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Unveiling the Socio-economic realities: A study of tea garden workers in Cinnamara tea estate (Jorhat district) and Purupbari tea garden (Biswanath Charali), Assam

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Abstract

Tea gardens have long been integral to the cultural and economic fabric of regions around the world, with millions of workers depending on them for their livelihoods. However, the history of tea garden workers is marked by a legacy of challenging conditions, exploitation, and marginalization. This research delved into the socio-economic realities of tea garden workers, examining the disparities and similarities between two prominent tea gardens, Cinnamora Tea Estate in Jorhat district and Purupbari Tea Garden in Biswanath Charali, Assam. The random sampling approach ensured unbiased representation, with 15 respondents from each garden, totalling 30 respondents. These gardens were selected due to their significance in the tea industry and their representation of typical socio-economic conditions. This comparative study sheds light on the socio-economic realities of tea garden workers in Cinnamora and Purupbari, Assam. The findings revealed disparities in gender distribution, education levels, housing, land ownership, and LPG access between the two estates. While both areas have made progress in certain aspects, challenges persist, particularly in education and gender equality. These insights were invaluable for policymakers, labour organizations, and stakeholders in the tea industry as they seek to address the ongoing issues faced by tea garden workers.

Keywords: Tea industry, tea workers, challenges, clothing behaviour

1. Introduction

The tea industry plays a pivotal role in Assam, contributing significantly to the state's income, with approximately 17% of its total revenue derived from this sector. Assam's prominence as the largest tea producer in India, cultivating over half of the country's tea, and contributing about one-sixth of the global tea production underscores its vital position in the agricultural-based industries of the region ^[1]. Tea gardens have been an integral part of the cultural and economic landscape in many regions around the world, employing a significant number of workers and contributing to the global tea industry. In Assam's tea industry, women constitute nearly 50 percent of the total workforce, playing a crucial role in meeting the labour demands of the tea plantations ^[2]. Throughout history, the status of tea garden workers has undergone considerable changes, reflecting broader social and economic shifts. In the past, tea garden workers often experienced challenging working conditions and meagre wages. Many tea plantations were established during the colonial era, where exploitative practices were prevalent. Workers, predominantly from marginalized communities, faced harsh labour conditions, low pay, and limited access to basic amenities such as education and healthcare. Tea workers faced increased risks while working in the gardens due to the absence of any protective gear provided to them during their work ^[3]. Their livelihoods were deeply intertwined with the success of the plantations, yet their contributions were often undervalued. Over time, various labour movements and advocacy efforts emerged, seeking better working conditions and fair treatment for tea garden workers. Through these struggles, some improvements were achieved in terms of wages, working hours, and access to social welfare.

Government interventions and labour regulations also played a crucial role in addressing the disparities in the tea industry. In the present day, the situation of tea garden workers remains diverse, varying significantly across different countries and regions. In some places, considerable progress has been made towards providing better living and working conditions for these workers. Unions and workers' rights organizations continue to advocate for fair wages, gender equality, and improved social welfare programs. However, challenges persist in many areas, including inadequate healthcare facilities, lack of proper housing, and a need for better education opportunities for the children of tea garden workers. Additionally, fluctuations in global tea demand and market dynamics can impact job security and stability for workers. In this rapidly evolving world, the future status of tea garden workers is uncertain. Global trends, changing consumer preferences, and technological advancements could potentially reshape the industry further, impacting the livelihoods of millions of workers.

2. Methodology

The socio-economic condition of tea garden workers is of paramount importance in understanding the well-being and livelihoods of those employed in this crucial sector. This research aimed to conduct a comparative study between two prominent tea gardens, Cinnamora Tea Estate in Jorhat district and Purupbari Tea Garden in Biswanath Charali, Assam. The study focused on examining the socio-economic realities of the workers in these two districts to identify potential disparities and similarities. The research seek to shed light on the challenges faced by the tea garden workers and identify opportunities for improvement in their living and working conditions.

2.1 Research Design

2.1.1 Sample Selection

The study employed a random sampling method to ensure unbiased representation of the target population. A total of 15 respondents were selected from each tea garden, yielding a combined sample size of 30. The sample size was determined based on the feasibility of data collection and the resources available for the study.

2.1.2 Selection of Tea Gardens

Cinnamora Tea Estate in Jorhat district and Purupbari Tea Garden in Biswanath Charali, Assam were chosen as the two study locations. These gardens were selected due to their significance in the tea industry and their representation of typical socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in their respective districts.

2.2 Data Collection

2.2.1 Questionnaire Development

To gather comprehensive data, a structured questionnaire was developed using Microsoft Excel. The questionnaire was designed to cover various aspects of the workers' socio-economic conditions, including income, education, housing, access to healthcare, and social welfare facilities.

2.2.2 Pre-Testing

Before administering the final questionnaire, a pre-test was conducted on a small sample of tea garden workers from a different garden to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the questions. Necessary revisions were made based on the feedback received during the pre-test.

2.2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Field visits were conducted to the selected tea gardens for data collection. The survey was carried out through face-to-face interviews with the selected respondents. The researchers explained the purpose of the study to the participants and obtained their informed consent before administering the questionnaire.

2.2.4 Data Analysis

The collected data were entered into Microsoft Excel and then imported into statistical software (e.g., SPSS or R) for analysis. Descriptive statistics and inferential analysis (e.g., T-Tests) were employed to compare the socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in the two districts.

2.2.5 Ethical Considerations

This research strictly adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and no personal information that could lead to the identification of any individual was recorded or used in the research.

3. Results

3.1 Gender: The table1 showed the distribution of respondents by gender in both estates. Cinnamora Tea Estate has 6 males (40.00%) and 9 females (60.00%), while Purupbari Tea Estate has 10 males (66.67%) and 5 females (33.33%).

3.2 Type of Family: The data displayed the composition of families as nuclear or joint. Cinnamora has 12 nuclear families (80.00%) and 3 joint families (20.00%), while Purupbari has 13 nuclear families (86.67%) and 2 joint families (13.33%).

3.3 Family Members: This category indicated the family size, categorized as small, medium, or large. In Cinnamora, 7 respondents (46.67%) have small families, 5 (33.33%) have medium families, and 3 (20.00%) have large families. In Purupbari, 5 respondents (33.33%) have small families, 8 (53.33%) have medium families, and 3 (20.00%) have large families.

3.4 Age: Respondents' ages were divided into three groups: (18-25) years, (26-33) years, and 34 and above. In Cinnamora, 2 respondents (13.33%) are in the (18-25) age group, 3 (20.00%) are in the (26-33) age group, and 10 (66.67%) are 34 and above. In Purupbari, 8 respondents (53.33%) are in the (18-25) age group, 3 (20.00%) are in the (26-33) age group, and 4 (26.67%) are 34 and above.

Education Qualification: The respondents' education levels were categorized as illiterate, elementary, and high school. In Cinnamora, 10 respondents (66.67%) are illiterate, 4 (26.67%) had an elementary education, and 1 (6.67%) has a high school education. In Purupbari, 9 respondents (60.00%) are illiterate, 6 (40.00%) have an elementary education, and none have a high school education.

3.5 Possession of House: This category indicates whether respondents own or rent their houses. In Cinnamora, 10 respondents (66.67%) own houses, and 5 (33.33%) rent. In Purupbari, 13 respondents (86.67%) own houses, and 2 (13.33%) rent.

3.6 Possession of Land: Respondents' ownership of land is categorized as yes or no. In Cinnamora, 6 respondents (40.00%) possess land, while 9 (60.00%) do not. In Purupbari, 14 respondents (93.33%) possess land, while 1 (6.67%) does not.

3.7 Possession of Ration Card: The possession of a ration card is indicated as yes or no. In both estates, the majority of respondents (more than 90%) possess ration cards.

Possession of LPG Connection: Respondents' possession of an LPG connection is categorized as yes or no. In Cinnamora,

10 respondents (66.67%) have LPG connections, while 5 (33.33%) do not. In Purupbari, 7 respondents (46.67%) have LPG connections, while 8 (53.33%) do not.

This table provides insight into the demographic characteristics, socioeconomic factors, and purchasing behaviours of respondents from Cinnamora Tea Estate and Purupbari Tea Estate. It seems to be part of a research study aimed at understanding the preferences and behaviours of individuals in these tea estates regarding various aspects of their lives.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents from Cinnamora Tea Estate and Purupbari Tea Estate

Type of Variables	Categories	Cinnamora Tea Estate		Purupbari Tea Estate	
		F	%	F	%
Independent Variables	Gender				
	Male	6	40.00	10	66.67
	Female	9	60.00	5	33.33
Type of Family	Nuclear	12	80.00	13	86.67
	Joint	3	20.00	2	13.33
Family Members	Small	7	46.67	5	33.33
	Medium	5	33.33	8	53.33
	Large	3	20.00	3	20.00
Age	(18-25) Years	2	13.33	8	53.33
	(26-33) years	3	20.00	3	20.00
	34 and above	10	66.67	4	26.67
Education Qualification	Illiterate	10	66.67	9	60.00
	Elementary	4	26.67	6	40.00
	High school	1	6.67	0	0.00
Possession of House	Own House	10	66.67	13	86.67
	Rented	5	33.33	2	13.33
Possession of Land	Yes	6	40.00	14	93.33
	No	9	60.00	1	6.67
Possession of Ration Card	Yes	14	93.33	14	93.33
	No	1	6.67	1	6.67
Possession of LPG Connection	Yes	10	66.67	7	46.67
	No	5	33.33	8	53.33
Dependent variables					
Knowledge about fabric	Yes	10	66.67	7	46.67
	No	5	33.33	8	53.33
Source of buying cloth	Local Market	11	73.33	12	80.00
	Shops	4	26.67	3	20.00
	Malls	0	0.00	0	0.00
Occasion of buying cloths	Weekly	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Daily	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Monthly	4	26.67	3	20.00
	During festival	10	66.67	9	60.00
	During the needs	1	6.67	3	20.00

3.8 Dependent Variables

Knowledge about fabric Respondents' knowledge about fabrics is divided into yes and no. In Cinnamora, 10 respondents (66.67%) have knowledge about fabrics, while 5 (33.33%) do not. In Purupbari, 7 respondents (46.67%) have knowledge about fabrics, while 8 (53.33%) do not.

3.9 Source of buying cloth: The Table 2 showed where respondents buy cloth. In Cinnamora, the majority (73.33%) buy from local markets, while 26.67% buy from shops. In Purupbari, 80.00% buy from local markets, and 20.00% buy from shops.

3.10 Occasion of buying cloths: The Table 2 presented the occasions when respondents buy clothes. In Cinnamora, the main occasions are during festivals (66.67%) and during needs (6.67%). In Purupbari, the main occasions are during festivals (60.00%) and during needs (20.00%).

There is a significant association with knowledge about fabric in Cinnamora tea garden and there was no significant association for Purupbari tea garden workers this may be due to the ration of more male among the respondent in Purupbari tea garden and less number of male respondents.

Table 2: Association between selected independent variable with knowledge about fabric in the selected tea estate

	Cinnamora tea estate	Purupbari Tea estate
Chi-square value	6.563	2.963
Sig value	.038	.085
DF	2	2

4. Conclusion

By employing a random sampling method and utilizing a comprehensive questionnaire, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the socio-economic conditions of tea garden workers in Cinnamora Tea Estate and Purupbari Tea Garden. The findings of this study will contribute to a deeper

understanding of the challenges faced by these workers and serve as a foundation for potential policy recommendations and interventions to improve their overall well-being and livelihoods.

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