

# Socio-Economic Condition and Rights of the Tea-Garden Women in Assam: A Study on Negheriting Tea Estate Area of Golaghat District

Dr. Dhiren Tamuli

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, DKD College, Dergaon, Golaghat, Assam (India)

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### Corresponding Author

Email: dhirendkd[at]gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

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. Tea tribe of Assam is one of most underdeveloped community and the women of this community are more vulnerable in comparison to man. Others social evils like superstition, exploitation also being inevitable among the poor and marginalized groups of people. Prevailing superstition and un-challenged customs of the society can be remarked as one of the major reason of women rights violation in Assam. Basically, women whose economic and education standard is not in expected level have been facing rigorous threat in enjoying their rights. 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.

## 1. Introduction

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. Tea tribe of Assam is one of most underdeveloped community and the women of this community are more vulnerable in comparison to man. Others social evils like superstition, exploitation also being inevitable among the poor and marginalized groups of people. Prevailing superstition and un-challenged customs of the society can be remarked as one of the major reason of women rights violation in Assam. Basically, women whose economic and education standard is not in expected level have been facing rigorous threat in enjoying their rights. 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. Against this background, this paper is designed to analyse the socio-economic condition and awareness of the women about their rights in Negheriting Tea Estate in particular and Assam as a whole.

## 2. Objectives of the study

- Analyse the socio-economic condition of the women of Negheriting Tea Estate area
- Find the awareness of the women about their rights in Negheriting Tea Estate.

## 3. Methodology

- Both primary and secondary sources of data are used for the analysis
- Primary data are collected from the four villages (Lines) of Negheriting Tea Estate area
- 200 nos. of women from 120 households (30 households from each line) are selected on the basis of simple random sample method.
- Secondary data are collected from various books, journals and websites.

## 4. Socio-economic condition of Negheriting Tea Estate area

The data collected from the field shows that the main earning source of the 120 households of the four lines of Negheriting Tea Estate only 16 households have a minimum standard of living based on service and business sector, whereas other 104 households are fighting for their sustenance (Table 1.1). As it is well known that tea workers have least agricultural land the agricultural sector of this area is not suitable for the economic development. Basically, they are used in agricultural purpose by other people nearer to their villages. In comparison to male, the condition of the women of these areas is the worst. Only one woman is involving in service sector whereas all other are depended upon her husband, fathers, brothers or have to involve in daily wage earning through privately working in other house, hotels or in the tea estate. In this case following table 1.1 shows the data of only 59 women who are directly related in earning other 141 women are non-workers which are not shown in the table.

Table No.1.1: Nature of Poverty in Negheriting Tea Estate area

Poverty (Household wise)				
		Total	Male	Female
Occupation	Service	6	5	1
	Business	10	10	0
	Agriculture	22	15	7
	Daily wage	29	11	18
	Labour	53	20	33
Total		120	61	59

Source: Filed study conducted on October, 2017

### 5. Educational Condition of the Women

The Table 1.2 highlights the educational status of the women of the study area. It reveals that without analysis village by village and class by class 95 percent of women respondents (29.5 percent, 37.5 percent, 18.0 percent, 10.5 percent are

Illiterate, Primary, Middle and High School level respectively) are below matriculate level which is treacherous to protect, promote and preserve the women rights not only from prevailing superstitions in the society but also to fight for the rights guaranteed by the constitution or legal bodies.

**Table No. 1.2: Educational status of Women (Above the age of 18 years) in study area**

Name of the villages	Educational status of Women (Above the age of 18 years)					Total
	Illiterate	Primary upto class V	Middle upto class Viii	High school upto Class X	Higher Class XI and above	
Tekela line	11	18	11	7	3	50
Borline line	9	25	10	5	1	50
Line 12	17	19	7	5	2	50
Line -20	22	13	8	4	3	50
Total	59 (29.5%)	75 (37.5%)	36 (18.0%)	21 (10.5%)	9 (4.5 %)	200 (100%)

Source: Filed study conducted on October, 2017

### 6. Awareness of Tea Garden Women about their rights

Rights are some preconditions, facilities and opportunities which are essential for each and every man for their sustenance. Women rights are also some such type facilities, opportunities and preconditions essential for their development as a part of the society. It is significant because, women are treated as vulnerable from socio-economic, cultural and political point of view. Women rights become prominent not only in regional or national but also in global level too. "Human rights of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights" (Article 18 of the Vienna Declaration and Programme Action). To maintain the equality of man and women it is also recognised by the International Organisation that women are equal in political, civil, economic, social and cultural life, at the national, regional and international levels. Besides, eradication of all forms of discrimination of grounds of gender is priority objectives of the international community. The core issues relating to the women rights can be remarked from the real basis of democracy that is maintenance of equality, enhancement of liberty and establishment of proper justice. India, one of the largest democratic countries of the world is also statutorily based on these principles but fails to achieve these goals. Women are still vulnerable and they are facing lots of problems. Unawareness and ignorance can be regarded as two vital factors for its. Poverty, lack of education or

knowledge, superstition available in the society fuel these process of negligence towards the rights of women for which they are not even interested to protect their rights with the help of judiciary too basically those who live in rural or backward areas. To analyse this concept a field study was carried out in Four Lines (Parts of Tea Estate marked as line) of Negheriting Tea Estate of Golaghat District. Out of 120 households, 200 women respondents are selected on the basis of simple random sample methods.

To understand the awareness of the women respondents about their rights following questions are prepared and asked as shown in the table 1.3 and response found as given. It is evident from the table 1.3 that women are not equal to men socially has been accepted by 55.5 percent in a great extent, 22.5 percent in some extent, 19.5 percent responded as not much and only 2.5 percent in favour of not at all. Similarly, only 6.0 percent, 5.0 percent, 0.5 percent and 15.5 percent responded that they not at all believe in women are not equal economically, politically, religiously and naturally respectively. This makes it very clear that these yet to develop group are still unaware about their status, prestige and position in every aspect of their social life. Significantly, they responded that they accept the domination, exploitation and other patriarchal hegemony greatly.

**Table No.1.3: Social Political, cultural, Economic Status of women in Negheriting Tea Estate area (percentage in brackets)**

Traditional Custom/ institution	Believer of it to a great extent	Believer of it to some extent	Not much	Not at all
Women are not equal to men in socially	111(55.5)	45 (22.50)	39 (19.5)	5(2.5)
Women are not equal to men in economically	80 (40.0)	77 (38.5)	31(15.5)	12 (6.0)
Women are not equal to men in decision making	117 (58.5)	63 (31.5)	10 (5.0)	10 (5.0)
Women should not take leadership in religious field	122 (61.0)	61 (30.5)	16(8.0)	01(0.5)
Women are inferior than men	71 (35.5)	43(21.5)	55(27.5)	31(15.5)

Source: Filed study conducted on Oct, 2017

### 7. Women and Superstition

Among of this the nature of superstition available in the society and their attitudes towards it has been tested on the

basis of following questions as shown in Table 1.4. It is evident from the table 1.4 that 66.67 percent and 18.33 percent and 9.17 percent households of the study area have been depended upon on local practitioners (*Bej*) in great deal, somewhat and not much respectively. Only 5.83 percent households not at all depend upon the local practitioners

known as *Bej* or *Dhai*. Thus, it clearly reflects the unawareness of the women and other people about the scientific measurement available in the society or their negligence towards its. As a result people of the study area, specifically the women have been facing various health problems.

**Table:1.4: Dependency of the villagers on local practitioners (Bej/ dhai) for treatment of disease.(Household-wise)**

Name of the villages	Great deal	Somewhat	Not much	Not at all
Tekela line	18	6	4	2
Borline line	13	10	2	5
Line 12	22	4	4	0
Line -20	27	2	1	0
Total	80 (66.67%)	22 (18.33%)	11 (9.17%)	7 (5.83%)

Regarding the nature of socio-economic and cultural superstitions prevailed in the study following responses are found from the women respondents of field which are shown in the Table 1.5. The Table 1.5 reflects that in a great extent 75 percent women respondents believed that men and women should have work classification, 69.5 percent believe that male child is more important than girl child, 80 percent believe that man born with a luck that determines the future, 45.5 percent believe that marriage should be based on the concept of *Rahi juwa*, 68.5 percent viewed that Widow should not allowed to

take leadership part in ritual function, 8.0 percent believe that husband has full power to control his wife by any means, 51.5 percent responded that Women should not complain in police against her husband or husband’s family and 84.5 percent nodded that women should not claim inheritance right of property. Less than 15 percent women only not believe on the prevailing superstition except in case of husband has full power to control his wife by using force and harm Thus, it is reveals the availability of superstitions in the study area in a great extent.

**Table: 1.5: Views of Women on role of superstition and customs**

Traditional Custom/ institution	Believer of it to a great extent	Believer of it to some extent	Not much	Not at all
Men and Women should have Work classification	150 (75.0%)	30(15.0%)	17 (8.5%)	3 (1.5%)
Male child is more important than girl child	139 (69.5%)	28(14.0%)	22(11.0%)	11 (5.5%)
People bring a luck by birth	160(80.0%)	22(11.0%)	18 (9.0%)	0
Marriage should be based on the concept of <i>Rahi juwa</i>	91(45.5%)	63 (31.5)	17 (8.5%)	29(14.5%)
Widow should not allowed to take leadership part in ritual function	137 (68.5%)	39(19.5%)	12 (6.0%)	12 (6.0%)
Husband has full power to control his wife by using force and harm	16 (8.0%)	80(40.0%)	55(27.5%)	49(24.5%)
Women should not complain in police against her husband or husband’s family	103 (51.5%)	47(23.5%)	28 (14.0%)	22 (11.0%)
Women should not claim inheritance right of property	169 (84.5%)	15 (7.5%)	11(5.5%)	5 (2.5%)

**8. Findings**

Major findings of the study can be mentioned as below-

- Women are to be considered as one of the foremost victims of superstition prevailing in the society basically those who are poor, uneducated and live in rural and backward areas.
- There is a close relationship among economic backwardness, prevailing of superstitions and violation of women rights in the tea garden area basically. Tea garden area is economically underdeveloped and all of them irrespectively male and female are fighting for sustenance every day.
- Women are also responsible for the violation of human rights against themselves too. Tea garden women have been made with habitual follower of the traditional custom and convention. As a result, they do not want to change it or ready to accept the modernity.

- Prevailing superstition is a common phenomenon in the tea garden area of Assam. Tea garden people are strong believer of this evil and prevailing superstition in the society leads to the violation of human rights.
- Economic backwardness forces the poor people to practice the existing superstition in the society. Thus, economic backwardness can be regarded as the sole responsible factor for the existence of all kind of socio-economic and cultural evils in this society.

**9. Expected Remedies**

On the basis of observation and analysis following recommendation as expected remedies can be stated-

1. **Expansion of woman education:** Expansion of women Education is the foremost requirement in improving the status of women in the society. Education creates awareness among women about their rights which in turn strengthens their claim for

better status in the society. Lack of education implies lack of awareness about their rights and privileges.

2. **Creation of proper awareness about woman rights:** The government and nongovernmental organization must have to take effective efforts to make awareness about the rights of women among them. Some social and political organization may also play important role in this regard.
3. **Legislative measures for the development of socio-economic condition of woman:** Strict vigilance and punishment system must be made under the governmental judiciary system against the violation of human rights violation against women. The process of complain should be easy and free of cost and judgment must be made with heavy punishment against the criminals.
4. **Improvement of morality and dignity:** All the people should morally sound and pure from soul to overthrow the immoral activities in the society which will able to eliminate the violence of women rights.
5. **Cooperative efforts for woman empowerment:** The violation faced by a woman should be treated as violation against the all women and society as a whole. Thus each and every one must come forward to eliminate it with their common efforts.
6. **Elimination of traditional discriminative custom and conventions:** People must have to try to accept modernization which is based on rationality and

scientific in nature by overthrowing the traditional superstitions which help the process of violation of women rights. But should not follow the westernization as presently in practice which is based on luxurious and emotional attitude.

## 10. Conclusion

On the basis of the above discussion it can be concluded that besides the application of above mentioned remedies, all people along with decision makers, academicians, media, civil society must come forward to help the women in tea garden area as a whole in enjoying their rights and recognize their all rights to live in society with dignity without any discrimination. This will lead to fight against all kinds of violation as a whole and woman rights in particular. Summarily, it can be prescribed that economic development of the tea tribes women and their educational and cultural modernization can bring all round development to that community as a whole. Without awareness of scientific knowledge through education and economic development, it would not be possible to ensuring the women rights particularly the tea tribe women and protect them from the prevailing superstition which are harmful not only for that section but also for the society as a whole.

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