

WATER ENVIRONMENT OF TEA PRODUCTION AREAS
- DARJEELING HILLY REGION AND ITS HEALTH
IMPACT ON TEA WORKERS

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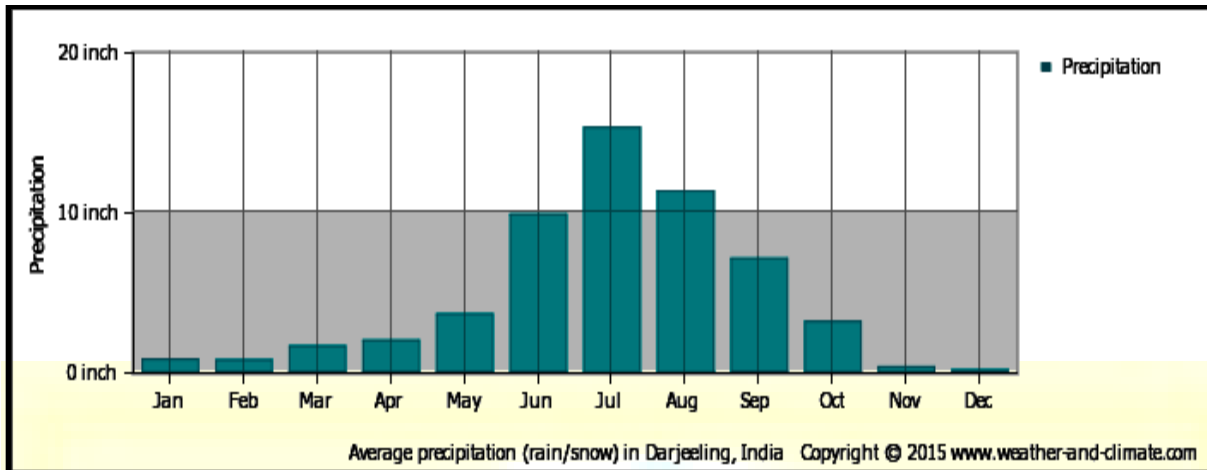
Abstract: Tea and tea workers are the two sides of a coin where health related issues of tea workers occupy delicate position in these state of affairs. In spite of heavy rainfall in Darjeeling hilly track the workers in tea garden suffer water crises. Hence they used to collect water from the nearer plain region and store for long times for their daily house hold works. The stored water strongly attracts water and vector born diseases like cholera and diarrhoea and malaria.

Key words: *Tea-workers, cholera, diarrhoea, sanitation, malaria, hygiene, water born disease, vector born disease.*

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INTRODUCTION:

The most common beverage throughout the world is “TEA”. It is related with the nostalgia of the Indian people. British people introduced this chip labour intensive drink to our daily routine from that time this golden liquid attached with our way of life from the past towards the present and surely for future era. In poetic word, “It is the cup that cheers but not inebriates” (1) .This tea commands a crucial position in India’s economy as it is one of the major foreign exchange earners. Tea is a labour oriented venture as it is agro-based production. It requires effort at every phase of its work right from maintenance of jungle, making the land appropriate for the tea plant growth , maintain nursery, spraying of pesticides, cutting drain, plucking, developing, drying, packing and then finally dispatching it to different destinations(2). The relation between tea and it’s labour this like mother and her baby. Labour nurture the plant as it is a soul .But the health related problems of this tea workers occupied a curtail role where water plays the most significant position because it is directly as well as indirectly related to the sanitation and health related scenario among the tea labours. In broader scene this situation deals with the number of (un) productive man-days of the labourers. According to koppen’s climatic classification Darjeeling hilly track considered under the Cwb zone. That is Sub tropical highland climate. (3) The average annual precipitation is 309.2 cm (121.7 in), with an average of 126 days of rain in a year. The highest rainfall occurs in July (4). Although Darjeeling hilly areas enjoy high rainfalls but it experiences seasonal water scarcity. This adversity situation leads to the health related problem among them.



Variability of climate and its impact on tea workers:

It is seen that, Tea-workers are mostly tribal people who were brought by the British colonial planters as indentured labours from the Chhota-Nagpur plateau region in different tea-gardens of Darjeeling area. A very striking issue emerged among the tea workers are that they don't have any sense to form community because of that they often like to live in isolated section. The field workers are separated by ethnic origin, housing blocks, castes, family, gender, age, etc... (5). Another feature is very common in the tribal society is that despite of heavy rainfall in the Darjeeling hilly areas the labours used to experience the seasonal water scarcity, water related problems among the tea workers due to inadequate water management practices are very common. Workers are stored their water which is coming from the near plain municipality areas. These storage probably one of the main cause for the growth of water related disease among the workers.



Tea labour store water for their household purpose in Kurseong

(Picture courtesy Lopamudra Ganguly date: 13.10.2015)

Water born diseases among tea workers:

Like many other over shadowed community, tea workers also face different types of socio-economic and environmental problems, among which water crises and its related issues are very much prominent. According to Plantation Labour Act 1951 a verdict was stated that each tea garden should have a health centre with adequate facilities. As the tea garden is remotely located and doesn't have proper connectivity to the nearest town areas in most of the cases. Health centre must be the primary concern of each tea garden. (6) But in reality this facility is not at all in visibility. This statement proved by the fact that among tea workers, health related problems not also a pervasive disease but it's an incurable one. In many journals tea workers wage related issues are discuss widely while their health related problems most of the time neglected. But it is a real truth that water-borne diseases like gastro-enteritis and cholera snatch life hundreds of plantation workers

every year. The common feature is that most of the plantations have no potable drinking water facilities and proper drainage systems. On the other hand sanitation service is not at all in consideration. (7) This situation is not even creating a big issue, because the peoples are belongs to tribal community so as for the societal norms they are not in the “main stream” of the social order. Most Common diseases among tea workers are cholera, malaria, jaundice, diarrhoeal which is repeatedly documented in varies survey. (8) This diseases are constantly notified but not highlighted. Colonial period’s text is also carried the witness of water born disease among the tea garden workers. Scarce Drinking water supply was important reasons for the outstanding mortality during this period. Due to Low wages the workers could not enjoys medical treatment in proper time and proper place. Cholera and diarrhoea were the most fatal diseases, which is mainly affecting workers section. With cholera and diarrhoea effect of hookworm also played a significant role among the Darjeeling tea garden workers.(9) According to an assessment a fact reviled that in 34 cases tea workers are currently suffering from either diarrhoea or vomiting (8 in open gardens, 9 in sick gardens, and 17 in closed gardens). On the other hand this data reviled the fact that in 197 tea gardens diarrhoea or vomiting during the past years are predominated, among them 38 (or 21%) on open gardens, 74 (or 36%) on sick gardens, and 85 (or 39%) on closed gardens(10). These numbers show raised levels of diarrhoea and vomiting on sick and closed gardens, which ultimately leads to starvation-related illness and death.

Darjeeling Tea is the best performer in case of flavour and yet it’s a good foreign money earner. But in reality the real producer means the workers lives in that conditions which are not expressible. The worker is treated like just a component in a huge swing, a cost of production. The position of the worker in the industry is totally destabilized and their work is cautiously undervalued. This

circumstance of deprivation and exploitation has been perpetuated for three to four generations from now. Millions of people enjoy their cup but they could not understand the dark side of the coin where capitalist economy played a curtail role, where a large number of inequality is prominent between the owner and the worker, regarding the issue of prices and costs. This situation leads towards the poor living condition of the labour even they don't effort for a better health treatment and addition to this situation water related health matter are increasing enormously.

Living condition of the Tea workers:

Livelihood of tea workers' has been continuously ignored generations after generation. These workers have very low literacy rates and they are not enjoying most of the basic amenities like safe drinking water in their regions. It is also awful that children of the plantation workers have no other option but to work on the plantations under the terrible socio-economic conditions. There is no escape from the vicious circle and the highest level of exploitation. Often workers suffer from diarrhoea, cholera and other waterborne diseases. Malaria and tuberculosis are also rampant. It is also estimated that infant mortality rate is much higher than the national average. Approximately only one percent of the workers are active after attaining the age of 60(11). A general difficulty in Tea industry in Darjeeling Hills suffers Sanitation situation related struggle where housing problem is icing on the top. A large proportion of garden labourers still reside in kutcha and semi-pucca houses. For this circumstances proper sanitation system is not applied and Open field defecation is still widely practiced in this area which making this area susceptible to numerous health complexities, notably worm infestation (12). Most

of the plantations had no potable drinking water facilities and drainage systems for this reason there was significant commonness of water-borne diseases like gastroenteritis and cholera. (13)



(Picture courtesy: www.darjeelingprema.org: 15.12.2015)

Indian Society and Tea workers;

Tea garden workers are still in very deprived condition. They are far away from the urbanized society and living a secluded life. This has led many labourers to leave tea garden related jobs and relocate in nearby areas outside tea gardens in search of better livelihoods. Many of them have now taken up farming and related jobs, works in the field of construction, small businesses, etc and migrated from the route. It is an established fact that tea is a major economic product in India, so any problem of workers will result in adverse effect on this industry. By receiving the special provision of ST status will not be of help to them to uplift their socio economic status. According to Maslow's theory of "Basic Needs", safe drinking water occupied the first level of basic needs where as this tea labours don't have that basic facility. Inspire of heavy monsoonal rainfall this region adversely affect by the water scarcity as well as water related disease. Unless basic amenities are not provided in the tea garden workers lines, there are no rationales to provide the ST status to the community at present.

Conclusion:

In Indian literature monsoon is described as the season of love and life, but once the rains disappear the whole country become dry as a desert, life become difficult. Hilly Darjeeling enjoys monsoon in a wider way but vagaries of monsoon and unequal distribution of rainfall creates a huge crisis among tea garden's labour. On the other hand climatic changes are one of the biggest treat in present scenario. This situation is emerging as 20th century's socio-economical playground prominently. If we look towards our tradition we can find out that civilization with small human settlements coming up on the banks of rivers and streams. Because water is not only a hydrological element but it's a social element also. In this background water conservation for future is not today's notion; it's related when a life begin. So if we established RAINWATER HARVESTING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM in the workers house or community then it will be beneficial of them to store their nature's gift for future use through proper executive system and for farther it would be helpful to control their health related problems. On the other hand various techniques can be introduced to stop breeding of mosquitoes in the rain water reserves. From that point of view use of mosques dunk (B.T.I) with many other options will be beneficial for the workers. (14)

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