

## Evaluate the Impact of Tea Garden on the Environment and Livelihood: A Folkloric Study on Kamalganj, Sylhet of Bangladesh

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### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

**Received:** January 20, 2022  
**Accepted:** February 22, 2022  
**Volume:** 3  
**Issue:** 2

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### KEYWORDS

Tea Garden, Environment,  
Impact, Livelihood

Bangladesh covers 2% of world tea production every year. There are 164 tea gardens in Bangladesh and most of them are in Sylhet district, exactly in Kamalganj and Sreemangal. Tea garden affects the environment and livelihood of Kamalganj. The object of the study was to examine the impact of the tea garden on the environment and the livelihood of Kamalganj. The direct participatory observation method was used to conduct the research. The study was conducted with the help of open-ended questions. Four tea gardens were selected as the research area. The population of the research was the people who worked in the tea garden. Overall 30% of people of tea gardens complete their primary education. Their social status is very low. Many superstitions are obeyed in a tea garden. Their economic system and sanitation system is very poor. They lead very miserable life. They have no political views. People live here from various tribes and religions. Every tribe has a different culture. It makes a cultural diversity here. But the culture and livelihood of Kamalganj depend on economic conditions and tea gardens control the economy of Kamalganj.

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## 1. Introduction

Tea is one of the most important cash crops of Bangladesh. Mr. Robert Bruce who is a British citizen might be considered as the father of tea plantations in this sub-continent from Assam in 1834. The present tea plant is the variety of indigenous tea of the chandkhani hill rock of Sylhet from 1855. Chittagong also started tea cultivation in 1840 with few plants imported from China and some plants of China origin developed in the Calcutta Botanical Garden. Malnicherra is the first tea garden of Bangladesh that was established in Sylhet in 1854. Now, there are many tea gardens in Moulvibazar, Hobigonj, Rangamati, Panchagarh, and Sylhet. There are 164 tea gardens in Bangladesh. Around 3 lakh workers work in those tea gardens and lead their lives. A large number of people depend on the tea garden. And so, tea garden has a great impact on their livelihood. Livelihood means securing the necessities of life.

And the average rainfall here is more than any other place of Sylhet. Different kind of animal and tree makes a sustainable environment here. Various kinds of occupations are originated for tea gardens. The tea laborer education system is very poor. Livelihood is defined as a set of activities performed to live for a given life span, involving securing food, shelter, clothing, recreation, culture, sanitation, education, and the capacity to acquire the above necessities working either individually or as a group by using endowments for meeting the requirements of the self and his/her household on a sustainable basis with dignity. In social science, livelihood extends to social and cultural means. This may involve information, cultural knowledge, social networks, and legal rights as well as tools, land, and other physical resources. The tea garden has also an impact on the

environment. Environment means the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates. In the environment, there are different interactions between animals, plants, Insects, soil, water, climate, and other living and non-living things. Tea garden builds up an economic zone and natural diversity in Kamalganj. To get a better result from tea laborers and tea gardens, the impact of tea gardens on the livelihood and environment of Kamalganj should be identified.

## **2. The Effect of Tea Garden on The Environment of Kamalganj**

There are 91 tea gardens in the Moulvibazar district and a large number of tea gardens situated in Kamalganj. For this reason, the tea garden has a vast effect on the environment of Komogonj. Tea plants need highlands and shade. Hillock fills the demand of highlands and tree fills the demand for shade. So many trees are planted in a tea garden. A tea laborer<sup>1</sup> said that Mahagoni, Akashmoni, Sirish are seen mostly in a tea garden. Besides this, Koroi, Eucalyptus, Polash, Shimul, Shishu, Neem, Jarul, Chikrassi are also planted. These trees give tea plants shade to grow up properly. Tree reduces high temperatures destructive of organic matter of the soil and provided large quantities of green manure, either in the form of looping or leaf-fall for maintaining humous and soil fertility. Trees protect the tea sun scorch and hail. Trees are much more important for tea. Trees and tea plants make a green revolution in Kamalganj. For this reason, Kamalganj has a diversified environment. The tree and tea plant keep the environment cool and cozy. The average rainfall of Kamalganj is higher and the temperature is lower than in any other part of Bangladesh. A tea worker<sup>2</sup> said that three seasons lasted here and summer, winter, rainy every season has four months latitude. Most of the respondents said that the rainy season lasted six months to eight months. There are many animals who inhabit themselves in the tea garden. The animal feels safe in the tea garden and it is like forestland to them. A tea laborer<sup>3</sup> said that besides Fox, Cougar, Monkey, various kinds of snakes, Wagtail, Parrot, Showl bird, Dove, Woodpecker many birds build their nests in here.

### **Table 1<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Gopal Dusad, National Tea Garden, Madhabpur

<sup>2</sup>Nur Mia, Fulbaria Tea Garden

<sup>3</sup>Shopon Raji, Dhalai Tea Garden

<sup>4</sup>timeanddate.com

## Average monthly temperature and rainfall of Sylhet

<b>Name of Month</b>	<b>Average Temperature °C</b>	<b>Average Rainfall m.m</b>
January	19	4.8
February	22	17.6
March	26	43.3
April	27	218.0
May	28	324.7
June	29	372.8
July	29	348.9
August	29	377.4
September	29	283.5
October	28	122.6
November	24	18.4
December	20	2.7

Table 2<sup>5</sup>


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<sup>5</sup>en. climate-date. org

Average monthly temperature and rainfall of Kamalganj

Name of Month	Average Temperature °C	Average Rainfall m.m
January	17.7	15
February	19.8	30
March	24.4	104
April	27	230
May	27.7	376
June	28.1	522
July	28.2	416
August	28.1	356
September	28.2	269
October	26.5	204
November	22.6	36
December	18.9	06

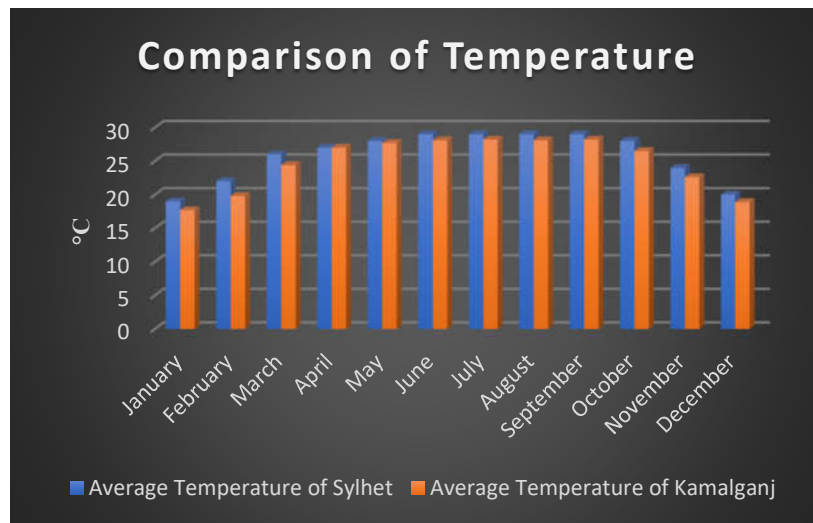


Chart 1

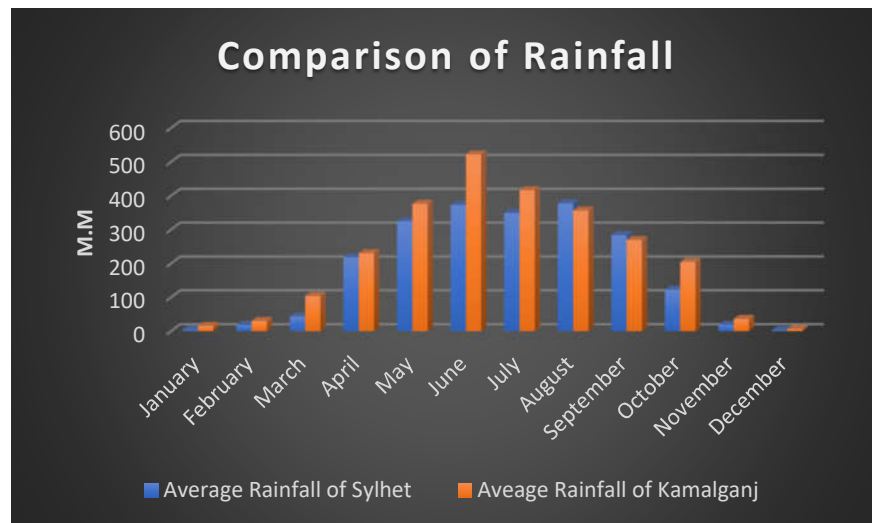


Chart 2

Table 1 shows us the average temperature and rainfall of Sylhet and table 2 shows us the average temperature and rainfall of Kamalganj. The comparative analysis of chart 1 and chart 2 shows that the temperature of Kamalganj is more suitable and comfortable than the temperature of Sylhet. And the rainfall of Kamalganj is higher than the rainfall of Sylhet. It is more effective for Kamalganj. So, it is easy to say that the tea garden plays an effective role in the environment of Kamalganj.

### 3. The effect of tea garden on the livelihood of Kamalganj

Tea garden turns a new culture and a cycle of a particular livelihood of Kamalganj. The tea garden generates an economic zone here. And the economy plays a crucial role in the culture and livelihood of Kamalganj. Various kinds of occupations are originated here for the tea garden. One kind of job is directly involved in the tea garden. Those who hold this kind of job are called tea laborers. And another is impliedly related to the tea garden.

The jobs are:

Shikling: Cleaning husk from the tea plant.

Dryer: Drying tea leaves.

Plucking Labors: Plucking tea leaves.

Planter: Planting tea plant.

Factory Worker: Working in the factory for processing tea.

Headman: Observing the work of tea laborers.

Counterman: Selling tea.

Driver: Transporting tea and tea leaves.

Guard: Ensuring the security of tea gardens.

Doctor: Giving treatment to tea laborers.

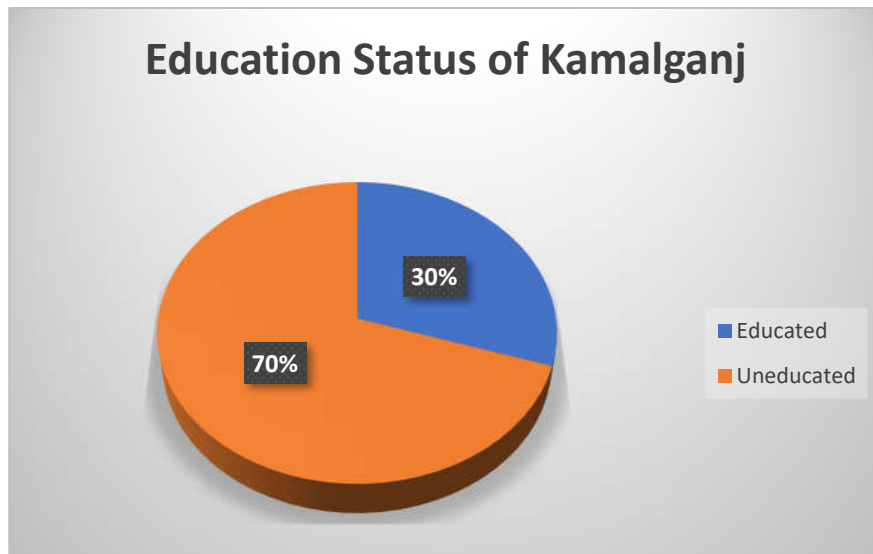
Electrician: Solving the electric problem.

Shopkeeper: Selling food and daily necessary goods.

The tea garden makes a particular economic zone. And it has an impact on the culture, economy, politics, religion, society, education, sanitation and every spare of life of Kamalganj.

#### **4. Education System**

The education system of the tea garden is not good. Most of the tea laborers are uneducated. Most of the tea garden has only a primary school. There is no primary school in some tea garden. BRAC, Anondo School and some other NGOs are trying to educate the people. Tea laborers are not aware of education. They always try to get a job for their family member. So, they give importance to getting a job more than education. They are bound in poverty and so they are not interested in education.



**Chart 3**

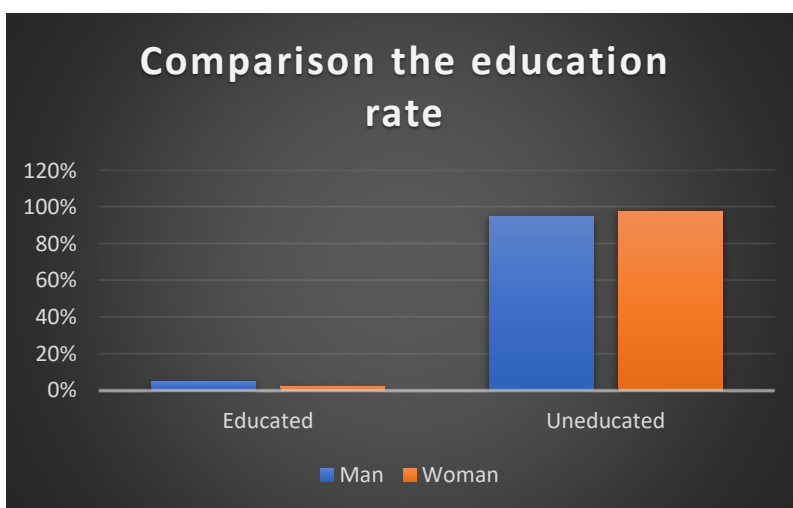
Education status of Kamalganj

The education system of tea gardens makes a bad impact on the education of Kamalganj because 80%-90% of people are directly and indirectly involved in tea gardens. In Kamalganj the educated rate is 30% but in the tea garden, it is much lower.

**Table 3**

Education Status of tea garden

Name	Educated (%)	Uneducated (%)
Man	5	95
Woman	2	98

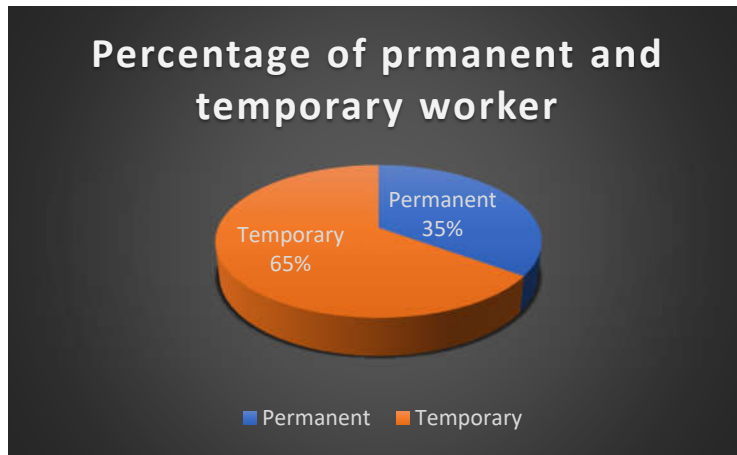
**Chart 4**

Comparison of the education rate of men and women

The chart shows that woman's uneducated rate is higher than man's. Women have demand in the garden to pluck tea leaves. And so, they join the tea garden at an early age. For this reason, the education rate of women is low.

## 5. Economic Condition

The economic condition of tea laborers is miserable. They work eight hours a day and get 85 takas. It is too difficult to lead their life with that little amount of wages. And they got 3 kg flour as ration. The ration cannot fulfill the demand of a family. There are two kinds of workers in a tea garden. One is permanent and another is temporary.



**Chart 5**

Diagram of permanent and temporary worker

Only the permanent workers get the ration and allotted house for living. Those who get the ration and house can lead their life from hand to mouth. Rest worker leads their life miserably. They are bound in the vicious cycle of poverty. And they do not have the ability to break the cycle. No tea laborers are satisfied with their wages. Their wages pattern is tenuous. Their weekly wage is 595 tk. So, they earn 2380 tk. in a month. With the bonus, their yearly income is 35000-40000 tk. But it is so far from the minimum annual cost of a family. To lead an easy life a family needs at least 80000-90000 tk. in a year. So, the wages pattern of tea laborers is responsible for their poverty.

## 6. Political Views

Tea laborers are not aware of politics. They are persecuted. So, they always try to change their condition. They are concerned about their fundamental rights. All of them are involved in a worker organization. They think the president of the organization do always good for them. Their politics is to agitation for their rights. They never talk about national politics. Because notional politic has no concern over them. Their politics is how to get a job for their family member, how to be a permanent worker. They cannot agitation properly for the fear of being fired to the job. Whose are influential, they abuse tea laborers to their benefit. They have no political views.

## 7. Sanitation

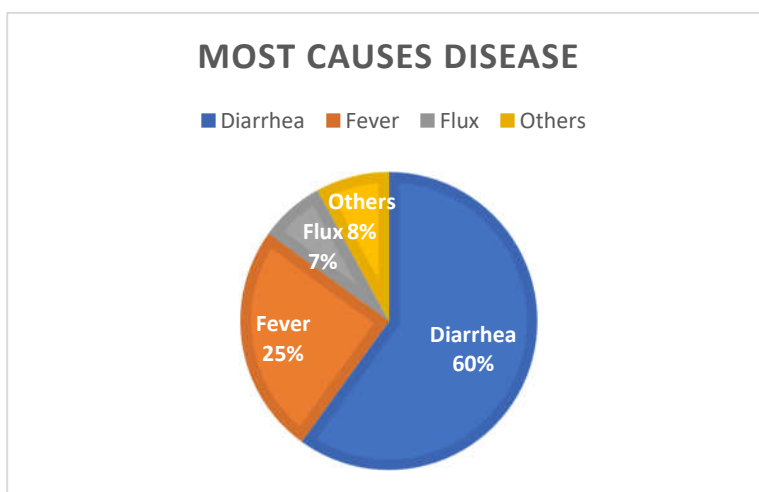
The house of tea laborers is very small in size. They live a very inhuman life. The sanitation facilities of the tea garden are very poor. 50-60% of the tea garden laborer use open space for defecation. Their children have poor nutrition. 80% of the children are stunted and 73% are under-weight. During their working time when tea laborers are in the garden, if they need excretion they cannot use a toilet. They finish excretion in the garden and buried it in the ground. They live and cook unhealthy atmosphere.

They work hard on wetting in the rain, tolerating heavy sunshine. Their drinking water is not safe and pure. For this reason, cholera, diarrhea, fever, flux, etc. suffers the most. The medical center of the tea garden is very poor. And the medical kit is insufficient. The doctor is not available in the medical center. The medical officer works as a doctor.

**Table 4**

The most causes diseases

Name of Disease	Percentage
Diarrhea	60%
Fever	25%
Flux	7%
others	8%



**Chart 6**

Most causes disease in the tea garden

## 8. Food Habit and Folk Food

Every tea laborers take tea and floured bread for their breakfast. They finish their lunch with rice and vegetables. But those who are working in the tea garden at this time, take flour bread, and condiment in their lunch. The condiment is made of green leaves of the tea plant, Chanachura, pepper, and onion. Usually, they take rice and vegetables for dinner. They do not take costly food. They do not have the ability to take costly food. They cannot take nutritious food. They make some special dishes at festivals like Eid and Durga Puja. During this festival, they cook beef, mutton, chicken, fish, pilau, biryani, vermicelli, and various kinds of the patty. Only at the festival, they can take tasty and costly food. They prepare tea using salt instead of sugar. Sugar is a costly

food item to them. A tea laborer<sup>6</sup> said that how many times they take tea in a day is countless. During leisure time, they are gossiping and drink tea. A tea laborer<sup>7</sup> said that he used a big mug instead of a tea cup to drink tea.

### **9. Costume**

Generally, tea laborers wear a sari, pants, shirt, lungi. During working time man and women both workers wear a towel. Towel protects their clothes from tearing off. When they pluck tea leaves their cloths torn off stalks of the tea plant. They also use “Chupri” which is architrave. They use it in their head. Chupri protects them from the sharpness of the sun and heavy rain. At the festival, they wear a new sari, pants, Punjabi, dhoti (lain cloth). In many festivals women also wear ornaments. They use bangles, beads necklaces, earrings, nose rings, anklets, etc. as an ornament.

### **10. Social System**

Tea laborer has a good relationship with each other. They are very social. They help each other when one’s needed. They have a strong community. But there is a huge communication gap between owner and workers. Most of the tea laborers said that they have not ever seen the owner of their garden. Even though, they do have not good communication with the manager and assistant manager. Workers and authority’s relationship is not good at all. The headman takes care of the worker. They inform to headman about their problems. Their social status is very low. The average marriage age of a girl is below 18 here. Tea laborers said that they spliced their



**Picture 1**

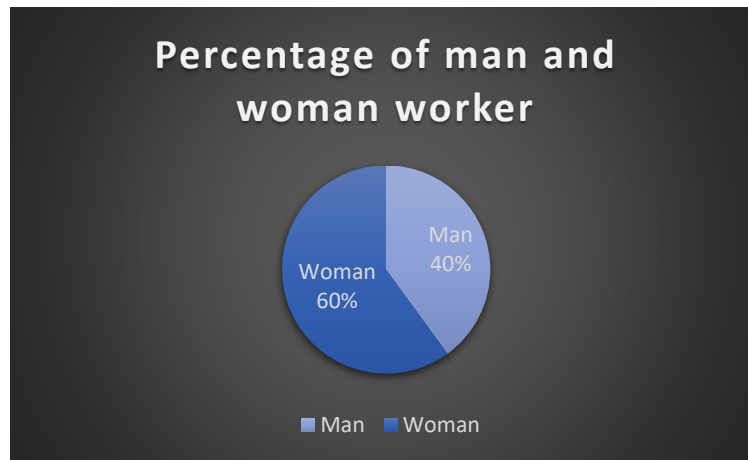
A woman worker in the tea garden

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<sup>6</sup>Gayetri Vor, Dhalai Tea Garden.

<sup>7</sup>Fatema Bibi, Dhalai Tea Garden.

girl at 18. But when they said it their reaction and our survey prove it as a lie. The average marriage age of a girl is below 16 here. Every tea laborer gives this information incorrectly. But those who are not involved in the tea garden inform us of the truth. That proves that the authority makes pressure on them to say that. That means they live under the pressure of authority and they do have not the ability to break the order even if it is false or bad. In some fields, social values have eroded in a tea garden. There are many thieves abuse in tea gardens and they steal cows, goats, and other livestock. A tea laborer said that if everybody gets a suitable salary for living it will not occur. Without this, woman workers are more in number than man and so many men are unemployed. Unemployed men suffer from frustration and occur crime.

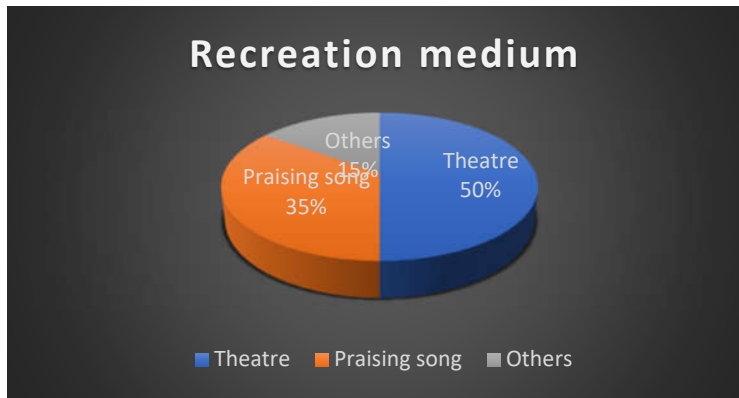


**Chart 7**

Diagram of the percentage of man and woman worker

## 11. Recreation

In their free time, tea laborers need refreshments. In this area, many organizations play theatre. The organization comes to Kamalganj from other places. Praising song's event is popular here. People enjoy it very much. So, most of the time people arranged this event here. Besides this, some cultural programs are held in the tea garden. People of all ages participate in the cultural program. Their recreational arrangement is poor. Theatre and praising songs cannot fulfill the demand.



**Chart8**

Percentage of recreation medium

Many tea laborers said that cultural function was arranged a long time ago but at present time no cultural program is arranged. But there live many people from various tribes. They arranged their tribal program. That kind of program is unique and that makes a cultural diversity. Besides this, in their free time, women sew nakshi khanta and men make much fancy good.

## 12. Festivals and Rituals

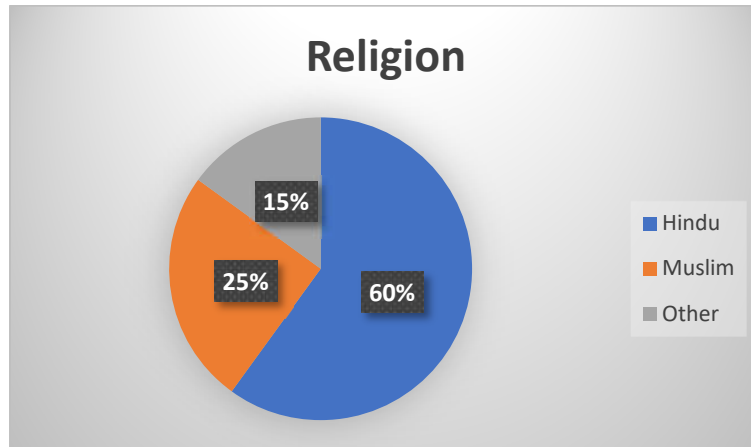
In the garden, two festivals are celebrated gorgeously. One is Eid and another is Dhurga puja. During eid and Durga puja laborers get the bonus with wages. They spend a vacation at that time. Every family makes special dishes at the festival and they visit one another. In tea garden workers came from various tribes. Every tribe celebrates their tribal festival in their way and everybody participates in the function. That makes a nice cultural diversity in the tea garden. They also observe “Banoshoti Puja”. They do this worship for getting a good yield of tea and security from the dangerous animal of the tea garden. They also make a get-together and enjoy themselves before planting a sapling.

## 13. Folk Tales and Folk Belief

There are many folk tales and beliefs about tea gardens. Many stories devise on tea gardens. Most of the tea laborers said that there were many jungle lands in Kamalganj. There lived a tiger, elephant, jaguar, cobra, and many other dangerous animals. There are many ghosts also. At present time, that kind of animal and ghost cannot be seen. After that, they observe Bono-Durga puja. They believe that gives security to dangerous animals. They never stay tea garden at night. They believe ghosts harm them. They have a belief if they marry in a low cast family his worship has broken down. So, they get married in the same cast. For this belief, many pickle incidents happened.

## 14. Religion and Liberality

The people who work in tea gardens are from various religions. Every religion obeys its religious rules and regulation. But they have no rivalry. They have a good relationship with each other. All of them are liberal.



**Chart 9**

Percentage of various religions

They practice their religion individually. And so at the same time, they have liberality and religious diversity.

## 15. Conclusion

60 respondents were selected for interviews from the population. 25 were men respondents and 35 were women respondents. Analyzing data it is noticed that the average temperature of Kamalganj is lower than any other place's temperature of Sylhet. As a whole the impact of the tea garden on the environment is good. But the impact of tea gardens on livelihood is not satisfactory. Tea gardens build an economic zone in Kamalganj and originate many occupations. People from different tribes and religions work here and they have a different culture.

But their lifestyle, food habit, costume, education system, and social conditions are maintained by their economic condition. So their economy builds up their culture. As they are not satisfied with their salary, their livelihood is not standard. Tea garden's effect will be satisfactory if proper initiatives are taken to maintain the standard livelihood of tea laborers. Tea gardens build an economic zone and the economy controls the livelihood and livelihood affect the culture and environment. So, it is very important to maintain a standard economic structure to get a better result from tea gardens and tea laborers. And it ensures a good environment, a diversified culture, and a serene livelihood.

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