SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITION OF THE PEOPLE IN SON GACHHI TEA ESTATE IN JALPAIGURI DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL

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Abstract: Socio-economic characteristics and status are the seminal issues all over the world, especially in the developing countries. The study of socio-economic condition tries to explain the actual situation of population in a particular region in micro level. The present work is an attempt to carry out a detailed study of the socio-economic condition and problems of the people residing at various labour lines of Son Gachhi Tea Estate and suggest possible measures to overcome them. Son Gachhi Tea Estate is registered on the left bank of river Mal in Matiali block of Jalpaiguri district in West Bengal. The study proposes to investigate the socio-economic life of people in Son Gachhi Tea Estate and how their socio-economic condition affects the day-to-day life of people in Son Gachhi Tea Estate.

Index Terms: Socio-economic condition, tea garden labourer, Son Gachhi Tea Estate, labour line, river Mal

1. Introduction:
   Social and economic conditions are critical elements in the sustainability of settlements and the habitats they depend on. They are concerned particularly with measures of social and economic well-being, including age-sex, marital status, services and amenities available to them, income, education and occupation. Drinking water, health, occupation, schooling etc are the good indicators of socio economic condition of any tribe. Now in the 21st century, in spite of the worldwide impact of globalization it is despairing that some of the tribal communities are still surviving in a deplorable condition. Thus the present paper addresses and looks into the determinants of socio-economic status of the dominant tribal communities of Son Gachhi Tea Estate in Jalpaiguri district.

   Son Gachhi Tea Estate was established in 1920 by James Field and is currently a private limited company, also known as Son Gachhi Tea Estate India Private Limited. Son Gachhi Tea Estate comprises two mouzas of Nakhati Tea Garden and Son Gachhi Tea Garden. It has three divisions, including Nakhati, Main and Bytagool divisions. In this Tea Estate, various labour lines are spread across the tea estate which may include Top line, Jungle Line, Main Line, Shimu Line, Mal Nadi Line, Gara Line, Naya Line, Bytagool Line, Chaibasa Line and Basa Line. Tea Estate Office Staff mainly based in Basa line and their socio-economic conditions are quite different from those residing at Tea Estate labour lines. Hence, household survey of Basa Line has been excluded from this analysis.

2. Study Area:
   The present study of Son Gachhi Tea Estate is located on the left bank of river Mal in Matiali block of Jalpaiguri district, in the foothills of Darjeeling Himalaya, nearer to the Mal Municipality with an area of approximately 14.65 sq.km. The nearest market is Mal Bazar, about 2 kms away and the nearest railway station is New Mal, about 6 to 7 kms away from the tea estate.
3. Objectives of the Research:
The major objective of the study is to assess the socio-economic condition of the people of Son Gachhi Tea Estate. For this purpose attempts are taken –
   i) To analyze the socio-economic conditions of the people;
   ii) To identify the different problems faced by the people;
   iii) To suggest the possible measures for improving their socio-economic conditions.

4. Methodology:
For the fulfillment of the specific objectives, a number of interactive and analytical methods, apart from the traditional and observational ones, are taken into consideration. As an initiative part of research collection, observation and tabulation have been done and finally area under study is worked out. Detailed socio-economic analysis through door to door household surveys (random sampling method) has been taken into consideration to know the socio-economic conditions of the people of Son Gachhi Tea Estate. The number of sample household was 147 and the survey was done in November, 2011. Necessary maps and suitable tables and diagrams have been prepared by using appropriate cartographic techniques to illustrate a clear exposition of the present study.

5. Result and Discussion:
The detailed socio-economic analysis of this tea estate is as follows:
• Population Composition by Gender
   Males slightly outnumber females, but actually it reflects a balanced sex ratio in this tea estate.
• **Population Composition by Social Groups**
  This is basically a tribal dominated area, with a small proportion of people belonging to ‘OBC’ (5 percent) and ‘General’ (4 percent) category.

• **Age-Sex Structure**
  In the ‘young’ age group (0-14 years), females outnumber males. In the ‘adult’ age group, younger adults (15-34 years) are mainly females, whereas older adults (35-59 years) are mostly male. In the ‘old’ age group (more than 60 years), males slightly outnumber females. The age-sex structure is broadly progressive, with a marked bulge in the working population and bottom heavy young population. Detailed age-sex structure is presented in Table 1.

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**Fig. 2** Demographic features of Son Gachhi Tea Estate
Table 1: Age-Sex Structure of Son Gachhi Tea Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Groups</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>% of Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>% of Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-4</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>4.65</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>5.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>5.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5.03</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>1.38</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>50.57</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>49.43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, November, 2011

- **Religious Groups**
  This tea estate shows a mixed population composition in terms of religious faith. Most of the villagers are ‘Hindu’ (82 percent), whereas ‘Christians’ (12 percent) and ‘Muslims’ (5 percent) are also present.

- **Mother Tongue**
  In terms of mother tongue also, one can decipher a diversified picture. While around one-third of the villagers report ‘Shadri’ as their mother tongue, presence of mother tongues like Hindi, Odiya, Munda and Sabar has also been noticed.

Table 2: Educational Status of Son Gachhi Tea Estate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>% of Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>% of Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level of education</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>20.34</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>24.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>11.08</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>10.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>V-VIII</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>9.96</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>8.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IX-X</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>XI-XII</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Post Graduate</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium of Education</td>
<td>Hindi</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>53.28</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bengali</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>55.56</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>44.44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Field Survey, November, 2011
In terms of literacy, this tea estate shows an average picture, where 56 percent of the villagers are literate, and the remaining 44 percent illiterate.

**Levels of Education by Gender**
By and large, this tea estate poses a dissatisfactory picture in terms of educational attainment. While illiteracy is prominent among females as compared to males, at the primary level of education, such differences hardly exist. But after this level, males outnumber females to a large extent. If one looks at the overall education levels, there is a progressively declining percentage of persons having attained higher education, with only one person with a Post-Graduate degree among the sampled villagers. Table.2 provides details on education of the respondents.

**Medium of Education**
Hindi is the major medium of education in this tea estate, with very little presence of Bengali and English.
Fig. 4 Household conditions and landholding of Son Gachhi Tea Estate
Fig. 5 Housing characteristics of Son Gachhi Tea Estate

- **Length of Stay**
  This tea estate seems to be quite old, as almost 26 percent of the households have reported to have been living here for two generations, and 17 percent living here for three generations. In comparison to this, only around 8 percent of villagers have been staying here for the last five years.

- **Family Structure**
  58 percent of the sampled families are ‘joint families’ whereas 42 percent are ‘nuclear families’.

- **Size of Landholding**
  Almost 80 percent of the sampled households possess below 0.5 acres of landholding. On the contrary, the proportion of sampled households having medium landholding of 4.0 to 6.0 acres is only around 1 percent.

- **Ownership of House**
While 70 percent of the households have their own houses, around 12 percent and 10 percent of families stay in houses belonging to tea estates and government agencies, respectively.

- **Number of Rooms**
  While almost half of the sampled households have two dwelling rooms, around one-third households stay in three rooms.

- **Availability of Electricity**
  78 percent of sampled households have access to electricity and 22 percent households have not access to electricity.

- **Electricity Consumption Charges Paid**
  While almost one-third of the sampled households pay a monthly electricity bill of Rs. 151-200, one-fifth of the families pay Rs. 101-150, and another 15 percent households pay a bill of Rs. 251-300.

- **House Building Materials**
  Mud and cement are the major materials used for constructing floors; tin and asbestos are the major roof materials; cement, mud and wood are major materials used in walls for fencing.

- **Sources of Drinking Water**
  46 percent households collect drinking water from wells, while 29 percent households depend on taps. 14 percent households fetch it from the river.

- **Fuel**
  Firewood is the major fuel used in almost 90 percent of the sampled households, whereas 6 percent households use tree leaves as fuel. A very small proportion of households are using LPG cylinders.

- **Toilet Facility**
  Although almost one-third of the sampled households have own toilets, and another 12 percent use common toilets, open defecation is a major problem.

- **Disposal of Waste (Solid)**
  Almost 43 percent of households have disposed solid waste at holes and another 42 percent households dumped in open space. In comparison to this, only 15 percent households disposed it at dumping ground.

- **Level of Poverty**
  Level of poverty, measured through the possession of ration cards, is a serious cause for concern. Around 66 percent of households belong to the BPL (Below Poverty Level) category, while only 27 percent are in the APL (Above Poverty Level) category.

- **Household Assets**
  In this tea estate, television, mobile phones and cycles are common household assets, and approximately 40 percent households possess these assets. But, refrigerators, telephones and motor cycles are available only to a handful of families.
**Living Conditions**

- **Gender-Wise Work Participation Ratio**
  In terms of work participation, males (63 percent) largely outnumber females (37 percent).

- **Earning Members**
  Around 44 percent households are dependent on a single earning member, whereas another 33 percent have two earning members.

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Fig. 6 Living conditions of Son Gachhi Tea Estate
Fig. 7 Household economy of Son Gachhi Tea Estate

- **Source of Income**
  Almost 50 percent households are involved in tea leaves plucking. Next important source of income comes from different factories and services, and roughly 14 percent households of each are dependent on this. Approximately 11 percent households’ income comes from services. Some families are involved in economic activities associated with tea estate and business.

- **Levels of Income**
  Monthly income of sampled households reveals that 47 percent households earn in between Rs.1000-2000, which indicates very poor economic conditions. About 14 percent households have monthly income of Rs.2000-2500, whereas 10 percent and 11 percent have Rs. 2500-3000 and Rs. 3000-3500 respectively.
• Gender-Wise Occupations
The gender-wise study of workforce among the sample households reveals that 63 percent of the male population are engaged in different occupational activities, while female workforce is 37 percent among total workforce in the tea estate population. 21 percent female workforce is engaged in tea garden labour, while 22 percent workforce is engaged in tea estate work.

• Cultivation of Agricultural Land
116 out of 147 households do not possess cultivated land for agriculture and only 31 households have cultivated land. 8 percent households possess below 0.5 acres of cultivated land, and 9 percent households have in between 0.5 to 2.0 acres of cultivated land.

• Irrigated Land
26 out of 31 households do not have any irrigated land for agriculture, and only 5 households possess irrigated agricultural land.

• Use of Fertilizers
20 out of 31 households do not use any fertilizers for their agricultural fields. 10 households use cow dung as fertilizer and 1 household uses urea for the same purpose.

• Cropping Pattern
Among the 31 households involved in cropping, 27 report mono cropping, and the remaining 4 report double cropping.

• Crops Cultivated
Among the 31 households involved in cropping, 26 cultivate ‘Paddy’ whereas 3 households cultivate paddy and potato and 2 households cultivate paddy and vegetables.

• Perception of Road Conditions
According to most of the respondent households, road conditions are satisfactory (about 23 percent) and more satisfactory (about 39 percent).

• Perception on Quality of Drinking Water
While 44 percent of sampled households are ‘more satisfied’ with the quality of drinking water, around 23 percent report less satisfaction. However, around 10 percent households report great satisfaction with the quality of drinking water.

• Perception of Drainage Conditions
Perception of drainage conditions also poses a mixed picture – as 38 percent sampled households are ‘less satisfied’ while another 23 percent and 20 percent are ‘satisfied’ and ‘more satisfied’ respectively.

• Perception of Electricity Conditions
33 percent sampled households are ‘satisfied’ with electricity conditions, but around 26 percent households are ‘less satisfied’ with it.

• Perception of Communication System
Almost 41 percent of the sampled households are ‘satisfied’ with the communication system, but almost one-third of the total sampled households report less satisfaction.
• **Perception of Transportation System**
  Approximately 46 percent of the sampled households are satisfied with the transport system, but again around one-third of the total sampled households show a response of ‘less satisfaction’.

• **Government Support in Agriculture**
  Almost two-third of the sampled households feel ‘less satisfied’ with government support in agriculture, and another 33 percent is in fact ‘least satisfied’.

• **Government Support in Medical Facilities**
  Unlike agriculture, households pose a mixed perception in terms of government support on medical facilities, as 38 percent report less satisfaction, 28 percent least satisfaction while around 22 percent report more satisfaction.

![Fig. 8 Agricultural conditions of Son Gachhi Tea Estate](source: Primary Survey)
5.1 Problems Faced by the People in Son Gachhi Tea Estate:
The dwellers in labour lines of Son Gachhi Tea Estate face various kinds of problems, including:

- Inadequate supply of drinking water.
- Dwellers are mainly dependent on the tea estate for their economic conditions. They are mainly employed in tea estate. Seasonal unemployment during January to April due to winter and drought conditions in this region is prevalent as the aforementioned season is not suitable for tea leaves plucking and tea growth.
- River bank erosion of river Mal near the Jahaj Busty, Mal Nadi Line and Jungle Line have encroached homesteads.
Landslide and floods are very common in Mal Nadi Line and Jungle Line during monsoons every year, which leads to damage of homesteads and agricultural land.

- Wage rates in tea gardens are Rs. 85 per day, which is insufficient to fulfill basic needs of the households.
- Inadequate supply of electricity hampers study of the students and other household activities.
- Company owned houses have not been repaired for a long time, which leads to extremely precarious conditions for dwellers, especially during the rainy and winter seasons.
- Half of the households have faced sanitation problems as they do not have any toilet facility and there is insufficient facility for disposal of solid wastes.
- Problems of addiction to consumption of alcohol are very common amongst dwellers in tea estate labour lines.
- Tuberculosis, cold and cough, malaria, diarrhea, jaundice are common diseases that affect the dwellers frequently.
- Inadequate medical facilities and transportation and communication facilities from the labour lines to the main road are other critical problems confronting the dwellers in this tea estate.

5.2 Facilities provided by the Son Gachhi Tea Estate Authorities:

Son Gachhi Tea Estate Authorities provide the following facilities only for their permanent labourers:

- Electricity for the households but the electricity bills are paid by them.
- Supply of firewood for domestic fuel used.
- Medical facilities for the entire family.
- Bonus and P.F.
- Provide ration of Rs. 40 paisa per kg of rice and wheat per head for 1 kg of rice and 2 kg of wheat per week.

6. Conclusion:

In the light of the above mentioned problems faced by the residents, a possible improvement in the quality of their life can be brought about by building schools in the neighborhoods, providing better health care facilities, better supply of drinking water, improvement of sanitation systems, availability of work throughout the year, increase in wage rates, etc. Government should take active role in developing proper, hygienic toilet facilities for every household within these mouzas, in ensuring various facilities like adequate wage rates, medical facilities and household facilities for the tea garden workers and their families. Government and Gram Panchayats should take initiatives to comprehensively engage them in 100 days’ work under Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to solve the problem of seasonal unemployment in this area. Tea Garden Authorities should take initiatives to protect the river bank in order to arrest further erosion and loss of land, to supply electricity for all the dwellers with a view to the improvement of socio-economic conditions of the people in this Tea Estate.

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Works Cited