

Education among Tea Garden Workers: A Study on the Availability and Accessibility in Udalguri District of Assam

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Abstract: Tea industry is generally a labour intensive industry. It provides employment to about two million persons in the state of Assam alone. Out of which, majority of these workers are still illiterates and backwards. There are several factors behind such vast illiteracy and economic backwardness. While studies on different socio-economic aspects are plenty, very few studies on educational perspectives of tea plantation workers are found in the literature. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the availability, accessibility and factors behind poor development of educational facilities among the tea plantation workers in Assam. The specific objectives of present paper are: (i) to evaluate the availability and accessibility of education among the workers in the sample tea gardens and (ii) to analyze the reasons behind the high wastage and stagnation and poor development of educational facilities among the sample workers. The entire analysis was based on primary survey data collected from four sample tea gardens of Udalguri district. Some of the important findings of the study are: (a) the state of education among the tea workers in the sample gardens is very poor both qualitatively and quantitatively. Still about 60 percent of sample population are illiterates. (b) Available schools are limited to the primary level only in the sample gardens, i.e., schools beyond primary level are not found in all the sample gardens. (c) The extent of wastage and stagnation among school children in sample gardens has been very high. (e) The parents' education level and parents' income level have been found to have direct and positive impact on their children's education.

Keywords: 1.Education, 2.Tea Plantation Workers, 3.Illiteracy, 4.Income

I: Introduction

Tea industry occupies a very prominent place in the economy of Assam. Tea industry, being a labour intensive industry, provides employment to a large number of workforces. It has contributed substantially to the economy of Assam by providing employment to nearly half a million population, contributing revenues and support to develop other infrastructure and service sector over the years. Demographically, tea garden labour community of Assam

represents around 20 per cent of the total population of the state accounting more than 45 lakhs tea garden labour population in the state (Census, 2011). Thus, tea garden labour is one of the biggest contributors to the organised workforce to the economy of Assam. About 17 per cent of workers in Assam are engaged in tea industry and around 50 percent of the total tea plantation workforce in Assam is women. Out of which, majority of these workers are still illiterate. Education, an important ladder for transformation of a community or society for betterment, is at the root of the social exclusion of the tea workers. There were few schools in the gardens which were run by garden authorities. Very few government schools are available in the tea garden areas. Added to it, the quality of education provided in these schools remains to be a concern. An overwhelming majority of the children of the tea plantation workers drop out from schools before they can use education to step in to other profession and thus they have to enter the tea gardens as labourers. Therefore, the literacy rate among the tea garden workers and their families is very low. In addition, some previous studies have pointed out that the educational facilities provided by the tea garden authorities in Assam for the children of plantation workers are far below the actual needs, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Studies of Dutta (1983) on the education and employment of the tea garden labourers of Assam with special reference to Sibsagar district, Sharma and Das (2008, 2009) on the plantation workers in North –East India, Sengupta (2009) on tea labourers of North East India and Singh et. al. (2006) on the socio-economic and political problems of tea garden workers pointed out that, tea plantation schools which were established by the garden authorities are limited to the primary level only. Therefore, students beyond primary level face many problems in accessing their higher education. Since many tea gardens are located in very far flung remote areas of the state, the workers are isolated from the transport and communication facilities. This further makes accessing educational facility beyond the primary level more difficult. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt has been made to examine the availability, accessibility and factors behind poor development of educational facilities among the tea plantation workers in Assam.

The primary objective of this paper is to examine the extent of provision, utilisation and benefits of different levels of educational facilities among the sample tea plantation workers in Udalguri district of Assam. The specific objectives of present paper are: (i) to evaluate the availability and accessibility of education among the workers in the sample tea gardens and (ii) to analyze the reasons behind the high wastage and stagnation and poor development of educational facilities among the sample workers.

The entire analysis is based on primary survey data collected from four sample tea gardens of Udalguri district. The primary data were collected during September–November 2011 through structured questionnaires. Further, the analysis is also made through author's observations during the field surveys. Wherever possible, to check the statistical significance of study variables, the chi–square (χ^2) test is run on the observed data tables.

II: Evaluation of Educational Facilities in Sample Tea Gardens

(a) Availability of Schools in Sample Tea Estates

Since the introduction of the PLA, 1951 and 'The Assam Plantations Labour Rules, 1956', both Bhootechang and Hattigor tea estates also established Lower Primary (LP) schools in

their gardens along with other tea estates in Assam. During that time both estates established two primary schools in each garden. On the other hand, small tea growers have no compulsion of providing free education to the workers. Therefore, there are no garden schools inside these small gardens. Further, almost all workers in these small gardens are temporary workers. Workers are employed from different parts of the local area. Children of these workers avail their education of their respective native places. Therefore, the establishment of schools is not a compulsion within the small tea gardens.

The available schools in the sample gardens are shown in Table 1. There are total four schools in the Bhooteachang tea estate of which two are garden schools (provided by garden authority) and two are SSA schools (established by Assam Sarva Siksha Abhiyan). Moreover, there are 3 private and government schools outside but near the garden areas. Therefore, there are total 7 primary schools inside and outside the Bhooteachang tea garden. On the other hand, Hattigor tea estate has total 5 primary schools within the tea estate of which two are garden schools and 3 are SSA schools. In addition, it has also 4 private and government schools near the tea estate. Therefore, there are total 8 schools inside and nearby Hattigor tea estate.

There are some private as well as government primary schools near small tea gardens of our sample. There are total 3 schools near Brotherhood tea gardens of which one is government primary school and 2 are private schools. Further, there are total 4 schools in nearby Jwnglary tea garden of which 2 are government schools and 2 are private schools.

Table 1: Number of Primary Schools in the Sample Tea Gardens

Gardens	Garden Schools	SSA Schools	Other Schools	Total
Bhooteachang	2	2	3	7
Hattigor	2	2	4	8
Big gardens	4	4	7	15
Brotherhood	...	...	3	3
Jwnglary	...	...	4	4
Small gardens	...	...	7	7

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Though schools in the sample are limited to primary stage only, yet number of schools has been increasing (Table 2). The total number of schools in the sample gardens and surrounding was only 6 during 1980s which increased to 22 during 2010s. A total of 16 extra schools had been established since 1980 which means almost 70 percent increase of schools during the last three decades. Such an increase has been partly due to the private agencies and NGOs who have decided to establish schools near garden areas to meet the required demand of schools. Further, the state government also has taken initiative to establish more primary schools to meet increasing demand of the schools in the state. Therefore, the number of primary and upper primary schools in surrounding sample gardens has been increasing.

Big tea gardens, being well established gardens, have more primary schools compared to small gardens in our sample (Table 2). Hattigor tea estate has the highest number of schools followed by Bhooteachang tea estate among the sample gardens. Though the number

of primary schools in Brotherhood and Jwnglary tea gardens is very less, yet the number has been continuously increasing over the years.

Though the number of schools upto the primary level has been increasing for the children of the tea labourers in the sample gardens, the available information shows that the quality of education has not improved. There still exists shortage of basic physical amenities in garden schools. Therefore, some families who are little better off and who can afford, they send their children to private schools. But many labourers are not able to afford to send their children to private schools and therefore many workers still prefer sending their children to garden schools which are provided free of cost by the garden authorities. Thus, many children of workers are not able to avail the better environment of education outside the gardens.

Along with the number of schools, the availability of educational facilities can also be measured by the availability of physical facilities of the schools and the availability of teachers. Therefore, an attempt has been made to examine the physical facilities and availability of teachers in the garden school in this section.

Table 2: Number of primary schools inside and nearby sample garden areas

Gardens	1981	1991	2001	2010
Bhooteachang	2	5	7	7
Hattigor	2	6	7	8
Big gardens	4	11	14	15
Brotherhood	1	2	2	3
Jwnglary	1	3	4	4
Small gardens	2	5	6	7
Total	6	16	20	22

Source: Field Survey, 2011

(b) Availability of Physical Facilities (Infrastructural Facilities)

To create an atmosphere congenial for efficient education, the school requires many amenities like class rooms, toilet, desk, bench, chair, table, library, black boards etc. According to the plantation labour Act 1951, the garden authority is supposed to take up all the responsibility of providing all kinds of amenities to the school. But it was observed that there were shortages of required physical facilities in the sample schools. Adequate care has not been taken on the educational development in the gardens by the authorities.

As regards to the accommodation facilities in the schools, almost all the four schools in the sample have only four class rooms in each school which is not sufficient for large number of students. Further, on the question of additional requirement of rooms, the head masters of Bhooteachang tea state replied that they do not require any more additional rooms. On the other hand, the head master of Hattigor tea estate reported the need of additional rooms as there are students in all classes from class I to class IV. Owing to the shortage of class rooms, sometimes, students have to sit outside the classroom (under the tree shades) for some classes. Though classrooms are there in the garden schools, the school buildings suffer from good maintenance. The buildings are congested and are not properly partitioned though there is sufficient land for expansion. As all the school rooms are not well partitioned, it becomes unmanageable for the teachers to give proper attention to all the students.

Moreover, there is no separate rest room for teachers. Therefore, teachers of these schools have to come directly to teach them and go back just after their classes. All the garden schools reported to have playground facilities but there seems to have shortage of games and sports materials. According to Plantation Labour Act 1951, the sports and games materials were also supposed to be supplied by the garden authorities in the garden schools. But due to the ignorance of labour community on these facilities, they are deprived of getting such facilities. Moreover, as there has been no demand placed by garden community to the authority, the schools continue to run without recreation facilities.

The facility for drinking water was not found available in all the sample schools. The students of these schools go to the nearby houses or to the wells located outside the school compound to drink water. As regards to urinals and toilets for the students, all the schools have toilet and urinal facilities but are not in good condition for use. These are very dirty and unhygienic. Therefore, students are seen going outside the school for urination. The number of furniture is not sufficient and the schools are not properly supplied with furnitures by the garden authority. Furniture for the teachers is also not adequate. Teaching aids other than the black boards are lacking in all the schools. Library facility is there in all the sample schools but there are no sufficient available books. And more interestingly, none of the students uses the library in the sample garden schools.

(c) Availability and Quality of Teachers

The role of teachers in the extension of education in a community is very important. The success or failure of the school mostly depends on the quality of teachers recruited in that school. There are altogether about 23 teachers in schools of sample areas including the head masters of whom 60 percent are males and 40 percent are females. The educational qualification of majority of teachers (about 74 percent) is up to the matriculation level only. Graduate teachers constitute only about 26 percent of whom all of them are untrained. Out of total teachers in the sample area schools, only one or two teachers were found to have formal training.

Table 3: No. of Teachers in the Garden Schools

Qualifications	Bhootechang	Hattigor	Brotherhood	Jwnglary	Total	Percentage
Matriculate	6	6	2	3	17	73.9
Graduate	...	2	2	2	6	26.1
Total	6	8	4	5	23	100

Note: Since no schools inside Brotherhood and Jwnglary gardens, no. of schools reported here are located nearby these gardens. Workers' children go to those schools.

Source: Field Survey, 2011

The tea garden areas generally do not attract properly qualified teachers due to their isolation from other urban areas and therefore, the tea garden schools suffer from the first requirement of a good school teacher. This is one the main reasons behind the low quality of teachers being recruited in these garden schools. Mostly educated people want settling down in urban areas compared to isolated areas like tea plantation gardens. Therefore, qualified teachers are not interested to join in garden schools. Moreover, the salary paid to the teachers is also very

low as compared to other government schools. In addition to above mentioned reasons, most of the planters remain unconcerned about educational or cultural upliftment of labourers as they are primarily interested in the business of tea production and everything else was considered unproductive and therefore uneconomic (Goswami, 1992). Therefore, enough qualified teachers are not recruited and the schools are under staffed.

The availability of educational facilities in the sample schools can be calculated by estimating students-teacher ratio of the sample schools. Table 4 shows that the students-teacher ratio in sample gardens is very high as compared to overall state's ratio. Assam state as a whole had 28:1 students-teacher ratio in 2009-10. But in the sample garden schools, this ratio was 37:1 during the time of field surveys in 2011. The ratio in the garden schools is even higher compared to SSA schools in both big gardens. The students-teacher ratio of tea garden schools is 51:1 whereas the SSA schools have 32:1 students-teacher ratio. This means that schools run by the SSA are better as compared to garden schools in terms of teachers.

Table 4: Students-Teacher Ratio in Sample Tea Garden Schools

Types of schools	Bhooteachang			Hattigor			Brotherhood			Jwnglary			Total		
	Student	Teacher	Ratio	Student	Teacher	Ratio	Student	Teacher	Ratio	Student	Teacher	Ratio	Student	Teacher	Ratio
Garden	173	3	58	182	4	46	...	...	...	...	...	...	355	7	51
SSA	137	4	34	171	6	29	124	4	31	184	5	37	616	19	32
Total	310	7	44	353	10	35	124	4	31	184	5	37	971	26	37

Source: Author's Calculation from Field Survey data, 2011

As stated above, schools beyond primary stage is not found inside the sample gardens. But there are some high schools and colleges which are located nearby towns of the garden areas. The distances of the nearest schools beyond primary level and colleges are given in Table 5. The nearest town from the gardens itself is more than 5 km. All the children who wish to continue their studies beyond primary level have to go to the schools which are far from the gardens. That is, all the higher educational institutes are located beyond 5 km from the gardens. Therefore, children who wish to continue their studies beyond primary level face many difficulties. First of all, they are from very poor families. Their parents work as a daily wage earners in plantations. Bearing transportation cost is big burden for them. Moreover, the qualities of transport available in these garden areas are very poor. There is no good road connectivity from gardens to nearby town where schools are located. Due to poor road connectivity, there are no good transport facilities in sample gardens. Only a few vehicles are available. Therefore, students are forced to go by cycles though it is more than 5 km away from gardens. Many families even cannot afford to buy cycles for every child.

To obtain higher education beyond primary schools, students from sample gardens go to nearby towns such as panery, Harisinga, Bengbari, Borigoan, Tangla, and Udalguri. Moreover, there are only two full fledged colleges in the entire district, namely, Tangla and Udalguri Colleges. These colleges are very far from all the four sample gardens. The nearest college for Brotherhood and Jwnglari gardens is Udalguri College. Tangla College is the

nearest college for Bhooteachang and Hattigor tea estates. All these colleges are located at the distance of about 8 to 18 kms from their gardens.

Table 5: Distances from the Local Towns (in km)

Gardens	Tangla	Udalguri	Panery	Harisinga	Bengbari
Bhooteachang	8	18	5	9	7
Hattigor	9	17	7	8	7
Brotherhood	16	13	12	8	10
Jwnglary	15	12	11	7	9

Source: Field Survey, 2011

IV: Accessibility of Education among Sample Workers

The accessibility of education among the sample workers is measured by two main indicators. These are the extent of participation of labour population on education and the social composition of the participants.

The participation of parents in educating their children is very low in tea garden areas. This is due to several interrelated socio-economic factors. But with the constant campaigns of government and non-governmental organisations to improve the education among the deprived section of the society, the participation rate of parents in educating their children has been increasing in the sample gardens. This is evident from Table 6 that as many as 85.5 percent of sample households send their children to schools. This figure much higher compared to those households (8.3 percent) who do not send their children to schools. Many sample garden families have televisions and several programmes in televisions have been effective in bringing awareness on importance of education. Interactions with persons outside the garden areas have also been useful to them.

Table 6: Participation of Sample Households in Educating their Children

Names of the Gardens	HH send their children	HH who does not send to schools	HH who does not have school going children
Bhooteachang	55	4	1
Hattigor	55	4	2
Big gardens	110	8	3
Brotherhood	45	8	7
Jwnglary	51	4	5
Small gardens	96	12	12
Total	206(85.5)	20(8.3)	15(6.2)

Source: Field Survey, 2011

To understand the extent of participation of labour force in education and educating their children, the present study classified the entire sample population according to their education level. Out of 1075 sample persons, 427 persons attended schools (Table 7). Among the educated sample population, about 61.5 percent are males and 38.4 percent are females. This shows that educated male population is more than educated female population.

Table 7: Sex-wise Classification of Educated Population

Names of the Gardens	Total No. of Educated Workers		
	Males	Females	Total
Bhooteachang	76	50	126
Hattigor	79	50	129
Big gardens	155	100	255
Brotherhood	60	42	102
Jwnglary	48	22	70
Small gardens	108	64	172
Total	263(61.5)	164(38.4)	427

Source: Field Survey, 2011

The sex-wise distribution of sample workers according to their level of education is given in Table 8. Sample garden areas are not only having low literacy rate but also a very low proportion (9.4%) of higher qualified persons (upto higher secondary level and above). The highest proportion (50%) of population studied only till primary level, and 22% upto class VII only. The number of higher educated persons in big gardens is higher than in small gardens. One of the important reasons for low motivation to obtain higher qualification is due to the fact that garden works do not require higher educational qualification. Thus, many workers think that spending money for higher qualification is some kind of wastage.

Table 8: Sex- and Class-wise Classification of Education of Sample Population

Names of the Gardens	Class 1 to IV			Class V to VII			Class VIII to X			Class XI and above		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Bhooteachang	22	23	45	21	15	36	17	7	24	16	5	21
Hattigor	37	33	70	11	10	21	21	6	27	10	1	11
Big gardens	59	56	115	32	25	57	38	13	51	26	6	32
Brotherhood	29	30	59	10	7	17	15	3	18	6	2	8
Jwnglary	27	14	41	15	5	20	6	3	9	...	...	...
Small gardens	56	44	100	25	12	37	21	6	27	6	2	8
Total	115	100	215(50.4)	57	37	94(22.0)	59	19	78(18.3)	32	8	40(9.4)

Notes: M is male, F denotes female and figures in brackets are percentages to total

Source: Field Survey, 2011

We further classified all children population of the sample into school-going and out-of-schools (see Table 9). While many sample children (349 out of 525) attend schools, still large number of children (33.5%) are not attending schools. This clearly indicates that a large number of parents are sending their children to schools.

Table 9: Classification of Sample Children in School going and out-of-school (no.)

Names of Gardens	Total Children	School Going Children			Out-of-School Children		
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Bhooteachang	147	65	38	103	19	25	44
Hattigor	163	65	41	106	22	35	57
Big gardens	310	130	79	209	41	60	101
Brotherhood	120	50	32	82	16	22	38
Jwnglary	95	42	16	58	18	19	37
Small gardens	215	92	48	140	34	41	75
Total	525	222(63.6)	127(36.3)	349(66.5)	75(42.6)	101(57.4)	176(33.5)

Note: Figures in brackets are percentages to the respective total and children include < 6 years

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Among the school going children, boys constitute the majority in all the sample gardens. About 63.6 percent of school going children are boys. However, the proportion of girls constitutes higher than the boys among out-of-school children in all sample gardens. This indicates that parents are giving less importance to education of girl children.

Thus, it is seen that education for girls in the sample gardens is yet to receive the same importance as that of the boys. A large majority of family heads of the sample gardens reported that they did not favour education of their girl children equally with the boy children. In case of girls, learning household works is considered to be more important than formal education.

The sex-wise and class-wise classification of school going children in the sample gardens are given in Table 10. Out of total school going children, majority (51.8 percent) of the children are studying in the primary level in the combined sample, followed by 21.5 percent studying at the upper primary level (class v to vii). Further, about 18 percent children are studying in the high school level but only 8.6 percent children are at the intermediate and college going children (above 10th standard). It is observed that at all levels of schooling, number of boys has been higher than number of girls in every garden.

Table 10: Sex- and Class-wise Classification of Education of School Going Children

Names of Gardens	Class 1 to IV			Class V to VII			Class VIII to X			Class XI and above		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Bhooteachang	19	17	36	19	12	31	15	5	20	12	4	16
Hattigor	32	28	60	8	8	16	18	4	22	7	1	8
Big gardens	51	45	96	27	20	47	33	9	42	19	5	24
Brotherhood	26	24	50	7	5	12	12	2	14	5	1	6
Jwnglary	24	11	35	13	3	16	5	2	7	...	...	...
Small gardens	50	35	85	20	8	28	17	4	21	5	1	6
Total	101	80	181(51.8)	47	28	75(21.5)	50	13	63(18)	24	6	30(8.6)

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Data in Table 10 also show two interesting trends. First, there has been continuously decreasing number of school going children as the level of school education goes up from the

primary level (51.8%) to the college level (8.6%). That is, enrolment of children in the schools decreases as they reach higher classes. This shows that high incidence of wastage, drop-outs and stagnation among the children of the tea garden labourers³. Second, the number of girl students has been decreasing at a faster rate than that of boy students as we move from the primary level to the college level. In the combined sample, the ratio of girls to boys was 0.792 at the primary school level, which declined to 0.596, 0.260 and 0.250 at the upper primary, high school and college level respectively.

VI: Factors behind the Poor Development of Children's Education

The above section showed disparities in participation of parents in educating their children. It also found that many children are still out-of-school in the sample gardens. Therefore, in this section an attempt has been made to examine the main factors behind these disparities in participation of parents in educating their children and dropout of children in the sample. Education development in a given community depends on many factors. All the possible factors can be broadly classified into social, economic and institutional factors. Factors such as parent's education, parent's attitude towards education, parental satisfaction and expectations, educational atmosphere and alcoholism are some of the main social factors which affect the educational development in a society. Income or the economic condition of the family and the occupation of the family head are important economic factors which can affect the education of children. It is generally assumed that the parents of better occupations are prone to have more education and as a result their children receive more education. Thirdly, the possible institutional factors such as the role of state and garden authority in education development and role of student and labour organisations are some possible institutional factors which can influence the education development.

(a) Social Factors

Parent's Education: Generally the labourers in the tea gardens are mostly illiterate. The overall literacy rate in the combined sample gardens is only 39.7 percent and within this, the literacy rate among male workers (45 percent) is higher than that of female workers (33.4 percent). Generally, it is believed that literate parents are more likely to send their children to schools than the illiterate parents. To examine the impact of parent's education of school going children, all the children of the sample families are divided into school going and not going according to their parent's educational status. Children below 4 years are excluded from the computation. The educational status of the parents has also been grouped into four, viz., literate parents, illiterate parents, literate father and illiterate mother and illiterate father and literate mother. Data show that, out of 241 sample households, about 132 households constitute illiterate parents and only 32 households have literate parents. It further shows that the highest number (158 children) of school going children is from the illiterate parents. The

³ Wastage in education refers to the drop-out of students from the course. By stagnation in education, it is meant the stay of students in a particular class for more than one year. In the words of the Hartog Committee (1929), "By wastage, we mean premature withdrawal of children from schools at any stage before completion of the primary courses". Similarly, "By stagnation, we mean the retention in a lower class of a child for a period of more than one year. Of course, stagnation always means wastage".

calculated value of χ^2 shows that parents' education has direct and positive impact on their children education. Thus, on average, the parents who are literate and educated are more prone to sending their children to schools.

Table 11: Education of Children in Relation to Education of Parents

Parent's education category	No. of HH	School Going Children	Drop-out Children	Total children
Literate parents	32	59(89.4)	7(10.6)	66
Illiterate parents	132	158(61.0)	101(39.0)	259
Literate father and illiterate mother	67	114(64.0)	64(36.0)	178
Illiterate father and literate mother	10	18(81.8)	4(18.2)	22
Total	241	349(66.5)	176(33.5)	525

Note: Figures are no. of children & households (HH), bracket figures are percentages to total

Source: Field Survey, 2011 $\chi^2 = 21.85$ d.f. = 3

Parents' Attitude towards Children's Education: The attitude of the parents towards education of their children is very important. Accordingly, questions were asked about their attitudes towards their children's education. The study found that about 53.9 percent of the sample workers are in favour of children's education. Among these labourers 25.3 percent are illiterate labourers and 25.3 percent are workers who are having education beyond primary stage. It shows that both literate and illiterate workers are also interested in sending their children to school. Illiterate labourers also have willingness to send their children to schools. About 46.1 percent workers expressed their indifferent attitudes on education of their children in the sample. Illiterate parents recorded to be the highest (32.8 percent) among them. This might be partially due to illiteracy and ignorance of the workers on the value of education. The illiterate parents are not much aware of children's education hence, they are indifferent.

Parental Satisfaction and Expectations: The heads of the sample families were asked whether they are satisfied with the studies of their children. The purpose of asking this question was to examine the awareness of satisfaction with children's education. About 53.2 percent workers replied that they are satisfied with their studies where 26.5 percent replied that they are not satisfied and remaining 21.1 percent sample workers are indifferent about it.

To ascertain the nature of motivation and the level of their aspirations the heads of the labour families who are sending children to school and also the students beyond primary stage of the sample were asked about the educational plan and occupational aspirations. In responses about 30.8 percent family heads replied that they wanted to educate their children up to primary stage and 36.9 percent up to graduation and above. A sizeable (32.3 percent) number of family heads plan to educate their children up to lower secondary level.

Table 13: Educational Expectation of Family Head from their Children' Education

Expected Level of Education of Children	Favourable parents' responses	Percentage
Primary School Level	40	30.8
Secondary Level	42	32.3
Graduate and Above	48	36.9
Total	130	100

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Same set of questions was also asked to students beyond primary level to know the children's own plan of education and the forces by which they are motivated towards it. The majority of the students plan to educate themselves up to graduation level in arts, science or commerce. Their aspiration to study in technical and professional courses is limited due to lack of awareness and financial constraints.

To examine the association between the educational level of family head and plan of children's education the χ^2 has been tested. The calculated value of χ^2 is highly significant at 10% level of significance. This shows the significant association between the educational level of family head and plan of children's education.

Table 14: Future Plan of Children's Edu in Relation to Level of Edu of the family Head

Levels of Edu of the Family Head	Plan of Children's Education (no. of responses)			
	Primary	Secondary	Higher	Total
Illiterate	22	21	18	61
Primary	4	3	1	8
Beyond Primary	14	18	29	61
Total	40	42	48	130

Source: Field Survey, 2011

$\chi^2 = 7.07$

d.f. = 4

Negligence of Girl Children's Education: Education of girl children in the sample tea gardens is yet to receive the same importance as that of the boys within the overall low literacy among sample population. Many of sample workers are still indifferent on girl's education. Therefore, very few girls attended to schools in the sample. Of the total school going children, girls constitute only 39.54 percent.

Table 15: Number of School Going Girl Children in the Sample

Tea Estates	Primary	Class V-VII	Class VIII-X	Class XI & above	Total
Bhooteachang	15	13	7	5	40
Hattigor	22	9	6	1	38
Big gardens	37	22	13	6	78
Brotherhood	21	9	4	2	36
Jwnglary	13	6	3	0	24
Small gardens	34	15	7	2	60
Total	71(51.4)	37(26.8)	22(15.9)	8(5.8)	138(100)

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Some of the important reasons for the low enrolment rate of female children in the schools in the sample are the indifferent attitudes of parents towards girl's education and more employment of women workers in plantation works by planters. During the survey, many parents said that girls are meant to help in household works like cooking of food, fetching of water, collection of firewood, baby sitting etc. Further, they said that when all the elder members of the family go for work, girl children have to look into the household works and look after their young brother and sisters. Secondly, the tea industry employs mostly the women workers. Employment of large number of women workers including children in the industry is also a responsible factor for the negligence of girl's education among the tea labourers.

Lack of Proper Atmosphere for Education: As stated earlier, the sample area has a very low literacy rate of 39.7 percent. Due to this mass illiteracy of the parents and a low rate of school development, the prevailing atmosphere is not at the desired level in educating their children. First, majority of parents themselves are indifferent to education of their children in general due to illiteracy and poverty. Secondly, the employment of both male and female adult members of the family also deprives the children of proper care. Owing to this uncongenial atmosphere at home and in the society, it becomes more difficult on the part of the children to make satisfactory progress in their studies. Moreover, the adult members of the family who are illiterate cannot give any guidance to the children in academic matters. Very few of them engage themselves in private tutors for their children. Moreover, the number of hours they study at home is very less.

Impact of Alcoholism: The habit of alcoholism is deep rooted among them. This is due to the fact that in the absence of proper mental and emotional outlet and seclusion from the active social life, they turn to escape the drudgery of existence by the flight to alcoholism. Alcoholism may not have negative effect on children's education directly yet it has its adverse effect on the economic and social life, and health and hygienic conditions of the labour families. The study shows the information on alcoholic families and their school going children and found that higher percentage (35.2%) of drop-out children is observed in alcoholic families than in non-alcoholic families. Thus, this shows that children of alcoholic families are more likely to be deprived of education than non-alcoholic families.

Table 16: Children's Education in relation to Alcoholism of Family Head

Family Types	Total HH	School Going	Drop-out	Total
Alcohol family	138(57.3)	182(64.8)	99(35.2)	281(53.5)
Non-alcoholic family	103(42.7)	167(68.4)	77(31.6)	244(46.4)
Total	241 (100)	349 (66.4)	176 (33.5)	525

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Note: Figures in brackets are percentage of total children

(b) Economic Factors

Due to data constraints, only two factors, namely, income and occupation of the families are examined in present study. These two factors are inter-related to each other. In general, better the occupation of the head of the family, the higher will be their earning capacity. Workers with better occupations are more prone to earning higher amount of income and as a result children will have better and more access to good education. Moreover, parents with higher income groups are more prone to educating their children with better and higher education.

Economic Condition of the Family: The economic condition of a family is generally measured by the income level, i.e., higher the income, higher the economic condition and vice-versa. Table 19 shows the classification of sample workers into three income groups and shows that higher income level and number of school going children are not positively related. That is, income is not the sole determining factor on giving education to children. Workers of all income groups send their children to schools. Although drop-out is a common phenomenon in all income groups, interestingly the highest proportion of drop-out children (53.8%) is in the high income group families. This finding invalidates the general assumption that higher income families send more children to schools than low or lower income group families.

Table 17: Education of Children in Relation to total Annual Income of the Family

Annual Income Level (Rs.)	No. of HH	School Going Children	Drop-out Children	Total
Lower Income Group (upto 30,000)	24(10.0)	19(63.3)	11(36.6)	30
Middle Income Group (30,000- 70,000)	186(77.2)	270(73.7)	96(26.2)	366
High Income Group (70,000 and above)	31(12.7)	60(46.5)	69(53.8)	129
Total	241	349(66.4)	176(33.5)	525

Source: Field Survey, 2011

$\chi^2=31.89$

df =2

Note: Figures in brackets are percentage of total HH

The calculated chi-square value (31.89) is more than table value (5.99) with 2 degrees of freedom at 5 percent significance level. Hence, the result is statistically significant. That is, on average, parents' income level affects on children's education. In other words, the test shows that on average, the higher the income level of the family, more children are likely to get more and better education. But the simple correlation coefficient between the household income level and number of school going children is found to be 0.37 which is positive but low. Thus, although the association between these two variables in the sample area is statistically significant and positive, its correlation is not so strong.

Occupation of the Family Head: The occupation of the head of the family may also be considered as an important economic factor which affects the education of the children. It is generally assumed that the children with better occupation of heads of the families are more prone to receiving more and better education. Since parents of better occupations are more likely to receive higher income, they can afford to send children to better schools. In terms of occupations, officers are at the higher positions compared to other types of workers. The highest number of students studying at the secondary and college levels (about 22 students) is from officer families. While children of other occupations are almost decreasing in number while moving from the lower class to higher class, children from officer families are almost remaining the same in number. Of the office staff, 21 children are in primary stage, 16 are in middle primary stage and 20 are in high school. As many as 22 students are studying in colleges. This clearly shows that, heads of the families with better work positions are more likely to send their children in schools of higher levels. Further, children of this group of population have better and more access to education in the sample. Almost all the children of the office bearers send their children to private English medium schools.

Table 18. Children's Education in relation to the Occupation of Family Head

Occupations	Total Labour	Total Children	Educational status (no. of children)					School Going	Out-of-School
			Primary	Class V-VII	Class VIII-X	Secondary			
Labour	156	318	64	47	26	5	142(47.5)	176(77.9)	
Office Staffs	33	92	21	16	20	22	79(26.4)	13(5.8)	
Sardars & drivers	22	57	20	11	12	5	48(16.1)	9(4.0)	
Agriculture	19	37	0	6	7	2	15(5.0)	22(9.7)	
Business	11	21	6	5	3	1	15(5.0)	6(2.7)	
Total	241	525	111	85	68	35	299(100)	226(100)	

Notes: (a) Office staff includes office bearers, technicians, manager's cook, etc.

(b) Bracket figures are percentages to total

Source: Field Survey, 2011

Institutional Factors

Institutional arrangements and policies can play an important role in the educational development of a society or country. Some of the institutional factors which are responsible for low and slow educational development in the sample garden areas include (a) lack of encouragement from the garden authorities, (b) indifferent attitude of the state authorities, (c) lack of strong workers' union and (d) indifferent attitude of worker community themselves.

Indifferent Behaviour of Garden Authority: Planters have always been indifferent towards the educational development of the labourers. This indifference behaviour of many garden authorities in providing the educational schemes is one of the main factors behind the poor educational development among the plantation workers. During our field surveys, to know the attitudes of planters on education for workers and their children, the managers of concerned gardens were asked whether they encourage the workers' children and if yes how do they

encourage them. Managers of sample gardens replied that they do encourage education by giving rewards to the children and tell their parents to send their children to schools. On the other hand, the students and the parents replied that, there is lack of encouragement of education from the garden authorities. The garden authorities maintain an indifferent attitude to education of the labourers' children. In their opinions, planters seem to be interested in the culture and marketing of tea. Although schools are there, these are still limited to the primary level only. Schools still suffer from the shortage of required class rooms, qualified teachers, basic amenities and infrastructure. This is partly due to the illiteracy of labour community and partly the negligence of the garden authority towards education.

Indifferent Behaviour of State Authority: The blame also goes to the state government authorities for low education development in the sample garden areas. The responsibility of education of the labourers was always left to the planters alone by the state authority. No proper effort has been taken by the concerned government on the improvement of their education. Further, they have not taken any step to establish schools specially schools beyond primary stage in the gardens though many schools have been established in other parts of the state. To enquire about the state's involvement in the development of education in sample gardens, questions were asked to the head masters of garden schools. According to them, there has been no proper effort by the government officials to inspect garden schools and to check the large scale wastage in children education. Hardly, concerned government officials have visited to garden schools to inspect the facilities provided by the garden authorities to gardens schools. The government officials also have barely imposed the garden authorities to provide infrastructure in garden schools. Therefore, the garden authorities are escaping from providing such facilities though there is written legislation to provide such amenities. The provision of awarding scholarships and any other financial assistance to the children of the tea garden labourers is too limited. Liberal scholarships are not provided to them as in the case of other backward communities.

According to the offices of sample garden authorities, out of total 349 schools going children, only 5 students have received scholarships from the Tea Board of India, 14 students who belong to SC/ST received post-metric scholarship from the state government. Out of four sample gardens, only one garden said that they provide scholarship to school going children.

Indifferent Attitude of Working Community: Another most important reason behind the poor educational development among the tea plantation workers in Assam is the indifferent attitude of the worker community towards education. The tea garden labourers are generally indifferent to the education of their children. Owing to their illiteracy, poverty and a psychology of hard earned subsistence they cannot appreciate the value of education. Therefore, the parents practically do not take any interest in the educational matters of their children. They hardly maintain any contact with the teachers and the garden authorities in matters relating to education. The poverty ridden parents always considered their children as economic assets. Sending a child to school upsets the whole economic consideration of the family. Education of the children is considered to be a liability rather than a responsibility.

VII: Summary and Conclusion

The paper examined the extent of provision, utilisation and benefits of different levels of educational facilities among the sample tea plantation workers in Udalguri district of Assam. Some of the main findings are given below: (a) The state of education among the tea workers in the sample gardens is very poor both qualitatively and quantitatively. Still about 60% of sample population are illiterates. (b) Available schools are limited to the primary level only in the sample gardens. Schools beyond primary level are not found in all the sample gardens. Children who wish to continue their studies beyond primary level have to go to outside schools which are located at nearby towns. These towns are far from the sample gardens and therefore, children who wish to go for further studies have to face many problems. Moreover, it was found that the existing schools suffer from various problems like lack of qualified teachers, shortage of class rooms, etc. (c) The power of accessibility of education among the sample workers is not equally distributed. The highest number of students studying at the college level (about 22 students) is from officer families while the children of other occupations are almost decreasing in number while moving from the lower class to higher class. (d) Factors such as the parents' education level, negligence of girl education, parent's income level, etc have direct and positive impact on their children's education. The statistical testing shows that, on average, parents' income level affects children's education positively, i.e., the higher the income level of the family, more children are likely to get more and better education. But the simple correlation coefficient between the household income level and number of school going children is found to be very low.

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