

Nature and Forms of Conflict in the Tea Industry of Assam with Special Reference to Dibrugarh District

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable aspect in any organization. Conflict has an impact on individual, groups and organization. Often managers tend to devote a major portion of their productive time on conflict management. From an organizational perspective, conflicts may be simple and inevitable but their impact can be far reaching and critical that conflict management has to be given enough attention. The right amount of conflict will impact an organization in a positive fashion and will ensure to achieve its pre-oriented objectives. However, conflict which hamper organizational functioning that needs to be checked. Management's perception to earn maximum profit and offer minimum benefit to their workers, whereas workers' perception to achieve maximum benefit (both monetary and non-monetary) and offer minimum profit for their proprietor. These differences in perceptions are the root cause of conflict in tea gardens.

The natures of conflicts in the tea gardens are both monetary as well as non-monetary. To get proper information questionnaire schedules are arranged considering the nature of conflict based on factors like: (i) management's response on claims by workers to improve their existing housing condition (ii) satisfaction with the amount of compensation in case of industrial accident/occupational hazard, sickness (iii) problems with the changes of managerial personnel (iv) attitudes of workers with their present job and (v) class/role conflict among various categories of workers. After analysis of collected data actual problems have been sorted out and finally this paper concludes by offering suggestion to overcome these problems.

Key Words : *Tea Industry, Conflict Management, Industrial Accident, Occupational Hazard, Managerial Personnel, Management's Perception, Trade Union.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is an inevitable aspect of any organization. It has an impact on individual, groups and as well as on the organization. Often managers tend to devote a major portion of their productive time on conflict management. In the study of organizational behaviour, conflict management acquires a very special place because of the significance of maintaining a healthy and positive organizational climate. From an organizational perspective, conflicts may be simple, inevitable but their impact may be far reaching and critical. Therefore, conflict management has to be given

enough attention and it also needs to be remembered that positive conflict helps organization to grow. The right amount of conflict will impact an organization on a positive fashion and ensure that it achieves its pre-oriented objectives. However, conflict which hinders organizational functioning needs to be checked. The diversified goal of management and workers results in disputes of interest and consequently industrial conflicts.

Tea gardens in Assam are either owned by sole proprietor or in the company form mostly private limited and managed by the managing directors or managers. Wage/salary, bonus and other welfare

measures to labourers are fixed by the provisions of the Assam Plantations Act, 1951. Various other legal provisions are also in force to protect the interest of Tea workers. Some of the important measures are:

- (i) The Assam Tea Plantations Employees' Welfare Fund Act, 1959.
- (ii) The Tea District Emigrant Labour (Repeal) Act, 1970.
- (iii) The Workmen Compensation Act, 1923 with its amendment.
- (iv) The Assam Tea Plantations Provident Fund and Pension Fund Scheme, 1968, Amendment in 1982.
- (v) The Assam Tea Plantations Provident Fund Scheme Act, 1955.
- (vi) The Trade Unions Act 1926, Amended in 1928, 1942, 1947, 1960 and 1964.
- (vii) The Industrial Disputes Act 1947 (with amendments).

Although there are various provisions and legislative measures to protect workers' interest but the desired goal is still a far cry and hence a high degree of resentment and dis-agreement among the various levels of management of the industry are prevailing.

2. MEANING AND DEFINITION OF CONFLICT

Conflict can be defined as a process in which one party (person and group) perceives that their interests are being opposed or negatively affected by another party. As per this definition incompatibility or disagreement can arise among people when they feel that their interests are not being duly considered by one of the party or person. Simply stated individual interest and ideas can lead to conflict(s).

Conflict creates tension situation in which people that are dependent upon one another attempt to reach incompatible objectives or to implement different action plans. Conflict occurs when two parties come into direct disagreement of ideas or interest. Conflict has been defined as all kinds of oppositions or antagonistic interactions in or among individuals,

groups and/or organizations. Conflict may be regarded as the disagreement or hostility between individuals or groups or in organizations.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

The primary objective of this paper is to find out the various nature and forms of conflict prevailing in the tea industry. This includes whether the nature of conflict is based only on monetary factors or on non-monetary factors or both. Finally this study attempts to find out the usual source of conflict in the tea industry as a whole.

4. METHODOLOGY

This study is empirical in nature based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data was collected mostly by direct contact and interview through interview schedule. For the purpose of the study the workers of 160 tea gardens of Dibrugarh district was taken as population. Secondly, 10 per cent of total tea gardens i.e. 16 gardens were taken as sample for the study. From this sample gardens 12% respondents were selected on stratified random sample basis (basis is on the sample size of www.research-advisors.com/tools/samplesize.htm). Therefore, the total numbers of respondents came to 524. Gardens were divided into three categories based on size viz. Small size gardens (Size - less than 100 hectares area covered under tea), Medium size gardens (Size – more than 100 hectares but less than 250 hectares area covered under tea) and Big size gardens (area covered under tea over 250 hectares). The secondary data was collected from the published records, journals, magazines and web portals. Percent analyses were taken for presentation of collected data.

After collection of data, other steps required to be followed were:

- (i) Classification and tabulation of data according to their nature and category.
- (ii) Preparation of tables and cross tables on similarities and dissimilarities of characteristics to arrive at a logical conclusion.

The literature review leads the areas for investigation to cope with the research gap viz. nature

and forms of conflict, followed by the reasons and its impacts in tea industry and finally the approach of conflict management is also explained in this paper.

5. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND FINDING

Conflicts in tea industries are hidden in nature. The areas of conflict in the tea garden level are mostly due to illiteracy of garden workers, discharge/ termination of workers, demand for higher wages & bonus, curtailing of existing facilities etc. The nature and form of conflict in the tea garden lies between these two aspects: (i) the deplorable life style of garden workers and (ii) dominion status of management. The companies' failure in respect of housing, education, electricity, ration, roads, drinking water etc. which are required to be provided to them under the Plantations Labour Act. 1951, is one of the root causes of conflict in the tea industry.

The natures of conflicts in the tea industry are both monetary as well as non-monetary. Questions schedules were arranged considering the factors relating to the nature and forms of conflict. These include: (i) claims made by workers to improve their existing housing conditions (ii) amount of compensation in case of any occupational hazards, sickness, industrial accidents etc. (iii) problems with the changes of managerial personnel (iv) attitudes of workers with their present job and (v) class conflict.

Following factors have disclosed (from the Exhibit No. 1) the factors relating to the nature and forms of conflict in the tea industry.

6. ANALYSIS OF DATA

(i) From the above Exhibit 1. (i) it was observed that out of total respondents a significant portion (35.11%) did not include in this category. Remaining 64.89% (340 out of 524) respondents have put their opinion. Here, only a small portion of the respondents (10.59%) said that management tried to solve the problems but never involved intensively to solve it. Most of the respondents (47.06%) said that management either ignored their problems or gave negative response against

their claims. Again, more than two-fifth (42.35%) said that management gave only assurance which was nothing but a tactful deferment of the actual problems.

(ii) The Exhibit 1.(ii) observed that out of total respondents a significant portion (38.93%) did not fall in this category. Hence remaining 61.07% (320 out of 524) respondents have put their opinion. Of these only a small portion of the respondents (7.19%) said that they were indifferent with the amount of compensation in case of any occupational hazards, sickness or industrial accident, whereas most of the respondents 70% said that they were not satisfied with the amount of compensation at all. About one-fifth of the respondents (22.81%) said that they were partly satisfied with the amount of compensation. Garden wise analysis of data revealed the facts that around the three-fourth (74.68%) of the respondents in case of small size sample gardens, 68.33% firm medium size gardens and 58.70 percent of the respondents from small size sample gardens were not satisfied with the amount of compensation any case of any accident

(iii) Regarding change of manager, the Exhibit 1.(iii) discloses the facts that more than three-fifth (61.45%) of the respondents were of the opinion that they faced problems with the change of manager where as remaining (38.55%) respondents were of the opinion that they did not faced any problem with the change of managerial personnel.

(iv) Regarding attitude towards the present job, the Exhibit 1.(iv) discloses that a significant percentage (43.89%) of respondents were getting very low wages whereas 34.92% respondents stated that their duties were routine bound and monotonous in nature, where as more than one-fifth (21.19%) of the respondent stated that their job had no future prospect.

(v) Regarding class conflict Exhibit 1. (v) disclosed that more than four-fifth (82.06%) of the respondents had experience with class conflict

Exhibit: 1
Factors relating to the nature and forms of conflict in the tea industry

Factors of conflicts	Options	Size / nature of sample Garden						TOTAL
		Big		Medium		Small		
		Number	Respondents (%)	Number	Respondents (%)	Number	Respondents (%)	
(i) Management's response on claim made by worker to improve the existing housing condition:	Negative and Ignore	119	49.38	31	46.27	10	31.25	160 (47.06%)
	Only assurance	102	42.32	26	38.81	16	50.0	144 (42.35%)
	Delay in response	20	8.30	10	14.92	6	18.75	36 (10.59%)
Total		241	100.0	67	100.0	32	100.0	340 (100.0%)
(ii) Satisfaction with the amount of compensation in case of occupational hazard, sickness & industrial accident:	No	115	74.68	82	68.33	27	58.70	224 (70.0%)
	Partly satisfied	33	21.43	29	24.17	11	23.91	73 (22.81%)
	Indifferent	6	3.89	9	7.5	8	17.39	23 (7.19%)
Total		154	100.0	120	100.0	46	100.0	320 (100.0%)
(iii) Problems with changes of managerial personnel (manager)	Yes	218	64.012	76	61.29	28	46.67	322 (61.45%)
	No	122	35.88	48	38.71	32	53.33	202 (38.55%)
Total		340	100.0	124	100.0	60	100.0	524 (100.0%)
(iv) Workers' attitude towards present job	Routine & Monotonous	121	35.59	44	35.48	18	30	183 (34.92%)
	Low paid	169	49.71	28	22.58	33	55	230 (43.89%)
	No future prospect & others	50	14.70	52	41.94	9	15	111 (21.19%)
Total		340	100.0	124	100.0	60	100.0	524 (100.0%)
(v) Class/role conflict among various categories of workers	Yes	308	90.59	87	70.16	35	58.33	430 (82.06%)
	No	32	9.41	37	29.84	25	41.67	94 (17.94%)
Total		340	100.0	124	100.0	60	100.0	524 (100.0%)

(Source : Compiled from Questionnaires)

Exhibit 2
Usual Nature of Grievances

Sl. No.	Option	No. of respondents	Per cent (%)
A.	Salary / wages	164	31
B.	Bonus	95	18
C.	Leave and working hours	88	17
D.	Promotional matter	80	15
E.	Job security	97	19
	Total	524	100.0

(Source: Compiled from Questionnaires)

among the garden workers. The class conflict prevails in the gardens as conflict between managerial personnel and official workers, between office workers and garden workers etc.

The analysis of the table shows that maximum respondents (31%) have grievances with the amount salary/wages they received. Next to this, 18% of the respondents had grievance with the amount of bonus which is given to them during festivals. Besides these, other factors related to grievances were related to non monetary aspects leave and working condition, promotion related aspect in their job and job security.

7. FINDINGS OF THE SUTDY

- (i) Negative response and ignorance of grievances is a common feature of all garden management especially in case of big and medium size gardens. Again big and small size garden management provides only assurance to their workers.
- (ii) Delay in response against any claim is prevails almost all the gardens irrespective of its size.
- (iii) Considering occupational hazard, sickness or industrial accident big gardens' workers are not satisfied with the amount of compensation where as respondents from small size gardens remain indifference which indirectly mean that

in bigger size gardens level of dissatisfaction/resentment would be higher in respect of compensation and vice versa.

- (iv) Garden wise analysis of the figures show that conflict due to monetary matters mostly faced by small and medium size garden where as non-monetary matters mainly faced by the workers of big size gardens.
- (v) Big and medium size gardens face problems with the changes of managerial personnel.
- (vi) Garden wise analysis of the data discloses that grievances relating to wages are more in case of small and big gardens than that of medium size gardens. Relating to the nature of job almost all the garden workers state that their jobs are routine bound and monotonous in nature. Relating to future prospect small garden workers has fewer grievances than that of medium and big garden workers.
- (vii) Garden wise analysis of the figures show that big size gardens have more class conflict than that of medium and small size gardens.

8. CONCLUSION & SUGGESTION

The expectation of the management is to earn maximum profit and offer minimum benefit to their workers, whereas workers' expectation is to receive maximum benefit (both monetary and non-monetary). These differences in expectations are the root cause of conflict in tea gardens. Besides, majority of the garden workers are illiterate, economically under paid and socially neglected. Conflicts in tea gardens arise mainly due to non-fulfillment of the provisions of labour welfare schemes as per the Plantations Labour Act. 1951. From the above study, it is crystal clear that conflicts in the tea gardens are more or less same irrespective of the size/nature of garden. The natures of conflicts in the tea gardens are both monetary and non-monetary. Monetary nature of conflicts arise due to inadequate wages, bonus and retirement benefit etc. whereas non-monetary nature of conflict arises due to negative response or ignorance by the management with the grievances like routine bound and monotonous work, class conflict, job insecurity, lack of any promotional scope etc. raised by the workers.

For greater interest of the industry, it is urgently needed to increase the awareness level of workers by which their participation in management will become more contextual and at the same time management should be more worker-friendly so that the workers should not feel that they are being exploited by the management. Management and organizational leaders have some influence in shaping workplace climate by changing their approach in dealing with workplace

issues. If conflicts are viewed as opportunities for growth and improvement, the work environment should be more conducive to fostering a sense of empowerment and learning, on both an individual and organizational level. This is the type of climate in which employees can thrive and, subsequently, in which organizations are better able to embrace organizational changes. ○

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