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ISSN (Online) : 2455 - 3662  
SJIF Impact Factor :4.924

## EPRA International Journal of **Multidisciplinary Research**

Monthly Peer Reviewed & Indexed  
International Online Journal

Volume: 4 Issue:9 September 2018



**Published By :**  
**EPRA Journals**

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**EPRA International Journal of  
Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR)**

**MIGRATION AND LIVELIHOOD OF DOOARS TEA GARDEN:  
CASE STUDY OF CHINCHULA TEA ESTATE, ALIPURDUAR  
DISTRICT, NORTH BENGAL**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Bengal Dooars or Western Dooars often known as gateway to Bhutan, Sikkim and the northeast region, lies in the Himalayan foothills of North Bengal. West Bengal is the second largest tea producer in India and tea production is primarily concentrated in the tea districts of Darjeeling hills, Terai, and Dooars situated in North Bengal. Dooars have the largest tea growing areas employing thousands of workers who were imported during British raj and still forms the majority of Western Dooars population. Over the years, tea gardens of West Bengal have undergone drastic change. The external factors like competition from international tea markets due to economic liberalisation and the internal factors like aging bushes, lack of investment in maintenance and frequent lockout hammered worst the lowest section of the Dooars tea garden daily wage workers, creating chaos in their lives. Since their livelihood depends on plantation not just for employment but also for basic services including food supplies, healthcare and education under Plantation Labour Act (PLA). In the absence of alternative employment opportunities in tea growing regions, many households are struggling everyday to feed mouths while many households are compelled to move out in search of alternative livelihood strategy. The present study was conducted in Chinchula Tea Garden located in Alipurduar District, West Bengal with an attempt to understand the present livelihood of Dooars tea plantation workers and to understand the nature of internal migration and impact of migration and remittances on family left behind. An attempt has been made to understand whether migration is soul source of earning or tea garden work still plays vital economic role.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Dooars, Tea plantation, lockouts, workers, Migration*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is an age old and universal phenomenon. History of human civilization shows that man has been moving from one place to another in search of food, water and better environment with important social, political, economic, ecological and demographical implication. Migration is considered as two ends of 'rainbow'- the pull and the pressures from destination to origin countries (*Politics of Migration, 2015*). Migration literature have often highlighted two types of migration: International migration, which implies boundary of a country, is involved in migration and Internal Migration, which implies migration within the national boundary (Dang,2005). Several migration experts have recognized that internal migration of any form have been very common in the Asian continent and India is no exception as internal migration is the most common form of migration In India (Srivasta and Sasikumar, 2003). Based on rural or urban nature of birthplace and the place of enumeration, internal migration in India is classified into four migration streams: rural-to-rural, rural-to-urban, urban-to-rural and urban-to urban. Among all the various streams of migration, rural-to-urban migration has emerged as a prominent field of enquiry. Harris and Todaro (1976), the earliest model of migration explained that rural-urban migration depends on expected rather than current income differential between rural and urban areas. Based on this several empirical research were conducted revealing that the primary motivation is indeed economic consideration (Connell et al 1977, Baril et al 1986). Many studies as Khan (1986), De haan (1997), Sharma (1997) shows that labour outmigration have played a stabilizing role among poor. However, studies like Ellis (2000) observed difference between livelihood diversification out of choice and out of necessity and the implication in latter case of migration intensify poverty and vulnerability.

Ever since the British rule in India, internal migration acquired variety of new shapes and forms. In fact, an idea of migration as the virtuous form of social mobility was introduced under Colonial Plantation system<sup>1</sup>. Britishers hired tribal labourers into North Bengal belonging to Santhal, Oraon and Munda tribal communities, initially for clearing jungle and gradually hired as tea garden labourers in Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling districts. As compared to the Colonial period where tea planters had strong control over labour force and coercion, exploitation and isolation was prominent in the life of migrant tea garden workers. However, after independence, the government's attitude towards these migrant tea workers became more favourable through introduction of legislation concerning plantation workers (Plantation Labour Act of 1951 along with

the Factories Act regulates employment). However crisis of 1980's and 1990's created despair and hunger, chaos among the workers of tea plantation industry of Dooars that impelled them to move out of the tea gardens due to the rampant violation of the laws promising to safeguard workers livelihood. Moreover, even after the crisis, management continues to neglect plantation workers despite increase in the tea prices. Irrespective of whether the garden is shutdown or functioning, life of a tea worker is excessively pathetic. Failure over the fixation of the minimum wages, the meagre daily wages of Rupees 150/- has made it more difficult for the tea labours to rely on garden work to sustain their livelihood as the wages of the tea plantation workers continues to be least as compared to the wages of all other organised sectors. Under such condition, workers are compelled to search for employment opportunities outside tea growing regions in order to supplement their existing source of income. Against this background, study of outmigration migration from Dooars tea garden is of outmost importance.

## 2. OBJECTIVE

The paper sought to identify the nature of outmigration from the Dooars tea garden through the field survey and personal interview from Chinchula Tea garden worker households. The paper also attempts to identify the role of remittances in day-to-day life of the family left behind; Uses and impact of remittances at the place of origin.

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted on purposively selected Tea garden located in Dooars: Chinchula Tea Garden (MERICO COMPANY LTD). Garden is owned by Merico Tea Estate Limited. Chinchula Tea Estate, 72 years old tea garden, spreads around 2,100 acre with actual area of tea plantation on (in hectares) is 567.1<sup>2</sup>. The study was based on Stratified random sampling. The process of sampling based on the stratification of workers according to - firstly, 30 samples of households with migrants and 30 samples of Households with no migrants were selected for the study from the various labour lines (Villages) of Chinchula tea garden. Beside this, ex leader of OMC, ICDS worker, workers of NGO's were interviewed. Empirical analysis based on simple statistical and econometric tools was resorted for data analysis. Classification of the data and data processing was done through MS Excel.

## 4. LIVELIHOOD OF CHINCHULA TEA GARDEN WORKERS

Chinchula Tea garden is located at Kalchini Block, Alipurduar district, West Bengal. There are 10 labour lines(Villages) namely Godamm line, Church line/Naya line, Pukka line, Staff Quater line, Roto

<sup>1</sup> Varghese, V.J (2009), Land,Labour and migrations: understanding Kerala's economic modernity(CDS Working Paper 420). Trivandrum: Centre for Development Studies.

<sup>2</sup> <http://cpiwestbengal.blogspot.in/2013/04/tea-estates-in-dooars-jalpaiguri.html>.

line, Muslim line, Dara Line, Upper line, Quarter line and Chota Koti line. Tea workers in Chinchula tea garden are mostly third generation workers. There are around 700 labours (Out of which only 300 are permanent) working in the garden out of which 368 are men and 332 are female (based on field survey). Labours employed specially in the garden factory work were mostly female due to disloyal attitude and inefficiency in work as well as outmigration of the male member indicating “*Feminisation of the tea garden labour force*”<sup>3</sup>. The crisis of tea prices of 1990’s had resulted in the closure and sickness of many tea gardens of Dooars including Chinchula tea garden of Kalchini block. It was locked out for the first time for 7 months between 20<sup>th</sup> Nov 2003 to 25<sup>th</sup> June 2004 and again on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2005 abandoned by Shimansu Vyaparik Kendra Ltd amounting to huge dues of total Rs 1 Crore/- of PF dues and Bank dues of over Rs 8 Crore/-<sup>4</sup>. Lockout in the Chinchula tea garden created havoc in the garden worker’s life as joblessness, despair, death, hunger and poverty haunted them every day. But workers managed to survive by forming management committee among themselves, plucking green leaves and selling it to bought leaf factories for processing with the daily wage of Rs. 50/-, FAWLOI (Family allowance for workers in locked-out industry) of Rs.1500/-, selling firewood per month at Rs 50/- per cycle and NREGA which fetched them minimal work occasionally. Finally, on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2009, Chinchula tea garden reopened with strength of 1,360 workers under the ownership of Merico Tea Company and still today runs under its ownership<sup>5</sup>. Even though Chinchula tea garden falls under the category of the functional tea garden, however the company is still laden with the heavy dues of the provident fund, gratuity dues of the workers. Apart from the basic wages, refusal of worker’s privileges in kindness was a major violation of Plantation Labour Act 1951. The condition of the Chinchula tea garden hospital was in dilapidated condition with lack of beds, medicines and in-house doctors. Garden management have failed to provide workers with basic facilities like firewood, umbrella, shoes, paints, ration, construction materials, blanket, etc. Water facilities were inadequate and Tea garden workers fully rely on ration under Antyodaya Anna Yojana with 15 kgs of rice and wheat monthly each. Electricity was a distant dream in the labour line of Chinchula tea

garden until 2015. MGNREGA has just managed to provide negligible jobs to the tea garden workers for just 14 days in a year. Thus, the study area reflects the dreadful condition of Dooars tea gardens. Low wages, poor livelihood and the uncertainty of the garden employment profile reflects the ongoing crisis of tea garden households. In order to understand the waves of transformations especially issues related to outmigration of people that have taken place after the garden has reopened makes it necessary to conduct in depth study of the area.

## 5. STUDY FINDINGS

### 5.1. Characteristic of Migration:

As in Table 1, Migration from the Chinchula tea garden prevailed at an early age between 20 to 30 years out of which 86 percent were male and 14 percent were female migrants. Propensity to migrate out of Chinchula tea garden appeared more among the male members. Male migrants were mostly married whereas female migrants also included separated and divorced. Migration was prominent among both Nepali and Adivasi community. Migrants from Chinchula tea garden lacked basic education and the proportion of migrants with education level below secondary level were very high (almost 80 percent of the migrant). Only three migrants acquired graduation degree and one migrant with post graduation degree. Almost 43 percent of the migrants believed that due to financial crisis in the family, migration for work became the prior reason for dropping out of school. The pattern of the migration observed in Chinchula tea garden was temporary but the migration had been predominantly long distance. The prominent stream of migration from the Chinchula tea garden was rural-urban migration. The major reason for long distance migration was the lack of alternative industries and lack of job opportunities in the adjoining regions of the Chinchula Tea Garden. Field Study showed that households with large family size tend to migrate more as compared to the smaller family size (Table 2). The households with more than six members on average migrated more. Out of total 30 migrant households surveyed, majority of the households (60 percent of the households) had two earning members with one member as a tea garden labour and another member who had migrated in search of alternative work (Table 2).

<sup>3</sup>Roy (2012): “The Adivasi in a Liberal Democratic Order and their Struggle for a Self”, in Biswajit Ghosh (ed.), *Interrogating Development: Discourses on Development in India Today* (81-103). Jaipur: Rawat publications

*Cited in Biswajit Ghosh (2015): Post reform Closure and Sickness of Plantation Industry, Marginalisation of Workers and Vulnerability of Women and Children in Jalpaiguri, West Bengal.*

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-business/Chinchula-tea-garden-in-Dooars-re-opens/article16553645.ece>

<sup>5</sup> The study on closed and re opened tea gardens in North Bengal by Anuradha Talwar, Debasish Chakraborty and Sarmishtha Biswas, September 2005

<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF MIGRANTS</b>	<b>MALE</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>AGE AND GENDER COMPOSITION:</b>			
BELOW 25 YRS	3	0	3
BTW 25-35 YRS	16	3	19
BTW 35-45 YRS	4	1	5
BTW 45-55 YRS	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>MARITAL STATUS BEFORE AND AFTER MIGRATION:</b>			
MARRIED BEFORE & AFTER	7	2	9
SEPARATED BEFORE & AFTER	1	1	2
SINGLE BEFORE AND AFTER	8	2	10
SINGLE BEFORE AND MARRIED AFTER MIGRATION	9	0	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>ETHNICITY:</b>			
NEPALI	19	4	23
ADIVASI	7	0	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>DURATION OF MIGRATION(in years):</b>			
1-5	10	4	14
5-10	8	0	8
10-15	5	0	5
15-20	3	0	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>30</b>

<b>DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTIC OF THE HOUSEHOLDS</b>	<b>MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD</b>	<b>NON-MIGRANT HOUSEHOLD</b>
<b>HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION:</b>		
1. MALE	58(33.72%)	39(26.9%)
2. FEMALE	61(35.46%)	38(26.2%)
3. DEPENDENT (BELOW 18 YEARS)	43(25%)	48(33.1%)
4. ELDERLY DEPENDENT (ABOVE 60 YEARS)	10(5.8%)	20(13.8%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>172(100)</b>	<b>145(100)</b>
<b>ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF THE HOUSEHOLDS:</b>		
1.NEPALI	23(76.7%)	8(26.6%)
2.ADIVASI	7(23.3%)	21(70%)
3.OTHERS	0	1(3.3%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30(100)</b>	<b>30(100)</b>
<b>SIZE OF THE HOUSEHOLDS (Number of household members):</b>		
1.SMALL SIZE (2-4)	5(16.67%)	19(63.33%)
2.MEDIUM SIZE (5-7)	22(73.33%)	7(23.33%)
3.LARGE SIZE (8-10)	3(10%)	4(13.33%)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30(100)</b>	<b>30(100)</b>
<b>NUMBER OF THE EARNING MEMBERS:</b>		
1 EARNING MEMBER	3(10%)	12(40%)
2 EARNING MEMBERS	19(63.33%)	18(60%)
3 EARNING MEMBERS	8(26.67%)	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30(100)</b>	<b>30(100)</b>

\* Note: Column Percentage in brackets (Source: Field Survey)

Tea garden work appeared to be one of the major occupation (73 percent of the total households surveyed including both the migrant and the non-migrant households had at least one member as a tea garden worker) reflecting high dependence on the tea garden income. However, through the study of the Chinchula tea garden the important strategy perceived for diversifying their source of earning was when one member was employed in the tea garden and latter migrated for work.

**5.2. Reason for migration:**

Field study revealed both pull and push factors were involved in the out migration from the Chinchula tea garden irrespective of the level of education acquired by the migrants. Push factors among the tea garden households were poverty, large family size, financial insecurity, lack of job opportunities, and lack of job assurance. Whereas the pull factors were job opportunities, better earnings, availability of civic facilities. However, migrants from Chinchula tea garden were absorbed in the very low section of work in the urban informal sectors mostly as carpenters, casual workers in the factory, domestic workers, hotel helpers etc. In addition, 76 percent of the migrants on an average moved to the destination with either friends or relatives. Thus, it may be deduced that migrants from Chinchula tea garden had strong social networks, which helped them to find job at the destination.

**5.3. Migrant’s Job profile at the destination:**

Migration from Chinchula tea garden was to the urban and semi- urban regions across different states as well as international (6 percent) migration to the Gulf Countries of Kuwait and Qatar. The common destination included Karnataka, Chennai, Maharashtra, Telangana, Delhi, Kashmir and Rajasthan. Very few educated migrants were employed in government jobs and moved within the state to the districts like Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar and Khoochbihar. The occupation pattern of the migrants

**5.5. Use of Remittances:**

manifested heterogeneous job employment structure. Since majority of the migrants with relatively lower level of education were employed in lower paid and low status jobs like waiter, cook, carpenters, painters, hospitality services (63 percent ) or as tea garden worker of south Indian tea estates (3 percent). The study also found that very few migrants(23 percent) acquired better status jobs like Indian Army, BSF Jawans, and West Bengal Police Officer. Even among the international migrants, work profiles were heterogeneous varying from employed as IT professional to parlour worker. Thus, migrants belong to the different occupational structure such as low status jobs as well as better-paid jobs depending on the level of the education and skills they had acquired. Hence, there is a strong correlation between education and the job profile.

**5.4. Remittances and household welfare:**

The analysis of the data on remittances showed that migrants (74 percent) sent remittances on monthly basis. There is the positive correlation between duration of migration and average remittances sent back home by the migrants annually. Migrants with long duration of migration(15 to 20 years) and permanent form of employment remitted highest annually. It was observed that majority of the migrants (60 percent) considered family attachment and responsibility were the primary reason for remitting frequently. Study also showed that migrants with old and retired family member back home remitted on average 69 percent of their income. Thus conclusion may be inferred that motive behind remitting money was “*purely altruistic*”. Majority of the migrants transferred money directly into their family’s account, which denoted awareness about the easy and modern mode of money transfer. On the other hand, migrants with very low status and uncertain jobs preferred saving their earnings and brought the meagre amount saved when they returned home.

REMITTANCES USED FOR	MIGRANT HH
PURCHASE OF FOOD	26(86.66%)
PURCHASE OF DURABLES	24(80%)
HOUSE CONSTRUCTION	17(56.7%)
CEREMONIAL EXPENDITURE	7(23.33%)
EDUCATION	12(40%)
SAVINGS	5(16.66%)
MEDICAL EXPENDITURE	14(46.66%)
PURCHASE OF VEHICLE	9(30%)

As shown in table 3, primary use of remittances was for consumption purpose followed by purchase of durable goods, which signified their social status. Household even used remittances for house construction as well treatment of severe illness. The study also revealed that remittances contributed significantly to the annual income of the migrant households in fact positive correlation existed between remittances sent to migrant households and migrant households annual income. Households with better working status migrants like Indian Army, Private Company Employer, Police and BSF predominantly purchased land property (Vested land) and gold. Study showed that possessions of assets by the households also had correlation with the duration of migration. Households with average years of migration of 11 years and above had been able to acquire assets, invest on land and repay debt borrowed during the time of migration on the other hand non-migrant were still trapped in the garden with minimum wages, which according to them was inadequate to run their livelihood.

The strong bond with the home/native land, old age, lack of social network, lack of finance were considered to be principal reasons among the non-migrant households for not been able to migrate in spite of harsh conditions at home. In fact Table 4, showed that migrant average household income (Rs.8859.833) is significantly higher than the non-migrant average household income (Rs.6251.667) with  $p < 0.01$ .

Field study also showed that remittances contributed significant proportion of the migrant household's income. Remittances contributed 45 percent of the household total income. After outliers were removed (Since three households had exceptionally high-income level), there still existed a positive correlation between remittances and household income with  $r(26) = 0.55$  and  $p < 0.001$ . As compared to the non-migrant households, the major source of income for the migrant households were the remittances which contributed to 45 percent of the household's total income however income from the tea garden wages attributed to 24 percent of the income exhibiting the importance of the tea garden work.

## 6. CONCLUSION

From the Study, the character of the migrants and pattern of migration revealed that migration from the Chinchula tea garden existed mainly among the semi skilled labour. Migration was temporary and circular in nature and the pattern of

outmigration was mainly rural to urban migration. Above study also reveals that, migration have actually created opportunity for tea garden households to boost financial assistance. It had allowed the poor migrants to move from state of deprivation to much better life. Furthermore, provided educated migrants with the opportunity to compete and ensure welfare of their family. The wave of gradual progress in the children's education of the garden worker has resulted into the higher aspirations among the new generation. However, migration from the Chinchula tea garden was not permanent in nature neither migrants perceived it as a permanent strategy. They sought to migrate and earn targeted income until they manage an alternative job at the tea garden back home. On the other hand, Tea plantation industry of Dooars has been in the dubious state because of the poor productivity, mismanagement and frequent shutdown. This has also resulted into lack of job opportunities along with rising population in the tea gardens of doors. Thus, it makes it necessary for the tea plantation industry of Dooars to look for alternative avenues such as utilising surplus tea land for multi cropping, emphasising more on tourism, which might help to improve the condition of the tea garden population. This in turn might help the garden residents to improve their quality of life as well as invest more on

human capital leading to a better standard of living.

**Table 4. Average household income of migrant and non migrant household**

	Mean	S.D	S.E.	Min	Max	CV
<b>Migrant Household</b>	<b>8859.833*</b>	<b>2882.522</b>	<b>588.4</b>	<b>4000</b>	<b>15000</b>	<b>32.53</b>
<b>Non-Migrant Household</b>	<b>6251.667*</b>	<b>2716.393</b>	<b>495.94</b>	<b>3322</b>	<b>11492</b>	<b>43.45</b>

\*highly significant [ $p < .01$ ]

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