

SOCIO-POLITICAL STATUS OF TEA GARDEN WOMEN WORKERS IN ASSAM: A STUDY OF SIVASAGAR DISTRICT

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CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The present of work seeks to study the “Socio-political status of the *Tea Garden Women Workers* in Assam: A study of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates under Sivasagar District of Upper Assam.” It is worthwhile to note that the *Tea Garden Workers* (TGWs) constitute a sizeable section of Assam’s total population who have remained the most backward, discriminated and dispossessed in all fronts of lives ever since the inception of their working in the state’s tea plantation. Moving one step farther what we witness is that the women TGWs whose holistic condition happens to be the most pathetic, deplorable and sometimes undescrivable. Indeed, the women TGWs comprise a substantial part of not only of tea plantation but also the state at large. But interestingly the women TGWs have to remain dominated, depressed and subjugated segment of our society. Virtually speaking, every type of domination is inherent to their lives. In a sense, the overall status of women TGWs in the state inclusive of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates have remained inexplicable and untold till date.

Nevertheless, in order to understand the overall status of the Women TGWs in Assam in general and Sivasagar District in particular. It is necessary to make a brief

description of migration of the impoverished tribal population from other parts of India to Assam and eventually to Sepon, Rajmai, khongea and Maskora Tea Estates under Sivasagar District.

Migration today has been a global phenomenon. Like today the initiation in tea plantation by the British colonial rulers paved the way for the migration of Tea Garden Labourers (workers) for getting themselves trapped into their colonial hands. As a result, the newly discovered wild tea proved to be a fertile area of trade and commerce by way of tea plantation and manufacture of the same in a lucrative way. The colonial masters therefore began to recruit poor tribal inhabitants of Bihar, West Bengal, Madhya Pradesh, Present Jharkhand states to work in Assam's tea plantation. On the other hand, due to lack of drought, paucity of jobs, famine overpopulation and civil war in own states forced them to move away from their native lands. Similarly, the British rulers were in need of labour force to work in their newly established tea plantations. Being tempted by the British tea planters the tribal labourers came to Assam in large number who in course of time constituted a substantial number of state's total Population. Despite so overall TGWs were by this way or that kept deliberately backward and disorganised. Eventhen by dint of population growth and dissemination of education plus growing organizational capability enabled the TGWs to get themselves organised and assertive. It eventually culminated in the proliferation of a host of socio-cultural and socio-political outfits. Some of them include the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS, 1958), *All Tea Tribes Students Association (Attsa, 1947 Assam Chah Janajati Yuva Chatra Parishad 1972)*, *Assam Labour Party Chah Janajati Surakhya Samiti*,

Assom (2001), Assam Chah Jana Janagosthi Pragati Samiti (1993), Assam Chah Mazdoor Adivasi Party (2010), Birsa Commando Force, Adivasi Cobra Militant Of Assam (1996), All Adivasi National Liberation Army (2003), and many others. But despite constituting more than half of TGWs their women were far lagging behind than their male counterpart. It may be evident from the fact that there are only two women TGWs are formed so far. They are *Asom Chah Janajati Mahila Samiti (2017)* and *Chah Mazdoor Mahila Samiti (2007)*. Further, these two women TGWs organizations seem to be weakly organised and are not as popular as required among the women TGWs in Assam. In fact, they appear to remain in paper only not in existence and actions.

As a result, the women TGWs are almost similarly all over the state of Assam have remained under same condition. For instance, they have no substantive economic liberty in spite of being the backbone of tea plantations. These are *Plantation Labour Act, 1951* and *Assam Plantation Labour Rules* which are formulated for the welfare of TGWs both men and women. Indeed they have not been instrumental in improving women TGWs pathetic condition but also the TGWs community at large. In addition, the women TGWs have also remained educationally backward which gets reflected in non-holding white-colour jobs by the TGWs both men and women. Likewise the ACMS the most powerful tea trade union (affiliated to INTUC) is apparently committed to be the messiah of TGWs both men and women instead of looking after in '*Labour Welfare*' which is thus contributing towards the backwardness of the TGWs. Other prime factor equally responsible for the pathetic state of affairs of the TGWs is the traditional prejudices

and unscientific superstitions strongly prevalent among the TGWs ever since time immemorial.

II

So far as the study areas (tea estates) is concerned the Sivasagar district of upper Assam has been selected. Moreover the said district is full of tea estates and as such four tea estates viz. Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora fall under the said area study. Established in 1840, the Rajmai Tea Estate by Williamson Magor is comparatively a small tea estate with 6326 TGWs population (both working and non-working living in the estate area).

Similarly the Sepon Tea Estate is owned by McLEOD RUSSEL INDIA LIMITED. The aggregate population of the Sepon Tea Estate is 6000 directly or indirectly depending on the Tea Estate. There are 55 regular TGWs while 500 casual TGWs in the said tea estate. In fact, lion's share of TGWs population happen to be temporary/casual workers who are forced to work without with equal facilities both in terms of infra-structural and financial benefits. The casual workers do not have landed property inherited from their forefathers are bound to rely upon in tea estate for their survival.

Established in the post-colonial era of 1951 and 1953 respectively Khongea and Maskora Tea Estates in Sivasagar district are owned by the private tea planters. They are Sudhi Prashad and Durga Prashad Agarwal are the owner of the aforementioned small tea estates respectively. The aggregate population of Khongea tea estate is 6570 while Maskora tea estate is 600. All the aforesaid four tea estate

i.e. Khongea, Sepon, Khorahat and Maskora are situated across the 37 national highway running through Sivasagar district. Another common characteristic is that all three tea estates barring Sepon is relatively small tea plantations.

III

As stated above, the TGWs consist of not only men TGWs but also the women TGWs who were almost more than equally committed to the plantation ever since inception in Assam. As a matter of fact, the women TGWs are inextricable part of the entire TGWs in the state. But compared to the men TGWs their women counterparts have been deliberately subordinated, subjugated and marginalised all over the tea plantation in Assam essentially due to the reasons cited earlier. In a sense, such sort of situation among the TGWs is vividly witnessed in all tea gardens of Assam. Therefore, it may be stated that the women TGWs are virtually deprived of socio-economic and political entitlements and thereby relegated them to the position of more and more backwardness and marginalisation even in their own society and state. In other words, both the TGWs social system at large and the tea management too are accountable for the women TGWs undescribable socio-economic and political status. Thus, a similar kind of picture regarding the women TGWs is holistically seen looking from this point of view, the women TGWs working as manual labourers in the study areas of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates in Sivasagar district is quite identical with the entire plantations in the state of Assam. In fact, the women TGWs have remained backward educationally, socially, economically and mostly politically.

IV

From the above discourse, it is found that a substantial number of women TGWs are living and working since the inception of Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates in Sivasagar district of Assam. They are, as hinted above, have remained diametrically lagging behind as because the TGWs parents are seen disinterested in sending their children to educational institutions rather they are used as helpers in plucking tea leaves in a bid to enhance their family income. Similarly, the women TGWs are many times not permitted by their husbands to use their hard earned money independently. In this respect, the men TGWs consent needs to be sought otherwise their husbands make quarrels which is likely to go the extent of physical harassment and torture.

So far as the electoral political domain is concerned it can be mentioned that only two congress (I) women TGWs who represented the TGWs community named Rupam Kurmi (Mariani Legislative Assembly) and Jibontara Ghatowar (Moran Legislative Assembly) more than once. To-day, there is developing a trend that the women TGWs specially the upcoming girls who are witnessed to be interested in pursuing higher education. It might enable them to participate in socio-economic and political game inclusive of grass-root electoral politics in Assam. It is evident from the abovementioned study areas in which almost equal number of women TGWs has got elected with that non-TGWs woman. This can evidently be called an optimistic sign/symptom in case of women TGWs which might be strong and instrumental source of inspiration for the prospective women TGWs to get

themselves involved into electoral politics in Assam. Otherwise the women TGWs would remain the most vulnerable chunk of Assam and Assamese society for all times to come. It may therefore be concluded that it is the education which would definitely help them to inherit the power of assertion in all fronts of their lives.

However, in case of the study areas i.e. Rajmai, Sepon, Khongea and Maskora tea estates the women TGWs without any exaggeration can be called a proto type of the entire TGWs (inclusive of women) in the tea estates of Assam. So in order to embolden and empower women TGWs of the aforesaid tea estates urgently need to be educated and enlightened which would make them obviously and squarely assertive and organised. Otherwise they would remain lagging behind and deprived of sorts of rights enshrined in the constitution of India. The end result is that the women TGWs would remain vulnerable section for all the days ahead. In a sense, emancipation for them would remain a utopia.

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- B. Booklets.
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- A. Books
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