

REPORT

STORIES BEHIND A HOT CUP OF ASSAM TEA Listening to the Voices of Women Labourers in the Tea Gardens

Submitted to:

**Ministry of Women and Child Development
Government of India**



Submitted by:

**Centre for Women's Studies
Dibrugarh University
Dibrugarh, Assam**

DECLARATION

I, do hereby declare that the present Report of the project titled “**Stories Behind a Hot Cup of Assam Tea: Listening to the Voices of Women Labourers in the Tea Gardens**”, sponsored by the Ministry of Women and Child Development, Government of India vide Office Letter No. 10-3/2015 - Research dated 28/12/2015 is the outcome of field based empirical research. The Report either in full or in part thereof has not been submitted to any other institution or agency either for degree or sponsorship.

Date: 18/12/2017
Place: Dibrugarh

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION:

The tea industry plays a crucial role in the economic well-being of the state of Assam. Since its inception as a colonial industrial venture, it has passed through different phases of development contributing heavily towards the social and economic well being of its workforce. The industry employs a large number of women workers who are essentially the driving force of the growth of the industry. Keeping in mind the invaluable role and importance of women workers in the tea industry, it is pertinent to explore the economic, social and cultural issues impinging upon the lives of the women workers in the tea gardens of Assam.

OBJECTIVE:

The study seeks to examine the following objectives:

1. To understand the quality of life of tea garden workers through a socio-economic survey and suggests for policy interventions.
2. It aims to document the lived history of the women workers of tea gardens.
3. To examine gender dimensions in the tea plantations.
4. To understand and reconstruct the history of women workers in tea gardens.
5. To create an Oral History Archive of voices of women workers in tea gardens.

METHODOLOGY:

The study is divided into two parts. Part-A deals with the socio-economic conditions of the workers of the tea gardens, while, Part-B looks into the oral narratives reflecting the lives of the women workers of some selected tea gardens in Assam.

Part A:

The methodology adopted for the study of socio economic conditions of workers in the tea gardens is quantitative. The survey employs different tools and techniques of data collection viz. close-ended questionnaire/ interview schedule for 20 tea gardens (10 each) in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia along with appropriate observation techniques. The collected data were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the software popularly used in social science research.

Part B:

In- depth interviews were carried out among women workers of varied age groups in the selected tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Part A: Socio-Economic Conditions of the Workers in the Tea Gardens: Evidences and Explanations

Personal Details:

- **Languages spoken and known:** The findings suggest that majority of workers speak only Sadri as their medium of communication (73.70% in Dibrugarh and 62.70% in Tinsukia) and very few speak Assamese as the singular mode of communication, (0.30% in Dibrugarh and 1% in Tinsukia). However, a substantial percentage of respondents (13.7% in Dibrugarh and 24.70% in Tinsukia) were found to be speaking both the languages of Sadri and Assamese. Further, it was found that a significant number of respondents speak other languages viz. Hindi, Oriya, Sabar etc.
- **Assamese as a Medium of Communication:** The survey found that highest numbers of workers could speak Assamese (an average of 90.70%) while a nominal percentage of workers (3.80%) could not speak Assamese. Further, it was found that 5.50% understand the language, but could not speak. Moreover,

observations of the survey indicate that Assamese is used as a medium of communication while interacting with the tea garden management or the members outside their community. However, on a daily basis Assamese is not used as a medium of communication.

- **Communities of the respondents:** The survey shows that a considerable percentage (14.20%) of respondents belongs to the 'Tanti' community followed by the workers (11.70%) who belong to the 'Munda' community. The study found that many workers belong to a diverse range of communities such as Manjhis, Bhumij, Rajputs, Kumars, Konds, Kalindis, Kurmis, Mahalis, Oraons, Kols, Santhalis and Gonds etc.
- **Religion of the respondents:** The highest percentage of workers (an average of 96%) is found to be following the religion of Hinduism, followed by a minimal percentage of respondents (an average of 3.80%) who practice Christianity. The study found that only one respondent follows the religion of Muslim, who converted his religion after marriage.
- **Literacy Rate:** A higher percentage of workers are found to be illiterate in the selected tea gardens of both the districts (32.70% in Dibrugarh and 51.30% in Tinsukia), while 18.30% of workers in Dibrugarh and 11% workers in Tinsukia are found to be educated to the level of primary education.
- **Marital Status:** The highest numbers of respondents (74.30%) are married in the sampled tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, while 17.80% respondents are unmarried. The study found a negligible percentage of respondents (0.70%) who are into 'live-in' relationships.
- **Age of Marriage and Other Details of Marriages:** The study found that highest number of respondents got married within the age group of 16-20 years (46.20%). This is followed by the respondents who got married in the age group of 21-25 years (34.1%). A minimal percentage of workers are found to be married at the age group of 26-30 years (7.5%). Further, the study found that a notable percentage of respondents (11%) got married in the age group of 10-15

years. This indicates the prevalence of child marriage in the sampled tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. Moreover, the highest percentage of respondents who got married in the age group of 16-20 signifies that the members of tea community get married at an early age.

- **Details of Children of the Workers in the Tea-Gardens:** The findings of the survey show that the highest percentage of respondents have three children (35.40% in Dibrugarh and 29.90% in Tinsukia) followed by the respondents having two children (34.60% in Dibrugarh and 26% in Tinsukia). It is found that a substantial number of respondents have four children (10.50% in Dibrugarh, and 16.20% in Tinsukia). There are a few workers having five children (3% in Dibrugarh and 4.90% in Tinsukia) and a very few workers have six children (0.40% in Dibrugarh and 2% in Tinsukia).
- **Age of Respondents at the Time of Giving Birth to the First Child:** The data reflects that a majority of the respondents have given birth to their first child between the age group of 21-25 years (42.30%). The respondents who are between the age group of 16-20 years stands at second place (33.80%). However, the percentages of respondents who gave birth to their first child between the age group of 31-35 and 36-40 years are found to be as low as 1.6% in Dibrugarh and 1% in Tinsukia.
- **Family Planning Measures:** The study found that 47.10% of respondents do not use any preventive measures for family planning. This considerable absence in the use of preventive measures indicates lack of awareness about family planning measures. The respondents of the reproductive age group are found to be typically using condoms (22.50%) and undergoing tubectomy (20.50%) as birth control methods.

Living Quarter Facilities in the Tea Gardens:

- **Housing Accommodation:** Overall majority of workers (92%) resides within the premises of the tea gardens. About 8% of workers live outside the tea gardens.
- **Nature of houses:** Majority of workers live in kaccha-pucca houses (67.30%), while 18.50% live in tin roofed brick houses, further 11.80% respondents reside in thatched houses and only 2.30% workers reside in concrete houses.
- **House Rent Allowances:** Although the report indicates that a majority of workers (63%) are provided with house rent allowances, while a significant percentage (37%) of workers are not provided with the same.
- **Toilet Facilities:** The report indicates a dismal depiction of toilet facilities in the tea gardens that majority of workers (75.70%) are found to have single toilets without water facilities, followed by an average of 13.50% of respondents who defecate in open.
- **Sources of Water:** Overall a majority of respondents (88.30%) use hand pumps or tube wells as the major source of drinking water, followed by stored water sources (6.20%), water taps (4.30%) and wells (1.20%).
- **Drinking Water:** Overall 88.5% respondents collect drinking water from hand pumps or tube wells, while 6.7% collect it from stored sources, and 4.8% consume from running water sources. Further, the data found a severe lack of drinking water filtration. Moreover, it is found that the drinking water had never been tested for purity.
- **Distance to Sources of Water:** The data found that 96.50% of workers walk less than a kilometer to collect water and 3.20% workers walk for one kilometer, while 0.20% of respondents walk for two kilometers, and 0.20% respondents walk for three kilometers to collect water.
- **Person Responsible for Collection of Water:** The data found that the primary responsibility of collecting water is entrusted on women. The data shows that

women (represented as the category of wife) are primarily responsible for collection of water (35.20%), followed by the category of 'husband and wife' (21%) who shoulder the responsibility of water collection. The category of 'wife and daughter' (15.80%) and the category of 'daughter' (5.20%) are also found to be responsible for this task. However, only 3.20% husbands and 2% sons are found to be responsible for the collection of water. An average of 2.80% of mother and mother in laws, 2% of 'wife and mother' and 1.80% of 'relatives' collected water for the family.

- **Provision of Electricity:** The data indicates that the provision of electricity is provided by the tea companies to 33.20% of the respondents, while it shows that electricity is provided to an average of 48% respondents by the government and further, it finds that 18.80% respondents are living without the provision of electricity.
- **Ration System:** The data shows that a majority of workers (86.80%) are provided with rice and wheat as the major items of ration, followed by 5.20% workers who attain rice as ration, while 5.20% workers is found to be not receiving any ration, only 2% workers get a combination of rice, wheat and kerosene as ration, and 0.80% workers receive a combination of rice and kerosene as ration.

Workers in the Private Space:

- **Division of Labour:** The report highlights the social construction of gender and work. It shows that allocation and division of varied works are dependent on the discrete gender categories (men and women). It indicates that the management and availability of water within the family is categorically a work typically ascribed to women. Further, it shows that a major percentage of women (an average of 62% in both the districts) to be contained in the work of cooking. It enunciates that work between men and women are socially divided, for example- work of cooking, nurturing and caring [taking care of family

members] is constructed to be women's work and those like fencing, repairing of house, grazing cattle is constructed to be men's work. Hence, the report indicates an inherent and normalized presence of sexual division of labour embedded within the societal structures of the surveyed tea gardens.

- **Recreational Facilities:** The report shows that 37% workers own television and it serve them as a medium of recreation; this is followed by 35% workers who are without any means of recreation, while 27% workers are found to watch cinema and television, followed by only 1% workers watch cinema as a medium of recreation.
- **Places of Travel for Personal Purposes:** The data shows that workers travel during weekly holiday (Sunday) and annual leave. They noted that they travel to nearby villages (31.70%), 20.80% to nearby villages and sites of worship, 16.20% to relative's and market places (category 'others' represent these places), 14.20% to worship sites and relative's and market places, 9.70% workers to sites of worship, only 7% workers informed that they travel to all places and 0.50% noted that they travel to native villages.
- **Alcohol Consumption:** The report indicates the rampant consumption of alcohol amongst workers (69.5%), while 30.50% workers stated that they do not consume alcohol. Further, the data found a co-relation between masculinity and consumption of alcohol. It was found that the habit of 'consuming alcohol' exists more amongst men (an average of 24.7% father/father-in-law, 27.5% Husbands), while the percentages of women (an average of 2.8%) who drink alcohol are relatively less.
- **Monetary Management:** The report elucidate that although all the respondents (men/women) were wage earners, however, economic decisions within the family are predominantly controlled by men. Overall a majority of men (35.50%) within the category of 'husband' are found to be dealing and controlling monetary decisions within the family, followed by the category 'wife' (26%), while 22.30% elders within the family are found to be regulating

and controlling the same. Further, 14.70 % respondents shared responsibility of monetary management between the spouses. Therefore, the report demonstrates an embedded culture of patriarchy that is contained in the social milieu of the studied tea gardens. The data, henceforth highlights that gender equality in the society cannot be achieved through a single-dimensional aspect of women's economic independence.

- **Savings Account:** The data found that overall an average of 59% workers claimed to have a deposit account in banks, post office and in other forms such as in cooperative and self-help groups. Further, the study reveals that a significant percentage of respondents (35%) avail no formal means of savings.
- **Family Disputes:** The data found that disputes within families are absent amongst 60% workers, while it found to be existing amongst 40% workers. Further, the report indicates consumption of alcohol as the major reason for family disputes (38.80%), followed by monetary decisions and management (29.20%). Moreover, 9.60% workers quarreled for problems related to children and a similar percentage of workers for both monetary matters and consumption of alcohol (9.60%). This is followed by 5.80% workers who stated monetary matters and children to be the source of family disputes, while 2.10% stated health matters to be a reason of family disputes.
- **Domestic Violence:** The data shows that a significant percentage of workers (60.70%) stated the absence of domestic violence, while 39.30% of workers confirmed the presence of violence within the private space. The study found verbal abuse (94.10%) as one of the primary forms of domestic violence followed by physical violence (3.40%). Further, 2.50% workers said about both physical and verbal abuse to exist within their private space. Therefore the study enunciates about the constructed and 'normalized' nature of verbal and physical violence exerted on women within the private spaces.

Work Details:

- **Nature of Employment:** Majority of workers in the study area are permanent workers (73%), while, about 27% are casual/temporary workers.
- **Nature of Work:** Data on the nature of work reveal that almost 50.50% of workers are engaged in plucking of tea leaves, followed by workers appointed in factory, spraying, repairing of machinery, digging of drains, felling of trees, in executive bungalows, field water provider, line *chowkidar* (23.20%). The remaining workers are shown to be segregated along different kinds of works such as pruning (1.70%), driver (0.80), helper (2.80%), nursery worker (2.00%), both plucking and pruning (9.00%), both plucking and *khulla* (0.70%), both plucking and factory, executive bungalows, spraying, repairing of machinery, digging of drains, felling of trees, field water provider, line *chowkidar*.
- **Joining Age at Work:** It is found that majority of workers (49.70%) joined work between the age group of 16 to 20 years, followed by workers joining work between the age group of 21 to 25 years, while a significant percentage of workers join work between the age group of 10 to 15 years. The data reveal that a few tea gardens have the provisions for employment of children above the age of 14 years with the consent of parents. The study further found instances of *chokri hazira* wherein girls below the age of 18 years are recruited for works such as plucking and packaging. The wages of this category of workers (who are engaged in *chokri hazira*) are less than the regular daily wages in the tea gardens.
- **Calculation of Wages:** The data reveals that the wages of highest numbers of workers are calculated for every 12 days (96.50%), while wages for 0.50% workers are calculated per week. The study found that Sunday wages of the workers is not calculated in the gardens.
- the workers in the tea gardens are at Sunday wages is not the calculated.

- **Gender Differences in Wages:** The data do not find major differences in the payment of wages between the two selected categories of gender - men and women. An amount of INR 126 is found to be the daily wages of 78% women workers and 74.30% men workers. However minuscule differences found in the payment of wages (for INR 115 is paid to 11.70% women workers and to 15.30% men workers) is primarily due to the nature of work and the different wage policies followed by various tea companies.
- **Working and Break Timings:** The findings reveal that the highest percentage of workers (91%) works for eight hours a day. It was found that the work hours vary depending on the nature of work. Further, during the peak seasons (June to October) workers have to engage in extra hours of work. The study show that the break timing are determined by the management and varies across garden. However, the majority of workers have break timings from 12.00 to 1.00 pm.
- **Leave Rules:** The data shows that leave rules exist in the highest numbers of surveyed tea gardens (92.80%). Workers are found to be provided with sick and maternity leave. However, it is found that in cases where sick leave exceeded a total number of 14 days in a year, leave is granted without wages. Further, it is found that maternity leave is granted during the post delivery period for three months only to permanent women workers. The survey found that if women workers are considered for pre-delivery leave; it is granted as leave without wages. Moreover, women workers reported that they work in the tea gardens till their last stage of pregnancy. Further, in some tea gardens it is found that the provision of maternity leave is applicable only for two children. Therefore, the study highlights that leave rules are determined by the managements of the tea gardens.

Welfare Provisions

- **Provision of Provident Fund:** Majority of workers are endowed with the provisions of provident fund (89.70%), while a minimal percentage (10.30%) of workers is not covered under the provisions of provident fund.

- **Medical Benefits:** The survey found that a larger percentage of workers (92.70%) are granted with medical benefits while a negligible proportion of respondents (an average of 7.30% in both the district) are not provided with the same. The survey further reveals that hospitals and dispensaries within the gardens are equipped only to address minor health issues such as cold and fever. Therefore, the survey found that hospitals and dispensaries in most tea gardens are inadequate to conduct child delivery (normal and c-section deliveries) and other important surgeries (gall-bladder, appendicitis and such other major operations). Further, the survey found conditional medical benefits for casual/ temporary workers that they are entitled only during their payroll period.
- **Bonus:** The survey finds that the provision of bonus in the form of ‘monetary assistance’ is a significant provision of the tea garden, and is given irrespective of permanent or casual workers.

Workers Union:

- **Presence of Workers Union:** The presence of workers union is found in the majority of the selected tea gardens (85%). However, it is found that a stark majority of workers are not the members of Workers’ Union (93.20%).
- **Advantages of Workers Union:** Overall a majority of respondents are unaware about the advantages of a workers union, however a significant percentage of workers outline the wage benefits (17.80%), work place conditions and comfort (16.80%) as some of the advantages of workers union.

Workplace Facilities:

- **Sanitation:** The survey found a severe lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites (89.30%). Further, a small percentage (10.70%) of workers affirmed to the availability of sanitation facilities, particularly highlighting the factories, in selected tea gardens. Further, the survey outlines that the non-availability of

sanitation facilities is a serious concern and this poses a question on the level of health and gender sensitivity of the tea garden authorities.

- **Drinking Water:** The survey found that drinking water is provided in the plantation sites of the surveyed tea gardens (76.70%). Further, it is found that maximum numbers of workers (96.50%) are provided with tea at the plantation work site. However, a significant percentage of respondents (an average of 92.20%) stated that the nature of the tea provided is salted.
- **Work Essentials:** The survey findings reveal that average of 32% respondents are provided with all the amenities (raincoat, *jaapi*, umbrella, boots and gloves) necessary at work sites-, followed by 25% workers who are provided with umbrella and boots. Further, since 6% respondents were engaged in other spheres of work (workers engaged in factory of the tea gardens and as line *chowkidar*), hence they are not provided with any of these amenities.
- **Medical Facilities:** Survey found the availability of medical facilities in maximum numbers of the selected tea gardens (81%).
- **Crèche:** The provision of crèche is present by a majority of workers in the surveyed tea gardens (80.30%), while 19.70% workers are denied the facility of crèche in the selected tea gardens. However, the survey found the inadequate infrastructural quality of crèches. Thereby it is found that crèches are not in good conditions and in many instances are non-functional. Further the study observes that crèches are not surrounded by fencing in a number of selected tea gardens.

Educational Facilities:

- **Enrolment of Children in Schools:** Overall a majority of children of workers are enrolled and found to be going to schools (75.10%), while a considerable percentage of children refrain from going to schools (24.90%). Further, 42.00% of boys and 44.60% of girls are not sent to schools, but a proportionate gender

analysis of the data shows a minimal percentage of gender gap between the percentage of boys and girls enroll in schools.

- **Kindergarten or Anganwadi Schools:** Majority of workers (93.20%) confirmed the presence of kindergarten or *anganwadis* schools in the surveyed tea gardens, while an average of 6.80% respondents state about the absence of such schools in the gardens.
- **Primary Schools:** The survey findings show that a majority of workers (94.50%) have affirmed the presence of primary schools in the surveyed tea gardens, while 5.50% of workers had denied the provision of primary schools in the surveyed tea gardens.
- **High Schools:** The data shows a dismal representation of high schools in the nearby areas of the surveyed tea gardens, that is - an average of 59.70% respondents said about the absence of high schools, while only an average of 40.30% respondents said about the existence of high schools in the nearby areas.

Health Details:

- **Menstrual Health:** The survey highlights the lack of toilet facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, which henceforth poses a threat to the menstrual health and hygiene among women workers. Further, the survey found that most women workers use clothes instead of sanitary napkin as a measure to absorb menstrual blood, and that they are unaware of the fact that usage of unclean clothes might lead to serious health issues.
- **Diseases Suffered:** The study finds the presence of various diseases and health problems in the selected tea gardens- fever, cold, cough, jaundice, high blood pressure, gastroenteritis, dysentery and diarrhoea, stomach disorder, and body ache.

- **Doctors or Traditional Healers:** The survey findings reflect that in case of any illness majority of workers consulted garden doctors (75.20%), while a minimal percentage of workers (8.20%) consulted garden doctors along with ‘others’ (traditional herbal medicine providers).

Social Customs and Culture:

- **Festivals Celebrated:** Overall majority of workers (38.80%) celebrate all the festivals in the tea gardens (Tusu Puja, Karam Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Bihu, and others [Christmas, Holi, Shiva Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja and others]). The survey found Tusu Puja and Karam Puja to be the main festivals of the tea tribe community; however it also found that they equally celebrate the festival of Bihu, which the survey highlights as a conscious attempt to reinstate a sense of belongingness and membership within the construct of ‘Assamese’ identity.
- **Presence of Witchcraft:** The data shows that witchcraft is almost non-existent in the surveyed tea gardens (93% workers had denied the prevalence of it). However, contradictory to this context the survey finds that a majority of workers know and believe in it. Further, 7% workers confirm the occurrence of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens of both the districts.
- **Instances of Witchcraft Known:** Majority of workers denied about any known instances of witchcraft (88.30%), while an average of 11.70% workers know about instances of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens. The survey highlights that it is prevalent in the practices of *Bej/Ojha* - a practice that is believed to magically treat ailments, personal and family problems, which includes issues of interpersonal relationships, family disputes, drives to bring good fortune and such other matters.

Civil Rights

- **Voter Card:** The survey shows that an average of 83.20% respondents in both the districts have voter cards, while, an average of 16.80% of respondents are found to be without voter cards.
- **Ration Card:** The findings of the survey reveal that ration cards are possessed by an average of 88.20% of workers; while an average of 11.80% workers are found to be without ration cards.
- **Resolving Disputes:** The report demonstrates that majority of disputes in the tea gardens are settled by the management. For instance, 34.50% respondents are found to approach the management for dispute resolution, followed by an average of 23.30% respondents resorting to the workers union. Further, 13% respondents approached both management and workers union.
- **Political Activities:** The report exhibit that a majority of workers participated both in the process of voting and political meetings. An average of 52% respondents were found to be participating in the voting process and political meetings, followed by an average of 20.50% respondents who were found to be participating solely in voting process. Amongst other parameters measuring the political activity amongst workers, the study found a low percentage of workers participating in *morchas*/rallies (0.70%).
- **Determination of Political Behaviour:** The report shows political awareness to be the major determining factor of participation of workers in political activities (an average of 55.80% respondents in both the districts).

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Part-B

Listening to the Voices of Women Workers in the Tea Gardens of Assam: A Glimpse into their Lives through Oral Narratives

1. Origin: The origin of tea garden workers can be traced from places such as Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, Chota Nagpur etc. The workers were bound by harsh contractual terms during the colonial times so as to ensure that they could not leave the plantations before expiry of their terms. The indented workers were cheated and brought to Assam on the pretext that they will become rich working in Assam and can improve their living conditions compared to their place of origin. Since recruitment was done on a family basis, generations after generations of the tea community stayed in Assam and have started to identify themselves as part of the greater Assamese community. However, during the interviews it has been found that a section of the people regretted how they were forced by destiny to leave their place of origin.

2. Working environment: A comparative analysis of working conditions of the women workers from British to present day times reflects a downward trend. During the interactions with the elderly women workers, it was found that life in the tea gardens and the working conditions during the time of the Britishers were much better than the present times. They had job guarantee, their working hours were less and their burden of work was minimal. Even with fewer wage, they could manage their household due to the good quality ration and other amenities provided by the colonial management. However in the post-colonial times, even when the wage structure improved, the ration and other amenities provided to them are not sufficient enough to run a household.

a) Wage Structure:

Even though the present wage structure in the tea industry rests on the premise of equal distribution of wage between both male and female but they get a meagre amount of 126 rupees which is almost half the amount of wage the workers get in other sectors. It is also found that the Sunday wage of the workers is excluded from their salary which is paid every fourth- nightly.

b) Sexual abuse:

Instances of sexual harassment of women tea workers during the colonial period were found where the British planters took advantage of the illiterate, ignorant and poor workers and tried to exploit the women for their ulterior motives. No workers union or other platforms were there during those times in which the workers could lodge their complaints. But at present because of education and awareness, there are fewer instances of sexual harassment in the plantations.

3. Maternity Benefits for women in plantations : There were variations from estate to estate and management to management in the observance of Maternity Benefits. In most of the plantations it is found that maternity leaves are given for three months with full wages. Maternity benefit was extended to casual or *faltoo* (casual) workers in the plantations as well.

a) Delivery in hospitals or at home: The better place:

Despite provisions of hospitals and other facilities provided by the management, many of respondents, especially the elder women were in favour of child birth at home with the help of *dais* or local mid-wives. At present, with the introduction of ASHA workers under NRHM Schemes women workers of the tea Gardens have been encouraged to use the estate hospitals for child births and have been made aware of the various medical schemes provided by the government.

b) Crèche:

There is no uniformity of conditions and maintenance of *creche* inside the tea plantations. The women workers are not satisfied with facilities provided in the *creche*. There are complaints about lack of resources and proper facilities available in the *crèches*. Such instances reflect the conflicting situations that women face as ‘mothers’ on one hand and as ‘workers’ on the other in the plantations.

4. Awareness among the women labourers in the plantations : The workers in the tea gardens of Assam are governed by strict and regimented structures which hamper their progress to a great extent in terms of education, health or political rights.

a) Education:

The infrastructural conditions and standard of education in the tea garden schools are far from satisfactory. The number of dropouts is also high, particularly among girl children because of parental pressure and their defined responsibilities as the care-takers of the house under the patriarchal family structures. Preference was given to the education of sons over the daughters. Higher education is also a matter of distant dream for most of the girls in the plantations because of early marriage, poor economic conditions, lack of transportation facilities, high cost of education and discouragement from parents.

b) Health and Hygiene:

Health is one of the most neglected sectors among the tea garden communities in Assam. Despite medical facilities available inside the tea gardens, it has been observed that the workers generally tend to have more faith in the *bej* or the traditional healers rather than qualified doctors.

Another distressing fact that came into light was the poor sanitation and hygiene facilities prevalent among the women in the plantations. There is lack of menstrual hygiene among the tea garden workers. Due to poor economic conditions women prefer to use cloth during periods rather than sanitary napkins.

c) Salt Tea: A Colonial legacy:

The habit of consumption of Salt tea which was introduced by the British still exists in the tea gardens. Consumption of salted tea has been said to be the main reason for the cause of anaemia among the women workers.

5. Problems of women workers in the plantations : Workers in the Tea Plantations of Assam lead a very harsh and regimented life. The main problems haunting the women workers are as follows:

a) Domestic violence and consumption of alcohol:

Occurrence of domestic violence is rampant among the tea garden communities of Assam and one of the main reasons of it is the excessive consumption of alcohol by both men and women.

b) Witchcraft:

The practice of witchcraft is a common occurrence in the Tea plantations of Assam. There are varied reasons for branding a woman as witch viz. illiteracy, lack of awareness, property disputes, marital status, malpractices etc. Not only women, but men too have become the victims of witch-hunting in the tea plantations.

6. Customs and Traditions: Life inside the Plantations :

The large-scale migration of tea workers from the various parts of the country led to the establishment of a new and unique culture much different from that of the dominant Assamese community. Along with their native cultural festivals they have also imbibed the culture of the local Assamese community, thereby celebrating festivals of the greater Assamese community viz. Bihu etc. They have different festivals, songs and dances for all seasons signifying the advent and herald of the new facets of nature. The gendered division of work is reflected in certain rituals and customs where men usually carry out the rituals related to animal sacrifice and chant mantras while offerings to the deity like cooked rice and fish curry must be prepared by women only.

Women's role in many of the rituals is restricted to procuring the needs during these rituals.

In case of marriages, it has been found that marriage by elopement is more common than formal marriages among the members of the tea garden communities.

Tattooing is a widely practiced method of body decoration among the tea garden workers, which is considered as symbol of one's community. Although not compulsory but it is preferable for a girl to have a tattoo in her body which marks her eligibility to get married.

One of the characteristic features of the cultural traditions of the tea community is their colourful and vibrant *Jhumur dance*. Some of the *jhumur* songs reflect the miseries and sufferings of the people of the tea community while some others depict the vibrant life, love, family bonding etc. among them.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

In the light of the above study findings, a number of recommendations are suggested to improve the quality of life of the workers in the tea gardens. Important among them are:

- **The Plantations Labour Act 1951 and The Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956:** The findings of survey since indicated that majority of the tea gardens had not abided by the guidelines of the Plantations Labour Act 1951 and The Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956, therefore, the study would recommend for the necessity of state intervention and probe to secure the interests of workers in the tea gardens.
- **Increase in the Wages of Workers:** The study recommends increase in the wages of the workers, since the daily wage of INR 126 is found to be inadequate and insufficient for the daily sustenance of workers.
- **Medical Benefits:** The study recommends that medical benefits be provided to casual workers irrespective of their payroll.

- **Maternity Benefits:** The study recommends that maternity benefits with wages should be granted to both permanent and casual women workers. Further it recommends that pre delivery maternity leave with wages be granted to women.
- **Toilet Facilities:** The study would recommend the need of toilet facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, since it has found that the absence of it have subjected women to vulnerable diseases such as Urinary Tract Infections, Reproductive Tract Infection.
- **Importance on Children Education:** To facilitate and promote education of children in the gardens the study recommends the need of more intervention by the state and tea companies.
- **Gender Awareness:** To eliminate the social constructions of patriarchy, violence, sexual division of labour, and other such gender constructs the study recommends that workers be provided with awareness programmes on gender issues and structures.

Conclusion:

An improved socio economic condition of workers is imperative for the wellbeing of workers. The wellbeing could fundamentally be achieved by taking into account the aforesaid recommendations of the study. Further, severe lack of awareness of rights and benefits is predominantly found amongst workers, which henceforth is found to be the major cause of exploitation of workers. Therefore, the study urges the need for state interventions. Further, the study finds the need of an integrated approach of government, management, workers unions, local bodies, voluntary organization and women organization, for ensuring and safeguarding the rights and interest of workers.

CHAPTER - I

Introduction

1.1 Introduction:

Assam is one of the easternmost state in India with a total geographical area of 78,438 square kilometre and a population of 3.12 crore as per 2011 Census. The state is predominantly rural with 98% of its total area falling under rural areas and a rural population of 86%. The state shares boundaries with seven of the North Eastern states of Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura and two international borders with Bhutan and Bangladesh. The economy of the state is primarily based on agriculture and a major portion of the state's economy depends on tea. Assam produces the largest quantity of tea in India. About 17 percent of the workers of Assam are engaged in the tea industry.

The word 'tea' or 'tay' is derived from the Chinese Amoy dialect and tea was known to the Chinese as early as 2737 B.C. The Chinese were the first to introduce it as a commercial beverage besides using it as a medical drink. China is also believed to be the first country to grow tea in a planned commercial manner. In India, tea was officially discovered by Robert Bruce in 1823 and within a few decades the produce from early tea estates was extensively exported to the markets of Great Britain and Europe. However, there have been reports of existence of tea in India long before the British discovered it, found in the forest of upper Assam produced by the Singpho communities of Arunachal Pradesh from where it was exported to the other countries.

Tea industry in India is one of the biggest sectors employing large number of female workers which is incomparable with any other organized business sector. Women are in fact the backbone of the tea Industry in India who constitutes half of the total labour force in the plantations. The vast majority of women workers employed in the tea plantations work mainly as pluckers. Though, the tea sector contributes heavily

to the national economy but the life of the tea garden workers, especially the women workers who are the prime drivers of the gardens are far from satisfactory.

This study, therefore, makes an attempt to highlight the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden communities of Assam based on empirical studies as well as oral narratives carried out in 20 tea gardens located in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts. Attempts have been directed at showcasing the socio-economic and cultural narratives of the community identifying the core issues they face in different phases of their life.

1.2 The Study:

The growth and development of plantation economy in most of the erstwhile colonial countries had its far reaching impact in the development of a complex structure of colonial economy and expansion of capital in the second half of the 19th century. The expansion of the plantation economy across the colonies had its profound impact in the proletarianisation of the tribal communities as these groups of people were uprooted from their native places under compulsion and were forced to be employed as indentured labourers. The history of forced migration of these communities, consequent change of identity of them as ‘Coolies’ who were entrapped within these plantation economies without proper civic and health support from the masters remains one of the darkest episodes of human suffering. Moreover the necessity of plantation workers in large numbers led to demographic changes in the areas under plantation economy and these demographic transformations had its ripple effect in the political domain. India also witnessed phenomenal expansion of Plantation economy in the second half of the 19th century. The discovery of tea in Assam in the early 19th century and the huge increasing demand for tea as a beverage across the globe subsequently led to the outpouring of colonial capital in the establishment of tea estates in Assam.

The colonial administration facilitated the expansion of commercial tea plantations funded by foreign capital by granting vast tracts of lands which were termed as 'Waste Land Grants' in the colonial discourse.

The exponential expansion of tea plantation economy in Assam in the late 19th century necessitated the demand for plantation labourers as the new economy was entirely labour intensive. Moreover, the local people were reluctant to work in the conditions imposed by the plantation regime. This led to the import of labourers from outside the province, mostly from the densely populated provinces of central and east India. Substantial portion of labourers brought to Assam was drawn mainly from the tribal areas of Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas. Most of the recruits in the tea plantations were mainly tribal peasants who were forced to move out of their habitat and compelled to migrate to work in the plantation economies. This process of dispossession of the tribals of their land and habitat and the subsequent recruitment in the plantation estates was regulated through a complex set of new policies which were completely in favor of the plantation capital. The labourers were recruited mainly through the indenture system which was operated through mischief and chicanery under the active supervision of the colonial state. Most of these labourers recruited in the tea estates of Assam in the late 19th and early 20th centuries did not return to their places of origin after expiry of the term of contracts and decided to settle in Assam permanently. After the completion of their contracted term of labour, substantial section of the labourers discontinued their stay within the 'Cooly Lines' of the estates and settled in villages mostly in the vicinity of the plantations.

These groups of people who were brought from different parts of India belonged to diverse ethnic groups some of whom were classified as Tribes in their places of origin. In the colonial vocabulary, these disparate groups of people of different origin came to be condensed as 'coolly' and this term with deriding connotation gradually came to be used in official and vernacular descriptions. The

census enumerations of the plantation workers were enumerated as 'Tea Garden Coolie Caste'. The census report of 1931 mentioned that "coolies in Assam form, however, a separate class of the population no matter what caste or tribe they belong to and hence it seems best to treat all cooly caste and tribes under one heading, for all have one characteristic and that is that, in Assam, a "cooly" is always a "cooly" and whether he works on a garden or whether left the garden and settled down as an ordinary agriculturist, his social position is nil." The social position of the tea garden plantation labourers and those who later on settled permanently in villages was determined by the 'cooly' status. The response and attitude of the Assamese middle class was also not favourable in the initial years of the 20th century as is evident from the writings. It should also be noted that the plantation economy made arrangements to confine these labourers within the "Cooly Lines' and discouraged interaction with the village folks. But as the National movement progressed, some of the Congress leaders took up the issue of the plight of the plantation workers and tried to ameliorate their conditions by forming unions and labour movements. The common suffering of the plantation labourers who lost their original habitat, the pains of the indentured systems and the shared experience in a new inhospitable environment of being bonded in the tea estates facilitated the emergence of a new identity among the tea garden communities.

The transformation of the identities of the different collectives as a labouring class as a result of the colonial expansion of capital unfortunately also continued in the post independent period. The collective suffering of generations of people in the tea gardens of Assam has facilitated the process of a common identity for these disparate groups of people. Since independence the tea garden labour community has been striving for identity and empowerment and they have been demanding Scheduled Tribe status. The worst suffering of the tea garden communities under the colonial regime has hardly improved in the post independence period in spite of the enactment of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 which was supposed to address the

problems of the tea garden people. The tea gardens are still waiting the basic facilities in terms of health, sanitation and education. The complex web of service conditions under which these groups people are compelled to work shows the failure of the state to fulfill its basic responsibilities. The social exclusion of the tea garden community is apparent in the contexts of the abysmal condition of health and sanitation of majority of these people. They still suffer from illiteracy, high rate of malnutrition, female mortality etc. Most of the tea garden women suffer from poor nutrition and this explains why most of the women are anaemic. According to a UNICEF sample survey, 95% of tea garden women are anaemic. Child marriage is also rampant among the tea garden people which also explain the health status of the women at the later stage of their lives. They also suffer from superstitious practices such as witch hunting which are still visible in the tea garden areas.

This study analyzes the socio-economic conditions of tea garden women workers in Assam.

1.3. Broad Objectives:

Though, a number of documentation exists that look at the history of the plantation economy and the plantation workers, their migration and the labour movements, however, the gender dimension in these researches are conspicuous by their absence. As in the colonial and post independent 'archival papers' voices of tea garden women are absent, the historical constructs based on such documents also fail to make the women visible. Recently Rekha Baruah has written two books *Tahanir Sonowali Dinbor* (Golden years of Yore) and an autobiographical book entitled *Tea Garden Memories*. However, these books are not about the women labourers and their life. The invisibility of women in the state papers, archives and failure of the researchers to create an alternative archive to record and document the voices of the women explains this absence of gender dimension in the researches relating to tea garden workers. Though recently social science researchers have tried to concentrate on studies relating to mortality and fertility and education of the tea garden women,

women's voices are not recorded and documented which makes the women passive objects of research without their agencies and subjectivities. The proposed project is aimed at documentation of the lived history of the tea garden women so that the absence of the gender dimension in the history of the working class can be meaningfully addressed along with an analysis of the socio-economic conditions of women.

1.4. Objectives:

6. To understand the quality of life of tea garden workers through a socio-economic survey and suggests for policy interventions.
7. It aims to document the lived history of the women workers of tea gardens.
8. To examine gender dimensions in the tea plantations.
9. To understand and reconstruct the history of women workers in tea gardens.
10. To create an Oral History Archive of voices of women workers in tea gardens.

1.5. Research Methodology:

The research is a combination of exploratory and explanatory research designs with data collected through both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research is being conducted in two parts –the first part of the study (Part A) deals with the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden workers and the second part (Part B) deals with the lived histories of the tea garden women workers.

1.5.1 Universe of the Study:

The Universe selected for the study is the tea garden workers living in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, Assam, India. A total number of 20 tea gardens (10 each) in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia have been selected to conduct the socio-economic survey for the first part (Part A) of the study. For the second part of the

study (Part B) a total number of 20 tea garden women workers were selected from the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia.

1.5.1.1. Socio-Economic Profile of the Area Surveyed:

1.5.1.1.1. Dibrugarh District:

The district of Dibrugarh is situated in the eastern part of Assam and surrounded by Dhemaji district and Lakhimpur district in the north, Sivasagar district and Arunachal Pradesh in the south, Tinsukia district in the East and Sivasagar district in the West. The district covers an area of 3,381 km². Geographically, Dibrugarh is situated between 27.4728⁰ North and 94.9120⁰ East. The river Brahmaputra flows throughout the North Western boundary of the district. As per 2011 Census, the total population of the district is 1,54,019 with a population density of 2,300 persons per km². The sex ratio of Dibrugarh city is 925 per 1000 males while the average literacy rate is 89.5%.

Oil and Tea are the major industries of the district. Some of the important industries located in Dibrugarh are Oil India Limited and the Assam Gas Co. in Duliajan, the Fertiliser Corporation of India and Assam Petro-Chemicals Ltd. at Namrup, NEEPCO (Kathalguri Plant) near Duliajan, Brahmaputra Cracker and Polymer Limited, Lepetkata, Dibrugarh among others.

Dibrugarh district boasts of the highest amount of tea production in India with more than 100 tea gardens operating in the district. Some of the gardens date back to the British era like the Chabua tea estate, Dikom, Bokel etc. The headquarters of the Directorate of Development of Small Tea Growers in India and a Regional Office of the Tea Board of India headed by a Deputy Director of Tea Development (Plantation) is located in Dibrugarh besides Zone 1 of the Assam Branch Indian Tea Association (ABITA).¹

¹. <http://dibrugarh.nic.in/district.html>

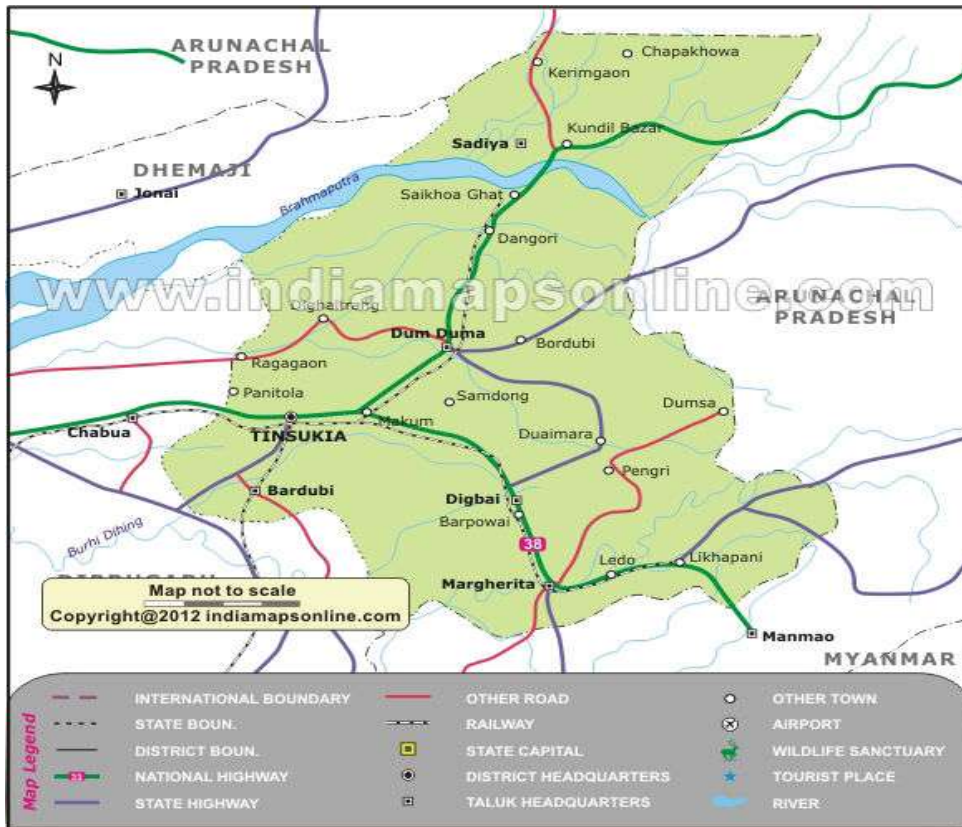


Source: www.mapsofindia.com

1.5.1.1.2. Tinsukia District

Tinsukia is the easternmost district of Assam bordering Arunachal Pradesh covering an area of 3,790 km². The geographical coordinates of the district is 27.4922⁰ North and 95.3468⁰ East. According to 2011 Census, the total population of the district is 1,316,948 with a population density of 347 persons per km². The sex ratio of the district is 948 females per 1000 males and the literacy rate is 70.92%.

Tinsukia is an industrial district of Assam. The oldest oil refinery of India is located at Digboi, Tinsukia and other places like Margherita and Ledo are famous for open cast coal mining. Tinsukia is one of the premier commercial hub of Assam. It also produces a sizeable amount of tea, oranges, ginger, other citrus fruits and paddy (rice).



Source: www.indiamapsonline.com

1.5.2. Sampling Design:

1.5.2.1. Area of Study:

Assam produces the largest quantity of tea and has the largest area for the crop. The tea industry has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam. About 17 percent of the workers of Assam are engaged in tea industry. Dibrugarh has the world's largest area covered by tea gardens. The entire district is surrounded by tea plantations and has many tea factories. The district of Tinsukia, contribute to a major proportion of tea production. Many tea gardens in both the districts are more than 100 years old. Both the districts are famous for producing the highest amount of tea in Assam.

1.5.3. Sample Size:

1.5.3.1. Selection of the tea gardens:

Part A:

For Part A of the study, a total number of 20 tea gardens, 10 tea gardens from each district of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, were selected to get a comparative understanding of the functioning of tea gardens in both the districts. The selection of tea gardens were made on the basis of total area of the tea gardens, different companies operating the tea gardens and the geographical location of the tea gardens. However, adhering to the code of research ethics, the study has kept the names of the tea gardens anonymous.

Part B:

For Part B of the study, a total number of 20 interviews across 20 tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam, 10 interviews from each district were taken.

1.5.3.2. Selection of the respondents:

Part A :

A total number of 30 respondents (15 men and 15 women) are selected from each tea garden for Part A of the study. Hence, the total number of respondents interviewed in the 20 selected tea gardens is 600 (300 from each district). The total number of men and women selected stands at 300 each. The numbers of respondents were determined at 30 for each garden due to the time constraint and availability of resources. The number of men and women were equally selected to have a nuanced gender analysis.

Table 1: Sample Size & its Distribution in the Study Universe

Sl. No.	Districts	No. of tea gardens	No. of men respondents in each tea garden	No. of women respondents in each tea garden	Total No. of men respondents	Total No. of women respondents	Total No. of respondents
1	Dibrugarh	10	15	15	150	150	300
2	Tinsukia	10	15	15	150	150	300
Total		20			300	300	600

Part B:

The sample size for the Part B of study on oral history is 20 women belonging to tea community spreading over 2 districts of Assam – Dibrugarh and Tinsukia within the age range of 25 years to 80 years.

1.5.4. Data Collection:

Part A:

Part A of the study deals with the socio-economic conditions of the tea garden workers. Quantitative methods were applied to extract data from the field site. Further, the study is primarily based on primary data, although secondary sources have been employed to understand the historical constructions of tea gardens. The first part of the research centre on the tea garden workers, both men and women, who constituted the main respondents of the study.

Part B:

Part B of the study documents the oral narratives of the tea garden women workers. Oral history is a systematic process of documenting the lived experiences of the people gaining wider currency in contemporary social research. This part of the study embedded in qualitative research employs different methods to collect primary data

1.5.4.1. Sampling:

Part A:

Part A of the study has employed mixed sampling method namely simple random sampling, purposive sampling, and convenience sampling method to gather information from the field. This mixed sampling method was used due to factors such as accessibility to the field, availability of the respondents, limitation of time and resources.

Part B:

The respondents were selected based on both snowball sampling and purposive sampling techniques in the Part B of the study.

1.5.4.2. Tools and Techniques:

Part A:

The methodology adopted for the study of socio economic conditions of workers in the tea gardens is quantitative. The survey employs different tools and techniques of data collection viz. close-ended questionnaire/ interview schedule for 20 tea gardens (10 each) in the districts of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia along with appropriate observation techniques. The collected data were processed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), the software popularly used in social science research.

Part B:

In-depth personal interviews were conducted ranging from a time period of 45 minutes to 1 hour 30 minutes for the Part B of the study. An Interview Guide was used to gather narratives to justify parameters ranging from a wide array of issues affecting women's lives. The interviews were taken in Sadri, Assamese, and Hindi language.

1.5.5. Major Variables for Data Collection: Part A

Milestones & Key Deliverables of Part A of the Study

1. Personal Details

- Demographic Characteristics
- Family Background
- Language
- Educational Qualification
- Marital Status and Age at the time of marriage
- Changes in terms of work performance after marriage
- Details of Children and Registration of birth
- Family Planning

2. Living Quarter Details

- Housing
- Household Assets
- Availability of Basic Amenities
- Household Work
- Family Members

3. Workers in the Private Space

- Division of Labour
- Recreation and Travel
- Consumption of alcohol
- Financial Management
- Domestic Violence

4. Work Details

- Occupational Details
- Duration of Stay at tea garden

- Calculation of Wages
- Wages from joining to present
- Working hours and break time
- Leave Rules and Maternity Leave
- Benefits received
- Workers Union, Membership and Advantages
- Age of retirement

5. Work Place Facilities

- Sanitation and Hygiene
- Provisions of drinking water and tea
- Work essentials provided
- Medical care and benefits
- Crèche

6. Educational Status

- Educational status of the children of the tea garden workers
- Availability of Schools
- Distance to School and Mode of travel

7. Health Status

- Work done during monthly periods
- Major health ailments/diseases
- Habits
- Health conditions of their children
- Consultation in illness
- Condition of tea garden hospital

8. Social Customs and Culture

- Festival celebrated
- Practice and instances of witchcraft

9. Awareness of Civil Rights

- Possession of Voter and ration Card
- Means of dispute resolution
- Political Activities
- Political Behaviour

1.5.6. Data analysis and report writing:

Part A:

To achieve consistency and accuracy in the data analysis and report writing for the Part A of the study, the data collected from the field was checked and cross verified. Information was completed in the questionnaire/interview schedules and subsequently, the data collected was processed through software of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

The collected data was analyzed in the light of various variables, i.e. Living Quarter Details, Family Life, Work Details, Work Place Facilities, Health Status, Educational Status, Social Customs and Culture, Awareness of Civil Rights. The data is presented in report in forms of various graphs and diagrams.

Part B:

The interviews taken in Sadri, Assamese, and Hindi language, for the Part B of the study, were transcribed into Assamese and translated into English and a detailed analysis done drawing certain parameters like working conditions, maternity benefits, awareness, problems of domestic violence and witchcraft, customs and traditions inside the plantations etc.

1.5.7. Chapterisation:

The Report is divided into the following parts and chapters:

Part A: Report on the Socio Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Workers

1. Chapter – I : Introduction

This chapter deals with an outline of the research project, its objectives, methodologies used to investigate the nature of work in the tea gardens of Assam.

2. Chapter – II : History of Tea Plantations in Assam

This chapter deals with a brief history of tea plantations in Assam to get a basic overview of the tea industry in Assam.

3. Chapter - III : Socio-Economic Conditions of the Workers in the Tea Gardens: Evidences and Explanations

This chapter deals with the empirical data collected through field surveys in the selected tea gardens to understand the socio economic conditions of tea garden workers in Assam.

4. Chapter – IV : Key Findings

This chapter will highlight the key findings of the study.

5. Chapter – V : Conclusion

This Chapter gives brief information about the study and put forward certain recommendations.

Part B : Listening to the Voices of Women Workers in the Tea Gardens: A Glimpse into their lives through oral narratives.

CHAPTER - II

History of Tea Plantations in Assam

2.1 Introduction:

The first half of the nineteenth century was the period when the colonial foothold in Assam and the North East in general as well as beginning of the tea plantation industry in the region coincided with each other. Dibrugarh as a district was formed only as recent as 1976 after it split from Lakhimpur district. This region is now renowned as the world's largest area covered by tea plantations. Tinsukia, on the other hand, split from Dibrugarh district in 1989. Hence prior to these divisions, both Dibrugarh and Tinsukia were part of Lakhimpur district as its sub-divisions in the colonial as well as post-colonial era.

It was in the plain, valley region of erstwhile Lakhimpur kept fertile by the flowing Brahmaputra river that a major portion of the land covered with thick forests were cleared to be covered with tea plantations. Lakhimpur was a region that was cool and pleasant during most part of the year, experiencing heavy showers of rain on a frequent basis with the months of June, July and August being the hottest. The region was covered with alluvial soil with a mixture of sand and clay. Hence, Lakhimpur possessed climatic and soil conditions which were ideal for the growth of the tea plant.

Lakhimpur was, in fact, the site of the first attempts at tea cultivation in the Indian sub-continent by the colonial government in 1835 and the origin of Assam Company the first tea company to operate from the year 1840 onwards. Other tea companies that came into prominence around this time included the Dum Duma Company, Jokai Company, the Assam Frontier Tea Company and the Dihing Company.² As tea plantations grew in abundance with vast tracts of land being brought

² *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, p. 123.

under tea cultivation,³ no new crops were introduced nor were any improvements made to develop older methods of cultivation.

Communication with the district was maintained through the plying of river steamers between Dibrugarh and Goalundo on the Brahmaputra and the construction of the Assam-Bengal railways which helped in connecting the region with the rest of the sub-continent, thus, not only easing the transport of men and goods to and from the region but at the same time easing and intensifying the colonial hold over it. A metre-gauge railway which connected the town of Dibrugarh with Ledo coal mines also linked many tea gardens in the region with the Assam-Bengal railways at Tinsukia. This line also connected Dibrugarh with Guwahati and further upto Chittagong near the sea.⁴Roads were the other means of communication apart from river navigation and railways, the most important ones connecting Sadiya with the Dihing river and between Dibrugarh and Jaipur. The development of the means of communication between Assam and Bengal made it ever more convenient for the transportation of a large labour force to man the newly emerging plantations in the region. The constant imperial references to the prevalence of sparse population in the region provided a justifying ground for encouraging a huge exodus of selective populations from different parts of the country to work in the newly started commercial ventures such as tea plantations. Hence, the beginning of plantations and colonization of the land in Assam seems to have gone hand-in-hand.

Hence, plantations were related to the project of colonization of a peripheral region such as Assam in order to closely entwine it with the workings of the imperial state at the centre. Having said that, it would be pertinent to highlight the reduction of the plantations' labouring population's identity as subjects as a result of imperialism and particularly that of its women labourers who form the focus of this project. Related to their status of subjection was the severe economic degradation suffered by them with

³ By the year 1904, there were a total of 143 tea gardens spread over an area covering 70,000 acres. The *Imperial Gazetteer of India*, p. 123.

⁴ *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, p. 125.

the onslaught of colonialism and their conditions in a newly emerged nation-state post the phase of colonialism. This would entail delving into the history of the tea plantation industry as well as tracing the process by which its labouring population came to exist and their conditions of life and work in the plantations in the post-independence era.

2.2 A Brief History of Tea Plantations in Assam:

Having discovered the indigenous tea plant growing 'wild' in Assam in 1823 by Robert Bruce, it was C.A. Bruce, the brother of Robert Bruce who forwarded specimens of the plant to the Superintendent of the Botanical Gardens in Calcutta during the 1830s for examination and research future prospects for its cultivation. William Bentinck, the then Governor-General of India appointed a committee to promote the cultivation of the plant. Thus, the first tea garden was opened in 1835 in Lakhimpur as a result of experimentation.⁵ As the potential of monetary benefit was realized by the government after the first experimental tea plantation, soon vast stretches of land were allocated to private companies and individuals to open up plantations on a large scale at minimal costs. This was made possible with the of the wasteland colonization policy under the Assam Waste Land Rules in 1856.⁶

After gaining immensely in terms of accessibility to land, more so, after the access to it came to be legalized under the waste land rules, the major hurdle for the private companies as well as the colonial government now lay in procuring human resources to engage in the production activities in the plantations. Initial constraints were faced by the colonial planter community to procure labour for newly begun tea plantations. One of the reasons being the severe loss of population caused by the Moamaria rebellion and the Burmese invasion, while the other being the economic self-sufficiency of the local population who produced crops and goods and engaged with trade only to meet the immediate requirements of their day-to-day lives. The

⁵ *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam*, Cultural Publishing House, Delhi, 1983 [1906], p. 49; W.W. Hunter, *A Statistical Account of Assam*, B.R. Publishing Corporation, Delhi, 1975 [1879], p. 262.

⁶ Priyam Goswami, *The History of Assam: From Yandabo to Partition, 1826-1947*, Orient Blackswan, New Delhi, 2012, p. 166.

disinterestedness, in being bound to a wage driven ‘time-work-discipline’⁷ structure demanded by a capitalist economic venture like tea plantations and their difficulty to adjust to a modern work structure with the onslaught of colonialism earned the local peasantry the nomenclature ‘lazy native’.⁸ The inability to bind and reduce the local peasant population into a position of hard physical labour for the functioning of modern economic enterprises such as tea plantations not only induced the colonizers to refer to them as ‘lazy’ but also provided a justification to recruit other populations whose identity can be reduced to physical labour to work in the newly begun tea plantations in Assam.

Way before the local peasantry was considered as a potential source of labour for the plantations, the imperialists had resorted to the recruiting of Chinese labour. The recruitment of the Chinese however, proved to be an expensive affair in comparison to locally available labour.⁹ Kacharis and Nagas were the only communities amongst the population in Assam who were considered for recruitment in the plantations.¹⁰ Although some gardens did recruit labourers from Bihar and Chota Nagpur on an individual basis,¹¹ it was only from 1859 onwards that a full-fledged recruitment of populations from Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Chota Nagpur Plateau, erstwhile United

⁷ This term was first coined by E.P. Thompson in “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” in *Past and Present*, No. 38, December 1967, pp. 56-97.

⁸ Jayeeta Sharma frequently used the term ‘lazy native’ in her works ‘Growing Tea: Lazy Natives and Colonialism’s Coolies’, *Agrarian Studies Colloquium*, April 14, 2006; ‘Lazy Natives, Coolie Labour and the Assam Tea Industry’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 43, Issue 6, Nov 2009 and *Empire’s Garden: Assam and the Making of Colonial India*, Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2011. Even authors like Rana P. Behal and Prabhu Mohapatra acknowledge the usage of this term by the British colonists for the local peasantry as indolent and lazy in their works : Rana P. Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude: Political Economy of Tea Plantations in Colonial Assam*, Tulika Books, New Delhi, 2014 and Rana P. Behal and Prabhu P. Mohapatra, ‘Tea and Money versus Human Life: The Rise and Fall of Indenture System in Assam Valley Tea Plantations’ in Daniel, E. Valentine; Bernstein, Henry and Brass, Tom (eds), *Plantations, Proletarians and Peasants in Colonial Asia*, Frank Cass, London, 1992.

⁹ H.K. Barpujari (ed), *Political History of Assam, 1826-1919*, Vol. I, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2008, p. 55.

¹⁰ Goswami, *Priyam The History of Assam*, p. 168.

¹¹ Percival Griffiths, *The History of the Indian Tea Industry*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1967, p. 70.

Provinces, Central Provinces and Madras began.¹² The rate of migration from these regions grew so rapidly that by the year 1891, the migrants formed nearly seven per cent of the total population in Assam with Lakhimpur constituting the highest number at forty one per cent in comparison to other districts.¹³ Ranajit Das Gupta has focused upon the prevalence of complex multiplicity of market structures within the colonial economy¹⁴ wherein heterogeneity was the essential component of any labour market structure. Recruiting labour with heterogenous origins not only tended to support the political motive of divide and rule among a population but is also provides a reflection upon heightened capitalist intrusion into a colonized society wherein a diverse population of labour was made available at the disposal of capitalist utility. The maintenance of a heterogeneous market structure can also be seen in the context of the recruitment of the tea garden labour population of Assam as well. It gets reflected all the more vividly as populations have been recruited from various regions of the Indian sub-continent as mentioned above. The rate of migration from these regions into the tea plantations of Assam amplified so much so that about 20,000 migrants was said to have moved from Chotanagpur to the tea plantations of Assam, on an average.¹⁵

Apart from Santhals, Oraons, Mundas, Bhumij and Bhuiyas, other communities that came to be recruited as the 'suitable coolies' include the Kols, Gonds, Konds and Kharias too. Most of them were from the tribal peasant population who were stripped of their landed possessions and forest habitats in their native place owing to the commercial expansionist policies of the colonial state, high taxation rates on land imposed by both the *zamindar* and the colonial state and pressures of paying up monetary debts to the local moneylender. Their experience as former peasants engaged

¹² H.K. Barpujari (ed), *The Comprehensive History of Assam*, Vol. V, Publication Board Assam, Guwahati, 2007, p. 48.

¹³ Darrang and Sibsagar together comprising twenty five per cent while Cachar constituting twenty four per cent of the migrant tea labour population. See *Provincial Gazetteer of Assam*, p. 49.

¹⁴ Ranajit Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol.16, No. 44/46, Nov. 1981, pp. 1781-1806.

¹⁵ Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India', pp. 1781-1806.

in agricultural activities back home and their inability to cope with the economic pressures created by the onslaught of imperialist expansion and harassment suffered at the hands of the local landlord in their native lands, these populations were the most exposed to being chosen as ‘coolies’¹⁶ who could be recruited to work in the tea plantations of Assam.

This resulted in a huge exodus of population from different parts of the Indian colony into Assam who were made to endure a torturous and inhuman journey of several days by road, railways and steamer. They were made to travel in packed and unhygienic conditions which often led to high mortality rates during the journey.¹⁷

The indentured system of labour recruitment was the main method of labour recruitment for the tea industry in Assam. The colonial control and regulation over the migration and transportation of labour was legalized with the passing of an Act of 1863 in the Bengal Council. The minimum monthly wages were of Rs. 5 for men and Rs. 4 for women, a three year contract with nine hours of daily work, authority to planters for breach of contract by labourers and also the right to arrest without warrant were sanctioned under a penal contract system as Act VI of the Bengal Council in 1865.¹⁸ The passing of these acts provided an authorized, legal rationale towards maintaining a superior, authoritarian, powerful position of the colonial planter community while reducing the position of the labourer to that of inferiority, subjectivity and rendering them into a position of powerlessness in a relationship vis-a-vis each other.

Unlike the coal mining or jute mill workers who continued to maintain ties with their native places with many of them also returning home after retirement,¹⁹ one can rarely find evidences of tea plantation workers continuing their links with their native lands and villages. The rise of such a circumstance is owing to the rigidity of the tea

¹⁶ The term ‘coolie’ was most often used by British colonial officials in reference to physical labour among a subject or conquered population in the colonies.

¹⁷ The mortality rates rising as high as 50 per cent. Behal and Mohapatra, ‘Tea and Money versus Human Life’.

¹⁸ Behal and Mohapatra, ‘Tea and Money versus Human Life’.

¹⁹ Das Gupta, ‘Structure of the Labour Market In Colonial India’, pp. 1781-1806.

plantation emigration acts such as the Workman's Breach of Contract Act, 1859. According to this act, the workers were bound to serve in the tea gardens through the signing of contracts that ranged from three to five years. If they failed to bind themselves to the gardens where they were recruited or violated rules of the contract by escaping or 'absconding' from it, the act gave the advantage to the planters to arrest the 'absconders' without any warrant and punish them as found necessary. Hence, while the act granted unquestionable power to the planter community over the labourers, it also criminalized the actions of the labourers which the latter sought to exercise out of their own free will. Hence, the nomenclature 'unfree labour' has been used to refer to tea garden labourers by several authors.²⁰ In his comparison between the tea plantation industry, coal mining and the jute mill industry, Ranajit Das Gupta agrees that it is in the tea plantation industry that labourers worked in the most oppressive environments as compared to coal mines or even jute mills.²¹ Profit became the determinant factor for the sustenance and smooth functioning of a privately owned enterprise such as tea plantations. Thus, free emigration became necessary to enable labour to migrate and contribute towards the generation of profit through the use of maximum utilization of labour power. Labour power, hence, needed to be realized to the maximum potential by reducing any hindrance which might deviate labour from working towards capitalist interests of profit. The solution, therefore, was found in necessitating oppression and confinement in order not to lose out on labour. This in turn, facilitated inhuman conditions of labour in the plantations, thus, creating a vicious circle from which it became practically difficult for workers to come out. The lack of proper sanitation facilities, low wages, poor housing facilities, poor medical facilities and authoritarian

²⁰ Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude*; Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market In Colonial India'; Rob Castle & Jim Hagan, "The 'Freeing' of Unfree Labour : Coolies in the Tea Gardens of Assam 1908-1948", Australian Society for the Study of Labour History Conference, 2001; Souparna Lahiri, 'Bonded Labour and the Tea Plantation Economy'; Bishnupriya Gupta & Anand Swamy, 'Unfree Labour: Did Indenture reduce labour supply to Tea Plantations in Assam?' ; S. Lahiri & A. Nanda, "The Plight of 'Unfree' Tea Workers", *Labour File: A Monthly Journal of Labor and Economic Affairs* 5, Nos. 7-9, July-September 1999, pp. 1-51; Tom Brass, *Towards a Comparative Political Economy of Unfree Labour: Case Studies and Debates*, Routledge, London & New York, 2016.

²¹ Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India', pp. 1781-1806.

regime of the planters and supervisors sucked the tea plantation workers into a never-ending black hole of abject economic poverty and social indignity for decades not just prior to independence but even after the phase of the freedom struggle albeit under different socio-political and economic conditions.

As far as work division is concerned in the estates, men usually prepared the land for planting of tea saplings while women largely were engaged with plucking of tea leaves in most estates although few men are also employed nowadays for carrying out plucking.²² Any neglect of work enabled the existence of the provision of Section 33 of the Act of 1865 continuing under Act I of 1882 and Act VI of 1901 which made it legal for planters to arrest and punish runaway or ‘absconding coolies’ by confining them within a *phatak* also known as a prison in the plantation.²³ Flogging, reduction of pay from a wage that was already meagre, non-payment of overtime work, confinement in *phataks* for attempted desertions, appointing watchmen or *chowkidars* to keep vigil over the activities of the workers and ensuring that they came to work on time, use of coercion or trickery used to compel workers to renew their contracts and sexual exploitation of women workers were some of the ways in which labour in the tea gardens were brought under the fold of control, domination, subjugation, order and discipline for the working of an efficient production system under the colonial state.²⁴ This not only led to severe physical and mental oppression of the labour force, but also economic degradation and along with it deterioration of their health. Most colonial records mention the prevalence of several diseases like diarrhoea, malaria, dysentery, cholera, fever, dropsy and anaemia to name a few among the labour community. These diseases were responsible for high mortality rates among plantation labour in the tea

²² Rekha Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories : An Autobiographical Account*, Translated by Biman Arandhara, The Visual Image, Guwahati, 2013, p. 17.

²³ Rana P. Behal, ‘Coolie Drivers or Benevolent Paternalists? British Tea Planters in Assam and the Indenture Labour System’, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, Special Issue 01, Jan 2010, p. 39.

²⁴ Due to such severe coercive methods used to keep labour oppressed in the plantations, the tea plantations in Assam have been described as a ‘thinly disguised slavery’ by Reverend Charles Dowding in ‘Tea-Garden Coolies in Assam’- A Letter by Hon’ble J. Buckingham, C.I.E, replying to a communication on the subject, which appeared in the *Indian Churchman*. The whole reprinted with introduction and an answer by The Rev. Charles Dowding, Thacker, Spink & Co, Calcutta, 1894, p.31.

gardens of Assam. Harsh conditions of work, lack of proper medical and sanitation facilities, poor nutrition and clothing also added to the deteriorating health conditions of labourers.²⁵

The Bengal Act VII of 1873 introduced the system of licensed *sardari* recruitment to keep a check on the fraudulent practices of recruitment and reports of insanitary conditions of transport which led to high mortality during the journeys.²⁶ The emergence of the *sardari* system of labour recruitment emerged as supplement to the indentured system and did not really lead to the complete annihilation of the indentured system. The adherence to the *sardari* recruitment system however, did not ease the conditions of recruitment for the labourers. Just like the indentured system, under this system too labourers were given false promises of a better future in Assam and sometimes tricked into migrating from their native place to work in the plantations of Assam.²⁷

Particular stress was laid on the migration of entire families to contribute towards the economic benefits of plantations with preference given mostly to migration of women.²⁸ Bikash Nath while highlighting the miserable health conditions of women labourers in tea plantations, stated that particular attention was drawn towards the recruitment of women labourers with children and looking after them a matter of 'enlightened self-interest...during and after confinement'.²⁹ Even in the words of Rana Behal :

A remarkable feature of the sponsored migration to Assam was that women and children constituted nearly 50 per cent of the total labour force, unlike

²⁵ Tables mentioning the list of unhealthy tea gardens in Assam and the causes of death are mentioned in 'Tea-Garden Coolies in Assam'- A Letter by Hon'ble J. Buckingham, pp. 11, 17.

²⁶ Behal and Mohapatra, 'Tea and Money versus Human Life'.

²⁷ Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market in Colonial India', pp. 1781-1806.

²⁸ Bikash Nath, *Tea Plantation Workers of Assam and the Indian National Movement: 1921-1947*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2016, p. 13.

²⁹ Bikash Nath, *Tea Plantation Workers of Assam and the Indian National Movement: 1921-1947*, Primus Books, New Delhi, 2016, p. 68.

the migration of indentured labourers to British plantation colonies overseas, where they were a minority. Women and children were paid less than the male labourers, which in the long run helped the employers to keep the wage bill low.³⁰

It is within this context of keeping wages as minimum as possible in a profit-oriented capitalist industry like tea that particular emphasis was laid on the recruitment of women and children although men too were recruited with low wages. However, the fact that in a situation where both the genders were paid low, the need to pay women and children lesser than their male counterparts suggests not only the need to keep the gender divide intact among a colonized population but it also suggests the need to denigrate the very act of labour and production through a gendered analogy. Hence, even when men were involved in the production activities in the plantations, the necessity to employ women more than men involved feminizing the task of physical labour under a notion of inferiority. This not only facilitated cutting of costs and making maximum profits at the top but also contributed to the exercise of domination and subversion of a conquered population within a confined space such as plantations where the colonizers were brought in closer contact with the colonized. Hence, closer proximity intensified the exercise of colonial power over a population whose identity got merged with the practice of physical labour for the benefit of the colonial imperial needs.

2.3 Review of Literature:

Some primary sources such as author Rekha Baruah's *Tea Garden Memories*³¹ although sympathizes with the numerous tea garden labourers whom the author was closely associated with and appreciates the immense hard work, dedication and loyalty of these people towards their work and their masters, nevertheless, also engages in glorifying the pioneering entrepreneurial activities of her ancestral family who happened

³⁰ R. Behal, *One Hundred Years of Servitude*, p. 2.

³¹ R. Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories*.

to be one of Assam's foremost planter families.³² The author's deep immersion in highlighting the achievements of establishing plantations by the male entrepreneurs of her family provides a demonstration of the immense power, authority and influence that her family enjoyed in Assam. Throughout the book, there seems a tendency to place Assamese entrepreneurs such as male members of her own family at the apex of hierarchy vis-a-vis the labour community.³³ Class hierarchy is not necessarily discarded in the narrative of the author. Where on the one hand, there is a projection of her ancestral family's opulence, high lifestyle and wealth, on the other hand, a projection of the hard physical labour and poverty of the tea working community very subtly places both entities in a comparative hierarchy wherein the labour became a site upon which her family's fortune and wealth thrived and their superior identity as a 'respectable' Assamese family gets entrenched. Although she resumes a sympathetic approach towards the labour community employed in the tea gardens owned by her family, however, the constant glorification of the family's achievements leaves ample room for doubts regarding the intention of the author – is she pro-planter or pro-tea worker? The glorification stands as a paradox to the humanistic approach in her work. Her maternal approach towards the workers which exude the attributes of protection, care and affection, does not contribute towards doing away with their position of physical labour. Thus, it is unable to free them of their condition of penury and struggle. The author's attempt to include them in her narratives is a reflection of the need felt to impart a touch of humanity to an exploitative system of labour of which her family, including herself, has been a part. Such an approach provided an illusion of the community being included within the paradigm of development. It also lends a false impression of giving them space in the power structure, this accessibility to power,

³²The author's great grandfather Someswar Sarma was a tea planter and so were the various male members of her extended family. Several tea gardens such as Oating, Bhogdabari, Balijan and Madhupur tea gardens were begun by Someswar Sarma. Chenijan tea garden was started by the author's grandfather, Padmanath Sarma.

³³References have been made by the author regarding the 'greatest responsibility' of tea garden owners for starting tea plantations, comparing the physical appearance of her grandfather with Europeans and describing the lavish lifestyle she and her family led in Chenijan and Jorhat.

however, being limited in nature according to terms defined by the author and unsurpassing that of the capitalists.

What is interesting to note in Rekha Baruah's work is the fascination and complete awe that a middle class woman such as Baruah is consumed with at her confrontation with the working class woman such as the Adivasi women workers of Chenijan tea garden. If on one hand, the middle class women such as those of the author's family are represented as the custodians of tradition³⁴, hence the custodians of the family's honour and dignity in society, the identity of the woman tea garden worker, on the other hand, is surrounded by her efficiency in providing service to her benefactors. Her clothing, marital status and physical appearance become a subject of ethnographic scrutiny through engaging in a detailed description that brings out the author's romanticization of the female 'other'. For instance, vivid description of Almoni-the midwife's repetitive hairstyle and clothing brought about a sense of Almoni's position in a state of motionlessness and non-progressiveness unlike that of the author whose position was determined as one of progress and development as she wore clothes, shoes and other items of luxury bought in Kolkata and New York.³⁵

For example, the issue of sexual exploitation of female labourers is completely overlooked in her autobiographical work as Baruah writes :

The young Adivasi girls working in the tea gardens were tall, slim and beautiful...It was not that some directors, general managers, assistant managers and others who worked in tea gardens owned by British planters as well as others, did not fall in love with the slender-bodied women or girls. As a result the offspring of some British people are still seen in certain tea gardens of Assam. There are even tales of some British men keeping such

³⁴ 'My grandparents, especially my grandmother, very strictly observed the rigorous customs of a conservative Brahmin family'. Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories*, p. 66.

³⁵ R. Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories*, pp. 70-80.

girls with them and teaching them their lifestyle or taking them away to England and marrying them.³⁶

She is so besotted with the romantic image of plantations and the role of British planters and several Assamese families like her own that the issue of sexual abuse of women workers gets camouflaged in the narration of 'love affairs' that might have existed between the planter executives and the Adivasi women in the tea gardens. Instances of male labourers being offended at the site of indecent behaviour being meted out to women labourers was commonplace. For example, citing one such incident of Lakhimpur District in the year 1888, its District Commissioner reported that:

A large body of coolies left the garden and came to the station complaining of ill-treatment. They stated that both men and women had been flogged; in the case of women that they had been tied to a post in the porch of the manager's house, their clothes lifted up to their waists, and that they had been beaten on the bare buttocks with a stirrup leather by the orders of the Assistant Manager, Mr. Anding, The District Superintendent of Police went out and enquired, and found that two women, Panoo and Khumti, had been assaulted in the way described. I myself also went out and on further enquiring ascertained that a woman named Sukni had also been beaten some three or four times. The women Panoo and Khumti had been flogged for desertion and Sukni for short work.³⁷

Even in her description of Almoni-the midwife's frequent drinking of *laopani*, her constant talking and her retaliation at any bungalow worker teasing her, Baruah does not engage in criticizing the act of teasing on the part of the servants but rather

³⁶ R. Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories*, p. 7.

³⁷ Bikash Nath citing from Report from the District Commissioner of Lakhimpur District in response to the Memorandum of the Commissioner of the Assam Valley, Enquiry into the Causes of Friction, Revenue A in Nath, *Tea Plantation Workers of Assam*, p. 86.

finds the midwife's behaviour as 'unusual' and 'scary'.³⁸ Being brought up in a conservative household, Baruah's encounter with Almoni's behaviour as 'unusual' and 'scary' emerges out of the author's own idea of 'ideal' womanly behaviour which the author might have experienced in her own household and might have also witnessed other female members of the family adhering to. Although she appreciates Almoni's sincerity at work, the author seemed compelled to note a woman's behaviour that tended to cross the boundaries of normalcy and 'reason' within which women belonging to the author's own class were supposed to behave. From the above, it can be noticed that an urban middle class woman's idea of another woman belonging to a different class and community was associated with the idea of a tame, domesticated female who fitted the notion of the 'ideal woman'.

Plantations have been represented as an 'enclave'³⁹ by writers such as Behal and Das Gupta. Das Gupta, even going as far as bringing to our attention that "in case of tea industry...the scope of movement from even one garden to another garden was virtually non-existent."⁴⁰

Such statements tend to focus mainly upon the restricted movement of labour owing to the private ownership aspect of a capitalist commodity such as labour. It completely negates the possibility of movement owing to social circumstances like interaction between labourers of different gardens during their visits to the local markets and fairs, religious or festive gatherings and even movement of women labourers from one garden to another as a result of marriage or other social compulsions. An unfortunate aspect of such absolute assertions is the non-acknowledgment of women's space in the labour market. It also exposes the socio-economic circumstances that had the probabilities of loosening up the rigidity of an 'enclave' owing to women's movement from one family to another, this sometimes, even leading to change in location from one tea garden to another. However, the

³⁸Baruah, *Tea Garden Memories*, p. 78.

³⁹ Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market In Colonial India'.

⁴⁰Das Gupta, 'Structure of the Labour Market In Colonial India', pp. 1781-1806.

reference to the tea garden as an ‘enclave’ or a closed entity is different if the author’s/authors’ intention is to portray the tea plantations of the colonial as well as the post-independence era as a prison where labourers toil in cruel working and living conditions with the lack of freedom to realize their rights and privileges and suffering inhuman behaviour from the planters.

The essence of Bikash Nath’s book *Tea Plantation Workers of Assam and the Indian National Movement* lies in the author’s efforts to link the economic transformation of the province of Assam with contemporary world and national developments such as effects of the First World War, the Non-Cooperation Movement as well as the World Depression. Hence, he emphasizes on the need to understand national and world economics and politics not as separate entities but in relation to each other and also in association with the beginning of a plantation economy in a peripheral region like Assam.

Nath follows a similar trajectory as Rana Behal and Prabhu Mohapatra, two noteworthy scholars in the field of plantation history in Assam who have been responsible in bringing to focus the brutality of the plantation work regime, right from the anomalies of the recruiting system, the atrocities faced by workers at the hands of the planters, the problem of low wages and prevalence of ill-health among workers which imparted the image of tea plantations as an ‘enclave’. Where Nath differs from both the scholars is in citing the violation of dignity of the womenfolk of their community at the hands of the management and the altercation of *dusturs* by the garden authority as possible reasons of collision between workers and the management.⁴¹

Although Samita Sen follows a similar trajectory of ideological approach like Behal, Nath and Mohapatra, her works are a departure from the three scholars mentioned above especially, in the context of addressing the issues of working class

⁴¹ Nath, *Tea Plantation Workers of Assam*, pp. 87-90.

women.⁴² Even though the anomalies of the sardari system over the recruitment of women for the tea gardens of Assam are examined in the article titled “Commercial Recruiting and Informal Intermediation”, the plight of the tea garden woman worker formed a mere passing reference while addressing the position of women in the growth and development of the industrial working class.

2.5 Conclusion:

Given the various studies and findings on labour conditions that prevailed in the region’s tea plantations by a number of eminent writers and scholars who are considered experts in the subject and whose works mostly follow a combination of a historical, anthropological and sociological dimension, it would seem a significant endeavour to shift focus on the examination of labour conditions in the post-independence period particularly within a recent time frame. This would enable us to perceive the current socio-economic conditions of work and life in the numerous tea plantations of Assam, particularly through a survey conducted among the tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. To what extent has life and working conditions changed for these workers, especially the female workforce, who bear the majority of the work load in the gardens mostly owned and supervised by men? Is transformation in the lives of these women workers a myth or a reality or has it taken the shape of mere tokenism? Is there a continuation of the colonial structure in the workings of plantations even in the present era? These questions are sought to be answered through a thorough investigation based on field based empirical study of the subject concerned, complimented by oral narratives of the women workers in order to get a close view of their lives and conditions.

⁴² Samita Sen, “Gender and Class: Women in Indian Industry, 1890-1990”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 1, Indian Labour, Jan 2008, pp. 75-116 and “Commercial Recruiting and Informal Intermediation: Debate over the Sardari System in Assam Tea Plantations, 1860-1900”, *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 1, The Politics of Work, Family and Community in India, Jan 2010, pp. 3-28.

CHAPTER - III

Study of Socio Economic Conditions of Workers in the Tea Gardens: Evidences and Explanations

3.1. Introduction:

This particular chapter seeks to look into the various facets of workers in the tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. It details the life of the workers and attempts to derive an understanding of their socio-economic conditions. The chapter is divided into sub sections- personal details, living conditions, family life, work details, work place facilities, educational facilities for the children, health details, social customs, and civil rights.

The section on ‘Personal Details’ discusses about personal details (age, family background, languages known and spoken) of workers, literacy rate, marital status and other personal information. The segment on ‘Living Conditions’ analyses the facilities provided to the workers such as housing and sanitation, provision of drinking water and other details related to households. The section on ‘Workers in the Private Space’ attempts to examine the division of labour, financial matters of the family, recreational facilities, consumption of alcohol, and gender based violence. The part on ‘Work Details’ analyses nature of work, wage details, working hours, leave rules, maternity benefits. The section on ‘Looking into Other Benefits of Workers’ gives a picture of Medical benefits, Provident fund, Workers’ Union etc . The section on ‘Work-Place Facilities and Welfare Provisions’ looks into the provision at work sites (drinking water, sanitation and level of hygiene), information on work essentials provided by the management, medical facilities, and any other provisions at the work sites of the plantations. The segment on ‘Facilities for Education of Children of the Workers’ examines the provision of schools for the children of workers in the tea gardens and percentage of school going children. The section on ‘Details of Health Conditions of Workers’ delves into the health conditions of workers on the basis of their diseases, habits, health conditions of the children, and conditions of the tea garden hospitals. The

part on ‘Social Customs and Culture’ discusses about the festivals celebrated and other cultural practices. The section on ‘Civil Rights’ attempts to analyse the political behaviour and participation of the workers in the surveyed tea gardens.

3.2. Personal Details:

The survey, as stated in the methodology part, was carried out among 600 workers (300 men and 300 women) in 20 sample tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. This particular sub-section engages in delving into the profiles of the respondents by detailing a set of personal characteristics such as age, community, religion, languages known and spoken, literacy rate, marital status and other personal information.

3.2.1. Languages spoken and known by the respondents:

Table No 1: Languages spoken by workers in the surveyed Tea Gardens

Language Spoken	Number of Respondents	Percentage	Language Spoken	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Only Sadri	221	73.7	Only Sadri	188	62.7
Only Assamese	1	.3	Only Assamese	3	1.0
Sabar	2	.7	Others ⁴³	2	.7
Sadri & Assamese	41	13.7	Sadri & Hindi	4	1.3
Sadri & Oriya	27	9.0	Sadri & Assamese	74	24.7
Sadri, Hindi, Assamese	6	2.0	Sadri & Oriya	2	.7
Sadri, Assamese, Oriya	2	0.7	Sadri, Hindi, Assamese	23	7.7
Total	300	100.0	Sadri, Assamese, Oriya	4	1.3
			Total	300	100.0
Dibrugarh			Tinsukia		

* Source: field survey

⁴³ Others here refers to a language known as *Farsi* and *Santhali* spoken in some gardens of Tinsukia district.

The study found that most of the workers (73.70% in Dibrugarh and 62.70% in Tinsukia) speak Sadri as their medium of communication and very few (0.30% in Dibrugarh and 1% in Tinsukia) respondents use Assamese as the singular mode of communication. However, a substantial percentage of respondents (13.7% in Dibrugarh and 24.70% in Tinsukia) were found to be speaking both the languages of Sadri and Assamese. Further, it is found that a significant number of respondents speak other languages viz. Hindi, Oriya, Sabar etc.

The tea garden workers were primarily brought from Jharkhand, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh etc. as ‘indentured labourers’ to Assam. This caused a historical dislocation of the workers from their homelands. The workers came from different parts of India, speaking a wide array of languages. Consequently, this led to the birth of the pidgin language, called Sadri, which henceforth is an amalgamation of the native languages (Oriya, Bhojpuri, Telegu etc.) and the host language (Assamese). The study found, as indicated in the following table, that the highest numbers of respondents know both the languages of Sadri and Assamese. A significant percentage (an average of 35%) of workers know three languages- Sadri, Assamese, Hindi. The study found a very few workers to have known the language of English.

Table No 2: Languages Known by the workers in the surveyed Tea Gardens

Language Known	Frequency	Percentage
Sadri	22	3.7
Assamese	2	.3
Sadri & Hindi	15	2.5
Sadri & Assamese	277	46.2
Sadri & Other	4	.7
Hindi & Assamese	4	.7
Sadri, Hindi, Assamese	210	35.0
Sadri, Assamese, Others	33	5.5
Sadri, Hindi, Assamese, English	3	.5
Sadri, Hindi, Assamese, Other	27	4.5
Sadri, Hindi, Assamese, English, Other	3	.5
Total	600	100.0

* Source: field survey

3.2.2. Assamese as a Medium of Communication:

Table No 3: Assamese as a Medium of Communication

Assamese	Frequency	Percentage
Can Speak	544	90.70
Can't Speak	23	3.80
Understand But Don't Speak	33	5.50
Total	600	100

* Source: field survey

The study found that highest numbers of respondents could speak Assamese (an average of 90.70%). A nominal percentage of workers (3.80%) cannot speak Assamese, while 5.50% understand the language, but cannot speak.

Although the majority of workers in the surveyed tea gardens are able to converse in the language of Assamese, however, they do not use it as a medium of communication on daily basis. Observations in the field reveal that Assamese is used more as a medium of communication while interacting with the tea garden management or the members outside their community.

3.2.3. Communities of the Respondents

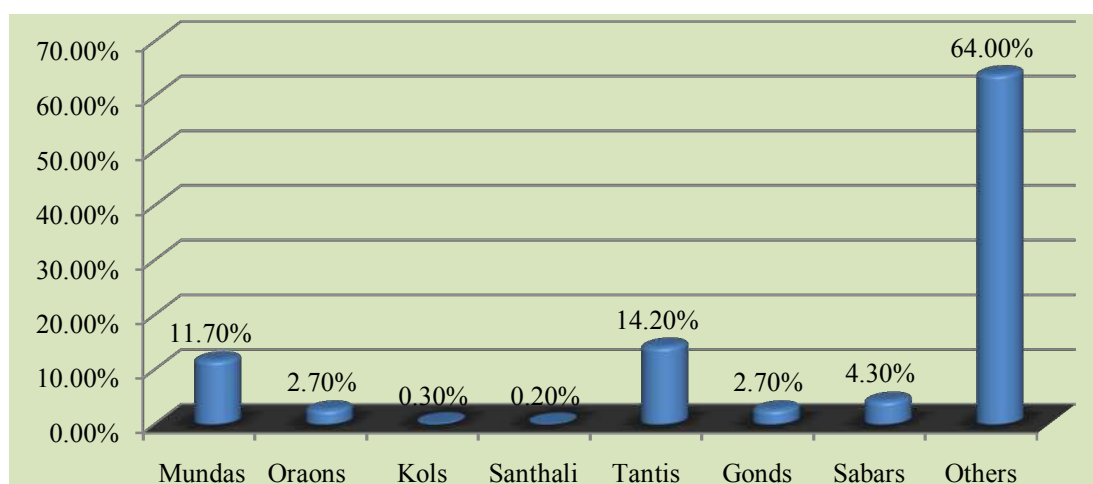


Figure 1: Communities of the Respondents in the surveyed tea gardens

* Source: field survey

The above diagram shows that a considerable percentage (14.20%) of respondents belongs to ‘Tanti’ community while 11.70% belong to ‘Munda’ community. The study found that many workers belong to a diverse range of communities viz. Manjhis, Bhumij, Rajputs, Kumars, Konds, Kalindis, Kurmis, Mahalis, Oraons, Kols, Santhals and Gonds etc.

3.2.4. Religion of the respondents

Table No 4: Religion of Respondents

Details	Numbers of Respondents	Percentage
Hinduism	576	96
Muslim	1	0.20
Christian	23	3.80
Total	600	100

* Source: field survey

It was found that 96% workers follow Hinduism, while 3.80% respondents practice Christianity. The study found that only 0.20 % respondents (1 in absolute number) follow Islam. The study reveals that the person converted his religion from Hinduism to Islam after marriage.

3.2.5. Literacy Rate:

Table No 5: Literacy Rate of Workers in the Tea-Gardens

District of the Respondent				
	Dibrugarh		Tinsukia	
Details	Count of respondents	% of respondents	Count of respondents	% of respondents
Never Went To School	98	32.7%	154	51.3%
Primary School	55	18.3%	33	11.0%
Middle School	48	16.0%	51	17.0%
High School	58	19.3%	27	9.0%
College	9	3.0%	5	1.7%
Can Sign	32	10.7%	18	6.0%
Can Not Sign	0	0	12	4.0%

* Source: Field Survey

The study delineates the fact that a large parentage of workers (32.70% in Dibrugarh and 51.30% in Tinsukia) is illiterate. There are 18.30% of workers in Dibrugarh and 11% workers in Tinsukia are educated to primary level. The study found that a considerable percentage of literacy rate (16% in Dibrugarh and 17% in Tinsukia) at the level of middle school education. The table above indicates a significant finding that in Dibrugarh the literacy rate at the level of high school is higher than Tinsukia (19.30% in Dibrugarh and 9% in Tinsukia). The percentage of respondents who attended college stands at 3% in Dibrugarh and 1.70% in Tinsukia. Further, the study found some respondents who could only put signatures (10.70% in Dibrugarh and 18% in Tinsukia), while a very few respondents (4%) were found in Tinsukia who could not even sign.

3.2.6. Marital Status of the Respondents:

The study delineates the fact that 74.30% respondents in the surveyed tea gardens are married, while 17.80% respondents are yet to marry. The study found a negligible percentage of respondents (0.70%) who are into ‘live-in’ relationships. Although, the finding was quantitatively minimal, however, it signifies an important aspect of their community that the respondents who are outside the matrix of marriage are accepted in their community and their relationship is unquestioned.

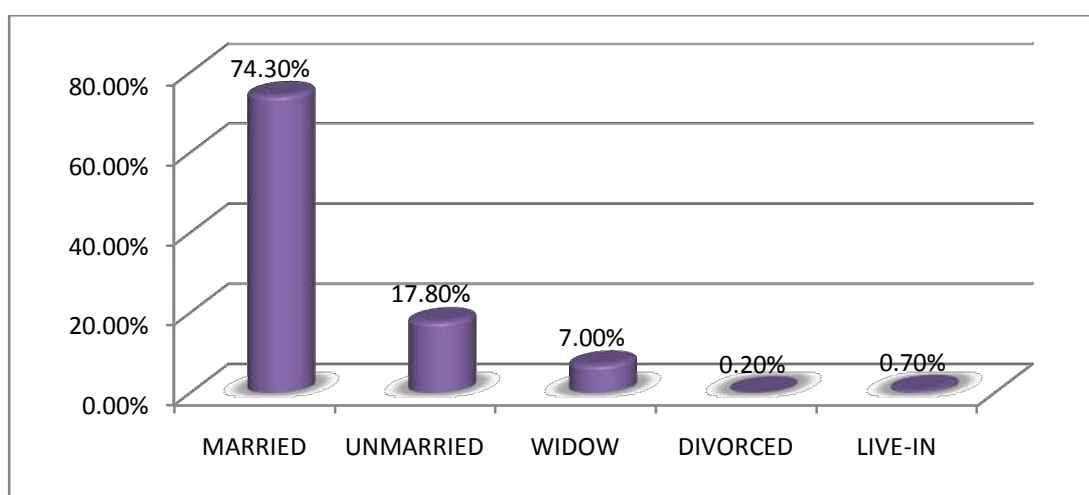


Figure 2: Marital Status of Workers in Surveyed Tea gardens

3.2.7. Age of Marriage and Other Details of Marriages

The study found that 46.2% respondents got married within the age group of 16-20 years. This is followed by 34.1% respondents who got married in the age group of 21-25 years. A minimal percentage of workers i.e. 7.5% respondents are found to be married at the age group of 26-30 years. The percentages of workers, who got married after the age of 30 years, is very few which stands at 0.8% in the 31-35 years category and 0.4% in 36-40 years category. Further, the study found that a notable percentage of respondents (11%) got married in the age group of 10-15 years. This indicates the prevalence of child marriage in the surveyed tea gardens. Moreover, the study reveals that the members of tea community get married at an early age, which is sometimes below the legal age of marriage.

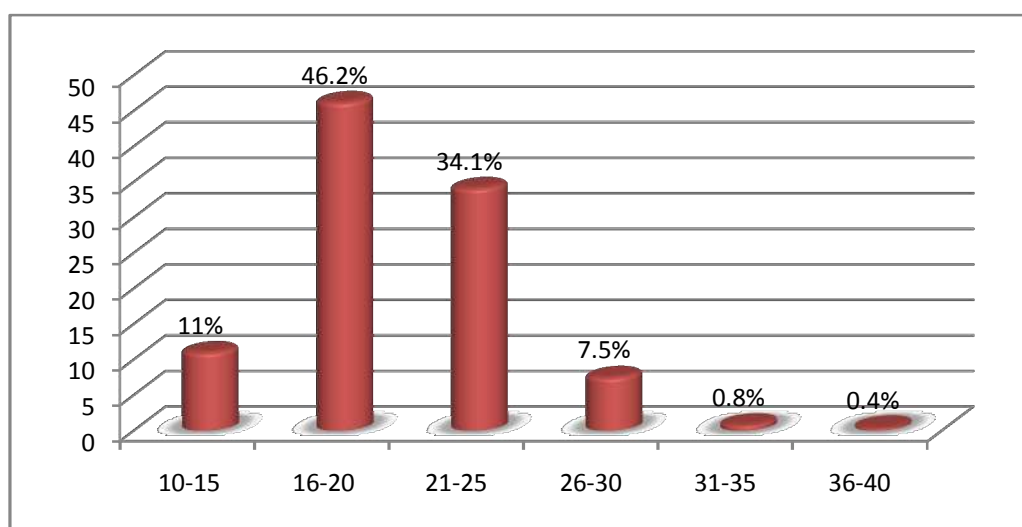


Figure 3 : Age of Marriage

The study reveals that early marriage is prevalent in the surveyed tea gardens. This primarily occurs in the form of elopement. However, it was found that the rituals of marriage are performed after the acceptance by their respective families. During the course of the field survey, some respondents noted that elopement happens either to get married or to establish a live-in relationship. Further, it was also brought to light that a

good number of live-in relationships exist in the surveyed tea gardens which are outside the institution of marriage. In some cases, the study found the prevalence of *matrilocal* practices.

In the context of the changes experienced by the respondents in the post-marriage period, 37.90% respondents reveal that there are changes in the nature and pattern of work, while 62.10% respondents declined of any such experiences. The workers, who responded positively about the changes, explained that it happened due to changes of location after marriage. A very few noted that there are instances of changes in the nature of work which is visibly evident in the home front but not in the workplace. According to the respondents, the household works are mostly carried out by women. This indicates the constructed societal norm that household works are the responsibility of women and thereby, the workers (both men and women) do not consider any kind of major changes at the household level after marriage.

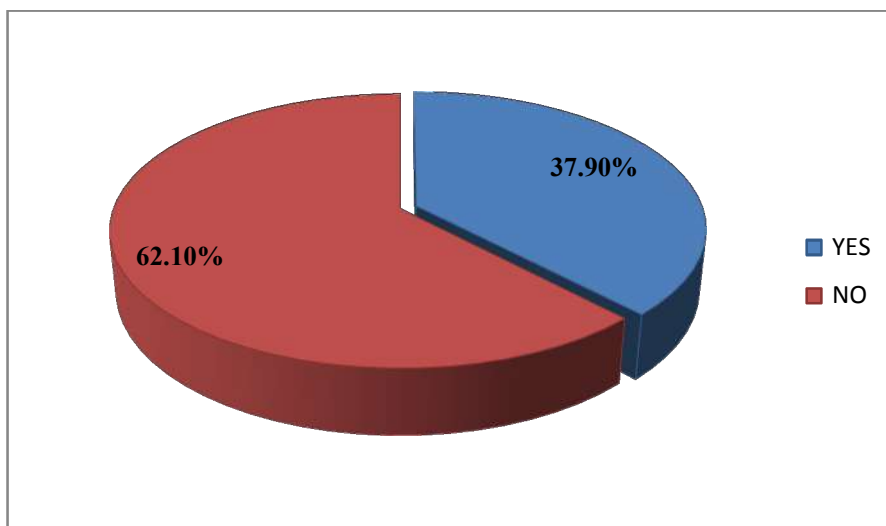


Figure-4: Changes in work after marriage of the worker

3.2.8. Details of Children of the Workers in the Tea-Gardens

The tables and figures below give a glimpse into the details of the children of the workers which is followed by an analysis.

Table No: 6 : Number of Children of the Workers

Nos. of children	District of The Respondent			
	DIBRUGARH		TINSUKIA	
	Total Number Of Children Of The Respondents		Total Number Of Children Of The Respondents	
	Count	%	Count	%
0	10	4.2%	13	6.4%
1	27	11.4%	30	14.7%
2	82	34.6%	53	26.0%
3	84	35.4%	61	29.9%
4	25	10.5%	33	16.2%
5	7	3.0%	10	4.9%
6	1	.4%	4	2.0%
7	1	.4	0	0

**Source: Field Survey*

Table No: 7: Details of Boy Child

No. of Boy child	District of The Respondents			
	Dibrugarh		Tinsukia	
	Respondents (%)		Respondents (%)	
0	37	15.7%	45	22.1%
1	106	45.1%	85	41.7%
2	62	26.4%	55	27.0%
3	22	9.4%	13	6.4%
4	4	1.7%	4	2.0%
5	2	.9%	2	1.0%
6	2	.9%	0	0%

**Source: Field Survey*

Table No: 8: Details of Girl Child

No. of girl child	District of the Respondents			
	Dibrugarh		Tinsukia	
	Respondents (%)		Respondents (%)	
0	70	29.8%	39	19.1%
1	95	40.4%	87	42.6%
2	51	21.7%	55	27.0%
3	13	5.5%	19	9.3%
4	6	2.6%	4	2.0%

**Source: Field Survey*

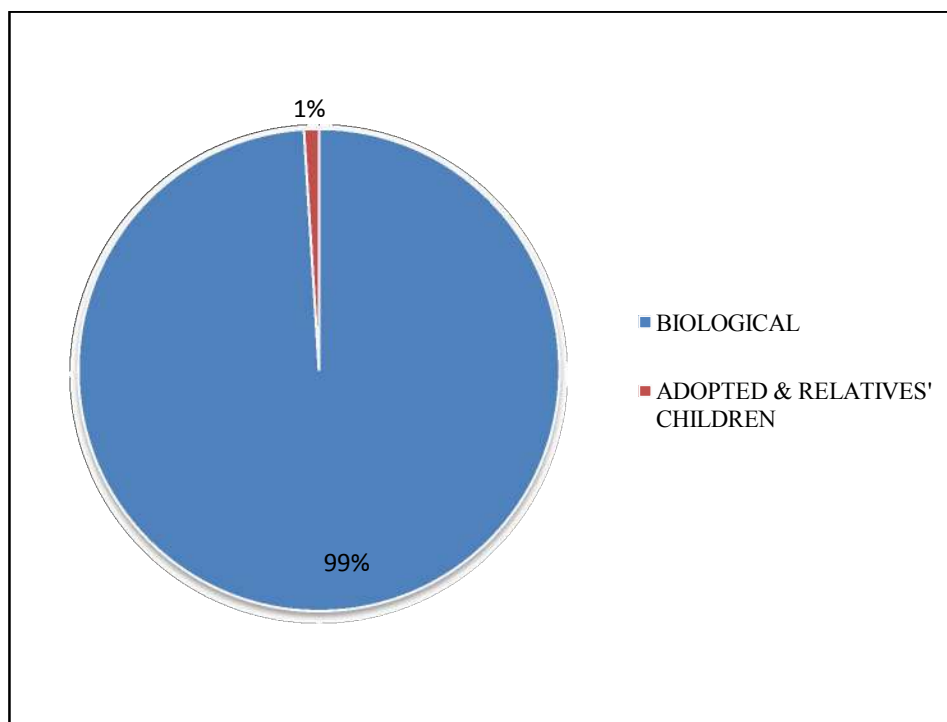


Figure-5: Children of the Workers (Adopted or Biological)

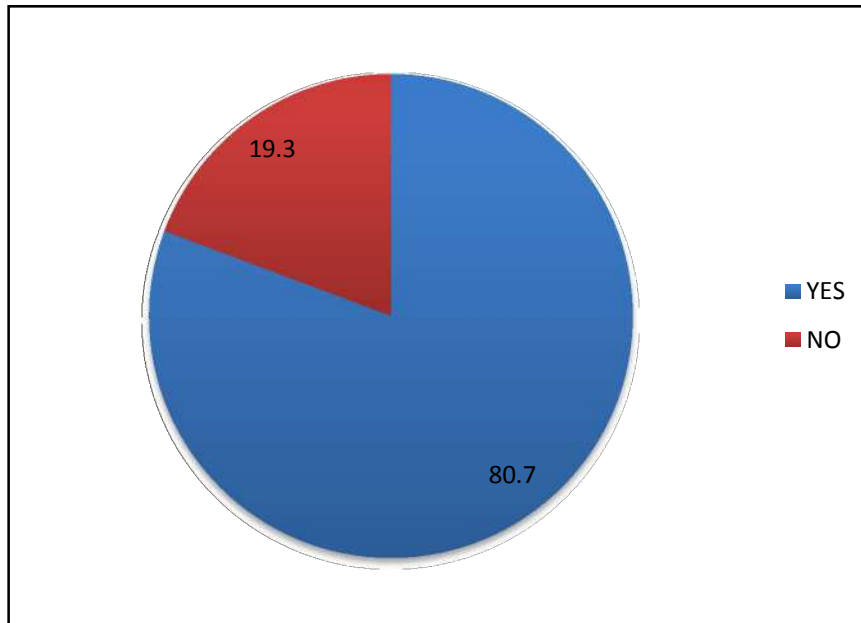


Figure-6: Details of Birth registration

The Table-6 demonstrates the fact that 35.40% respondents in Dibrugarh and 29.90% in Tinsukia have 3 children while 34.60% respondents in Dibrugarh and 26% respondents in Tinsukia have 2 children. It is found that a substantial number of respondents have four children (10.50% in Dibrugarh, and 16.20% in Tinsukia). There are a few workers who have five children (3% in Dibrugarh and 4.90% in Tinsukia) and a very few workers have six children (0.40% in Dibrugarh and 2% in Tinsukia). The study reveals that only 0.4 % (1 in absolute number) respondents in Dibrugarh have seven children. Further, the study found a minimal difference between the rate of boy and girl children (Table-7 and Table-8).

The Figure-5 delineates the fact 99 % respondents have biological children while 1% either adopts children or looks after children of relatives. The Figure-6 explicates that 80.7% of respondents have registered the birth of their children while 19.3% respondents have not done birth registration of their children owing to various reasons. It was found that the birth registration is mostly done at the tea garden hospitals. Further, they mentioned that the main reason for registration of births in the

tea garden hospitals is mainly to serve the purpose of employment, particularly, to record the age at which an individual could be recruited in work or to calculate the year of retirement from work.

3.2.9. Age of Respondents at the Time of Giving Birth to the First Child

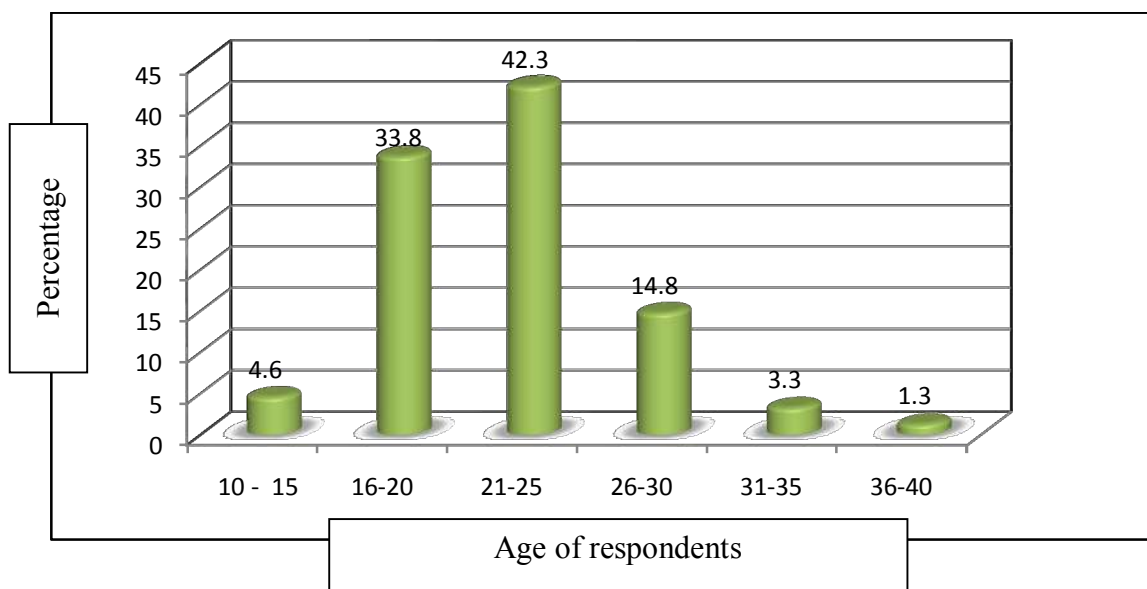


Figure-7: Age of Respondents in giving birth to the First Child

The Figure-7 demonstrates that 42.30% of married respondents have given birth to their first child in the age group of 21-25 years, while 33.80% of the married respondents gave birth to their first child in the age group of 16-20 years. However, the study reveals that the respondents who have given birth to their first child between the age group of 31-35 and 36-40 years is as low as 3.3% and 1.3% respectively.

This depicts the picture that giving birth to their first child at an early age is a common phenomenon in the surveyed tea gardens. Moreover, the study found that a total of 4.60% respondents have given birth to their first child in the age group of 10-15 years. This figure reflects the existence of child and teenage parenthood in the surveyed tea gardens. This evidences the presence of ‘child marriage’. It needs to be mentioned

that the defining principle of child marriage revolves around the forceful marriage of children and adolescent girls and boys. However, it was found in the surveyed tea gardens that children and adolescent girls and boys voluntarily move in with their partners. Further, it is found during the survey that this is an accepted practice followed in the surveyed tea gardens. The study delineates the fact that the birth of the first child in this community occur at an early age i.e.16-25 years range.

3.2.10. Measures of Family Planning:

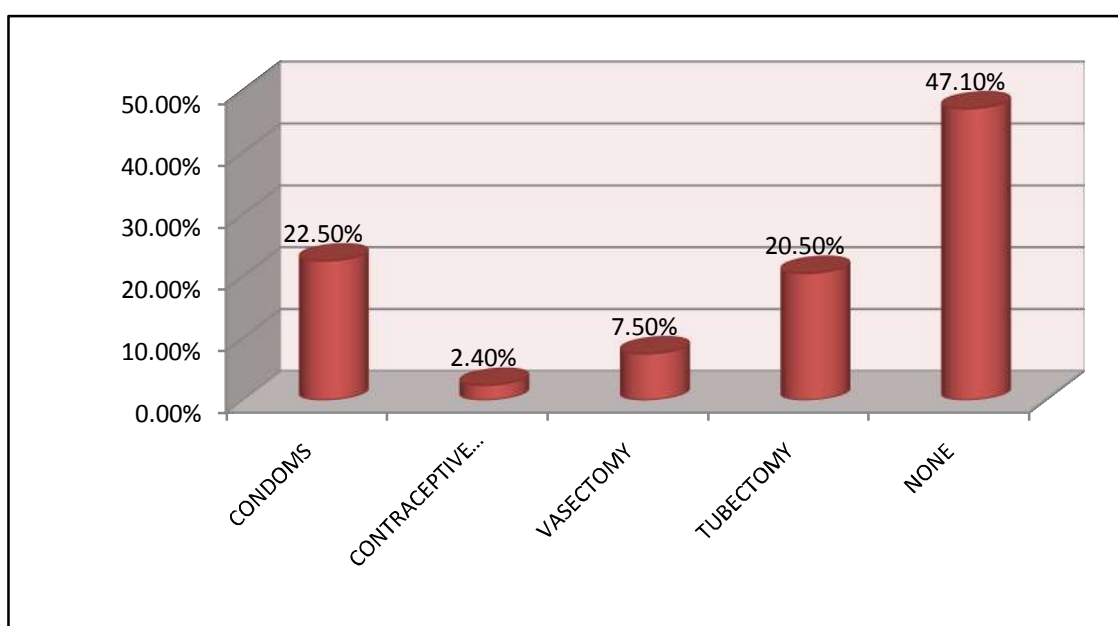


Figure-8: Details of measures taken for family planning in the surveyed tea gardens

The study found that 47.10% respondents do not use any preventive measures for family planning. This considerable absence in the use of preventive measures indicates lack of awareness about family planning measures. The respondents of the reproductive age group are found to be typically using condoms (22.50%) and undergoing tubectomy (20.50%) as birth control methods.

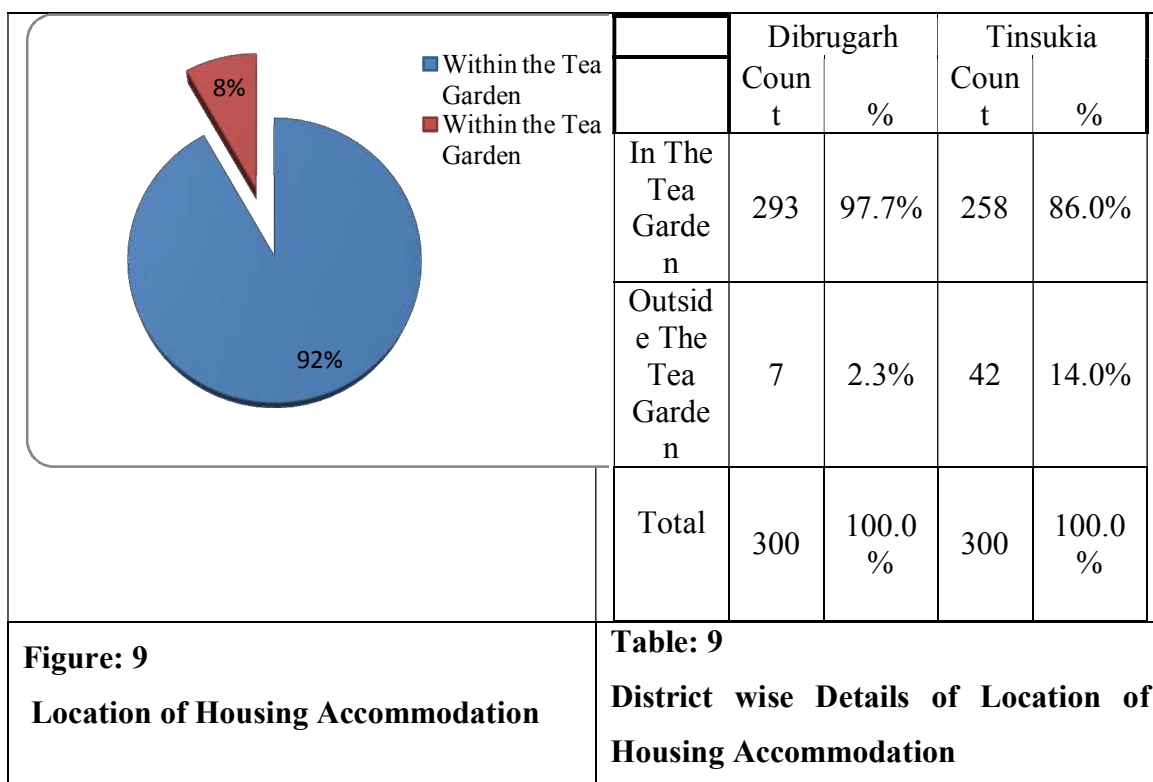
Among the measures followed, the practices of vasectomy (7.50%) and consumption of contraceptive pills (2.40%) are found to be lowest. It is found that Tubectomy is preferred more than vasectomy. The preference of tubectomy over vasectomy, when analyzed through 'gender analysis framework' is found to be associated with the social construct of masculinity and maleness. The process of sterilization is socially constructed as an inevitable loss of masculinity and impotency. The study found that this conception is a guiding factor in the greater choice of tubectomy over vasectomy.

3.3. Living Conditions of the Workers of Tea Gardens in Dibrugarh and Tinsukia:

This section of the study analyses the facilities provided to the workers such as housing and sanitation, provision of drinking water and other details related to households of workers in the surveyed tea gardens.

3.3.1. Location of Housing Accommodations:

The Assam Plantation Rules, 1956 in accordance with the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, directs that the every worker (including his/her family) shall be provided with housing accommodation in a plantation as near as possible to the place of work. The study reveals that 92% reside within the premises of the tea gardens, while 8% stay outside (Figure-9). It is found that the percentage of workers residing outside the vicinity of the tea garden is higher in Tinsukia (14%) than Dibrugarh (2.3%).



Historically, the purpose of providing quarters to the workers were twofold- firstly, in order to retain them back in the tea gardens of Assam, and secondly, to gain easy accessibility of their labour. These places of residence provided by the company are temporary in nature. Because, if a worker retires or for some reason no longer remains an employee of the tea garden, he or she ought to vacate the residence whenever necessary. However, the study found that if a worker retires, her/his vacancy gets filled by another member of that particular family and thereby, the quarter remains with them.

3.3.2. Provisions in the Households:

The Assam Plantation Rules, 1956 in accordance with the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, has outlined the provisions that should be provided to workers of the Tea Gardens.

3.3.2.1. Numbers of Rooms :

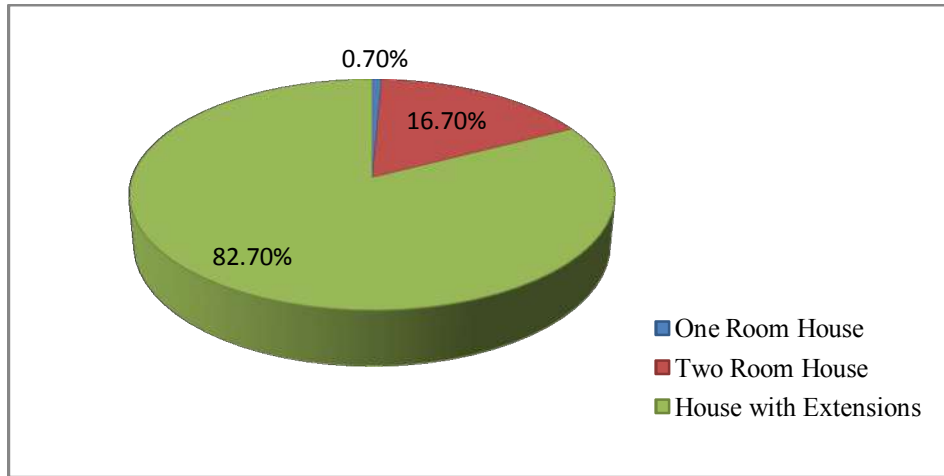


Figure: 10 Numbers of Rooms in a House

The data above depicts that 82.70% of respondents lived in houses with extensions in the surveyed tea gardens, while 16.70% lived in houses having two rooms. The study found that 0.70% of respondents lived in houses that had only one room. Upon asked about the numbers of rooms in their houses, they informed that usually the houses have very few rooms. However, they made extensions according to their needs and requirements. In such cases, the tea companies do not give any kind of compensations for the expenditures incurred by the workers.

3.3.2.2. Types of Houses:

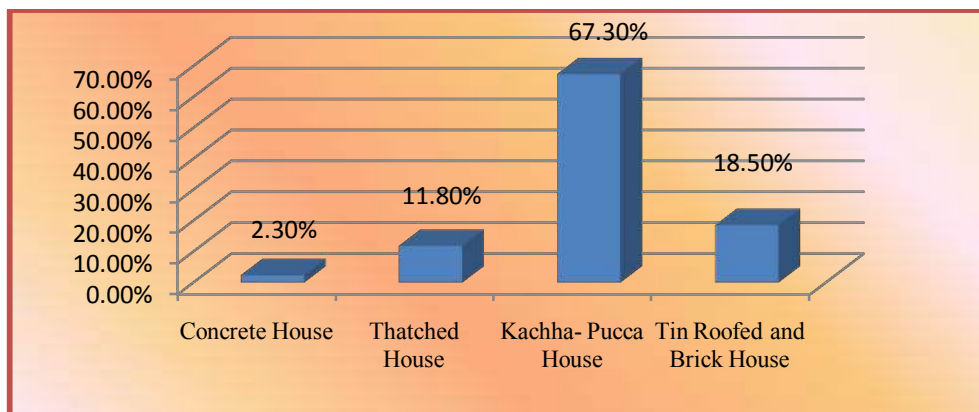


Figure 11: Types of Houses in the Surveyed Tea Gardens

Houses of 67.30% respondents are ‘Kaccha-Pucca’, while 18.50% lived in ‘tin roofed brick house’. The percentage of respondents who lived in ‘thatched houses’ stands at 11.80%. However, the instances of respondents living in concrete houses stands at 2.30%.

3.3.2.3. Provision of House Rent Allowances:

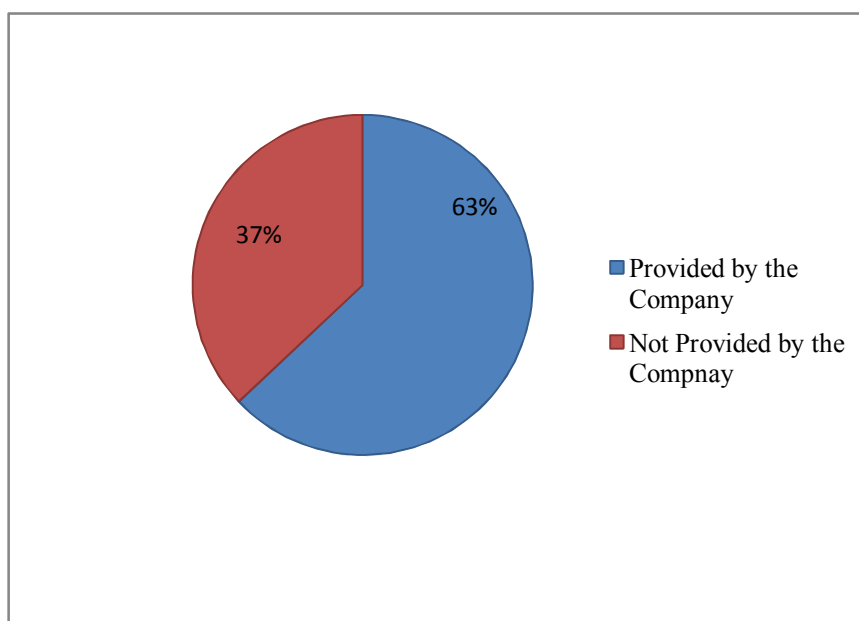


Figure12: Details of the provision of House Rent Allowances

63% of respondents received house rent allowances while 37% did not receive the allowance. The study found a mixed picture in the context of this provision due to the different rules that are followed by the tea companies. Further, it was found that in most of the surveyed tea gardens house rent allowances are given only to permanent workers whereas the temporary/casual workers are denied this provision.

3.3.2.4. Facility of Toilets:

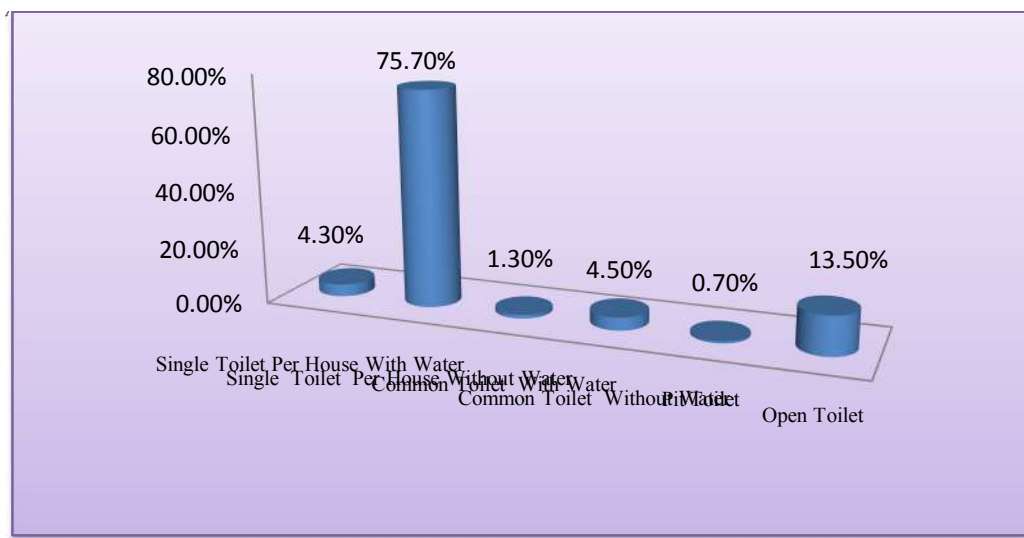


Figure 13: Toilet Facilities in the Houses of Workers

The above figure shows a dismal picture of household toilet facilities. 75.70% of respondents is found to have single toilet in their houses but without water facilities. They stated that they have to carry water to the toilets. The study found that a 13.50% of respondents defecate in open.

3.3.2.5. Provision of Water for Household Works:

The study found that 88.30% of respondents use water for household works from hand pumps or tube wells whereas 4.30% have the provision of water taps and 6.20% have the provision of stored water facilities.

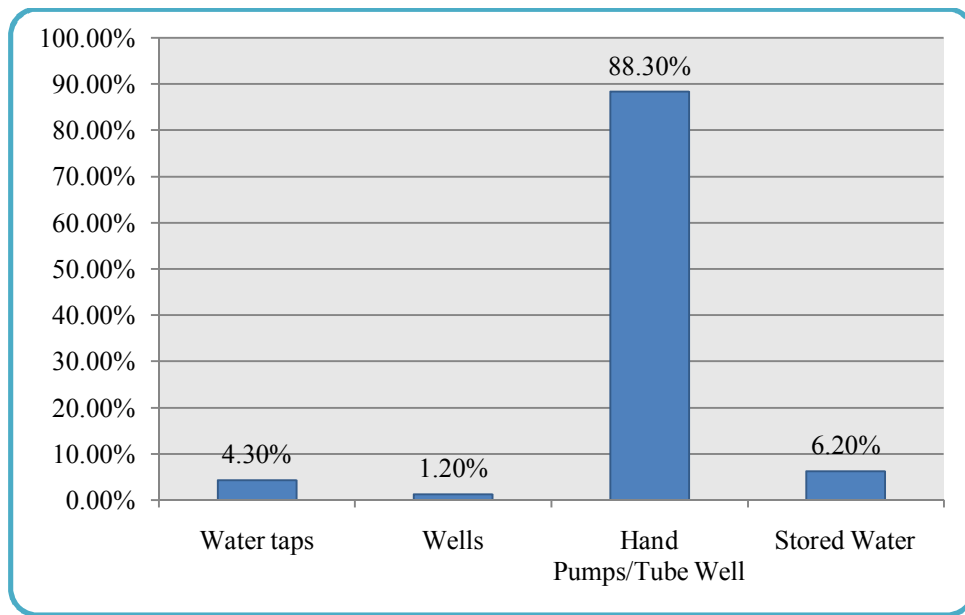


Figure 14: Sources of Household Water

The study found that, hand pumps and tube-wells as a common source of water are shared by many families, ranging from 4 families to 12-15 families in the residential areas of the surveyed tea gardens. The ‘four families’ norm is a policy which is formulated by the Assam Branch of Indian Tea Association (ABITA) for tea gardens which come under its purview. This means that one hand pump or tube well is shared approximately among a population more than 20 people.

3.3.2.6. Sources of Drinking Water:

Hand pumps and tube-wells are major sources of drinking water for 88.50% of respondents. Taps and stored water are accessed by a very few families. Figure-15 delineates that 4.8% of respondents use water from taps while 6.7% use water from stored reservoirs.

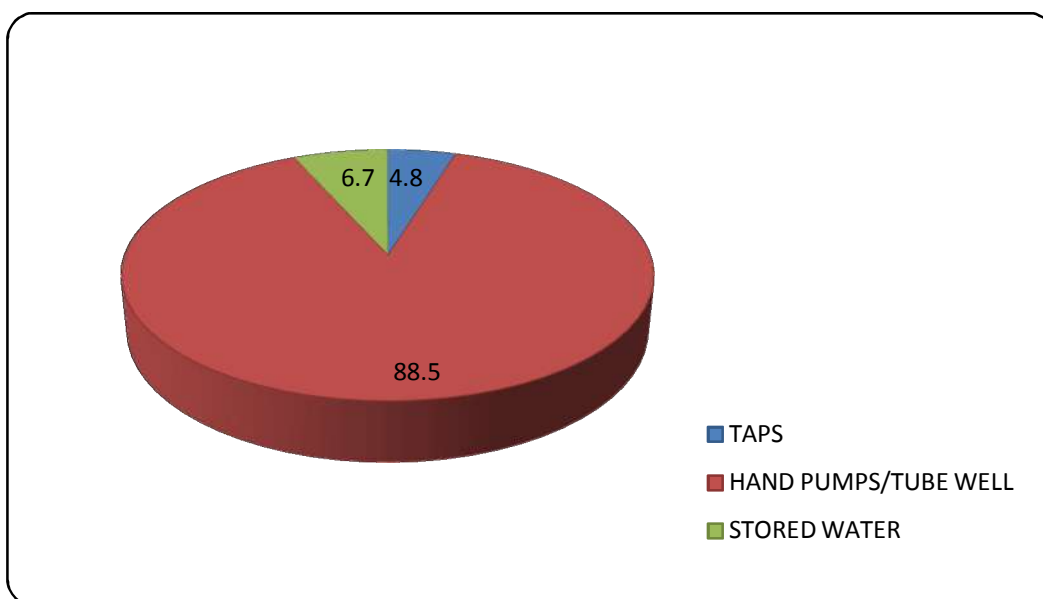


Figure-15: Sources of Drinking Water

The quality of drinking water available from sources such as hand pumps, tube wells, taps or even stored water is questionable. Because, the study found that the workers consume water from those sources without any filtration. Moreover, it is found that the quality of drinking water is not tested for purity. Further, in some cases, water is found to be purified by adding *fitkiri* or other chemical products readily available in the market. The respondents stated that this method is the most cost effective filtration method and are commonly practiced. However, this technique does not guarantee complete purification of drinking water, as workers in the surveyed tea gardens reported diseases viz. dysentery, jaundice, typhoid etc.

3.3.2.7. Distance to the Sources of Water:

The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956 states that the supply of drinking water shall be provided within a reasonable distance from the housing accommodations of the workers. The study found that the surveyed tea gardens follow the above mentioned regulation as the distance to water sources is less than a kilometer for the majority of respondents (96.50%). As discussed earlier, hand pumps and tube wells are

the major sources of water; hence, this signifies that the tube-well/ hand pumps are located at a reasonable distance from every worker's house.

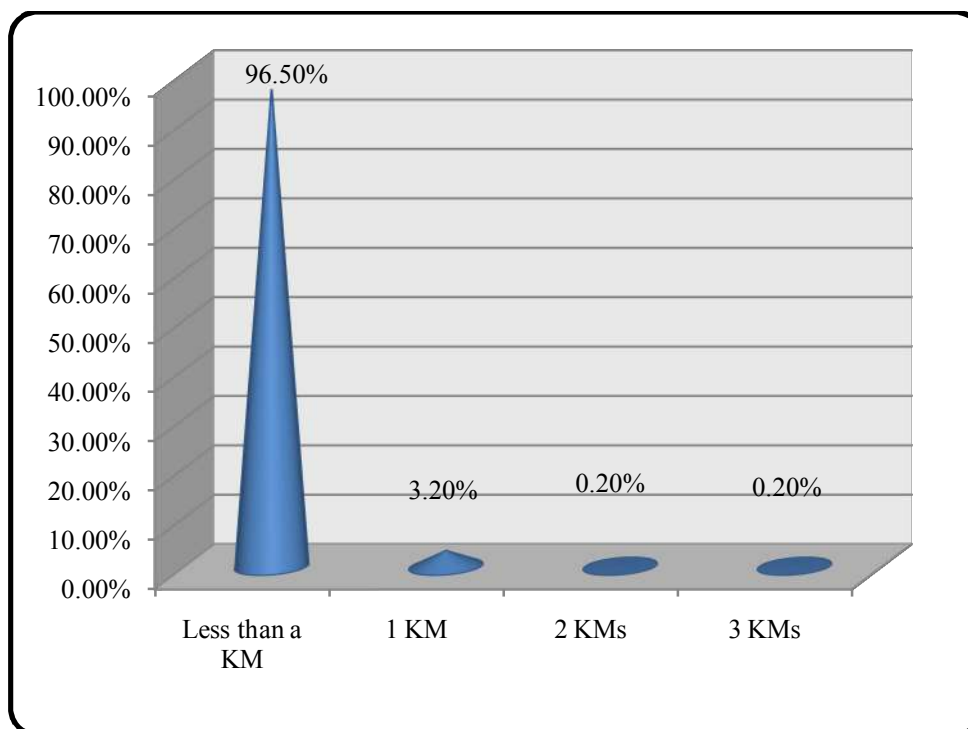


Figure-16: Distance to Water Sources

Table-10: Containers used to collect water

Details of Containers	Dibrugarh		Tinsukia	
	Respondents	%	Respondents	%
Plastic Buckets/Pots	119	39.70%	132	44.00%
Metal Pots	123	41.00%	40	13.30%
Earthen Pots	0	0	2	0.70%
Plastic Pots & Metal Pots	58	19.30%	124	41.30%
Plastic Pots, Metal Pots & Earthen Pots	0	0	2	0.70%
Total	300	100.00%	300	100.00%

* Source: field survey

It is found that the Tea communities in the surveyed tea gardens use different types of containers to collect water. The study found that plastic buckets are the most commonly used. During the course of the field survey, it was noticed that the tea garden workers use unclean plastic bottles to collect water for household consumption and also carry it to the work sites. Apart from that, they use these bottles/containers for keeping alcohol, oil, milk etc. It has serious health repercussions as the workers report that they suffer mostly of water borne diseases. Health and hygiene in the tea gardens is a matter of serious concern impacting heavily on the productivity of the workers.

3.3.2.8. Person Responsible for Collection of Water:

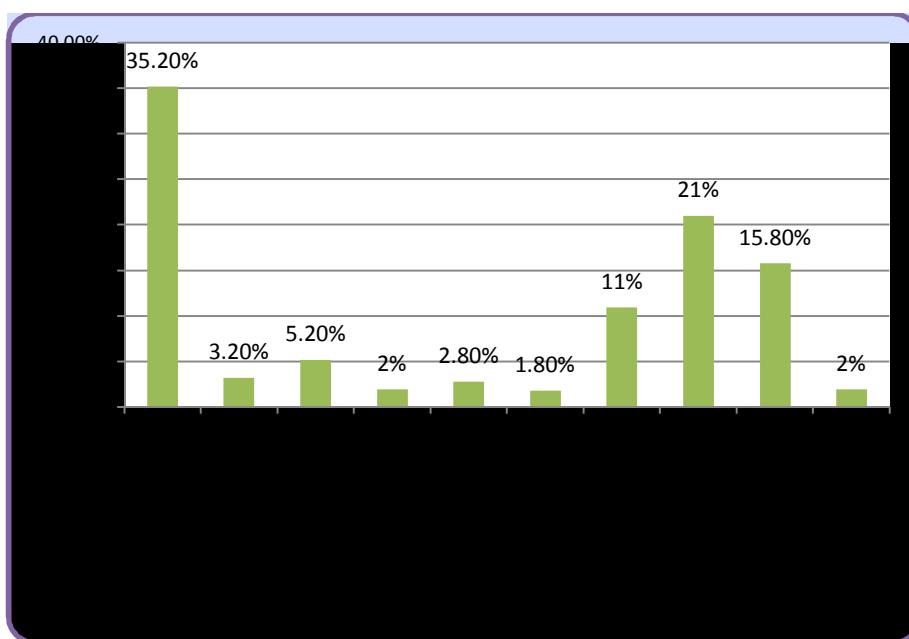


Figure-17: Persons Responsible for Collection of Water

The study indicates that 35.20% wives bear the responsibility of collecting water for the family. This is followed by the category of ‘wife and husband’ (21%) who shares the responsibilities of collecting water for the family. Though it appears as shared responsibilities between the husband and wife, however, it is found that the husbands do not collect water on a regular basis. The category ‘wife and daughter’

comes at the third place (15.80%), which is followed by the category of ‘others’ (15.80%). The category ‘others’ comprises of sisters, sister-in-laws, and daughter-in-laws.

It is evidently clear from the above facts that there are no individual water sources (hand pumps and tube-wells) for the workers of the surveyed tea gardens and the obligation of collecting water is mostly performed by women. Women shoulder the responsibility of collecting water along with other household works on a day-to-day basis. Even though, participation of husbands and other male members is found in this daily household activity of collecting water, however, their presence is of a minimal count. This is an indication of ‘sexual division of labour’ at ‘domestic sphere’. In the conceptual framework of sexual division of labour, the provision and management of water is typically a ‘domestic labour’ associated with women. Further, in the ‘gender analysis framework’, household duties performed by women are considered as ‘unpaid labour’ and collecting water is recognized as a part of gender inequality.

3.3.3. Family Details:

The following section discusses various aspects of family viz. socio-economic conditions of a community, level of gender equality, decision making within the family, family disputes etc.

3.3.3.1. Family Size:

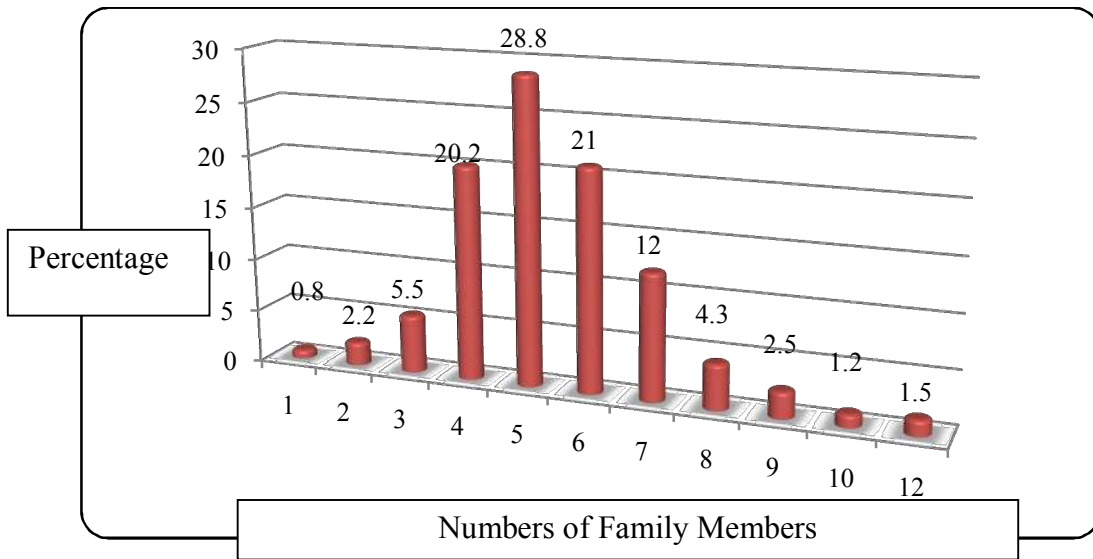


Fig 18: Total Number of Members in the Family

It is found that 28.8% of respondents have five members in their families, followed by a four member families (20.2%). 28.8% of respondents live in families having five members while 12% live in families that have seven members. 4.30% of workers live in families having members of eight, 2.50% in nine and 1.5% in twelve.

The 'gender analysis framework' establishes the fact that higher the number of family members, greater the additional responsibilities that women have to shoulder. Since, the employers recruit a substantial numbers of women as workers in the tea gardens; hence they are expected to perform plantation work as well as other household duties equally. Thus, the bigger family size indicates the level of burden that women workers have to bear.

3.3.3.2. Earning Members in a Family

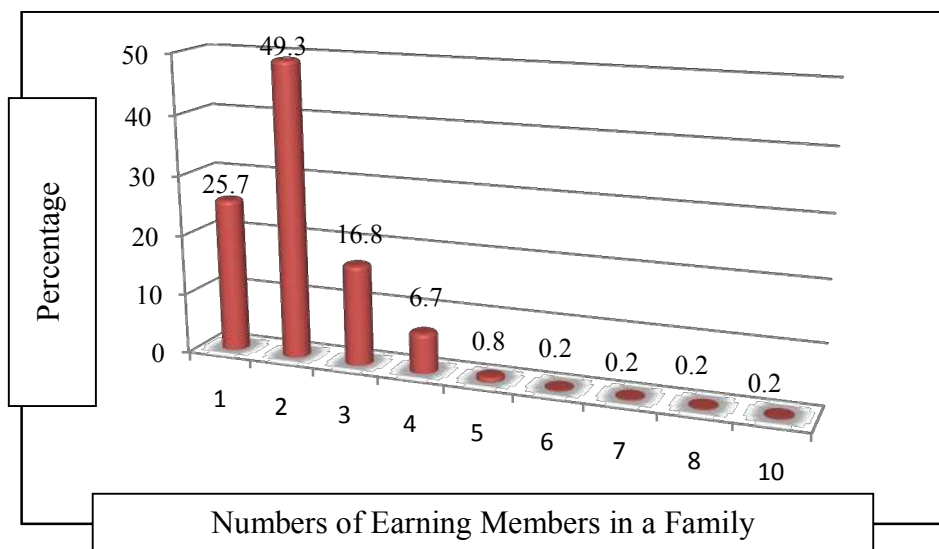


Figure-19: Details of Earning Members in a Family

Employment is very central to livelihood security. Since, the tea gardens are the principal source of bread and butter for the tea communities hence, the study made an attempt to examine the level and nature of employment generated in the tea gardens. After careful scrutiny, it is found that in the families of 49.3% of respondents, two members work in tea gardens while in the family of 25.7% respondents' only one member engage in earning activities.

3.3.3.3. Person Responsible for Cooking:

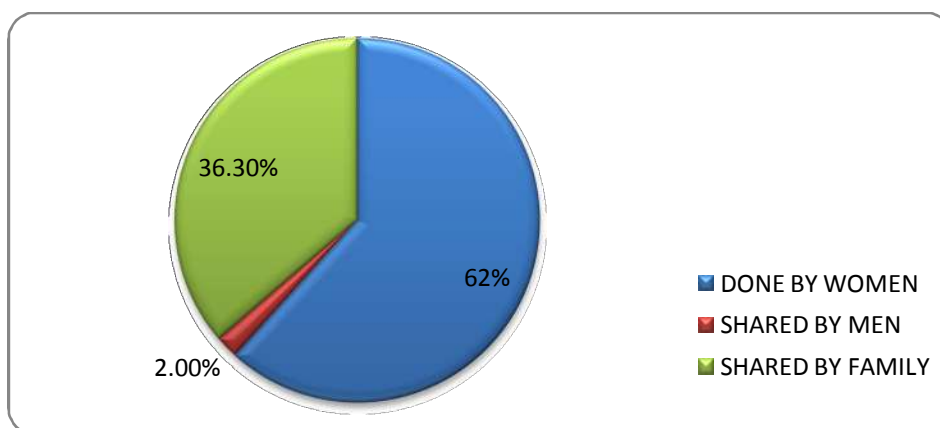


Figure- 20: Details of Persons responsible for cooking

Figure- 20 exhibits the fact that 62% of women respondents are responsible for cooking while in the families of 36.30% respondents, cooking is shared by the family members. It was also found that only 2% of men are found to share cooking work in the family. On the basis of sexual division of labour 'cooking' is levied as a duty of women. Hence, gender, and its protocols as a social construct is being internalised, and normalised by the social milieu. This internalisation and normalization, henceforth, becomes a justification for the sexual division of labour of men and women. Further, the marginalised position of women is an outcome of the internalization of social ideals of gender, which thereby, becomes a part of the identity of women. Social construct of the gendered division of work/labour plays an important role in creating a hierarchy of work in the society. The sexual division of work places the economic pursuits of men higher in the hierarchy, while women's work of nurturing, caring and household work remains unpaid and is relegated lower in the hierarchy.

The social milieu in the tea gardens essentially is a part of the larger society guided by gendered norms and ideals. Though both men and women in the gardens form a part of the work force, however, women in the tea gardens perform duties both in the gardens and at home. The study has found that women invariably perform both their first and second shift. First shift in this context is the paid economic work in the gardens and second shift relates to the unpaid work women perform as a part of their gendered work.

3.3.4. Other Household Facilities:

The Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 outlines a number of facilities under the section 'housing' and the following section attempts to look into those provisions.

3.3.4.1 Provision of Electricity:

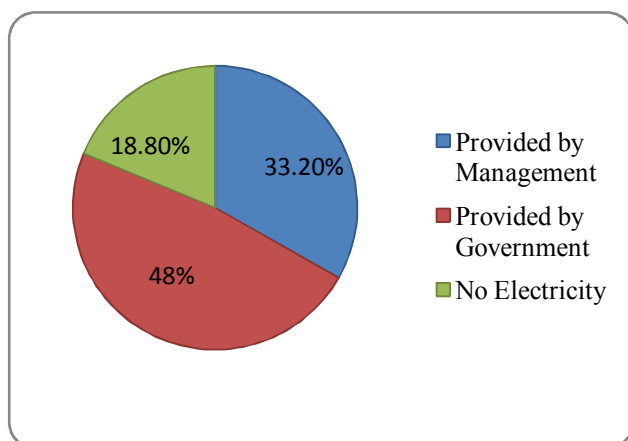


Figure-21: Details about Supply of Electricity

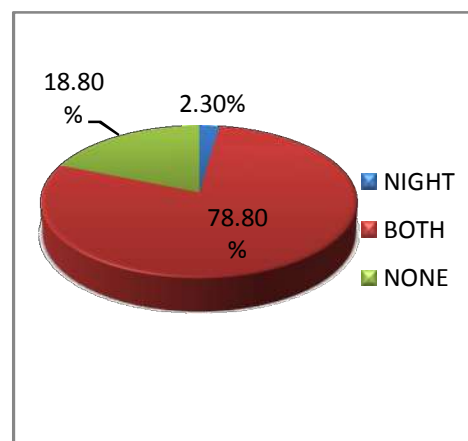


Figure-22: Details on Duration of Electricity Supply

The Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956 directs that the workers should be supplied with adequate lighting arrangements in and around the area in which housing accommodation is provided. 48% of respondents stated that electricity is provided by the government while 33.20% mentioned that electricity is supplied by the tea companies. 18.80% of respondents reported that there is no supply of electricity in their houses. It was found that the workers have to pay their electricity bill irrespective of the source of electricity supply (government or tea companies). The study found that the provision of electricity forms a part of the real wage for those working higher in the hierarchy (executives of the tea companies). However, it was not a part of the real wage for the workers at lower level of hierarchy in the tea gardens.

Figure-22 indicates 78.80% of respondents get the benefit of electricity at both times of the day 2.30% of respondents get electricity only at night. The aforesaid discussion shows the similar account wherein a high percentage of respondents live without the provision of electricity at an average of 18.80% in both the districts.

3.3.4.2 Types of Cooking Stove:

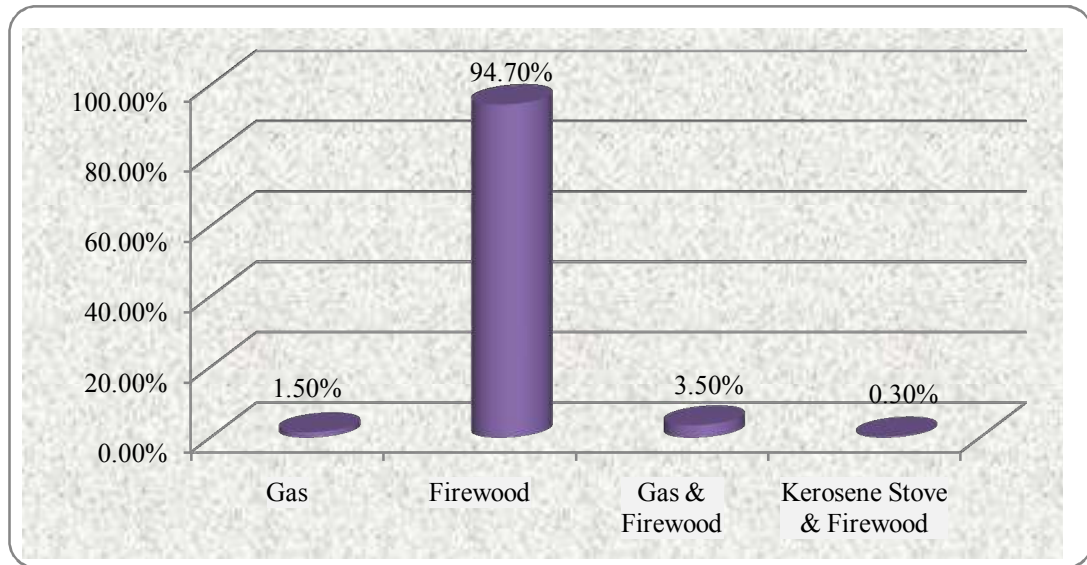


Figure-23: Details of Cooking Stove Used by the Workers

Figure -23 indicates that 95.70% of respondents use firewood as a means of cooking while 0.30% are found to be using gas and kerosene stove as a medium of cooking. The above statistics portray that firewood is the most commonly used means of cooking since the tea companies do not provide the workers with gas or kerosene. The study found that the tea companies provide firewood as a means of cooking purposes for a particular period of the year and for the remaining period the companies provide monetary assistance to the workers. Further, it was also found that apart from the amount of firewood provided, the workers are prohibited to collect any wood from the plantation areas.

3.3.4.3. Ration System

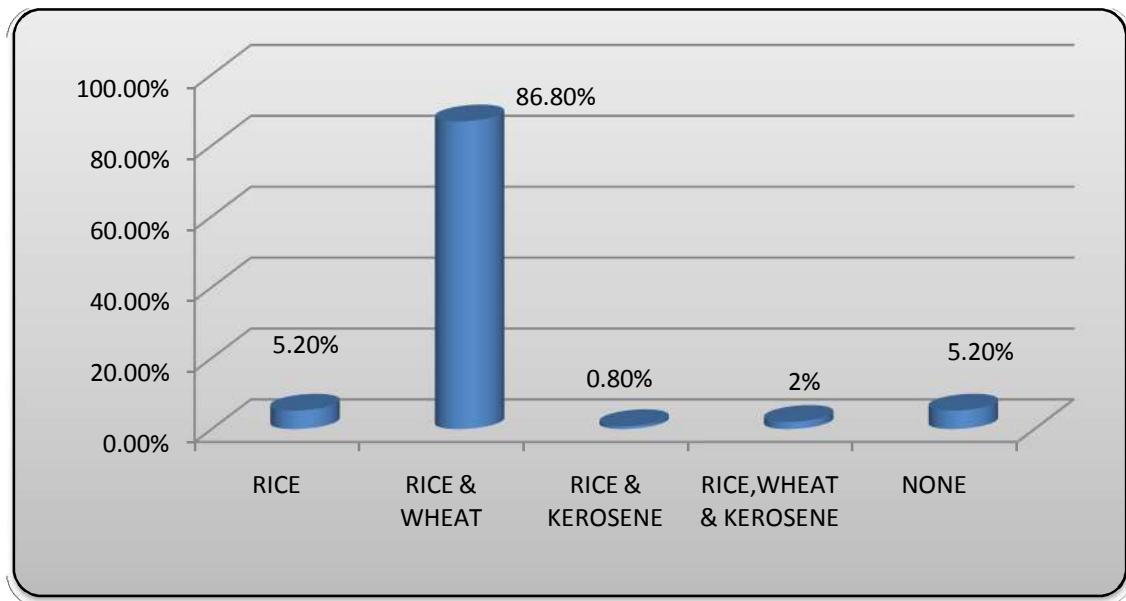


Figure-24: Details of Ration System

Rice and wheat form a part of the real wage of 86.80% of the respondents in the surveyed tea gardens. 5.20% of the respondents receive only rice as ration while another 5.20% do not receive any kind of ration. Further, 2% of respondents stated that they are provided with rice, wheat and kerosene and 0.80% of respondents receive only rice and kerosene as part of the ration. The respondents who do not get any kind of ration are found to be the temporary/casual workers, as only permanent workers are entitled to receive ration.

3.4. Workers in the Private Space

This section examines the family life of workers in the surveyed tea gardens. It attempts to analyze some findings of the study from the feminist perspective of ‘personal is political’.

3.4.1 Division of Labour:

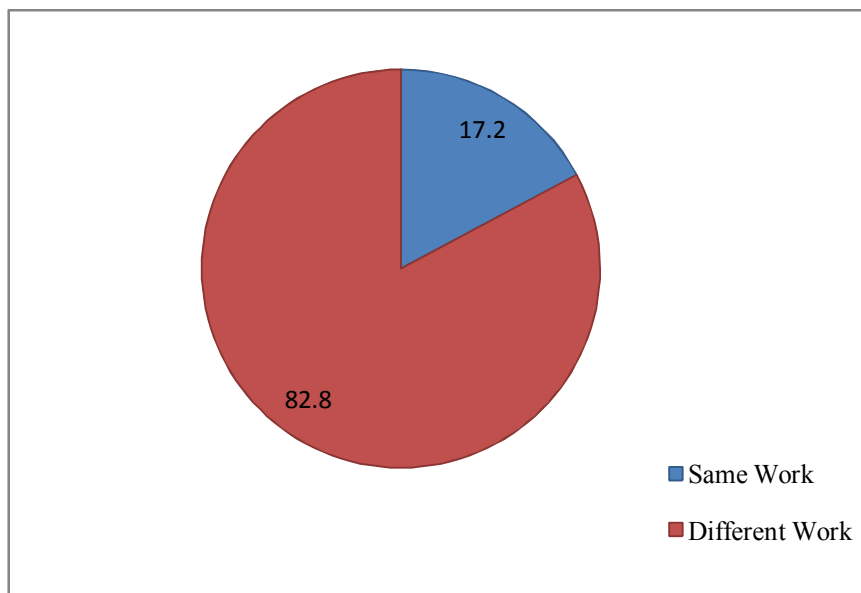


Figure-25: Division of labour within the family.

The study observed that 82.80% perform 'different work' in the household while 17.2% perform the same work within the household. The category of 'different work' includes varied household works performed by both men and women in the surveyed tea gardens. This category comprises work done by women- cooking, nurturing and caring [taking care of family members], fetching water, cleaning; and works done by men- fencing, repairing of house, grazing cattle. The data here essentially indicates the allocation of work between the discrete gender categories (men/women) which are based on the social construct of gender and work.

3.4.2. Financial Management within the Family

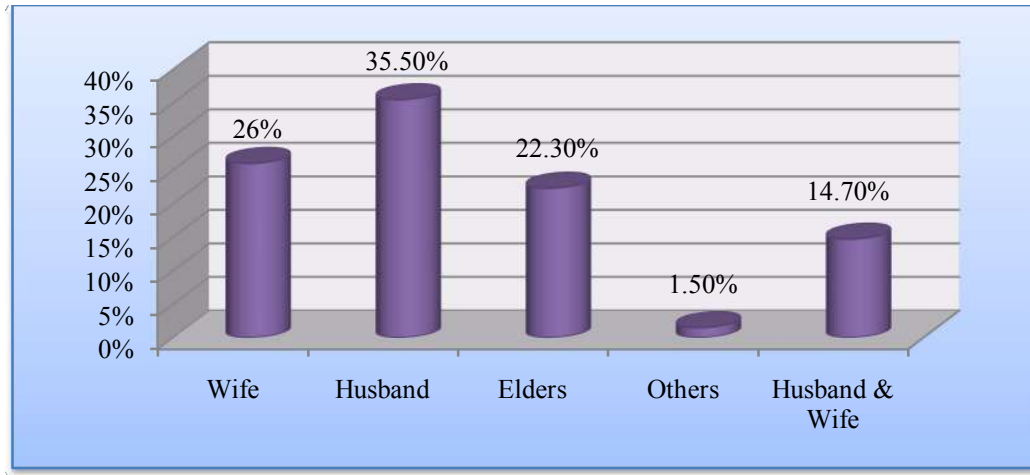


Figure-26: Financial Management within the Family

Figure-26 shows that 35.50% of respondents stated that matters related to financial management in the families is controlled by the husbands while 26% said that it is controlled by wives. The study found that in the families of 22.30% of respondents, the ‘elders’ look after the economic aspects of the family. Further, in the families of 14.70 % of respondents, both husbands and wives share the monetary responsibilities. 1.50% of respondents said that ‘others’ (sons and daughters, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law) are responsible for handling the monetary matters of the family.

The study reveals that economic decisions are predominantly controlled by men. Aforesaid gender analysis leads one to state about the embedded patriarchal norms that exist in the social milieu of the surveyed tea gardens. In this context, one may put forth the question- can economic independence of women lead to gender equality in the society. Hence, a gender analysis of the study would state that gender equality in society cannot be achieved by one-dimensional aspect of women’s economic independence. Therefore, equality between men and women could only be realized by dismantling the multi –faceted structures of patriarchy.

3.4.3. Family Disputes:

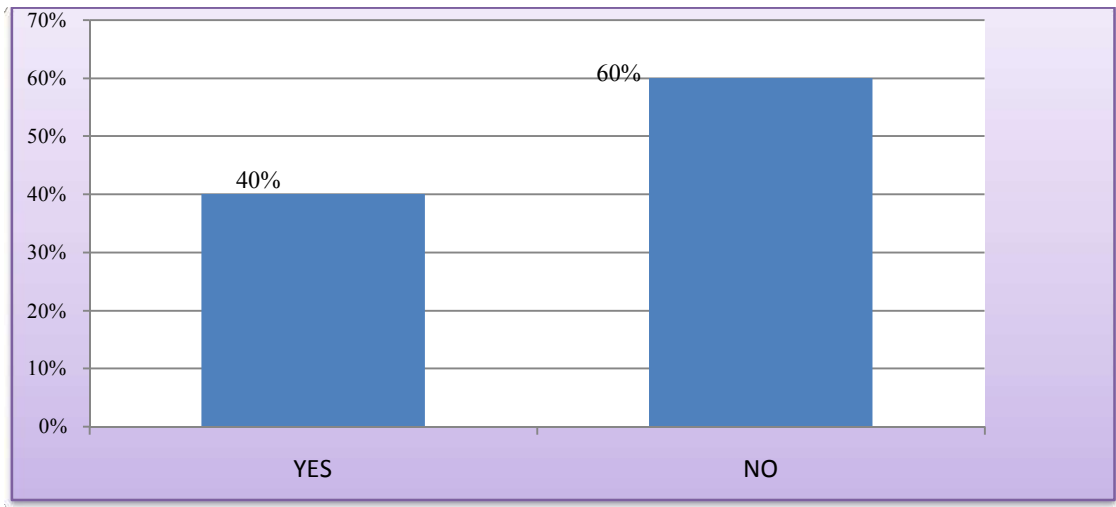


Figure-27: Instances of Family Dispute

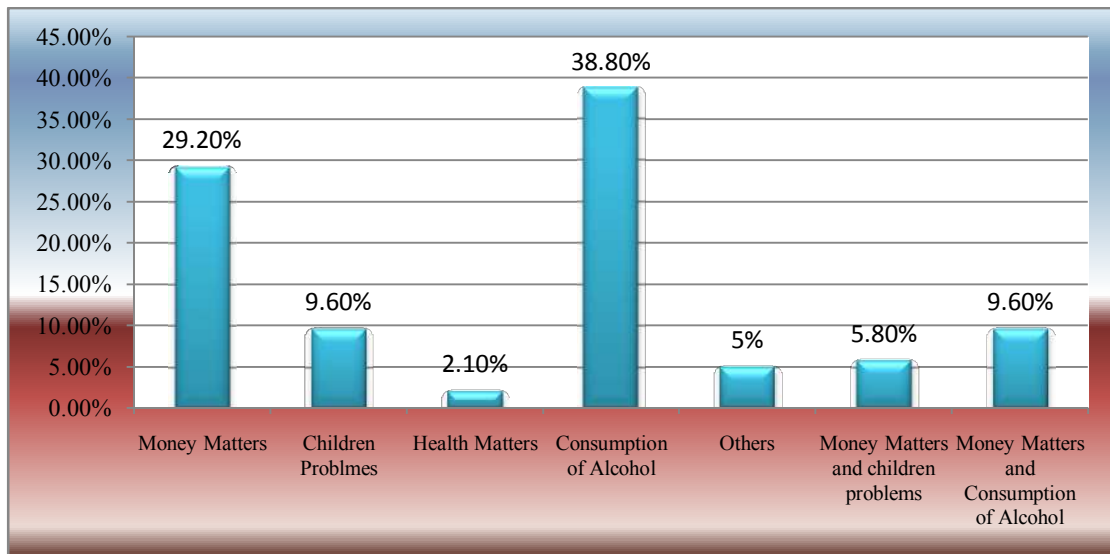


Figure-28: Reasons for Family Dispute

Figure-27 demonstrates that 60% of respondents do not have any instances of family disputes while 40% states the existence of family disputes. Even though, instances of lower percentage of family disputes appears from the above data, however, the precision of the data could be examined from the dynamics of cultural concepts of insiders and outsiders. In this context, field investigators of the study are socially,

culturally and economically outsiders to the tea community. Therefore, it demands for re-examination and further probe.

Further, Figure-28 reveals that among 38.80% of respondents, consumption of alcohol is the primary reason of family disputes while in the households of 29.20% of the respondents, money matters is the cause of family disputes. Consumption of alcohol is one of the primary reasons of family disputes. Many women respondents expressed that consumption of alcohol leads to drunken abuse within the family.

Further, the study, as mentioned above, found money matters to be another vital reason of disputes within the family. This finding, if debated from a feminist perspective, leads one to conceptualize that controlling and maintaining of economy is a socially constructed responsibility of men. Though women respondents are economically independent, it was found that majority of them do not have a control over financial matters of the family. Many women respondents stated that denial of the right over their earned money lead to disputes in the family.

3.4.4. Domestic Violence:

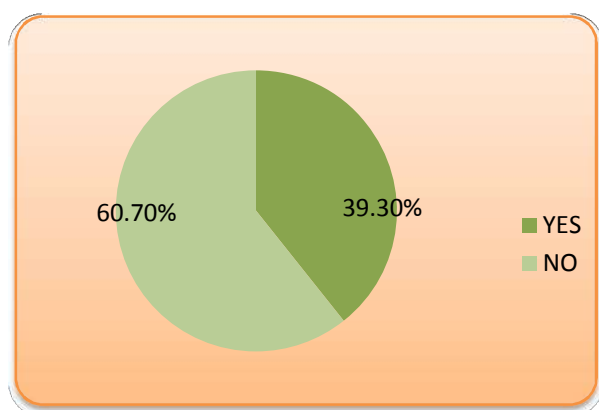


Figure-29: Cases of Domestic violence

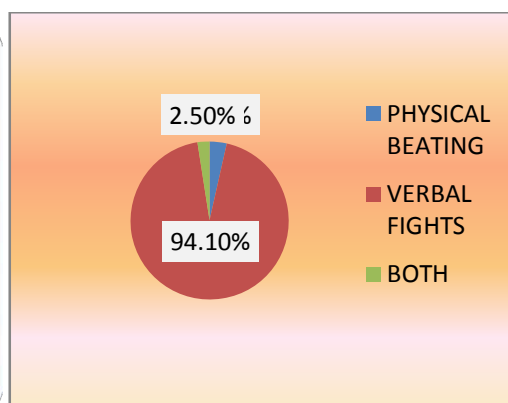


Figure-30: Nature of Domestic Violence

Figure – 29 represents that 60.70% of respondents denied the presence of domestic violence in their families while 39.30% confirmed the existence of domestic

violence in their families. However, it was found that many women respondents accepted the constructed ‘normalized’ nature of verbal and physical violence by their counterparts (men). Moreover, drawing into the insider and outsider perspective, data on domestic violence is difficult to yield since respondents are found to be uncomfortable in disclosing their private matters. Further, this aspect came out more vividly in the Part B of the study based on oral narratives.

Probing into the nature of domestic violence, Figure-30 reflects that verbal fights/abuses are the most common form of violence among 94.10% of respondents. During the survey, many women respondents specified that they do not consider ‘beating by the husband’ as an act of violence. The study found that lack of awareness, normalizing attitude and internalization of the structural norms negated the gravity of mental and psychological abuse in the surveyed tea gardens.

3.4.5. Consumption of Alcohol:

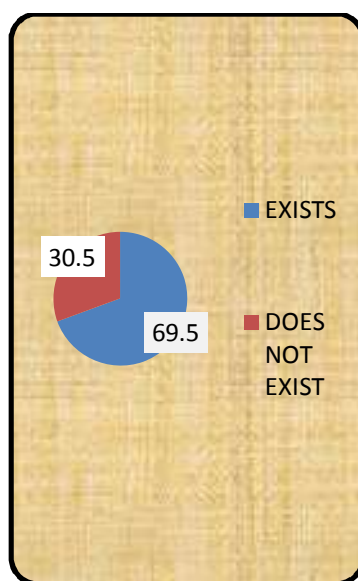


Figure-31: Rate of Consumption of alcohol

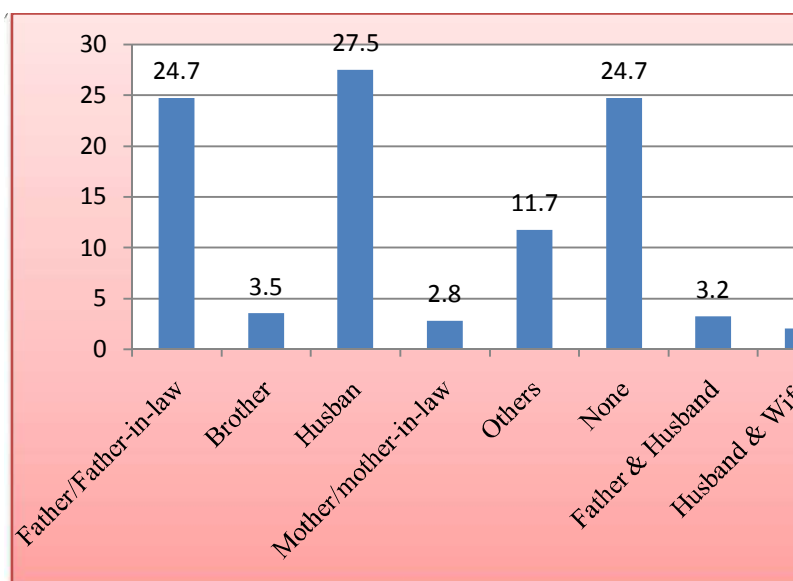


Figure-32: Details of Consumption of alcohol in the Family

The study found that 69.5% of respondents consume alcohol whereas 30.50% respondents stated that they do not consume alcohol. However, it was found that the

respondents are reluctant to reveal any information regarding 'consumption of alcohol'. This was found when a few respondents expressed a sense of discomfort to the question on consumption of alcohol. Therefore, the accuracy of responses in this context can be further pondered upon.

Figure-32 demonstrates that 27.5% of respondents stated that only husbands consume alcohol while 24.7% mention father and father-in-law consume alcohol. A similar 24.7% of respondents stated that none in their family consume alcohol.

A study (Richard & Jonathon: 2007) in Britain on the consumption of alcohol between the age group of 18-21 years found the co-relation between hegemonic masculinity (essentially characterized by physical and emotional toughness, risk taking, predatory heterosexuality, and being bread winners) and alcohol consumption. One of the key findings of the study was that- drinking, drug abuse, casual sex and fights were considered as key domains of masculinity⁴⁴. Therefore, the present study also shows a similar co-relation between masculinity and consumption of alcohol. Most of the women respondents, when asked about the consumption of alcohol, overtly stated that they do not drink because their gender identity as women.

3.4.6. Recreational Facilities:

The study found that the tea companies arranged for movie screening as a mode of recreation in playgrounds or any other open spaces. This recreational arrangement existed since the colonial period. However, the screening of movies is found to be arranged on festivals and occasions of Durga Puja, Bihu, Diwali, and Holi. The study

⁴⁴Richard OD, Jonathon AS, 2007- Alcohol Consumption and masculine identity among young men. *Psychology and health*, 22:595-614.

found that an average of 37% of respondents watched TV, 1% watch cinema, while 27% of respondents watch both TV and cinema. However, the study recorded a significant percentage 35% of respondents who do not engage themselves in any kind of recreational activities.

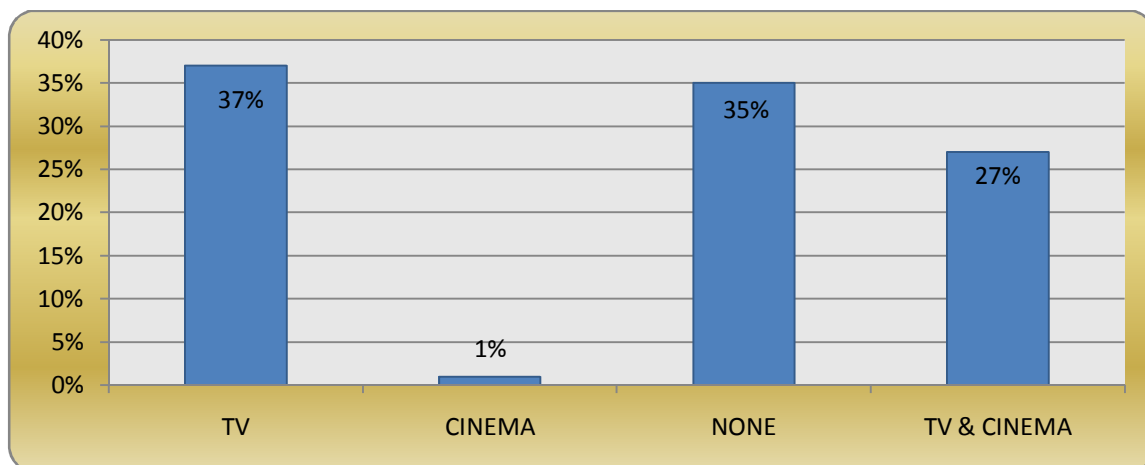


Figure-33: Details of Recreational Measures

3.4.7. Places of Travel for Personal Purposes:

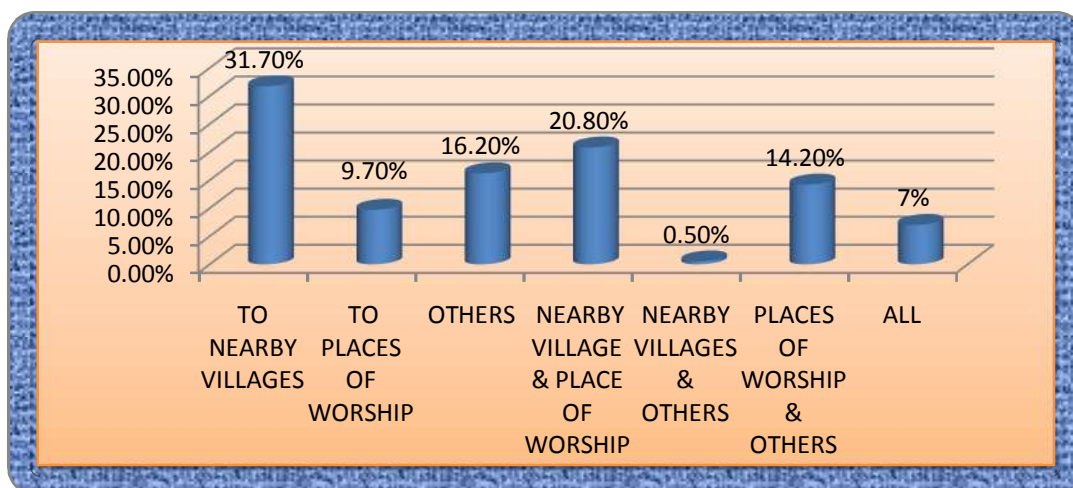


Figure-34: Places of Travel

The respondents stated that they travel to nearby villages, places of worship, and others (relative's places and market places) during weekly holiday (Sunday) and at the time of annual leave. They mentioned that they manage to travel only during the

period of annual leave since they are engaged in the tea plantations around the year. However, on weekly rest day (Sunday), they access the market places and at times travel to nearby villages, or places of worship.

3.4.8. Method of Saving:

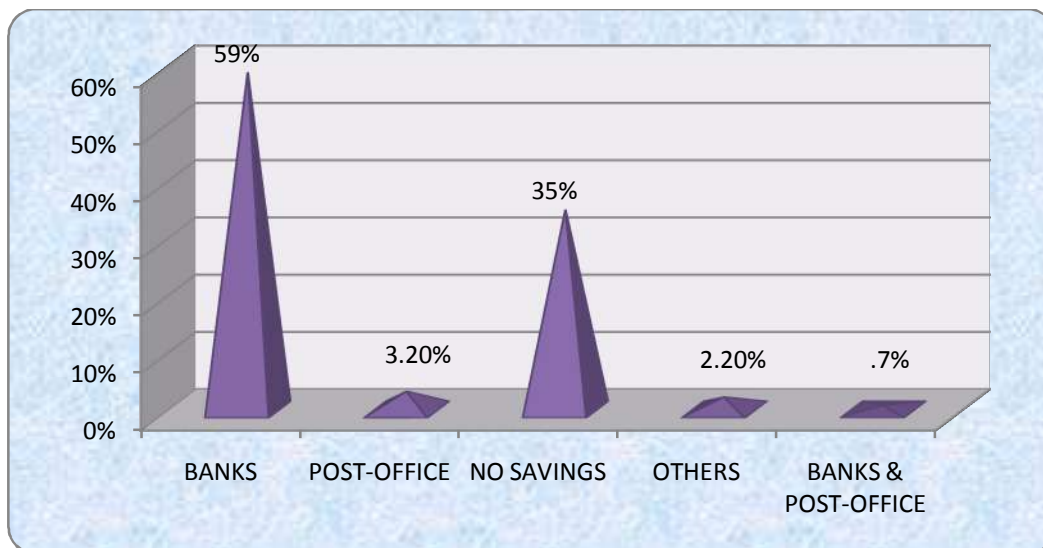


Figure 35: Details of Saving Method

The study found that 59% of respondents have savings accounts in banks. 3.20% have saving accounts in post office and 2.20% have savings in other forms such as cooperative and self-help groups. Further, the study revealed that 35% of respondents do not have any means of savings. It is imperative to highlight the phase of demonetization post 8th November 2016 which compelled many respondents having no formal savings account to open up a bank account in the nearest branch available. Further, at this juncture it is important to mention that a significant proportion of the field work was conducted post demonetization. Therefore, the above figure representing an average of 59% respondents is an outcome of the mandate for compulsory bank accounts.

3.5. Work Details:

This section engages into the work details of the workers in the tea gardens. This segment is based on the nature of employment and work, types of work, reasons of

coming into the surveyed tea garden, wage calculation, working hours, work and break timing, leave rules, maternity leave benefits.

3.5.1. Nature of Employment:

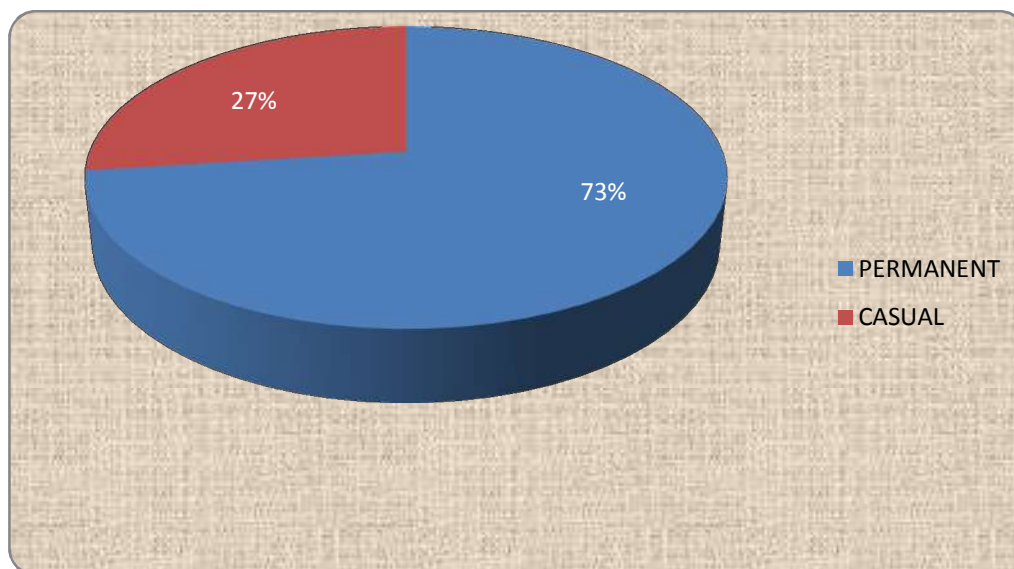


Figure-36: Nature of Employment

The study found 73% of respondents as permanent workers while 27% as casual/temporary workers. It was found that casual/temporary workers are referred to as ‘faltoo’ workers since the term metaphorically means ‘useless’. In the context of tea gardens, this category of workers does not have a guarantee to daily work or wages or the benefits enjoyed by the permanent workers. It was found that the permanent workers are provided with housing accommodations, medical facilities, provident fund, maternity leave with pay, ration, workplace essentials and so forth, while the casual worker are denied of these benefits.

3.5.2. Types of Work in Tea Gardens:

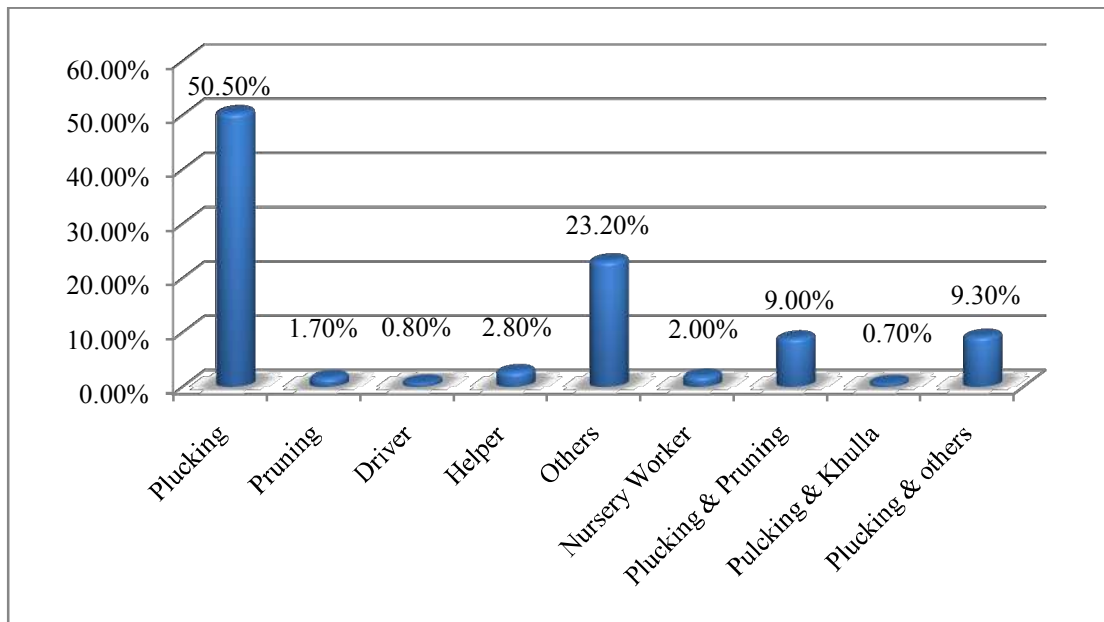


Figure-37: Details of work

The study found that 50.50% of respondents are engaged in plucking while 23.20% of respondents are engaged in other works that includes workers engaged in factory, repairing of machinery, executive bungalows, spraying, digging of drains, felling of trees, field water provider, line *chowkidar*.

3.5.3. Joining Age at Work:

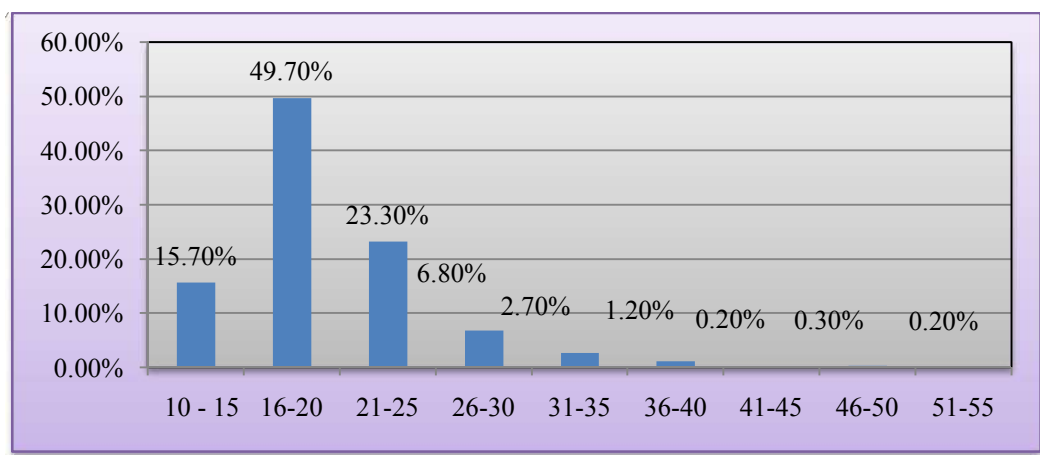


Figure-38: Details of Joining Age at Work

The above figure represents that 49.70% of respondents joined work between the age group of 16 to 20 years. However, 15.70% of respondents joined work in the age group of 10-15 years which shows the existence of child labour in the tea gardens. However, the study found that there is provision for employment of children above the age of 14 years with the consent of parents. They are seen to be engaged in works such as tea-packaging. Further, the study found instances of *chokri hazira* wherein girls below the age of 18 years are recruited for works such as plucking and packaging. The wages of this category of workers are less than the regular daily wages in the tea gardens.

3.5.4. Number of Years at Work::

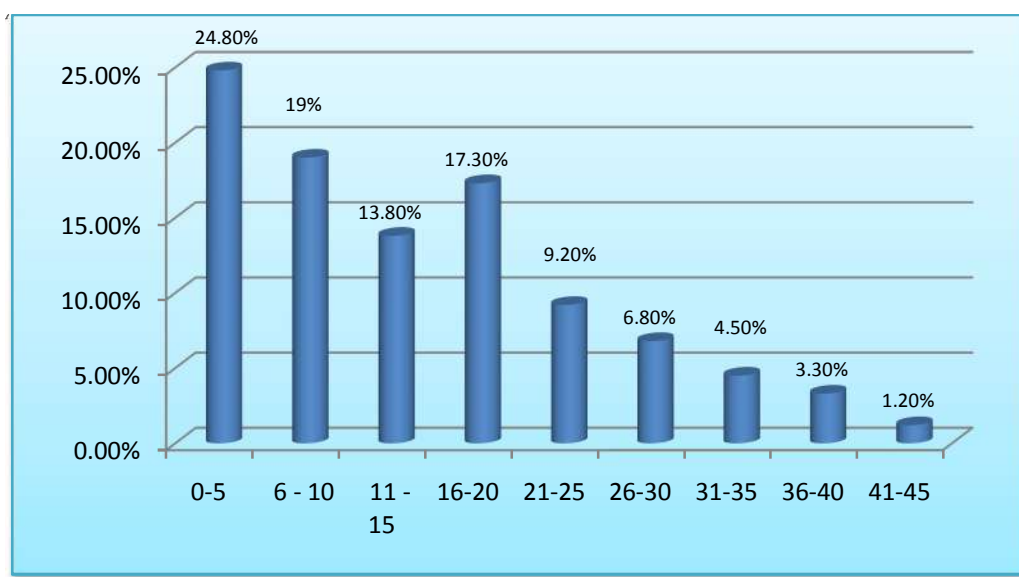


Figure 39: Number of Years at Work

The study found that 24.80% of the respondents had worked up to 5 years at work. There are 19% of the respondents who have worked 6 to 10 years in tea gardens. This shows that tea gardens employ a fairly young population at work as many workers claimed to have joined work at an early age between 16 and 20 years.

3.5.5. Reasons for Settling Down in Tea Gardens:

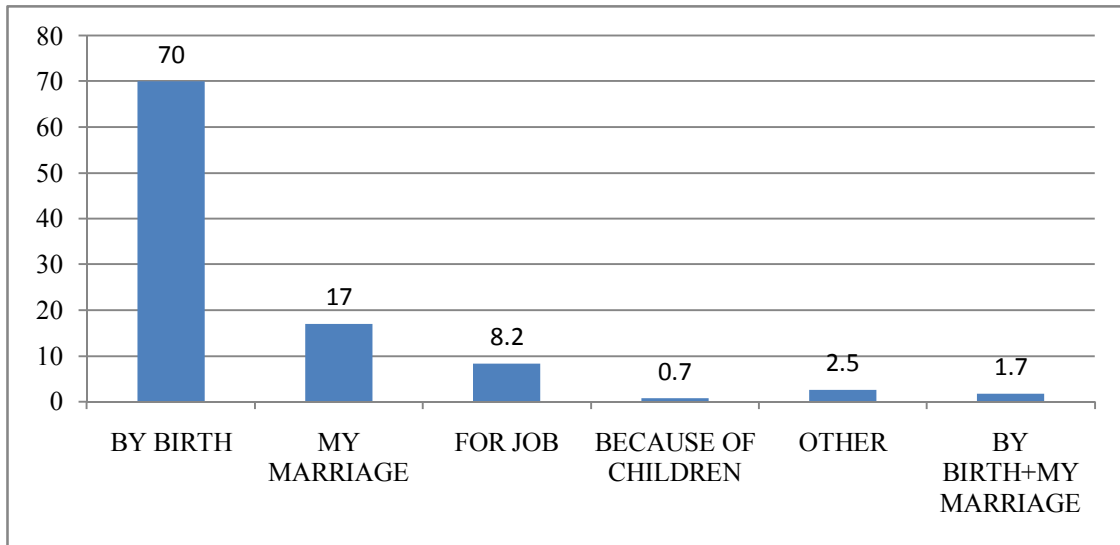


Figure-40: Reason for settling down in Tea Garden

The above figure shows that 70% of respondents are born in the selected tea gardens while 17% of the respondents replied that they came to the tea garden where they are presently employed as a result of marriage.

3.5.6. Calculation of Wages:

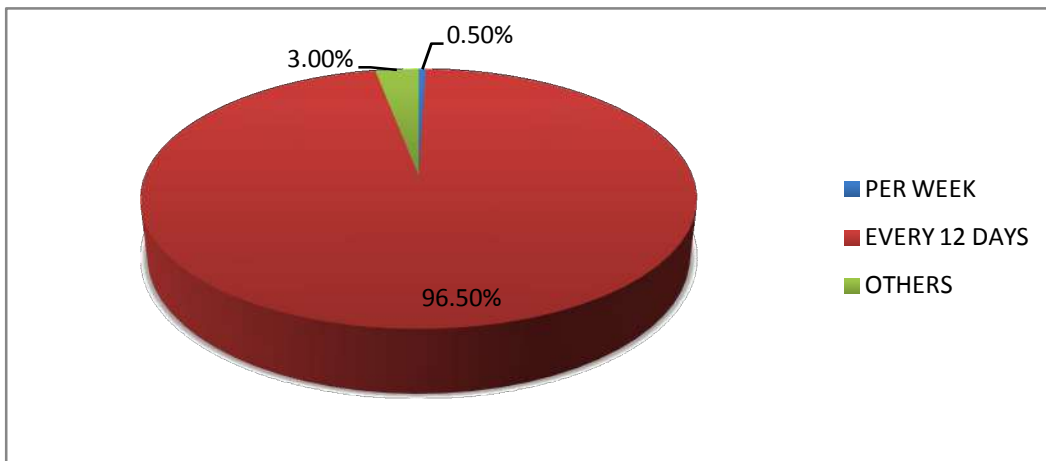


Figure-41: Details of Calculation of Wages

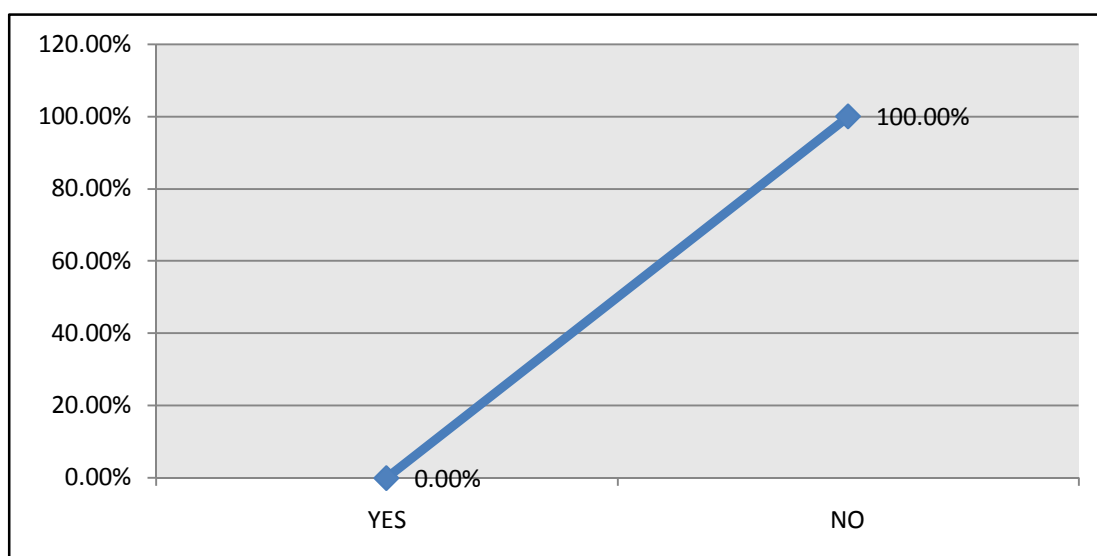


Figure-42: Sunday wage

Figure-41 reveals that 96.50% stated that wages are calculated for every 12 days. The instance of weekly wage calculation is recorded by 0.50% of the respondents while 3% stated that wages are calculated for 10 days, 14 days and 15 days which is reflected in the category of ‘other’ in the above figure.

Further, the survey found no provisions for Sunday wages for the workers of tea gardens. Workers irrespective of their nature of employment (permanent or casual), are found to be paid on daily wage basis which is paid at different times by different gardens. The respondents said that Sunday wage is not claimable as it is a rest day. According to the Minimum Wage Act 1948, the workers in tea gardens should be paid ‘Sunday Wages’. Moreover, as per the Plantation Labour Act 1951 and the Assam Minimum Wages Rules, 1952, the workers in the plantations are entitled to payment for the rest days. However, the study found that the managements in the surveyed tea gardens have not incorporated this provision till date.

3.5.7. Rate of Wages: Men and Women:

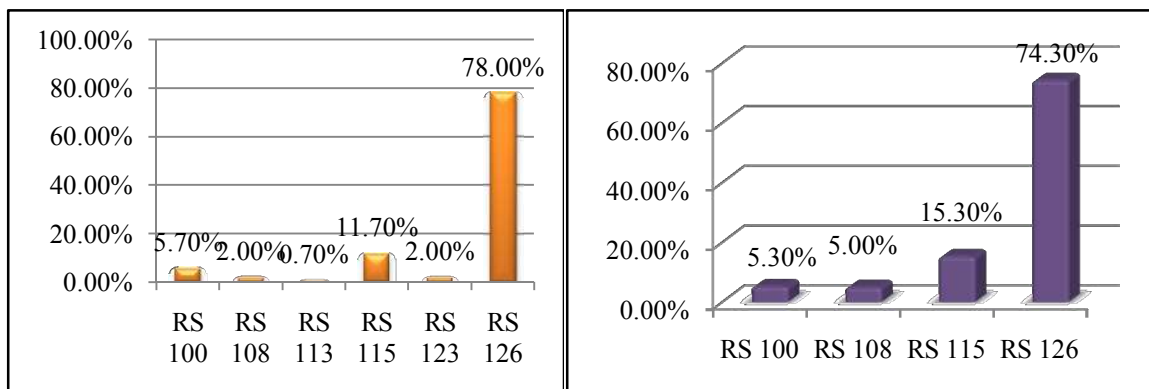


Figure-43: Rate of Women's Wages

Figure-44: Rate of Men's Wages

Figure-43 and Figure-44 find no major differences in the payment of wages between the two selected categories of gender - men and women. An amount of INR 126 is found to be the daily wages of 78% of women workers and 74.30% of men workers. However minuscule differences are found in the payment of wages (for INR 115 is paid to 11.70% women workers and to 15.30% men workers) is primarily due to the nature of work and the different wage policies followed by various tea companies.

3.5.8. Rate of Wages: Then and Now:

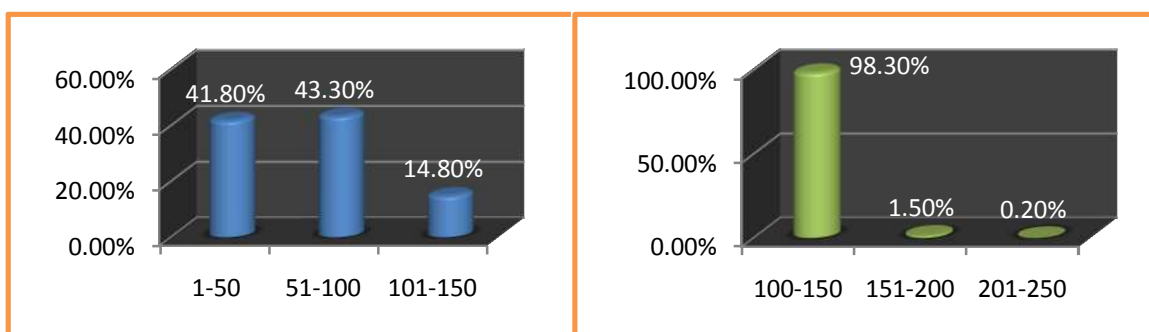


Figure-45: Wages at the Time of Joining Work

Figure-46: Wages Now

Figure-45 reflects that 41.80% of respondents received wages rupees 1 to 50 at the time of their joining in the tea gardens. These workers are found to be employed in tea gardens several years ago. The study found that the common wages in the surveyed tea gardens is Rs. 126. Even though there has been increase in the wage rates over the years, the respondents expressed that with rising expenses of goods and other basic necessities of daily requirement, the wages are not enough to support their families.

3.6. Working and Break Timings:

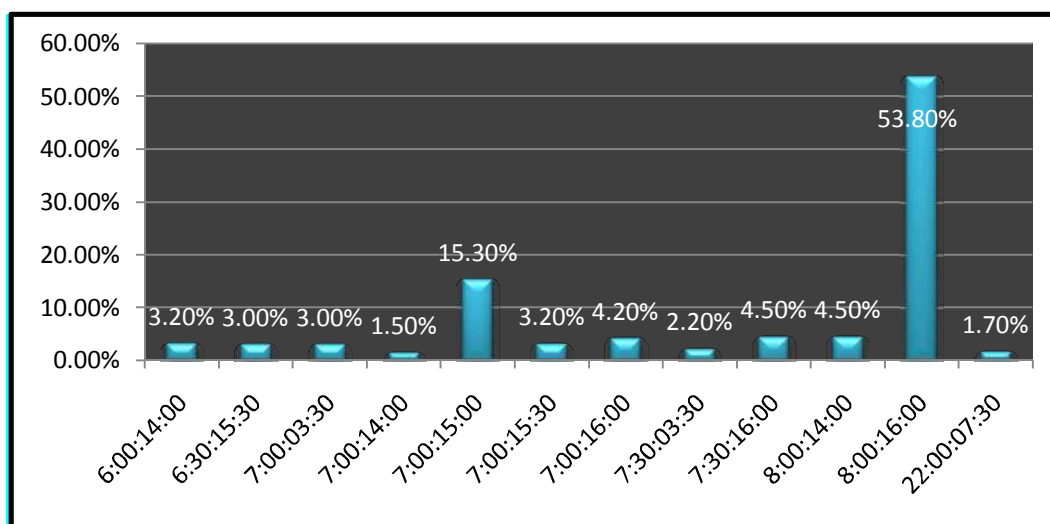


Figure- 47: Work timings

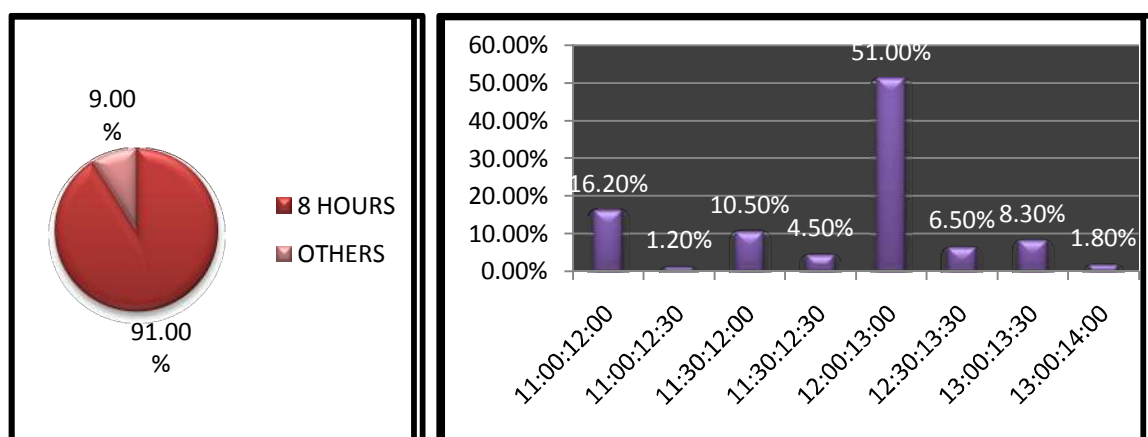


Figure-48: Hours of Work

Figure-49: Break timings

The findings reveal that 91% of respondents works for eight hours a day. It was found that the work hours vary depending on the nature of work. Further, during the peak seasons (June to October) workers have to engage in extra hours of work. The study show that the break timing are determined by the management and varies across garden. However, the majority of workers have break timings from 12.00 to 1.00 pm. The survey found that working hours vary depending on the nature of work. It found that workers engaged in driving, or who are night and line *chowkidars* have different working hours than those involved in other works of plantation (plucking, pruning, spraying and others).

3.7. Leave Rules:

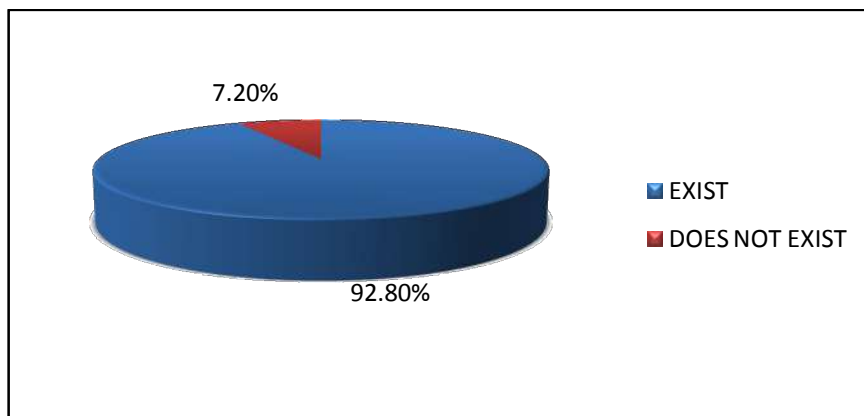


Figure- 50: Details of Leave Rules

As presented in the Figure-50, 92.80% of respondents stated the existence of leave rules (maternity and sick leaves) while 7.20% said about its absence. Those who expressed the absence of leaves said so due to the nature of their employment. However, in case of sickness, leaves are granted with wages for 14 days. The study found that if sick leave exceeded a total number of 14 days in a year, the subsequent leaves were granted without wage.

3.7. 1.Provision of Maternity leave:

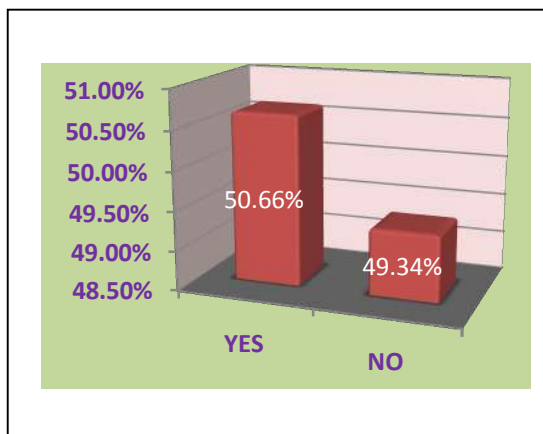


Figure-51 : Maternity leave given

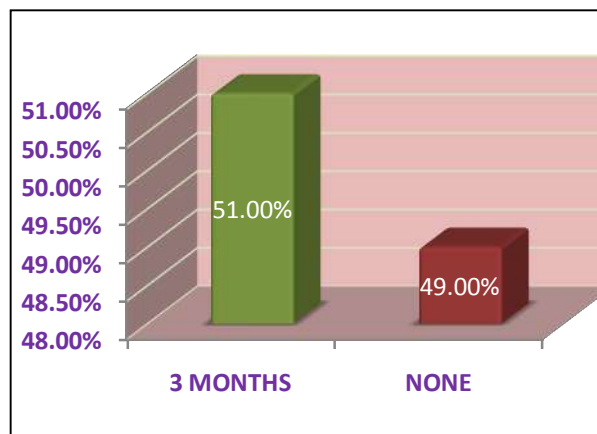


Figure-52: Duration of maternity leave

The study found that tea gardens granted the provision of maternity leaves. However, this was found to be a conditional provision since maternity could only be availed only by permanent women workers. The data in Figure-51 shows that 50.66% of women workers are found to be availing this provision while 49.34 % are not entitled to the benefits of maternity leave since this percentage of workers comprise of single unmarried women and casual workers. Hence, the figures on maternity leave demonstrates bleak picture of access to maternal health care services in the tea gardens. Permanent women workers are found to avail the provision of maternity leave with wage while temporary or casual women workers are not provided with maternity leave benefits, which thereby deprived them of the vital health care provisions and facilities of maternity leave.

The study found that maternity leave is granted for a period of three months (Figure-52). Further, in some tea gardens it is found that the provision of maternity leave is applicable only for two children. Further the women workers, who are entitled to this provision, stated that they could avail it only in the post-delivery period. Pre-delivery leaves are considered as leave without wage. However, there has been a recent development in the ‘duration of maternity leave’- it is mandated that women workers

be provided with three months of pre delivery leave. Subsequently, the state authorities have issued an order to provide pre delivery leave to women workers in the tea gardens of Assam. Hence, it was found that the tea companies have initiated for two months of pre delivery maternal leave to the permanent women workers in some of the surveyed tea gardens.

3.8. Looking into Other Benefits of Workers:

The workers in the tea gardens are provided with some other benefits- provident fund, medical facilities, and bonus. This segment of the study delves into these aspects of tea gardens.

3.8.1. Provident Fund and Medical Benefits

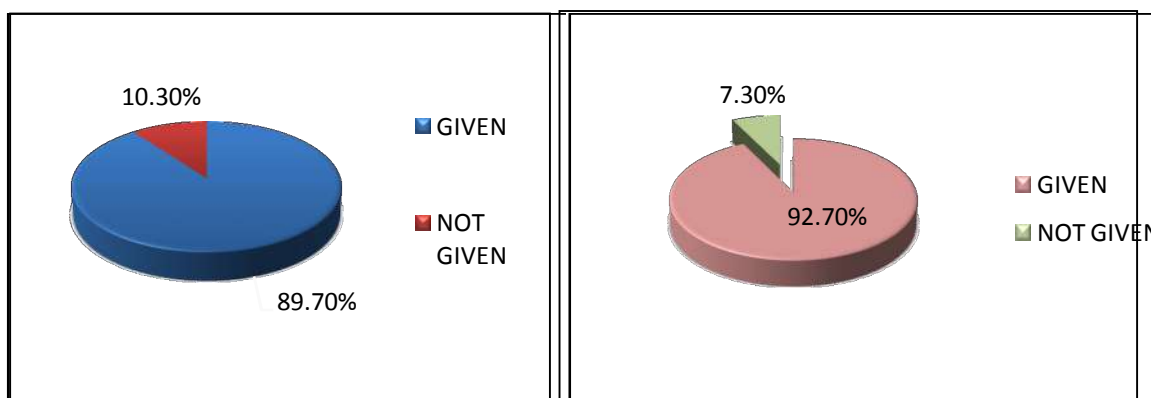


Figure-53: Provident Fund Benefits

Figure-54: Medical Facilities

Figure-53 and Figure-54 reflect information on Provident Fund and Medical Facilities availed by the respondents. The study found that 89.70% of the respondents have the benefits of provident fund while 10.30% of respondents do not have it.

According to The Plantations Labour Act (1951), every worker including her/his family is entitled to medical benefits irrespective of their nature of employment (permanent/temporary). In this context, referring to the medical provisions in the tea gardens, the study found that 92.70% of the respondents are given the medical benefits while 7.30% are denied of the same.

Although, hospitals and dispensaries are available to provide free medical services, however, the respondents stated that the hospitals and dispensaries are equipped only to address health issues such as cold and fever. Moreover, they mentioned that for serious health matters they prefer to consult doctors outside. The study found that the hospitals and dispensaries in most of the tea gardens are not adequately equipped to conduct child delivery (normal and c-section deliveries) and other important surgeries (gall-bladder, appendicitis and such other major operations).

It was also found that the permanent employees are invariably entitled to the benefits of free medical services in the tea garden hospitals. However, the study found that the medical benefits for casual/ temporary workers are conditional. They are entitled to free medical benefits in the tea garden hospitals only during their payroll period. In the tea gardens, the payroll period of the temporary/casual workers is comprehended to be the specific period for which they are employed in the tea gardens. Further, the respondents informed that the permanent workers, when referred to hospitals outside tea gardens, are entitled to reimbursement of medical expenses incurred by them. However, the principle of reimbursement varies across the tea companies.

3.8.2. Provision of Bonus:

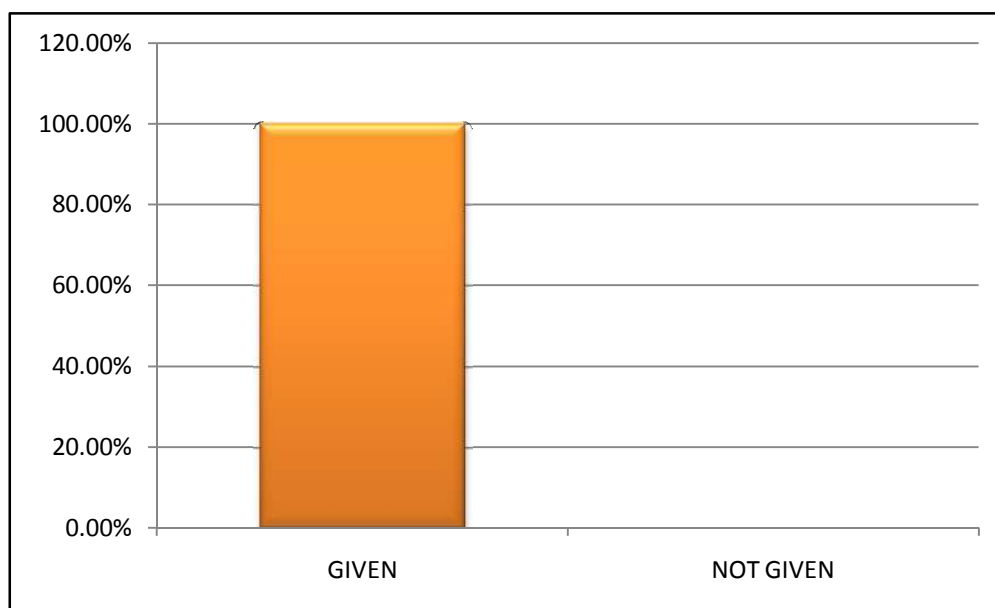


Figure-55: Provision of Bonus

The sum of money that is given in addition to an employee's wages is referred to as 'bonus'. Under the payment of Bonus Act, 1965, payment of bonus to industrial employees is mandatory. It was found that the tea industry adheres to the Bonus Act, 1965 and all workers of tea gardens are eligible for bonus at a minimum rate of 8.33 per cent and a minimum of 20 per cent on the basis of earning by a worker in the previous fiscal year. It was found that all the respondents (both temporary and permanent workers) received bonus in the surveyed tea gardens. However, the respondents mentioned that the percentage of bonus vary across tea companies. In the majority of selected tea gardens, the study found that the entire amount of bonus was given during Durga Puja, while some gardens conferred the amount in two instalments – one instalment in Durga Puja and the other instalment in Holi.

3.8.3. Workers' Union:

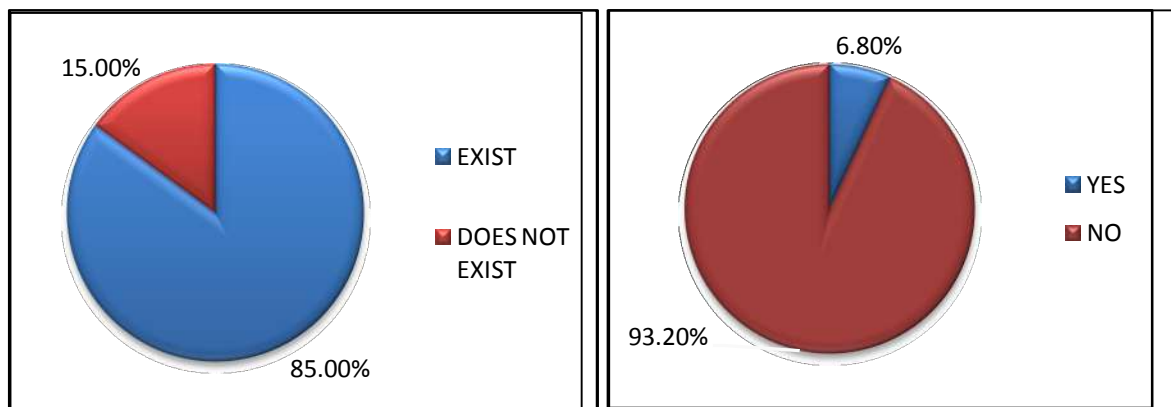


Figure-56: Existence of Workers' Union **Figure-57: Membership of Workers' Union**

85% of respondents stated the presence of workers union in the surveyed tea gardens. However, a stark majority of respondents (93.20%) said that they are not the members of the Workers' Union. This absence of membership in the Workers' Union compels one to view the entire idea of a union as a facade or a ghetto of only selected members of the community. Drawing from the Part B of the study, it was found that the Workers' Union lacks equal gender representation. It was found that the Workers' Union is primarily dominated by men. Based on the responses, the study found that women are strategically left out from the political and economic domain of the Workers' Union. This reflects the historical process of keeping women out of the decision making bodies.

3.8.3.1 Advantages of Workers' Union:

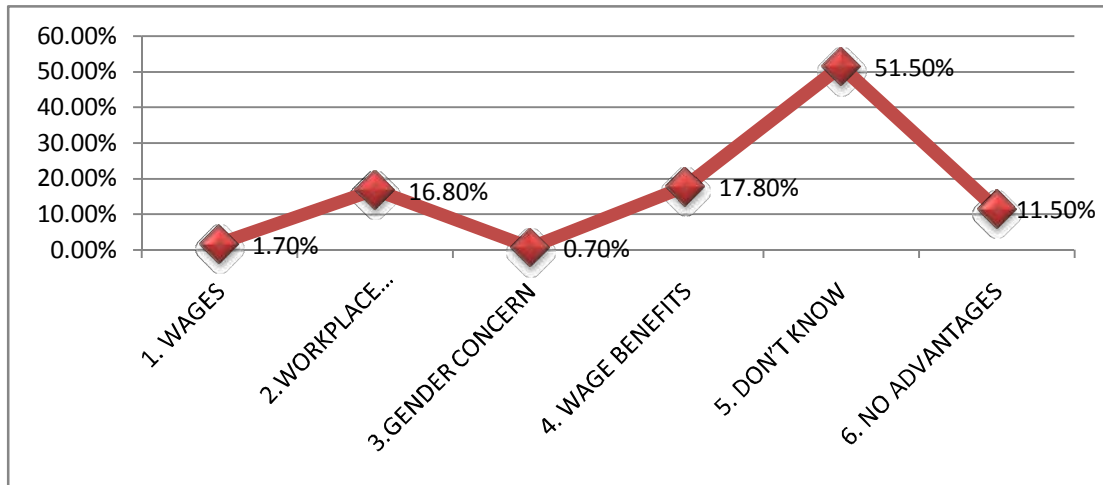


Figure-58: Advantages of Workers' Union

The study found that 17.80% of respondents believed in the advantages of Workers' Union. According to them, because of the existence of workers union, they could assert their rights in terms of wage benefits. However, 51.50% of the respondents do not know about the existence of such unions which in a way reflects the fact that the workers are unaware about their legitimate rights and benefits which can be facilitated by such unions.

3.8.4. Age of Retirement:

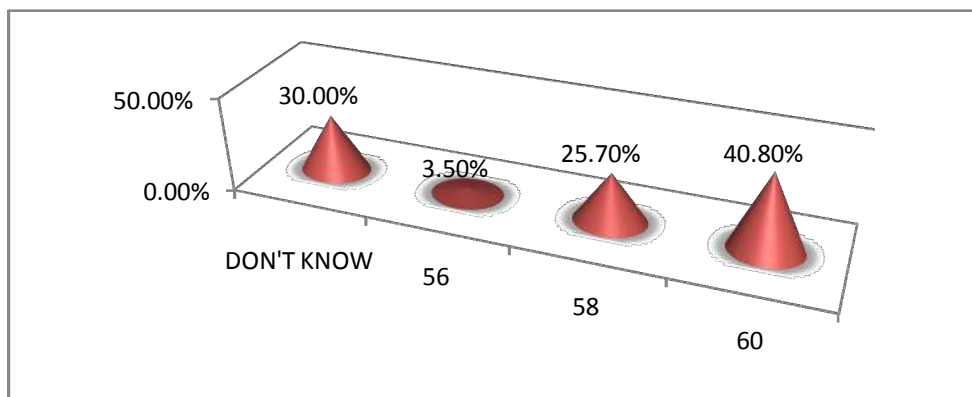


Figure-59: Age of Retirement

It was found that 40.80% of respondents said that the retirement age for them is 60 years while 30% are oblivious about the age of retirement. In contrast to the standard age of retirement, the study found that in some of the surveyed tea gardens, the age of 58 years was considered to be the age of retirement.

3.9. Work Place Facilities and Welfare Provisions:

This section outlines an important aspect of the socio-economic study of the tea garden workers. It deals with the work place conditions and facilities provided to workers by the management of the surveyed tea gardens.

3.9.1. Sanitation Facilities at Work Sites:

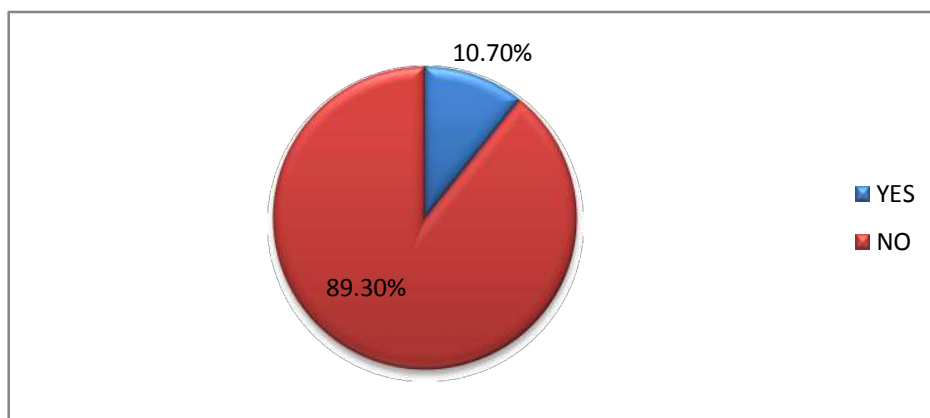


Figure-60: Sanitation Facilities at Work Sites

Figure-60 indicates about the lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites of the selected tea gardens. 89.30% of the respondents stated about the non-availability of sanitation facilities at the site of plantations. Further, 10.70% of respondents said that sanitation facilities are available but only in the factories.

At the sites of plantations, the study observed the highest recruitment of women workers, and, thereby the non-availability of sanitation facilities poses serious questions and concerns over the lack of gender sensitivity of the tea garden authorities. The

discourse on gender and health upheld that proper sanitation facilities are integral part of women's health. The absence of which may subject women to getting infected by diseases like Urinary Tract Infection (UTI). The studies on UTI have shown that its infection may lead to severe health hazards (urinary burning, fever, and others) amongst women.

3.9.2. Drinking Water Facility at the Work Site:

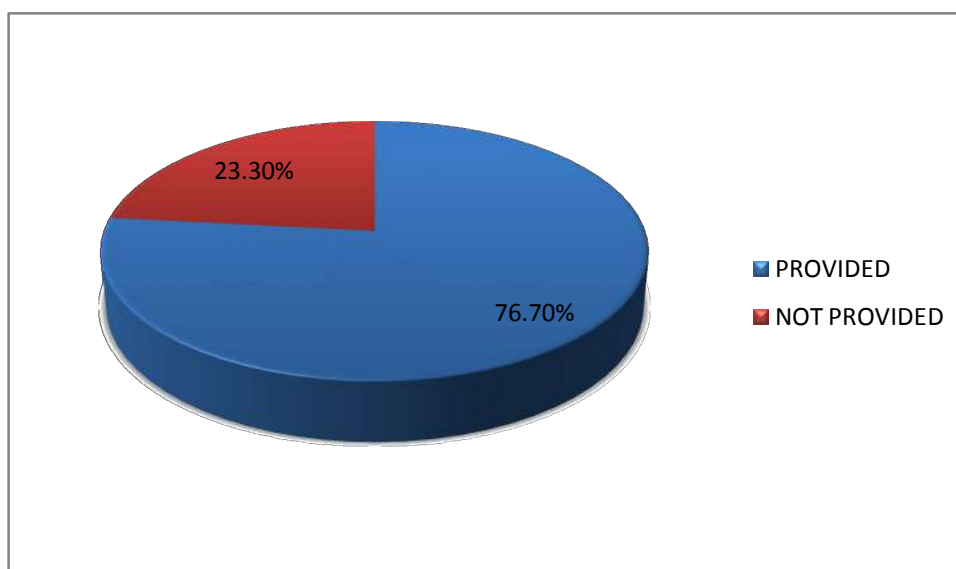


Figure-61 : Drinking Water Facility at the Work Site

The Assam Plantation Labour Rules 1956 mandates for the provision of water under the Chapter III- Health. It directs the tea gardens to supply an adequate quantity of drinking water at work sites of the plantations during the working hours and states that *paniwallas* (a person who is employed to provide drinking water and tea at the work sites) should supply drinking water at conveniently accessible points. Further, the Rules mentions that water shall be supplied from the taps connected with a public water supply system; or from any other source approved by the Chief Inspector of plantations. The study found that 76.70% of the respondents confirmed about the provision of drinking water at work site of plantation.

3.9.3. Provision of Tea at the Work Site:

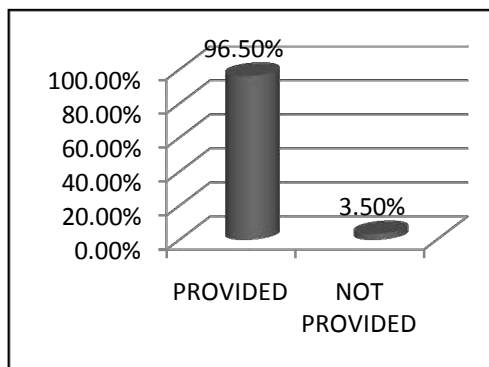


Figure-62: Provision of tea

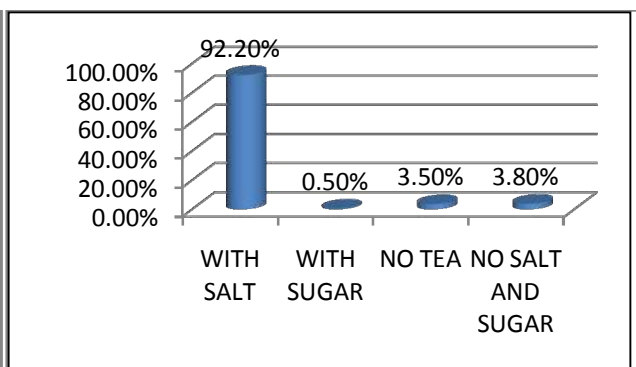


Figure-63: Type of tea provided

The study found that 96.50% of respondents are provided with tea at the plantation work site. However, 92.20% stated that salt tea is provided at the work sites. They mentioned that the practice of drinking salt tea is an inherent habit and they preferred salted tea. Further, they informed that the colonial owners of the tea gardens started this practice which had continued to the present time.

3.9.4. Work Essentials Provided:

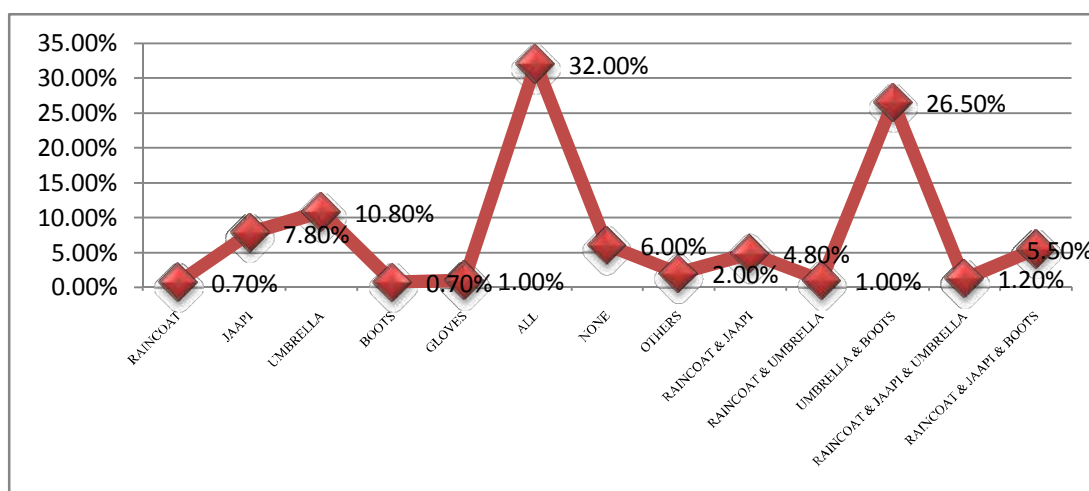


Figure-64: Work Essentials Provided

The Assam Plantation Labour Rules, 1956, under Section 17, prescribes that tea garden management shall supply every worker with one umbrella, one blanket or jershy, one rain-coat for every two years and one pair of *chappal* for every year. The

Plantations Labour (Amendment) Act, 2010 also states that employers shall provide protective clothing and equipment to the workers of the tea gardens.

The study found that 32% of respondents are provided with all the amenities necessary to work at work sites- raincoat,*jaapi*, umbrella, boots and gloves whereas 25% of respondents are provided only with umbrella and boots. In lieu of raincoats, the study found that, the workers are provided with a plastic water-proof material commonly known as *tripal*. Further, the 6% of respondents who are not provided with any of these amenities are engaged in other spheres of work in the tea gardens (workers engaged in factory of the tea gardens and as line chowkidar).

3.9.5 Medical Facilities:

The Plantation Labour Act 1951 mandates that the tea gardens/plantations must have the provision of 'readily available' medical facilities plantation for the workers (and their families). Further, in the context of medical facilities, the Act allows the state government to make rules and regulations. Accordingly, The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956 has guidelines regarding the provision of hospitals in the tea gardens of Assam. It states that there shall two types of hospitals- Garden Hospitals to deal with out-patients, in-patient not requiring any elaborate diagnosis and treatment, infectious cases, mid-wifery, simple pre-natal and post-natal care of infants and children and periodical inspection of workers; and Group Hospitals which 'shall be capable of dealing efficiently with all types of cases normally encountered but will not be used for routine treatment'.

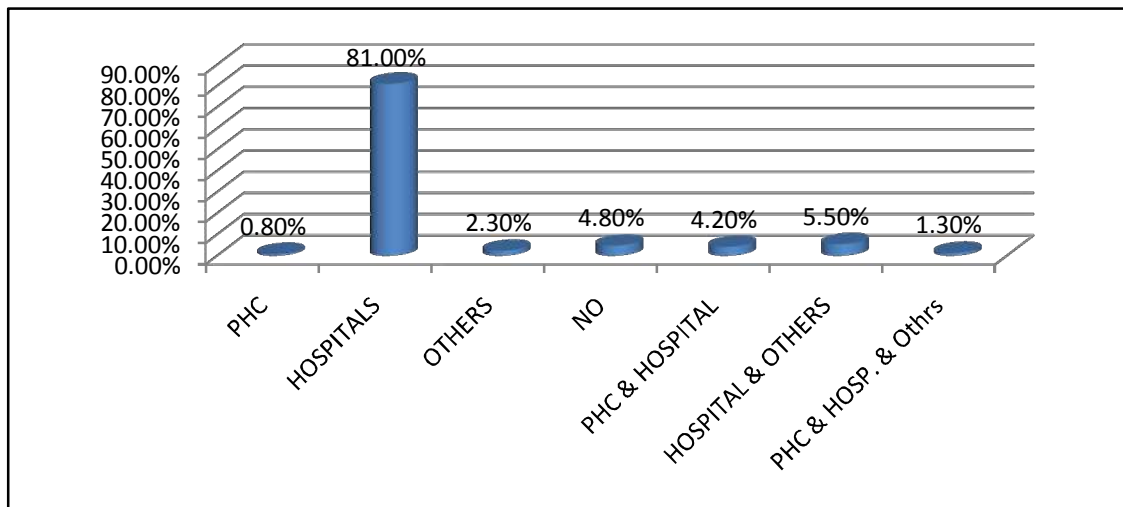


Figure-65: Medical Facilities

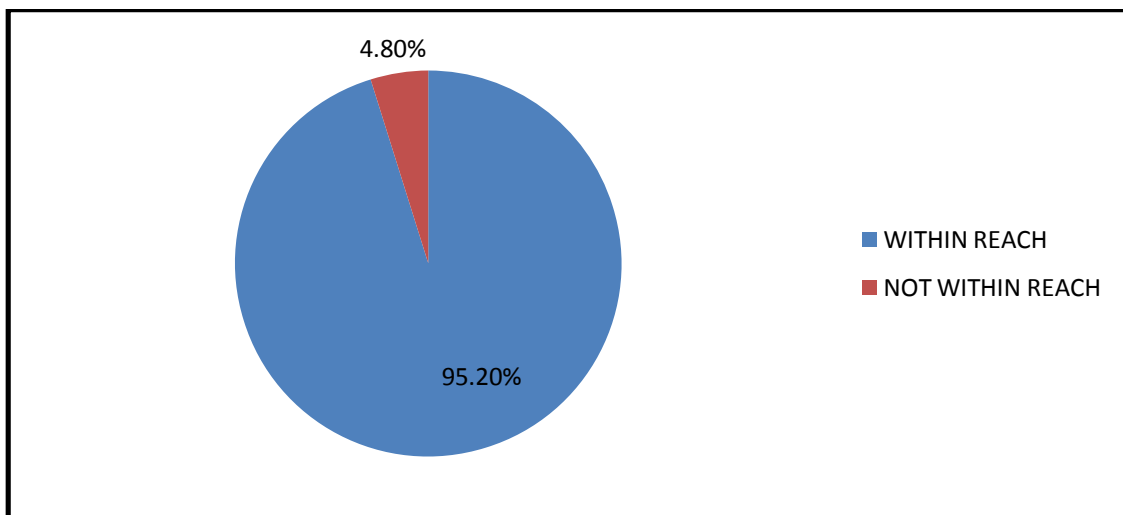


Figure-66: Distance to medical Facilities

The study found the availability of medical facilities in maximum numbers of the selected tea gardens. 81% of respondents confirmed the presence of hospitals in the surveyed tea gardens. It was found that the remaining respondents, who relied on the other options of medical facilities, resided on the out-division of a tea plantation. In such cases, as per the The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956, the immediate

medical care shall be provided by a full time qualified pharmacist assisted by a full time trained midwife.

Figure-66 highlights that 95.20% of respondents stated that the provision of medical facilities for are within their reach.

3.9.6. Medical Care:

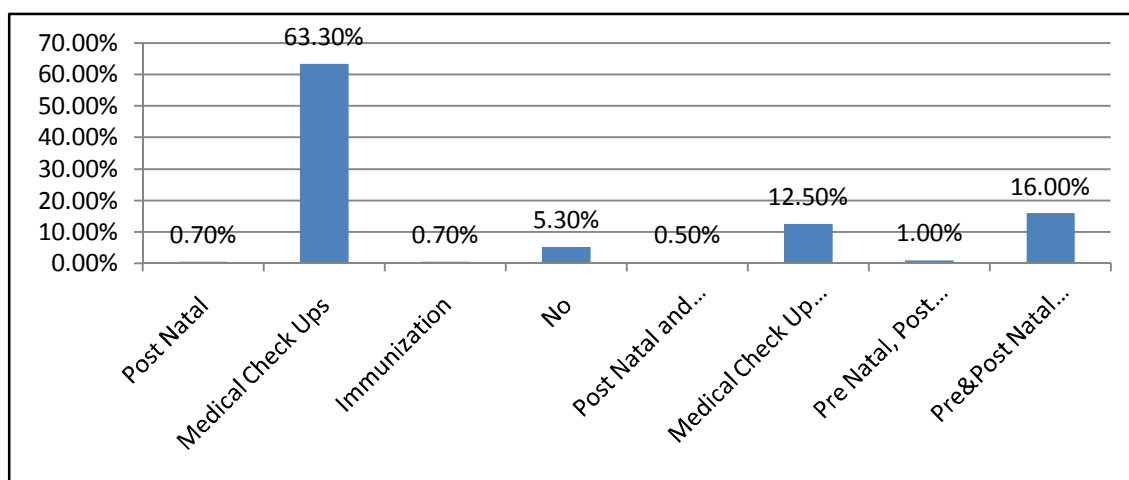


Figure-67: Medical Care Facilities

Figure-67 exhibits that 63.30% of the respondents avail the benefit of regular medical check-ups. 16% of the respondents noted that they are provided with pre-natal and post-natal medical services, and immunization and other medical check- ups. The workers stated that they receive primary medical care services (for cold, cough, fever) at the tea garden hospitals on regular basis.

3.9.7. Crèche Facilities:

The provision of crèche in the workplace plays a crucial role in a industry like tea plantations, where women workers are recruited in large numbers. The Plantation Labour Act 1951 states that a plantation shall have crèches ‘wherein fifty or more women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) are employed or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months, or where the number of

children of women workers (including women workers employed by any contractor) is twenty or more.’ Further, the Act allows the State Government to make its own regulations, and, accordingly The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956, directs that every plantation having employment of fifty or more women workers are employed shall provide and maintain the facility of crèche. Further, it mentioned that there should be ‘crècher’ at suitable sites of the work places for the use of the children who are below 2 years of age at scale of one of every 25 hectares of tea. Moreover, the Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956 states that the tea gardens should arrange and maintain crèches for children in the age group of 2-6 years. There should be at least one for each of the ‘main and the out-garden, if any’.

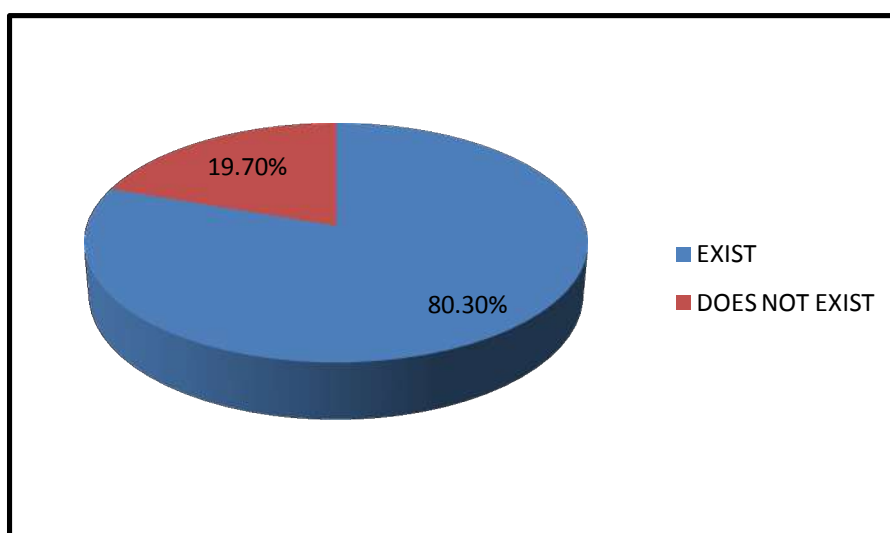


Figure-68: Facility of Crèche

Figure-68 demonstrates that 80.30% of the respondents noted about the existence of crèches, whereas 19.70% answered negatively. The study found instances of ‘crècher’ at the plantation work site for the children below the age of 2 years that is looked after by a women ‘care-taker’. However, many of the respondents said that although the tea gardens have the provision of the crèches, the infrastructural quality is not up to the mark as stated by the Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956. The Rules

says that the crèches shall be furnished with suitable furniture (to lie down and sit), a hammock for each child below the age of two years along with provision of toys and other play things. The respondents stated that the crèches are not in good conditions and in many instances non-functional. It is observed during the field survey that crèches are not surrounded by fencing in a number of surveyed tea gardens. Although the Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956 mandates the provision of washrooms in the crèches, but it is found to be absent in most instances.

Several women respondents informed that they have to go home to feed their babies since crèches are maintained poorly. The women workers who are employed as casual/temporary workers pointed out that this has resulted loss of their productive time which even cost their wages. This is due to the payment method applied for the casual workers employed for tea-plucking during ‘peak-season’ (March-October). For this period, the casual workers are recruited mostly under the *thika* system (contract based method of payment). They are paid on the basis of the quantities of plucked tea-leaves-higher wages for maximum amount of plucked tea-leaves. In this context, the casual/temporary women workers, who has to go home to feed their children due to lack/ poor conditions of crèches, loss their productive time. Thereby, they could pluck less quantity of tea-leaves, and, as a result they get lesser amount of wages. The casual women workers, as discussed earlier, are devoid of many facilities (maternity benefits and other health care services) availed by the permanent workers (both men and women).

3.10. Facilities for Education of Children of the Workers:

Education is the driving force of a flourishing society. Educated minds can positively contribute towards the growth of the society as well as the economy.

Therefore it is imperative to scrutinise the institutional arrangements to facilitate education in the tea gardens as well as to identify the embedded lacunas impinging the system. This section thus makes an attempt to highlight the provisions of educational facilities in the surveyed tea gardens. The parameters of analysis adopted are- number of children attending school, provision of kindergarten and primary schools, children attending high school and mode of travel adopted to attend schools.

3.10.1 Details of Children going to School:

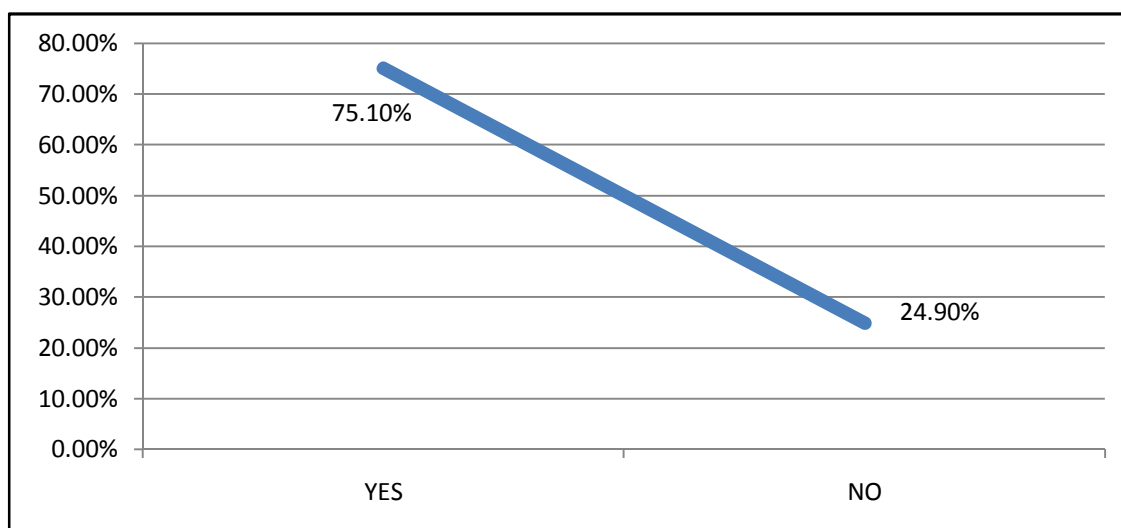


Figure-69: Details of Children going to School

The study reveals that children of 75.10% of the respondents are enrolled in schools. The respondents held that they mostly send their children to the nearby *anganwadi* schools or primary schools. However, the study found that a large proportion of children of the workers abstain from going to schools which constitutes 24.90%. School drop outs is a regular phenomena in the tea gardens. Although, corrective measures are adopted by the schools to retain them but owing to socio-

economic and cultural setting prevalent in the tea gardens, students do not deem it to be indispensable and vital.

3.10.2 Details of Children going to School: Boys and Girls:

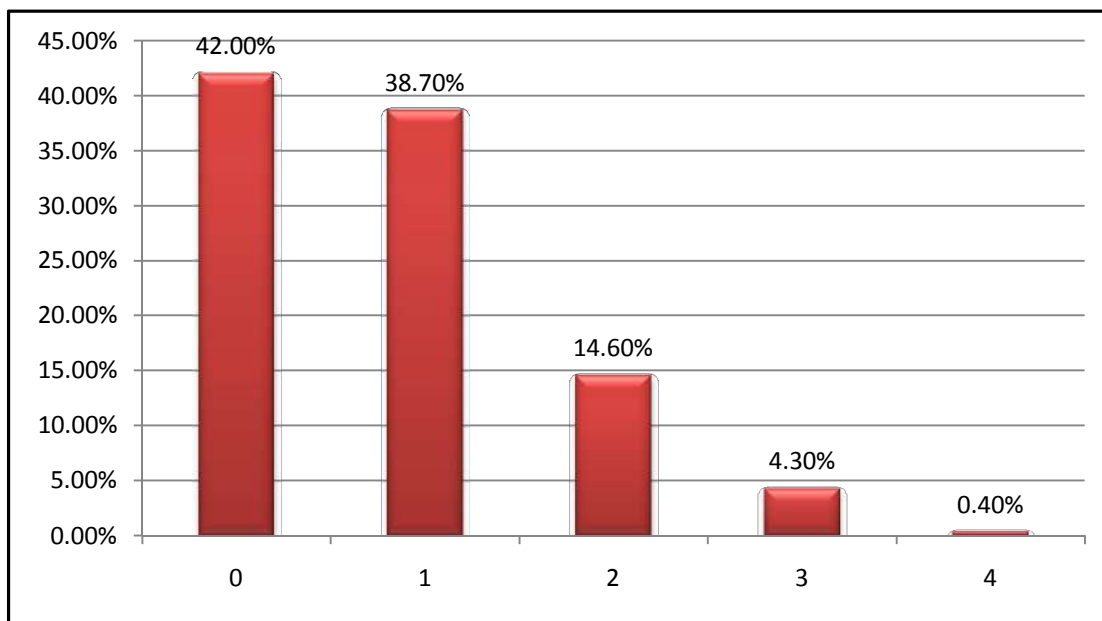


Figure-70: Number of boys attending school

The study substantiates the fact that one boy of 38.70% of the respondent's family attend school while two boys of 14.60% respondent's family go to school regularly. A meagre 4.30 % and 0.40% respondent's family send their boys (three and four respectively) to school. In contrary to popular perception that dropouts are decreasing in schools in contemporary times, the study however, reveals that a whopping 42% of the respondent's family do not send their boys to schools.

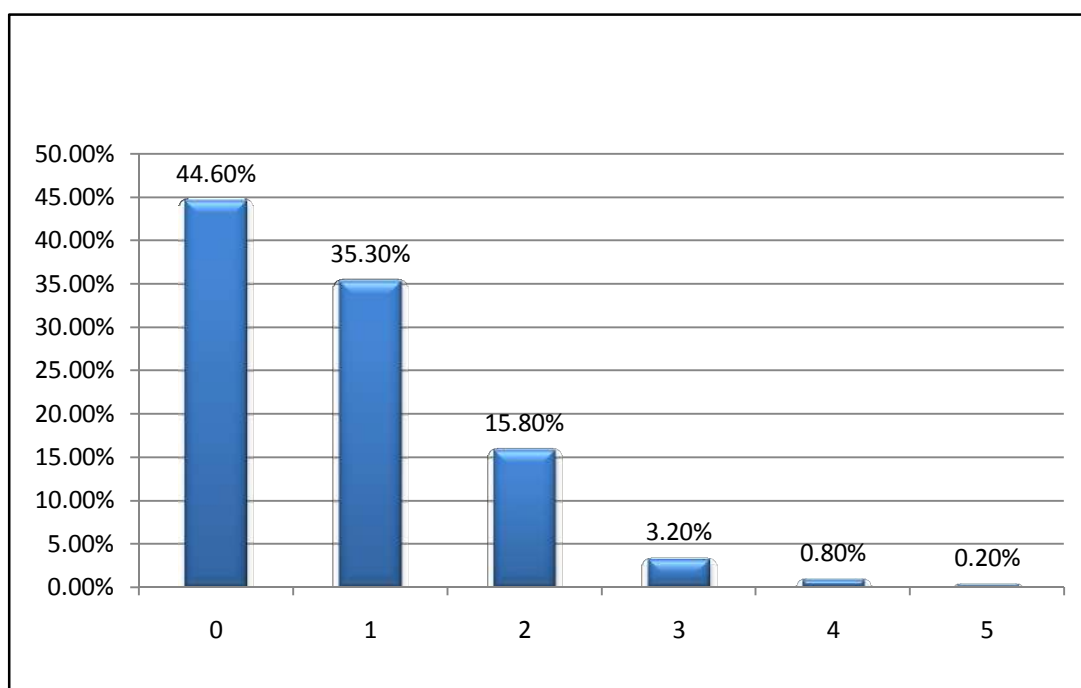


Figure-71: Number of boys attending school

Figure-73 delineates the fact that one girl of 35.30% of the respondent's family attend school while two girls of 15.80% respondent's family go to school regularly. A meagre 3.30 %, 0.80% and 0.20% of the respondent's family send their girls (three, four and five respectively) to school. Validating the popular perception on the education of girl child, the study corroborates the fact a staggering 44.60% of the respondent's family do not send their girls to schools.

A comparative study of Figure-70 and Figure-71 reveals the pathetic picture of education system in the tea gardens. Inclusive policies in respect to education are evidently absent in the surveyed tea gardens. The study found that higher the number of children of a respondent, lower is the rate of enrolment in primary educational institutions. Hence, in case of both boys and girls, increase in the number of children means decline in the accessibility to privileges such as education for children within a

family. The issue of financial affordability is another major factor impacting the lower enrolment of children in schools.

3.10.3 Provision of Kindergarten Schools:

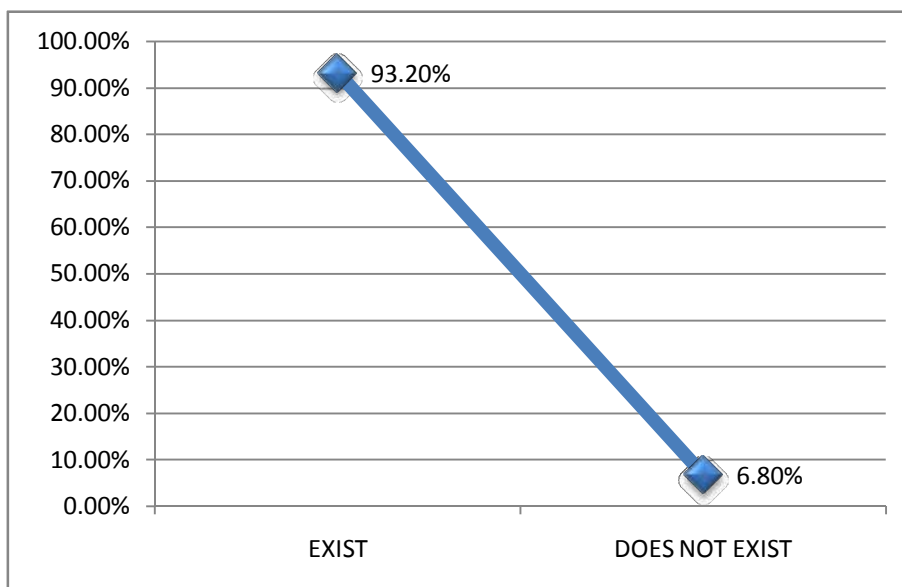


Figure-72: Provision of Kindergarten Schools

Figure-72 shows that 93.20% of respondents stated about the existence of kindergarten schools in the surveyed tea gardens, while 6.80% of respondents stated about the absence of such schools in the gardens. The study found that kindergarten schools are referred to as *anganwadi* schools in the tea gardens. Moreover, the study found *anganwadi kendras* in both the districts of the surveyed tea gardens. Further, the *kendras* are specifically designed to facilitate the government's agenda of universal primary education.

3.10.4 Provision of Primary Schools

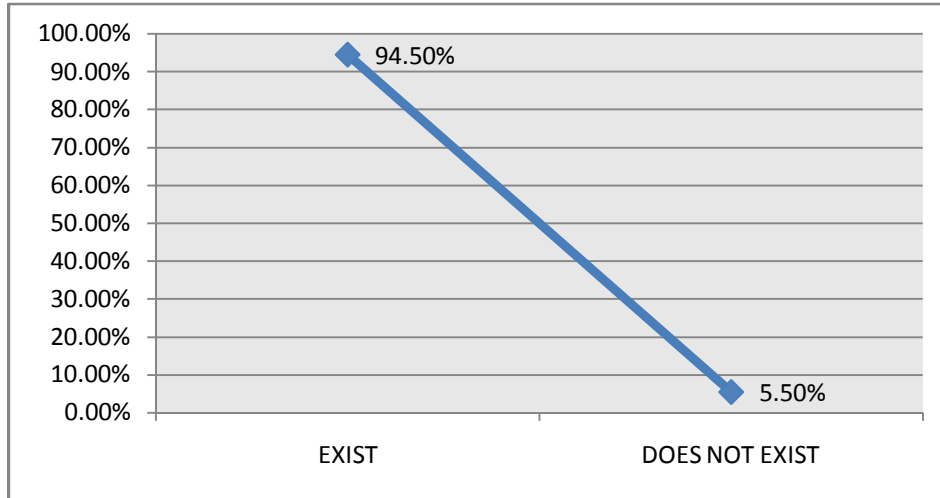


Figure-73: Provision of Primary Schools

Figure-73 indicates that 94.50% of respondents stated that there are primary schools in the surveyed tea gardens while 5.50% of respondents denied about the provision of primary schools which reflects the existence of the foundational base of educational facilities in the tea gardens.

3.10.5 Provision of High Schools:

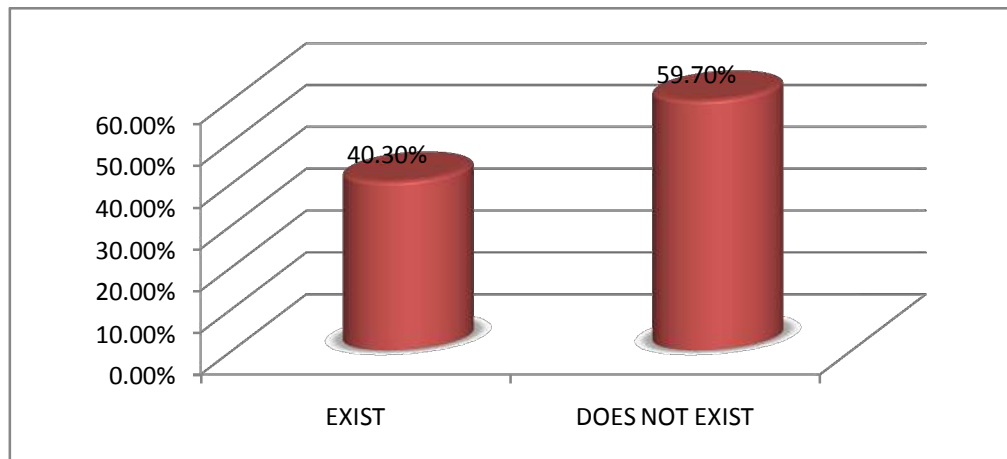


Figure-74: Provision High Schools

Unlike *anganwadi* and primary schools which is found to exist in a large number of surveyed tea gardens, the study found a severe lack of high schools. This is primarily due to lack of any mandatory provision of high schools within the tea gardens. Thereby the study found that the children attended high schools in the nearby areas of the surveyed tea gardens.

Further, the data above shows a dismal representation of high schools in the nearby areas of the surveyed tea gardens i.e. 59.70% of respondents denied the existence of high schools, while only 40.30% of respondents said that high schools are present in the nearby areas.

3.10.6 Mode of Transportation to Educational Institutions:

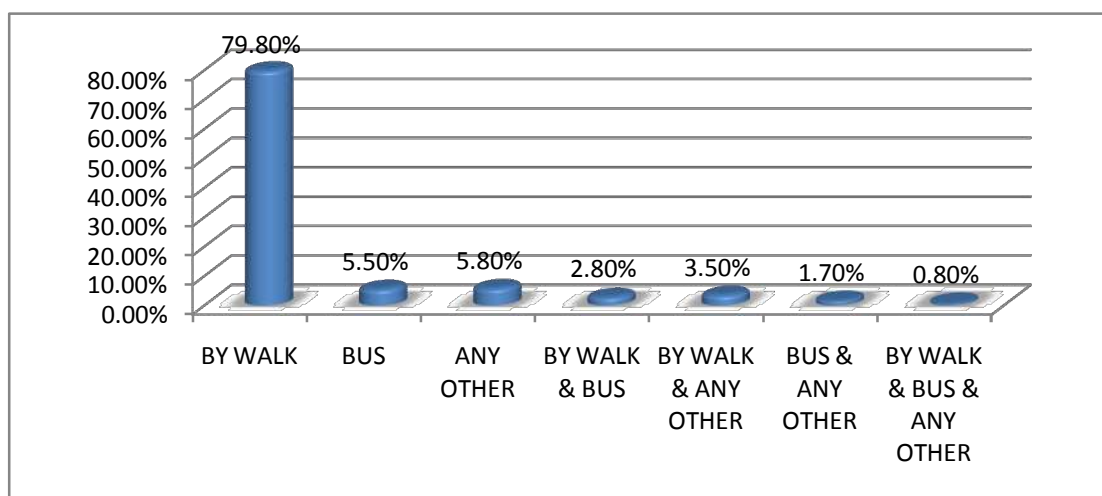


Figure-75: Mode of transportation

The study reveals that children of 79.80% of the respondents go to primary schools by walking while the rest of the children go to school (basically high school) either by bus or other means of travel.

3.11 Details of Health Conditions of Workers:

The Assam Human Development Report, 2014 has indicated that tea gardens in Assam show disadvantaged life-expectancy (p 23)⁴⁵. Further, the report identified higher rate of maternal mortality, low nutritional status of children, poor health conditions of workers in the tea garden. This section also tries to examine the details of health conditions of the workers in the selected tea gardens.

3.11.1 Work Participation during Menstrual Period:

The health condition of women workers of tea gardens is a significant aspect to be pondered upon wherein menstrual health conditions are an integral part of women's health. In regard to attendance at work during menstrual period, the study found that 84.30% of women workers go for their daily work at the plantation during their periods in comparison to 15.70% of women workers who do not go to work.

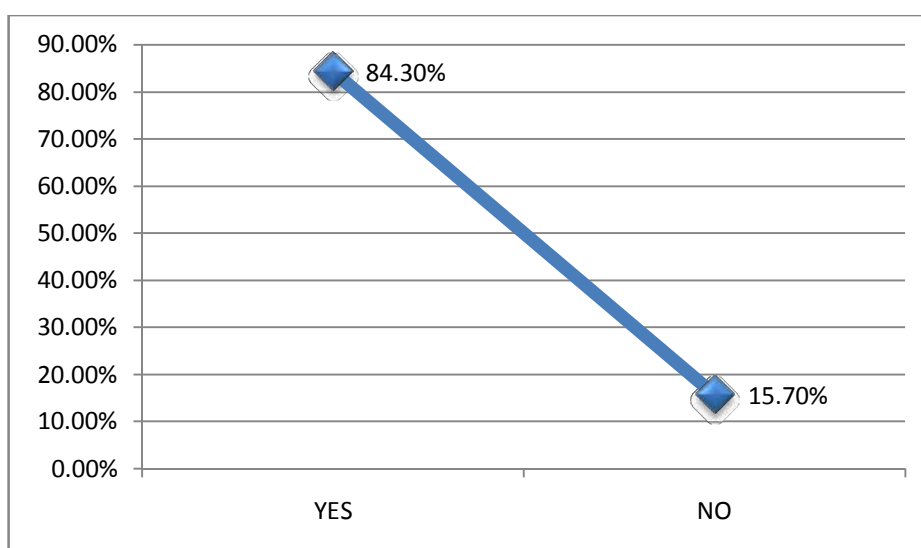


Figure-76: Work done during menstrual periods

However, as discussed earlier, the facility of toilets is absent at the work sites of plantations which is a major concern for the women workers during their menstrual

⁴⁵ OKDISCD and Government of Assam (2014). Assam Human Development Report: Managing Diversities, Achieving Human Development.

period. Moreover, it was found that most of the women workers are not aware of the significance of menstrual hygiene. It was found that most of the women workers used clothes as a measure to absorb menstrual blood, however, they are not aware of the fact that usage of unclean clothes might lead to serious health issues. Further, many of them are found to be ignorant of sanitary pads and those who have knowledge of sanitary pads preferred using clothes over sanitary pads. The women workers have to go to work during menstrual days to earn their livelihood, however, lack of hygiene and toilet facilities engendered severe discomfort.

3.11.2 Diseases Suffered:

Prevalence of a varied range of diseases and health problems are found during the survey. Illness such as fever, cold, cough, jaundice, high blood pressure, gastroenteritis, dysentery and diarrhoea, stomach disorder, body ache are found to be prevalent among the workers in the surveyed tea gardens.

The study found, as discussed earlier, that the workers in the tea gardens live in poor living and working conditions. The quality of drinking water is a major concern due to lack of appropriate filtration method. In most of the cases, the provisions of housing and sanitation facilities are found to be appalling. The lack of toilet facilities at the work sites of the plantations compel the workers to opt for open spaces for defecation, which results in various health issues. Therefore, the above mentioned health issues are found to be common occurrence in that kind of living and working environments in the surveyed tea gardens. Further, the study found similar types of illness among the children of the workers in the surveyed tea gardens. Anaemia is identified as one of the major health issues among the children, and lack of iron-rich and nutritious food is found to be a primary cause.

Moreover, the study found that 46% of respondents in Dibrugarh and 46.70% in Tinsukia are habituated to tobacco chewing while 30% of respondents in Dibrugarh and 15.70% in Tinsukia have the habit of consuming of alcohol. These habits are found to have negative impact on health conditions of workers in the surveyed tea gardens. Women workers are found to be not accustomed to such habits. This finding of the study put together the picture of socially constructed gendered association of men with the habits such as tobacco chewing and consumption of alcohol.

Table No-11: Habits prevalent in the Tea gardens causing Health Hazards

	District of the Respondent			
	Dibrugarh		Tinsukia	
	Habits of the Respondent		Habits of the Respondent	
	Number	%	Number	%
1.Tobacco	138	46.0%	140	46.7%
2.Ganja	5	1.7%	2	.7%
3. Alcohol	10	3.3%	5	1.7%
4.None	47	15.7%	83	27.7%
5. Nut	1	.3%	5	1.7%
1 & Ganja	0	0	6	2.0%
1 & Smoking	2	.7%	2	.7%
1 & Alcohol	90	30.0%	47	15.7%
1 & Nut	0	0	4	1.3%
1 & 2 & Alcohol	5	1.7%	3	1.0%
1 & Smoking & Alcohol	2	.7%	3	1.0%

* Source: Field Survey

3.11.3 Consultation in case of Illness:

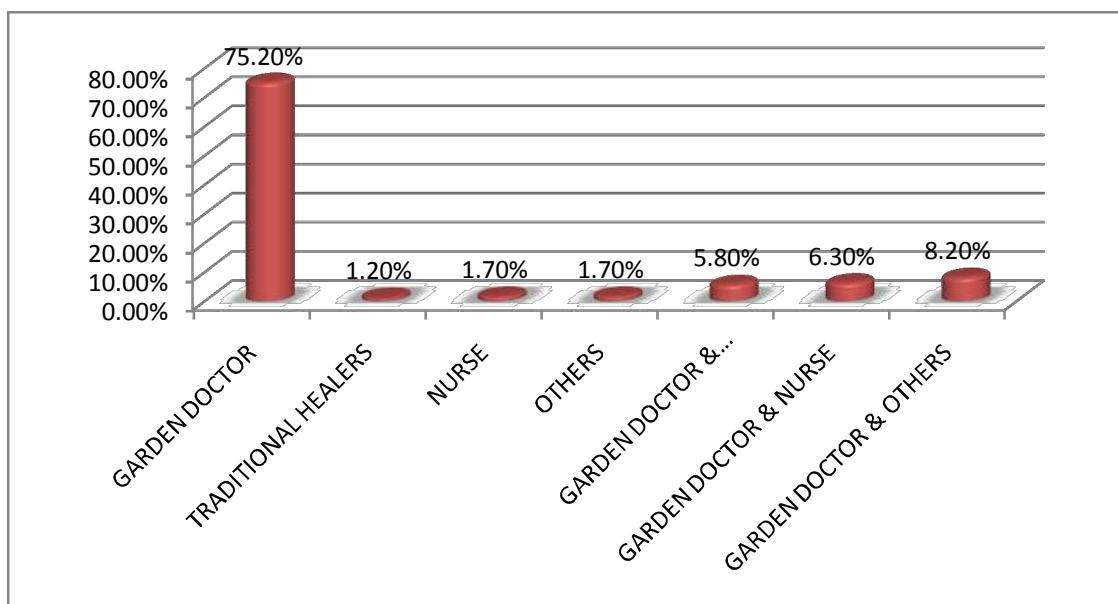


Figure-77: Consultation in case of Illness

In the times of illness, 75.20% of the respondents are found to consult the doctors employed in the tea gardens while 8.20% stated that they consult garden doctors along with ‘others’. ‘Others’ signifies traditional medicine providers.

3.11.4 Condition of Tea Garden Hospital:

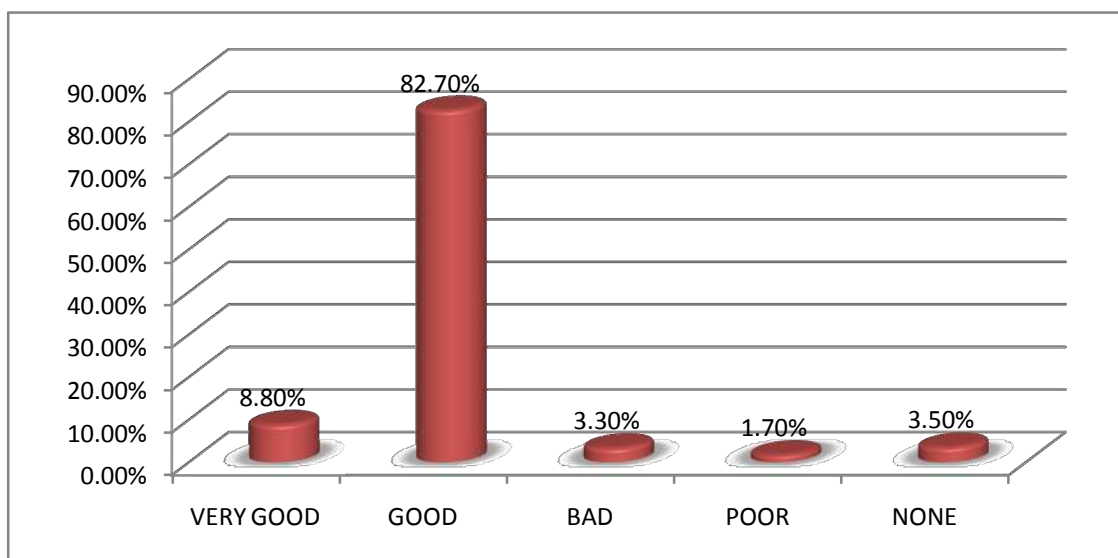


Figure 78: Condition of Tea Garden Hospital

82.70% of respondents stated that hospitals in the gardens are in good condition. They mentioned that they could avail free medical facilities for their commonly occurred health issues like cold, cough, fever, diarrhoea, body pain. However, it was also found that many of the respondents have never visited a hospital other than the garden hospital. Therefore, the worker's assessment of the garden hospital to be in 'good' condition is a subject of further research.

3.12. Social Customs and Culture:

This section is a brief outline of the festivals celebrated in the tea gardens and also an attempt to deliberate upon the practices of witchcraft in the surveyed tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts.

3.12.1 Celebration of Festivals:

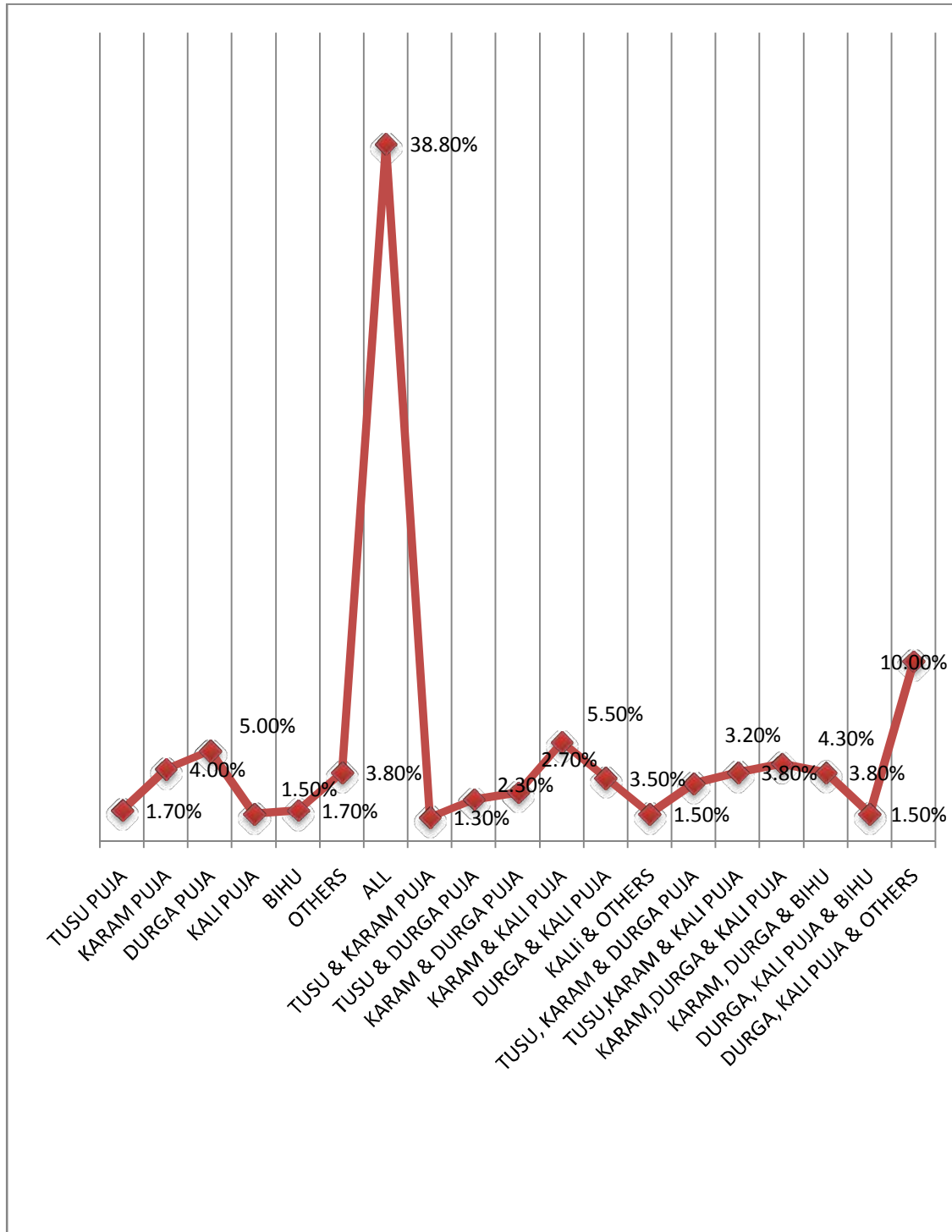


Figure-79: Celebration of Festivals

38.80% of the respondents stated that they celebrate the festivals of Tusu Puja, Karam Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Bihu, and others (other festival such as Christmas, Holi, Shiva Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja and others). The survey further found Tusu Puja and Karam Puja to be the main festivals of the tea community, however it was also found that they equally celebrate the festival of Bihu. This context when analysed from the diasporic and migration narratives leads one to argue that the celebration of Bihu, amongst the tea community, is an attempt to reinstate a sense of belongingness to the greater 'Assamese' identity in the state and society.

3.12.2 Practice of Witchcraft in the Community:

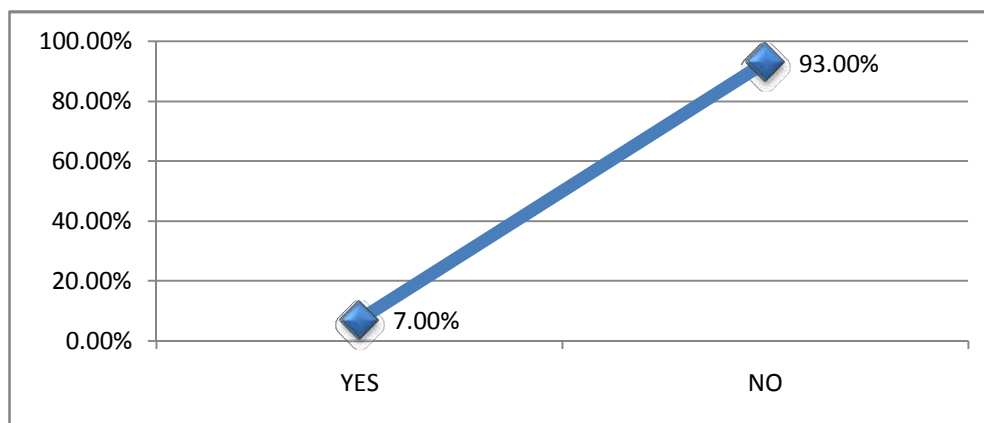


Figure-80: Presence of witchcraft

The data shows that witchcraft is almost non-existent in the surveyed tea gardens (93% workers had denied the prevalence of it). However, contradictory to this context the survey finds that a majority of workers know and believe in it. Further, 7% workers confirm the occurrence of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens of both the districts.

3.12.3 Instances of Witchcraft Known:

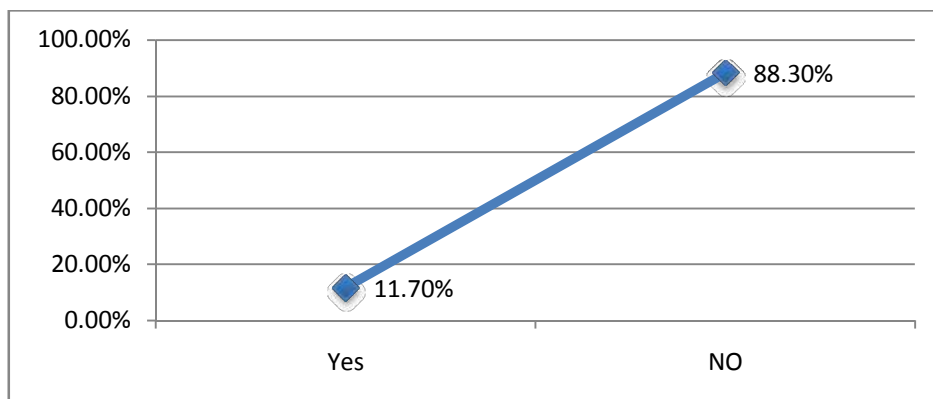


Figure-81: Instances of Witchcraft Known

Majority of workers denied about any known instances of witchcraft (88.30%), while an average of 11.70% workers know about instances of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens. The survey highlights that it is prevalent in the practices of *Bej/Ojha* - a practice that is believed to magically treat ailments, personal and family problems, which includes issues of interpersonal relationships, family disputes, drives to bring good fortune and such other matters.

3.13. Civil Rights :

The section attempts to analyse the political participation of the workers in the surveyed tea gardens.

3.13.1 Voter Card and Ration Card:

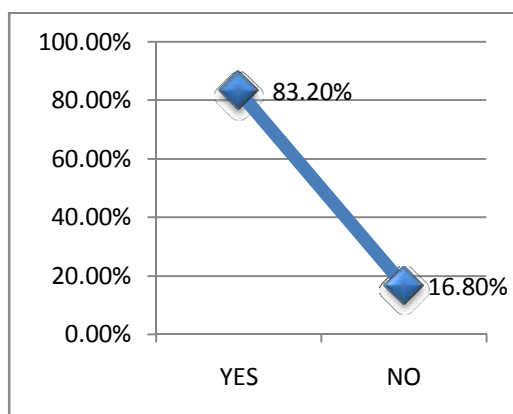


Figure 82: Voter Card

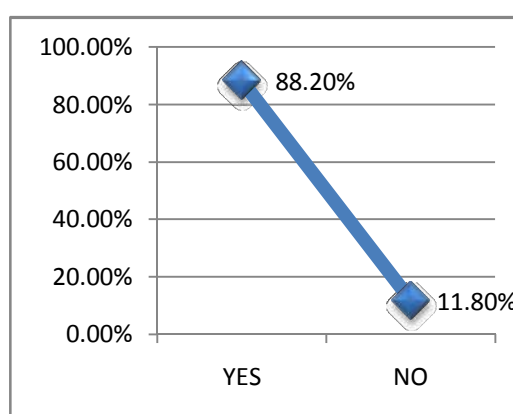


Figure-83: Ration Card

The survey shows that an average of 83.20% respondents in both the districts have voter cards, while, an average of 16.80% of respondents are found to be without voter cards. The findings of the survey reveal that ration cards are possessed by an average of 88.20% of workers; while an average of 11.80% workers are found to be without ration cards.

3.13.2 Dispute Resolution:

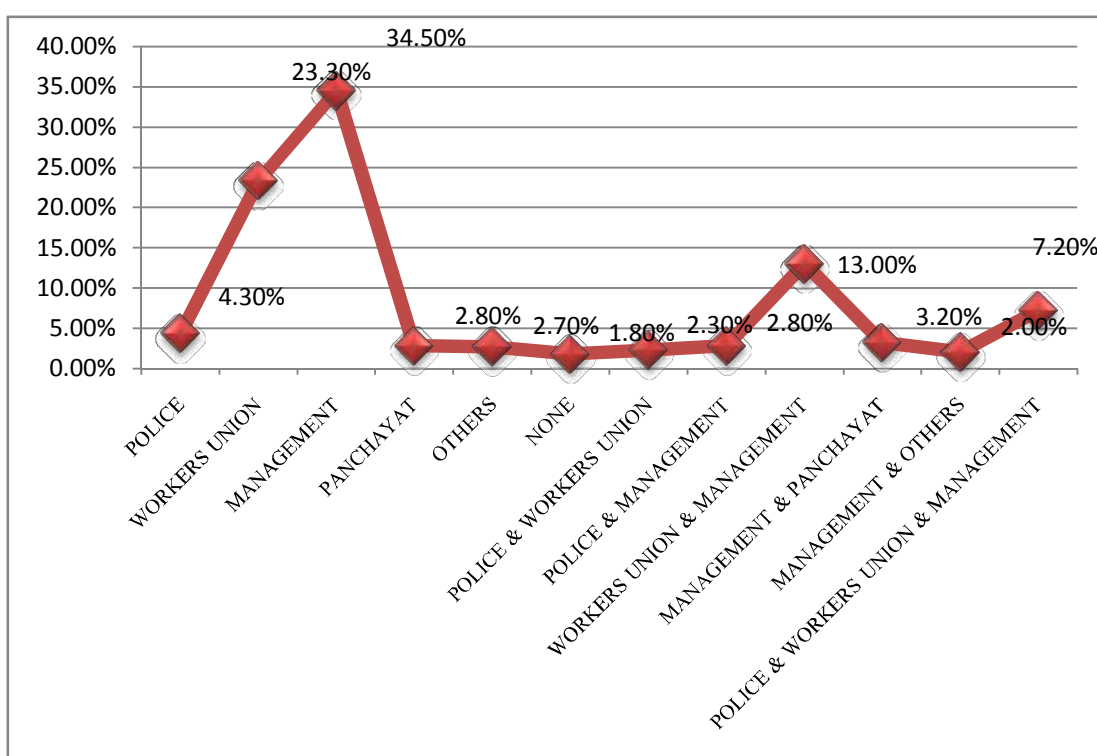


Figure-84: Dispute Resolution

The report demonstrates that majority of disputes in the tea gardens are settled by the management. For instance, 34.50% respondents are found to approach the management for dispute resolution, followed by an average of 23.30% respondents resorting to the workers union. Further, 13% respondents approached both management and workers union. Moreover, the study found that trivial matters are intervened by the

management and the workers union, while in major disputes respondents are found to seek help of state machineries. However, such instances were rare in the selected tea gardens.

3.13.3 Political Activities:

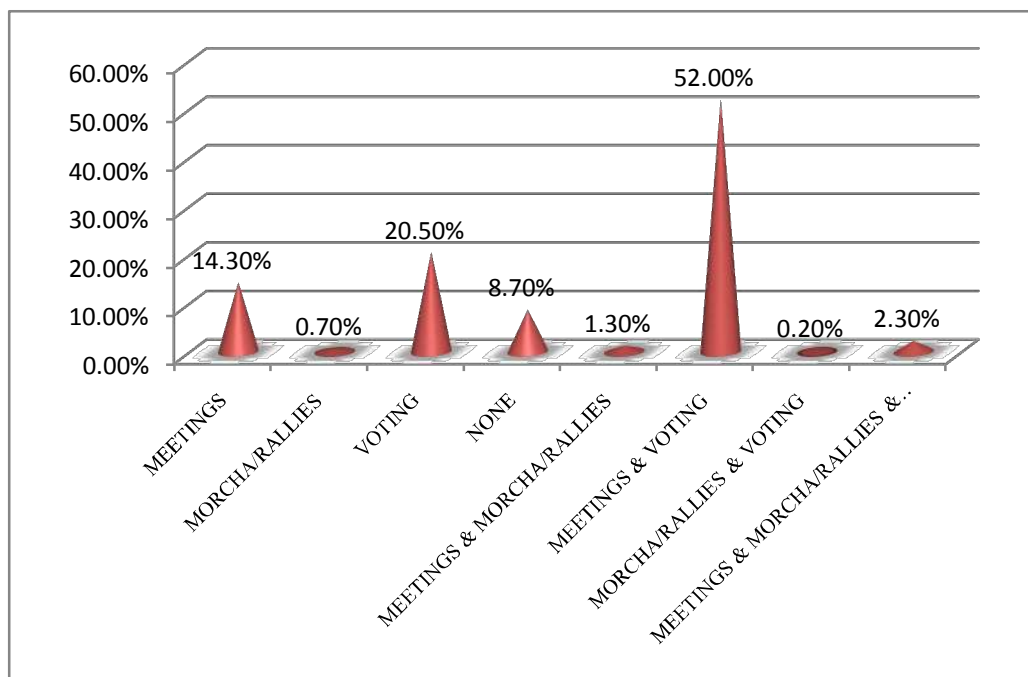


Figure-85: Political Activities

The report exhibits that 52% respondents are found to be participating in the voting process and political meetings while 20.50% of respondents are found to be participating solely in voting process. Amongst other parameters measuring the political activity amongst workers, the study found a low percentage of workers participating in *morchas/rallies* (0.70%). The politics of *morchas/rallies* outlay a dimension of political agency and consciousness. However, a dismal representation of data in the above graph portrays a lack of consciousness and agency amongst the respondents of the surveyed tea gardens.

3.13.4 Determination of Political Behaviour

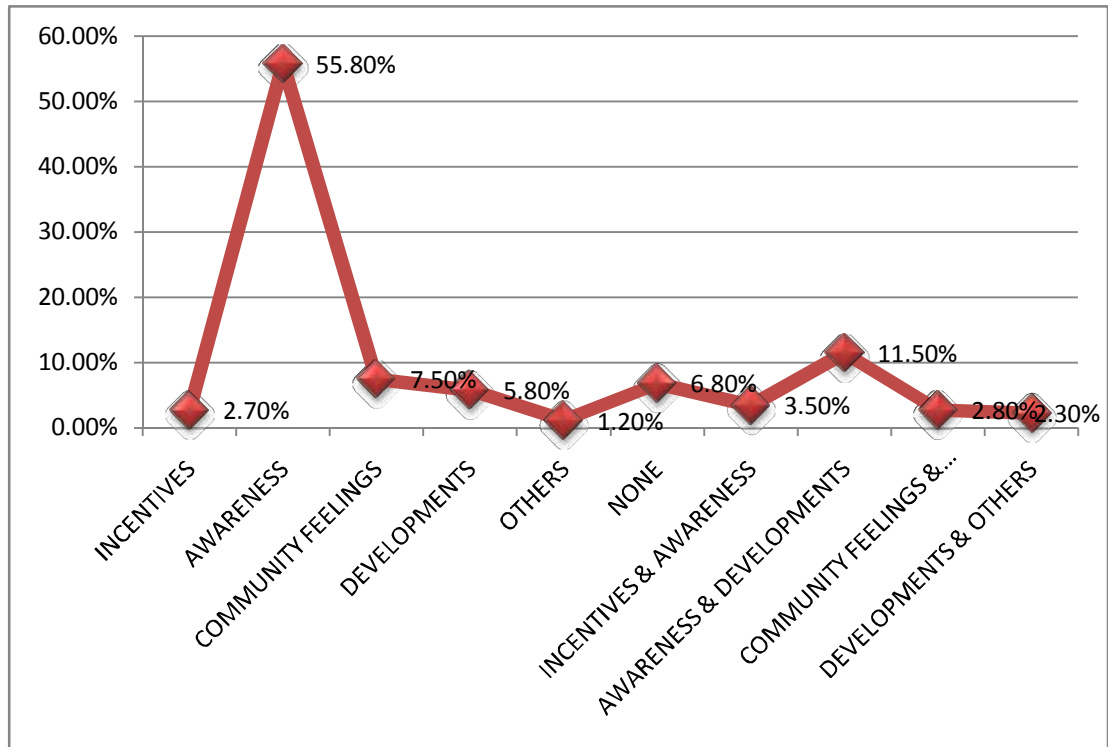


Figure-86: Determination of Political Behaviour

Figure-88 shows the factors determining the political behaviour of workers such as- participation in political meetings, voting and in *morchas*/rallies. The diagrammatic representation of the data shows that 55.80% of the respondents are aware about various political activities. 11.50% of respondents participate in political activities primarily due to political awareness and developmental expectation as promised by the political candidates.

CHAPTER - IV

Key Findings

This chapter outlines the major findings of the study of socio economic conditions of workers in the tea gardens.

Socio-Economic Conditions of Workers in the Tea Gardens: Evidences and Explanations

4.1. Personal Details:

- **Languages spoken and known:** The findings suggest that majority of workers speakonly Sadri as their medium of communication (73.70% in Dibrugarh and 62.70% in Tinsukia) and very few speak Assamese as the singular mode of communication, (0.30% in Dibrugarh and 1% in Tinsukia). However, a substantial percentage of respondents (13.7% in Dibrugarh and 24.70% in Tinsukia) were found to be speaking both the languages of Sadri and Assamese. Further, it was found that a significant number of respondents speak other languages viz. Hindi, Oriya, Sabar etc.
- **Assamese as a Medium of Communication:** The survey found that highest numbers of workers could speak Assamese (an average of 90.70%) while a nominal percentage of workers (3.80%) could not speak Assamese. Further, it was found that 5.50% understand the language, but could not speak. Moreover, observations of the survey indicate that Assamese is used as a medium of communication while interacting with the tea garden management or the members outside their community. However, on a daily basis Assamese is not used as a medium of communication.
- **Communities of the respondents:** The survey shows that a considerable percentage (14.20%) of respondents belongs to the ‘Tanti’ community followed by the workers (11.70%) who belong to the ‘Munda’ community. The study

found that many workers belong to a diverse range of communities such as Manjhis, Bhumij, Rajputs, Kumars, Konds, Kalindis, Kurmis, Mahalis, Oraons, Kols, Santhalis and Gondsetc.

- **Religion of the respondents:** The highest percentage of workers (an average of 96%) is found to be following the religion of Hinduism, followed by a minimal percentage of respondents (an average of 3.80%) who practice Christianity. The study found that only one respondent follows the religion of Muslim, who converted his religion after marriage.
- **Literacy Rate:** A higher percentage of workers are found to be illiterate in the selected tea gardens of both the districts (32.70% in Dibrugarh and 51.30% in Tinsukia), while 18.30% of workers in Dibrugarh and 11% workers in Tinsukia are found to be educated to the level of primary education.
- **Marital Status:** The highest numbers of respondents (74.30%) are married in the sampled tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia, while 17.80% respondents are unmarried. The study found a negligible percentage of respondents (0.70%) who are into 'live-in' relationships.
- **Age of Marriage and Other Details of Marriages:** The study found that highest number of respondents got married within the age group of 16-20 years (46.20%). This is followed by the respondents who got married in the age group of 21-25 years (34.1%). A minimal percentage of workers are found to be married at the age group of 26-30 years (7.5%). Further, the study found that a notable percentage of respondents (11%) got married in the age group of 10-15 years. This indicates the prevalence of child marriage in the sampled tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia. Moreover, the highest percentage of respondents who got married in the age group of 16-20 signifies that the members of tea community get married at an early age.
- **Details of Children of the Workers in the Tea-Gardens:** The findings of the survey show that the highest percentage of respondents have three children

(35.40% in Dibrugarh and 29.90% in Tinsukia) followed by the respondents having two children (34.60% in Dibrugarh and 26% in Tinsukia). It is found that a substantial number of respondents have four children (10.50% in Dibrugarh, and 16.20% in Tinsukia). There are a few workers having five children (3% in Dibrugarh and 4.90% in Tinsukia) and a very few workers have six children (0.40% in Dibrugarh and 2% in Tinsukia).

- **Age of Respondents at the Time of Giving Birth to the First Child:** The data reflects that a majority of the respondents have given birth to their first child between the age group of 21-25 years (42.30%). The respondents who are between the age group of 16-20 years stands at second place (33.80%). However, the percentages of respondents who gave birth to their first child between the age group of 31-35 and 36-40 years are found to be as low as 1.6% in Dibrugarh and 1% in Tinsukia.
- **Family Planning Measures:** The study found that 47.10% of respondents do not use any preventive measures for family planning. This considerable absence in the use of preventive measures indicates lack of awareness about family planning measures. The respondents of the reproductive age group are found to be typically using condoms (22.50%) and undergoing tubectomy (20.50%) as birth control methods.

4.2. Living Quarter Facilities in the Tea Gardens

- **Housing Accommodation:** Overall majority of workers (92%) resides within the premises of the tea gardens. About 8% of workers live outside the tea gardens.
- **Nature of houses:** Majority of workers live in kaccha-pucca houses (67.30%), while 18.50% live in tin roofed brick houses, further 11.80% respondents reside in thatched houses and only 2.30% workers reside in concrete houses.

- **House Rent Allowances:** Although the report indicates that a majority of workers (63%) are provided with house rent allowances, while a significant percentage (37%) of workers are not provided with the same.
- **Toilet Facilities:** The report indicates a dismal depiction of toilet facilities in the tea gardens that majority of workers (75.70%) are found to have single toilets without water facilities, followed by an average of 13.50% of respondents who defecate in open.
- **Sources of Water:** Overall a majority of respondents (88.30%) use hand pumps or tube wells as the major source of drinking water, followed by stored water sources (6.20%), water taps (4.30%) and wells (1.20%).
- **Drinking Water:** Overall 88.5% respondents collect drinking water from hand pumps or tube wells, while 6.7% collect it from stored sources, and 4.8% consume from running water sources. Further, the data found a severe lack of drinking water filtration. Moreover, it is found that the drinking water had never been tested for purity.
- **Distance to Sources of Water:** The data found that 96.50% of workers walk less than a kilometer to collect water and 3.20% workers walk for one kilometer, while 0.20% of respondents walk for two kilometers, and 0.20% respondents walk for three kilometers to collect water.
- **Person Responsible for Collection of Water:** The data found that the primary responsibility of collecting water is entrusted on women. The data shows that women (represented as the category of wife) are primarily responsible for collection of water (35.20%), followed by the category of 'husband and wife' (21%) who shoulder the responsibility of water collection. The category of 'wife and daughter' (15.80%) and the category of 'daughter' (5.20%) are also found to be responsible for this task. However, only 3.20% husbands and 2% sons are found to be responsible for the collection of water. An average of 2.80% of mother and mother in laws, 2% of 'wife and mother' and 1.80% of 'relatives' collected water for the family.

- **Provision of Electricity:** The data indicates that the provision of electricity is provided by the tea companies to 33.20% of the respondents, while it shows that electricity is provided to an average of 48% respondents by the government and further, it finds that 18.80% respondents are living without the provision of electricity.
- **Ration System:** The data shows that a majority of workers (86.80%) are provided with rice and wheat as the major items of ration, followed by 5.20% workers who attain rice as ration, while 5.20% workers is found to be not receiving any ration, only 2% workers get a combination of rice, wheat and kerosene as ration, and 0.80% workers receive a combination of rice and kerosene as ration.

4.3. Workers in the Private Space:

- **Division of Labour:** The report highlights the social construction of gender and work. It shows that allocation and division of varied works are dependent on the discrete gender categories (men and women). It indicates that the management and availability of water within the family is categorically a work typically ascribed to women. Further, it shows that a major percentage of women (an average of 62% in both the districts) to be contained in the work of cooking. It enunciates that work between men and women are socially divided, for example- work of cooking, nurturing and caring [taking care of family members] is constructed to be women's work and those like fencing, repairing of house, grazing cattle is constructed to be men's work. Hence, the report indicates an inherent and normalized presence of sexual division of labour embedded within the societal structures of the surveyed tea gardens.
- **Alcohol Consumption:** The report indicates the rampant consumption of alcohol amongst workers (69.5%), while 30.50% workers stated that they do not consume alcohol. Further, the data found a co-relation between masculinity and consumption of alcohol. It was found that the habit of 'consuming alcohol' exists more amongst men (an average of 24.7% father/father-in-law, 27.5%

Husbands), while the percentages of women (an average of 2.8%) who drink alcohol are relatively less.

- **Financial Management:** The report elucidate that although all the respondents (men/women) were wage earners, however, economic decisions within the family are predominantly controlled by men. Overall a majority of men (35.50%) within the category of ‘husband’ are found to be dealing and controlling monetary decisions within the family, followed by the category ‘wife’ (26%), while 22.30% elders within the family are found to be regulating and controlling the same. Further, 14.70 % respondents shared responsibility of monetary management between the spouses. Therefore, the report demonstrates an embedded culture of patriarchy that is contained in the social milieu of the studied tea gardens. The data, henceforth highlights that gender equality in the society cannot be achieved through a single-dimensional aspect of women’s economic independence.
- **Savings Account:** The data found that overall an average of 59% workers claimed to have a deposit account in banks, post office and in other forms such as in cooperative and self-help groups. Further, the study reveals that a significant percentage of respondents (35%) avail no formal means of savings.
- **Family Disputes:** The data found that disputes within families are absent amongst 60% workers, while it found to be existing amongst 40% workers. Further, the report indicates consumption of alcohol as the major reason for family disputes (38.80%), followed by monetary decisions and management (29.20%). Moreover, 9.60% workers quarreled for problems related to children and a similar percentage of workers for both monetary matters and consumption of alcohol (9.60%). This is followed by 5.80% workers who stated monetary matters and children to be the source of family disputes, while 2.10% stated health matters to be a reason of family disputes.

- **Domestic Violence:** The data shows that a significant percentage of workers (60.70%) stated the absence of domestic violence, while 39.30% of workers confirmed the presence of violence within the private space. The study found verbal abuse (94.10%) as one of the primary forms of domestic violence followed by physical violence (3.40%). Further, 2.50% workers said about both physical and verbal abuse to exist within their private space. Therefore the study enunciates about the constructed and ‘normalized’ nature of verbal and physical violence exerted on women within the private spaces.

4.4. Work Details:

- **Nature of Employment:** Majority of workers in the study area are permanent workers (73%), while, about 27% are casual/temporary workers.
- **Nature of Work:** Data on the nature of work reveal that almost 50.50% of workers are engaged in plucking of tea leaves, followed by workers appointed in factory, spraying, repairing of machinery, digging of drains, felling of trees, in executive bungalows, field water provider, line *chowkidar* (23.20%). The remaining workers are shown to be segregated along different kinds of works such as pruning (1.70%), driver (0.80), helper (2.80%), nursery worker (2.00%), both plucking and pruning (9.00%), both plucking and *khulla* (0.70%), both plucking and factory, executive bungalows, spraying, repairing of machinery, digging of drains, felling of trees, field water provider, line *chowkidar*.
- **Joining Age at Work:** It is found that majority of workers (49.70%) joined work between the age group of 16 to 20 years, followed by workers joining work between the age group of 21 to 25 years, while a significant percentage of workers join work between the age group of 10 to 15 years. The data reveal that a few tea gardens have the provisions for employment of children above the age of 14 years with the consent of parents. The study further found instances of *chokri hazira* where in girls below the age of 18 years are recruited for works such as plucking and packaging. The wages of this category of workers (who

are engaged in *chokri hazira*) are less than the regular daily wages in the tea gardens.

- **Calculation of Wages:** The data reveals that the wages of highest numbers of workers are calculated for every 12 days (96.50%), while wages for 0.50% workers are calculated per week. The study found that Sunday wages of the workers is not calculated in the gardens.
- **Gender Differences in Wages:** The data do not find major differences in the payment of wages between the two selected categories of gender - men and women. An amount of INR 126 is found to be the daily wages of 78% women workers and 74.30% men workers. However minuscule differences found in the payment of wages (for INR 115 is paid to 11.70% women workers and to 15.30% men workers) is primarily due to the nature of work and the different wage policies followed by various tea companies.
- **Working and Break Timings:** The findings reveal that the highest percentage of workers (91%) works for eight hours a day. It was found that the work hours vary depending on the nature of work. Further, during the peak seasons (June to October) workers have to engage in extra hours of work. The study show that the break timing are determined by the management and varies across garden. However, the majority of workers have break timings from 12.00 to 1.00 pm.
- **Leave Rules:** The data shows that leave rules exist in the highest numbers of surveyed tea gardens (92.80%). Workers are found to be provided with sick and maternity leave. However, it is found that in cases where sick leave exceeded a total number of 14 days in a year, leave is granted without wages. Further, it is found that maternity leave is granted during the post delivery period for three months only to permanent women workers. The survey found that if women workers are considered for pre-delivery leave; it is granted as leave without wages. Moreover, women workers reported that they work in the tea gardens till their last stage of pregnancy. Further, in some tea gardens it is found that the

provision of maternity leave is applicable only for two children. Therefore, the study highlights that leave rules are determined by the managements of the tea gardens.

4.5. Welfare Provisions

- **Provision of Provident Fund:** Majority of workers are endowed with the provisions of provident fund (89.70%), while a minimal percentage (10.30%) of workers is not covered under the provisions of provident fund.
- **Medical Benefits:** The survey found that a larger percentage of workers (92.70%) are granted with medical benefits while a negligible proportion of respondents (an average of 7.30% in both the district) are not provided with the same. The survey further reveals that hospitals and dispensaries within the gardens are equipped only to address minor health issues such as cold and fever. Therefore, the survey found that hospitals and dispensaries in most tea gardens are inadequate to conduct child delivery (normal and c-section deliveries) and other important surgeries (gall-bladder, appendicitis and such other major operations). Further, the survey found conditional medical benefits for casual/ temporary workers that they are entitled only during their payroll period.
- **Bonus:** The survey finds that the provision of bonus in the form of 'monetary assistance' is a significant provision of the tea garden, and is given irrespective of permanent or casual workers.

4.6. Workers Union:

- **Presence of Workers Union:** The presence of workers union is found in the majority of the selected tea gardens (85%). However, it is found that a stark majority of workers are not the members of Workers' Union (93.20%).

- **Advantages of Workers Union:** Overall a majority of respondents are unaware about the advantages of a workers union, however a significant percentage of workers outline the wage benefits (17.80%), work place conditions and comfort (16.80%) as some of the advantages of workers union.

4.7. Workplace Facilities:

- **Sanitation:** The survey found a severe lack of sanitation facilities in the work sites (89.30%). Further, a small percentage (10.70%) of workers affirmed to the availability of sanitation facilities, particularly highlighting the factories, in selected tea gardens. Further, the survey outlines that the non-availability of sanitation facilities is a serious concern and this poses a question on the level of health and gender sensitivity of the tea garden authorities.
- **Drinking Water:** The survey found that drinking water is provided in the plantation sites of the surveyed tea gardens (76.70%). Further, it is found that maximum numbers of workers (96.50%) are provided with tea at the plantation work site. However, a significant percentage of respondents (an average of 92.20%) stated that the nature of the tea provided is salted.
- **Work Essentials:** The survey findings reveal that average of 32% respondents are provided with all the amenities (raincoat, *jaapi*, umbrella, boots and gloves) necessary at work sites-, followed by 25% workers who are provided with umbrella and boots. Further, since 6% respondents were engaged in other spheres of work (workers engaged in factory of the tea gardens and as line *chowkidar*), hence they are not provided with any of these amenities.
- **Medical Facilities:** Survey found the availability of medical facilities in maximum numbers of the selected tea gardens (81%).
- **Crèche:** The provision of crèche is present by a majority of workers in the surveyed tea gardens (80.30%), while 19.70% workers are denied the facility of crèche in the selected tea gardens. However, the survey found the inadequate infrastructural quality of crèches. Thereby it is found that crèches are not in

good conditions and in many instances are non-functional. Further the study observes that crèches are not surrounded by fencing in a number of selected tea gardens.

4.8. Educational Facilities:

- **Enrolment of Children in Schools:** Overall a majority of children of workers are enrolled and found to be going to schools (75.10%), while a considerable percentage of children refrain from going to schools (24.90%). Further, 42.00% of boys and 44.60% of girls are not sent to schools, but a proportionate gender analysis of the data shows a minimal percentage of gender gap between the percentage of boys and girls enroll in schools.
- **Kindergarten or Anganwadi Schools:** Majority of workers (93.20%) confirmed the presence of kindergarten or *anganwadis* schools in the surveyed tea gardens, while an average of 6.80% respondents state about the absence of such schools in the gardens.
- **Primary Schools:** The survey findings show that a majority of workers (94.50%) have affirmed the presence of primary schools in the surveyed tea gardens, while 5.50% of workers had denied the provision of primary schools in the surveyed tea gardens.
- **High Schools:** The data shows a dismal representation of high schools in the nearby areas of the surveyed tea gardens, that is - an average of 59.70% respondents said about the absence of high schools, while only an average of 40.30% respondents said about the existence of high schools in the nearby areas.

4.9. Health Details:

- **Menstrual Health:** The survey highlights the lack of toilet facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, which henceforth poses a threat to the menstrual health and hygiene among women workers. Further, the survey found

that most women workers use clothes instead of sanitary napkin as a measure to absorb menstrual blood, and that they are unaware of the fact that usage of unclean clothes might lead to serious health issues.

- **Diseases Suffered:** The study finds the presence of various diseases and health problems in the selected tea gardens- fever, cold, cough, jaundice, high blood pressure, gastroenteritis, dysentery and diarrhoea, stomach disorder, and body ache.
- **Doctors or Traditional Healers:** The survey findings reflect that in case of any illness majority of workers consulted garden doctors (75.20%), while a minimal percentage of workers (8.20%) consulted garden doctors along with ‘others’ (traditional herbal medicine providers).

4.10. Social Customs and Culture:

- **Festivals Celebrated:** Overall majority of workers (38.80%) celebrate all the festivals in the tea gardens (Tusu Puja, Karam Puja, Durga Puja, Kali Puja, Bihu, and others [Christmas, Holi, Shiva Puja, Lakshmi Puja, Saraswati Puja and others]). The survey found Tusu Puja and Karam Puja to be the main festivals of the tea tribe community; however it also found that they equally celebrate the festival of Bihu, which the survey highlights as a conscious attempt to reinstate a sense of belongingness and membership within the construct of ‘Assamese’ identity.
- **Presence of Witchcraft:** The data shows that witchcraft is almost non-existent in the surveyed tea gardens (93% workers had denied the prevalence of it). However, contradictory to this context the survey finds that a majority of workers know and believe in it. Further, 7% workers confirm the occurrence of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens of both the districts.
- **Instances of Witchcraft Known:** Majority of workers denied about any known instances of witchcraft (88.30%), while an average of 11.70% workers knowabout instances of witchcraft in the selected tea gardens. The survey

highlights that it is prevalent in the practices of *Bej/Ojha* - a practice that is believed to magically treat ailments, personal and family problems, which includes issues of interpersonal relationships, family disputes, drives to bring good fortune and such other matters.

4.11. Civil Rights:

- **Voter Card:** The survey shows that an average of 83.20% respondents in both the districts have voter cards, while, an average of 16.80% of respondents are found to be without voter cards.
- **Ration Card:** The findings of the survey reveal that ration cards are possessed by an average of 88.20% of workers; while an average of 11.80% workers are found to be without ration cards.
- **Resolving Disputes:** The report demonstrates that majority of disputes in the tea gardens are settled by the management. For instance, 34.50% respondents are found to approach the management for dispute resolution, followed by an average of 23.30% respondents resorting to the workers union. Further, 13% respondents approached both management and workers union.
- **Political Activities:** The report exhibit that a majority of workers participated both in the process of voting and political meetings. An average of 52% respondents were found to be participating in the voting process and political meetings, followed by an average of 20.50% respondents who were found to be participating solely in voting process. Amongst other parameters measuring the political activity amongst workers, the study found a low percentage of workers participating in *morchas*/rallies (0.70%).
- **Determination of Political Behaviour:** The report shows political awareness to be the major determining factor of participation of workers in political activities (an average of 55.80% respondents in both the districts).

CHAPTER - V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 The Study: A Brief Sketch:

The easternmost State of Assam has a total geographical area of 78,438 square kilometre and a population of 3.12 crore as per the Census of 2011. The state produces the largest quantity of tea in India and an estimated 17 percent workers are engaged with the tea industry. The economy of the state is largely dependent on the tea industry. The history of the tea industry can be traced back to the 19th century, which was historically facilitated by the colonial administration. Moreover, workers in the tea gardens were brought as indentured labour to Assam. They were primarily brought from now Jharkhand, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha and now Chhattisgarh.

Although, debates and probes of the 19th century socio-economic positions of the tea gardens workers have portrayed an improved picture, however the present survey finds a grim reality of the socio economic condition of workers in the 21st century. The present study conducted a field work in 20 tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia (10 each). A total number of 600 respondents were selected from the sample tea gardens- 300 respondents in both the districts, taking an equal representation of the two gender categories- 150 men and 150 women. The study attempted to look into the socio-economic conditions of the workers in the tea gardens. Further, the study made an attempt to analyse various aspects of tea garden through a gender analysis framework. It attempted to examine and document the social processes and economic activities which is dependent as well as instrumental for the development, progress, or stagnation of the social and economic milieu in the tea gardens.

The profile of the workers essentially outlines two grim realities- a) incidence of high rate of illiteracy amongst workers in the tea gardens, and b) high rate of early marriage. The study shows absence of provision of toilet with ample water facilities in the housing accommodations of the workers in surveyed tea gardens. Moreover, adequate method of filtration of drinking water is absent and workers rely on conventional ways of filtering the drinking water.

Further, the social constructs and processes embedded within the tea gardens are found to have deeper impacts on socialisation of and internalization by workers both within the private and public space. An elaboration and interplay of gender constructs found that work within the private spaces is allocated and divided based on the two selected gender categories (men or women). Women are allocated the work of cooking, nurturing, caring, managing and collecting water, while men are found to be assigned with works like fencing, repairing, grazing of cattle, financial management etc. The study has found that the gendered socialisation and internalization have inherently led to the normalisation of violence within the private spaces.

The social constructs and processes that manifest in the public spaces have found that, despite women being an equal proportion of the workforce, it is men who have control over the decisions of workers' union, negotiation with the management. Further, the study found that women workers are primarily engaged in the plantation sites, while men are found to be recruited less in the factory work.

The study found that workers are provided with both maternity leave and sick leave. Maternity leave with wages is provided during the post-delivery for a period of three months, while pre-maternity leave is granted without wages. Hence, the data shows gendered attitude and lack of gender sensitivity towards women workers. Further sick leave exceeding a period of 14 days in a year, is granted as leave without wages. The study found a range of welfare provisions for the workers in the tea gardens- Provident Fund, Medical Benefits and Bonus.

Moreover, the study reflects an absence of sanitation facilities in the plantation sites of the tea gardens, which henceforth poses serious threat to the health of women. Further, the study found that workers majorly participated both in the process of voting and political meetings. The study finds that a majority of respondents have both ration and voter cards.

5.2. Recommendations:

In the light of the findings of the study, a number of recommendations are suggested to improve the socio-economic conditions of the workers in the tea gardens.

- **Policy Formulations:** The study recommends for further state interventions through necessary policy formulations for the greater interests of the workers of tea gardens.
- **Increase in the Wages of Workers:** The daily of wage of INR 126 is found to be inadequate and insufficient for the daily sustenance of workers, thereby the study recommends increase in the present rate of wages.
- **Medical Benefits:** The study recommends that medical benefits be provided to every workers irrespective their nature of employment (Permanent or Temporary/Casual)
- **Maternity Benefits:** The study recommends that maternity benefits with wages be granted to both permanent and casual women workers. Further it recommends for the mandatory provision of pre-delivery maternity leave with wages.
- **Toilet Facilities at Work-sites of the Plantations:** The study recommends for adequate provisions of toilet facilities be made available in the plantation sites of the tea gardens.
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5.3. Limitations of the Study:

The study has the following limitations:

- **Time Frame:** The study had to be conducted within a short time of one year involving translation of the interviews taken into both Assamese and English from the Sadri language.
- **Accessibility and Resources:** The study had to be conducted with limited time, and resources and constraints of accessibility.

PART - B:
**Listening to the Voices of Women Workers in the Tea Gardens of
Assam: A Glimpse into their Lives through Oral Narratives**

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PART - B

**Listening to the Voices of Women Workers in the Tea
Gardens of Assam: A Glimpse into their Lives
through Oral Narratives**

6.1: Introduction:

As a colonial industrial venture, the contribution of the tea industry of Assam towards the economic growth of the state is noteworthy. The tea industry continues to flourish through the utilization of the labour potential of women who form the bulk of the workforce in the industry's plantations. Despite the collapse of the colonial regime, the socio-economic conditions of the women workers have failed to portray a marked degree of positive change even in the post-colonial era. As an industry heavily reliant on female labour, it would be significant to explore the strong entrenchment of patriarchy in the economic, social and cultural constructs in the lives of the women workers in the tea gardens of Assam. Studies on plantations have ranged from highlighting the pioneering efforts of the colonial planter community reflected in the writings of Percival Griffiths and H.A. Antrobus to that of Marxist perspectives reflected in the works of Amalendu Guha, Rana P. Behal, Bikash Nath, Prabhu Mohapatra, Sharit Kumar Bhowmik and Nitin Verma. Other themes in plantation related research in Assam include commodity fetishisation of women's labour in the tea gardens of North Bengal as articulated by Piya Chatterjee, the issue of tea labour women's position within the realm of the working class woman by Samita Sen and the interlink between the beginning of tea industry and ideas of 'improvement' and 'progress' among the natives in Assam by Jayeeta Sharma. However, tremendous emphasis on the archives and observation of the workings of a plantation regime in the studies mentioned above have tended to deviate focus from retrieving the agency of women workers of the region's tea industry.

It will be interesting to assess working women's ideas about life, work and gendered roles in the plantations through the concept of memory. Against such backdrop, the study seeks to examine patriarchy not just as a significant factor in shaping the current identity of women workers in the tea plantations but the very internalization of the subject by women themselves. It would be interesting to look at the role of the women as equal participants in the patriarchal mode and not just as

passive victims in the construction of their own identity both within the realm of family and workplace. In the light of the absence of the labouring women's voices in the written sources of the archives, one of the ways to enable the women to become agents in the creation of their own history and identity is by resorting to documenting their oral narratives. Hence, particular emphasis is laid on the in-depth interviews conducted among women of varied age group who worked as workers in the selected tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts of Assam. Through this Report, an attempt has been made to record the oral narratives of women and allow the reader to have a glimpse into their lives and working conditions. However, in view of research ethics and for the sake of protecting the identities of the respondents as well as some of the interviewers who belonged to the tea community, names were not mentioned and a generic interviewer-respondent framework is followed throughout the excerpts in the report.

6.2: Life in the Plantations: The Journey of the women workers:

Tea industry is a labour intensive industry. From the very beginning, the industry in Assam faced severe labour shortage. In Assam, a "class seeking wage employment on regular basis was absent."⁴⁶ (Singh, 2001:17). The local communities of Assam were mostly occupied in cultivation of paddy and therefore, were not interested in involving themselves in the regimented routine of working in the tea plantations. The people were also averse to the idea of the local women working as workers or pluckers in the tea gardens. Men were more interested to work in official and clerical positions but not as workers in the field. Hence, there arose a pressing need to recruit workers from outside Assam.

In the beginning the colonial planters brought workers from China to work in the field at much higher wages, but as the industry expanded and the demand for labour increased, there was a renewed search for cheap labour within India. After failing to

⁴⁶ Phukan, U. (1984). *The Ex Tea Garden Population in Assam*. New Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation as cited in Singh, Navinder K. (2001). *Role of Women Workers in the Tea Industry of North East India*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company.

procure local labour, the tea planters of Assam decided to import labour from distant areas such as Bihar, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa, Chota Nagpur etc. It was only after 1850, that labour recruitment for Assam plantation began in an organised manner. A landless and poverty ridden class of tribal and semi-tribal peasants were brought on the pretext of giving jobs in the plantations. The workers were bound by harsh contractual terms during the colonial times so as to ensure that they could not leave the plantations before expiry of their terms. Recruitment of indented labour was done mainly on a family basis and through Garden Sardars. The Sardars, in most cases were village headmen who enjoyed the confidence of the people and thus, through them, a large number of men, women as well as children were recruited and employed in the plantations. When a 'Sardar' is assigned to bring a group of people into the tea plantations for recruitment that group of people is referred to as his Challan. This can be exemplified from the following excerpts:

Interviewer: From where did your parents and grandparents come?

Respondent: My parents had come from the 'desh'.

Interviewer: Desh, means from where?

Respondent: Orissa

Interviewer: How were they brought here? Were they brought by ship?

Respondent 1: They were brought by train. My father was brought in the challan.....

My father came back after working for three to six months after which he was again taken to work. The Britishers wanted to establish the tea gardens, for which the forest had to be cleared. And so, my father was brought from the desh.

Generations of our family have been working in Assam. We grew old here. Now my children are working here and after that my grandchildren will work here too. We won't get any place there even if we go back to the desh.

Respondent 2: At that time, my father was young and his grandparents were brought. The people earlier were naïve were 'nt they? The bura and buri (old couple) had gone to the market, from where they were put in train. My father was with them, where will they leave him? So they also brought him along with them.

From this excerpt, it can be deciphered how the indented workers were forced to work in the newly established Tea Plantations of the colonial times with strict terms and conditions. They were cheated on the pretext that they will become rich working in Assam and can improve their living conditions compared to that in the *desh*. Since recruitment was done on a family basis, generations after generations of the tea community stayed in Assam and have started to identify themselves as part of the greater Assamese community. However, during the interviews it has been found that a section of the people regretted how they were forced by destiny to leave their 'homeland' and settle in a new place in harsh conditions. This can be reflected through the following excerpt:

Interviewer: When your parents and grandparents were brought here, what were they told?

Respondent: Earlier, people used to say, my in-laws were brought by the challan. They were told that in Assam, money falls from the tea leaves. There is a lot of money in Assam.

The people were poor in the desh, so they were cheated. A lot of people have said this to me that there is plenty of money in Assam and after coming here, they regretted their decision of coming to Assam.

Here, one has to wake up in the morning and collect the leaves in the cane basket. We wouldn't even get time to eat. One has to cook the food at 12 at noon and then feed the kids and go to work. After coming from work, again look after the children and bathe them. In fact on many days there was nothing to eat at

all. Our parents would stay hungry and feed the kids... chana (cheakpeas) and panilao (bottle gourd)... they had to suffer very much.

During the course of conducting the interviews, the oral narrators remember snippets of their ancestral past or do not remember anything at all. However, many do remember the inhuman conditions in which their ancestors were brought to Assam or treated as they were converted into wage labour in the tea gardens. Even though the event of displacement made the narrators lose their roots to some extent, at the same time, there are some selective aspects of their past which the women narrators have held onto. Hence, holding onto certain memories associated with their roots seemed to play an important role in determining their present and to some extent, their future. Even when asked to recall the history of the community in terms of their construction as tea garden workers during the colonial era, many do not seem to recall vivid details of their own origins. However, most of them are aware of the origins of the community from the *desh*⁴⁷ although there is an absence of a specific reference to which place can exactly be identified as *desh*. Among those who did, they are aware of their ancestors' journey from different places like Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Dumka, Rourkela etc. while some using a general reference to the region of 'Orissa'.

6.3: Working environment: From Colonial to Post-Colonial Times:

Working conditions in the tea plantations differ from plantations to plantations and from management to management. A comparative analysis of working conditions of the women workers from colonial to post colonial times reflects a downward trend as experienced from the oral narratives. According to many of the respondents, the working conditions of the tea workers deteriorated from the British times to the present day. During interactions with the elderly women workers, it was found that life in the tea gardens and the working conditions during the time of *gora sahibs*⁴⁸ were much

⁴⁷ *Desh* refers to place of origin.

⁴⁸ *Gora Sahibs* refer to the British planters

better than the *kala sahibs*.⁴⁹ They had job guarantee, their working hours were less and their burden of work was minimal. They even got spare time to work in their own paddy fields. Even with fewer wage, they could manage their house-hold due to the good quality ration and other amenities provided by the colonial management. However in the post-colonial times, even when the wage structure improved, the ration and other amenities provided to them are not sufficient enough to run a household. One of the main reasons for this is that the present day tea companies have indulged in cost cutting and maximizing profit with the available resources. This is reflected from the following excerpts:

Interviewer: Earlier, what kind of work were you asked to do by the babu sahib?

Respondent: The babu-sahibs of earlier days gave us good work.

Interviewer: Did they care for you?

Respondent: O (yes) ... nowadays, managers do not care.....

Interviewer: How were the sahibs earlier and how are they now?

Respondent 1: Earlier they were good. The British were good; they were nice to the labour people. But nowadays, who would do so? However strong the sun may be, let people die. Who would care? If people are dying, let them die, they just need labour and the leaves. They need the leaves. In earlier days, if it kept raining for the whole day, they had a meter... they would give a leave for that day. If it kept raining for the whole day, they would give it an off day. There was so much love, but now it is not so.

Respondent 2: earlier, we used to do our agricultural work in the morning and then go to the garden. Even if we arrive at 9.00 am (which is late) for our assigned work in the garden, the management won't send us back. According to the requirement for e.g 15 kg, 16 kg or 20 kg, we would pluck leaves

⁴⁹ *Kala Sahibs* refers to the Indian planters

irrespective of time. But now things are different. Even if we arrive at 6.00am, they would send us back. Today, we do not have tea leaves like earlier... (lamented on the quality of leaves produced now..)

The above narrations show a transition of working conditions in the plantations from colonial times as 'good' compared to the present times.

6.3.1: Wage Structure: An Eye-Opener:

Being a labour intensive industry, the tea plantations employ a large number of both permanent and casual workers (male and female) who are given a meagre amount of 126 rupees which is almost half of the wage given to workers in other sectors. The wage structure changed considerably from the colonial times to the present times. Previously there was wide discrimination of wages between the male and the female workers which was sought to be rectified with the passing of the Equal Remuneration Act of 1975. However, even after the Act was passed, many of the employers in some tea gardens refused to pay equal wages to both the sexes. This condition is nevertheless no longer in existence. Many of the respondents said that they were recruited at a very young age with a minimum salary known as the *chokri hazira* (girl wage) which was almost half of the wage of women. The following excerpts give a glaring reflection of the sex discrimination of wages during the colonial times:

Interviewer: What was the salary of men and women?

Respondent 1: They used to get 17 rupees, women got 16 rupees and girls got 9 rupees 12 paise.

Respondent 2: When the British gave us work, they had given us the girl wage. The girl wage was less; we were paid 6 rupees and 6 paise. Now, there is no 6 paise, isn't it? We have 1 rupee, 2 rupees, 50 paise nowadays; but in those days, these weren't there. First, we were given the job to loosen and spread the soil. After that, we were given the wage that is paid to a woman. We were given the women wage when we grew up. We were paid 12 rupees then. The men were

paid 15 rupees and the women were paid 12 rupees. And the girls were paid 6 rupees and 44 paise.

When asked the reason behind the sex based wage discrimination, the respondents remarked that women worked less than men. This gives an impression of the internalization of the patriarchal structures by women themselves who were made to believe the sex based division of labour due to the socialization process as reflected in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Why were women paid less than men?

Respondent: Men worked more than women, that's why.

The present wage structure rests on the premise of equal distribution of wage between both male and female. However, there exists a system of payment of extra allowance based on additional plucking. It was also found that the workers were paid on a fortnightly basis with the Sunday wage excluded. This reflects the exploitation of labour that exists in the plantations where the remnants of the colonial regime mindset of exploit labour for profit still hovers around.

Interviewer: How much are they paid per kg of tea leaves?

Respondent: The present system of payment is based on the weight- based system. The workers have to pluck a specified amount of leaves. If a person plucks more than 24 kg, then they get a tip. Now the rate at present in our garden is Rs 126. If a person plucks 24 kg, then Rs 126 is fixed; that is during the peak season. But when it is not the peak season, the wage is Rs126 even if only 10 kg are plucked. Till 30 kg, the tip is fixed at two rupees and thirty paise. For 30 kg to 35 kg, the extra rate is two rupees and seventy paise.

Respondent: That is after they pluck 24 kg; that is the minimum which they have to pluck during the season time. Then after 24 kg, they are paid two rupees and from 30 kg to 35 kg, the rate is two rupees and thirty paise. And above 35 kg, they are given three rupees.

Interviewer: After how many days is the salary paid?

Respondent: Fourteen days.

Interviewer: Fourteen days. That means the Sunday wage is not included?

Respondent: That is not included.

From the above discussion it becomes apparent that although in terms of benefits the colonial regime was thought to be better than the present regime but in terms of equality of wages the present regime follows a much more democratic and equality principle. Apart from benefits and wages, working conditions in the tea plantations among the women workers must also be examined from a perspective of 'safe spaces'.

6.3.2: Sexual abuse: The Reality:

From the oral narratives taken during the process of the project, it has been revealed that there were instances of sexual harassment of women tea workers during the colonial period. The British planters took advantage of the illiterate, ignorant and poor workers and tried to exploit the women for their ulterior motives. The people were reluctant to raise a voice against the management for fear of losing their jobs and being thrown out of the tea gardens. During the colonial era there were no workers union or other platforms in which they could lodge complaints. But at present because of education and awareness, there are fewer instances of sexual harassment in the plantations. Fear of being sexually abused is often seen as one of the reasons behind why girls mostly prefer to work in the plantations as pluckers rather than in the bungalows. The following excerpts justify the above discussion:

Interviewer: have you heard of any instances of sexual harassment of women in the tea gardens?

Respondent 1: British sahibs were very fond of our girls. British men were not that good looking. However, our girls were very pretty.

British sahibs would then ask the sardar (supervisor) or the chowkidar (watchman) to send a particular girl to his bungalow the next day. He would say, "Chowkidar, send this girl to my bungalow". Sardar would then pass on the message to the parents of the girl saying, "Your girl is called to the bungalow for work". There were one or two sahibs like this, not everyone.

Respondent 2: They (British sahibs) call for work. Earlier people were frightened of the manager of the tea gardens. Now they (girls and boys) know to how read and write and they have formed associations. Now they are not scared. Earlier, sahibs were not scared; they did anything and everything at their own whim.

Interviewer: When incidents like this happened, didn't the people go and charge the sahibs?

Respondent: No, they did not go and charge the sahibs and if they did, they were thrown out of work or the line. Not everyone. There would be one out of hundred instances like this.

From an in-depth treatment of the subject through the narratives explored, what came to light is the fact that the women workers were more concerned about an improvement in their economic conditions of life in the plantations, preservation of their rights and protection of the plantations which they see as their lifeline rather than an understanding about issues of sexual abuse or wage discrimination.

6.4: Maternity Benefits for women in plantations: Provisions and Evidences:

Maternity Benefits form an essential part of social security and welfare facilities in the tea plantations which have a large concentration of female workers. Various benefits have been extended to the women workers in the tea plantations of Assam as per the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 including maternity leaves, provisions of crèche, pre-natal and post-natal care in the garden hospitals etc in addition to the benefits provided under the different policies and programmes of Government of Assam. The

Plantation Labour Act 1951 extended the benefits to three months leave with full pay, four weeks before and eight weeks after delivery.

Prior to the coming into effect of the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, there was no uniformity in the granting of maternity benefits to the women workers in the tea plantations. There were variations from estate to estate and management to management in the observance of these benefits. Records show that some plantations extended maternity leaves to three months with full pay while some others gave three months leave with half pay. There were also instances of some gardens providing maternity leaves up to six months with full pay. Some gardens also observed the practice of providing free meals in the garden hospital for three to six months to pregnant workers while there were also some who gave extra payment to pregnant workers.⁵⁰(Singh, 2001:99). Such discrepancies were sought to be removed and the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961 was passed to ensure uniformity in the matter. Henceforth, an average daily wage was to be paid for 12 weeks i.e., 4 weeks before and 8 weeks after delivery to women workers provided she had worked for at least 150 days in a year in the establishment.⁵¹ (Ibid, 2001:101). Hence maternity benefit was extended to casual or *faltoo* (casual) workers in the plantations as well. Observance of these benefits in the plantations can be substantiated with the following excerpt from one of the many interviews taken during the course of the project:

Interviewer: At the time of delivery, are women given leave before delivery or after that?

Respondent: They get leave from before delivery.

Interviewer: How many months of leave do they get?

Respondent: They get a leave of three months.

⁵⁰ Singh, Navinder K. (2001). *Role of Women Workers in the Tea Industry of North East India*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company.

⁵¹ Ibid.

When asked about the salary during leaves sought, they replied that salary is being paid irrespective of the number of days taken as maternity leave.

Interviewer: Do they get the salary for those days?

Respondent: Yes, that is given in 84 days.

Interviewer: And if it is more than 84 days?

Respondent: They get the wage for that.

Respondent: The number of days for which they cannot come, they need not come. If they go to the hospital, their name would be noted down there. After the delivery, 84 days of leave is fixed, after which if they can go to work, then they go and if they cannot, then they would be considered as being on leave.

When asked about the types of work assigned during pregnancy, some of the respondents replied that light works were assigned such as spraying medicines, collecting waste materials and in some cases, they have to continue with their regular jobs of plucking leaves.

Interviewer: Was light work assigned to you during pregnancy?

Respondent: Yes, light work was given.

Interviewer: What types of works were given to pregnant women?

Respondent: Spraying medicines and picking up waste materials.

Interviewer: How did you do the work in such a condition?

Respondent: Easy works were given. It is only now that plucking and ploughing is allotted.

6.4.1: Delivery in hospitals or at home: The better place:

There seems to be incongruence among most of the female respondents regarding the issue of child delivery in hospitals or at home. Despite provisions laid down under the Plantation Labour Act and facilities provided by the management, many of respondents, especially the elder women were in favour of child birth at home

with the help of *dais* or local mid-wives who are experienced but untrained and in most cases, illiterate. Because of this widespread practice, it has been found that many of the complicated deliveries sometimes lead to fatal consequences for both the mother and the child. Quite often, women in the tea gardens die of serious post- natal infections because of the unhygienic methods of delivery used by the *Dais*. However, of late, women workers of the tea gardens have been encouraged to use the estate hospitals for child births and have been made aware about the best practices by various government schemes like the introduction of ASHA workers. The following excerpt substantiates the above point:

Interviewer: Were your children born in the hospital or at home?

Respondent: Earlier, children were born at home itself, there were midwives in the line.

Respondent: Now baideo, there are so many diseases; the newborns often suffer from jaundice. We, the members of the Mother's Club hold meetings where we have ashakarmis among us... Yes, they explain the pregnant women to give birth in the hospital where they would be entitled to various facilities.

When asked about the presence of mid wives at present times and the nature of their work, the respondent replied that the mid wives mainly do the job of applying oil to the baby and giving massage both to the baby and the mother.

Interviewer: Is the midwife there now?

Respondent: They are at the hospital now. They stay in the line itself, but they work at the hospital during the day. Earlier, they were known as lineburi.

She would stay there itself and give oil to apply to the baby. When the delivery time approaches, then someone would inform her. She would then come and whether it was one day or two days, she would remain there itself.

After the birth, the midwife would go and inform the doctor that a child is born in a particular house. She would be given medicines and would be called for

check-up after a week. But now, the car is sent immediately at the time of delivery.

Interviewer: Do you prefer giving birth in the hospital or at home?

Respondent: Nowadays, children are born in the hospital. Medicines are provided there itself.

Interviewer: Do midwife come at the time of delivery? Don't you face any problems at home?

Respondent: Yes the midwife comes and massages the baby and the mother for nine days and also washes the clothes. After that, we have to give the midwife new clothes and feed her.

6.4.2: Provisions for Crèche:

The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 made it compulsory for plantations to set up crèche facilities for children below the age of 6 years. However, conditions and maintenance of crèche differ from plantations to plantations. It has been observed from the interviews that out of compulsion, the women workers keep their babies in the crèche inside the plantations but they were not happy with the facilities provided in them. There is lack of resources in the crèche which are run by only one or two caretakers, mostly aged women. Moreover, the baby food supplied in the crèche is of poor quality according to many of the respondents. This is illustrated from the following excerpts:

Interviewer: Nani, when you were working in the garden, where were your children kept?

Respondent: Ujon ghar .

Interviewer: Ujon ghar means crèche house?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: How were the children cared for in the crèche house?

Respondent: Children were kept with the babysitter.....the baby was fed milk by the mother.

Interviewer: Do you keep the baby at the crèche?

Respondent: Even though we keep, who would look after them? Now, two women are there. They have to sweep the office and after that, heat the milk and bring them to the garden. The milk is then given to feed the baby but it is too watery. So the people hardly feed that milk but they take it anyways. After that, they go back.

In some cases, there is lack of basic amenities in these houses which force many workers to carry their babies with them to work as illustrated in the following excerpts:

Interviewer: Did you face difficulties in taking care of your children in their growing days?

Respondent: Yes, it is but natural to have challenges... (I) used to carry them on my back and make bed (at the worksite) for them and keep the children.

Interviewer: Did you get permission to do so (to bring the children to worksite)?

Respondent: Yes, if they would cry when I plucked, the loradhora (caretaker) would call me... I would go and feed them and then continue plucking after I feed my children.

Such instances reflect the conflicting situations that women face as ‘mothers’ on one hand and as ‘workers’ on the other in the plantations. A cursory look into the provisions makes one to believe in the existence of a healthy work environment for women keeping in mind their specific needs. At the same time, evidences point out to a contrary situation where one realizes that despite the provisions, there is a constant need of governance and proper administration in which goals pertaining to a safe and sound environment for mothers and children can be fulfilled.

6.5: Awareness among the women workers in the plantations:

Life inside tea plantations are more or less like living in confined spaces which often results in a disconnection of the workers from the outside world. There is less socio-economic and political awareness among them as a result of their isolation. Moreover, there seems to be minimal effort on part of the managements in the plantations to generate awareness amongst the workers about the different aspects concerning their lives. The workers in the tea gardens of Assam are governed by strict and regimented structures which hamper their progress to a great extent. Whether in terms of education, health or political rights, the workers, particularly the women workers are found to have minimal awareness about these issues.

6.5.1: Education: A Path Less Treaded:

During the colonial times, educational facilities in the plantations seemed to have been a neglected area since it was believed that promotion of education would make the people unfit for work. The workers also had a sense of disinterest towards sending their wards to school since their earnings were meagre to afford education and also due to the fact that sending children to school would result in a shortage of earners in the family. Hence, the vast majority of the workers remained in steep ignorance till the passing of the Plantation Labour Act of 1951. According to this Act, each plantation having 25 children of workers between the ages of 6 and 16 years must have an estate school. Most tea plantation schools in Assam are primary level schools which are now managed and governed by the State Government. However, the infrastructural conditions and standard of education provided in them are far from satisfactory. The number of dropouts is also high, particularly among girl children because of parental pressure and their defined responsibilities as the care-takers of the house under the patriarchal family structures. Preference was given to the education of sons over the daughters as it was believed that the family would be in a better financial position if the daughters worked and helped the family earn a living. This can be examined through the following excerpts:

Interviewer: Did you study?

Respondent: No, no. My brothers were sent for studying; so they studied.

Interviewer: Were you sent to school?

Respondents: Two brothers studied and two sisters did not study.

Respondent: The girls did the household chores. They would work in the paddy field or feed the cows if required. To manage these things, they did not go to school.

In another instance, it was found that the girls discontinued their studies as they had to look after their siblings while both the parents were away at work.

Interviewer: Did your daughters go to school? How much did they study?

Respondent: They didn't study much; they left school after my sons were born. They had to look after them as I went to work. So I keep the boys and the daughters with the watchman. When the boys cry, the watchman would call me. The elder son and daughter went to school, but the younger daughters could not go as they had to look after the boys.

Respondent: There is no one at home, who would send her to study? And after the birth of my sons, if I keep them with the caretaker then I have to pay them. I can't afford so much money.

Higher education is also a matter of distant dream for most of the girls in the plantations because of early marriage, poor economic conditions, lack of transportation facilities to towns, high cost of education and discouragement from parents. Such discrimination emerged out of a discussion on education for girls with one of the respondents who remarked - *Girls can be brought up in any manner, but the boys have to be turned into men.* Even when some managed to pursue education despite hurdles, they usually get disillusioned as they find it difficult to get desk jobs or managerial positions in the tea estates because of the prevailing stigma of women as 'unfit' for

such jobs. Moreover, there seems to be unwillingness on part of the tea companies to employ members of the tea community in managerial positions. Though things have started to improve in the recent past with the younger generation embracing the opportunities of the modern world, yet, there seems to be a long way for girls in the tea gardens to materialize their dreams of being educated and independent.

6.5.2: Health and Hygiene: Science vs Tradition:

According to the Plantation Labour Act, 1951, every tea plantation employing up to 100 workers is required to maintain a hospital with basic first aid kit and necessary medicines or reservations of certain number of beds available at the hospital on the nearest neighbouring plantation. Tea estates employing 300 workers or more must have a dispensary with at least 5 beds. They must employ necessary qualified staff working under the supervision of a trained medical officer in the hospital of the nearest Tea garden. For every thousand workers, the estate hospital must possess at least 15 beds. Such estates are required to employ a full time medical officer, nurse, a mid-wife, a health assistant, a compounder, and a dresser. There should be a separate ward for female patients and one isolation ward has to be provided as well.⁵² (Singh, 2001:111-112). The hospitals should be equipped with the basic amenities and necessary medicines. Each tea estate is also required to have at least one ambulance for sending patients to district hospitals. Some of the common and serious health afflictions among the tea garden workers are tuberculosis, dysentery, diarrhoea, fever etc.

Interviewer: Tell us something about the Company hospital, about the way they do the check-up or provide medicines.

Respondent: They give good medicines. They give injections, medicine and food. The doctor comes on time and they provide tea in the morning and evening. If the patient is serious, then they send the patient to Dibrugarh.

⁵² Singh, Navinder K. (2001). *Role of Women Workers in the Tea Industry of North East India*. New Delhi: Classical Publishing Company.

Despite such facilities, it has been observed that the workers generally tend to have more faith in the *bej* or the traditional healers rather than qualified doctors. In many of the interviews, it has been found that the people of the tea community are inclined towards the traditional methods of healing, even for serious ailments and have a preference for the local *ojhas* or the traditional healers. The following excerpts highlight such tendencies in the tea gardens despite having minimum health care facilities.

Respondent: My son was suffering from stomach ache and he was also vomiting. Then we had brought salt from the bej and fed our son.

Interviewer: How did he treat your son? Did he give salt or by some other means?

Respondent: The bej gave us salt and mustard oil.

Respondent: The bej chanted some mantras and then gave us salt and oil to feed my son. He said that this will give him relief.

Interviewer: Did he get cured?

Respondent: Yes, he was cured.

On another instance, when asked about the presence of such people in the neighbourhood, the respondent replied in the positive and told the interviewers that people go to the *bej* or the traditional healers when they are possessed by ghosts.

Interviewer: For healing which diseases did you approach him?

Respondent: We approached him when we were possessed by a ghost.

Stories of treatment by traditional methods by people possessing ‘supernatural’ powers are found to be common inside the tea plantations. In some gardens, there were male healers while in some others, there were women practitioners. Apart from curing diseases of people, the local healers were also approached in cases of diseases of animals or in many cases, by childless couples as reflected in the following excerpt:

Respondent: I went to her. When she saw me, she said, "Mahi (aunt), didn't you go to work today?" I told her that something had happened to my hand. I had gone to the doctor, Pandey babu and he told me that I had pressure and asked me to drink milk. He told me that I had pressure from before itself, but I didn't know it. She just touched me and gave me a flower which she had sank in the water. She asked me to eat the flower and drink the water. Then I got cured. If someone doesn't have children, they also go to her. She can solve these problems and if something happens to the cows or goats, or they get lost then also she can look into these problems.

Such practices which might be the outcome of the low levels of literacy amongst the people of the tea community as well as their economic condition often tend to infuse in the people a faith in the supernatural which causes them to stay outside the realm of modern, developed and improved medical care. Another distressing fact that came to light during the interviews is the poor sanitation and hygiene prevalent among the women in the plantations. Their deplorable economic condition is one of the reasons behind lack of basic sanitation facilities at their homes which is a major cause of concern for girls, particularly adolescent girls. Menstruation hygiene again is a matter least discussed amongst the women workers. In one of the interviews, it was specifically asked whether they use sanitary napkins or clothes during their periods to which the respondent replied that:

Interviewer: When you get your monthly periods, what do you do?

Respondent: During those days, we normally use cloth, since that is what women of the old times used to use, now you have different other things. So, when we get our periods while at work, do you know what we do, we ask the didi-bhoni (elder and younger sisters) for pieces of cloth and that way we manage.

This shows that older women are still in favour of using clothes during periods while younger girls are more likely to use sanitary napkins. However, the high cost of the napkins is another factor why most women prefer to use clothes over napkins

because of the question of affordability. When asked if the management or the government has made certain arrangements to distribute napkins in the gardens, they replied in the negative and said that all these promises are gimmicks to garner support from the people.

Interviewer: We have heard that women are given sanitary pads...napkins by the government. Do you not use such things?

Respondent: The government has not given any such thing.

Interviewer: You have not received them, right?

Respondent No, have they given in other places?

Interviewer: We have heard that they have).

Respondent: God only knows.

6.5.3: Salt Tea: A Colonial legacy:

Consumption of Salt tea is one of the most important features of the life of the people inside the tea plantations of Assam. The habit was first introduced by the British to check dehydration among the workers working for long hours in the sun. More than refreshment, intake of salt tea has become a necessity for the workers in the gardens. Despite various health awareness programmes aimed at minimizing the consumption of salt tea, the habit is yet to be arrested among the workers. Excessive intake of salt is said to increase blood pressure and risk of cardiovascular diseases. The mechanisms used by the British prevailed even after independence and companies even today resorted to the same methods used by the colonizers. The practice of serving *chai pani* (salted tea) during working hours in large quantities is a cause of concern as its consumption in heavy doses would make the workers vulnerable to killer diseases. Consumption of salted tea has also been said to be a cause of anaemia among the women workers. The hearsay that the British introduced this habit of drinking salted tea to make the brain of the workers futile seemed to hold significance as heavy intake of

salt is reported to affect the functions of the brain. The following excerpts from the interviews taken reflect the necessity felt by the workers to consume salted tea:

Interviewer: Do they give you salted tea?

Respondent: We take salted tea once a day. They (means the management) give it.

Respondent: Tea with salt is more enjoyable.

Respondent: Actually we have got used to it. It has become a habit. It has turned out like this that even if sometimes we do not get to drink salted tea in the bagan, we have to drink it at home after coming back.

Respondent: We feel refreshed after drinking the salted tea. We drink sweet tea only once in the evening.

The above excerpt provides a glaring view of the demand of salted tea by the workers. It has been observed throughout the project process that the workers are provided with salted tea in large quantities during working hours. Conversations with the workers reveal the fact that many of them are being misled into believing that salt tea is beneficial for them to work better in the fields which are ridden with *leech* as is reflected in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Why do they give you salted tea? In a way people drink tea with sugar, (Asha laughs) why do you have it with salt?

Respondent: Actually it is like this with us: we work in the garden so these juk (leech). The juk creeps onto us a great deal. So if we do not take salted water, it sucks lot of blood. Then mosquitoes attack us, so we drink salted tea.

Moreover, it was found that since the workers were habituated into drinking salted tea for generations, it has become almost like a ritual for them to drink tea with salt. Some respondents even said that if they failed to drink salted tea at work, they prepare it at their homes and drink it since without having salted tea, they feel nauseated and do not get the required strength to work.

Respondent: Tea without salt makes me feel very nauseated. I do not feel good if I don't take the salt tea. You don't fall sick if you take a little salt with tea.

Although many people are aware of the harmful effects of consumption of salted tea as is reflected by the following excerpt, yet, it would take a long way to shed this practice among the tea garden workers of Assam

Respondent: Moreover, in the present times, most of the workers are patients of high blood pressure. People have either died of blood pressure attacks or have become patients of paralysis, where one part of the body becomes disabled. This happens due to the high intake of salt.

The workers in the plantations, particularly the women workers, live a life of isolation from the mainstream socio-political life of the nation. Their socio-cultural environment is equally responsible for their poor social and political awareness. Their level of political perception, degree of political consciousness and political knowledge are limited and inadequate. In recent times many organizations like the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) or the Assam Tea Tribes Student's Association (ATTSA) have sprung up and have been working towards spreading awareness amongst the workers on various issues but it has been observed that these organizations are mostly dominated by men who work for their own interests. There are women members in these organizations but when asked about their role in the organizations, they lamented the fact that women are just being 'used' in the organizations and are being made members just to serve the interests of men. Moreover, the existence of these organizations are presumed to serve only an 'ornamental' purpose in the plantations rather than serving as a platform to create socio-political awareness amongst the women workers of the gardens.

6.6: Problems of women workers in the plantations:

Workers in the tea plantations of Assam lead a very harsh and regimented life as is evident from the above discussions. Their economic conditions are pitiable, their working conditions are harsh and their lives are conditioned by their deplorable socio-economic environment. Amidst such circumstances, the foremost problems haunting the women workers of the tea plantations are addiction to alcohol and drugs by both

men and women. The habit of consumption of alcohol – *haria*⁵³ and *sulai*⁵⁴ prevailed so extensively among the tea garden workers that it is the foremost reason behind domestic violence and other problems in the family life of the women inside the garden. A major portion of their income is spent on the purchase of liquor which not only spoils their health but also their economic status and social life.

6.6.1: Domestic violence and consumption of alcohol: The Saga Continues:

Domestic violence and fights in the locality are common instances in the tea gardens. It also leads to disharmony in the family lives of the people affecting the growth and mental well being of the members of the family including children. Excessive consumption of alcohol is a big menace in tea plantations in Assam having detrimental effect on the lives of the womenfolk.

Drinking is an accepted way of life among the tea garden workers as they are accustomed to the consumption of local drinks known as *Haria* or *sulai* which is brewed by them in their community. Every religious, social or cultural function or festival is considered incomplete without the presence of it. They regard its preparation and intake as a time honoured privilege. Consumption of alcohol is also present among the women of the community. Drunkenness often leads to fights, clashes, violence and disturbance of peace in the tea gardens. Hence wife battering along with child abuse continues unabated. The health and welfare of the wife and children gets deteriorated and in many cases, children also get used to alcohol from a very early stage thwarting their chances of getting good education and leading a dignified life. A common picture of domestic violence in the gardens can be understood from the following excerpt:

Respondent: It happens at home after the man comes drunk. (A woman talking to another woman as the conversation continues). They would then scream at the wife saying, “Why did not you cook this food, why have you made this?” We will cook only if there is something to cook at home, right?

⁵³ *Haria* is the local word for alcohol made from rice

⁵⁴ *Sulai* is a local word for alcohol made from objects like sandal, rotten jaggery etc

Sulai and *haria* are two alcoholic drinks that are made and consumed by the people inside the plantations. *Sulai* is made from jaggery and other harmful substances like sandal, batteries etc and *haria* from rice. The preparation of these drinks is done in a very unhygienic manner. These are illegally made and traded inside the gardens. Consumption of such unhealthy drinks not only creates havoc in the lives of the workers but also decreases their mortality rates and is a major factor behind their pitiable health conditions. The following excerpt will give a glimpse of how these drinks are prepared in the gardens:

Interviewer: How do you prepare sulai?

Respondent: To make sulai, we need chappal (sandal), battery...

Interviewer: What do you mix in the battery?

Respondent: Slipper baideo (sister)... which we wear, rotten jaggery that is stored in the tin, dry cell and a lot of other things are mixed. That is why people suffer from such diseases. Dirty things are mixed; the people fail to understand even if we explain them.

In another interview, one respondent lamented the fact that alcohol is the main reason behind domestic violence in the families and despite repeated efforts being made to stop people from consumption of liquor, the menace still persists affecting a large number of families in the gardens, particularly affecting the lives of the women workers.

Respondent: My father used to drink a lot, come home and hit my mother. We were four siblings and were very young then. My father would come home drunk, ill-treat my mother and turn us all out of the house irrespective of whether it is night or day. So, we would work anywhere. My mother was tired of all these, so she went away and got married to someone else leaving us all alone.

Respondent: In the morning, after brushing their teeth, this is their breakfast. The families would get spoilt in this area. The families are destroyed.

6.6.2: The malice of witchcraft:

Another important problem plaguing the lives of the women workers of the plantations is the practice of witchcraft. Instances of branding a woman as a witch are very common in the tea gardens. There are varied reasons for this, the foremost being illiteracy and lack of awareness. In some cases, it has been found that a woman is branded as a witch on the basis of her marital status of being widowed or a single woman. During one of the interviews it was found that an unmarried woman was referred to as witch because she was single and the only Hindu in a Christian neighbourhood. In many cases, it was seen that for becoming famous, some people resort to certain malpractices which might even lead to the death a person and then they are being branded as witch. Not only women, but men too have become the victims of witchcraft in the tea plantations. People at times take pride in killing witches or resorting to violent means to stop witchcraft in the sense of protecting their community from the so called 'evil.' But it is disheartening to note that the managements or the administration is not taking enough measures to stop witch hunting or spreading awareness against this social evil. The following excerpts provide a glimpse of the practice of witchcraft in the tea plantations of Assam:

Interviewer: Do you know any stories regarding witchcraft in your garden?

Respondent: It was there.

Interviewer: Who was it? And how did you come to know that the person was a daini (witch)?

Respondent: She stayed right behind you(laughs).If you come in contact with her (daini) and fall down on the ground, then it means that she has done something to the person.

Interviewer: Was the daini male or female?

Respondent: A very old woman.

Interviewer: Did she do anything to anyone?

Respondent: Yes, she did something to my elder sister.

Interviewer: What did she do?

Respondent: When my sister went to fetch water, she fell down and a xul (a thin bamboo with a sharp end) pierced through my elder sister's leg. She was unable to walk. After that when we went to the bej (traditional healer), he said that it was done by her (witch).

However, one also encounters a disassociation from such stories by many, particularly the young and the educated ones. In one of the interviews, the respondent called these practices as lies and as superstitions

Interviewer: Do you believe in witchcraft?

Respondent: We don't believe this. The bej (traditional healer) will come and say that this person is possessed, all these are lies. One should not believe in this. All these are andhavishwas (superstitions).

It is evident from the above discussion about how the women workers in the plantations are being forced to live a life of drudgery and struggle with maintaining a balance between their work and family despite difficult situations. Here one needs to ponder over the question of the patriarchy as an operating system in the lives of the women both in their public as well as their private life.

6.6.3: Customs and Traditions: Life inside the Plantations:

The large-scale migration of tea labour from the various parts of the country during the colonial era for the establishment of tea plantations in Assam introduced in the state traits of a new and unique culture much different from that of the dominant Assamese community. From their narratives it has also come to light that along with their native cultural festivals they have also imbibed the culture of the local Assamese

community, thereby celebrating festivals of the Assamese people like Bihu. They have different festivals, songs and dances for all seasons signifying the advent and herald of the new facets of nature. Even though the workers face untold suffering and hardships in their day to day life, yet they celebrate their festivals with great enthusiasm.

The tea workers celebrate variety of festivals which have different myths and legends associated with them, such as, *Ghar Puja* or House Worship, *Gram Puja* or Goan Puja, *Karam Puja*, *Kathi Nach*, *Durga puja*, *Kali Puja*, *Tusu parab*, *Garia parab* and *Monsa puja* etc. Tusu puja is performed in honour of Goddess 'Tusu' where women weave a garland of flowers to make bonds of friendship with other women. Festivals like *Garia puja* was performed to worship the cow or other domesticated animals while *Monsa puja* is performed to worship the Goddess Monsa Devi. These festivals witness the active participation of women from all quarters of life and reflect the strong community bond in them.

Interviewer: Do you go to see Tusu puja?

Respondent: Yes, we go to see Tusu puja.

Interviewer: Tell us what you know about it.

Respondent: In Tusu puja, pithas are made like they are made in Bihu and dhunachi is lit.

The gendered division of labour is reflected in certain rituals and customs where men usually carry out the rituals related to animal sacrifice and chant mantras while offerings to the deity like cooked rice and fish curry must be prepared by women only. Women's role in many of the rituals is restricted to procuring the needs during these rituals.

In case of marriages, it has been found that formal marriages are of rare occurrences among the members of the tea garden communities. Many marriages are formalized long after the couple has lived together for many years or perhaps much later when their children are of marriageable age. When asked the respondents as to

why they delay formalization of their marriage, they usually attribute it to not having sufficient money at the time of marriage to cover the expenses and feasting. Marriage by elopement is a common form of marriage in the plantations where if the boy and the girl intend to get married they usually elope for a few days and on their return are blessed by their parents. This is an accepted form of marriage ceremony in their society as reflected from the following excerpt:

Interviewer: At what age do the boys and girls get married?

Respondent: Boys and girls of these days...what to say. It is difficult to make them understand. Some of them are good, the boys get married at the age of nineteen or twenty while the girls get married at the age of fifteen or sixteen years. If they get married around this age, then it is good. While those who elope, do so at the age of twelve or fourteen. Means after attaining puberty, the girls think that they have grown up. If they are good and understanding, they get married at the right age.

Tattooing is a widely practiced method of body decoration among the tea garden workers in which markings such as signs, symbols and letters are applied to the body by piercing through the outer layer of the skin and inserting colour in it. Although not compulsory but it is preferable for a girl to have a tattoo in her body which marks her eligibility to get married. In most of the tea communities it is the women who have tattooed her skin. Particularly in the Munda society, it is customary for girls to make tattoo in their bodies as reflected from the following:

Interviewer: You have a khoda (tattoo), how did you make it on your body?

Respondent: We made khoda when the khodni (tattoo maker) came by.

Interviewer: Is it compulsory to make it? Does anyone say anything if you don't make it?

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Who would say?

Respondent: Our Munda society would say.

Interviewer: What happens if you don't?

Respondent: They say that you don't belong to our society.

Moreover, tattoos are considered as symbols of one's community and have been assigned a sacred role as revealed from the narrative below:

Interviewer: Why do they make the tattoos?

Respondent: Maybe it is a symbol of one's community.

One of the characteristic features of the cultural traditions of the tea community is their colourful and vibrant *Jhumur* dance. The dance is basically performed by young girls, who are accompanied by few male members. Women wear red border white saris and silver jewellerys adorning *kasi* flower in their hair buns during the performance. Many of the *jhumur* songs reflect the miseries and sufferings of the people in their *desh* and the reason behind their mass migration to Assam – the land of lush green tea plantations. They also reflect the poignant tales of how the people were brought to Assam by the colonizers and how they were being mistreated on their journeys; there are songs of love and betrayal and others. When asked about the significance of the *jhumur* songs, many of the respondents replied that they express their sense of solidarity and their living conditions and lifestyles through the *jhumur* songs. One of the songs sung by a respondent during one of the interviews:

Respondent: (song)

“On the night of Bhado Ekadasi

I keep remembering my love

And I feel this emptiness within me”.

6.7: Conclusion:

One of the significant aspects of this project has been to follow the trajectory of oral narratives in order to get a glimpse into the history, identity and culture of women who are associated with the task of physical labour in various tea gardens of Dibrugarh and Tinsukia districts. The preservation of these narratives is to enable researchers from various disciplines to draw rich insights into the lives of the women of the tea community. The idea of recording and documenting the lives of the women through oral narratives is to substantiate data collected through the socio-economic survey part of the project. One would find a deeper penetration into the issues mentioned above through the in-depth interviews taken which reveal many hidden facets of their lives which might not have surfaced otherwise.

One of the revealing instances portrayed from the interviews is the women's reminiscence of the colonial era or even the reign of British planters in the post-colonial era as being the 'good old days' in comparison to the present times.

What can be deciphered from the interviews is the fact that most women workers are not concerned about the identity of the regime that is in power whether at present or even in the past. What is of utmost concern for the women is an improvement in the economic condition of life in the plantations. Above all, the interviews also force one to question whether the process and the attempt to empower women actually stand valid.

There has to be concerted efforts both on part of the state, the management of the plantations and the members of the tea community themselves to work towards desired change and a positive end.

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SOCIO - ECONOMIC QUESTIONNAIRE/INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT ON
STORIES BEHIND A HOT CUP OF ASSAM TEA: LISTENING TO THE VOICES OF
WOMEN LABOURERS IN THE TEA GARDENS
(BOTH WOMEN AND MEN)

DATE OF INTERVIEW: _____ **Sl No.** _____

PERSONAL DETAILS:

1. NAME: _____

2. AGE: _____

3. SEX

a) Female	[]	b) Male	[]
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4. NATIVE
PLACE: _____

5. ADDRESS:

6. TRIBE :

7.

a) Mundas []	b) Oraons []	c) Kols []	d) Santhali []	
e) Kumhars []	f) Tantis []	g) Gonds []	h) Sabars []	i) Others []

8. LANGUAGE SPOKEN: _____

9. LANGUAGES KNOWN: _____

10. ASSAMES

a) Speak []	b) Can't Speak []	c) Understand but don't Speak []
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E

LANGUAGE:

11. EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS:

a) Never went to School []	b) Primary School []	c) Middle School []
d) High School []	e) College []	f) Can read and write []
g) Can sign []	h) Cannot sign []	

12. RELIGION

FOLLOWED: _____

13. NAME OF PARENTS:

Mother: _____

Father: _____

14. NUMBER

a) Brother []	b) Sister []
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OF SIBLINGS:

15. MARITAL STATUS:

a) Married []	b) Unmarried []	c) Widow []
d) Divorced []	e) Live-in []	

16. AGE OF MARRIAGE: _____

17. NAME OF HUSBAND/WIFE/COMPANION: _____

18. AGE OF HUSBAND/WIFE/COMPANION: _____

19. NATURE OF

MARRIAGE:

a) Institutional	[]	b) Elopement	[]
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20. ANY DIFFERENCE OR CHANGE IN YOUR PARTNER'S WORK AFTER MARRIAGE:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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If yes, Change in:

a) Location	[]	b) Nature of Work	[]
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21. CHILDREN:

a) Total	[]	b) Number of Girls	[]	c) Number of Boys	[]
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22. BIRTH REGISTERED:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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23. AGE OF CHILDREN:

a) Child 1 _____ yrs	b) Child 2 _____ yrs	c) Child 3 _____ yrs
d) Child 4 _____ yrs	e) Child 5 _____ yrs	f) Child 6 _____ yrs

24. TYPE OF CHILDREN:

a) Biological Children	b) Adopted/Foster Children	c) Children of relatives being brought up
[]	[]	[]

25. AGE WHEN GAVE BIRTH TO THE FIRST CHILD _____

26. KIND OF THE PREVENTIVE MEASURES TAKEN FOR FAMILY PLANNING:

a) Condoms []	b) Contraceptive Pills []	c) Vasectomy []
d) Tubectomy []	e) Others []	

LIVING QUARTERS DETAILS:

27. LOCATION:

a) In the tea garden []	b) Outside the tea garden []
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28. NATURE OF THE HOUSE:

a) Owned by self []	b) Provided by Company []	c) One room quarter []
d) Two-room quarter []	e) Quarters with Extension []	f) Concrete house []
g) Thatched house []	h) <i>Kachha-Pucca</i> House []	i) Tin Roofed Brick House []

29. HOUSE RENT

ALLOWANCES

a) Provided by the Company []	b) Not Provided by the Company []
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:

30. TOILET FACILITIES:

a) Single toilet per house with water []	b) Single toilet per house without water []	c) Common toilet with water []
d) Common, without water []	e) Pit Toilet []	f) Open toilet []

31. HOUSEHOLD WATER FOR TOILET/BATHING:

a) Water Taps []	b) Wells []
c) Hand Pumps/ Tube Well []	d) Stored water []

32. DRINKING WATER:

a) Taps []	b) Hand Pumps/ Tube Well []	c) Stored Water []
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33. DISTANCE TO WALK TO FETCH WATER:

a) Less than a km []	b) 1 km []	c) 2 kms []	d) 3kms []
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34. CONTAINER TO FETCH WATER:

a) Plastic buckets []	b) Plastic pots []
c) Metal pots []	d) Earthen pots []

35. WHO FETCHES WATER:

a) Wife []	b) Husband []	c) Daughter []	d) Son []
e) Mother-in-law []	f) Father-in-law []	g) Relatives []	h) Others []

36. NUMBER OF MEMBERS IN THE FAMILY: _____

37. AGE OF MEMBERS OF THE FAMILY

a) 1-10 yrs []	b) 10-20 yrs []	c) 20-30 yrs []
d) 30-40 yrs []	e) 40-50 []	f) Above 50 yrs []

38. TOTAL NUMBER OF EARNING MEMBERS: _____

39. COOKING STOVE:

a) Gas []	b) Kerosene []	c) Coal []	d) Firewood []
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40. ELECTRICITY:

a) Provided by the management []	b) Provided by the Government []
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41. DURATION OF ELECTRICITY:

a) Day []	b) Night []	c) Both []
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42. RATION SYSTEM: List of things available:

a) Rice []	b) Wheat []	c) Kerosene []	d) Sugar []
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43. COOKING:

a) Done by women []	b) Shared by men []	c) Shared by family []
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FAMILY LIFE:

44. WORK:

a) Same work done by wife and husband []	b) Different work []
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45. RECREATION:

a) TV []	b) Cinema []	c) Others []
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46. TRAVEL:

a) To native villages []	b) To places of worship []	c) Others []
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47. ALCOHOLISM IN THE FAMILY:

a) Exists []	b) Does not exist []
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48. WHO DRINKS?:

a) Father []	b) Brother []	c) Husband []	d) Father-in-law []	e) Other []
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49. MONEY MANAGEMENT: Who Manages?

a) Wife []	b) Husband []	c) Elders []
-------------	----------------	---------------

50. SAVINGS ACCOUNT:

a) Banks []	b) Post Office []	c) Others []	d) No savings []
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51. QUARRELS: How Often? _____

Why?

a) Money matters []	b) Children Problems []	c) Health matters []	d) Alcoholism []
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52. Domestic Violence:

a) Physical Beating []	b) Verbal fights []
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WORK DETAILS:

53. NATURE OF WORK:

a) Permanent []	b) Casual (<i>Faltoo</i>) []
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54. KIND OF WORK:

a) Skilled []	b) Unskilled []
----------------	------------------

55. FROM WHICH AGE YOU HAVE BEEN WORKING IN THIS GARDEN: _____

56. YEARS OF WORK: _____

57. WORK:

a) Plucking []	b) Pruning []	c) Thalli []	d) Driver []
e) Helper []	f) Cook []	g) Khulla []	h) Other []

58. REASONS FOR COMING TO THIS GARDEN:

a) By birth []	b) My marriage []	c) For Job []
d) Because of Children []	e) Others []	

59. WAGES: Calculation of wages:

a) Per Week []	b) Every 12 days []	c) Others []
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60. Rate of Wages:

a) Women's Wage: Rs. []	b) Men's Wage: Rs. []	c) <i>Chokri Hazira</i> []
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61. SUNDAY

WAGE

CALCULATED:

a) Yes []	b) No []
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62. WAGES AT THE TIME OF JOINING WORK: _____

63. WAGES NOW: _____

64. HOURS OF WORK:

a) 8 Hours []	b) Other []
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65. TIME OF WORK: _____

66. BREAK TIME: _____

67. LEAVE RULES:

a) Exist []	b) Doesn't Exist []	c) Any other []
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68. MATERNITY LEAVE GIVEN:

a) Yes []	b) No []
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If Yes,

a) Duration: _____ months	b) With pay []	c) Without Pay []
d) Pre-delivery []	e) Post-delivery []	f) Others []

69. PROVIDENT FUND:

a) Given []	b) Not given []
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70. MEDICAL BENEFITS :

a) Given []	b) Not given []
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71. BONUS:

a) Given []	b) Not given []
--------------	------------------

72. WORKERS' UNION:

a) Exist []	b) Does not exist []
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73. MEMBER OF THE UNION:

a) Yes []	b) No []
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74. ADVANTAGES OF UNION:

a) Wages []	b) Workplace Comfort []	c) Gender Concern []
d) Wage Benefits (like bonus, medical insurance, provident fund etc)		[]

75. RETIREMENT AGE: _____

WORK PLACE FACILITIES:

76. SANITATION:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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77. DRINKING WATER:

a) Provided	[]	b) Not Provided	[]
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78. TEA PROVIDED:

a) Provided	[]	b) Not Provided	[]
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If Yes,

a) With Salt	[]	b) With Sugar	[]
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79. WORK ESSENTIALS PROVIDED:

a) Raincoat	[]	b) Jaapi	[]	c) Umbrella	[]
d) Boots	[]	e) Gloves	[]	f) Others	[]

80. SURROUNDINGS:

a) Clean	[]	b) Dirty	[]	c) Fairly Clean	[]
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81. MEDICAL

FACILITIES:

a) PHC	[]	b) Hospitals	[]	c) Others	[]
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82. MEDICAL CARE:

a) Pre natal	[]	b) Post natal	[]	c) Medical Check-ups	[]	d) Immunization	[]
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83. MEDICAL FACILITIES:

a) Within reach	[]	b) Not within reach	[]
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84. CRECHE FOR CHILDREN:

a) Exist []	b) Does not Exist []
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85. IN CASE THERE IS NO CRÈCHE, WHERE ARE CHILDREN LEFT?:

a) At home with relatives []	b) At home with older children []
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EDUCATION FACILITIES:

86. CHILDREN GO TO SCHOOL:

a) Yes []	b) No []
c) Number of Girls go to School []	d) Numbers of Boys go to School []

87. KINDERGARTEN
SCHOOLS:

a) Exist []	b) Does not Exist []
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88. PRIMARY
SCHOOLS:

a) Exist []	b) Does not Exist []
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89. HIGH SCHOOLS:

a) Exist []	b) Does not Exist []
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90. HOW CLOSE
ARE THE
SCHOOLS?:

a) Very close []	b) A little away []	c) Very far []
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91. MODE OF
TRAVEL:

a) By Walk []	b) Bus []	c) Any Other []
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HEALTH DETAILS:

92. WORK DONE DURING MONTHLY PERIODS:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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93. ANY DISEASES SUFFERED?:

a) T.B.	[]	b) Anaemia	[]	c) Skin Disease	[]
d) Stomach Disorder	[]	e) Diabetes	[]	f) Body Pain	[]
g) Heart Problem	[]	h) Malnutrition (<i>Dhena</i>)	[]	i) Other	[]

94. HABITS:

a) Tobacco chewing	[]	b) Ganja	[]	c) Drugs	[]	d) Smoking	[]	e) Alcohol	[]
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95. HEALTH OF CHILDREN:

a) Malnutrition	[]	b) Anaemia	[]	c) T.B.	[]	d) Other	[]
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96. CONSULTATION IN CASE OF ILLNESS:

a) Garden Doctor	[]	b) Traditional Healers	[]	c) Ayurvedic Doctor	[]	d) Nurse	[]	e) Others	[]
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97. CONDITION OF YOUR TEA GARDEN HOSPITAL:

a) Very Good	[]	b) Good	[]	c) Bad	[]	d) Poor	[]
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SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND CULTURE:

98. FESTIVAL CELEBRATION:

a) Tusu Puja	[]	b) Karam Puja	[]	c) Durga Puja	[]
d) Kali Puja	[]	e) Bihu	[]	f) Others	[]

99. WITCH-CRAFT PRACTICED IN YOUR COMMUNITY:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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100. INSTANCES OF WITCH-CRAFT KNOWN _____

CIVIL RIGHT DETAILS:

101. VOTING CARD:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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102. RATION CARD:

a) Yes	[]	b) No	[]
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103. DISPUTE RESOLUTION:

a) Police	[]	b) Workers' Union	[]	c) Management	[]
d) Panchayat	[]	e) Court	[]	f) Others	[]

104. POLITICAL ACTIVITIES:

a) Meetings	[]	b) Morcha/Rallies	[]	c) Voting	[]
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105. POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR DETERMINED BY:

a) Incentives	[]	b) Awareness	[]	c) Community Feeling	[]
d) Development	[]	e) Others	[]		

Signature of the Interviewee: _____

Name of the Interviewer: _____ Signature of the Interviewer: _____
