

The Economic Conditions of Workers in Doomni and Barchapari Tea Estates of Assam, A Comparative Study.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2025.120800079>

Received: 07 Aug 2025; Accepted: 15 Aug 2025; Published: 06 September 2025

ABSTRACT

The Assam Tea Industry, which accounts for more than 50 percent of India's total tea production. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment to nearly half a million population, contributing revenues and support to develop other infrastructure and service sector over the year.

The history of tea in India began with the plantations of tea in the lowlands of Assam during the late 1930s by the British after its discovery by Robert Bruce and Maniram Dewan in the hills of Assam. The tea tribe population, being extremely diverse in terms of religious and linguistic composition, is intricately associated with tea plantation, processing and production, and bears immense significance to the socio-culture and economy of Assam. Tea tribe of Assam is one of most underdeveloped community and the women of this community are more vulnerable in comparison to man. They have been facing enormous problems and difficulties (poverty, homeless and illiteracy) in their day-to-day life. Therefore, it is essential to study the economic status and the living condition of tea garden workers. The study proposes to investigate a comparative analysis of economic condition of tea garden workers in Doomni tea estate in Baska district and Barchapari tea estate in Golaghat district of Assam.

Keywords: Plantation, Socio-culture, tea-garden, Community, Tea-tribes.

INTRODUCTION

The Assam Tea Industry, which accounts for more than 50 percent of India's total tea production. The tea industry developed by British planters brought in labourers from Bihar and Orissa. Tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment to nearly half a million population, contributing revenues and support to develop other infrastructure and service sector over the year.

Tea occupies a very intricate place in the economy and lives of the people of Assam as it not only has the largest acreage under tea contributing to more than half of tea produced in India, but it is also quite popular all over as breakfast and evening drink. It is not only used as refreshment during our day-to-day life but is also consumed at social events and many formal ceremonies have been created for tea.

The history of tea in India began with the plantations of tea in the lowlands of Assam during the late 1930s by the British after its discovery by Robert Bruce and Maniram Dewan in the hills of Assam. Today, due to the recent inclusion of small tea growers the tea plantations in Assam have grown and mushroomed to such an extent that it has become one of the largest tea growing regions of the world producing 52.04 per cent of India's tea, constituting 53.97 per cent of the country's tea area and providing employment to nearly half a million population, contributing revenues and support to develop other infrastructure and service sector over the year.

For tea plantations in Assam British Imported huge number of cheap, hard pressed and illiterate labourers belonging to lower and downtrodden communities such as Santhal, Munda, Oraon, Khond, etc. from famine and poverty-stricken areas of Bihar, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal having diversity in respect of their language, tradition, culture, religion and social background.

The tea tribe population, being extremely diverse in terms of religious and linguistic composition, is intricately associated with tea plantation, processing and production, and bears immense significance to the socio-culture and economy of Assam. They are mostly rural in nature, live in almost every district of Assam, and their density varies according to the number of tea plantations. Hence, they are more numerous in upper and central Assam than lower Assam. This population today constitutes about 20 per cent of the total population of Assam.

Tea tribe of Assam is one of most underdeveloped community and the women of this community are more vulnerable in comparison to man They have been facing enormous problems and difficulties (poverty, homeless and illiteracy) in their day-to-day life. Others social evils like superstition, exploitation also being inevitable among the poor and marginalized groups tea garden workers. Without awareness of scientific knowledge through education, women would not be able to enjoying their rights and protect them from the prevailing superstitions which are harmful not only for that section but also for the society as a whole.

The study proposes to investigate a comparative analysis of economic condition of tea garden workers in Doomni and Barchapari tea estate of Assam.

Significance of the Study: Economic situation plays a vital role in individual as well as in social life. Without a sound economic condition, availing of rights and enjoying of equality, liberty, fraternity can't be expected. Most of the tea garden labourers are backward in all aspects of their life. Poor socio-economic conditions, ignorance due to illiteracy, over-crowded and unhygienic living conditions in the residential colonies make tea garden population helpless to various communicable diseases and underfeeding. There may be some also specific health problems, which may be related to their occupation.

Among the total tea garden working labour in each tea garden, only 30 percent of them are permanent employees. During the peak season, each garden employs casual workers at wages much lower than the actual minimum wage.

Tea Estate labourers play an important role in our society. Our society will never be complete without their involvement and contribution. Therefore, it is essential to study the socio-economic condition of tea garden workers. The economic condition they live in, their living condition and the facilities enjoyed by them need to be understood in the light of the present-contemporary society. This paper tried to make a comparative study on economic condition of tea garden workers and the facilities enjoyed by them between Doomni tea estate and Barchapari tea estate.

Objectives: The main objectives of this study are—

- 1.To examine the economic conditions of workers in Doomni and Barchapari tea estates.
2. To compare the wages, benefits and working conditions of workers in both estates.
- 3.To suggest recommendations for improving the economic conditions of workers

METHODOLOGY

Both primary and secondary sources of data have been extensively used for the purpose of the study. The primary data have been collected mainly from the tea garden workers living in the tea garden area of both the tea garden through the structured questionnaire, personal interview and observation. For the present study 95 nos. of sample are selected from each two garden on the basis of simple random sampling, so total size of sample is 190.Secondary data are collected from the management of the tea estate, various books, journals and websites. Both primary and secondary data was processed with systematic statistical procedure. Classification of data was done in proper way and it was presented in tabular form where ever necessary.

Study Area: The present study is in Doomni Tea Estate, located in Baska district of lower part of Assam, which is 7 kms away from district headquarter and in Barchapari tea estate which is located in Golaghat district of Upper part of Assam and is 31 kms away from district headquarter.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Nair (1989) made a study on the socio-economic conditions of labourers in the Ponmudi tea estate a unit which is closed since 1973. He made a case study of this unit to highlight the fate of workers in a sinking factory. The only reason the workers stay in the factory is because they have nowhere else to go. Due to unemployment, they are essentially living in poverty.

Goswami (1992) conducted a study on the labour population of Brahmaputra valley of Assam considering all aspects highlighted that their condition was not at par even with that of the workers of the unorganised sectors as well local peasantry. He found that if there were no socio-cultural barriers many of the garden workers would have come out of the plantation for good and joined the local peasantry even as land less peasants.

In his book Socio-economic development of plantation workers in North-East India, Chakravorty (1997), examined how workers participate in socioeconomic development processes. The author emphasised education as a tool for fostering in workers a sense of awareness and responsibility, a sense of belonging to industry, and discipline, all of which make workers more duty-conscious and cautious about showing up for work on time and on a regular basis.

In Kerala, Kurian (1999) conducted an evaluative study on socio -economic background, working and living condition, consumption pattern and physical quality of life of women workers in the plantation sector. His study indicates that the facilities provided to the plantation workers are not satisfactory. Their consumption pattern shows that major spending is on food and consumption of nutrients are very limited. The facilities provided for medical and child care are also not sufficient. The social interaction of women workers and their general awareness is found to be poor due to their low level of education.

A study conducted by Joseph (2001) on prevailing status of women workers in Assam in the context of existing socio -economic setting to which they have been exposed since their immigration. In another work Joseph (2002) found that the leisure and recreational facilities are not evenly distributed among the tea worker community. The women get less leisure time and recreational facilities as compared to their male counterparts. It is also found that Christian women workers enjoy a better status in all spheres of life than the non-Christian women workers.

In their paper "Socio-economic and Political problems of Tea Garden workers," Singh et al. (2006) contend that while the tea sector may benefit the state and national economies, it is unquestionably not a panacea for human issues. The tea business has been viewed as a "cross between a milk cow and a flogging horse" by both the federal government and state governments. Social activists and others view tea gardens as kamadhendu, or milking cows, that provide milk when needed.

A study on the socioeconomic circumstances of tea garden labourers in the Darjeeling hills was also carried out by Khawas (2006). His research brought to light the incompetence and haughtiness of tea management with regard to the social and developmental needs of nine garden workers. In addition, he emphasised the state of the Darjeeling Hills tea garden workers in light of the nation's pervasive tea industry crisis and its effects on the workers. He also contends that the majority of tea gardens continue to function in the colonial master-slave system, with the sole objective of the owners and planters being to dominate the market and exert as much pressure as possible on the main producer (labourers).

A study conducted by Gadapani Sharma (2007) highlighted the economic condition of tea community of Lahpahia Tea Estate and how they are failing to provide the basic facilities to labours at epidemic time. Demanding various facilities agitation of labours is common against management. Non education, poverty, addiction of male and health facilities are the immutable problems in their lives.

Hazarika (2012) studied the vulnerable living conditions of tea tribes and labourers in six big tea gardens of Assam. His study shows that women workers in India are facing one of the worst forms of exploitation in modern times. Productivity of the industry is badly affected by the wage cut policy of the employers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION:

The findings and the results by the analysis of a comparative study of economic condition and the living status of tea garden workers between the Doomni tea Garden and the Barchapari tea Garden are given below--

Economic condition: The economic condition of the respondents is determined by occupation, level of their income, number of earners in a family, saving habit, financial liability, etc. of the tea garden workers of both Doomni and Barchapari tea Garden.

Table 1: Characteristics of respondents of Doomni Tea Estate and Barchapari Tea Estate.

| Types of variables | Categories | Doomni Tea Estate | | Barchapari Tea Estate | |
|--|-----------------------|-------------------|------|-----------------------|------|
| | | F=95 | % | F=95 | % |
| Occupational category | Permanent Worker | 44 | 46.3 | 38 | 40 |
| | Casual Worker | 51 | 53.7 | 57 | 60 |
| Main Earner | Head of the household | 47 | 49.5 | 42 | 44.2 |
| | Wife | 39 | 41.0 | 48 | 50.5 |
| | Others(Son/daughter) | 09 | 09.5 | 05 | 5.3 |
| Monthly family Income | Below Rs 5000 | 13 | 13.7 | 11 | 11.6 |
| | Rs 5001-Rs 8000 | 44 | 46.3 | 49 | 51.6 |
| | Rs8001-Rs 12000 | 33 | 34.7 | 25 | 26.3 |
| | Rs 12001-Rs 15000 | 05 | 05.3 | 08 | 8.4 |
| | Above Rs 15000 | 0 | 00 | 02 | 2.1 |
| Is their monthly income sufficient to meet their monthly needs | Yes | 11 | 11.6 | 16 | 16.8 |
| | No | 84 | 88.4 | 79 | 83.1 |
| Total Earner of The Family | One | 09 | 9.4 | 11 | 11.6 |
| | Two | 68 | 71.6 | 59 | 62.1 |
| | Three | 13 | 13.7 | 17 | 17.9 |
| | Four | 05 | 5.3 | 08 | 8.4 |
| Saving Account | Yes | 90 | 94.7 | 93 | 97.9 |
| | No | 05 | 5.3 | 02 | 2.1 |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------------------|-----|----|------|----|------|
| Regular saving in Every month | Yes | 03 | 3.1 | 06 | 6.3 |
| | No | 92 | 96.9 | 89 | 93.7 |
| Financial Liability | Yes | 17 | 17.9 | 09 | 9.5 |
| | No | 78 | 82.1 | 86 | 90.5 |

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents by occupational category in both the tea estates. There are two types of worker present in tea estates of our survey area. They are permanent or contractual. In Doomni tea estates 46.3% of the respondents are permanent worker and 53.7% of the respondents are casual worker while in Barchapari tea estates 40% respondents are permanent workers and 60% respondents are casual workers. So percentage of casual workers are high in both the tea garden.

So far as main earner of the respondent's family is concerned it is found in table 1 that highest percentage (49.5) of main earner in Doomni tea estate is head of the household While in Barchapari tea estate highest percentage of main earner (50.5) is household's wife. It is highlighted from the table that female workers (50.5%) are playing a significant role as a main earner to maintain their family in Barchapari tea estate.

Family income of the respondent is mainly based on tea garden wages. During survey respondent replied that wages of tea garden is not adequate to meet their daily expenses. Hence, they are not financially sound. The table 1 displayed that large number of respondents are in the range of monthly family income of Rs 5001- Rs 8000 in both the tea estates. In Doomni tea estates no one respondents have family income above Rs 15000 while in Barchapari tea estates 2.1% respondents have family income above Rs 15000. Almost 84% respondents in both the tea estates replied that their monthly income is not sufficient to meet their monthly needs.

Regarding the number of earners in the family of respondents in both the tea estates table 1 highlighted that highest number of respondents have two earners in their family. 11.6% respondent's family have single earner in Barchapari tea estates while this percentage is only 9.4 in the Doomni tea estates.

Savings of a person depend upon his earning. The daily wage of tea garden workers is comparatively low due to which their propensity to save is very low. Table 1 reveal that majority of tea garden workers have saving account in both the tea estates, but comparatively it is higher in the Barchapari tea estates than the Doomni tea estates. As per information received from the respondent, during field survey, they have opened saving account in the bank only because of zero balance account and getting direct benefit transfer (DBT) to them by the govt. or management and due to their low level of income they are unable to make regular savings.

So far financial Liability is concerned the table 1 indicates that Majority of the respondents have no financial liability in both the tea estates. Percentage of respondents having financial liability is higher in Doomni tea estates (17.9%) as compared to Barchapari tea estates ((9.5%). Respondents have taken loan from Self Help Group and Non-Banking Financial Institutions (NBFIs) for meeting their various needs. Those who have financial liability they have taken loan for marriage, education of their children and hospital expenses.

Living condition of respondents: The analysis focused on the living conditions of the respondents, examining factors such as the nature and kind of housing, accessibility to facilities, types of family, level of education, and availability of water which are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Characteristics of respondents of Doomni Tea Estate and Barchapari Tea Estate.

| Types of Variables | Categories | Doomni Tea Estate | | Barchapari Tea Estate | |
|--------------------|------------|-------------------|---|-----------------------|---|
| | | F=95 | % | F=95 | % |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|----|------|----|------|
| Gender | Male | 51 | 53.7 | 39 | 41.1 |
| | Female | 44 | 46.3 | 56 | 58.9 |
| Marital status | Married | 89 | 93.7 | 84 | 88.4 |
| | Unmarried | 6 | 06.3 | 11 | 11.6 |
| Types of Family | Joint | 3 | 03.2 | 6 | 06.3 |
| | Nuclear | 92 | 96.8 | 89 | 93.7 |
| Level of Education | Illiterate | 31 | 32.6 | 25 | 26.3 |
| | Elementary | 58 | 61.1 | 60 | 63.1 |
| | High school | 6 | 6.3 | 10 | 10.6 |
| Housing Condition | Pucca | 32 | 33.7 | 43 | 45.2 |
| | Kacha | 63 | 66.3 | 52 | 54.8 |
| Sources of Drinking water | Tubel (Own) | 39 | 41.1 | 47 | 49.5 |
| | Ring/Well (own) | 27 | 28.4 | 26 | 27.4 |
| | Supplied at Common places. | 29 | 30.5 | 22 | 23.1 |
| Sanitation | Pucca | 35 | 36.8 | 47 | 49.5 |
| | Kacha | 41 | 43.2 | 39 | 41.1 |
| | Not available | 19 | 20.0 | 09 | 9.4 |

The table 2 showed the distribution of respondents by gender in both tea estates. Doomni Tea Estates has 51males (53.7%) and 44 females (46.3%), while Barchapari Tea Estate has 39 males (41.1%) and 56 females (58.9%). Majority of the respondents are married in both the tea gardens.

The data displayed the composition of families as nuclear or joint. Doomni tea estate has 92 nuclear families (96.8%) and 3 joint families (3.2%), while Barchapari has 89 nuclear families (93.7%) and 6 joint families (6.3%).

When we consider the level of education of tea garden workers Table 2 highlighted that 32.6% of the respondents are illiterate in Doomni tea Estate while it is 26.3% in Barchapari tea estate. Of the total respondents 61.1% got education up to primary(I-V), while 6.3% of the respondents got education up to high school level in Doomni tea estates. The percentage of respondents who got education up to primary level and high school in Barchapari tea estate is 63.1% and 10.6% respectively. Thus, it can be said that educational level of tea garden labourer is not satisfactory. The poor socio-economic condition of the guardians is mainly responsible because of which the younger children usually remain away from education.

The housing conditions of the tea garden workers are not the same. The tea garden authority provides the house for their workers depending upon their type of job. Table 2 highlighted that 33.7% respondent have pucca houses while 66.3% respondents live in Kacha houses in Doomni tea estate. The respondents who live in Pucca house in Barchapari tea estate is 45.2% while living in Kucha house it is 54.8%.

Pure drinking water is one of the major concerns in the tea garden. Tubel are the most common source of water supply in both the tea garden. From table 2 it is found that 41.1% respondent have own tubal in their campus while 28.4% respondent have own ring or well in Doomni tea estate. In Barchapari tea garden the percentage of respondents who have own tubal is 49.5% while 27.4% have own well in their campus. The percentage of respondents who have no own source for water and need to fetch water either from public tubal or well or supplied by management at a common place is 30.5% in Doomni Tea estate while it is 23.1% in Barchapari tea estate.

Although it is the responsibility of the employer to provide complete sanitary installation in the garden, the reality is often different. Table 2 highlights that 36.8% respondents use pucca Latrine and Bathroom while 43.2% respondent have kutchra latrines and bathroom in Doomni Tea estates. In Barchapari tea estate the percentage of respondent who have pucca toilet and bathroom is 49.5% while 41.1% respondents use kucha toilet and bathroom. The remaining respondents who have neither pucca toilet nor any kutchra or indigenous toilets and defecates in open areas is 20% in Doomni tea estates and 9.4% in Barchapari tea estates. It is noticed that the sanitation facility is comparatively better in the Barchapari tea estate than the Doomni tea Estate.

So far as the provision of medical facilities in the tea garden is considered, a dispensary is provided by the Tea Garden Authority in both the tea Garden. The management provides free treatment, medicines and the indoor patients are given free food to the workers in the garden. For better treatment they need to go to the civil hospital situated in the district head quarter which is 6/8 km far from the tea garden. The management also provides 24*7 ambulance service to the patients to check up. The permanent workers get wages during their illness and hospitalised for their treatment up to 7 days. The distance from modern health facilities remains a problem for plantation workers. Tea garden workers are the most economically deprived and therefore the most vulnerable to disease and ill health.

CONCLUSION:

The intensive field study on economic status and living conditions of tea tribes' community of Assam, by employing a random sampling method and utilizing a comprehensive questionnaire, this research indicates that tea garden workers are being subjected to a long process of socio-political deprivation and discrimination in both Doomni tea estate and Barchapari tea estate state. Their presence has a significant impact on the socio-economic field of the state. Therefore, there is urgent needs for the govt to adopt various measures and interventions to improve the economic and living conditions of the tea tribe community. Some of the **suggestions** are listed below--

The proposal suggests introducing both formal and non-formal education to children of tea workers, with employers and the government providing free education. A joint awareness campaign on educational entitlement is also suggested.

Generation after generation of labourers are compelled to work in the garden. Such a clause limits their ability to change jobs and allows planters to exploit them by all means. To increase workers' professional mobility, certain policy measures are needed. They ought to be given the chance to work in other industries as well.

Again, tea garden workers should receive higher pay and other benefits. The tea section should be paid a minimum standard wage, which should be reviewed frequently and raised yearly.

There should be housing, water, sanitary facilities, and other utilities available in the workers' colony. To improve the colony's situation, the government and non-governmental organisations should propose specific plans. The government should also have a policy mechanism in place to compel the planters to provide the essential services in the workers' colony.

The government and nongovernmental organisations must make a concerted effort to educate the public about women's rights. In this context, some social and political organisations might also be crucial.

People must make an effort to embrace modernity, which is grounded in reason and science, by dispelling the old superstitions that support the infringement of women's rights.

Better Medical facilities, immunisation, and family planning services should be provided in the garden. Sports and leisure activities for both male and female employees should be set up in the garden to enhance their mental and physical well-being.

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