

“Assamese Tea’s History and the Effects of Welfare Initiatives on Tea Plantation Workers” (A Study in Golaghat District of Assam)

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Abstract

Tea is one of the largest agro-based industries in the North Eastern region discovered by the Britishers during their colonial rule in India. It is a vital sector in the economy and socio-cultural life of the people of Assam. Being agro-industrial in character, tea is a labour oriented industry requiring a very large number of workers. Since about mid-nineteenth the British Company started tea plantation in Assam and imported a large numbers of labourer from different parts of India for tea plantation. Through the natural process of social change and assimilation; the tea labourer have been formed a separate community in Assam called them the “Tea Garden community” or “Cah Bagicar Asomiya.” The migrant labourer, who came to this part of the North East for their means of livelihood, gradually assimilated in the Assamese society in heart and soul and living permanently depending on British company system. With their excessive labour, they planted tea gardens in Assam and majority of them cut off their close relation from their own kith and kin in the native places and now they are inseparable part of Assamese nationality in various name as Cah Bonua, Cah Mozdur, Cooli, etc, “The tea garden labourer connected so much with tea that without ‘Tea’ their existence is unthinkable.

Key Words: Agro-based, Labour oriented, Cah Bonua, Cah Mozdur, Kith and kin.

Introduction:

The history of the tea plantation in Assam dates back to the year 1823, when indigenous tea plants growing in the Districts of Assam came to the notice of Mr. Robert Bruce during a visit to Garhgaon, near Sibsagar through a Singpho chief. The cultivation of this plant in this district had first introduced in the thirties of the last century by British East India Company. In 1835, a few indigenous plants were this from the forest at

‘NINGROO’ bordering the Singpho country and grown at ‘KOONDILMUKH’ at Sadia. However, the garden established, they did not succeed because of the inferior quality of the soil. After that, Government operations remained confined to the plantations in the Muttok Country (Now Dibrugarh District). The area confined by Kujupar fort in East, the Dihing River South, the Dangaree and Dibru rivers in the North, was called Muttok Country where a large number of indigenous tea plants had been discovered and the soil was also found suitable. The seeds from China were planted experimentally at a site some 28 k.m. away from Dibrugarh in 1837. That site was named ‘Cha-Bua’ (Place where tea was planted) and now the name of the place has become known as Chabua. During 1852, Messers Warren & Jenkins: the proprietor of “Chaboah” formed a Mauzan Tea Baru which later

on became a flourishing tea garden. The first Assamese tea planter and great freedom fighter Moniram Dewan started two tea estates viz, Chinamora and Chingpho and got credit of the first India Tea planter. During colonialism to the post colonialism expansion of tea industry has been growing up a continuous process. The plantation of small tea garden since 1979 has also significant impact on the local people of Assam. Due to the lack of labour force in the Brahmaputra valley, the tea garden authorities employed intermediates to procure Tea Tribe communities from various parts of India where it was readily available subsequently, the labours were recruited from the districts of RANCHI, CHAIBASA, HAZARIBAGH, SANTAL, PARGANAS, DUMUKA, GAYA of BIHAR, MAYURBHANJ, GANJAN, SAMBALPUR, PURI of ORISSA, RAIPUR, RAMPURHAT and JABALPUR of MADHYA PRADESH. These migrated people belong to a number of tribal and caste groups from various cultural linguistic and ethnic heritages. The tribal communities are the SANTAL, MUADAS, KHOUDS, ORAONS, KHARIAS, GOUDS, KISHANS, MAZI, KARMAKAR, VHUMIJ and NAGESIAS etc..

Man is a social animal and he has to live in society. He lives in society from birth till death and in this process acquires many things. Various factors that are available in society can help to learn anything. The Labour welfare activities in tea estate are also one of the most significant factors that can help to understand the living standard and social position of the tea garden community. In every society, there are social institution and systems. These are very deeply rooted in social setup and without them; the entire social arrangement faces serious dislocation. Since general welfare is a wide, complicated and impracticable notion yet, it resides in a man’s state of mind or consciousness which is made up his satisfaction or utilities. The basis of welfare therefore is necessarily the extent to which an individual’s desire is met. The emergences of tea estates have directly or indirectly have helped to the growth of small tea garden in the rural areas. It has completely changed the cropping pattern in Assam and transformed the low productive rice fields into high cash crop productive gardens. It has provided direct and indirect employment to more than one lakh families. According to the tea board of India; there are more than 43000 small tea growers in Assam producing about 9% of the States total annual production. From the beginning till now expansion of tea industry is growing up a continuous process; simultaneously a new kind of society developed

live in society. He lives in society from birth till death and in this process acquires many things. Various factors that are available in society can help to learn anything. The Labour welfare activities in tea estate are also one of the most significant factors that can help to understand the living standard and social position of the tea garden community. In every society, there are social institution and systems. These are very deeply rooted in social setup and without them; the entire social arrangement faces serious dislocation. Since general welfare is a wide, complicated and impracticable notion yet, it resides in a man's state of mind or consciousness which is made up his satisfaction or utilities. The basis of welfare therefore is necessarily the extent to which an individual's desire is met. The total area under tea cultivation in Assam is near about more than half of the country's total area under tea. The tea industry in Assam also provides average daily employment to more than six lakh persons in the state which is around 50% of total average daily number labour employed in the country. On the other hand, labours are the backbone of an industry and primary factor of production. Welfare is a term closely related with labour. Labour welfare is directed specifically to the preservation of employee's health and life style which reflects their families because the workers well-being cannot be attained in isolation of his family. The labour welfare activities are generally accepted by the employers and it is regarded as moral responsibilities to patronize them not only as labour but also as humankind. Labour welfare activities provided by tea estates can create efficient, healthy, loyal and satisfied labour force for organization. The purpose of providing such facilities is to make their worked life to better and also to raise their standard of living in society. The term welfare bears comprehensive meaning refers to well being, good health, happiness, prosperity and development of human resources in a society. It can also help to develop physical, mental, moral and emotional upbringing of individual, his family and community. The welfare is changeable in nature and differs from society to society and place to place, it aims at helping the worker to work better and in more congenial surroundings and also to live better physically, socially, morally, economically, and intellectually. Of course, it depends on types of problems occur in a society, such as age group, sex, socio-cultural background, economic status educational level of employees in different industries are significant among them. The tea industry has greater importance because it is a foreign exchange earner. In addition to existing big and large tea gardens owned by reputed both Indian multinational companies, the profession of tea plantation of the state has taken up by common man as business venture at present, particularly by unemployed youth. On the other hand, since 1978 the development in the history of tea plantations in Assam is the inclusion of small tea growers for production of green leaf to the factories owned by bigger tea gardens. According to Tea Board of India, 'there are more than 43000 small tea planters in Assam producing about 9% of the state's total annual production. It has provided direct and indirect employment to more than one lakh families in Assam. Thus, the time has come to think about the welfare activities of the tea garden labours and enable them to help in more productivity so as that our country attain more foreign capital. That is why; it is more important contribution towards achieving farther development of the industry.

Objective of the study:

1. To observe the migration of the tea garden labour in Assam.
2. To observe the impact of tea garden labour in the socio-economic life of the people of Assam.
3. To observe the Demographic change after the migration of tea garden labour in Assam.

Methodology:

The present study is descriptive in nature. The data has been collected through primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been collected on the basis of field work interview schedules observation and case study. Secondary data has been collected through office records, journals, books, News Papers internet and Magazine e.t.c.

UNIVERSE OF THE STUDY:

The universe of the proposed study covers entire Tea Estates of Golaghat District of Assam.

FIELD OF THE STUDY:

Field of the study is “**Dukhengra**” Tea Estate of Golaghat District of Assam.

SAMPLE: Random sampling method has been adopted for selecting 50 respondents from the Tea Garden.

ANALYSIS OF DATA:

The discovery of tea in Assam resulted in the establishment of a big industry called the tea industry. This labour-intensive industry of Assam has been contributing a major share in the economy of the country. Interesting to be noted that the discovery of tea in Assam has an interesting history of its own. It is a well-known fact that Mr. Robert Bruce and his brother C.A. Bruce, Scottish by born initiated the process of the discovery of tea in Assam. (Gait, Edward, (2006:129). Mr. C.A. Bruce collected a large number of tea plants and seeds from the Singpho Chief of Sadiya and some of them were handed over to David Scott, the agent to the GovernorGeneral on the North-East Frontier of Bengal. Consequently, after a series of experiments, the tea plants which were found in Upper Assam were proved to be genuine ones. (Griffiths, P.,1967: 36- 3 Inscribing the Migratory History of Tea Plantation Labours of Assam: A Journey from Ignorance to Experience 41). The letter of the Tea Committee which contained the matter of the discovery of tea in Assam reads thus, "It is with feelings of the highest possible satisfaction that we are enabled to announce to his Lordship in Council that the tea shrub is beyond all doubt indigenous in Upper Assam, being found there through an extent of the country of one month's march within the Honourable Company's territories, from Sadiya and Beesa to the Chinese frontier province of Yunnan, where the shrub is cultivated for the sake of its leaf. We have no hesitation in declaring this discovery to be by far the most important and valuable that has ever been made in matters connected with the agricultural or commercial resources of this empire. We are

perfectly confident that the tea plant, which has been brought to light, will be found capable, under proper management, of being cultivated with complete success for commercial purposes, and that consequently the object of our labours may be before long fully realised." (Mann, Harold, H, 1918: 7). Interestingly, after the successful discovery of indigenous tea in Assam the attempts were initiated to start tea nurseries and then tea gardens. Consequently, at the end of 1835, the first tea nursery with the

Chinese tea plants was established at Sadiya at the confluence of the Kundil and the Brahmaputra rivers. In these attempts, no good result was found. Then in 1837, a tea garden was established at Chabua, 18 miles away from Dibrugarh which was a successful one. Gradually, the discovery of tea and the opening of tea gardens gained momentum in Assam and after that, the production activities were also undertaken. Interesting was that the quality of tea produced in Assam was also good. It is a fact that the attempt of manufacturing tea in Assam was started by following the Chinese technique. In the Calcutta Courier the news of this tea manufacture was published on 21st November 1836 which reads thus, "a small quantity of tea (of the green species, from indigenous seed) prepared at Suddaya in Assam by the Chinese teaplanter brought round by Mr. Gordon has arrived in Calcutta." (The Calcutta Courier, 21 November 1836) Important was that Chinese, as well as indigenous seeds, were used to grow tea plants in the Upper Assam and a satisfactory result was also found. According to Perceval Griffiths, "It will be convenient here to review the position which had been achieved in Eastern India by 1839. There were at that time East India Company's nurseries were planted with Chinese seeds at Jaipur, Chabua, Chota Tingri, and Hukanpukri. Bruce also appears to have established a nursery with the indigenous plant at Sadiya, near the official China nursery. At the same time, tracts of indigenous tea had been discovered in many parts of Upper Assam and native chiefs had been encouraged to care for them." (Griffiths, P., 1967:53) The letter written by the Court of Directors to the Tea Committee on 23rd January 1839 shows that the tea produced in Assam was of good quality. The letter reads thus, "We receive with much satisfaction the samples of Assam Tea (twelve Chests) alluded to in your letter dated 23 May 1838, and which arrived in November last, under the 4 Rupkatha Journal, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2021 designation of paho and souchoing. Specimens of each sort have been very extensively distributed, and it affords us much pleasure to communicate to you, that we have received very favorable reports regarding it, as well from the most respectable brokers and tea dealers as from several individuals and various corporation towns and scientific bodies to whom it has been submitted." (Griffiths, P., 1967:53) For the proposed study data has been analyzed logically and statistically.

At present, 70 % labourer has been depended upon their livelihood in this **Dukhengra** Tea Estate, 10% labourer of these areas has been depended upon their livelihood on Govt or private services, paddy cultivation as well as small or large business. 10% of labourer works in the house of small tea planters or as daily wages labour. 5% of labour has neither work in the tea garden nor as wage did labour 2% labourer are engaged in green leaves business and other 3% of labour supposed to be mentally dissatisfied and helpless for the existing labour welfare activities provided by the tea garden authority as they are educated and conscious enough

about their rights and obligations. It is crucial to point out that the living positions of the labours are very pathetic; if they live in tea Garden the main problems must be highlighted. Of course modern technological devices and communication (Mobile phone internet, fax, media etc) have also encouraged them for uprising. That is why they refuse to accept the existing tea garden authority or government especially in the hope of improving condition as they desired.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY:

The major findings is that the working people in Dukhengra Tea Estate are living in a compact and closed community quite separated from either urban or local communities. But those labours have played a significant role in the socio-economic life of our society. For all round development of the tea labours Government must provide education and employment opportunities and awareness among the tea garden labours will create for far-reaching change. The labour welfare activities spread all over the world. It included anything's that is done for the comfort and improvement of employees and is provided over and above the wages. Welfare helps in keeping the moral and motivation of the employees high so as to retain the employees for longer duration. The welfare includes monitoring of working conditions, creation of individual harmony through infrastructure for health, industrial relations, and insurance against disease, accident and unemployment for the workers and their families. Labour welfare entails all these activities of employer, which are directed towards the employees with certain facilities and services in addition to wages or salaries. But while it was conducted the study in **Dukhengra Tea Estate**, it was experienced that labour welfare activities provided to them in the same process followed by British tea company since long back. Labours are always busy at their work, but they get little chance for upgrading their social status in the society. Most of their valuable time has been consumed in the Tea Garden only for their livelihood. On the other hand, they have to live in a tea garden being a labour only. Therefore they sometimes face tremendous threat in their health and hygiene as well as social existence. It is very crucial to point out that the living positions of the labours are not good enough on the other hand they are always busy at their work only but they do not have any chance of upper stage level. The labours are working in the tea garden without long resting time sometimes they face tremendous trouble in health particularly they are not much conscious about their health care in this regard; the activity of the Labour Welfare Department is not so much significant. The garden has implemented a few measures of labour welfare activities. As a result their living standard and social position is found pathetic. Their problems broke out at their time of early stage. Even their death rate is very high because of poor arrangements and lack of literacy.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion it is to be determined that adequate labour welfare activities can bring about the development of the whole personality of the workers to make a better work force. The very logic behind providing welfare schemes is to create efficient, healthy, loyal and satisfied labour force for organization. The purpose of

providing such facilities is to make their worked life to better and also to raise their standard of living as well as Socio-economic life of the Tea Garden Community. In Assam 45% women are employed in Tea plantations. The probable factors that contribute towards having such a large chunk of women workers in the plantations are living in rural areas and many women have to seek employment in order to balance the family budget. Evidence from a number of national surveys relating to women workers about the double load of outdoor and indoor work can lead to the conclusions like-working women enjoy an outside income and some increase in independence as a result of it; they go out of the house and so on. But they also pay for these benefits in reduced free time for themselves, a more hectic pace and a more complicated life. The life of a housewife, in contrast, is somewhat easier and almost certainly less hectic (Hurlock, 1981). But, Hate (1969) maintains that the main problem of the Indian working women is that role-conflict which stems from their dual responsibilities. In tea plantation the women worker are generally large in number and they are mostly involved in outdoor tasks like plucking tea leaves. All provisions made in the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and the Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 is ironically remarkable. However, this study is a micro level in nature so may not cover all the components relating to the community for development.

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