

GENDER INEQUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AMONG THE TEA GARDEN TRIBE IN ASSAM

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ABSTRACT

Tea industry is one of the oldest industries in India. The industry employs a huge labour force. Women constitutes about half of the total labour force in the industry. Despite this fact, women in the tea garden are discriminated in the work place in respect of their nature of work. Tea gardens are attributed to low level of illiteracy. However, the women workers are discriminated in educational attainment also. The illiteracy is more among women workers than the male counterpart. Though not much significant difference found in the primary education between male and female in the tea gardens, but higher educational attainment made a clear difference of it. Various social and economic issues are related to the inequality in higher educational attainment of the tea garden women workers. Thus, this paper is trying to highlight the inequalities in the higher educational attainment and the reason for such practices.

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Higher Education, Tea Garden Tribe, Tea Industry, Women Workers.

INTRODUCTION

Women play a significant role in the agricultural and rural development of a country (**Jumi et. al, 2021**). Tea Industry is an agro based industry which requires a huge number of labour force. More than 50 thousand people are directly engaged in the plantation alone in Assam, of which women constituted more than half of the workers. Tea industry is the only organized industry in private sector which involves one of the largest employers of women in India (**Arya, 2013; Saikia, 2019**). Women are considered as the best pickers due to their dexterity and smooth work. Besides having equal share in the workforce in the tea industry, women hold the lowest place in the society.

Education plays the most important role in the upliftment of a society. The tea garden society however has a very low literacy level (**Hazarika, 2012**) which affects its all round development. According to Census 2011, tea garden community has a very low rate of literacy of about 46% as against state literacy rate of 72.19%. Illiteracy is also higher among the women as compared to the male workers (**Sarkar, 2013**).

METHODOLOGY

A total of six tea districts of Assam were selected using multi-stage sampling. A total of six tea gardens, one from each of the tea districts were selected by using simple random sampling. A total of 120 workers (60 male and 60 female) were selected randomly using simple random sampling method. Personal interview method was used to collect primary data. Analysis of data was made using percentage and mean.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1, illustrates that more than two fifth of the workers are illiterate in the selected tea gardens. Nearly, 43.3% of the workers never went to get formal education. Out of this percent, women constitutes majorly of about 28.3%, while the man constitutes 15% of the total. Almost 24.2% of the worker's maximum educational qualification is up to primary level of which 12.5% are the female workers and remaining 11.7% are male workers. Only 5% of the workers in tea garden are such who have completed their education up to middle school level. Both women and man shares the same percentage of 2.5% each in middle school.

Table 1: Educational qualification of the workers in tea gardens

| Garden Name | | Shakumato | Duklingia | Salonah | Tongani | Silcoorie | South Cachar | Total | Total (In %) | |
|---|----------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------|-----------|--------------|--------|--------------|------|
| Educational Qualification of the Tea Garden Workers | Never went to School | Male | 6 (30) | 4 (20) | 5 (25) | 1 (5) | 2 (5) | 0 | 18 | 15 |
| | | Female | 7 (35) | 6 (30) | 9 (45) | 6 (30) | 4 (20) | 2 (10) | 34 | 28.3 |
| | | Total | 13 (65) | 10 (50) | 14 (70) | 7 (35) | 6 (30) | 2 (10) | 25 | 43.3 |
| | Primary School | Male | 0 | 5 (25) | 5 (25) | 1 (5) | 2 (10) | 1 (5) | 14 | 11.7 |
| | | Female | 1 (5) | 1 (5) | 0 | 2 (10) | 5 (25) | 6 (30) | 15 | 12.5 |
| | | Total | 1 (5) | 6 (30) | 5 (25) | 3 (15) | 7 (35) | 7 (35) | 29 | 24.2 |
| | Middle School | Male | 0 | 1 (5) | 0 | 2 (10) | 0 | 0 | 3 | 2.5 |
| | | Female | 0 | 1 (5) | 1 (5) | 0 | 0 | 1 (5) | 3 | 2.5 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------|--------|--------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|-----|------|
| | Total | 0 | 2 (10) | 1 (5) | 2 (10) | 0 | 1 (5) | 6 | 5 |
| High School | Male | 4 (20) | 2 (10) | 0 | 6 (30) | 4 (20) | 8 (40) | 24 | 20 |
| | Female | 2 (10) | 0 | 0 | 1 (5) | 1 (5) | 1 (5) | 5 | 4.17 |
| | Total | 6 (30) | 2 (10) | 0 | 7 (35) | 5 (25) | 9 (45) | 29 | 24.2 |
| Higher Secondary | Male | 0 (0) | 0 | 0 | 1 (5) | 0 | 1 (5) | 2 | 1.66 |
| | Female | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 (5) | 0 | 1 (5) | 2 | 1.66 |
| College | Male | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 (10) | 0 | 2 | 1.66 |
| | Female | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 (10) | 0 | 2 | 1.66 |
| Total Worker | | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 20 | 120 | 100 |

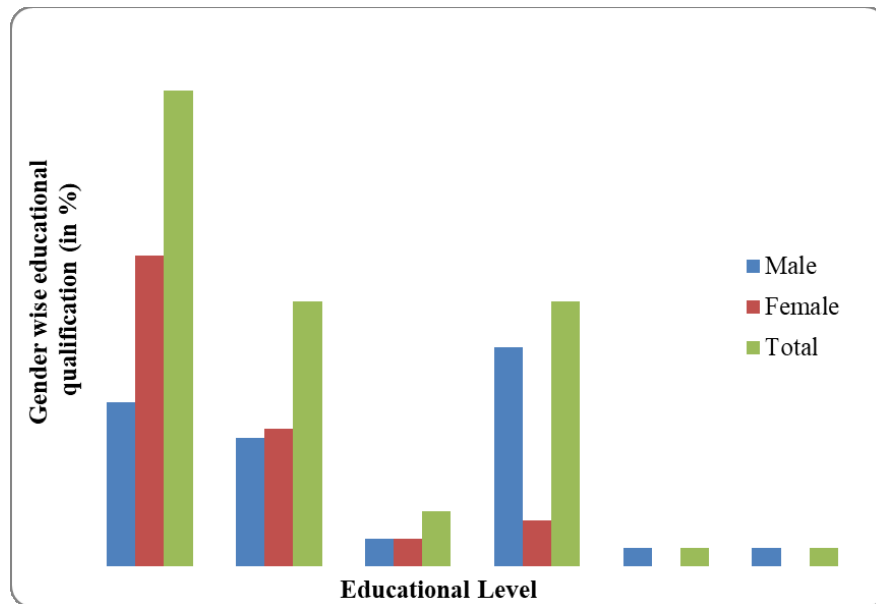
Source: Field Study (2021)

Note: The data of education qualification has been converted into frequency distribution

Figures in the parenthesis indicate percentage

Surprisingly, nearly 24.2% of the workers attended school up to high school level. But, it is obvious that male constitutes the highest percentage with 20% while, women constitute a small percentage of only 4.17% to it. The researcher observed that, hardly 1.66% of the workers studied up to higher secondary level and the same percentage of worker attended till college. These numbers constitutes only the male workers.

Figure 1: Educational qualifications of the workers in tea gardens



Source: Field Study (2021)

If we put an insight into gender wise educational status from figure 1, it can be seen that female illiteracy surpasses the male. Those who managed to attend their schooling; a maximum up to high school level was reached. However, female attendance gradually falls after primary school more than the male attendance. No female worker in the garden had studied after higher school level.

Reasons for lower higher educational attainments are:

- Early marriage of the girls in the tea gardens.
- Attitude of the parents towards educating their girl child is very poor.
- Lower wages at the tea garden leads to choose among the children to be educated.

CONCLUSION

Tea garden women are one of the vulnerable sections of the society. They are placed at the bottom position in the social domain. Man enjoys comparatively more importance than the women. It was observed that the illiteracy rate among women is less than male in the tea gardens. There is not much difference in the enrollment till high school level. However, when it comes to higher education, only a few

percentages of the workers reach the college level, which constitutes only the male workers. Therefore, necessary policy need to be formulated so as to encourage the higher education among tea garden worker's children irrespective of any gender so that the girl child too can attain higher education in future.

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