



# Women Socio-Economic Status of Tea Garden Labourers In Darjeeling District, West Bengal

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## INTRODUCTION:

Women Tea Garden labourers play an important role in Darjeeling community. Our society cannot be completed without their involvement and contribution towards our developing country. Therefore, it is essential to study the socio-economic status of this particular section. Most of the tea garden labourers are backward in all aspects of their life. The tea garden labourers have been facing enormous problems and difficulties (poverty, homeless and illiteracy) in their day-to-day life.

The term 'status' is difficult to conceptualized and it is often eluded to the empirical grasp. Yet, the idea of status is essential to an understanding of a social system, which includes role, position and stratification.

“A 'role' is the expected behavior associated with a social position. It is not possible to list all the roles in a particular society, because there are no clear principles for deciding, what a social position is. In so far as the people are conscious of themselves and others occupying positions with generally known rights and duties, then their behavior cannot be understood without reference to their expectations about how others should behave towards them. “In order to analyse actual behavior, the concept of role is only a beginning which must be supplemented by a battery of related concepts which give it greater utility (Batton, 1989: 716).”<sup>1</sup>

“In defining status as “an effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges”. Weber (1978) emphasizes its relational base and the fact that a status claimant must have an audience from which to receive or to demand differential response. Gerth and Mills (1953)\* emphasizes that a status situation is not fixed; it tends to be played out on the uncertain grounds of the claimant and the audience negotiation and promise.

### Status of Women

The National Committee on the status of women maintains (ICSSR 1955: 3-4), “Status is realized through roles. This brings into focus the rights and opportunities provided to women by the state and socio-cultural institutions to perform these roles, which may not necessarily reinforce each other. Processes of change are

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<sup>1</sup> FMA Kaniampady Elizabeth. “Status of Women Working in the Tea Plantation” Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, India, 2003, pp. 1-2

responsible for divergence, between the expected and the actual role behavior .... Status will have to relate to the living realities of the social and cultural context of the individual's present situation.”

Women are in fact the backbone of a society. Yet, it is a well-known fact that they are faced with many problems. They are exploited, suppressed and subjected to harsh restrictions, discriminatory rules, and unreasonable customs and so on and so forth.”<sup>2</sup>

**Key words: Socio-Economic Status, Tea Garden, Women Labourers**

### **Objectives of the study-**

1. To find out the main reasons, why women tea gardeners labourers have very low wages in the tea garden industry in Darjeeling, West Bengal.
2. To examine the main causes of poverty, lack of socio-economic opportunities, illiteracy and other related problems among the women tea garden labourers, and to find out what initiatives have taken by the government and NGOs to minimize their problems.

Tea garden women workers are mostly illiterate and they are not aware of the minimum standard of living. Prejudice, superstitious beliefs, alcoholism etc. are high among this underdeveloped community. The whole activity of plucking tea leaves is generally associated with women due to the essentialist stereotype of women being delicate and efficient only as pickers.

Socially they are less exposed, economically hard pressed and hand to mouth, educationally and culturally dwarf which cast gloomy picture on their posterity. The women tea workers have been strengthening the economy of the tea garden proprietors are well as the state by their physical labour, but in return, they become the victims of untoward exploitation, low wage, unhygienic dwelling, filthy drinking water all sorts of deprivation leading to their life and family in unprivileged and lower rank.

As of the first objectives of this paper talking about the main problems of women workers, why they have lowest wages? With the help of primary data collection, we came to know many of their problems in the tea garden, among these problems, there are some problems which cost them very high price in their day to

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<sup>2</sup> FMA Kaniampady Elizabeth. “Status of Women Working in the Tea Plantation” Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, India, 2003, pp. 1-3

day life. Generally the status of women means the role of women in decision making, their educational attainment, participation in social, political and economic activities and finally their position in various professions (Vaidyanathan, K. E, 1988). Yet, socio economic status is directly related to aspect of education, health, income and attaining other alternative skill where education is the key element for improving the status of women (Panduranga & Nayakara, 2014; Ramya, T, 2014).

It is very sensitive issue to determine the socio economic status of women in tea garden of Terai areas because majority of the tea garden labourers are belonging to adivasi communities. This adivasi under developed communities are facing many problems like illiteracy, poverty, ignorance although women are one of the major work force in the tea industry because of their nimble fingers are suitable for plucking tea leaves.

**As of my present study and experience here are some of the main reasons why women labourers have lowest wages in this tea garden job:**

**1. Illiteracy Rate:** In tea garden job most women labourers are adivasi people migrated from different part of the country. In early 18<sup>th</sup> century when white skinned British people leading our country, there was a prime problem in tea industry, it was very difficult time for all the tea industry because there is big shortage of tea labourers. To fill up the big gap of tea labourers all agents and middlemen started to higher the labourers from Bihar, Oddisa, now Jhardkhand, Chattishgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Even later on there was shortages of labourers and again they recruited some labourers from Mednepur, 24 Pargana and Purulia.

Among this tea garden area illiteracy rate is very high, almost 100 percent workers were illiterate, and they cannot read and write. Especially for women labourers, it was different situation in the tea garden. Adivasi people were known as jungle men, they were from ancient age or uncivilized people. Their life style, believes, languages and culture are totally different from others, even their looks also different from others.

Education was very strange for this group of people, they cannot think about their children education in tea garden job and more or less there was a problem of school and colleges. So, it was very difficult and challenging job for tea garden women labourers.

- 2. Lack of Efficiency:** From the beginning in traditional way our concept about tea garden women labourers, we all are involved in way we think about our female colleagues, or female tea garden labourers. We always think negative about female workers/ and try to look them down in our modern society. We don't give them equal rights in the society, we don't respect their work and sincerely. From the time of British Raj women has been neglected and demoralized in the society, we cannot realize their role in the tea industry. Knowingly or unknowingly we are avoiding their hard work and sincere commitment in the development of tea industry. However, we must reconcile our thinking and behaviors towards our female workers in the tea industry. We must recall the role of female workers for the establishment of a tea industry; we should not forget that female workers are the major work force in the industry, their restless hard work and wiliness to serve the tea industry.
- 3. Quantity of Work:** I think this is another reason for paying the low wages in the tea garden job, what we see here, every tea garden there is a target for whole day, how much tea leaves has to be pluck by a women workers. Majority tea garden set the target of 24 kg of leaves to be plucked for every individual, if labourers pluck more than 24 kg of leaves; it means she has fulfilled the quotas for the day. And if she plucked more than 24 kg of leaves, she will get extra Rs. 3 more per kg. In the pick time (May to September) some female workers may reach the target of 24 kg, but majority workers failed to reach their target.
- 4. Low Demand of Women Workers:** This is could be an another reason for low wage of women in the tea garden, we know the golden rules of economy "Demand and Supply" day by day the demand of the female labourers are decreasing in the tea garden, because every time we get updates about tea garden status, and this is very news when come to know that some tea garden has been closed in dours and in Darjeeling District. It means day by day the demand of the female labourers sinking, and that is reason why women in tea garden labourers getting low wages.
- 5. Monopoly of (Tea Garden Association/Union) TGA:** Wages for women in tea garden labourers set by higher authorities and Tea Garden Association/union; it is not set by the any individuals. It is bound to accept any decisions taken by the associations/Unions, because these are the institutions which have control over all the tea gardens. Tea garden owners cannot over ruled any decisions come from associations/unions; these institutions are very strong and powerful in the sense of law and orders. According to my observation these

institutions are corrupt and rapacity, every year all the tea garden women labourers get bonus during (Dashera) as usual but this time only permanent workers has given bonus on minimum percent.

**To examine the main causes of poverty, lack of socio-economic opportunities, illiteracy and other related problems among the women tea garden labourers, and to find out what initiatives have taken by the government and NGOs to minimize their problems.**

The main causes of poverty in tea garden women labourers are many of them but some of the major causes we are going to discuss here below:

**1. Lack of Education:** The most and an important reason is lack of education, as we know that most of the tea garden labourers are belonging to adivasi community, this is the root cause of their poverty. If a person is not able to read and write, how we can expect about his/her prosperity in the society? How can we assume some things, good out of nothing? What I mean that if he/she is uneducated, it is very difficult to make him/her to understand the value of education. If a person is educated, he/she will make some difference in the role of society as usual as in the life of individuals. When we talk about tea garden women labourers, they don't have any other options in their hand, as they are uneducated; it seems to be impossible to make any change in their family.

**2. Mind Set Need to Change of Labourers:** Women tea garden labourers need to change their mind set, they need to think broad way. They need a change in their mind that they can also do better like other people, because they think themselves they are very weak and poor, they cannot do any things better than tea garden job. This is most weak points in their mind that they are good for nothing, this thought make them more and more poor among themselves. Internally they are very weak and they need to come out from their mind set, all tea garden labourers they became addicted with this type of environment. Where there is no respect of their values, where they cannot think different way of life, where people are less bother about education, where people are accepted tea garden is the only place where they can earn some thing for their life. If some people want to do something good, if they want to make a good life, then they have to come out of this tea garden environment.

**3. Alcoholism Among the Labourers:** In tea garden job almost all male and female workers they consumed alcohol in the their day to day life, very little money they earn and out of that little money they spend

more money for their bad habits. Consumed alcohol is very normal thing for a tea garden labourers, even though he/she gender doesn't make any difference in tea garden labourers, equally they consumed alcohol and misused the money. They take local liquor, which is very harmful especially for kidney, it is totally waste of money and drinking any amount of alcohol can potentially lead to unwanted health consequence. Drinking too much can lead to harmful short-term and long-term effects. It can affect your physical and mental health, your job, your finances, your family and your community. Drinking alcohol bring conflict with family members and hatreds within the family members, most of the time fight take place between husband and wife bring unrest in the society.

**4. Lack of socio-economic Opportunities:** Few years back working in the tea garden was drawback for the labourers, because labourers were marginalized from all kinds of government facilities like drinking water, electricity, INDRA – BIKASH, schools, healthcare, sanitation, old age pension and public transport system. All of these public facilities were not provided for the tea garden labourers, whereas other local people, those who are not working in the tea garden or staying out side of the tea garden they used to enjoy all facilities or schemes. All of these government schemes helps poor people in the society and at the same time it gives great support for the self sustain or develop their own household. Recently, the entire tea garden stop giving ration for the tea garden labourers, because government has introduced all of these schemes for tea garden labourers also, now tea garden labourers also can avail them for their person development.

**5. Born with Empty Hand in Tea Garden:** This reasons could be one of the factors for poverty among the tea garden labourers, born with empty hand what I mean it, the person who was migrated in early 18s as a tea garden labourers, today in 21<sup>st</sup> century his/her sons or daughters are also working in tea garden as a labourers. Generation after generation, they will be in the same position, from where they have started their lifelong back; they are not able to bring the changes because they are in the same profession. It is very import issues about the mindset of the tea garden labourers, they think that tea garden is the beginning and end of their life because they have been living and experiencing themselves from childhood decades after decades. This tea garden job is like a slow poison in the life of labourers, it is very difficult to come out from this environment but if they want they can come out from this environment. This is the only way they can improve themselves and

bring some changes in their life hood. This is not my comment, this is comment from many retire tea garden workers.

**Here some other related problems among the women in tea garden labourers as follows:**

- Poor health care facility
- Maternal mortality
- Problems of epidemics of various diseases
- Scarcity of drinking water
- Early marriage
- Child labour
- Alcoholism
- Illiteracy
- Superstition belief

**Poor health care facility:**

In tea garden women labourers are facing poor health facility, as they are doing hard work though out the day morning to evening, they must get minimum protein requirements. However, it is very difficult for them because it is unaffordable for a tea garden labourer. When we think about their health, it is amazing that when somebody fall in sick or not feeling well, they cannot stop going to the daily work because if they stop going to the work, they will have difficult time to buy their ration. They are bound to go for their daily work, they are not concern about their health problems, and they are concern about their food. In tea garden health care community center only some tablets and first aid facilities are available, they cannot buy good medicine from outside, now a days they have some medical facility from government hospital for fever, headache and some cough syrup, so women in tea garden they don't have good health care facility available.



**Maternal Mortality:**

In Tea Garden industry, women are playing major role in the overall development of family, society, state as well as the country. Women workers are the major work force in the tea garden in Darjeeling but we are not able to take care of mothers, as all the women in tea garden suffering from many kinds of numerous diseases, they need good care and food for their nourishment but how they will make it? It's a big question to every one of us. Lack of proper medication and proper food they become the victim of uncertainty death. Women in the tea garden should have some extra benefits from tea garden authorities, so that they can take care themselves during the time of sickness and health problems.

**Problems of epidemics of various diseases:**

Apart from maternal mortality women in the tea garden facing various epidemics diseases, this is happening lack of nutrition food or balance diet. What they are earning in tea garden it is not sufficient to have nutrition or balance diet. According to their income they spend for their food and nothing left in their hand, they try to save some money but it is not possible for them, with the little income they need to manage household.

**Scarcity of drinking water:**

As a tea garden laborer this is one of the most important problems they are facing for long period of time, they don't have municipality running water facility. Mostly in tea garden area well is available, they used well water for drinking, bathing, and washing clothes and utensil etc. They don't have any other options for drinking water. But in some tea garden now local authority is providing running water facility, before it was very difficult for tea garden labourers. At the moment very few tea gardens come under the municipality area, but rest vast tea garden areas are facing scarcity of drinking water. Tea garden water is not pure for drinking, it is contaminated and dirty. If anybody drinks impure water he/she will be fall in sick, many stomach problems. Contaminated water and poor sanitation are linked to transmission of diseases such as cholera, diarrhoea, dysentery, hepatitis A, typhoid and polio. Ninety percent health problems linked with drinking contaminated or dirty water.

**Early marriage:**

This is another problem for women in tea garden job, this is totally unlawful and crime, especially area likes tea garden, it is common for every one, they don't think much about a girl child, even parents in tea garden area a girl child is a burden for them. Giving education to a girl child is unworthy for a tea garden labourers because one day that girl child is going to leave them along back home. So, if a girl grow 14-15 years old they think how to marries her and send to the husband house. Parents doesn't give opportunities to grow matured at the early age parents want to give them marries and want to get rid of daughter's burden. Till today we can witness early marriage is happing surrounding tea garden areas, being a responsible citizen of India, we must stop this early marriages and save the girl child.

**Child labour:**

Adults are working in tea estates are indirectly forced to involve their children into this labour profession, due to the lack of any childcare facilities provided. It is not only in tea garden areas it is common to all India. It is very common what the child is witnessing from childhood definitely they will be in father's profession someday, as tea garden job is not much difficult to get. In this job no need of any education qualification, no need of any work experience, and no need of any formal interview processes, simple if you want you can join any time any moment. In other hand tea garden authorities *also exploiting them and used the opportunities to dominate and keep them under control. All the tea garden managers and babus are keeping watching the boys and girls, if they see any boys and girls are going to finish high school or before interring the high school those boys and girls will be the victim of money. During the high school life if any boys or a girl earns little money, they think that they have done something very great in their life because that is the first side money in their life. And slowly their mind will be diverted how to make money.*

**Alcoholism:**

Alcoholism is like a disease for tea garden labourers, there is no difference between male or female every one they use alcohol. Even young boys and girls they also take alcohol, they think taking alcohol is a

very minor matter for them. Because they have been born and brought up in that society and it is acceptable by the family members. Family members also take it very easy way, parents don't mind if young boys and girls are taking wine or alcohol, parents will be very happy about his/ her boys and girls are grown up. Same way father and mother also involved in this activity, many families are involved with making local inquire, which is very harmful for human body. And that is the reasons many young boys and girls they spoiled their precious life, in tea garden life style is totally different from a normal village. Parents are also bound to accept their life style, if parents are scolding their children then my serious steps to end their life.

### **Illiteracy:**

This is the root other related problems for women in the tea garden, as Illiteracy rate is very high in tea garden area. Very few boys and girls are come out of this environment, and they settle their life out of the tea garden once for all. From the beginning generation after generation they are used to working in tea garden. They cannot change easily because this is bad habit within them, they are not much bother about the outer world, and they don't know what they are doing for what? And they forget that, they are belonging to the world, they have many things to do, they have better life in future and they have a lot of responsibilities towards their family members, we need to make them understand with love and care.

### **Superstition belief:**

In tea garden areas still we can witness some old ritual belief, if any one fall in sick some people think that someone has did something wrong with that sick person. They prefer to call a witch doctor from villages, whereas he/she must look for a physician or a doctor. Values and beliefs are two important concepts that govern our behavior and attitudes. Although values and beliefs are interrelated since they collectively affect our attitudes, perceptions, personality, character and behavior, there is a distinctive difference between values and beliefs is that values are principles, ideals or standards of behavior while beliefs are convictions that we generally accept to be true. In tea garden labourers both of these two are lacking within them, as we know that majority of the tea garden labourers are adivasi people and they have

some superstition beliefs. Without any scientific proof they accept what the people says, because they are not that much educated, but slowly it is going to be vanish from the mind of all adivasi people but it will take time.

### **What initiatives have taken by the government and NGOs to minimize their problems?**

“As it is said that all the tea garden was not controlled under the local authorities or panchayat but now all the tea garden has come under the controlled of Department of Panchayats Rural Development. Here are some schemes/projects under Panchayats and Rural Development, Government of West Bengal.

**Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA):** The scheme aims at improving livelihood and standard of living of the rural population, allowing them to self-sustainable and independent at the same time by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

**ANANDADHARA(West Bengal State Rural Livelihood Mission) WBSRLM:** Anandadhara, a flagship anti-poverty programme envisages to enable the community to come out poverty through formation and strengthening of women SHGs and their networks, their capacity building, financial inclusion, access to institutional credit and skill development for taking up different livelihoods options, supported with provisions of technological as well as marketing support.

**Banglar Gram Sadak Yojana(BGSY):** The primary objectives of this yojana is to provide connectivity by way of all weather road (with necessary culverts and cross drainage structures which is operable throughout the year) , to the unconnected habitations in the rural areas of the state.

**Rural Housing:** This scheme with the objective of addressing housing needs in the rural areas aims at providing a pucca house, with basic amenities, to all houseless households living in kutchha and dilapidated house, by 2022 with a minimum unit (house) of 25 sq. m including a dedicated area of hygienic cooking.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> EGYE BANGLA

e-Bangla

Department of Panchayats & Rural Development

Government of West Bengal

## Institutional Strengthening of Gram Panchayats (ISGP) Programme – II:

They play a significance role to establish the tea industry. The present study has designed to know about the women workers in the development of socio-economic status of women workers in the tea garden. They are the only one who manage the family, how to maintain the daily expenses. In the tea garden industry women workers are taking more responsibilities of the family.

As I am visiting some family house hold every day, I have seen how women workers are struggling in their day to day life. After all women workers are most visible about their family members, early in the morning they wake up and get ready for food for every family members, especially if there is a small children in the family it's become very difficult for them because they cannot leave their children back home alone, in this case woman has to carry their children while they are going for work. They cannot afford to leave their children alone back home because the children is very small, who will take care of their children at home because no one is at home.

I have seen many tea garden women workers are carrying their small children on posterior or dorsal, they just tie their children with the piece of cloths and start plucking the tea leafs, so we can imagine how difficulties it is for a woman, in a case study by Dr. Manoj Kumar Sharma, he has mentioned the clear picture of tea women. He has discussed about the role of a woman in the family as well as for the development of the society. In his manuscript he has talked how a woman is lagging behind socio- economically, culturally and educationally in the society especially in tea garden area.

India is the second largest tea producing country in the world after China, and how tea garden women are victim of certain circumstances and they are struggling for their existences. Tea garden women are mostly illiterate, they are not aware of the minimum standard of living. Prejudices, superstition beliefs, alcoholism, hustlers etc are high among this underdeveloped society. In our present day tea garden women are less exposed socially, economically hard pressed and hand to mouth, educationally and culturally they are marginalized from rest of the society.

In this circumstances, every single women in the tea garden they are facing many social obstacles like illiteracy and poverties, the most prominent problems with tea garden women workers is illiteracy and followed all other problems. As illiteracy is very high in tea garden area, it not possible to make any prosperity within their family members, it is complete mind set for women in the tea garden that, there is no other options left to bring a new way of making life. Only one way they can make money that is plucking the tea leafs and survives the rest of the life.

There are more than 50 sub castes among the tea garden labourers community in Darjeeling. The women workers in Darjeeling generally lead a very busy daily life, all the tea garden women workers carry out day to day work along with all the domestic activities. As women workers become major work force in the tea industries they faced various socio-economic problems. In this present study we are going to discuss some of the major problems for socio-economic status of women tea garden labourers in Darjeeling District.

### **Some NGOs**

**UNICEF (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund)** in full but now officially United Nations Children's Fund, parent organization: United Nation General Assembly, United Nations Economic and Headquarters: New York, Head: Catherine M. Russel, Legal Status: Active 11 December 1946 (75 years ago as United Nations International)

In Terai Branch Indian Tea Association is working with Unicef for tea garden children, they are taking care of under privilege children, they are taking care of school expenses, food, clothes, medicine etc.

### **Indian Tea Association**

“Tea Association is also working for tea garden children, stopping various children trafficking in tea garden, trafficking of children is a form of human trafficking and is defined by the United Nations as the “recruitment transportation, transfer harboring, and/or receipt” kidnapping of child for the purpose of slavery, forced labour and exploitation. Article 3(a) this definition is substantially wider than the same

document's definition of "trafficking in persons" Article 3(a) children may also be trafficked for the purpose of adaption."<sup>4</sup>

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"Though statistics regarding the magnitude of child trafficking are difficult to obtain, the international labour organization (ILO) estimates that 10,000 children are trafficked each year. In 2012, the United Nations Office on drugs and crime (UNODC) reported the percentage of child victims had risen in a 3-year span from 20 percent to 27 percent. Every year 300,000 children are taken from all around the world and sold by human traffickers as slaves. 28% of the 17,000 people brought the United States are children –about 13 children per day in 2014, research conducted by the anti –human trafficking organization reported that internet sites like Craigslist are often used as tools for conducting business within the industry and that 70 percent of child sex trafficking survivors surveyed were at some point sold online."<sup>5</sup>

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The book Socio-Economic and Political Condition of the Female Tea Garden Workers of South Assam and their Reflection in Literature and Culture. In chapter he has discussed how women workers work in the tea garden and their physical labour. Even he has talked about their great contributions towards their family and brings the significance changes in the society. The female workers work very hard, sincere and faithfully even though they have been deceived by the tea garden owners and higher authorities. In return they become the victims of untoward exploitation, low wage, unhygienic dwelling, and filthy drinking water all sorts of deprivation leading to their life and family in unprivileged and lower rank.

In tea garden job women workers has to tolerate many anti social activities; like alcoholism, superstition believe, unworthy work environment, low wages and poverty in the family. Beside all of these problems and difficulties they labour very hard, they engaged themselves to pluck the tea leaves to support their family. From morning to evening they work with heart and soul to support the tea industries, end of the

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<sup>4</sup> <https://ally.org/what-is-human-trafficking/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ally.org/what-is-human-trafficking/>

day they get very little to survive, and major portion of the profit they made is taken by the owner and other higher authorities.

In tea garden jobs (Jakri) system has been followed by the higher authorities at the time of payment, jakri is the payment system in tea industry, suppose a workers work for two weeks (15 days), what the authority does with labourers, at time of payment, they only pay for one week (7 days) and left one week payment they hold for next week. It means a labourer does not get full payment, it will be continuous processes keep one week payment due, and this is call Jakri system. Even though labourers are facing many problems in their family, tea garden authorities are not willing to help the labourers.

Dr. Barunjoyti Choudhury stated in his book *Socio-Economic and Political Condition of the Female Tea Garden Workers of South Assam and their Reflection in Literature and Culture* published in 2021.” He has brought a beautiful Bengali drama “Cha Kar Darpan” in his drama he tried to show us how the white-skinned British Sahib inflicted torture upon the tea garden labourers, if any workers take a break for drinking water it’s also crime for British Sahib. They cannot take any break during the work time; they have to continue their work till the evening. They get very little pay for the whole day work, because they don’t have any other options in their hand.”<sup>6</sup>

In his literature he mentioned even though it was a drama but in practical life there was nothing less torture in their life. Specially women labourers they sacrificed their every happiest moment with very little money and hard work. From morning to evening they cannot think about their little child and family, they have to compromise with poverty, prejudices and hatreds because they need to feed their babies and family. Mother, a women tea garden labourer avoids them willingly and pretends that they are the happiest mother/women when they meet their children and family members. These adivasi female tea garden workers are committed and devoted towards their duties and work, they cannot cheat their landowners/proprietors, and they cannot lie to them, they have a fear and respect of their landowners.

<sup>6</sup> Choudhury Dr. Barunjoyti., “Socio-economic and Political Condition of the Female Tea Garden Workers of South Assam and their Reflection in Literature and Culture” Sankalp Publication, Bilaspur, India, 2021, p. 8



At this moment I remembered Mr. Subash Chandra, great personality man, he is a great thinker and philosopher and great motivator too, one he was giving the TV interview and he commanded about adivasi people that if there were some one faithful, hard work and honest people than they are the adivasi people. Yes, I feel most proud and happiest people being a Santhal adivasi man. As I am writing about women in tea garden labourers, they love their job and enjoy the work. So, what I want to say “As we love and worship the nature, we respect our duties”. Very often we utter words like class struggle or communism. But such kind of high sounding words seem to be so baseless and fragile as they have failed to show the light of liberation to many. This holds well if we have a glance at the tea labourers, whether of Darjeeling or Barak Valley or belonging to any part of India. In case of the tea labourers, both sides of the coin seem to depict the same picture. The tea labourers have chosen this profession for earning a square meal a day for which they toil very hard.

Some time you will have an eye witness that many tea garden women set to work, in the tea garden but as a return what they get? This is indeed a big question. When a tea garden achieved the level of commercial crop, there seems to be neglect of their improvement in the socio – economic status of women in the tea garden labourers. Weather their financial condition appeared to get obliterated in perpetual darkness. Their dreams about their socio-economic upliftment has been hold, if we look towards the history of tea labourers, we will find that how this British people recruited men, women even children from various parts of the country.

“First time in Cachar 1855 when tea garden was established newly, there was a big problem of labourers, the tea garden owners appointed Arekthieus in order to import labourers from board. The agents or middleman to earn commission they procure poor people by saying them that they will have a bright future in tea garden so they handed over to the owners. These labourers were started work very hard as a slave. Tea garden owners told them lie and they never supported the labourers for their necessities things in

their life, not even food, clothing, shelter, drinking water facilities and medicines. As a result all the labourers were started running away from tea garden.”<sup>7</sup>

“At that time, local labourer was very less in the tea garden; to increase the production they started import labourers from different parts of the country, in 1890, the labourer’s number was only 51,894 which is increased the labourers numbers to 75,412 in the next decade. Those labourers who were imported to Barak Valley had to go undergo an arduous journey spanning more than a month. As a result many labourers used to die on the way. At that time one things could be noticed that after finishing their contract, many labourers left the tea garden job and moved around the fertile land where they can grow some crops and live their life peacefully. This category of people came to be known as ex-tea garden labourers.”<sup>8</sup>

“At the present, the number of voters belonging to the tea labourers community in Barak Valley is 2, 90,440. Dr. Purnendu Kumar in his research book has mentioned that the tea labourers of Barak Valley were all victims of Poverty and famine who migrated from Chotanagpur in Bihar, Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dumka, Buxar, Gaya, Palamo, Bhagalpur, Munder, Chapra etc. Another batch of labourers were migrated from differ part of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Raipur. Even some more labourers were migrated to Barak Valley from Mednipur, Purulia, Bankura and Bardhman in West Bengal.”<sup>9</sup>

On the basis of tea garden work, all the labourers were classified in to three categories.

1<sup>st</sup> –Manager

2<sup>nd</sup> –Babus(Clerical cadre)

3<sup>rd</sup> –Lower level labourers

Manager: Managers are higher level authorities, they directly report to the owners. They enjoy the lavish life in the tea garden; they have all the facilities with whole families’ members. All kinds of facilities means like housing facility, transportation facility, medical facility, drinking water, education facility for their children and highest salary.

<sup>7</sup> [http://idr.aus.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/21011994/1046/10/10\\_chapter%202.pdf](http://idr.aus.ac.in/jspui/bitstream/21011994/1046/10/10_chapter%202.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Arup Baisya, “Frontier an Independent Weekly since 1968

<sup>9</sup> Choudhury Dr. Barunjyoti., “Socio-economic and Political Condition of the Female Tea Garden Workers of South Assam and their Reflection in Literature and Culture” Sankalp Publication, Bilaspur, India, 2021, p. 8

Babus(Clerical cadre): These are the people who deal with the labourers, this people also have quite good number of facilities. They co-ordinate the works under the supervision of top managers, they look after all the labourers' necessary equipments and maintained the unity among the labourers. Babus are prepared the daily report card for all the labourers, these people recommend for regular workers in the tea garden. All the labourers have to respect and honor them because they have authority to promote the labourers for permanent categories.

And 3<sup>rd</sup> categories is lowest level labourers, labourers are the back bone of a tea industry, without women labourers it is not possible to run a tea industry, all the women labourers has to pluck tea leaves with very carefully, all the leaves has to pluck in a certain way so that tea plants should not get damage. With their tender finger tea leaves has to collect which produce the best quality of tea in the factory, quality tea increase the profit margin for industry. Although, women labourers are not recognized their sincerity and hard work, from morning to evening they work like salves.

### **Conclusion:-**

We need to look after their socio-economic status of women tea garden labourers in Darjeeling. We need to look after their socio-economic status, as the women tea garden labourers are suffering from multiples problems; the economic life of women tea garden labourers are miserable and in bad shape. The tea garden labourers in general are still lagging behind in terms of social and economic status.

Tea garden women are not simple in our civilized society, they are the most hardworking and honest to the family, and they are faithful or loyal to their lord/owners. Because of women workers till now all the tea gardens are alive and surviving, because of them many men are most benefited. How sad and selfish we are, if we can think about our mother, we could have give them best recognition in the society. Instead of love and care we give them most sad and black day in our family, we make them cry and shed tears; we hurt them and damage their love. We don't respect their diligent labour, only we think about ourselves.

In today world women are most successful in their profession, any sector you go, you will find as a women they are doing far better than men. Women are more active in every sector, as house wife most

effective, in the office more punctual, for the country serving they are in the first row. Women are more powerful than men because of their genetic reasons, they not dependable any more on men. However, we should honor them for their credible performance. We should appreciate them for their bravery believe and command.

Most of the tea garden women labourers are not empowered socio-economically as well as socially although they are earning little money. From this analysis, it is found that most of the tea garden women labourers possess poor socio-economic status, culturally and educationally. They are facing problems like religion, ethnicity, age of the respondent, illiteracy, poor health care facility, marital status, alcoholism, and problems of epidemics of various diseases, scarcity of drinking water, child labour, early marriage and superstition belief. Most of illiterate and innocent for that they are working for their daily livelihood and survival of their family. So, it is our duty to help them in their education and gives them moral supports, so that they can establish socio-economically sound people.

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