



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Education of Tea Tribe Children: A case Study of Udalguri District of Assam

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Abstract

Education is considered as a vital tool to fight various challenges in life. The knowledge that is attained through education helps open doors to a lot of opportunities for better prospects in career growth. But unfortunately in India till a large section of people are deprived of education on the ground of poverty and gender discrimination. Poverty is the biggest hindrance for attainment of education. In Assam the tea tribes is such a community which is still backward in term of education despite of various effort taken by the government in the field of education. This paper makes an attempt to highlight the problems faced by the tea workers in continuation of education for their children after the primary level of education. The primary data were collected by interacting with 50 tea workers of Sheikh tea garden of Udalguri District of Assam with a structure questionnaire.

Keywords: *Education, Gender,*

Introduction

India is a vast country with over 1.2 billion people close to 200 million children studying in primary and secondary school. The majority of each child is in rural areas, spread over 6 lakhs villages and facing various challenges in education. Since after independence the government of India and almost all the state government took initiative steps in providing basic education to all the children which is very time consuming and capital intensive as India has to address other problem apart from providing education. The other problems are increase in food production, providing irrigation facilities, building infrastructure and protecting the border.

Despite of all this limitation the country has achieved significant milestones. Today there is school within 1km distance and almost every child is in school. At present the enrollment rate in primary education is expected to be around 93%. The government

flagship programmed Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) has done a miracle within 10 years. Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is an Indian government program aimed at universalisation of elementary education "in a time bound manner", as mandated by the 86th amendment to the constitution of India making free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. The program was pioneered by former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

Tea industry in Assam is still a labour intensive industry which requires a large number of regular and casual labour forces. Due to this feature, tea industry provides employment to a large number of workforces in the state. The employment potential in tea industry is more than the employment potential of any other plantation sectors. The magnitude of employment generated by the tea industry in Assam can be understood by its direct employment of about 2 million

persons spread over the state both in the field and factory of which about 50 percent are woman workers and children (Tea Digest, 2005-06, Tea Board of India). In tea industry, women and children are generally considered the better pickers and the most productive labour. It is sad that a large proportion of these women tea plantation workers are illiterate or educationally backward. Since independence, the Government of India has been implementing various policies for accelerating the women's overall education, literacy rate as well as to reduce the school drop-out rates.

Some of such educational policies include Mahila Samakhy (1989), District Primary Education Programme (1994), Mid-Day Meal Scheme (1995), Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (2000), National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (2003-04) and various schemes under the Department of Women and Child Development. In addition to these policies, the Government of Assam through the Assam Tea Employees Welfare Board conducted various training programmes for the females at the Mezenga Female Labour Welfare Training centre situated at Mezenga in upper Assam.

The females are taught about the health, hygiene and first aid, family welfare, care for children including crèche attendance etc. and vocational training like cutting and tailoring, weaving, embroidery etc. Under another scheme, the Board also sponsored the willing female candidates from the tea community to undergo professional training in nursing courses at the Gauhati Medical College, Gauhati and Assam Medical College, Dibrugarh.

After independence, the Government of India through the 'Central Board for Workers Education' (CBWE) introduced educational programmes such as vocational training to increase the general awareness of the workers in the organized, unorganized and rural sectors at national, regional and unit levels.

This central board also gave emphasis on the adult education programmed to educate those workers who could not attend or were compelled to leave schools early. The CBWE started functioning since 1958, which gets grants-in-aid from the Ministry of Labour

and Employment to operate its activities. The Directorate of Welfare of Tea Garden and Ex-Tea Garden Tribes, constituted by the Government of Assam in 1984 also introduced post-metric scholarship, grants for cultural activities including educational tour, grant to non-official organizations, grants for purchase of text books and uniform and grants for construction of hostel for boys/girls.

The Tea Garden Cell in Assam was established in line with Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA) and the officials of elementary education in 2003. Since the inception, the SSA Mission has been conducting many programmes such as enrolment drive programmes, Meena Campaign, summer camp, etc. in tea gardens of Assam. Meena Campaign is a continuous effort to promote education among girl children in tea and ex-tea garden areas for creating awareness among girl children and make them active.

In tea garden areas in Assam in collaboration with UNICEF, Meena Campaign is aimed to implement in 1055 tea gardens, 1336 ex-tea gardens and 2180 char area schools and education guarantee scheme centers by engaging tea garden volunteers and mothers' group.

First, the SSA Mission in Assam identified some educationally backward areas covering all 825 registered tea gardens as the special focus group areas in 2004. In addition, to evaluate the available infrastructure facilities in the schools of tea gardens, the SSA officials conducted a survey on school infrastructure in July 2004. Though the SSA could not provide physical facilities to the tea garden schools, they have been engaging in many educational developmental activities in plantation areas. Every year during summer vacation, summer camps were organized in many schools in tea garden areas and tea garden volunteers were entrusted for organizing the camps.

Orientation of children on scouts & guide, drills, reading ability development of children and enhancement of co-curricular skills of children were the main targets of the programmed up to 2005-06. Further, the SSA mission also granted annual school infrastructure, maintenance & repairing and

teachers' grants to the tea garden managed schools in 2008-09. This scheme includes granting financial assistance for construction and repairing school buildings, toilets, drinking water facilities and fencing/boundary wall etc. Despite many efforts, improvement of their educational level seems to be far below the expectation.

In spite of various educational policies since independence, high percentage of illiteracy still exists among the tea garden women laborers compared to other occupations. The study conducted by Labour Bureau, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India; New Delhi (1980) showed the pathetic condition of educational scenario in tea plantation areas even after the Plantations Labour Act (PLA) was introduced in 1951.

There were only 66.1 percent tea gardens that provided educational facility to their workers in the country as a whole by the managements. Remaining 33.9 percent of tea gardens had no schools. The management provided only primary schools in all these tea gardens. Schools beyond primary level did not exist in these gardens. The study found that, no fee was charged in any of these schools. But the picture of supplying certain articles such as books, uniform, etc. to the school going children were in vague. Only about 27.3 percent of tea estates were supplying such articles to children in entire southern region of the country whereas about 15.1 percent were in West Bengal. Assam, where country's more than half percent of the tea is produced, has been receiving only 6.3 percent of such articles.

Another study conducted by the Labour Bureau (Chandigarh) in 2008-09 on Socio-economic conditions of women Workers in Plantation Industry found that about 40.4 percent tea gardens (19 units out of 47 tea plantation sample units in the country) were maintaining schools. The study also found that about 50 per cent of the units were providing education facilities in Assam and West Bengal. Toppo (1999) also showed the poor quality of education system in tea plantation areas which resulted in drop-out of children from schools. Similar studies by Fernandez et al. [1] also revealed that poor infrastructures as the main reasons behind

the illiteracy among workers in the all tea growing districts of Assam.

Objectives and Methodology

Despite the important of education in our nation a large number of children are still deprived of education on the ground of poverty, caste system gender etc. The government since independence has been implementing a number of scheme for educating its citizen at least up to the primary level. The study attempt to bring out the gender discrimination in educating their child, as gender discrimination is still prevailing as a biggest obstacle for achieving education. The study intended to highlight the Socio-Economic background and Gender discrimination in contributing towards the status of education among children of tea workers.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Udalguri district. The district is situated in the central part of Assam and on the Northern side of the river Mighty Brahmaputra. This district is bounded by Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in the north, Sonitpur district in the east, Darrang district in the south and Baksa district in the west. Total geographical area of the district is about 1,852.16 sq. km, while the population of the district is 831,668. Distance of the District Headquarters from the state capital of Guwahati is about 140 km.

Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data were collected from newspapers, journals, books and internet sources and primary data were collected through direct interaction with 50 respondents from a Shilikha tea garden with a structure questionnaire. The proposed study has been built upon the information collected from primary sources. In the present study 50 respondents was purposively selected and interviewed with a structured questionnaire. Analysis of primary data is done through tabular method, bar diagram and pie diagram.

Related Review of the Study

Sharma [2] in her study of the educational problems of Tea garden labourers of Assam extensively analyzed the occupational

pattern of the out of school children of the Tea Garden Labourer. It was found that 60 per cent of the out of school children are not engaged in any specific work and 30 per cent children are of the age group (6-14). The cause of non-enrolment and drop out of the children of tea garden labour community is their unawareness about the need of Education.

This unawareness results in general disinterest in school and education. Immediacy of job in garden makes the problem more intense because they are almost sure to get a job in the garden for which they need not have any schooling. Having been confined within the garden, they do not feel the need of Education.

Bora in 2002 [3] conducted a study to examine the existing facilities for primary education in Tea Gardens of Dibrugarh District. The study reveals that (1) School in the tea gardens area fail to create congenial atmosphere to motivate the students to attend the school. (2) Teachers are engaged in other works of the tea gardens in addition to the teaching works. (3) Infrastructural facilities of the schools are also found not satisfactory. (4) Low percentage of enrolment of girl children in the schools was found due to parent's illiteracy and early marriage of the girl child. (5) Teacher pupil ratio of the schools under study range from 1:30-1:35. Enrollment percentage of boys was found to be 66.93% and for girls it was 33.07% only.

A study carried out by Sharma .G [2], said that the tea tribes of Assam are among the backward and most exploited tribes in India though their newer generation is comparatively educated. The tea planters usually exploit the tea tribe in every possible way. Lacks of education, poverty, addition to alcohol are the major problems in the life of tea garden workers

Saikia [4] in her study examined the problems of non-enrolment and drop out of the children of tea garden labourers. The study reveals that the rate of both these variables are higher for girls than for boys the degrees of this problem various from garden to garden. Another important finding is the tea garden labourers are not used to get admission in the primary school in the

appropriate age. Involvement in domestic work, engagement in wage earning activities irregular attendance, unattractive school environment, care of siblings are some of the reasons for dropout and non-enrolment. Parent's addiction in alcohol is a major hindrance in the part of educational progress of the tea garden labourer children.

Sharma Nirmal [5] conducted a study on Universalization of Elementary Education among tea tribe of Assam with special reference to Jorhat district. His study is based on the educational facility available in the tea gardens for elementary education and to estimate the enrolment trend in primary stages schools, to estimate the dropouts and to know the teacher pupil ratio of the primary schools of tea gardens.

The study reveals that the girls are not encouraged to study beyond primary level. Tea tribe children who are living in Tea garden labour lines are primarily 1st generation learner whose parents are either illiterate or with low educational status. Though 58 percent of parents of these children are literate the education level is not high and most of them are not yet aware about the need of education. Therefore the school system for them must be special. In all plans, programmes, decision and policy implementation Tea garden schools should get extra special attention.

Bosumatari and Goyari [6] conducted a study on "Educational Status of Tea Plantation Women Workers in Assam: An Empirical Analysis". They said that a large proportion of tea plantation workers in India are still women, most of whom are illiterate or educationally backward. The study examined the factors responsible for the literacy rate and school dropouts among girls in the tea gardens areas. The study found that a very low proportion of women workers are literate, it seems that the literacy rate of female was less than the male.

They said that the economic backwardness, negligence of girl's education, early marriages and unavailability of educational infrastructure etc were found to be important reasons for low literacy among women workers.

Pradip Kurmi [7] made a study relating to the education level of children of Derby Tea garden of Assam. Their study shows that factors like family size, mother’s education level, household income have high statistical significance in influencing the level of education of the children. Other factors like family debt, sex of the children and father’s exposure to outside world are not so significant.

Another study emphasising girl’s education among tea tribes was conducted by Madhumita and Gogoi [8] in Rajgarh tea estate of Dibrugarh district of Assam. Their main objective of the study was to understand the problem of girl child education of the tea tribe community.

Through their study they found out that educational status of girl children is still low among the tea tribes community as compared to boys. They said that the factors that lead to backwardness of girl child education are due to the household works entrusted on the girl child, parent’s unfavourable attitude towards girl education and lack of unfavourable social environment and lack of minimum facilities for study.

Hassan [9] carried out a study focusing on the socio-economic condition of the female workers in Lackatoorah tea garden of Sylhet district of Bangladesh. The study reveals that the living condition of the female labourers in the tea garden is very poor. It shows that about 94% of the female workers admitted that they have to right to inherit property, 92% admitted that they are physically mentally tortured by both their husband and employer. 68% of the female workers claimed that they have no control over their income and 86% of them prefer small family but they have no power to take decision regarding child issue.

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Distribution of Respondents according to their Gender and Religion

Out of the total sample of 50 respondents, 32 respondents were Hindu and 18 respondents are Christian families. From the above table (1) it is evident that 15 of respondents are male and 35 are female. And 32 are Hindu and 18 are Christian. As majority of the tea garden workers are women, hence the number of female respondents are more than male respondents.

Table1: Distribution of Respondents according to Gender and Religion

Gender	Male	Female	Total
	15	35	50
Religion	Hindu	Christian	Total
	32	18	50

Distribution of Respondent according to their Age Group

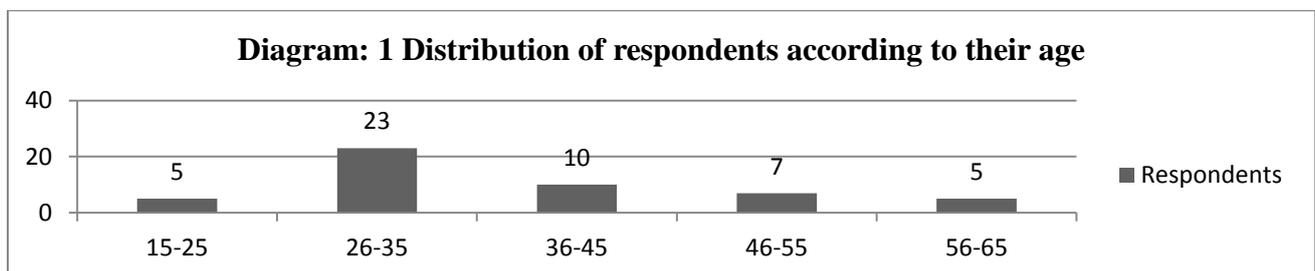
It is cleared from the above figure1 and table 2 that out of the total respondents, highest number of respondents that is 25 of the respondents belong to the age group of 26-35, followed by 10 respondents in the age

group of 36-45 and 7 respondents come under the age group of 46-55. While in the age group of 15-26 and 56-65 the numbers of respondents are 5 respectively. It shows that majority of the respondents are from the age group which is a crucial time of parenting. And of the biggest responsible of a parent is to educate their child.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to their Age

Age group	15-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-65
Respondents	5	23	10	7	5

Source: Primary data field survey Udalguri district, April 2016



Distribution of Respondents According to their Educational qualification

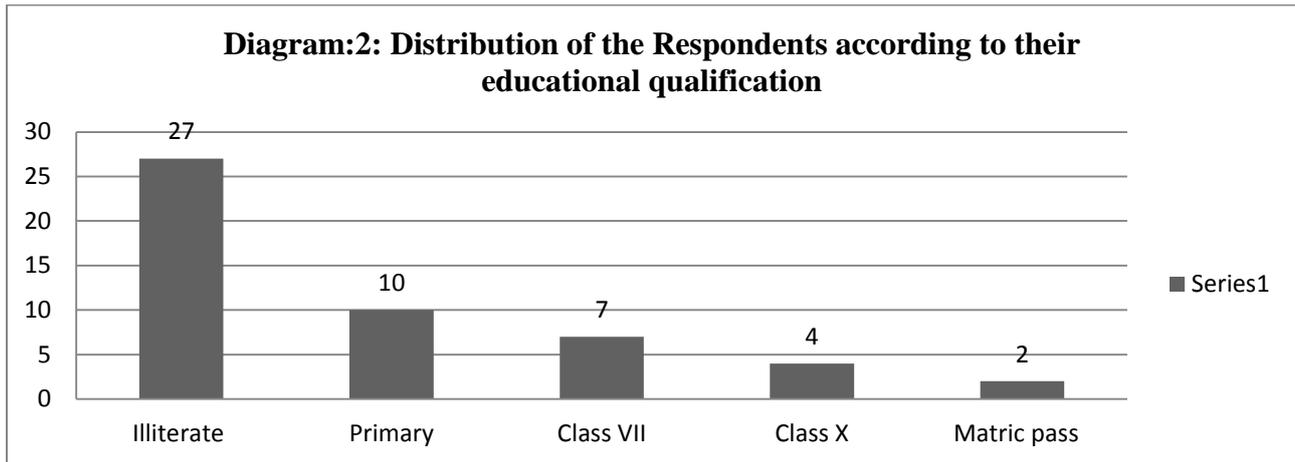
It has been widely accepted that the education of the child to some extent depends on the education level of the parents. The table 3 and figure 2 below shows the educational qualification of the

respondents. The survey reveals that majority of the respondents are illiterate (27 respondents), and 10 respondents are educated up to primary level with a capacity to hardly recognize the alphabets. 7 and 4 respondents are educated up to class VII and Class X respectively, and only 2 respondents are metric pass.

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents According to their Educational qualification

Illiterate	Primary	Class VII	Class X	Matric pass
27	10	7	4	2

Source: Primary data field survey Udalguri district, April 2016



Total Income per week

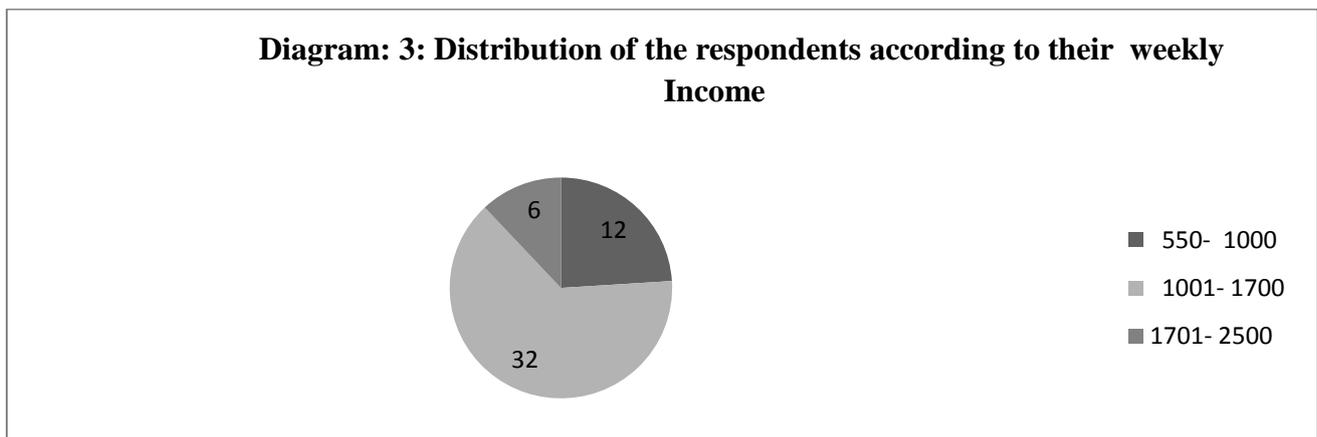
Along with education of the parents, income of the parents is also an important determinant for the education of their children. As it has been increasingly accepted that children of poor family are mostly drop-out students and get engaged in some informal job to contribute monetarily to their family. The following table shows that majority of the respondents have a

weekly income of 1001- 1700, and 12 respondents get a weekly income of Rs 550 to 1000 and only 6 respondents get a weekly wage of Rs 1701-2500. Even though their children go to government school where the fees is very low or even free in some cases they are not much interested in sending their children to higher than primary level of education, as their income does not support them, and expenditure of education increases beyond primary level.

Table: 4 Distribution of the respondents according to their weekly Income

Income (in Rs.)	550- 1000	1001- 1700	1701- 2500-
No. Of respondent	12	32	6

Source: Primary data field survey Udalguri district, April 2016



Total family Size

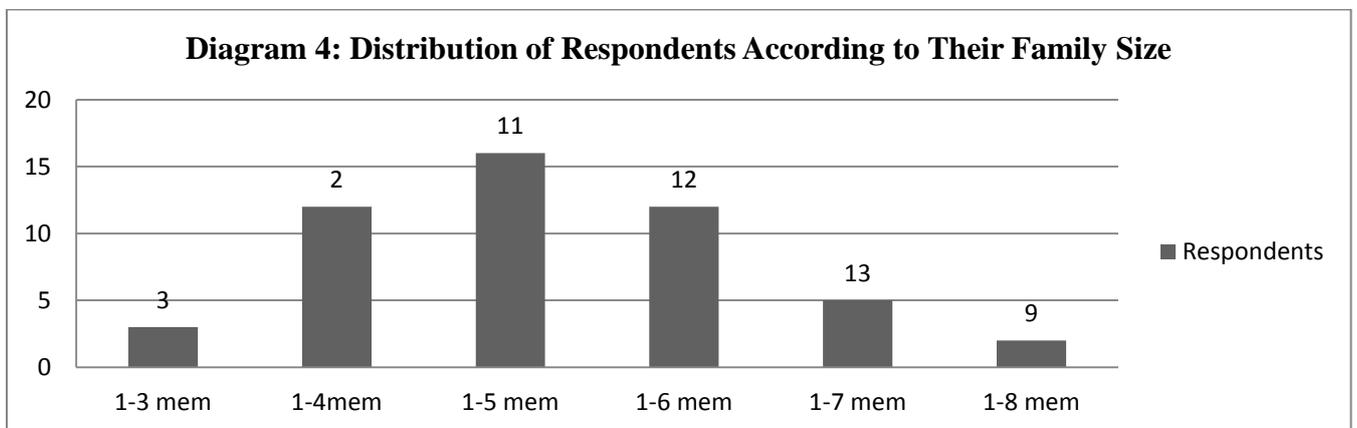
The size of the family is another factor that affects the attainment of education of the children of that family. It is strongly realized by many academicians and policy makers that small family is a happy family, as there are fewer burdens on the bread earner. The table below shows that only 5 respondents have a family of less than five members. 13 respondents have a family of seven

members, 11 respondents have family of five members and 9 respondents with eight family members. It has been observed that most of the respondents have a family of more than five members. As the tea labourers are not aware of the benefit of small family they consider their children as earning member of the family at a very early age of their live and fail to provide their children with proper education.

Table 4: Total Family Members of the Respondents

Total family size	1-3	1-4	1-5	1-6	1-7	1-8
No. Of respondents	3	2	11	12	13	9

Source: Primary data field survey udalguri district, 2016



Educational Status of the Respondent's Children

Education plays a great role in the life of everyone all through the life. Getting proper education is very necessary to get success and happy life just like food is necessary for healthy body. It is the prime duty of the parents to send their children to school. Through school education helps children to learn and develop personality, mental skills, moral and physical powers. Education is the only key to success in personal and professional life.

The table 5 below shows that there are a total number of 121 children (only children below 14 years of age are taken into account) among the sample of 50 respondents, so it shows that in an average each respondent have two numbers of children (below 14 years of age) . In case of some respondents they have children of above 14 years of old who are mostly dropout and engaged in some or the other type of unskilled work in the tea garden. The total number of male

children is 69 and female children are 52. From the responds of the respondents it has been found that 10 male and 12 female are illiterate. 37 male and 27 female children are educated up to primary level, Only 12 male and 10 female child goes to class V.

The number further declines when it comes to class VII and class X, 6 male, 3 female are educated up to class V and 4 male children are educated up to Class X, there is no female child educated class X. This shows that the children are mostly educated up to primary level and the number declines for both male and female beyond the primary level of education (especially in case of female child).

To pursue education beyond primary level, they have to go to nearby towns where higher level schools are located. Pursuing education beyond primary level became more difficult due to poor transport and communication system in the areas. There are no good roads which reached the nearby

town easily. Added to this, majority of families are economically poor due to which they cannot afford to send children to high schools or colleges. They also admitted that they are not getting any financial help from the tea garden owner in educating their children beyond the primary level. Even if any family decide to educate their children beyond the primary level of education more preference is given to the male child than to a girl child.

When the girls child grows up more importance is given in training them to look after the house like cooking, taking care of younger siblings, collecting water and also they get engaged in tea garden for picking tea leaves. The gender wise discrimination

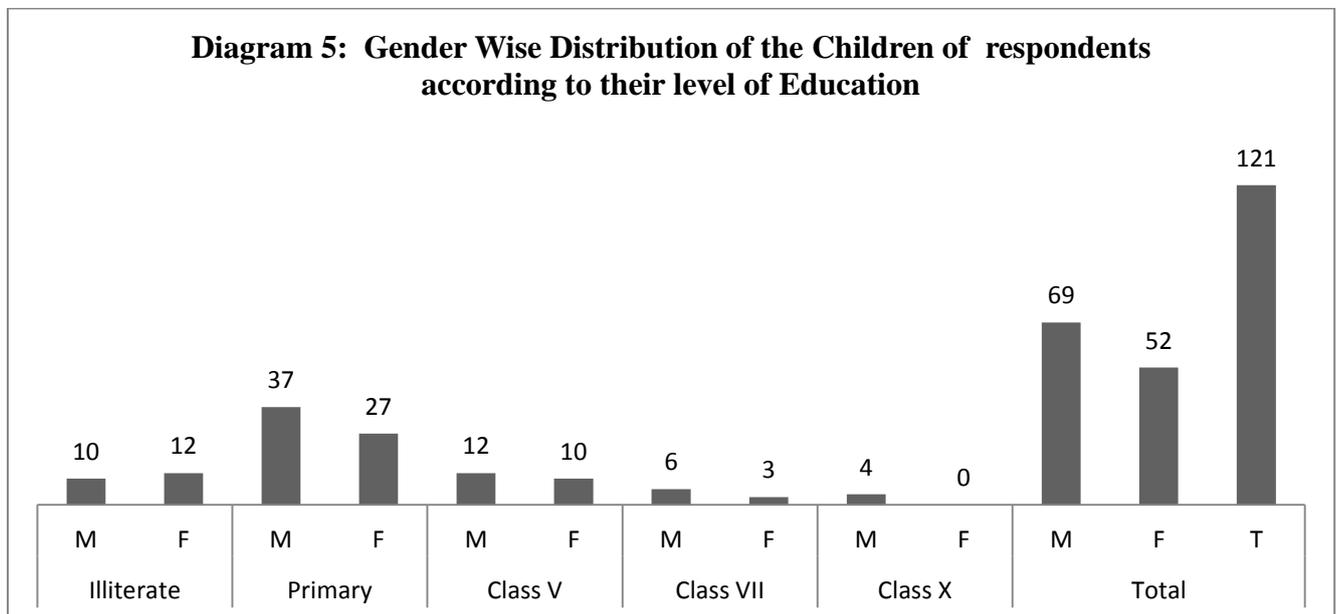
analysis of education of the children shows a more or less satisfactory picture, as the table and figure 3.8 shows that the female child competing with the male child in all level of education, but however at higher level of education the male child get more preference then the female child as the data shows that at the secondary and above secondary level the male child are more than female child.

This may be because the government have taken various initiatives for primary education, which has increase the number of female child in primary education level. But there is a long way to go for increasing the female enrolment in higher level of education.

Table 5: Distribution of the respondents children (age below 14 years) as per their educational level

Educational qualification	Illiterate		Primary		Class V		Class VII		Class X		Total		
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	T
Children of respondent	10	12	37	27	12	10	6	3	4	0	69	52	121

Source: Primary data field survey Udalguri district, April 2016



Household Infrastructure

Different household compositions may lead to differential life and health expectations and outcomes for household members.

Therefore Household infrastructure is also one of the main factors for the development of education of the children. The problem

arises due to lack of infrastructure facilities like insufficient rooms, electricity, water supply etc. Therefore proper infrastructure at home is also a basic requirement for creating an atmosphere at home for the children to study. The table 6 below holds a detail about the infrastructure available to the respondents.

Table 6: Distribution of Respondents according to the various amenities available to them

S.NO	Characteristics	No. of respondents	
1.	What is the ownership status of your house?	a. Owner of the house	30
		b. Tenant	2
		c. Provided by the employer	18
2.	How many rooms are there in your house?	a. 1	11
		b. 2	16
		c. 3	17
		d. 4	6
3.	What are the domestic water resources in your house?	a. Running water supply on tap	12
		b. Common pond	7
		c. Well water	11
		d. Tube well	20
4.	Do you have electricity?	a. Yes	31
		b. No	19
5.	What is the building material of your house?	a. Brick	11
		b. Wooden	5
		c. Soil	34

- **Ownership status of the house:** it is observed from the table above that 30 workers have their own house, while 18 workers are living in the house provided by the employer and only 2 workers are living in the rented house. Thus it is concluded that majority of the respondents of the tea workers are living in their own houses. The respondents having own houses are mostly small in size with at the most two rooms. The workers staying in house provided by the owner are also not in a good condition with lack of proper sanitation and water supply facilities.

- **Rooms of the house:** Number of rooms in a house also plays an important role in providing a healthy atmosphere for education. The survey reveals that 17 respondents have three rooms and 16 respondents have house with two rooms. And 11 respondents have house with only one room only 6 respondents have four rooms. It have been observed that most of the tea workers are alcoholic, and most of them destroy the peace at home, which distract the children from education. The children of houses with less than three rooms face this problem, which gradually reduces their interest in studies. For proper education of children apart from the school environment the environment at home should also be comfortable, but

unfortunately the children of tea workers rarely get a positive environment at home.

- **Domestic water resources:** From the table above, it have been observed that about 12 respondents get running water supply, 16 of them collect water from a common pond and 11 respondents said that they get water from well and majority of them almost 20 of them collect water from tube well. Absent of proper water supply also contribute to discontinuation of education especially the girl child as they have spent much of their time in collecting water.

- **Electricity in the house:** 31 workers have electricity in their house and 19 workers don't have electricity. Even those who have electricity supply it is not in a sufficient amount. Electricity is an important amenity, absent of it affect the daily activities of life.

Conclusion

Tea tribe children who are living in Tea garden labour are primarily 1st generation learner whose parents are either illiterate or with low educational status. Therefore the school system for them must be special in all Plans, programmes, decision and policy implementation. Tea garden schools should

get extra special attention. The existing barrier in education at tea gardens can be removed to a great extent by introducing more schools beyond primary level in the garden areas. This will help to improve education among garden workers qualitatively and quantitatively. It is good that the state government of Assam has already initiated to introduce schools through Assam Sarva Siksha Abhiyan. However, the introduction of schools is limited to primary level only.

Therefore, state government should initiate to establish school beyond primary level, college and some vocational technical centres. Maximum workers in sample gardens are illiterate and are not able to appreciate the value of education. Therefore, constant campaign on education through the government agencies, NGOs and garden authorities to spread the awareness of education among them is very important. To eradicate illiteracy, massive adult education programme should be introduced in the garden areas. For this purpose,

night/evening schools may be established in the garden areas by the planters in co-operation with the concerned government departments and workers should be encouraged to attend such schools. Since most of the problems in obtaining higher education are related to economic backwardness of the garden workers, therefore measures should be taken to improve the economic conditions.

This can be done, by proper wage policies, promotion schemes, pay incentives for skilled workers, incentives to those who obtain higher education, scholarship for children of the tea garden workers etc. Apart from the other, measures should be also taken to educate the tea labourers by introducing adult schools as when parents are educated they will know the value of educating their children. So, the tea garden management should come up with such school where the tea labourer can be introduced to the alphabets during their free times.

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