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## **Socio-Economic Condition of Tea Garden Workers of West Tripura District with Special Reference to Meghlipara Tea Estate**

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### **Abstract**

*Tripura has a history of tea plantations dating back to 1916 A.D. There are 60 tea estates and 4,346 small tea growers in the state. The total production is 7.5 million kg. of tea every year. This makes Tripura the 5th largest among the 14 tea producing states of the country after Assam, West Bengal, Tamilnadu and Kerala. Tea garden absorbed a huge number of man power for producing tea. Women workers are specially engaged in plucking soft leaf. It plays a vital role for developing socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers. Tea garden of Tripura has also been empowering women by providing them job opportunities. The present study has been attempted to reveal the socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers of West Tripura district of Tripura specially Meghlipara Tea Estate. The study exposes that the socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers of West Tripura District of Tripura is very despondent during study period.*

**Keywords: Scio-economic condition, Women workers, Tea garden, West Tripura.**

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**Introduction:** Tea is an economic product of Tripura. One century has been completed of tea plantation in the state. The geographical situation of the state is favorable for tea plantation. As Tripura is a geographically backward state of the north-east India and suffering from various economic constraints, tea garden may help the poor workers by providing job opportunity in tea garden. A lion portion of the total workers of tea garden are women, they are very much potential work force for tea garden work. But the living standard of the tea garden workers is desperately miserable. They are suffering from various social problems like illiteracy, superstition, early marriage, non-availability of pure drinking water, electricity supply, sanitary system, health service, nutrition, modern science and technology etc. They are depriving from the main stream of the society. In this paper the

researcher has been tried to find the causes of various social constraints and avenue for better living standard of the tea estate workers of West Tripura District.

**Objectives of the study:** The basic objective of the present research work is to present a detailed scenario on socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers of West Tripura District of Tripura. Apart from these overall objectives there are some specific objectives which are as follows:

- To examine the socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers.
- To analyze the role of tea garden authority, NGOs and State Government as well as Union Government for socio-economic development of the tea garden workers.
- To suggest some remedial measures for improving the socio-economic condition of the tea garden workers.

**Review of Literature:** Many studies on the saving and investment have been carried out by the researcher. Some studies regarding Socio-economic conditions of the tea garden workers are quoted in subsequent lines.

**Joydev Dutta, Mridul Chetia, J.P. Sarmah Baruah and Abani Kumar Misra (2010)** conducted a study on an assessment of Drinking Water Quality in Different Small Tea Gardens of Sonitpur District (Assam), India. They found that the sources of drinking water in the tea garden area are not safe for use. The uncontrolled uses of various chemicals in the tea garden are the main source of pollution of drinking water for which the general workers of the Tea garden area are suffering from various deceases.

**Nayana Borah (2013)** who made a study on the rights of women workers in the tea gardens of Assam. He found that health care facility is not satisfactory in various tea gardens, maternal mortality problem faced by women workers in tea gardens; they are mostly superstitious and living in unhealthy environment.

**Biswajeet Saikia (2008)** in his details investigation on the development of tea garden community and Adivasi identity politics in Assam identified that, casual workers of tea garden are not getting rations as a part of their negotiated wage package under present PDS system. He also found that casual workers of tea garden are not availing housing facility from the tea garden management.

**Dipali Bosumatari and Phanindra Goyari (2013)** in their study on Educational Status of Tea Plantation Women Workers in Assam examined that the education facility is not sufficient for tea garden worker's children especially for girls because of non-availability of school nearby labour's house. They also found that child marriage is another problem among the tea garden labours.

**Tulshi Kumar Das and S.M. Hasan Zahirul Islam (2006)** in their work on "Human Rights of the tea gardeners: Case study of selected gardens in Sylhet" found that Child labours are engaged in tea garden for generating income for their family. Housing facility,

pure drinking water, scientific sanitary system and wages structure are not adequate for tea garden workers.

**Nizara Arya (2013)** made an analysis on the Indian tea scenario. He found that the major factors responsible for poor performance of Indian tea industry are high cost of production, old age of tea bushes, lack of infrastructure, high price, labour problem, inefficient Tea Board and high labour cost etc. Because of rising competition at domestic as well as in international market has extended the crisis of tea industry of India and has lost its position in the international market due to its high cost and poor quality.

**Pradip Kurmi (2014)** in his detailed investigation on the problem of Educational attainment of children of the tea garden labourer's house hold in Derby Tea Estate analyzed that women's education level in the tea garden workers is so poor.

**M. Ahmed, Anwara Begum and M. A. I. Chowdhury (2010)** conducted a study on Social constraints before sanitation improvement in tea gardens of Sylhet, Bangladesh. They found that sanitary system of the tea garden of Sylhet district of Bangladesh is not sufficient. It is very difficult to raise water to the place of installation as the sources of water are far from there and suitable place of the installation of sanitary system is not available.

**Achyut Krishna Borah (2013)** in his work on Socio-economic condition and income and expenditure pattern of plantation workers with special reference to Lepetkota Tea Estate in Assam examined that a big number of tea garden workers were spend less than Rs.400/- per month for their child .A big portion of their family income is used for food. And remaining negligible portion of their income are using for cloth, house, transport and others purpose as their income is so less than other section peoples of the society.

**Pallabi Devi (2014)** analyzed Socio-economic status of the Tea garden women workers in Sonitpur District, Assam. She identified that the number of family member is so high, education level of women workers is so less and women workers have their monthly wages less than Rs.5000/- , this is so less than other section peoples of the society.

**GK.Medhi, NC. Hazarica, B. Shah and J. Mahanta (20016)** in their study on health problems and nutritional status of tea garden population of Assam. They found that the number of underweight children is significantly higher among female children than male children of tea garden workers. Prevalence of hypertension among alcohol user is significantly higher as compare to among non-users of alcohol.

**Sangita Saikia, Supriyo Mishra and Bandita Mishra (2014)** they made a study on living conditions of tea garden labours of Sarusarai tea garden of Jorhat District, Assam. They highlighted that the rate of school-drop is significantly high among the tea garden worker's children due to poverty, which is very despondent scenario. Thy live in an unhealthy environment without basic amenities. Minimum wages is not adequate to meet their basic need.

**Basudab Sadhukhan (2014)** who had attempted a study on Tea industry in West Bengal analyzed that most of the tea gardens of the studied area are over staffed, steps may be taken for optimum utilization of existing staff. Cash compensation may be providing for labours in lieu of existing food grain supply system.

**Shyamal Chandra Sarkar (2013)** examined the condition of tea garden workers of Jalpaiguri District, West Bengal, in colonial India. He suggested that tea garden workers in Jalpaiguri District are disadvantaged, deprived, underserved, exploited, and alienated group. The tea garden labourers of Jalpaiguri District were not free from forcible methods of labour control. Directly and indirectly they were exploited by the garden authority.

**Renuca Rajni Beck (2007)** in her detailed work on condition of the workers in closed tea gardens of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal identified that after the gardens is closed the workers of these gardens are facing several problem like irregular supply of drinking water, irregular supply of electricity, inadequate medical facilities, irregular ration supply, irregular and partial payments of wages as work is not going on frequently.

### **Methodology:**

The following methods and tools have been used for the study to come at a feasible and meaningful conclusion:

**i) Scope of Study:** - The present study is covering West Tripura district of Tripura.

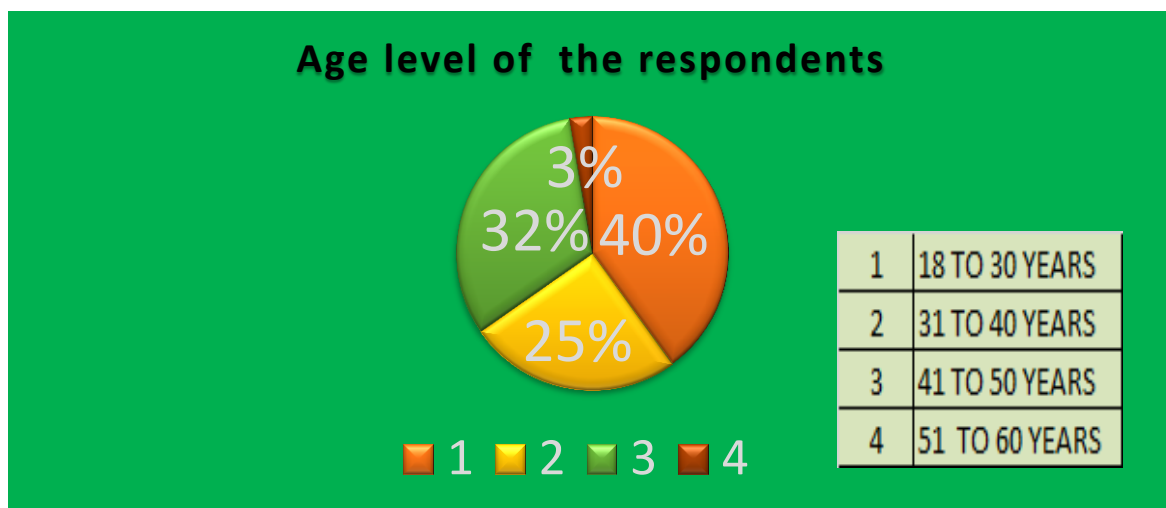
**ii) Sources of Data:** - Both the primary and secondary data has been used for the present study. The primary information required for the present study has been collected randomly from 75 numbers of households of tea garden workers with in study area with the help of structured questionnaire. Primary data for the present study has also been collected through interaction and consultation with the top management of tea garden authority, local tea garden labour union leaders and Government official personnel from the concern department.

The secondary data has been collected from Tripura Tea Development Corporation Limited, Ministry of Industry and Commerce; Government of Tripura and Tea Board of India. Other relevant secondary information has also been collected from various books, journals, annual reports, magazines, publications& thesis, etc.

**iii) Framework of Analysis:** -Primary and secondary data collected from various sources has been analyzed with the help of various financial tools and statistical devices including pictorial presentation methods wherever necessary to get the result of socio-economic analysis.

## Results and Discussions:

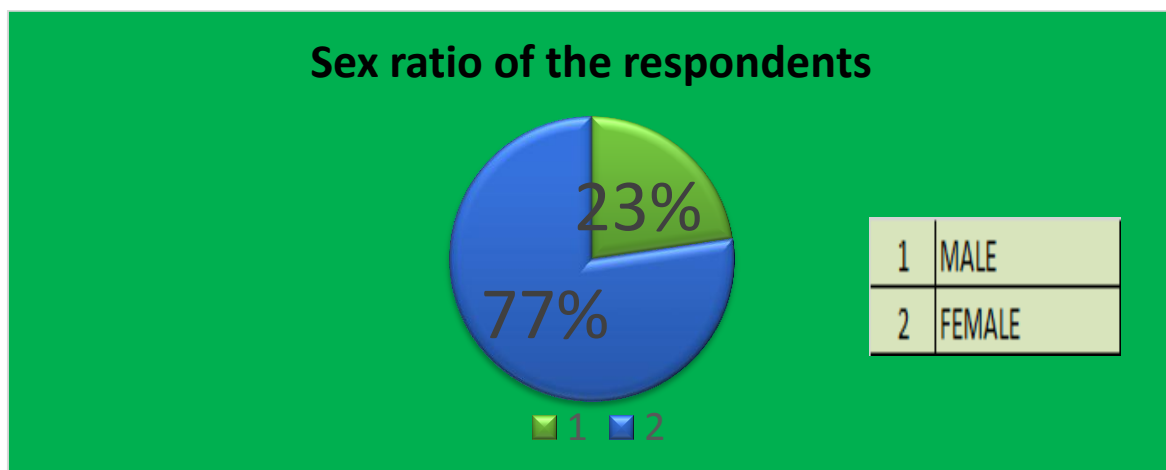
Chart No.1



Source: Field survey

**Age:** -From the above chart no. 1 it is showing that a lion portion of the respondents are belongs to 18-30 years age group (40%), 25% of the respondents are belongs to 31-40 years age group, 32% of the respondent are belongs to 41-50 years age group and only 3% of the respondent are belongs to 51-60 years age group. It implies that the majority of the tea estate workers are belongs to 18-30 years age group.

Chart No.2

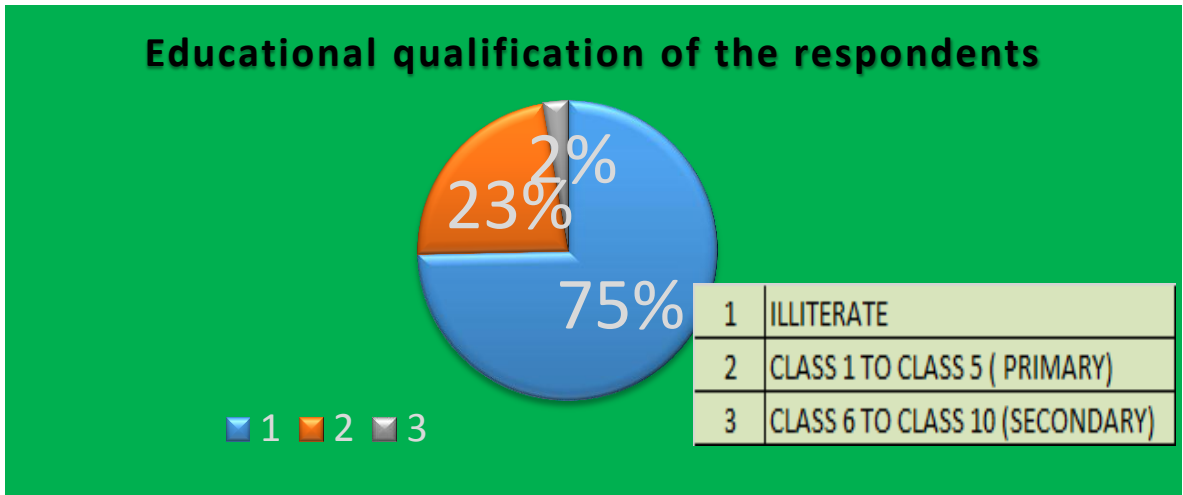


Source: Field survey

**Sex ratio:** -The above chart no. 2 showing that 77% of the workers are female workers and remaining 23 % of the workers are male workers. It indicates that female workers are

widely engaged in tea plantation work. They are specially engaged in plucking soft leaf. For upliftment of the society female workers can play a vital role. Economic freedom of the women is so far significant for developing the society as well as reducing any kind of malpractice playing over women.

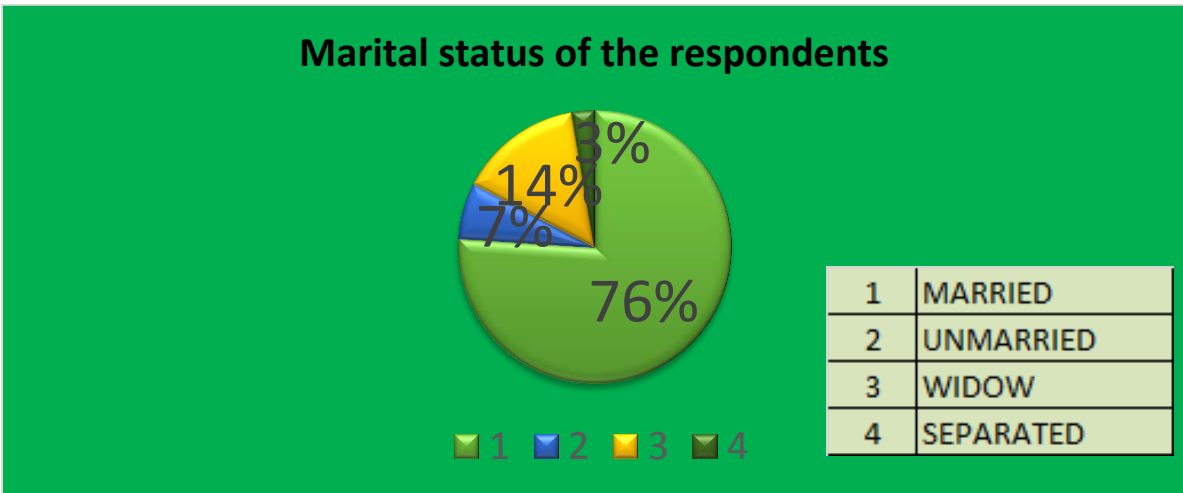
Chart No.3



Source: Field survey

**Education:** -Educational qualification of the tea estate workers are quite pessimist. From the above chart no. 3 it is clear that 75% of the workers are illiterate, 23% of the workers are primary educated and only 2% of the workers have secondary education. It means that majority of the tea garden workers are illiterate. Education is very much significant to be free from unauthorised exploitation by the tea garden authority and by the society as a whole. An educated person can make a happy family as well as a happy society and so on.

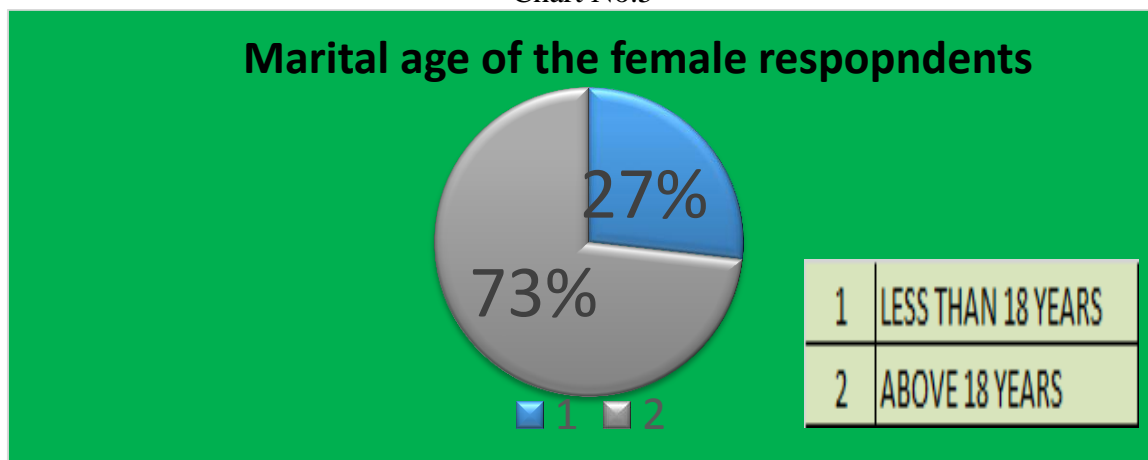
Chart No.4



Source: Field survey

**Marital Status:** -From the above chart no.4 it is showing that 76% of the respondents are married, 7% of the respondents are unmarried, 14% of the respondents are widow and remaining 3% of the respondents are separated. These separated respondents are female and 18-30 age group. The financial conditions of the separated female respondents are very poor along with widow respondents.

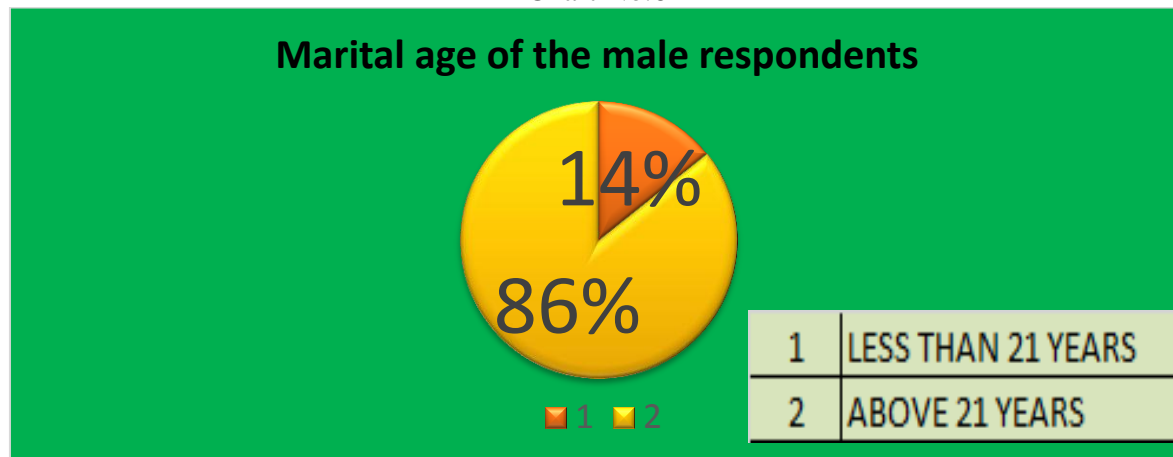
Chart No.5



Source: Field survey

**Marital age of the female workers:** -Early marriage of women workers is vigorous problem of the tea garden workers. From the above chart no.5 it is clear that 27 % of the female workers are getting marriage below 18 years of their age and remaining 73 % of the female workers are getting marriage above 18 years of their age. Female's marriage may be above 18 years for mental, physical and economic development of the female workers.

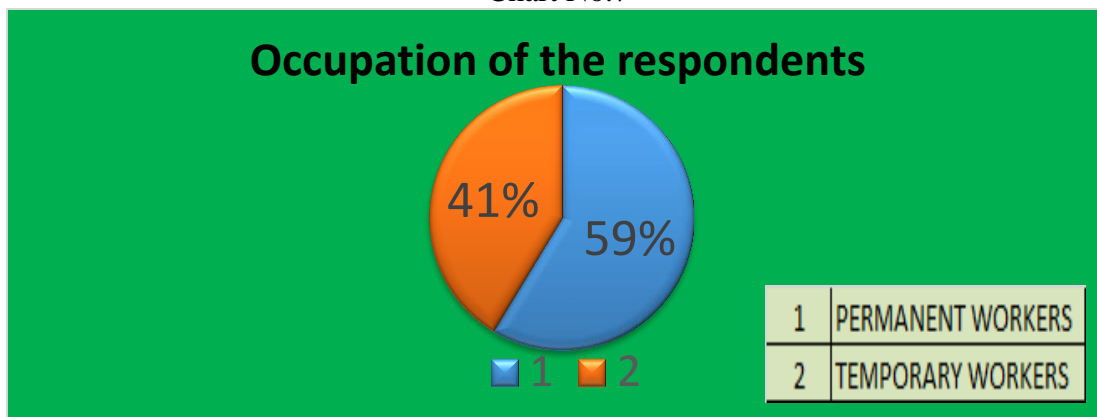
Chart No.6



Source: Field survey

**Marital age of the male workers:** - From the above chart no.6 it is clear that 86% of the male workers are getting marriage above 21 years of their age and remaining 14 % of the male workers are getting marriage below 21 years of their age. Because of early marriage these 14 % of the male workers are facing financial crisis.

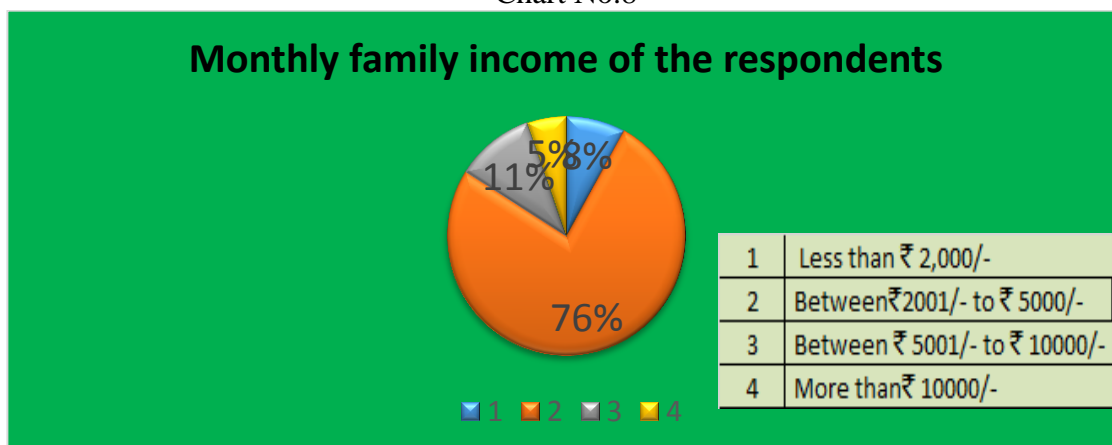
Chart No.7



Source: Field survey

**Occupation:** -59% of the respondents are permanent workers and remaining 41% of the respondents are temporary workers in the tea estate (chart no.7).Permanent workers are getting 2kg of rice per week and 3 kg of wheat per week as food grain supply by tea garden authority in addition to daily wages of Rs.71. Temporary workers are getting only 3 kg of wheat per week in addition to their daily wages of Rs.71. Temporary workers are not getting medical facility and other benefits like permanent workers. So, temporary workers may convert to permanent workers for welfare of the workers.

Chart No.8

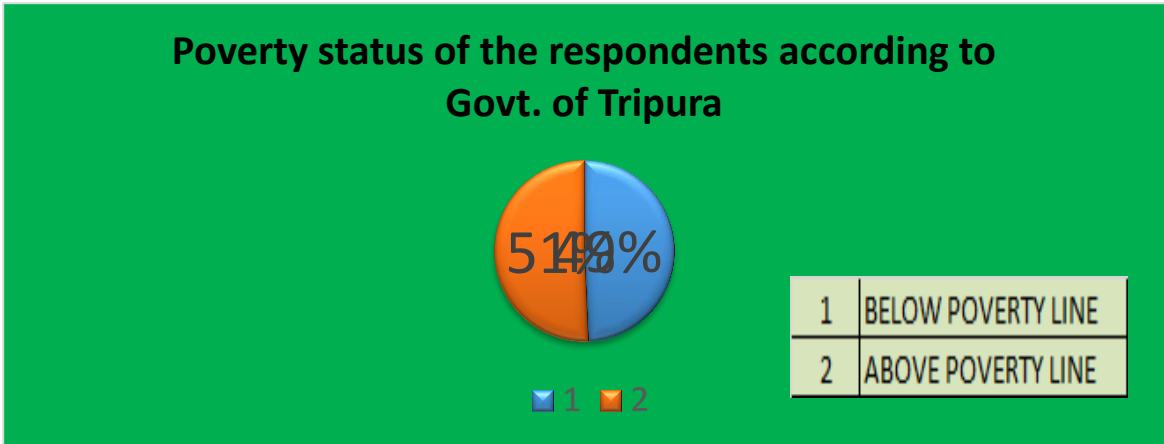


Source: Field survey



**Family Income:-**Monthly family income of the majority workers are Rs.2001- Rs.5000 (76%),8 % workers have monthly family income less than Rs.2000, 11% workers have monthly family income Rs.5001- Rs.10000 and only 5% workers have monthly family income more than Rs.10000. So, from the above table no.8 it is clear that the majority of the tea estate workers have monthly income Rs.2001 – Rs.5000. It indicates that the majority of the tea garden workers are poor.

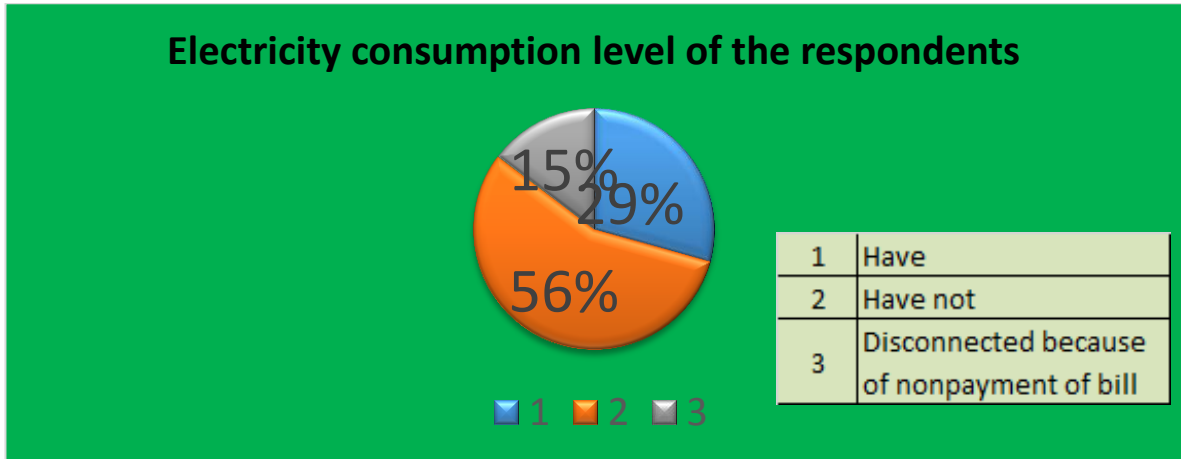
Chart No.9



Source: Field survey

**Poverty:** 51 % of the respondents are living in above poverty line and remaining 49% of the respondents are living in below poverty line (chart no.9). These 49% people are getting food grain, medical and other facilities from the government at concessional rate or free of cost. On the other hand 51 % of the respondents are not getting such type of opportunity. It implies that a lion portion of the people of tea estate are living under dejected financial condition.

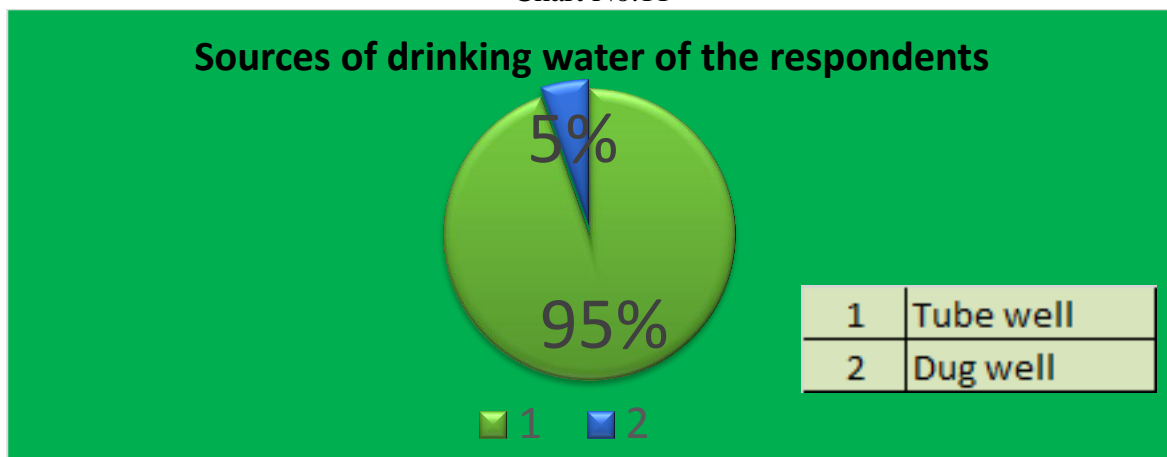
Chart No.10



Source: Field survey

**Electricity consumption:** -Only 29% of the respondents have electricity connection in their house, 56% of the respondents have no electricity connection and remaining 15% of the respondent had electricity connection, but has been disconnected because of non-payment of electricity bill. It is quite significant that, as 15% of the respondent have failed to pay their electricity bill and finally disconnected their line, their economic condition is very much dejected. From the above chart no.10 it is showing that a majority of the respondents have no electricity connection, as a result they are not able to enjoy modern social life.

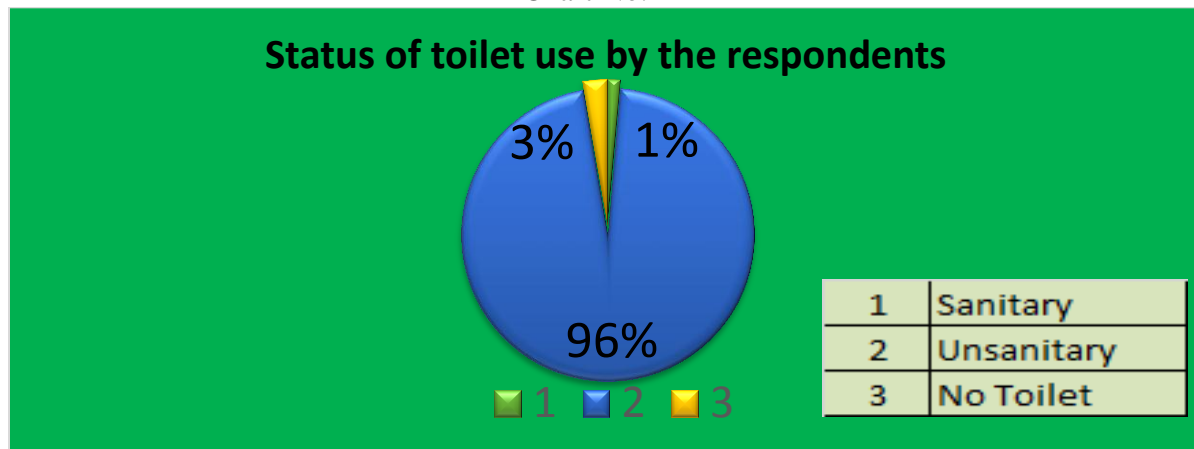
Chart No.11



Source: Field survey

**Drinking Water:** - 95% of the total respondents are collecting their drinking water from tube well and remaining 5% of the respondents are collecting their drinking water from dug well (chart no.11). There is no iron removal plant. It denotes that majority of the workers are collecting their drinking water from tube well. So, drinking water from tube well and dug well may be harmful for health of the tea estate workers.

Chart No.12



Source: Field survey

**Sanitary Toilet:** -From the above chart no.12 it is showing that 96 % of the respondents have no sanitary toilet, only 1 % of the respondents have sanitary toilet and remaining 3% have no toilet. It is harmful for health of the tea estate workers.

**Findings of the study:**

1. In the present study the researcher found that most of the respondents were female (77%). Most of the respondents were in the age group of 18-30 years (40%) and 41-50 years (32%)
2. Most of the respondents were married (76%) and 14% respondents were widow. Most of the respondents having 1-5 family members (83%).
3. In the present study it has been found that most of the respondents were illiterate (75%) and 23% of the respondents were primary educated (clas-1 to class-5).
4. In the tea estate 73% of the female workers got marriage above 18 years of the age and 27 % of them got marriage below 18 years of the age. On the other hand 86% of the male workers got marriage above 21 years of the age and 14 % of them got marriage below 21 years of the age.
5. In the tea estate 59% workers are permanent workers and remaining 41% workers are temporary workers.
6. In the present study it has been found that most of the respondents having monthly income amounting Rs.2001 – Rs.5000 (76%) and 8% of the respondents having monthly income is less than Rs.2000.
7. The researcher has found that in the tea estate 49% of the respondents were BPL (Below Poverty Line) card holder and remaining 51% were APL (Above Poverty Line)card holder.
8. A lion portion of the respondents have no electricity connection (56%) and 15 % of the respondents had electricity connection, but it has been disconnected due to non-payment of bill.
9. In the tea estate 95% of the respondent collecting their drinking water from Tube well and remaining 5% of the respondents collecting their drinking water from Dug well.
10. In the tea estate 96% of the respondents using unsanitary toilet, only 1 % of the respondents have sanitary toilet and remaining 3% of the respondents have no toilet.

**Suggestions:**

1. Wages rate of the tea estate workers is too less irrespective to the male and female workers. The present wage rate is Rs.71 per day, it may be increased up to Rs.150 per day or more.
2. Various financial inclusion scheme of the Government may be implemented in tea estate for financial strengthening of the workers, especially female workers. So that female workers may be financially independent.

3. Girl education is so far essential for upliftment of the society. Government, NGOs and tea estate authority may take initiative for improvement of the girl education rate.
4. Tea estate workers and their children are suffering from nutrition problem. Mead day meal, Kishori Shakti Yoyana, Janani Suraksha Yoyana and others nutrition program of the Govt. may properly implement in the tea estate.
5. Number of casual workers of the tea estate may be reduced by converting them to permanent workers. Tea estate authority may see that the tea estate may not suffer from over or under staff. If the number of population of the tea estate is increasing they may be shifted to others job.
6. Early marriage is a burning problem of the tea estate. Tea garden authority, NGOs and Govt. may organize some awareness campaigns against the problem of early marriage.
7. Govt. and tea estate authority may supply electricity to the house of workers at a concessional rate, as a huge number of workers are not able to pay full electricity bill.
8. Unsanitary latrine may be discontinued. Govt. and tea estate authority may establish 100% sanitary latrine in the house of workers.
9. There may be at least one High School near by the tea estate area. So that the children of the workers can study there.
10. Various employment generation and vocational program of the Govt. may implement in the tea estate. So that unemployed person of the tea estate can get job to meet their financial needs.

**Conclusion:** From the above discussions it is concluded that the living standard of the tea estate workers of West Tripura District are very miserable. They are economically and socially backward and deprived from the modern social life. The tea garden workers are living in the land of tea estate authority, as they are living in the land of tea estate authority they have no right to use that land for any kinds of economic and commercial purposes. They are living there generation after generation without any ownership of the land. Most of the tea estate workers are illiterate so that they have no ideas regarding various labour welfare and other social security schemes which are implemented by the Government and tea estate authority. Early marriage may be discontinued and girls' literacy rate may be increased. Tea estate authority, Government and NGOs may take initiative for economic, social and cultural development of the tea estate workers of West Tripura District. Moreover, financial strength of the workers, especially female workers are very much essential pertaining to overall development especially, to improve the girls' literacy rate in the tea estate of West Tripura District. The problems mentioned in the findings are needed to be removed so that the socio-economic condition of tea garden workers of West Tripura District is developed gradually.

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