Need of education among the tea tribe women in the Udalguri district of Assam, India

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Abstract

Women education has occupied a very important place in society. Various organizations of the Globe have launched various schemes and programmes to promote and educate in each and every corner of the world. Education is a fundamental right of human development; hence the present study was conducted on education of the tea tribe women in Udalguri district of Assam. The study is a descriptive type of study. The highlighting point of the study indicates that the education of women among Tea tribe women in the district is lacking behind but now they have become very much conscious and aware about their educational rights. Education of women among tea tribes plays an important role in the development in the district. They also play their role in the economic development. Tea tribe women play their role in the socio cultural development also. Tea tribe women and their management both have positive views towards education. Tea tribe women favor Sarva Shiksha Abhijan and its full implementation with Mid-day Meal, with free text books and qualitative support. Hence the author of this paper studied the need of education among the tea tribe women in Udalguri district.

Keywords : Tea tribes, Women, Education, Udalguri.

1. Introduction

Education is lifelong and continuous process of learning and empowerment and is also the basis of development and change. Every developing nation should believe that education is the heart of the development process. Development in any country will mean the improvement in the quality of life of the people as a whole as also of the individual.

A nation’s development is determined by its economic, social and technological development. Underlying all these parameters is the human resource development.

The role woman in any society is a significant indicator to the level of culture and social justice and economic and social development. Therefore, education for women has become a necessity for achieving developmental goals.

Education for girls and women is one of the most rewarding investments a nation can make. Not only does it contribute to overall development, it also raises income, promotes health and increases productivity.

Therefore the principle of gender equality is enshrined in the Indian Constitution in its Preamble, Fundamental Rights, Fundamental duties and Directive Principles. The Constitution not only grants equality to woman but also empowers the State to adopt measures of Positive discrimination in favour of woman. Within the framework of a democratic policy, our laws, democratic development policies, plans and programmes have aimed at women’s advancement in different sphere.
India, along with the other SAARC countries, dedicated the year 1990 as the year of the girl child and initiated policies and strategies to elevate the sufferings of the girl child. Special measures were taken to ensure that benefits of all developmental efforts are acquired to the girl child equally with boy child.

Education can certainly play a positive role in the improvement of women’s status. It helps to create an environment for women to seek knowledge and information in order to make informed choices and create circumstances in which women can learn at their own pace. As women become more aware of the complex web of factors which have deprived and marginalized them, they begin to identify the ability to read and write as a skill which can contribute to the process of their role in the society. At this juncture it is to be mentioned that the traditional Assamese society is constituted with various tribes who migrated to Assam at different times from different parts of India for their survival. Among them the tea tribes constitute the most important part in the Assamese society. Assam had a perennial problem of shortage of labourers during the early days of the tea plantation. This had necessitated the British tea planters to procure laborers from the Adivasi areas of Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh etc.

Thus it has become very essential to conduct a study on education of women among tea tribes in the Udalguri district.

2. Significance of the study

Women play a very significant role in every family. She is the hub centering round in which the entire family revolves. Women plays the role as a mother, as a wage earning member, manager of the family and in keeping contact with the society. It is a fact that women can only educate the family because home is the first place to learn.

3. Tea Tribes

Tea tribes are by and large the aboriginals of India. They are believed to be non Aryan race. They are of Austo-Asiatic origin. They are migrated from various parts of India, like Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal, Maharashta and Tamil Nadu. The tea tribes have various caste and sub-castes among themselves. They have a total of one hundred thirty one castes and sub-castes. Some of the important sub-castes are Arya Male, Asar, Bhumihar, Mali, Basar, Basphor, Bania, Banzara, Chamar, Chara, Dhonwar, Dhopi, Dhanger, Ganda, Garhwali, Hari, Kawar, kalhandi, Karmakar, Kharia, Lodhi, Majhi, Nag, Orang, Pradhan, Rautia, Sanatal, Tanti, Teli, etc. They are the tribal people of different ethnic groups speaking dialects and having different culture. Though they have their own language and culture, yet now days they have mingled with greater Assamese society. Now they constitute the most important part in Assamese society and they like to identify themselves as a part of the Assamese society.

Tea Gardens are unique situations. The life in the Gardens, which is closely knit the overall management style, represents a true picture of feudal imperialism. The situation in the Tea Gardens is unique from two aspects:

The Management of the Gardens is still operating in the style that prevailed during the British regime, when Gardens were mostly set up and owned by British Companies. There are three kinds of functionaries: the Management, the Office Staff, and the Plantation Workers: The uniqueness of norms and practices, which are otherwise uncommon in other areas keep the society secluded from other surrounding situations.

The demographic pattern of the Gardens itself is unique. As the pioneer Planters could not manage to avail cheap but hardworking laborers from among the local populations, they imported laborers from the tribal populations of Central Indian Regions and its eastern peripheries hence, the population of Tea Garden in Assam represent about 50 tribal groups having origins in the Central
Indian belt. During course of time, these people developed their identity as Tea-tribes. The common language of these people, known as sadani, in other parts of Eastern India, got modified.

The tea tribes may be defined as the Tea Garden Labour Society and they belong to a working class society under a highly Capitalistic Industry. Women Laborers of tea gardens constitute almost half of its total labor force. The number of female tea workers in Assam constitutes 50.35% of the total female workers engaged in India. Among the laborer community a girl is considered an economic asset to the family, who takes the responsibility of looking after the younger siblings from her childhood and making it convenient for her mother in wage earning. These girls are involved in childcare and socialization process of younger siblings. These young girls who take up such responsibility at a tender age gradually enter into labor market after reaching their adolescence.

Tea tribe’s women play an important role in the tea industry. Tea industry solely depends on women for the plucking of tea leaves. Tea tribes women not only manage their house hold affairs but also they look into the economic condition of the family. Most of the women earn their livelihood by themselves. Thus, it can be easily understood that in comparison with men, women folk occupies a high status in the family. It is an obvious fact that the Plantation Workers in the Tea Gardens represent one of the deprived lots in Assam from all-round welfare aspects. In education, the scenario is alarmingly grim. Around 43% of the children in the age group of 6-14 years ‘are still out of school (against the State average of around 25%). Some areas show very high number of schools with PTR higher than 1.40. There are still around 15% areas that are not served by any lower are not served by any lower primary school, although the Garden Manage-ments are bound to schooling facilities to the children of the plantation Workers by the Statutory provision of Plantation Labour Act, 1951. There are certain additional contributing factors like high extent of alcoholism, lack of savings element, practice of early marriage, unsatisfactory hygiene status — those are prevailing among the Plantation Workers. Given the UEE becoming Fundamental Right, children of the Plantation laborers deserve special attention and accordingly Tea Gardens are considered as Special Areas by Axom Sarba Siksha Abhijan Mission (A.S.S A.M.). There are around 850 tea gardens in Assam government and management responsibilities.

4. Udalguri District

Udalguri, the newly created District has been curved out of the erstwhile District of Darrang. It is under Bodoland Territorial Council. It has two sub divisions i.e. Udalguri and Bhergaon. The total area of this District is 1,85,2 16 sq km and total population is 7,56,671. (As published by the D.0 office Udalguri District on 2008) Udalguri District shares its boundaries with At this juncture, it is to be mentioned that there are thirty (30) tea gardens in the Udalguri District. These include more than half of the total population of tea tribes of the Udalguri District. These gardens are divided into two groups. One is managed by the Multi National Companies and known as other is managed by the local people, which are known as Native Gardens. Most of the tea gardens have primary schools and these are managed by the tea garden authorities. After primary education they have to go to the neighboring places for further education. Most of the tea garden authorities provide free bus services to the children of tea garden employees studying in nearby educational institutes.

On the basis of the above discussion, the investigator felt the need to develop a research paper with the following objectives:

**4.1 Objectives of the study**

To study the need of education among tea tribes women in the Udalguri district.

To study the role of tea tribes women for their economic, social and cultural development in the Udalguri district.
To study the facilities provided to the tea tribes women by their employers.

4.2 Limitation of the study

The study was limited to Udalguri district only.

4.3 Delimitation of the study

The study was delimited only to the tea tribes women working in the tea gardens of Udalguri district only.

5. Operational definition of Terms

Tea tribes : community engaged in tea production specially working class people.

Women : The female sex.

Education : The process of learning.

District : An administrative unit of state.

Udalguri : A newly carved out district of lower Assam within Bodoland Territorial Area.

6. Review of Related Literature

Review of related literature provides academic guidance to the investigator to develop the research designs/plans and procedures. It directs the researcher to acquaint with the current knowledge in the area in which he/she is going to conduct the research. Accordingly the present investigator consulted a number of books and studies on tribal and tea garden workers. A few are mentioned here, for example, M. L. Dutta and K. P. Bora (1979-82), A. R. Rahman (1989), B. C. Rai (1990), G. C. Biswal (1991), Meghraj A et al., (2009) which helped the investigator to prepare the plan and procedure of the study.

7. Plan and Procedure

The objectives of the study were to analyze the need of education among tea tribes women, their economic support to family and role towards socio-cultural development of Udalguri district. The other objective was to see the facilities provided by their managements to the women tea workers. At the time of investigation, there were 200 women tea workers from 8 tea gardens. From each tea garden, 25 women tea workers were selected for interviews randomly. The investigator constructed the interview schedule and also examined by the experts. Responses were collected through YES and NO process verbally and as per need a few open ended queries were considered. Analysis are done only through percentages and interpreted accordingly. Following tables 1, 2 and 3 shows the total responses of the respondents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Women workers need education</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>90.5%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Need of education for their children</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Need of education for girls</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Mothers provide study time to daughters</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Parents send siblings regularly to school</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>71.5%</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>28.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>They need separate primary school for girls</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table-1 reveals that women tea workers (90.5%) are in favor of education whereas only 9.5% replied negatively. 90% women workers felt the need of education for their children. Interestingly 75.5% women workers stated positively for girl’s education whereas 24.5% replied negatively. 71% women workers provide time for study to their daughter. On the other hand, 29% stated negatively that they do not provide time to their daughters. 71.5% mothers replied that they send their siblings to school regularly because education is the key for knowledge. Here also 28.5% mothers showed negative views towards the statement. Very surprisingly 71% women workers viewed that they want separate primary school for their daughters as still in the tea gardens alcoholism, superstitions and unwanted rituals prevailed.

**Table - 2 :** Women play a significant role in development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Education changes women worker’s lifestyle</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Education helps everyone for development</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>79.5%</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Girls play a significant role in self development</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>74.5%</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Girls in the tea gardens help their families economically by working in the gardens</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Girls play their role in the society through cultural activities</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Women workers help their siblings in socialization</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>89.5%</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table-2 illustrated that 65.5% women tea workers have positive views that education brings changes in their lives. Of course, 34.5% women workers are against of the statement. Secondly more than 79% responded that education can bring development in life as well as in gardens. 74.5% workers viewed that girls play a significant role in self development. But here also 25.5% women workers replied negatively. 69.5% women workers viewed that girls helped their parents economically by rendering their services towards the gardens. On the other hand, 30.5% workers replied negatively. In the cultural activities also, girls play vital role by performing cultural programmes like group dance which is popularly known as Jhumur dance where 82.5% women workers replied positively. 89.5% respondents stated that they helped their siblings to become social in their gardens.

**Table - 3 :** Role of the employers towards women workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl. No.</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Women workers are satisfied with their employers</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>95.5%</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Employers provide facilities for health, education towards workers and sometimes they open Mother’s club also</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Multinational garden workers get more facilities than the native garden workers</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>52.5%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Women workers stated for Sarbha Siksha Abhijan for the primary level</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>88.5%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Table-3, 95.5% women workers are satisfied with their employers. Only a negligible number of workers responded negatively. 52.5% workers viewed that looks after their health, education and other creative activities like opening Mother’s club. But on the other hand 47.5% women workers are of the opposite views. It is clear that 95% replied that multinational garden workers get more facilities than the native garden workers. The last query gives a sensible answer for the study i.e., Sarbha Siksha Abhijan is known to them and therefore, 88.5% women workers want more of primary schools under the Abhijan and only 11.5% are against the statement.

**Figure - 1 :** Tea Tribes Women opinion towards Assamese society.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of tea gardens</th>
<th>Sample Female workers per garden</th>
<th>Total Sample</th>
<th>Positive Response</th>
<th>Negative Response</th>
<th>Positive Response (%)</th>
<th>Negative Response (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Above Figure No.1 shows that all the tea tribes women workers think themselves as a part and parcel of Assamese society. They like to identify themselves as Assamese.

### 8. Conclusion and suggestions

In conclusion it is clear that though education of women among tea tribes in Udalguri district is lacking but now they have become more aware about their educational right. Education of women among tea tribes plays an important in the development of the district. They also play their vital role in economic development. Tea tribes women play their roles in socio-cultural development also. The management or the employers are also trying to provide women workers more of facilities.

To solve the challenging problems of the tea tribe women, effort should be made collectively with the mutual cooperation and understanding among women tea workers, management, local people and no doubt the government.

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