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**Tea Garden Workers Perception towards Working Condition and Role Performed By
Trade Unions: With Special Reference to Jorhat District**

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Abstract

'Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (ACMS) is the largest trade union organizing labourers in tea gardens of the Assam Valley in north-east india. The union is affiliated with the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC).[3] As of the early 2000s, ACMS claimed a membership of 1.1 million (another figure, presented in 2009, put the total membership at 325,000) The organisational network of ACMS includes 850 company tea gardens. The Union of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha has been established on a democratic set up comprising of three Tires:- Central Level, Branch Level, and Primary Committee at plantation Level. It is the applied principles of INTUC to establish an order in society which is free from hindrances in the way of an all round development in its individual members which encourages the growth of human personality and education to all its aspects and goes to the utmost limit in progressively eliminating social, political and economic exploitation and inequality.

Ever since its inception the ACMS has been working successfully to its credit as the only one actively strong and effective union of the Tea Plantation Workers recognized by the Tea Industry as well as the State Administration. The ACMS has an experienced staff of more than three hundred employees who keep regular contact with the primary units of the plantations and the workers on all matters of their interest, common good and welfare. An attempt has been made to know the existing working condition of tea garden workers in the study area and satisfaction level of tea garden workers towards their working conditions in the tea gardens.

Keywords: Age Group , wage, medical treatment, fire wood, ration and promotion policies etc.

Introduction

Trade unions are major components of the system of modern industrial relations in any nation. All unions have their own constitution, their own set of objectives or goals to achieve. Change in the political, social and educational environment has seen them rechristened as a forum that protects and looks after workers' interests and improves the quality of life of workers, enlarging their traditional roles of establishing terms and conditions of employment. (Dankert, 1948).

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Central Level, Branch Level, and Primary Committee at plantation Level.

The ACMS (Central Office) Dibrugarh is the registered body under the Indian Trade Union Act. The ACMS Central Office Dibrugarh Has 22 (Twenty Two) Branches spread throughout Assam (Brahmaputra Valley). Each Branch is functioning with jurisdictions demarcated according to local conditions and convenience with the primary committee based at the plantation level. The primary units at plantation level form the base of democratic set up comprising of three tires in more than 800 Tea Gardens in Assam. ACMS is very fortunate that it owns approx 3,50,000 (Three Lac Fifty Thousand) members who are working permanently in the Gardens in Assam. ACMS also achieves success to some extent in serving the needs of the Temporary Workers who are equal in number like the Permanent Workers in Assam.

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Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To know the existing working condition of tea garden workers in the study area.
2. To know the satisfaction level of tea garden workers towards their working conditions in the tea gardens.

Data Source and Methodology

The present research study is an exploratory one and based on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data were collected from available literatures, websites, journals, periodicals, newspapers and the office of the Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha, Centel office Dibrugarh.

For collection of primary data, a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire was developed. Questionnaire has been developed keeping in view the problems of the study and nature of the information to be collected. The questionnaire was designed with a set of statements using a *Likert Technique or scale*. The employees were asked to evaluate some statements and in term of their perception and expectation of performance of the organization being measured. Their satisfaction is generally measured on a five-point scale-. Highly Satisfied, Satisfied, Average, Dissatisfied, Highly Dissatisfied

In the present study, workers' perception about their working condition and the role performed by the trade unions has been studied in Assam Cha Mazdoor Sangha, Jorhat, Branch.. It is not possible to study the perception of all the workers in Jorhat Branch. So initially sample size of 300 was selected for the study as per convenient sampling. The data collected with the help of semi-structured questionnaire from 300

respondents were not accepted because it contained unnecessary information and under-emphasized facts. Therefore, respondents from 200 tea garden Workers were considered for the purpose of analysis. Thus, the effective samples size for the study was 200. In this study we have not considered the opinion of those employees who belongs to management personnel.

Discussion and analysis

Profile of Respondents:

In order to obtain primary data, field survey conducted with the help of a questionnaire and responses of 200 tea garden workers in Jorhat Branch were taken.

Following is a summary of workers in the study areas considered for the present study.

Table: 1.1: Age Group Of The Respondent

Sl No	Age of the respondents	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	21-30	40	20
2	31-40	120	60
3	41-50	30	15
4	51-60	10	05
	Total	200	
<i>Classification of Gender:</i>			
1	Male	80	40
2	Female	120	60
	Total	200	100
<i>Educational Qualification</i>			
1	Illiterate	180	90
2	Up to Vstd	14	7
3	VI-X	06	3
	Above X	Nil	Nil
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Study.

Table 1.1 reveals that majority of the respondents belongs to the age group 31-40. It can so be said that most of the respondents are aged people who have long been in tea industry of Assam. A good number of respondent belong to the age group 31-40 who have gather some experience as well as representing comparatively younger group.

On the question of gender, out of 200 respondents 80 (40%) are male and rest 120(60 are female; As per qualification, out one hundred eighty (180) respondents 90are illiterate, 7% are up to Vstd, 3% are Up to X std and above X std are nil..

Table: 1.2: Satisfaction level of the Respondents for wage

Sl No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Highly satisfied	60	30
2	Satisfied	40	20
3	Average	20	10
4	Dissatisfied	40	20
5	Highly Dissatisfied	40	20
		200	100

Source: Field study.

Table 1.2 reveals that most of the respondent workers are satisfied with the wage given to them by the organization. Hence they do not have any grievance relating to their wage.

Table: 1.3: Satisfaction level of the respondents for other benefits like free medical treatment, fire wood, ration etc.

Sl No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Highly satisfied	10	05
2	Satisfied	30	15
3	Average	20	10
4	Dissatisfied	60	30
5	Highly Dissatisfied	80	40
		200	100

Source: Field study.

Table 1.3:reveals that 20% respondent workers are both satisfied highly satisfied with the benefits provided by the organization like free medical treatment, fire wood, rationsl benefits etc. but still some of the employees are not satisfied with such benefits; according to them they do not get adequate medical facility whenever they needed the same. In such cases, the respondents expressed that the trade unions play a vital role by helping the victimized employees from the trade union fund, if the case is very urgent.

Table1.4: Satisfaction level of the for promotion policies.

Sl No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Highly satisfied	20	10
2	Satisfied	40	20
3	Average	20	10
4	Dissatisfied	20	10

5	Highly Dissatisfied	80	40
		200	100

Source: Field Study.

Table 1.4: reveals that 50% respondent employees are both dissatisfied and highly dissatisfied with the promotion policy of the organization. According to those employees who have been working in the organization for more than 25 years, their grievance is that they are on their way to retirement, but they were not promoted fairly. In this regard, the employees responded that the trade unions are striving for a fair promotion policy through negotiation with the higher authorities, but yet the trade unions were not fully successful in achieving a fair promotion policy.

Table: 1.5; Satisfaction level of respondents for Bonus

Sl No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Highly satisfied	40	20
2	Satisfied	20	10
3	Average	20	10
4	Dissatisfied	80	40
5	Highly Dissatisfied	40	20
		200	100

Source: field Study.

Thus table 1.5 reveals that 30% respondent employees are both satisfied and highly satisfied with the bonus that they receive occasionally, especially during Durga Puja. But some of the employees have minimum grievance regarding un-uniform amount of bonus at Durga Puja. In this regard, the employees responded that the trade unions are trying to negotiate with the higher authorities that if at all the amount of bonus cannot be increased; the bonus amount is not reduced in any respect.

Table: 1.6: Respondents view about the role played by trade unions in their grievances to the higher authorities.

sl.no	Factors	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	T.Us do play an active role	160	80
2	T Us do not play an active role	40	20
	Total	200	100

Source: Field Study.

Table 1.6 reveals that more than 80% of the respondent employees are of the opinion that the Trade Union play an active role in addressing their grievances to the higher authorities and tries their best for mitigating those grievances. Again a few employees are of the opinion that the Trade Unions do not help in forwarding their grievances to the higher officials. Such employees expressed that trade union official pay more attention to higher grade employees.

Table: 1.7: Respondents view about the services rendered by the trade unions to the Non-member:

Sl.No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	T.U.s help the non member	152	76
2	T.U.s do not help the non –member	48	24
		200	100

Source: Field Study.

Thus table 1.7: reveals that 76% of the employees responded that the trade unions help the nonmembers if they approach the trade union for help. Thus it implies that trade unions open their door for all the employees of the organization. In other word, it can be said that trade unions help all the employees impartially.

But there are some employees who perceive that the non-members of the trade union are not being helped by them. Here we can take the example of the Railway School Teachers who are not allowed to join any union; hence they do not get any type of help from the trade unions.

Table: 1.8: Respondents view about the best way to be by the trade union for fulfilling their demands

Sl.No	Factors	No of respondents	Percentage
1	Negotiation with higher authorities	170	85
2	Coerce action	30	15
		200	100

Source: Field study.

Thus the above table shows that all the respondent employees are of the opinion that if the trade unions negotiate with higher authorities, it provides a better way for fulfilling their demands. If any such negation does not provide fruitful outcome, then only TU should resort to coercive steps.

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Summary and conclusion

From the study the following points could be highlighted:

i. The workers are satisfied with the wage and benefits provided by the organization in form of leave, working hour, maternity leave, and bonus. Since the employees do not have any grievance regarding these factors therefore the trade union tries to adopt a policy of maintaining the status- quo

.ii) Most of the workers are not satisfied with the promotion policy of tea industry, they have the grievances that they are not promoted fairly. Hence, the trade union strives to bring a better and fairer promotion policy through negotiation with the authorities.

iii) The workers gave a mixed response about the attitude of the trade union officials toward the non-members. Though most of the workers responded that TUs equally help all the employees, some employees expressed that trade unions do not help the non-members.

iv) Regarding the role played by trade unions in forwarding the grievances of the employees to authorities, most of the employees expressed that trade unions are playing an active role. But again, a small number of employees responded that trade unions remain busy with gaining power over the other union, and in this way they overlook employee"s grievances.

From the study of the activities of Trade Unions of Jorhat Branch, it could be understood that although the trade unions are working well, yet there exist a scope of improvement. Following are some of the suggestions for the trade unions which can guide them towards benefiting the employees:

- i. Unions may actively involve themselves in organizing training and development Programmes on subjects such as technical skills, computers and safety measures at work, to ensure a healthy and safe working and learning environment.
- ii. Not only the individual development of workers, but the welfare of workers' families and the quality of their social lives may also be taken up as a concern by unions.

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