

Poverty and the Impact of Government Schemes in Augmenting Sustainable Development of Tea Tribes of Assam

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the Socio-economic status of Tea Tribes of Assam and how the recent initiative of the Government and their cooperation and partnership with Tea companies has helped in transforming the lives of this community. Tea Tribe is one of the most backward communities of people residing in the state of Assam. They are the predecessors of the indentured labourers who hailed from different caste and tribal communities and migrated to Assam in the year 1939 during British raj. From the beginning of the time of migration, the tea tribe community has lived in extreme poverty with very poor health condition. Their growth in terms of standard of living, social, health and economic condition has been very minute or almost stagnant even after India's independence in 1947.

The recent enthusiastic attentiveness of the government (both state and central) in ameliorating the Tea Tribes living condition by providing support through schemes to augment a sustaining development within this community comes as a fresh air. In the light of the above, primary survey was conducted in Hazelbank and Basmatia Tea Estate to determine how the implementation of government schemes has helped to empower this section of the society.

1. Introduction

Tea Tribe is a colloquial term that was incorporated by British officials of East India Company to refer to the indentured labourers transported from east and central India to work in the Tea Gardens of Assam. This is a heterogeneous community belonging to different caste and tribal groups, but they are still referred to as Tea Tribes at present times. Tea Tribes do not fall under any reservation category as provided by the constitution, i.e. the community does not fall under scheduled caste or scheduled tribe even though they originally fall under backward sections of the society, thus, not being able to avail the benefits of it to empower themselves.

Although the popularity of tea as a beverage in India and the successful establishment of the commercial plantation of tea can be credited to the British East India Company and the favorable geographical characteristics of the Assam landscape, the main tribute should be given to the Indentured labourers and their descendents (now called Tea Tribe of Assam) who helped to lay the foundation stone of Tea industry in India. But these are the very same people that are still living in poverty stricken condition even after their enormous contribution to the growth of this industry.

It is only in the recent decade that emphasis has been laid by the government to catapult progress within this community by fostering a culture to promote continuous learning through skill and talent upgradation and alleviate poverty. This study focuses on the research themes of Poverty, Health and Well-being, Zero Hunger, Quality Education and Clean water and sanitation as defined under Sustainable development goals.

2. Geographical profile of study area:

The study area chosen for the purpose of this research is Dibrugarh, a district in the state of Assam, India. Dibrugarh,

also known as the tea district of upper Assam, comprises of 63 tea gardens. Its latitudinal and longitudinal extensions are as follows:

- LATITUDINAL EXTENSION- 27° 5' 38" N to 27° 42' 30" N
- LONGITUDINAL EXTENSION-94°33'46"E to 95°29'8"E

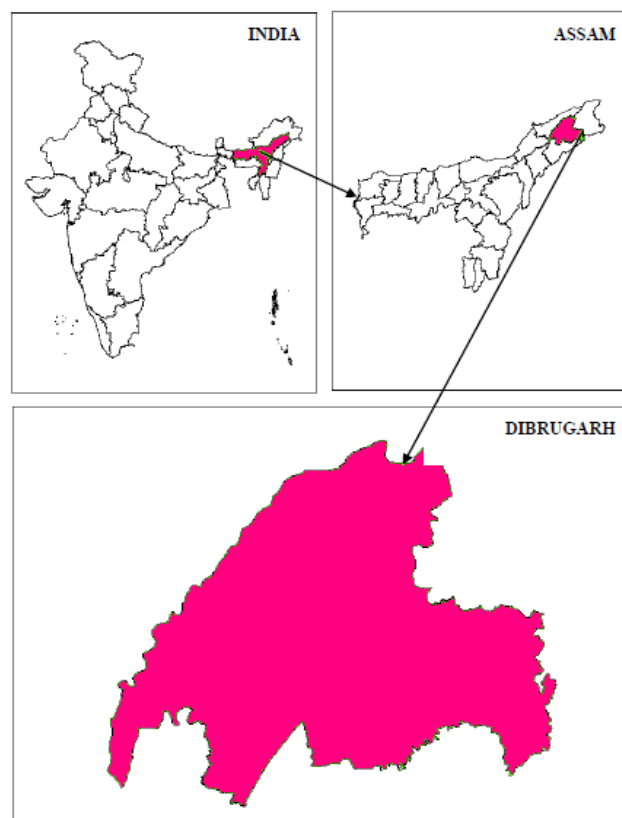


Fig 1: Location of the study area

Within the District two Tea gardens were selected for the purpose of performing primary survey and these are Hazelbank Tea Estate which is owned by Assam Company India Limited and Basmatia Tea Estate which is owned by Andrew Yule Company run by the central government under the Ministry of Heavy Industries and Public Enterprise.

3. Objectives of the study

- To study the socio-economic condition of the Tea tribes.
- To examine the role of government and companies in augmenting sustainable development of the tea tribe communities.

4. Scope of the study

The scope of the study is restricted to understanding the recent trends of Socio-economic changes in the tea tribe community of Assam and the role of the central as well as state government in initiating the developmental changes and augmenting positive sustainable growth in their living conditions and living standard.

5. Database and Methodology

- The present research proceeded in three phases:
 1. First phase: Pre-field observations and secondary data collection.
 2. Second phase: Primary data collection through in-depth interviews with the help of questionnaires/schedules containing both structured and unstructured questions.

3. Final phase: Analyzing the collected data in detail and conclusions were drawn.
- Sampling design: The type of sampling method used is Random sampling method.
 - Primary unit of analysis: Household unit.
 - Sample size: 100 households units were chosen, 50 each from Hazelbank and Basmatia Tea Estate.
 - The methods used for collection of data are as follows:
 1. *Observations*: Observing the Tea Tribe community, characteristics of their dwellings, and immediate environment from close proximity aided in comprehending the prevailing conditions, which helped in providing an insight into potential interview questions and the identification of potential participants for the study.
 2. *Schedules/Questionnaires/ Interviews*: Primary data was collected through interview schedule. The scheduled questionnaire was constructed as per the purpose of the study. It included questions related to their health, education, hygiene and sanitation, socio-economic condition, their immediate surroundings, etc. of the Tea Tribe community.
 3. *Collection of Secondary Data from government portals*
 - Indicators used for this Study are provided in the table below:

Table 1: Indicators for the Purpose of Study

SL NO.	DIMENSIONS	INDICATORS
1	SOCIO-ECONOMIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Literacy • Family size • Income • Housing (type and floor area) • Electricity facility • Facility of running water • Cooking fuel • Assets (properties and land ownership)
2	HEALTH AND WELL-BEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food security • Access to Clean drinking water facility • Toilet facility • Drainage system for discharge of sewage • Proper ventilation of houses • Access to Health care facilities

Gender and age profile of respondents:

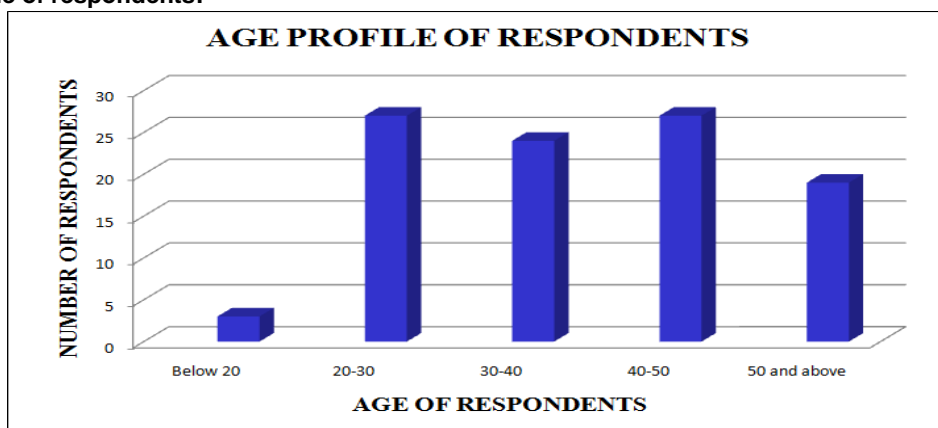


Fig 1: Age Profile of Respondents (Source: Primary Survey, 2019)

For this study of 100 households that were surveyed, out of which 43 of the primary respondents were female and 57 of them were male. 27 respondents each belonged to the working age group between 20 to 30 years and 40 to 50 years. 24 respondents were from the age group between 30 to 40 years and 19 respondents belonged to the oldest age group i.e. 50 years and above. 3 respondents belonged to the age group below 20 years.

Household Size:

Family planning defines the capacity of an individual household to secure the desired and feasible family size as per

their economic capability of the household with enough space and time between the births of their children. It is important to apprise the society, especially illiterate, poor and vulnerable community that having larger family necessarily do not mean it will help upgrade the economy and standard of living of the household, but rather, may increase the pressure of feeding and taking adequate care of the children and family.

In India, family planning was initiated by establishing the “National Family Planning Program” in 1952. Its main target was to reduce fertility rate and slow down the swelling of population in the country.

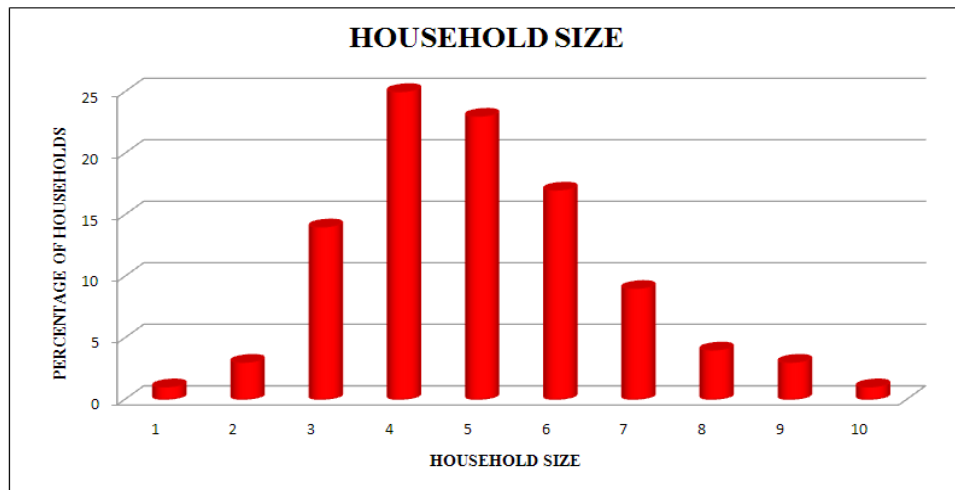


Fig 2: Household size of Respondents from Hazelbank and Basmatia Tea Estate
(Source: Primary survey, 2019)

As observed in the figure above, majority of the household has attained the perfect household size of four persons (25 per cent). 14 per cent of the household has 3 persons, 23 per cent has 5 persons and 17 per cent has 6 persons. Majority of these households has nuclear family. This shows that, the initiation of National Family Planning Program has brought positive changes within the tea tribe community and has been successful in curbing exponential growth in this community in the current decade to some extent.

Housing structure in labour lines:

In tea gardens, the tea company provides each worker family with a concrete house of 450 square feet with 3 main rooms. But the number of quarters has not been increased in past 1 decade since 2010 [ACIL company reports]. Due to expansion of family in the past decades, many extended families separated from the main household to construct houses of their own.

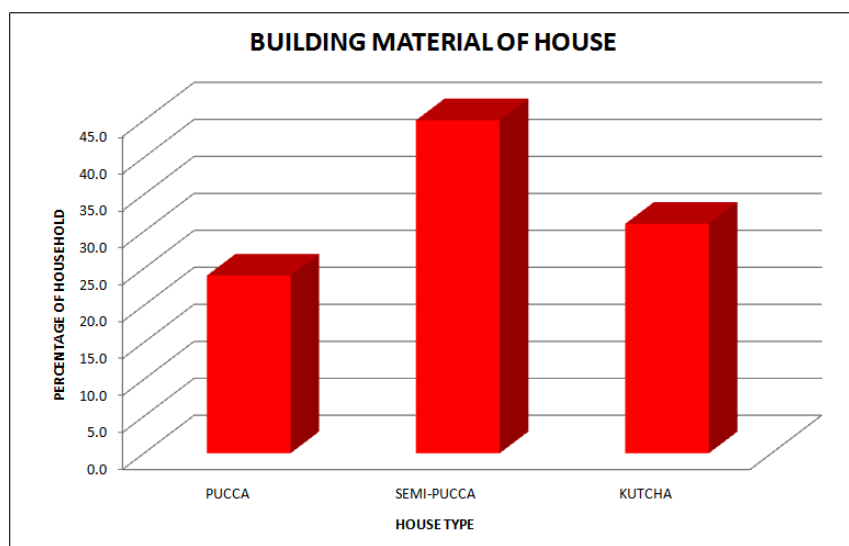


Fig 3: Type of House based on Building Materials used
(Source: Primary survey, 2019)

As per information gathered through primary survey, 24 per cent of the households have Pucca housing facility, 45 per cent of the household has semi-pucca housing structure and 31 per cent of the household in Hazelbank and Basmatia Tea Estate still lives in kutcha houses.

“Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin)”, the scheme which succeeded the “Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY, 1996)” in the year 2016, is a central government aided scheme which provides Pucca housing facility having all the basic amenities to one crore families that lives in kutcha houses and to the houseless. But due to presumption about housing facility to workers in labour lines of tea gardens, government enumerators has not performed surveys in labour lines. Therefore, the 31 per cent of the households that live in kutcha houses has not yet benefitted from this scheme.

Cooking fuel:

Clean cooking fuel like LPG, helps in reducing indoor air pollution in houses. Although under “Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana” scheme LPG cylinder and cooking stove was provided to tea garden workers, majority of the Tea Tribe community people still prefer to use wood and twigs that are collected from the tea garden for cooking purpose.

Primary survey showed that 98 per cent of the households still utilizes wood and dry twigs. 50 per cent of the household do use LPG but very occasionally, because using garden wood is much cheaper and affordable as compared to refilling the LPG cylinders. The above data has been shown diagrammatically in figure below. Moreover tea companies do provide wood allowance to their labours.

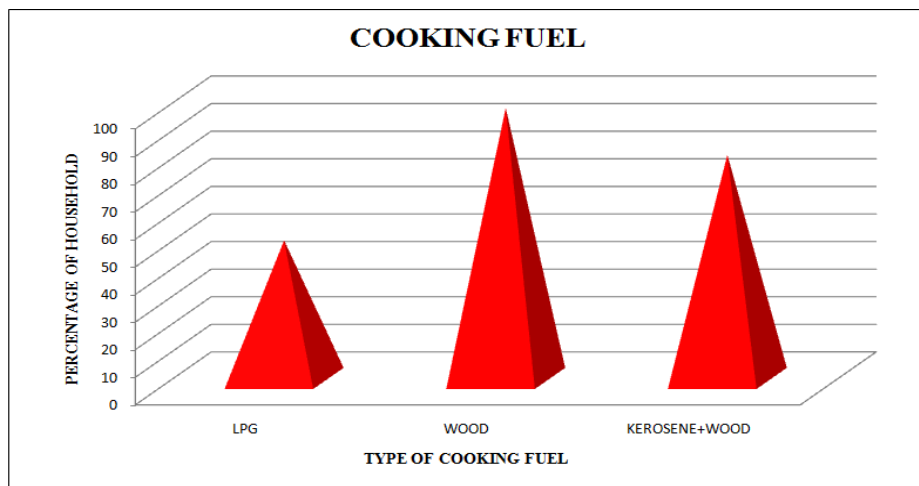


Fig 4: Cooking Fuel (Source: Primary survey, 2019)

Sanitation facility:

Sanitation facility generally implies to the requisite essential facilities imperative for maintaining hygienic condition in the environment such as well-designed toilet facilities for disposal of human excreta, properly maintained sewage system for house premise and proper solid waste disposal system.

Before 2014, the typical form of toilets used in the labour lines, were the shallow pit latrines with temporary plastic

enclosures around it. In 2014, a revolutionary hygiene and sanitation focused scheme called “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan programme” was initiated, under which, proper toilets were constructed with small septic tanks or single leach pits for several of the households.

According to the statistics gathered through primary survey, out of 100 household’s, 65 per cent have well built concrete toilets.

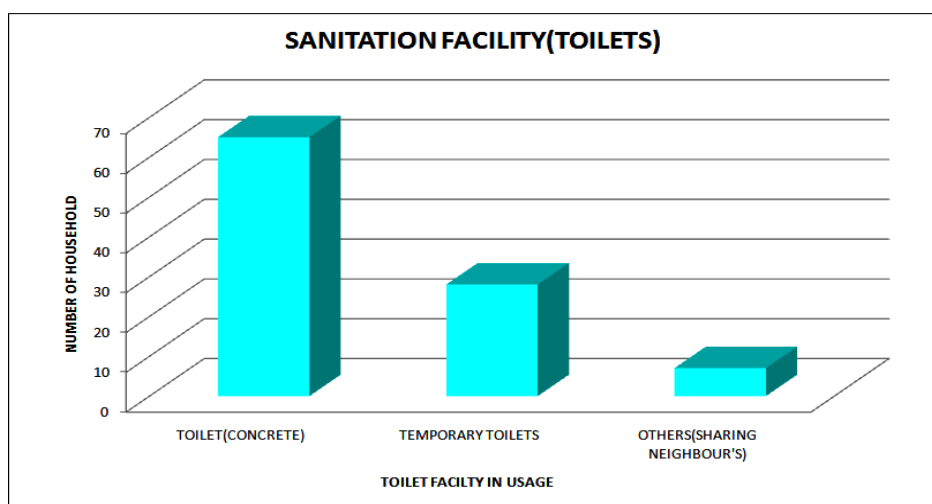


Fig 5: Sanitation Facility (Toilets) (Source: Primary survey, 2019)

Although as per reports on toilet construction collected from verified authentic government portal stated that concrete toilets have been constructed for 99.95 per cent of the population, the primary survey showed that 28 per cent households has temporary built toilets which are self-made shallow pits with 2 to 4 bricks placed for standing which is covered with plastic sheets on three side and a bamboo door. There are also households that do not have any facility and

claim to be sharing their neighbour’s toilet instead of openly defecating (7 per cent). When inquired about the construction of toilets in the labour line in the District labour inspector’s office, information was provided that there is a delay due to lack of manpower and is still in process. For cleaning the toilets, the Tea Tribe families still uses just water or sometimes detergent powders. Surface cleaning disinfectants like Harpic, Lyzol or Acid is not in use among this community yet.



PLATE 1: Toilets constructed for Tea Tribes under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan Scheme

Electricity connection:

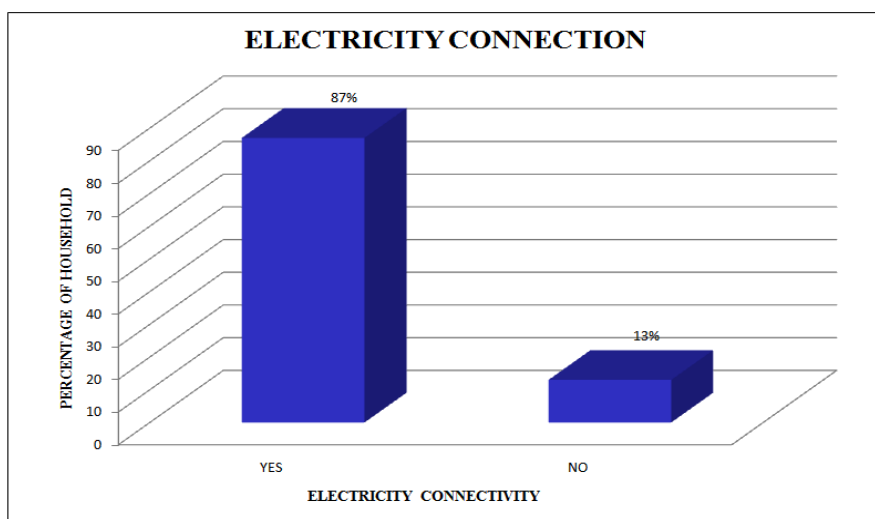


Fig 6: Electricity Connectivity in Hazelbank and Basmatia Tea Estate (Source: Primary survey, 2019)

In the year 2019 as per primary survey statistics, 87 per cent of the households had electricity connection and 13 per cent of them did not have any electricity connection. Out of the 13 per cent, 77 per cent of the household belonged to Hazelbank Tea Estate and 33 per cent belonged to Basmatia Tea Estate. This 13 per cent household are to be provided by

electricity connection under SAUBHAGYA scheme very soon, as per information provided by tea company management staffs.

In 2017, “Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojana (SAUBHAGYA)” scheme was launched, through which, aim

was to provide full free electricity connection to around 4 Crore un-electrified houses in rural and urban areas of India by end of March, 2019.

Food security:

The accessibility and availability to quality nutritious food in sufficient quantity at any given time indicates to as having

food security. Food security was never an issue in relation to Tea Tribes of Assam since they are entitled to receive low cost affordable food grains and necessary fuel through government's "Public Distribution System" established under Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, and also from "Ration Distribution System" of the Tea Companies which has been under operation since the colonial rule.

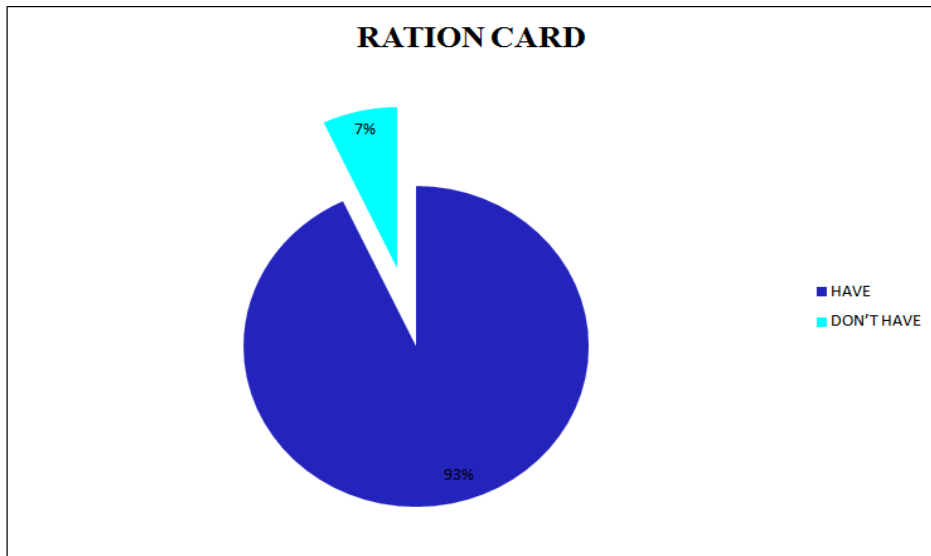


Fig 7: Percentage of Households Holding Ration Card
(Source: Primary survey, 2019)

For acquiring ration from the government's PDS, each household needs to have a ration card. Information collected through primary survey showed that 7 per cent of the sample households did not have a ration card and therefore cannot avail the benefits of this plan. However, they are receiving ration from their respective tea companies (Assam Company India Limited and Andrew Yule) on regular basis.

Wage structure and banking facility:

As per directives of both Andrew Yule Company and Assam Company India Limited based on the draft formulated by Assam state government and Assam Branch Indian Tea Association (ABITA) for Tea Garden labourers, each labour is paid Rs.167 per working day regardless of whether they are temporary workers or permanent workers prior to the year 2021. Therefore each labour was earning maximum up to Rs.4000 if they work regularly.

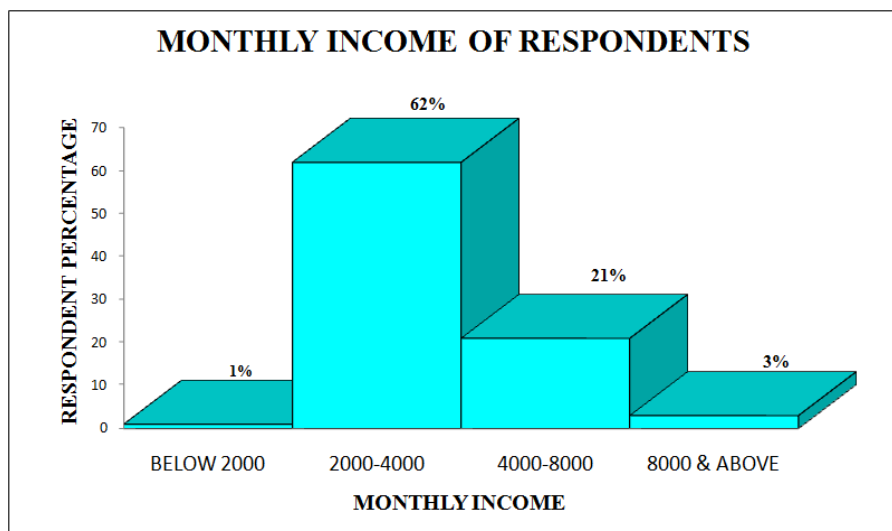


Fig 8: Monthly Income of the Respondents
(Source: Primary survey, 2019)

But this is hardly the reality. Many of the male labourers, who sometimes also are the Head of the household, under the influence of local alcohol, come to work for less than 20 days a

month. Other than heavy alcohol consumption, many workers are heavy smokers too. As shown in the figure above, majority

of the respondent's monthly income (62 per cent) ranges between Rs.2000 to Rs.4000.

Very recently on 6th February 2021, a revision was made in the wage agreement signed between the Assam state government and ABITA. The tea labourer's wages structure in

Assam has been increased to Rs.217 per working day. This change was implemented from March 2021. Thus a regular worker now to earns Rs.5208 per month. This increment in wages has enabled them to improve their living standard and has also empowered them to save more for future utility.

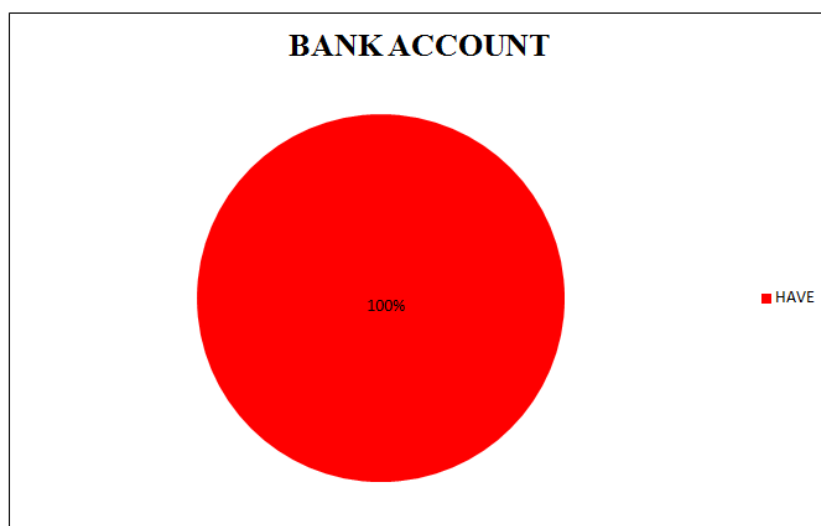


Fig 9: Bank Account Provision

(Source: Primary survey, 2019)

Within the selected sample there was no household that did not possess even a single zero balance bank account. The concept of saving for future financial stability of the household was sensitized within the Tea Tribe community only after the initiative was taken by the Central and State Government for opening zero balance bank account under the "Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana" scheme, launched in August 2014. This initiative has to some extent helped in bringing financial stability among the tea tribe community people.

6. Conclusions

Tea Tribe community, which has its origins in northern, central and eastern India, but, now is a part and parcel of the state of Assam, is a section of the society that is still struggling

to cope with poverty. Since their inoculation to Assam's population during British raj, they have remained poor due to the negative impact of a combination of factors such as lack of proper education, health, awareness, lack of capital, etc. which have retarded their advancement and improvement in the modern world too.

But at present times, the proper and effective deployment of schemes both by the central and state government to unfasten the shackles of poverty has played a major role in augmenting sustainable growth of the Tea Tribe community. Nonetheless, catapulting the thorough implementation of schemes having core focus on eradication of absolute poverty and improving the awareness level is need of the hour.

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