

Social and Educational Condition of Tea Tribes of Assam: A Study

Anita Bishwasarma, Bitu Borah

Assistant Professor (Contractual), Assistant Professor (Contractual)

Assamese Dept., Assamese Dept.

Chaiduar College, Gohpur, Assam, India, PIN- 784168, North Lakhimpur College (Autonomous), Lakhimpur, Assam, India, PIN- 787031.

Abstract

This article will try to show the contributions of the Assam tea tribe from the beginning of the set up of the tea industries in Assam. It will show the different aspects of the community- how and why they were immigrated, the social aspects, occupation, socio-political set up, educational status, work culture etc. The article will also so how the industries have now become one of the influential source of government revenues and are the nonviable component, which have been regarded as one of the subjugated and dominant class of Assamese Society. However from the times of their immigration to the recent time of Digitalization, they have been subjugated from the Educational, Health and other important parameters of socio-economic security.

Keywords- tea tribe, socio-economic, immigration, education, work culture etc.

0.00 Introduction: Assam from its time of millennium has been regarded as the land of migration. Due to its Geo-political location, it has been acting as a pull factor which resulted in the demo-graphical diversities of different communities. After the colonial invasion in Assam, which happened in 1826, Assam has been experiencing its tea industries, which started to evolve during the British Regime. In 1839, the 'Assam Tea Company' and in 1859 the 'Jorhat Tea Company' was established. But as a tea estate, the first plant was launched in Chabua (1837) of Dibrugarh district.¹ A scarcity of waged labor was confronted to expand the tea industries, due to which a large number of waged labor were immigrated from West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh and Tamilnadu under the British ruler. They, by experiencing colonial exploitation had replaced the jungles of Assam to tea estates.²

Tea industries have now become one of the influential source of government revenues. Tea tribes are the nonviable component of the tea industry, which have been regarded as one of the subjugated and dominant class of Assamese Society. However from the times of their immigration to the recent time of Digitalization, they have been subjugated from the Educational, Health and other important parameters of socio-economic security. According to Sushil Kurmi, one of highly celebrated social worker and author of the tea tribe, "Tea labors have been employing in all the activities of a tea estate, from the ploughing to the industrial works. Their life span, that they have been spending here, always goes on with the assamese proverb- 'Eti Koli Duti Pat' (Indicates that their life is all about themselves dealing daily in the different kinds of work, differently within and outside the tea estate). Their lifeline is all about the whistle of the plant, which have the present but not the future in their hands. They do not realize about their future as tea industry is the only way of their livelihood, totally dedicating themselves to the work in the gardens."³

1.00 Social Condition: The analysis of 'Social Condition' covers the entire arena of the rituals, food habits, occupations, education, folklore and folk literatures etc. of the relating community. Due to technical limitations, all aspects cannot be analyzed or covered up and so this paper will cover the studies of Occupation and Social System to visualize the reality of the Social condition of the tea tribe.

1.01 Occupation: Assam is an agrarian state, in which tea industries are one of important agri-based industry. Both of the male and female of the tribe have been employing in the tea-estate as labor. The women of the tea tribe can earn income by self. Apart from the tea estate works, they have been habituating to hunting, Animal husbandry, cultivation, collecting wood and making handicrafts.

Tea labors are habituating to animal husbandry. They usually nurture goat, dog, duck, chicken, bullock and cows and other domestic beings, from which they earn extra incomes. They usually sell the milks of cows and goats. Apart from these, there are a few folks, who live on hunting. But by changing tide of time, hunting become a culture instead of an occupation.

1.02 Social System: Though the women class of tea estates earns income, but the social system of tea estate is merely patriarchal. The women are not allowed to spend their income by their own. In terms of distributing social justice, the role of the chief of the labor line (usually which is a slam area) is unavoidable. The post of the 'Chief' is selected as per the eligibility. But in some tea estates, the post have been selecting on the basis of tradition, which is merely through heredity. Though the post of the chief has been called differently in different areas, but the power and responsibilities are almost same among the tea estates of Assam. The Chawtals called the post as 'Majhi' or 'Naik', the Urang call it as 'Pahan', the Chaura call it as 'Gamehngen', or 'Boya-hoja' or 'kuran', the Poroja named it as 'Pengam' etc.⁴

A kind of dormitory can be seen in the tea estates, in which the young folks are trained. They have been trained in different subjects, like: Self- defense, Social education (Norms, rituals, cultures etc.) and the responsibility to protect the society. Different

communities of the tribe named this dormitory by different names. The Mariya community named it as 'Ghutul' whereas the Chawtal named it as 'Chikar Disum'.⁵ The culture of dormitory has been going to be extinct someday due to the negligence of the community.

2.00 Educational Aspect: Education is the main sailer of a nation. Without education, a nation cannot ascend high. According to educationist, "Education is the chief instrument of social change." or education is the root way for the welfare of a society. Mahatma Gandhi told, "By education I mean an all-round development of the child, his body, mind and spirit."

From these, it is clear that without education a nation, a society or a country never survive. From this point of view, a huge amount of tribal people of Assam is still suffering due to lack of education. Tea estates are the evidences of these all. Still they are ignoring their education and as they belong to a very poor status. They are not interested in education, although there are many reasons behind this. According to the policy of govt. there should be a primary school in every one or one and half kilometer of a tea estate. But there is no implementation of that policy. The primary schools are situated in 2/3 k. m. away from the garden- line, which creates problems in having education. Moreover there is no sufficient number of teachers against the subjects, due to which a teacher cannot cover all the subjects and obey his duty by only supervising the classes. The teachers are not familiar with the local language of the tribal people and due to lack of consciousness the students also get attracted towards 'working in garden' more and to education less. According to 'Plantation labor act', the tribal children from 6 to 12years of age should get primary education, but there is no importance of this act. And that is why, those among them who are now educated tribal people, are also not able to contribute towards their society for development.

Lack of education also affects the economic condition of tribal society. Parents do not value education, and reason of the issue, are lack of education itself. This causes food crisis, and they suffer very badly. Lack of education also leads to child marriages, which acts as a factor of the increasing population. There is also a culture of wine in the tribal society. Almost every functions or program of that society ends with local wine. After having hard work they are habituated to drink wine. And these all affects the educational, economic, social, cultural and other aspects of the society. There is no sign of social responsibility in that community and due to the false beliefs of the people, many commoners suffers from evil practices like witch-hunting.

However, there are many labor organization and social welfare board for the upliftment of education, and all-round development of the society. Moreover, members of the parliament are there, who belong to that community, but they are still in under developed stage, and if we emphasize the reasons behind this, we'll find reasons like lack of collective interests, lack of bravery etc. Those, who even tried to do something for the society, had to stop themselves due to various causes or some pressures from within, due to lack of proper knowledge and way of heading forward.

Before the Independence of India, 'Bagisa Srom Aain' was adopted. After that, many policies and laws were introduced for the wellbeing of the labor class. Those policies are—

1. Workmen's compensation act, 1923
2. Payment of wages act, 1936
3. Industrial employment act, 1946
4. Industrial disputes act, 1947
- 5, Minimum wages act.1948

Unfortunately, these all only fulfilled the interests of the gardens, not of the labors.

3.00 Conclusion: From the above study, a pathetic reality has been visualized. The Tea tribes are those who have been strengthening the backbone of the Assam, by producing tea materials. To develop the community, the government has to develop the educational and social aspects of the community.

End notes:

¹Muhan Tanti, Horen Bhumij: **Seujipat**, Page:39

² Above mentioned, Page:47

³ Sushil Kurmi: **Axomar chah sromikar avodan**, Page:69

⁴ Sukdeva Adhikari: **Axomor Chah jonogusthi aru Luka-jivan**, Page: 118

⁵ Above mentioned, Page: 123

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