

# Livelihood Pattern among the Tea Garden Labours of Mornai Tea Estate of Kokrajhar District, Assam

Premjith Mohendiar<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Alam Ara, (Advisor)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Masters in Social Work student, Department of Anthropology and Social Work, SHUATS Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor and Department of Anthropology and Social Work, SHUATS Allahabad, Uttar Pradesh, India

**Abstract:** *The main occupation of the Tea garden labour is wage labour. The economic condition is not highly sound among the Tea Garden community. The permanent workers have their own quarters allotted by the owner of that particular Tea garden. House is the indicator of socio-economic condition and its change in a particular family or community. The housing conditions of the respondent are not the same. This study aims to show the living conditions of the tea garden labourers of Mornai Tea Estate of Kokrajhar District of Assam. The study reveals that the conditions of the tea garden labours are not the same although they avail the facilities from the management of the Tea Garden. The data were collected from daily wage labour, elderly persons, permanent workers, etc.*

**Keywords:** Tea garden labours, Living conditions, Mornai, Kokrajhar, Assam

## 1. Introduction

The tea cultivation of Assam is a century old practice. It was first started by the British and has continued till date with full glory. In fact Assam alone produces more than half of India's total tea produce. Such is the glory of Assam Tea. The tea industry developed by British planters brought in labourers from Bihar and Orissa. These factors led to migration of huge bulk of population to Assam in search of livelihood. 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. Most of the workers engaged in Mornai tea Estate have migrated from other parts of India. They were brought to this place by the Christian Missionary during the later part of the 19th century and even in the early part of the twentieth century. It is mainly due to the fact that when the British found that vast stretches of uncultivated land was available here and the prevailing climatic conditions are also very pleasant to the growth of tea plantation, they tried to develop this Tea Estate in the region. However, there was a problem of unavailability of cheap labour in the region. As the local people were not inclined to work in the tea gardens due to some socio-economic reasons. They had to solve this problem by importing labour from various parts of India by using different methods. This migration of labourers to Assam was remarkable as it was a very large-scale internal migration which was composed of many tribal groups from Central India. The Mornai Tea Estate in Kokrajhar districts of Assam, India is a property of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). It is a charitable institution and held upon the Trust by (the Trust Association of) the NELC. The Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church is a protestant Christian Organization. It is a religious organization. It may be of some interest to know how a religious organization, whose activities are supposed to be continued to spiritual and moral development through religion, came to acquire Mornai Tea Estate which is a business

concern. Mornai Tea Estate is owned and managed by the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (Santal Mission) at Dumka in Jharkhand state. Dumka is also the head-quarter of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC), which is especially important among the santhal people in the district. This headquarter also administers a lot of property in West Bengal and Assam. Mornai Tea Estate in Kokrajhar District is a particularly important Estate for the economy of the NELC. Mornai Tea Estate was started in 1889 by Rev. Lars Olsen Skrefsrud. He was the pioneer Missionary of the Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Mornai Tea Estate had become the focal point of most of the social and economic activities. Mr. Skrefsrud was the first Manager of the garden. The labourers for the garden were recruited from the colony. It is recorded that in 1891, in Mornai Tea Estate, 200 acres of land was brought under tea cultivation. By the passing year the growth and development of tea estate have been increased up to 570 hectares its areas under tea plantation.

## 2. The Study Area

This study is carried out in Mornai Tea Estate which is located in Kokrajhar district of Assam. Mornai, a lone tea estate, is situated at the border of Assam and West Bengal, located by 26° N latitude and 90° E longitude. The estate is distributed over scattered areas, represented by five divisions, viz, Mornai Main, Kalaghat, Paushpur, Thakurpur and Grahampur. However the scattered areas are in reasonably close proximity and, in general, the estate is of longitudinal shape, being restricted in width by two rivers namely, Mor-nai and Bao-nai skirting the estate is generally flattish in nature, aerially extended between the relatively lower river banks and the land owes its origin to the alluvial deposits in the past. The name Mornai (In Assamese it is spelled as "MOR NOI") came after the river "Mora Noi" which flows through Mornai Tea Estate, ends up at river "BaoNoi". The low banks supporting tea are flood-susceptible.

### 3. Review of Literature

**Mehrotra (1930)** reported that The Plantation Labour Act 1951, as regards health and welfare the employers have to supply pure drinking water to all employees and provide latrines and urinals of prescribed standards separately for men and women workers. The medical facilities have to be provided to all workers free of cost housing accommodations have to be provided to all permanent workers. Moreover other essential materials like umbrella rain coat blankets sandals fire wood ration at subsidised rates etc have to be provided under the Act.

**Tyagi (1930)** mentioned that the labour welfare as "any arrangement of working conditions organisations of social and sports club and establishment of funds by a firm which contributes to the workers health and safety, comfort, efficiency, economic security, education and recreation".

**Kisku (1991)** views that after Rev. Riber, Indians were appointed as Manager of Mornai Tea Estate. Mornai Tea Estate has improved much. It is now managed by the Managing Committee appointed by the Synod of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. Mornai Tea Estate is one of the major income generating sources of NELC.

**Eie (1991)** reported that Mornai T. E. has constant aim is to make the workers healthy and happy as possible. With this end in view some sports have also been arranged and silver challenge cup was presented to the football club by G. Lochen Esq. who is the Norwegian Consul General of Calcutta and also managing agent of the garden. Better prices have been obtained for tea and it is hoped that the depression in the tea trade is over and that Mornai T. E. can look forward to brighter times again.

**Bhadra (1999)** says wider social-economic background of tea plantation workers in north-east has considerable importance for understanding their social change. A large number of labourers were brought from Bihar, Orissa, and Madhya Pradesh during British period to work in tea gardens. These labourers belonged to the various ethnic groups like Oraon, Munda, Santhal, Baraik, KhariaGhasi, Gond, Mahali, Sabar, Khond, etc. There have been many changes in the life due to their migration and adaptation in the plantation industrial environment. This study seeks to understand the process of migration and its consequent effects on socio-economic life of migrant workers.

#### Research Methodology

Based on both primary and secondary data were collected in the research for extracting relevant informations to answer research questions. Primary data have been collected mostly by direct contact method. The Questionnaires and interview schedules have been taken to carry out the whole investigation. All the information, based on primary sources have been collected from the selected Tea Estates of Kokrajhar District of Assam with pre-structured questionnaires on a number of major aspects of age, education,

marital status, living condition etc. Secondary information have been obtained from the magazines, newspapers, journals, books, theses and various other publications of Government of India and Government of Assam.

**Table 1:** Distribution of the respondents by rate wage

Sl. No	In yearly wise	Rate wage: per kg
1.	2011	66.50
2.	2012	71.50
3.	2013	89.00
4.	2014	94.00
5.	2015	115.00
6.	2016	126.00
7.	2017	137.00
8.	2018	167.00

Source: annual report

#### Wage Structure

The wage structure is based on 15 day basis for and for permanents labour monthly basis. It is not paid by the daily basis. It is revealed from the data that the average daily earnings of the workers employed as plantation labour works has been constantly increased out to be at Rs. 167/- irrespective of male and female permanent and casual labours. It is observed that majority 41.67 per cent of the worker have their average monthly income of Rs. 5000 or below. Tea garden labourers are generally dependent on wage of the tea garden to maintain their livelihood. Their daily wage is so less than one person's wage is not sufficient to maintain a family. That is why more than one member is engaged in tea garden work to meet their daily expenses.

#### Housing Facilities

Worker housing is a high level at Mornai Tea Estate. This is perhaps due to the role of Church and the Management committee in the tea garden. Majority of the respondent's houses are cemented. However, for many years there was no construction of new houses in the garden. In many houses workers themselves repaired and extended their own living quarters in the labour lines. Hence the workers themselves manage somehow to repair the quarters. Moreover, few of the tea garden labour families had been provided new houses by the government scheme. However, since the tea estate is now fully taken ultimate authority to run by the Northern Evangelical Lutheran church. Gradually the church becomes full active in concern to fulfill the needs of the tea garden labour. Church also has built a mutual relationship between tea management committee and labour union (ACMS). From this year onward houses repair work has been started and as well as other facilities are to be fulfill in the coming days.

#### Medical Facilities

Regarding the provision of medical facilities hospital is situated inside the tea garden and a dispensary is provided by the Tea Garden Authority. Mornai hospital consists of one doctor, two Health Assistants./Pharmacist./Lab Tech, 2 nurses (GNM) and 2 attendants, 4 midwives (qualified)/Trainee, 1 qualified medical practitioners. The Maijan hospital have 2 indoor wards for males and 2 for females, one children ward,

one maternity ward and one labor room. The management provides free treatment, medicines and the indoor patients are given food to the workers in the garden. The management also provides 24\*7 ambulance service to the patients to check up. Certain health problems like mal-nutrition, diarrhea, tuberculosis etc. are common among the tea plantation labours. During such condition they have to rush to the nearest M. R. M. Memorial Hospital in Kokrajhar and Dhubri Civil Hospital in Dhubri district.

### Education Facilities

Education facilities are given at school in the Garden as well as outside. Many children, young people boys and girls not only from the Garden but also many villages outside the Garden in the area are getting education at these institutions. Graduate of these schools are serving the local government as school teacher, college professors, office workers, and one of them as an MLA and sometime as Welfare Minister. In Mornai, the literacy rate is high 58.76 percent. This is perhaps due to the role of the church in matters of education. Mornai Tea Estate is consist 3 schools. There is two L.P. school and one M.E school in the village in which one L.P school and M.E. school is government and another L.P. school is maintained by the tea estate. The estate is providing monthly stipend to college going student. Tea estate is also has a provision of scholarship for higher study. There are six Anganbadi school in Mornai Tea Estate. The midday meal scheme provided by the government is also available. Gradually the scenario is changing the next generations are keen on their duty and studious, coming out with good ranks in H.S.L.C., H.S and in Govt. conducted competitive exams and are also very good in sports, yearly 5 to 6 boys are being selected to Sub-divisional junior and sub junior level. Lately 5 to 6 Boys/Girls succeeded in TET and are engaged as Teacher. So, we can hope the future aspect is very bright not only economically but also socially.

### Provision of Electricity

The terms of electricity supply to labour quarters is as per the Assam Government norms. The tea management authority extends grid power supply to the labour quarters provided to them by the state electricity board. The tea management authority has able to setup power house sub-centre through Assam Supply Electricity Board (ASEB) in the tea garden. The consumption of electricity, internal wiring and maintenance inside the quarter is entirely borne by the tea management. But the cost of procuring electric bulbs is totally borne by the workers themselves.

### Sanitation

The Tea Garden Management does have access to appropriate water supply and sanitation technology. The facilities provided therefore are in adherence to the standards set by the government programmes that are normally implemented in the rural areas in the country. There is a scheme of latrines provided by the present government for each family in the garden.

### Water Supply

According to Plantation Labour Act, 1951 section 8: "Drinking water-In every plantation effective arrangements shall be made by the employer to provide and maintain at convenient places in the plantation a sufficient supply of wholesome drinking water for all workers." Tubewell are the most common source of water supply in the Tea Garden. However, tea garden has consist 3 types of source of water supply namely Tubewell, Ring wells and taps. Notably, one hand pump is provided for 4 to 5 families at an average, which is a much higher ratio compared to the norms followed by the water supply programmes of the Government of India.

### Fuels used for cooking

They use firewood for cooking which they procure from the jungles or from the nearby villages. The permanent workers receive some allowance to procure fuels and this is not available to the temporary workers. Gas stoves and gas cylinder has been provided by the government scheme to each family with subsidy.

### Public Distribution System (PDS)

Although the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, has not made it mandatory to provide rations to the tea labour community, the management has been continuing with this practice, which has been prevalent for the last 100 years. Under the present system, the tea industry is allotted food grains through the PDS quota under the APL Scheme. The Food Corporation of India (FCI) supplies food grains to tea garden employers at a rate fixed by it. (Biswajeet Saikia, 2008). Thus, two systems of the PDS are running in the tea gardens- by the government and by the tea management. The items provided by the government are - rice, wheat, sugar and kerosene to those who are having valid ration cards. The PDS items provided by the tea management are rice, wheat and tea to those permanent and casual workers. But the casual workers do not receive PDS to the whole family members.

### Provision of Provident Fund

In Assam, a special Act viz., 'Assam Tea Plantation Provident Fund and Pension Scheme' was enacted to provide pension and provident fund to the tea garden permanent employees. But, presently tea gardens have dues to pay to the state government as provident fund and Pension. This is perhaps because of previous managing committee which was run by the Bhutan Duars Tea Association. However, presently the Mornai Tea Estate comes under the ownership and administration of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC). Recently the church and tea managing committee have able to paid the pending amount approximately 5 crores to the state government as provident fund and pension of tea garden permanent employees. It is clear indication that the church and managing committee has a positive concern towards labours of tea garden and their well-being in socio-economic aspect of their life.

### Recreational Facilities

The terms of recreational facilities is also have been utilize and practicing by the management of the tea garden. There is

one staff club and one labour club. Type of indoor game provided in each of the center namely Carom, Chess, and Chinese Checker etc. Type of outdoor games also made available, such as Foot ball, Volley ball, Cricket and Badminton. There is a one play ground. . Number of radio sets provided Color T.V. each for Staff and Labour Club.

#### Provision of Weather Protection

The tea garden also has provision of weather protection facilities such as umbrella, rain coat, blanket and a pairs of chappals for each labour. Apart from that tea garden also has a provision of aprons for medical stuff.

**Table 2:** Distribution of the respondents by Economic Profile of Tea Garden

Sl. No	Economic profile		Frequency	Percentage
1.	<i>Occupational Category</i>	<i>Permanent</i>	80	66.67
		<i>Temporary</i>	40	33.33
2.	<i>Monthly Family Income</i>	<i>Below Rs. 3000</i>	40	33.33
		<i>Rs. 3001-5000</i>	50	41.67
		<i>Rs. 5001-70000</i>	20	16.67
		<i>Above Rs.7000</i>	10	08.33
3.	<i>Housing conditions of Tea Garden labour</i>	<i>Cemented</i>	110	91.67
		<i>Semi-cemented</i>	10	08.33
4.	<i>Education qualification of the labour</i>	<i>Illiterate</i>	36	30.00
		<i>Primary (1s to 4<sup>th</sup>)</i>	16	13.33
		<i>High school</i>	20	16.67
		<i>Higher secondary</i>	36	30.00
		<i>Graduate</i>	12	10.00

#### 4. Conclusion

From the above discussion it can be concluded that livelihood pattern and living condition of Mornai Tea Estate is good. Since, Mornai Tea Estate has become big a asset to the NELC. Mornai Tea Estate has improved much than before. It is now manage by the Managing committee appointed by the Synod of Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church. Mornai Tea Estate is one of the major income generating sources of NELC. So long it has been a source of good local income for the church. Mornai is not for benefit, but for service. This principle has been maintained and Mornai want to maintain it always. According to the provisions made in, the Plantation Labour Rules/Act labourers now provided with approved type houses facilities, medical facilities, recreation facilities, education facilities electricity facilities, etc. The medical facilities have been provided to all workers free of cost housing accommodations have been provided to all permanent workers. Moreover other essential materials like umbrella rain coat blankets sandals fire wood ration at subsidised rates etc, have been provided under the Act. The health care is meager with respect to quality and access. The facilities like ambulance services are available in the tea garden. In relation to health concern of labour, the tea Management committee should implement Provision of medical equipments of basic/ elementary type to take care of the accessibility of the public health facility of the Mornai tea labour community.

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