

**PROFILE OF TRIBAL COMMUNITY IN TEA GARDENS OF DOOARS: A CASE STUDY OF COOCHBEHAR TEA ESTATE, WEST BENGAL**

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**Abstract**

Tea is the backbone of economic growth and development in the Dooars area of West Bengal. More than two hundred gardens are located in this region. The garden and production are being maintained by tribal communities with their hard works over hundred years. It is because of their untiring effort, the tea industry has flourished to a great extent. But if we consider their socio-economic condition, they are not good enough. Till now, the literacy rate among them is very low. They have been suffering from deficiency of balance diet and living in unhygienic condition. Malaria, Filariasis, Ringworm, Ascariasis and dysentery are some common diseases they have to face. This study aims to assess their lifestyle, status of literacy, sex differences and health condition.

**Keywords:** Tribal community, Tea garden, Ecological aspect, Culture

**Introduction**

Coochbehar tea estate is located in Mathabhanga sub division of Coochbehar district. This garden, covering 540 acres, was established in 1947 by Maharaja Nripendra Narayan. National Highway-31 passes through the middle of the garden and makes it picturesque. There are five categories of workers here. Besides office staff, nearly 535 permanent labourers, 500-550 temporary bigha labourers and 150 pick labourers are working here. All belong to the tribal community.

Only permanent labourers get subsidized rations and fire- wood per annum from the garden. As far as their lifestyle is concerned, the inhabitants of the garden have been facing different kinds of health problems. Self built narrow home without entry of proper sunlight makes their dwelling places damp. As a consequence, they are likely to have a higher exposure to gastro enteric diseases. Poor sanitation and lack of sufficient drinking water supply bring them to other infectious diseases.

In this case study, resources may be taken into the consideration when estimating an ecological niche. The area of our discussion is overpopulated, lacks clean water, food, shelter and also the basic amenities for the survival. Tribal people of the garden mostly follow primitive life style and facing lesser resources in education, health care and economic empowerment. Regarding environmental aspects, more concentration is needed towards installing proper sewage system and waste management.

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**Objective**

The present study is designed with the following objectives-

- 1) To study the population and lifestyle of the tribal community in the Coochbehar tea garden.
- 2) Socio-economic status of tribal people in the garden.
- 3) Detailed description of the hygienic condition of the dwellers of the garden.
- 4) To ascertain the occurrence of disease causing organisms or vector in the garden area.

**Detail of Survey**

In this case study, resources were taken from the inhabitants of tribal community in the Coochbehar tea garden. A survey was conducted from July to September, 2010. During this detailed study, total fifty numbers of households were selected from tribal community and 784 male, 863 female and 452 children were counted. Different aspects like biological, socio-economic, social-custom and ecological aspects have been studied.

**Biological Characteristics**

**Race**

In this study area, mainly Oraon and Munda are dominated. Oraon is 50%, Munda is 40% and other Kheria, Mahali, Baraik and Chikbaraik are 10%. They belong to the Proto-Australoid races.

**Population Density**

A large number of populations is an economic burden for any country. So population exploitation is a major factor for underdevelopment. In this area, population density is very high due to poverty and lack of education that may cause a particular rural area underdeveloped. It was noticed during surveys that total population is 670 in 50 houses. Out of this number male, female and children are 185, 203 and 282 respectively. Average number of members in a family is more than 12 and it is a burning example of a large population in a small area. Child population is more than the male and female population. The percentage of the child population is 42.09 whereas male is 27.61 and female is 30.30. The following age groups have been categorized on the basis of the survey done in 50 houses where the total population was found 670 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Number of Male and Female population on the basis of age groups**

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0-15 years	132	141	273
16-25 years	47	35	82
26-35 years	60	72	132
36-50 years	52	45	97
51 years-above	40	46	86

Source: Field survey

**Sex composition**

Sex ratio which indicates the number of male per 100 females in a population is the most universal measure of sex composition (Trewartha, 1969). But the widely used definition is the number of females per 1000 males in a population. India is reputed for having more male population than the females. But this study area is an example where the female number is very much greater than the male number. Within 50 houses, female numbers are 203 whereas male 185 (Table 2).

**Socio economic condition of the tea garden**

**Literacy**

Social progress depends on education among the people of a particular area. But in this area educational level is not satisfactory. Poor economic conditions, social situation and lack of occupation are certainly the reasons for backwardness in educational attainment (Sarkar, 2011; Das, 2011). Literacy means the ability to read or write by one in his own mother tongue and degree of literacy is the basic measurement of educational status. Two primary schools and one MSK are located in the vicinity of the garden. Data shows that the literacy rate is 20-25%. Among them 64.4 percentage is male and 35.6 percentage is female. In case of age wise literacy, it is found in the highest age group of 1-15 years and lowest in 51 years and above. It is a good sign that people of the garden realized that their children should go for schooling. As a result, now a day, child literacy rate has been increased compared to the previous data. 6 boys and 2 girls have crossed the limit of college level. But drop out is a serious problem in the study area due to financial obstacle in the family. (Table 3)

**Table 2: House wise population in the garden**

Houses No.	No.of Male	No.of Female	Total population
1-5	20	20	40
6-10	17	23	42
11-15	24	21	35
16-20	18	23	41
21-25	20	22	42
26-30	16	22	38
31-35	14	20	34
36-40	22	20	42
41-45	16	13	29
46-50	23	19	42

Source: Field survey

**Table 3: Standard of Education in the garden**

<b>Standard</b>	<b>&lt; V</b>	<b>V-VIII</b>	<b>IX-X</b>	<b>XI-XII</b>	<b>B.A</b>
Male	82	63	43	28	6
Percentage	18.98	14.58	9.95	6.48	1.3
Female	68	50	27	15	2
Percentage	15.74	11.57	6.25	3.47	0.46
Total in %	33.72	26.15	16.20	9.95	1.76

Source: Field survey

### Financial Condition

The people of tea garden area are economically very poor. Most of the people are the tea garden labourer. In this garden, total no. of labourer is near about 1060, out of them 535 are permanent and others are temporary called bigha. There are some categories according to their work. There are five categories. Category-1 belongs to the daily rated worker on plantation side and they get Rs. 67.50 per day. Category-2 belongs to the daily rated worker in factory side and they get Rs.72 per day basis. Category-3 to Category-5 belongs to the official staff in which clerical, technical and medical staffs are there but very least numbers. They are all monthly salaried and get Rs.5000-8000 (Table 4). Besides this, those who are not working in the tea garden, some of them are engaged in agricultural works and wood cutting. Hence, the people are very much economically poor and also their surrounding environment is also very much unhealthy. The people live with their kids and domestic pets like hens, pigs, cattle, sheep which are vectors of different diseases.

**Table 4: Financial scenario of tribal community in the tea state**

<b>House No.</b>	<b>INCOME GROUP</b>						<b>Total</b>
	<b>Below Rs1000/-</b>	<b>Rs. 1000-2000/-</b>	<b>Rs. 2001-3000/-</b>	<b>Rs. 3001-5000/-</b>	<b>Rs. 5001-8000/-</b>	<b>Rs. 8001-15,000/-</b>	
1-5		2	3				5
6-10		3	2				5
11-15		2	2	1			5
16-20		1	3	1	0		5
21-25		2	1	1	1		5
26-30		2	3	0	0		5
31-35		4	1				5
36-40		3	2				5
41-45		1	4				5
46-50		3	1				5
<b>Total</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>

Source: Field survey

## **Social Customs and Functional Analysis**

### **Food**

Tribal communities of garden usually have rice, roti, pulse, sabji, leaves of wild plants, fish, meat etc. Their delicious food is head of pig and intestine of animals like pig, goat etc. They use to drink rice beer i.e. Haria in every occasion. Now a day, they are more or less preferring Bengali dishes because this garden is encircled by Bengali community that has turned them to receive Bengali culture.

### **Medicine**

The concept of health by tribal community is a strong built body, capacity to do manual work for at least 8-10 hrs a day. They believe in the effect of bad spirit or breaching of some taboos that make an individual physically weak. Munda people believe on local doctors like Kabiraj and Ojha. They treat diseases and disorder with drug and medicine derived from root, bark and fruit of plants.

### **Housing**

The construction of houses follows with the environment for getting better wind and windows or doors are set towards the southern side to make the house well ventilated. Each house has separate chambers for different purposes like bedroom, cooking room and room for pets.

### **Festival and Culture**

Oraon community commemorates 'Bhelora Fari' festival to celebrate any kind of social festival like birth, death, marriage etc. Also they observe Sarhul, Phaggu, Karam, Sohbai, Hariary, Tusu etc. throughout the year. The spring festival known as Sarhul is celebrated with Sal tree in full blossom. In this festival, Oraons perform the symbolic marriage of the sky with earth. Phaggu is observed towards the end of February. Karam festival is classified as an agricultural festival celebrated in Bhado Ekadashi. They adjudge Dharam or Bhagavan as their almighty God and they obey Gaondeoti, Debi mai, Jhokra buria, Kali, Manasa, Sitala, Banabibi etc. as their god. They try to diminish supernatural evil or ghost by worshipping their traditional deities. They think that ancestors reside in the old people. Beside that, Durga Puja and Holi are the major festivals in this garden.

Tribal communities mainly prefer group performance than solo, which is an important feature of tribal art. Group dancing and singing is the most important medium to express their joy and happiness. Drum, Tumda, Tamak, Tiriao or Flute is essential instruments in Music. Their well known dance is a group of women with interlocked hands forming a semicircle, encircling a relatively small group of male percussionists at the center. The dance steps are in accordance with drum beats. The dasai dance is performed only by male on festive occasion. Langre, Guluri and Hunti are danced all round the year, whereas Baha and Sohorai are only festive season.

### **Ecological aspects**

#### **Sewage system of this area**

The sewage system of the garden is not proper. There is no permanent drain or way to pass out the waste water. The drains are also very close to the households. Usually the unhealthy bad smell comes from the blocked drains and waste creates unhealthy environmental conditions. During rainy season, the situation becomes worse. Administrations of garden usually do not take necessary steps. Hence, people have to lead their life in unpleasant environmental conditions.

#### **Poor waste management system**

In this area, there is no proper waste management system. Garbage heap can be found here and there. The vet is very suitable habitat for the pigs and hens. These animals are the carriers of different protozoa, virus etc. Many family members keep pigs, hens, cow as domestic pets in the same living place where they are living. These pets usually take food from the garbage heaps. Hence, allergy causing agents spread and contaminate foods and cause different diseases.

#### **Major health problem of the people of garden area**

The people of this area live in a very unhealthy condition. They often suffer from several diseases like allergy, amoebic dysentery, malaria, tuberculosis and cough etc. Sometimes, the waste materials become decomposed improperly and bad smell of nitrogenous waste spreads the surrounding environment which causes airborne diseases. Stagnant water, dumping waste materials and living houses is placed very much close to each other, which make the region squalid but sweeter for mosquitoes and other vectors.

### **Conclusion**

The study focuses on the backward socio-economic condition of tribal community. Their family is big but monthly income is less which is not enough to maintain a family life. This may be a major reason for dropouts in school. The study suggests that much intensive development policy package is required for improvement of tribal races. It is also observed that lack of proper management, wrong decision making affect the environment of the garden area in a negative way. Gastro-enteric diseases, Malaria, Ring Worm, Dermatitis and Allergy are common in them. These people usually suffer from different contaminated diseases due to their traditional practices in food preparation, waste disposal and sanitary use. They need proper knowledge to improve health and hygienic condition.

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