

**TITLE: *PRACTICING LABOR RELATION IN ASSAM TEA INDUSTRY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCES TO SOME OF THE SELECTED TEA ESTATES OF JORHAT DISTRICT IN ASSAM.***

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**Abstract:**

There is no question that labor relations practices are crucial in fostering a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment among employees in a given industry. As a result, an effort has been made to research the current labor relations practices in the Assamese tea business. The state of Assam's most significant business is the labor-intensive tea industry. Three tea estates owned by three distinct sorts of organizations—public, private, and government—were used as the source of the samples. The opinions of the chosen samples are sought on crucial elements of labor relations, such as individual policies and practices, pay and benefits, working conditions, union activity, participative programmes, and grievance remedies. Though the responses of the workers differed from one tea estate to the next. They expressed a strong level of dissatisfaction with various aspects of labor relations practices. As a result, it is not incorrect to say that the Assam tea industry has long neglected the human aspect of the organizations. An attempt has been made to highlight the strong areas that tea estates should capitalize on, as well as to identify problem areas and formulate appropriate recommendations to improve the pattern of labor relations in Assam tea estates.

**Keywords:** Labor, Organizations, Practices, Remedies, Wages.

## Introduction

The tea industry is one of the most important industries in Assam, and throughout the country as well. It is a significant industry in Assam. The industry has brought fame and wealth not only to the state of Assam, but also to the nation and internationally. Leaving aside the other components of the industry, let us look at the human input, with a focus on the workers. Assam's tea estates employ approximately eight lakh people. Initially, the planters faced significant difficulties in securing the necessary labor force for the plantation, and it became necessary to bring workers from other parts of the country.

A large number of very poor people, primarily from Orissa, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and other parts of India, were brought to Assam by the Britishers with enticing offers to work in tea gardens. Since then, migrated workers have played an important role in the development of Assam's tea industry. They are now an integral part of the industry. Many of the migrated workers eventually settled down permanently and contributed to the Assam economy.

The main reason why employees have settled permanently in and around the plantations is because initial labor recruiting was focused on family. Families of workers were encouraged to move to the plantations. This accomplished two things. First, by encouraging families to migrate rather than individuals, the landowners could attract cheap labor that would live permanently in the plantations. The entire family—men, women, and kids—worked on the plantation for the planters' set salaries. Second, family migration made sure that labour could be duplicated, which would lessen the difficulty of future hiring.

The state of Assam is characterized by significant diversity—geographic, economic, social, and political, to name a few. The same can be said for tea estates and their employees. The economic conditions of tea garden laborers vary greatly across the country. As a result, the conditions and other amenities differ from one estate to the next. A detailed study has been carried out in a few tea estates in order to project a clear picture which are as follows:

Year	Assam	North India	All India
2010	7,02,531	9,21,658	7, 21, 657
2011	7,11,063	9,83,785	14, 28, 352
2012	7,19,663	9,95, 520	14, 58, 254
2013	7,23,743	9,96, 857	14, 35, 654
2014	7,28,654	9,96,253	15, 12, 874
2015	7,55,128	9,97,717	15, 28, 645

2016	8,05,125	10, 12,486	15, 42, 150
2017	8,25,451	10,48,759	15, 56, 325
2018	9,15,458	11, 25, 852	16, 75, 457
2019	9,35, 687	11, 45, 587	17, 15, 857
2020	9,48, 512	11, 49, 457	17, 25, 728
2021	9,56,53	11, 73, 400	17, 47, 597

Table No. 1: Employment of Labor in the Tea industry of Assam.

Source: Tea Board Statistics, Govt. of India, 2021.

### **Labor Relations: A Conceptual Explosion**

The phrases "labor" and "relations," in general, make up the term "labor relations". Marshall (1961) stated that "labor" can be defined as "any exertion of mind or body undergone partly or entirely with a view to some other than the pleasure derived from the work "and" relations" can be defined as "the relationship between the employer and his employees that exists at the place of employment".

Cryster (1994) defines labor relations as "that part of the general labor field which includes the procedure in collective agreements, the servicing of grievances, and the conciliation of disputes between employers and employees, if at all possible, without cessation of work". It is concerned with scientific investigations of social and psychological interactions, with the goal of establishing a direct relationship between the employer and the employee.

The main topics of labor relations are union-management relationships, negotiation strategies, collective bargaining, contract evaluation, discipline, joint consultation, arbitration, conciliation, adjudication, and other related legal issues, strikes and lockouts, labor costs, employment and no employment, and other terms and conditions of service like pay, bonuses, allowances, and benefit plans, as well as closure, retrenchment, working hours, and holiday celebrations (Nath and Ghosh, 2021).

### **Review of Literature**

As the purpose of the literature review is to provide insight into how the subject matter is dealt with, the researchers chose to summarize the findings and conclusions drawn from, and recommendations given on, studies made by various researchers in the field of labor relations in India and even in foreign countries.

A study of labor relations and productivity in the building trades was designed by Haber and Levinson (1956). They discovered that the labor relations pattern in the building trades is significantly different from that perfected in other industries. The progress in ensuring steady employment is the only suggestion for improving labor relations in the building trades. In his study titled "Industrial Relations in Five Industrial Units of Meerut District", Saxena (1964) brought to light the need to address the issues with industrial relations on more than just an economic level. These are social issues whose resolution depends on the employers' and employees' shared confidence and trust in one another.

In his published PhD thesis titled "Labor Management in Sugar Industry," Singh (1966), noted that companies do not proactively take steps to offer workers with welfare facilities, with the exception of when doing so is required by law.

Nair (1973) investigated labor-management relations in Kerala through case studies. He emphasized the rich diversity in the pattern and composition of labor-management relations in the state. It demonstrates that Kerala has forged ahead in terms of developing a system of labor-management relations that can serve as a guide and model for the rest of India.

Das (1983) conducts an in-depth study of industrial relations in six textile mills in Indore. He discovered that industrial relations are sociological issues that must be resolved through mutual understanding between operative and managerial personnel.

Chand (1989) designed a study of industrial relations in the Andhra Pradesh public sector. He proposed uniformity in the wage structure of all public sector units in Andhra Pradesh (to alleviate many labor issues).

## **Research Gap**

From the aforementioned examination of the literature, it is clear that while several studies have been done on various elements of labor relations in India and even abroad, there hasn't been any research done explicitly on the labor relations practices in the Assamese tea business. Additionally, no study has compared the levels of satisfaction among those working in Assam's public, private, and government-owned tea industries. Furthermore, at the tea estates sampled for this study, no research has been done to yet on any elements of labor relations. As a result, the current study investigates empirically the critical issues affecting the relationship between labor and management in selected tea estates of Assam's Jorhat District and proposes measures to make them more effective contributors to the productivity and prosperity of Assam's tea estates.

## Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the current study is to make a comparative analysis of labor relations in the state's tea farms, taking into account the public, private, and government-owned tea plantations of Assam. The study looks at the labor relations practices in the Assamese tea business. The following are the study's key objectives:

- i. To investigate the labor relations practices in Assam tea estates;
- ii. To conduct an attitude survey on selected samples, analyze the data, and draw conclusions;
- iii. To identify strong areas where the tea estates should capitalize;
- iv. To identify problem areas and formulate appropriate recommendations to improve the pattern of labor relations in Assam tea estates.

## Research Design

Assam's tea business is split into two categories: organized and unorganized (small growers). The study, which covers the years 2000 to 2010 subject to data availability, only pertains to Assam's organized tea plantations, which include privately owned, publicly owned, and government-owned tea estates in the District.

But since this is a very time-consuming and labor-intensive endeavour, it was chosen to employ the case method instead of one of the finest approaches for the study, which would have been to perform a survey of all the tea farms in the District. Therefore, from the perspective of cost and time feasibility, a sample of three tea plantations (choosing one from each sector) has been deemed as the modest number.

The field investigation is based on a sample of 300 respondents chosen using a simple random sampling technique with a 5% precision. Out of this, 100 respondents from each sector were chosen to determine their reactions to various labor issues and to pinpoint the problems. When making a decision, respondents, efforts have been made to interview employees from all categories.

The survey is primarily on the responses they provided the research was carried out in the three tea estates listed below:

- Public Sector: Hoolung Goorie Tea Estates, Jorhat, as a Case Study.

- Private Sector: Teok Tea Estates, Jorhat, as a Case Study.
- Government Own Tea Estates: Dhekiajuli Tea Estates, Jorhat.

## **Research Methodology**

The sampling design and various tools of analysis are chosen based on the study's specific objectives. Data for the study are gathered from both primary and secondary sources. To carry out the investigation, primary data were collected primarily through direct contact and prepared questionnaires and schedules.

All primary source information was gathered from the personnel departments of Assam's selected tea estates, as well as through personal interviews with workers, union leaders, and officers using pre-structured questionnaires eliciting information on a variety of major aspects of labor relations.

Personnel policies and practices, wages, labor welfare, working conditions, trade unions, strikes, and procedure are all examples. For the resolution of disputes, the redressal of respondents' grievances, and the imposition of disciplinary action, workers' participation in management, for example, to authenticate the research and reach genuine conclusions. A large portion of the secondary information is obtained from magazines, newspapers, journals, books, unpublished theses, company annual reports, and various other publications of the Government of India and the Government of Assam. Finally, all of the information and data gathered have been analyzed, and significant conclusions have been drawn.

## **Limitations of the Study**

The current study made an attempt to cover all important aspects of tea laborers in the Assam tea industry as thoroughly as possible. However, at all stages of the investigation, various serious difficulties have been encountered in this sincere effort.

The study, on the other hand, encompasses nearly all critical issues concerning labor relations in Assam's tea industry. However, because these are case studies, the results and findings presented may not be strictly applicable to the tea industry in Assam as a whole.

An effort has been made to emphasize the work's empirical component. On a number of common issues connected to the labor relations practices of their various gardens, the respondents' opinions were solicited. An effort has been made to assess their perspectives on these issues in the pages that follow:

## Respondents' Views on Personnel Policies and Practices

The following data reveals the opinion of respondents regarding personnel policies in the sample tea gardens:

Factors	Hoolung Goorie T. E.			Teok T. E.			Dhekiajuli T. E.		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Recruitment procedure	20	70	10	40	60	--	--	90	10
Selection procedure	10	90	--	50	50	--	--	100	--
Training scheme	10	90	--	20	80	--	--	100	--
Transfer policy	90	10	--	80	20	--	--	100	--
Promotion policy	20	80	--	30	70	--	--	100	--
Total	150	340	10	220	280	--	--	490	10

Table No. 2: Respondents' Opinion towards the personnel policies and practices in Tea Industry of Jorhat District.

Source: Questionnaire and personnel interview.

The survey of personnel policies and practices of the sample gardens clearly reveals that respondents of Dhekiajuli T.E are more dissatisfied than respondents of Hoolung Goorie T.E and Teok T.E. 90% of Dhekiajuli T.E respondents were dissatisfied with the recruitment process. However, 70% of respondents were dissatisfied with the recruitment procedure in Hoolung Goorie T.E, while 60% were dissatisfied in Teok T.E. In Hoolung Goorie T.E, 20% of the total sample was satisfied with the recruitment procedure, 40% were satisfied with the Teok Tea Estate recruitment procedure, and 10% of Hoolung Goorie T.E and Dhekiajuli T.E were given no opinion.

According to analysis, the majority of respondents were not satisfied with the recruitment process of the sample gardens in the Jorhat District of Assam, with 90%, 70%, and 60% of respondents expressing dissatisfaction. This high level of dissatisfaction was caused by the lack of sound policies and the management's failure to make the right appointment at the right time because they were controlled by various pressure groups.

Study says that a total of 100% of Dhekiajuli T.E. respondents overall expressed dissatisfaction with their company's hiring process. However, in Teok T.E, 50% of respondents were unsatisfied with the selection process, compared to 70% of respondents in Hoolung Goorie T.E. Only 10% of respondents in Hoolung Goorie T.E, 50% in Teok T.E, and absolutely no respondents in Dhekiajuli T.E expressed satisfaction with the selection process.

### **Attitudes of Respondents towards Wages and Salaries**

The level of job satisfaction among employees is influenced by wages and pay. The opinions of respondents regarding their compensation are shown in the following table:

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Hoolung Goorie T. E.</b>	<b>Teok T. E.</b>	<b>Dhekiajuli T. E.</b>
Satisfied	70	75	10
Dissatisfied	30	25	80
Neutral	00	00	10
Total	100	100	100

Table No. 3: Respondents` Opinion towards the wages and salaries.

Source: Questionnaire and personnel interview.

When the wages and salaries of the three tea gardens were compared, significant differences were found. The majority of respondents in Hoolung Goorie T.E. and Teok T.E., 70% and 75%, respectively, were satisfied with their current wages. In comparison to Dhekiajuli T.E., respondents in Hoolun Goorie T.E. and Teok T.E. are more satisfied with their wages and other financial benefits. In Dhekiajuli T.E, the level of dissatisfaction with their monthly remuneration was found to be as high as 80%. However, in Hoolun Goorie T.E. and Teok T.E., only 30% and 25%, respectively, were dissatisfied with their wages.

### **Working Conditions**

The atmosphere and circumstances in which workers provide their services have a significant impact on whether or not those workers are complacent about their jobs and general well-being. Therefore, as shown by the accompanying table, opinions and parameters are reflected in the following table:



Factors	Hoolung Goorie T. E.			Teok T. E.			Dhekiajuli T. E.		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Apron	30	60	10	60	20	20	00	100	00
Umbrella	25	65	05	50	50	00	00	100	00
Creche	25	55	20	30	70	00	00	100	00
Chappall	20	80	00	30	70	00	00	100	00
Water	40	50	10	60	40	00	00	100	00
Lighting	20	60	20	30	70	00	00	100	00
Sanitation	30	70	00	40	60	00	00	100	00

Table No. 4: Opinions of Respondents on Current Working Conditions

Source: Questionnaire and personnel interview.

According to the survey, working conditions in Dhekiajuli T.E were generally unsatisfactory, with 100 percent of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with all aspects of working conditions. A close examination of the data reveals that the working conditions in Hoolung Goorie T.E and Teok T.E were also quite deplorable, with the majority of respondents dissatisfied with the current working conditions. Only a few respondents in Hoolung Goorie T.E. and Teok T.E. expressed satisfaction with their working conditions.

#### vii. The Activities of Unions and the Attitude of Management

The present day trade unions have a stronger role to play in maintaining excellent labor relations in the industry as well as gradually achieving better facilities and amenities for the workers. As a result, opinions of employees regarding the function and activities of trade unions are solicited, and responses are displayed in the following table:

Factors	Hoolung Goorie T. E.			Teok T. E.			Dhekiajuli T. E.		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Union activities	40	60	00	70	30	00	20	80	00
Management activities	30	60	10	60	40	00	10	90	00

Table No. 5: Opinion of respondents towards the Union activities and Management activities.

Source: Questionnaire and personnel interview.

According to the survey, 40% of respondents in Hoolun Goorie T.E. and 70% in Teok T.E. were satisfied with trade union activities. Some respondents, however, believed that union leaders of recognised unions in Hoolun Goorie T.E and Dhekiajuli T.E were influenced and directly controlled by management. Unions do not plan any welfare programmes or fight for respondents' rights, as evidenced by the fact that 80 percent of respondents have a negative opinion of union activities.

Additionally, respondents from Hoolung Goorie T.E. and Teok T.E. claimed that the attitude of management was supportive of unions in proportions of 30% and 60%, respectively. On the other hand, 40% of Teok T.E., 60% of Hoolung Goorie T.E., and 90% of Dhekiajuli T.E. claimed that the management did not support unions. The situation with Hoolung Goorie T.E. and Dhekiajuli T.E., however, was completely different. Generally speaking, management did not obstruct legal union activity. Interview results showed that 60% of respondents in Hoolung Goorie T.E. and 40% of respondents in Teok T.E., respectively, believed that their company's management had a hostile attitude toward their association.

Furthermore, no proper record of membership was kept in Hoolung Goorie T.E and Teok T.E by the tea estates' unorganized unions. Workers' participation in trade union activities was also found to be significantly lower in Dhekiajuli T.E and Hoolung Goorie T.E when compared to Teok T.E.

## **Participatory Schemes, Grievance Redress, and Arbitration of Industrial Disputes**

Different participatory schemes, grievance redressal procedures, and industrial dispute resolution are all part of labor relations practices, and all of these contribute to the development of a complacent workforce. As a result, respondents' opinions on these parameters were solicited, and the results are shown in the table below:

Factors	Hoolung Goorie T. E.			Teok T. E.			Dhekiajuli T. E.		
	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Neutral
Participatory Schemes	20	70	10	30	70	00	30	70	00
Disciplinary action	30	70	00	40	50	10	10	90	00
Redressal of grievances	30	70	00	30	70	00	00	100	00
Settlement of disputes	30	70	00	40	50	10	00	100	00

Table No. 6: Opinions of respondents about participatory schemes, the discipline process, grievance redress, and the resolution of labor disputes.

Source: Questionnaire and personnel interviews.

It was evident from the study that with the exception of a few schemes where worker participation was legally required, it was noted that the majority of respondents from all three tea gardens stated that their management does not encourage workers' participation in management. However, Dhekiajuli T.E. reported a greater level of unhappiness with this issue. In the Dhekiajuli T.E., every single respondent expressed unhappiness with the management's stance on union-related activities. According to the respondents, management has done a terrible job of encouraging employees to get involved in various union activities and rarely gives employees the chance to take part in management's many programmes and policies.

Another aspect on which respondents' opinions were sought was the procedure for taking disciplinary action. It was discovered that only 40% of total respondents in Teok appreciated the procedure for taking disciplinary action, while the level of satisfaction was slightly lower in Dhekiajuli T.E (10%) and Hoolung Goorie T.E (30%), respectively. The procedure for resolving grievances was not approved by Dhekiajuli T.E respondents, whereas in Hoolung Goorie T.E and Teok T.E 70 percent of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. The remaining respondents were pleased with the procedure for resolving complaints. The percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied with the dispute resolution process reached 100% in Dhekiajuli T.E, 70% in Hoolung Goorie T.E., and 50% in Teok T.E. Further investigation revealed that the respondents to the Dhekiajuli survey had a widespread perception that the management would never resolve their issues unless they approached the conciliation process through a union representative or

went on strike. Being illiterate in the majority, the responders are unable to follow the grievance procedure.

## **Findings**

- 1) The workers on the sample tea estates are extremely dissatisfied with the authority's recruitment, appointment, and selection procedures, and the respondents perceived the existence of various pressure groups as a hindrance in adopting a transparent, suitable, and sound recruitment policy.
- 2) Regarding the current salary system, there has been a noticeable disparity in the respondents' levels of satisfaction from the three tea estates selected for the study. When compared to tea plantations owned by the private and public sectors, the levels of satisfaction in government-owned tea estates are disturbingly low. This is due to poor management, excessive bureaucratic red tape, and the government's failure to provide these tea farms with enough funding.
- 3) The working environment in which the workers are being employed depicts a bleak image because the majority of respondents don't think the current working conditions are even remotely satisfactory.
- 4) Trade union activities in the sample tea estates are found to be below the desired level. This is a result of the trade unions' inability to foster a sense of community and establish trust among the workforce by playing a proactive role.
- 5) Trade union activities in the sample tea estates are found to be below the desired level. This is due to trade unions' failure to take a proactive role in developing a sense of belonging and building trust among workers.

## **Conclusion**

Assam's industry, in general, and the tea industry in particular, have long ignored the human aspect of the organization. The majority of industries do not even have a personnel manager. Now is the time for Assam's tea industry to recognize that in order to produce extraordinary results, organizations must rely heavily on human factors, which will aid in achieving the much-

needed competitive edge. This has increased the significance and meaning of the term "labor Relationship".

The tea industry needs to realize that neither technology nor money are monopolies anymore; rather, the people connected to the industry may still be. The commercial techniques of the industry's rival can be copied, but not the people. In this environment, one should expect that the tea business would build a mechanism that will enable it to take advantage of and put into practice good, sound labor relations practices.

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