been designed along with the objectives of the study. Secondary information has been gathered from the publication of labour department of Government of West Bengal, Tea Board of India, various research journals, books, etc. In this study, previous four years records in terms of welfare expenses have been taken into consideration.

Analytical Tools and Techniques: In our present study, one way ANOVA technique has been used to draw appropriate conclusions.

Study Area: The study has carried on in the tea belt of the northern part of Bengal which is known as North Bengal. The tea belts of North Bengal are divided into three tea producing regions; Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling.

7. Welfare Measures as per PLA, 1951

Housing Facilities

Section 15 of the Act prescribes that every employer has to provide suitable house accommodation for all permanent workers who are employed in plantation. It has noticed that only 166 591 workers have been provided houses out of 262 426 workers in the study area. The rest of workers (95 835) are yet depriving of getting housing benefits from their employers. There are six such tea estates in North Bengal and they have not at all provided housing facility to any single worker.

Educational Facilities

Section 14 of the Act prescribes that the plantations wherein the children ages between six and twelve of those workers who are permanently appointed in the plantation and if the number of such children is more than 25, the appropriate authority may frame rules to provide education in prescribed standard manner for those children.

It has been noticed that school facility is available in 231 tea estates in North Bengal out of total 276 tea estates. Children of the remaining 45 tea estates have to go to the neighboring schools for learning. Only 143 tea estates provide vehicles for school purpose. Tractors and trucks are the common mode of transportation for the school going children.

Recreational Facilities

Section 13 of the Plantation Labour Act prescribed that the planter should arrange recreational facilities for its workers as well as for the children of the workers.

It has been noticed that only 197 tea plantations have arrangements of club for the recreation purpose of the workers. In most of the plantations, it has found that the club is not in well conditions and non-operative. Play ground is available almost in all the tea plantations but for the recreational purpose it is not financially supported by the plantation management to arrange of any kind of sports or games.

Crèches

According to the section 12 of the Act, employer should provide crèches facility in every plantation where the number of women workers is 50 or more and these workers may be employed ordinarily or by the contractor and the number of children of those women workers is 20 or more (aged up to six years).

It has been found that almost in every tea estate crèches exists except in three tea estates. In most of the tea estates have found mobile crèches. Crèches have been also found under tree or tent in somewhere in open area besides the plucking plots. Number of the attendants was very less and they are not well trained. Biscuits and milks are the common food for the children in crèche. However, only in 144 tea estates supply milk in the crèches.

Canteen Facilities

Section 11 of the Act prescribes that the State Government may frame regulation for those plantations wherein 150 numbers of workers are generally engaged. One or more canteen(s) must be provided in that case and the maintenance shall be done by the employer. It has observed that only in 148 tea estates having canteen facilities for their workers and out of which 43 tea estates have subsidized facilities.

8. Analyses and Results

8.0: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA)

For conducting one way ANOVA, the following assumptions should be satisfied:

8.1: Dependent and Independent Variable

The dependent variable should be continuous. In our study, the dependent variable is previous four years average welfare expenses. So, this is continuous data. The independent variable should possess various levels. In our study, the independent variable is ownership pattern and it has four levels i.e. Partnership Company, Public Limited Company, Proprietorship Company, and Public Sector Undertakings. Hence, the first criterion has met.

8.2: Test of Normality

Normality test suggests us whether we will apply parametric test or nonparametric test. If the data set is somehow normally distributed then it would be parametric test and on the other hand, if the data set is not approximately normally distributed, it would be nonparametric test.

Ho: Data is normally distributed.

Table 2: Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Welfare Expenses	0.117	33	0.200*	0.977	33	0.694

The normality test has been shown in the above Table 2. Since we know that if the sample size is smaller than 2 000 elements, the Shapiro-Wilk test is used; otherwise, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is suggested. In the case of this study, since we have only 33 respondents, so, Shapiro-Wilk test has been followed.

In case of welfare expenses, the calculated p value of the Shapiro-Wilk test is **0.694** which is above 0.05; so, the null hypothesis is accepted. From the extracted result of the normality test conclusion may be drawn that the data set is somehow normally distributed.

8.3: Homogeneity of Variances

Ho: There is no significance difference among the group's variance.

Table 3: Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Welfare expenses			
Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
2.507	3	29	0.079

From the above Table 3, it is clearly shown that the calculated value for Levene's test is 2.507 with a significant (p) value of **0.079**. The significant

value is more than the generally accepted value of alpha ($p > .05$). Hence, we keep up the null hypothesis for the homogeneity of variance. It can be concluded that there are no statistically cabalistic differences among the variances of four groups.

For conducting the ANOVA, the data set has met the stipulated criteria. Now, we can conduct the following analysis.

8.4: Hypotheses

Ho: There are no significant differences among the various types of tea plantation company's average welfare expenses in the North Bengal region.

Ha: There are significant differences among the various types of tea plantation company's average welfare expenses in the North Bengal region.

Table 4: ANOVA

Welfare expenses					
	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	427.490	3	142.497	8.499	0.000
Within Groups	486.226	29	16.766		
Total	913.716	32			

From ANOVA Table 4, it has been noticed that the value of F is 8.499 and the corresponding 'p' value is **0.000** which is smaller than the generally accepted value of p (0.05). Hence, our null hypothesis is discarded and we may infer that there are significant differences among the various types of tea Plantation Company's average welfare expenses in the North Bengal region.

From the F ratio of ANOVA in Table 4, we have confirmed that statistically significant imparity exist somewhere among the groups being studied. Post hoc analysis elaborately describes in the Table 5, specifically where the differences exist.

In Table 5, it is detected that the differences exist among Public Limited Tea Companies and Partnership Tea Companies ($p = 0.004$), Public Limited Tea Companies and Public Sector Undertakings Tea Companies ($p = 0.004$), Proprietorship Tea Companies and Partnership Tea Companies ($p = 0.046$), Proprietorship Tea Companies and Public Sector Undertakings Tea Companies ($p = 0.044$). In all the cases, p value is smaller than 0.05.

Table 5: Multiple Comparisons

Dependent variable: Welfare expenses						
Tukey HSD						
(I) ownership	(J) ownership	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Public	Proprietor	2.90173	1.52893	0.251	-1.2638	7.0673
	Partnership	11.49750*	3.07101	0.004	3.1305	19.8645
	PSU	11.54250*	3.07101	0.004	3.1755	19.9095
Proprietor	Public	-2.90173	1.52893	0.251	-7.0673	1.2638
	Partnership	8.59577*	3.11013	0.046	0.1222	17.0694
	PSU	8.64077*	3.11013	0.044	0.1672	17.1144
Partnership	Public	-11.49750*	3.07101	0.004	-19.8645	-3.1305
	Proprietor	-8.59577*	3.11013	0.046	-17.0694	-0.1222
	PSU	.04500	4.09468	1.000	-11.1110	11.2010
PSU	Public	-11.54250*	3.07101	0.004	-19.9095	-3.1755
	Proprietor	-8.64077*	3.11013	0.044	-17.1144	-0.1672
	Partnership	-.04500	4.09468	1.000	-11.2010	11.1110

9. Findings

From the statistical examination of the study, it has been noticed that the average amount of expenses on welfare of tea plantation workers in the study are significantly unequal. The inequality has been established between the public limited tea company with partnership Tea Company and public sector undertakings Tea Company, proprietorship Tea Company with partnership Tea Company and public sector undertakings Tea Company. This inequality on labour welfare is never expected while all the sample tea plantations are operating in the same region and more over under the same frame work of the laws.

As far as the Plantation Labour Act is concerned, the scenario of welfare benefit has found worse. Regarding the housing for the workers, around 36 percent of them are deprived of the said benefits. Talking about the schools, no sufficient numbers of teachers are there. Most of the schools are

run and maintained by the State Government. Quality of education provided by these schools is abysmally poor. Mode of transportation for the school going children is also low standard. Only 148 tea estates have canteen facilities but most of these are not operating smoothly and no price chart has been found. Crèches and recreational facilities have found not up to the standard.

10. Conclusions

Labour welfare is for the betterment of the workers community. Besides payment of monetary compensation upon their physical effort they need to be nurtured properly by the way of welfare facilities. However, from the study, it may be concluded that labour welfare facilities in the tea estates of the North Bengal largely depends on the ownership pattern of the tea estates. From the study, it is justified that the tea estates are operating in the country under the same provisions of the act but they have different policies on maintenance their workforce.

The wave of globalization has led the strategy of the planters to remain competitive. Owners have taken various cost reduction strategy, labour welfare expenses is notable one. The study has revealed that some companies have realized the need to maintain labour in a recognized way and some other has felt insignificant to maintain their workforces. As a result of which a considerable amount of labour unrest has increased significantly. However, it is advisable that the labour force should be maintained and preserved in a better way to sustain the tea industry in the long run.

11. Implications and Managerial Decision Making

The existing literature meticulously reveals that tea industry in India and West Bengal region in particular has been undergoing a crisis due to low returns generated by the planters. Tea planters in this region are not in a suitable position to provide the basic amenities to the workers as per the act. As a result of which, deprived workers influenced by the unions and create pressure on the management of tea plantations. Thus the routine activity of the estate hampers and its snowball effects finally goes on the overall profitability.

On the basis of the present instance of tea industry of West Bengal it is preferred that the industry should strengthen its internal environment, especially for its workforce. To produce good quality of tea, contributions of labour is the most important factor. It is the responsibility of management of tea estates to maintain labour rigorously. It has been reported in the study that the worse kind of welfare facilities available for the workers in this region.

Such poor maintenance of workforce in terms of welfare facilities are the key factor for poor quality of tea and also responsible for the degradable industrial relations of the tea industry. Hence, the decision makers should emphasis on the fulfillments of the requirements of labours which has enshrined in the act.

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