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Problems of Lower Primary School Education among Tea Tribe Students in Goalpara of Assam: An Analytical Study

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ABSTRACT:

Education is a fundamental right for the children of 6 – 14 years of age group. The issues of Drop out, out of school children, quality of education and availability of trained teachers would be addressed in near future. It provides an education of equitable quality based on principles of equity and non-discrimination for right of children. Most importantly, it provides an education for right of children that is free from fear, stress and anxiety. There are few specific problems which are responsible for the slow progress of education in the tea garden areas. The present study attempts to investigate the educational problems together with the infrastructural facilities available in the lower primary schools of tea garden areas. The study also enquires the drop-out rate of students in the schools of the tea garden areas. The data have been collected with the help of self structured interview schedule, observation and house hold survey. In the present study, a sample of three schools from two tea gardens in Goalpara district of Assam are taken where children of the two garden laborers are enrolled have been selected purposively. The total sample comprises of School-3, Teacher-5, Students-60 and parents-50. The data have been analyzed using simple percentage and graphical representation. Based on both primary and secondary sources of data it has been found that students of lower classes suffer from linguistic difficulties leading to poor academic progress. There is no Adult Education Centre in the areas of the surveyed tea gardens. School supervision is not done on a regular basis.

KEY-WORDS: Lower Primary Education, Tea Tribe Students, Infrastructural Facilities, Drop-out, and Right to Education etc.

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INTRODUCTION:

Lower primary education is a stage of formative development which shapes the child into a learner, thinker and a social being. It provides children with better chances to explore new ideas, to socialize with children of same age and to develop their individual skills and personality. Education being a fundamental right for the children of 6 – 14 years of age group, with the enactment of Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, it is expected that issues of Drop out, out of school children, quality of education and availability of trained teachers would be addressed in near future¹. It provides an education of equitable quality based on principles of equity and non-discrimination for right of children. Most importantly, it provides an education for right of children that is free from fear, stress and anxiety². In India, Primary education is divided in two parts- Lower Primary Education (1st to 5th standard) and Upper Primary Education (6th to 8th standard). Elementary school is defined as a period of formal education following pre-school but before high school. Lower Primary Education is the initial stage of education and has as its basic aim to create, establish and offer opportunities to all children, regardless of age, gender or country of origin, to achieve a balanced cognitive, emotional and psychomotor development. The Sarba Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) is being implemented as India's main program for universalizing elementary education. Its overall goals include universal access and retention, bringing of gender and social category gaps in education and enhancement of learning levels of children.³

Historical Background of Lower Primary Education in the Tea Garden Areas:

Assam is the biggest producer of quality Tea in India. A contribution up to 55% of the total tea production is done in Assam. Tea Industry of Assam is dependent on about two million laborers almost all of whom are the descendants of those who were brought to Assam by the Britishers from outside. These laborers are the backbone of the Assam tea industry and are called Tea Tribes. In 1823, Robert Bruce was an intrepid businessman who had joined the British military force against Burmese invaders in Assam and discovered what looked like a tea bush growing in parts of eastern Assam. This added some incentive to the British East India Company to undertake the business in the region known as Assam for their commercial interest, as back as 1778. The company directors had instructed Sir Joseph Banks to prepare a series of notes to help them to explore the possibility of growing tea in their domains in India. Robert Bruce undertook serious measures to invest in the tea industry in Assam.⁴ In the next few decade large sums of money poured in to the enterprise. However, its main building block was not

capital along. Workers accounted for the most crucial factor of production system. The large tracts of lands have to be cleared. After that a regular supply of laborer was needed to work in the regimented plantation economy. After a brief attempt to attract people, the British planters found that they were not willing to become wage laborers on the land that they once owned. So, European planter and administrator felt that imported labor was best for the plantations. Hence, between 1861 and 20th century the tea industry began to hire workers from distant parts of the sub-continent. This wave of immigration was instrumental in the creation of industry, as we know it today. From mid-1860 the planters resorted to a policy of a systematic and organized requirement of Tribal, semi tribal and non-tribal present communities inhabiting and extensive contiguous area of several central and eastern India province. In 1947 the right to govern the country was handed over formally to section of the leadership of the anti-colonial struggle. With this transformation the condition of tea garden labor was also studied by the government and some welfare program was introduced to develop their standard of living. The Plantation Labor Act was formed in 1951. It made compulsory for the employer to provide certain welfare measures for the workers. It also emphasized on the education of the children of tea garden areas. The act stipulate that when the workers exceed 25 years in a garden or division, the employer should provide at least a lower primary school for imparting education to children for age group of 6 – 12 years. The lower primary education is guaranteed to the children of the workers under the Plantation Labor Act 1951. Moreover, education is a right of all citizen of India according to part II of the Indian Constitution. Article 45 states that the state shall endeavor to provide free and compulsory education to all children until they complete 14 years of age.⁵ In 1968 the state provincialized many schools run by the garden management in the Sibsagar, Jorhat, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi and Goalpara district following due inclusion of education as state policy of Assam. But till date it failed to resolve the problems of education and other also in the tea garden areas. Mostly lower primary school that catered to children between 6 and 11 were handed over to the government but upper primary schools for children aged between 11-14 years are rare in the tea gardens. There are some problems, which are responsible for the present condition of education scenario of the tea garden areas.⁶ From the above discussion we can easily understand that though there are many policies are adopted in different times to improve the educational status and some other welfare activities but it is not sufficient to fulfill the actual meaning of development in that special sector. Therefore, it requires a systematic and thorough study to find out problems of lower primary education and to provide some remedial measures to solve or to minimize them.

NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The present study focuses on the status of lower primary education imparted in the tea gardens of Assam with reference to Goalpara district in Assam. Though many studies and literacy campaigns have been done on the problem of lower primary education and socio-economic status of tea-laborers, yet its goal to achieve useful elementary education for the pupils of tea-estate is far away. In spite of the facilities provided by the tea garden authorities to the lower primary schools, they are still backward and illiterate. Only proper education can improve their standard of living. Therefore, in this present study a humble attempt has been made to study the problems of the lower primary schools of tea gardens of Goalpara district in Assam. Because of these requirements the investigator studied and examined the problems that hampers in providing proper education in the tea gardens specially that lies in the district of Goalpara of Assam.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The following objectives are formed for the present study.

1. To investigate the educational problems of students at the lower primary school level in Goalpara district of Assam.
2. To enquire the status of infrastructural facilities available in the lower primary schools of tea garden areas in Goalpara district of Assam.
3. To find out the causes of drop-out of students at the lower primary school level in Goalpara district of Assam.

DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY:

The delimitations of the present study are as below.

1. The study is delimited to the tea gardens of Goalpara district in Assam only.
2. The study is based on the lower primary schools situated in the tea garden areas of Goalpara district in Assam only.
3. The study has been delimited only to lower primary school level in Goalpara district of Assam.

METHODOLOGY:

Different aspects of methodology are as below.

Method: The study is based on Descriptive Survey method.

Sources of Data: Both primary and secondary sources of data are collected. The primary sources include interaction with the students, teachers and guardians through self structured questionnaire and personal interview. The secondary data are collected from various records of Office Register and other written documents.

Identification of Population: The population of the present study consists of the following.

1. All the lower primary schools in the tea gardens of Goalpara district in Assam.
2. All the teachers of the lower primary schools of tea garden areas of Goalpara district in Assam.
3. Parents of children reading in the tea gardens of Goalpara district in Assam.
4. All the students of the lower primary schools of the tea garden areas of Goalpara district in Assam.

Sampling: In the present study a sample 2 tea gardens of Goalpara district in Assam are taken. From two tea gardens a sample of 3 schools where children of the tea gardens laborers enrolled are selected purposively. The schools are selected from inside and around the tea gardens.

Table-1: Selection of Sample

Sl. No	Name of Tea Garden	Name of School	Sample
1	Simlitola Tea Garden	1. Pachim Simlitola Tea Garden Lower Primary School 2. Simlitola Tea Estate Lower Primary School	2
2	Moijongga Tea Garden	1. Moijonga Tea Garden Lower Primary School	1

Source: Goalpara Educational Block

Total Sample: School-3 Teacher-5 Students-60 Parents-50

Tools: In this study, self structured questionnaire, interview schedule and personal observation have been used as tools for gathering data.

Questionnaire: For the present study, a close form questionnaire has been prepared to find out the problems existing in lower primary education in the tea garden areas consisting ten items.

Household Survey: With the help of this schedule information regarding the number of the children, number of family members, educational status of the member of family, and school dropout etc. are

collected. Respondents are the heads of the households and Interview Schedule for Head Master/Teachers. In the present study, interview has been conducted among select teachers of the schools, management staff and mainly the students of IIIrd and Vth standard. Here items are included to know the present status of the school, operation of MDM Scheme etc.

Interview Schedule for Tea Garden Authority: With the help of the schedule information regarding facilities provided by the garden authorities is collected. Items are also included to know the provision of scholarship provided by the garden authority.

Observation: Personal observation helps the researcher for analyzing the matter in proper perspective.

Statistical Analysis: The following statistical tools are used in the study.

1. Simple percentage.
2. Bar diagram and Pie diagrams have been used for presentation of data.

Operational Definitions: Operational definitions used in the study are as below.

1. **Tea Tribes:** The tea-tribes are basically laborers, living inside the tea estates established by tea-planters. These estates are located in interior places and this is the reason of their backwardness and exploitation by the tea-planters. The tea-tribes are found in almost all the districts of Assam in India. But in the present study, only the tea tribes of Goalpara district in Assam have been included.
2. **Elementary Education:** Elementary education includes the lower primary and upper primary education.
3. **Enrolment:** In the proposed study, the word 'enrolment' means the total number of children registered as students from class I to V in the tea garden lower primary schools of Goalpara district in Assam.
4. **Drop-out:** According to the dictionary meaning, the word dropout means leaving school, for any reason except death, before completing a program of study and without transferring to another school. In the present study, the word dropout means leaving of school by students at elementary level from class I to V.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA:

The analysis and interpretation of the data have been done as per the sequence of the objectives. As such the analysis is presented as under.

Objective- 1: To investigate the educational problems of students at the lower primary school level in Goalpara district of Assam.

Table-2: Problems of Students at the Lower Primary School Level

Sl. No	Problems of Students	Percentage
1	Language Problem	80%
2	Lack of Interest of Parents	65%
3	Absence of Adult Education Centre	100%
4	Poor Supervision	70%
5	Lack of Medical Checkup	75%
6	Unattractive School Environment	60%

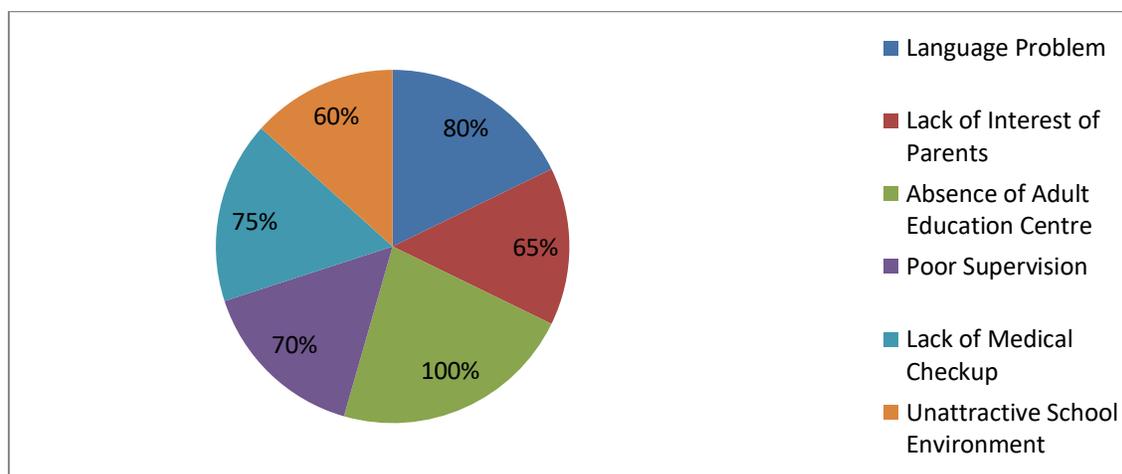


Figure-1: Problems of Students at the Lower Primary School Level

From the Table-2 and Figure-1: It has been found that 80% respondents admitted that Language problem is mainly responsible for lack of progress of lower primary education in the tea garden areas. The tea garden dwellers use their common dialects. The surveyed schools in the tea gardens use Assamese as the medium of instruction. Since the pupils have to learn the language used in the school, they cannot properly express their thinking and culture and as such affects their creativity. It is a broken

language consists of Hindi, Assamese and their own Tribal dialects viz. Soutal, Munda etc. The surveyed households reveal that as many as 65% parents are not at all conscious about their children's education. Most of the parents are not interested to send their female child to school for education. They engage the child in various manual works. They even ignore about their fundamental rights. According to Kothari Commission, in every rural and urban school there should be an Adult Education Centre⁷. But from the study it has been found that there is no Adult Education Centre among the surveyed tea garden areas, which may be the cause of slow progress of education among the tea garden childrens. Regular supervision and inspection is essential but as many as (70%) respondents report that the supervision of the schools is not satisfactory. From the responses of the teachers and parents it has been learned that the school inspector inspects garden lower primary schools only once in two years or more. So, the Headmaster finishes his duty after sending an annual examination report to the inspector of schools through the School Management Committee. The School Management Committee doesn't pay proper attention to the proper management and functioning of the lower primary schools. Further, many schools do not have medical facilities as opined by 75% respondents. Further, as many as 60% respondents express their displeasure on the educational environment of the schools. They feel that the school environment is also unattractive and very poor. Due to negligence of the school authority, in some lower primary schools the doors and windows are damaged and stolen by un-identified people and due to lack of boundary wall, domestic animals enters the school surroundings, leaving the school building unhygienic and dirty. Hence, unattractive school environment may be responsible for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the students and teachers.

Objective 2: To enquire the status of infrastructural facilities available in the lower primary schools of tea garden areas in Goalpara district of Assam. The basic infrastructural facilities of the schools are analyzed on the basis of the following parameters.

1. **Toilet Facility:** Availability of toilet facility is an important factor in the participation and retention of the children in schools, especially for the girls. Students in the tea garden areas face the problem of unavailability of proper toilet facility in the schools.

Table-3: Percentage of Schools having Toilet Facility

Category	No of Schools having Toilet	Percentage
Common Toilet	1	33%
Girls Toilet	1	33%
Boys Toilet	1	34%
Total	3	100%

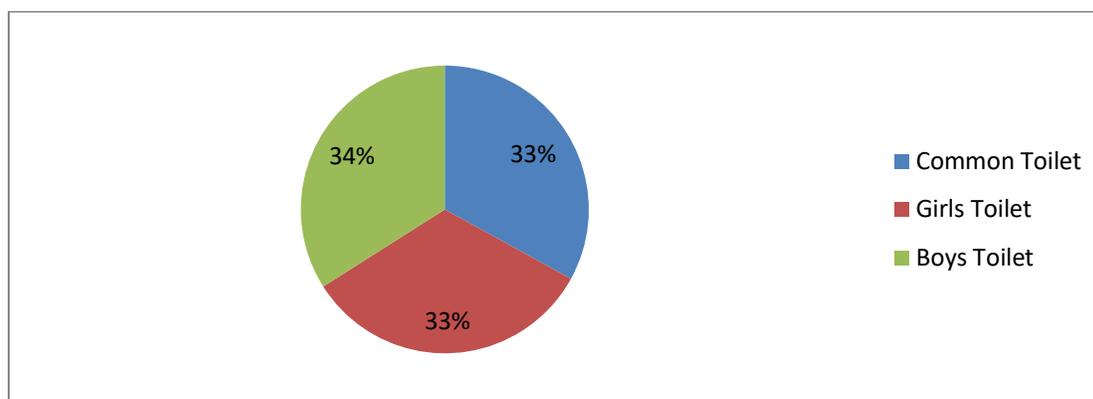


Figure-2: Percentage of Schools having Toilet Facility

From the Table-3 and Figure-2: It is evident that only 1 school has separate Girls' toilet facility. Separate boys' toilet is available only in 1 school. As many as 1 school has common toilet. Further, the running water and cleanliness of the toilets are also questionable. As such, it is very urgent to take steps for proper toilet facilities.

2. **Drinking Water Facility:** It may be noted that all the lower primary schools provide drinking water facility to the children though these are not properly purified.

Table.4: Percentage of Schools having Drinking Water Facility.

Category	No of Schools having Drinking Water	Percentage
Hand Pump	2	66%
Well	-	-
Tape Water	1	34%
Total	3	100%

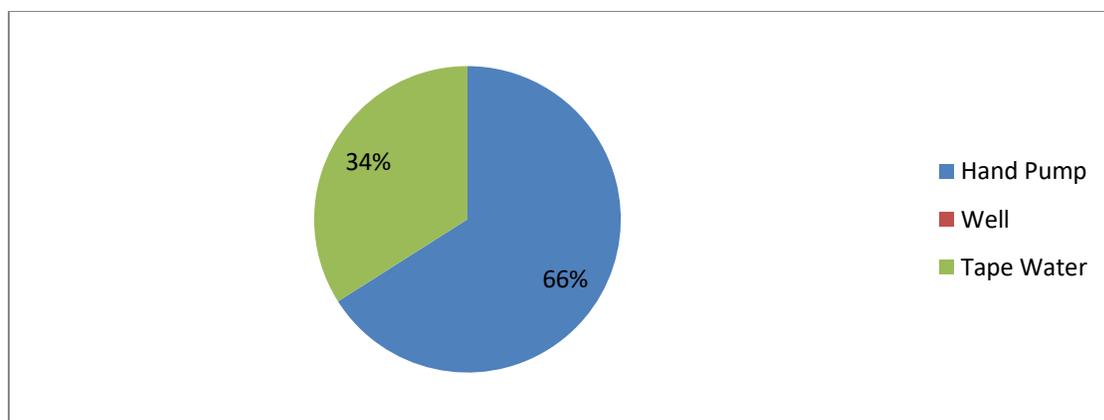


Figure-3: Percentage of Schools having Drinking Water Facility

From Table-4 and Figure-3: It may be observed that majority 2 schools use hand pump for drinking water and 1 of schools use tap water.

3. **Lack of Classroom Facilities:** Lack of proper classroom facilities is a vital problem faced by the tea garden schools. Most of the lower primary schools have single class rooms where the teachers sometimes have to hold two classes at the same time. To carry out the various activities no separate room with facilities are available.

4. **Non-availability of Boundary Wall, Playground, Play Materials and other Facilities:** A playground, play materials and boundary wall is the most essential requirement of a lower primary school.

5. **Mid-day Meal Scheme:** Mid-day meal program is an important inclusion in the school education program of the country. Its aim is to attract children into the educational mainstream. It also helps in providing the nutritional support to otherwise malnourished children. As observed from the sample schools, MDM scheme is serving its sole purpose especially in the tea garden schools. The heads of all schools opined that MDM scheme is helping in increasing enrollment and attendance.

Objective-3: To find out the causes of drop-out of students at the lower primary school level in Goalpara district of Assam.

1. **Students Dropped Out from the Surveyed Lower Primary School:** The table-5 shows the total dropout of the children in the sampled schools of the tea garden area of Goalpara district in Assam for the period 2019 to 2020. Among the students, girls' drop-out rate is more as they were engaged in household chores, rearing of siblings and many other activities.

Table-5: Drop-out of Students in Surveyed Tea Garden L P School during 2019-20

Name of Schools	2019		2020	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Pachim Simlitola Tea Garden Lower Primary School	3	5	2	4
Simlitola Tea Estate Lower Primary School	4	6	3	6
Mojjonga Tea Garden Lower Primary School	4	5	4	7

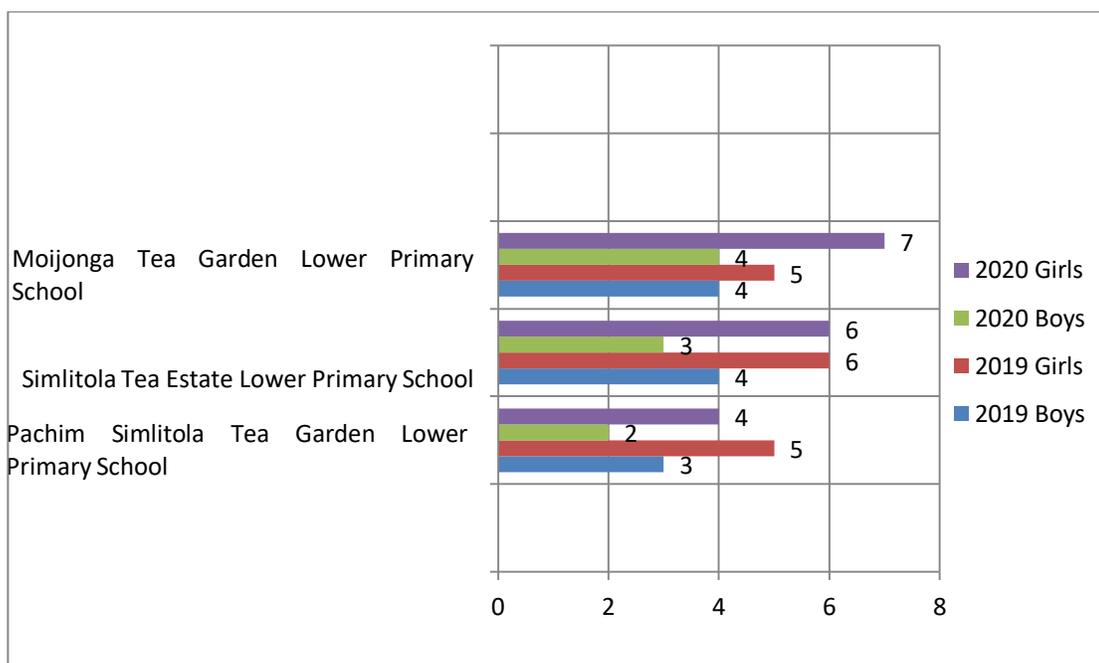


Figure-4: Drop-out students in surveyed tea garden LP Schools during 2019-20

Reasons of Drop-out: From the survey of the tea garden schools of Goalpara district in Assam, the headmaster as well as the parents point out some reasons for drop-out of their children from the schools. Table-6: shows the reasons of drop-out of children from schools in surveyed areas. It is evident that even children have interest in their studies but due to family or health condition children have to drop-out of schools.

Table-6: Reasons of Drop-out Children

Reasons	Drop-out	Percentage
Poverty /inadequate family income	5	19%
Lack of adequate facilities of school	3	12%
Lack of parents interest in education	6	23%
Engaged manual work at home	8	31%
Ill health/malnutrition	4	15%
Total	26	100%

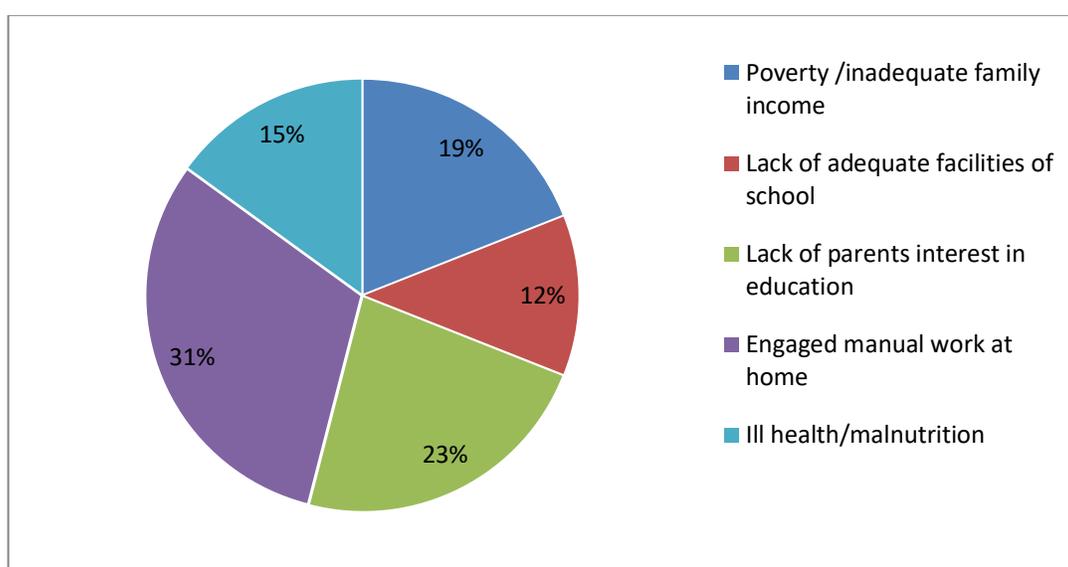


Figure-5: Reasons of Drop-out Children

The Table-6 and Figure-5: show that the lot of children drop out of school due to lack of interest of parents in education, engagement in manual work at home and inadequate family income. Many children drop-out because parents cannot afford educational needs of their children. Another important finding is that the tea garden laborers are not used to get admission in the schools at the appropriate age. Involvement in domestic work, engagement in wage earning activities, early marriage, care of sibling are some of the reasons for drop out and non-enrollment. Parent addiction to alcohol is a major hindrance in the path of educational progress of tea garden labor children.

MAJOR FINDINGS: On the basis of analysis and interpretation of data the following are the findings of the study.

1. Students of lower classes suffer from linguistic difficulties leading to poor academic progress. Language spoken at home and school are different.
2. 23% parents are not at all conscious about their children's education.
3. Most of the parents are not interested to send their female child to school. They engage the child in various manual works.
4. No Adult Education Centre in the areas of the surveyed tea gardens.
5. School supervision is not done on a regular basis.
6. 60% respondents express their displeasure on the educational environment of the schools. They feel that the school environment is unattractive and very poor.
7. All the schools have drinking water facility.
8. There is difference in the drop-out rate of boys and girls.
9. Girls drop out of schools and are engaged in household responsibilities
10. Mid-day Meal Scheme helps in the enrollment of students in lower primary school level.
11. Many schools have single classroom for two or three classes.
12. Most of the children's home environment is not conducive for education.
13. Alcoholic parents and disturbing home environment is a hindrance in educational progress.
14. Majority of parents are poor and illiterate, they were unable to help their children both financially and educationally.
15. Though the parents are illiterate yet they want to educate their children. Gradually, they are becoming conscious about their health and hygiene.

SUGGESTIONS: From the above discussion, the following suggestions are given.

1. Educated boys and girls from tea tribes' communities should be appointed in garden lower primary schools to minimize linguistic difficulties.
2. Emphasis should be given on the development of girl child education.
3. Through in every tea garden there is L P School, but high school is not available in tea garden areas. Because of non-availability of high school, many students are deprived of further education. So, more educational institutions should be established in tea garden areas.
4. There should be the provision of separate classroom for each class, and emphasis should be given on co-curricular activities.
5. The school authority should provide sufficient teaching aids and teaching materials to every school.

6. Awareness program should be organized to make them aware of their health, education and socioeconomic development.
7. Regular supervision and inspection should be done to improve the standard of education.

CONCLUSION:

The lower primary stage of education is that stage which builds the foundation of an individual's personality and empowers the child to grow with strong fundamental rights. In spite of lot of government efforts for lower primary education but in the tea gardens, schools have suffered insufficient attention and inadequate financial responsibility. Because of lack of education the tea garden laborers are still very backward as compared to the other sections of the people. So, it is necessary to take proper steps to improve the quality of education and to eradicate illiteracy from tea gardens and help them to progress as global citizens.

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