

**PLANTATION INDUSTRY OF DARJEELING REGION:  
A HISTORICAL STUDY**

**Dissertation Submitted to the Sikkim University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Award of  
The Degree of**

**MASTERS OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Submitted by  
SUSHMA RAI**

**Supervised by  
Ms. SANGMU THENDUP  
Assistant Professor**



**Department of History  
School of Social Sciences  
Sikkim University  
Sikkim  
2015**

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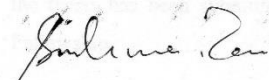
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**DECLARATION**

I declare that the dissertation entitled “**PLANTATION INDUSTRY OF DARJEELING REGION: A HISTORICAL STUDY**” submitted to Sikkim University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy**, is my original work. This dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

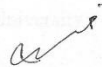


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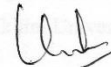


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### CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “**PLANTATION INDUSTRY OF DARJEELIG REGION: A HISTORICAL STUDY**” submitted to the **SIKKIM UNIVERSITY** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **Master of Philosophy in The Department of History**, embodies the result of *bona fide* research work carried out by **Ms. Sushma Rai** under my guidance and supervision. No part of the thesis has been submitted for any other Degree, Diploma, Associate-ship and Fellowship.

All the assistance and help received during the course of the investigation have been duly acknowledged by her.

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February, 2015

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- A.T.T.S.A : All Tea Tribes Students' Association
- D.H.R : Darjeeling Himalayan Railways
- E.P.F.A : Employees Provident Fund
- G.T.A : Gorkha Territorial Administration
- I.T.A : Indian Tea Association
- N.B.M.R : North Bengal Mounted Rifles
- P.L.A : Plantation Labour Act
- S.G.T.P : Small Growers Tea Plantation
- S.O.A : Standing Orders Act

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## CHAPTER: 1

### 1: INTRODUCTION

The study of regional History has been expanding its horizon greatly in the recent years. In this respect exploration of man and environment relationship is a promising field for any social science researcher today. The history of the development of the plantation industry in the Darjeeling district dates back to the early fifties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the English entrepreneurs took lease of extensive land area on the mountain slopes of the Darjeeling Himalaya and started tea and cinchona plantation for commercial purpose. During the formative years of the introduction of the plantation industry the region was sparsely populated so laborers from various parts of India and her neighboring countries were encouraged to settle in the fringe areas of the tea and cinchona gardens. As plantation was a labour intensive industry and the region was sparsely populated the Britishers started recruiting laborers from various parts of India like: Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Santhal Parganas etc., and the neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim (as Sikkim was not a part of the Union of India at that time). Thus during the initial phase, the plantation industry of Darjeeling region was largely dependent on the migrant laborers whose migration was induced by the planters. Different groups of people were recruited from different provinces like the Munda and Gond from Bihar; Santhal, Tanti and Bhumij from Bengal and Bihar; Oraon from Bihar and Orissa; Goala from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh; Lohar from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh; and Khond from Andhra Pradesh.<sup>1</sup> These migrant laborers easily agreed to settle permanently with their entire family in the newly establish plantation areas as indentured laborers. The employment of these indentured or slave labour ensured for the planters that the workers were bound to work on the plantation on whatever wage fixed by the planters.

Apart from these different Adivasi (tribal) groups from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc., many laborers belonging to various caste and community from

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<sup>1</sup> R. K. Kar, 'Absenteeism Among Tea Labour: A Case Study In Cultural Ecology', in R.K. Bkadra and Mita Bhadra, ed., *Plantation Labours of North-East India*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p84

Nepal and Sikkim along with few Bhutias and Tibetans also migrated into the plantation areas of Darjeeling region. But the migration of Bhutias and Tibetans was mainly for trade purposes. As these migrant laborers came from different parts of India and the neighboring countries, they made the plantation regions a meeting ground for various cultures, languages and ethnicity.

Over the last 160 years of the introduction of the plantation industry in the region, many changes have taken place in the lifestyle of these migrant and the local laborers. The main purpose of the study is to explore their life and culture and also to learn how they adjusted themselves with the given environment with the changing scenario of the area. The study seeks to examine historically the socio-economic and political factors that reinforced the plantation labour in the Darjeeling hills.

It is true that the rapid growth of Darjeeling can be traced back to the introduction of Plantation Industry (Tea and Cinchona) in the hills which was followed by the introduction of Railways (1881) and other Missionary activities like establishment of various educational institutions and other construction works. Therefore, it would not be wrong to say that the history of Darjeeling is incomplete without the study of history of the plantation Industry in this region. Because the development of plantation industry in the second half of the nineteenth century was an important chapter in the history of North Bengal in particular and the whole of India in general.

## **1. 1: DISCUSSION OF THE KEY CONCEPT: PLANTATION INDUSTRY**

Before discussing the impact of the introduction of the plantation industry in the Darjeeling region it would be appropriate to discuss what exactly the term plantation is. Plantations originally referred to a human settlement and not to the crops they raised. The term was commonly used to European settlements in America and later to the farms on which the colonialist lived and raised various crops. Hence tobacco, cotton and sugarcane came to be known as the plantation crops. However, the plantation industry as we know it today evolved from the experience of nearly three centuries, as the colonial influence settled over much of the tropical world. Plantation enterprise represented a shift from conquest, occupation, consolidation, establishment of trade and the gradual shift to the

production of the commodities required in trade. Production was organized on large areas of land which brought under specific crops like tea, cinchona, coffee, rubber, cotton and jute to produce in adequate volumes to secure the economies of scale and make overseas investments worthwhile.<sup>2</sup>

According to ILO (International Labour Organization) Convention No. 110, the term 'plantation' includes any agricultural undertaking regularly employing hired workers which is situated in the tropical or sub-tropical regions and which is mainly concerned with the cultivation or production for commercial purposes. Crops like coffee, tea, sugarcane, rubber, bananas, cocoa, coconuts, groundnuts, cotton, tobacco, fibers (sisal, jute and hemp), citrus, palm oil, cinchona and pineapple comes under the category. The term may also be extended to the crops i.e. rice, chicory, cardamom, geranium and pyrethrum or any other crop by any member country of the ILO, after consultation with the representative organizations of employers and workers concerned.<sup>3</sup>

However it should be noted that for the purpose of ILO convention 'plantation' does not include family or small scale holdings producing for local consumption and not regularly employing hired workers. It also excludes the undertakings which do not cover more than 12.5 acres (5 hectares) and employs more than 10 workers at any time during a calendar year.

According to the PLA (Plantations Labour Act, 1951) 'Plantation' means any land used or intended to be used for growing tea, coffee, rubber or cinchona which admeasures twenty- five acres or more and whereon thirty or more persons are employed, or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months, and in any State where the provisions of this Act have been applied by notification under sub-section (4) of section 1 to any other class of plantations, means also any land used or intended to be used for

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<sup>2</sup> R. N. Chakravorty, *Socio- Economic Development of Plantation Workers in North East India*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p2

<sup>3</sup> Programme of Industrial Activities, Report – II, p-1, International Labour Organization, Geneva, 1882, mentioned by R. N. Chakravorty, op. cit., 1997, p3

growing the plant mentioned in such notification and whereon thirty or more persons are employed, or were employed on any day of the preceding twelve months.<sup>4</sup>

From the definitions stated above it would be amply clear that though the plantation comes under the category of agriculture, yet it differs from agriculture mainly on the following grounds:

- a) The term 'plantation' refers to some specific industries such as, tea, coffee, rubber, cinchona etc. as defined under Convention of ILO No. 110 and also brought under the coverage of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951.
- b) Plantation includes any agricultural undertakings running with a number of hired workers on regular basis and is situated in the tropical or subtropical regions only.
- c) Plantation industry is essentially an agro-industry as manufacturing processes are also carried out simultaneously to prepare the finished products for commercial purposes and domestic consumption.
- d) To be categorized as plantation or estate, certain criteria is to be fulfilled i.e. specific area of cultivable land, employment of stipulated number of workers whose service and working conditions are guided by specific legislations e.g., Plantation Labour Act (PLO), 1951, Factory Act, 1948, Standing Orders Act (SOA), 1946, Employees Provident Fund Act (EPFA), 1952, etc.
- e) Plantation is controlled or owned by large Private Limited companies, Govt. or cooperative society etc., investing huge capital and employing large number of permanent and temporary workers, and
- f) License for starting the plantation and export of the products are also regulated by the Tea Act or relevant rules or Act of the government.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore the term 'Plantation' can be define as a kind of extensive farming, wherein profitable crops are cultivated especially for marketing purposes. The beginning of the plantation Industry in India during the second half of the nineteenth century was a breakthrough in the Indian Industrial map and undoubtedly a remarkable event in the history of the Colonial India's economy, because in the pre-colonial period plantation

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<sup>4</sup> The Plantations Labour Act, 1951, No. LXIX Of 1951, 2<sup>nd</sup> November, 1951, p1

<sup>5</sup> R. N. Chakravorty, op. cit., pp7-8

industry was not present in the list of Indian industries. The plantation Industry not only affected our economic development but it gradually led to the formation of a new kind of a society altogether. Although the area of plantation industry includes Tea, Coffee, Cinchona, Rubber, Cotton etc., But since the area of the present study is Darjeeling Region, so this work will focus only on tea and cinchona as the two basic plantation crops of this region planted by the Britishers.

## **1. 2: INTRODUCTION AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA: DARJEELING**

Darjeeling is truly the Queen of the Hills, nestling in grandeur and beauty of towering snow-capped mountains with Indra's Abode, mighty Kanchenjunga, the king of the Mountains, snowy sentinels and having incredibly beautiful name with various origins. The first view suggest that, Darjeeling being situated at the height of about 7000 ft, is accompanied by thunder and lightning during rainy season, hence it got the name "Dorji" meaning "Thunderbolt" and "Ling" meaning "Place", together called as "the place of the thunderbolt".

According to the Tibetan legends Darjeeling got its name from the chief abbot of the Buddhist Monastery (built during 1757-1763 in the hill) named Rinzing Dorji Legden La. So they called the place "Dorji-Ling" ("Dorji" name of the abbot and "Ling" house or monastery) meaning "the place where Dorji lives". According to the Lepcha tradition Darjeeling comes from the Lepcha word "Dar Tzu Lyang" meaning "The abode of the heavenly Goddess of Beauty" Another belief of the Kirat Rais suggests that the upper cave of the Mahakal Dara at Darjeeling was called as "Duwa-Ling" meaning "that stony place" where the Rais, as part of their rites of an ancestral worship, made stone offerings. Many stone offerings inside the cave still visible today serve as mute testimony to this fact.<sup>6</sup>

The district of Darjeeling lies between 26° 30' 50" and 27° 13' 5" north latitude, and between 88° 2' 45" and 88° 56' 35" east longitude and its total area is about 1,200

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<sup>6</sup>Basant B. Lama, *Through the Mists of Time: The Story of Darjeeling, The Land of Indian Gorkha*, Kurseong, 2008, p2

square miles. Darjeeling is the northernmost district of West Bengal. It is located on the lap of the Himalayas. The district comprises of four subdivisions namely, Sadar Darjeeling, Kalimpong,<sup>7</sup> Kurseong and Siliguri.<sup>8</sup> Darjeeling Himalayas, strictly speaking, consists only of the first three sub divisions of the district and forms a significant part of Eastern Himalayan System. The fourth subdivision Siliguri is mainly characterized by the *Terai* portion and foothills of the district. The district is bounded by the state of Sikkim in the north, Nepal in the west and Bhutan on the northeast. The exquisite scenic grandeur and invigorating climate in the area have earned the place the title of ‘Queen of the Hills’.

Historically, the district of Darjeeling was acquired by the Britishers from neighboring states of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. Until 1706, Darjeeling including Kalimpong and Dooars was under the rule of the Raja of Sikkim, a petty ruler who had long been engaged in an unsuccessful struggle against the growing power of the warlike Gurkhas.<sup>9</sup> But during the same year Kalimpong was seized by the Bhutanese. However, it is to be noted that although Darjeeling is comparatively a later settlement unit but this cannot be said for the whole of Darjeeling Hill, particularly for the Kalimpong subdivision because archeologist S. Chakraborty of Visva Bharati University has excavated three Neolithic sites in the area namely Tashiding, Senkhedunga and Samdong – II in the year 2003. In course of the excavation Chakraborty found out some Neolithic stone tools and two potteries. Anyway in the past it was a part of Sikkim Kingdom.<sup>10</sup>

After overrunning the hills and valleys of Nepal, the Gurkhas of Nepal marched east into Sikkim in 1780; and during the next 30 years the country suffered repeatedly from their intrusion. At the end of this period, they had overrun Sikkim as far as the Tista river (an abbreviation of Trisrota i.e., the three currents), and had conquered and annexed the Terai, i.e., the belt of country lying along the lower hills between that river and the Mechi, which is now covered by the valuable tea-gardens of the Darjeeling planters. In

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<sup>7</sup>Kalimpong: Taken from a Tibetan word the stockade (pong) of the king’s minister (kalon). The place was formerly the head-quarter of a Bhutanese governor.

<sup>8</sup>Siliguri: Meaning the stony site. A Koch name due to the fact that the bed of the Mahanadi by which Siliguri is situated is a mass of broken stone.

<sup>9</sup>Gurkhas: Martial hillmen from the region of Gorkha who under the leadership of Prithivi Narayan Shah conquered the Newar Kings and established the kingdom of Nepal.

<sup>10</sup>Dinesh Chandra Ray and Bishal Chhetri, ed., *Discourses on Darjeeling Hills*, Gama Publication, Darjeeling, 2014, p10



the meantime, the Britishers were engaged in preventing the Gurkhas from overrunning the whole of the northern frontier. In 1814 Anglo-Nepal war broke out in which Britishers became victorious. Defeat of the Gorkhalis led to the signing of the famous treaty known as the Treaty of Sugauli in 1816. According to the treaty Nepal had to cede those territories (Sikkim and its Terai region) which the Gurkhas had annexed from the Raja of Sikkim to the East India Company. The Raja, who had been driven out from his dominions, was reinstated; and again in 1817 another treaty was concluded at Titalya, under which the whole of the country between the Mechi and the Tista, a tract extending over 4,000 square miles was restored to him and his sovereignty was guaranteed by the Company. Sikkim was thus, now maintained as a buffer state between Nepal and Bhutan<sup>11</sup>. At this stage, Darjeeling (proper) was a small village under the Kazi (minister) of the Raja of Sikkim.<sup>12</sup>

Ten years later in 1827 disputes on the Sikkim Nepal frontiers arose and were referred to the Governor General (Lord William Bentinck). Two officers, Lt-General (then Captain) G.A. Lloyd and Mr. J.W. Grant, I.C.S., were deputed in 1828 to deal with the disputes and they penetrated into the hills as far north as Rinchinpong (in the Kulhait valley in Sikkim) and were much impressed with the possibilities of the place as a sanitarium. Mr. Grant reported accordingly to the Governor General Lord William Bentinck the numerous advantages promised by a Sanitarium at Darjeeling and also recommended its occupation for military purposes as the key of a pass into Nepal. The Governor General then deputed Captain Herbert, the Deputy surveyor-General, to the country with Mr. Grant and in due course the Court of Directors approved the project.<sup>13</sup>

The Court of Directors assigned Lt.-General Lloyd to start negotiations with the Sikkim Raja for a cession of the hill either for an equivalent in money or land. The transfer was successfully accomplished on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1835, through the personal influence and efforts of Lt.-General Lloyd with Raja of Sikkim. Accordingly he handed over a strip of hill territory, 24 miles long and about 5 to 6 miles wide, stretching from the

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<sup>11</sup>LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1907, p19

<sup>12</sup>Vimal Khawas, *Socio – Economic Condition of Tea Garden Labourers in Darjeeling Hills*, Council For Social Development, Sangha Rachana, New Delhi, 2006, p20

<sup>13</sup>Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1947, p37

northern frontier of the district to Pankabarie in the plains, which in its trend included the villages of Darjeeling and Kurseong. In return the Raja received an allowance of Rs.3,000/-, which was subsequently raised to Rs.6,000/- per annum. This exchange, however, considered at that time from a financial point of view was entirely in favour of the giver as the revenue derived from the hill never exceeded Rs.20/- the year.<sup>14</sup>

Darjeeling in 1836 was a small market of few mat-roofed houses popularly known as Goondri Bazar. Due to the various political tensions between the kingdom of Sikkim and British India, the Terai part of Sikkim, which forms the present Siliguri subdivision, was also annexed by the British in 1850. Kalimpong subdivision along with the adjacent Dooars was annexed to British India in 1865 following the Indo-Bhutanese war of 1864. After its brief inclusion in Jalpaiguri district, Kalimpong was included in the Darjeeling district in 1866 leaving out the Dooars. In 1880 the subdivision of Siliguri was taken out from the Jalpaiguri district and included in Darjeeling district. Thus it was only in 1880 the present shape of Darjeeling took its full shape.<sup>15</sup>

### **1.3: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

A good number of scholars have already studied the different facades of the plantation industry, but it still requires an intensive study. It is to be noted that the number of reference books and research articles on the issue is still far from satisfactory. But still it would be worthwhile to mention the name of P.G Griffith's *The History of Tea Industry in India*; Birendra Chandra Ghosh's *Hundred Years of Tea Industry in India*; Amalendu Guha's *Planter Raj To Swaraj – Freedom Struggle and Electoral Politics In Assam*; R.K Bhadra And Mitra Bhadra's *Plantation Labour In North East India*; Sharit Bhowmik's *Class Formation In The Plantation System* and so on.

Besides, the above mentioned works, various other published and unpublished works are also note worthy like the research paper by Namrata Thapa titled *Employment Status And Human Development Of Tea Plantation Workers In West Bengal*; Vimal Khawas's *Status Of Tea Labourers in Eastern Himalaya: A Case Study Of Darjeeling*

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<sup>14</sup>E.C. Dozey, *A Concise History of The Darjeeling District Since 1835, With a Complete Itinerary of Tours in Sikkim and The District*, Bibliophil, Kolkata, 2012, p5

<sup>15</sup>VimalKhawas, op. cit., p20.

*Tea Industry*; Rinju Rasaily's *Labour And Health In Tea Plantations: A Case Study Of Phuguri Tea Estate Darjeeling*; Indumati Rai's *Tea Industry In Darjeeling– With Special Reference To Women Participation In Badamtam And Vah-Tukvar Tea Estates*; Latil Premlal Tirkey's *Tea Plantation In Darjeeling Districts, India: Geo-Ecological And Socio-Economic Impacts In Post Independence Period* etc.

It is to be noted that most of the research work done on the topic is based on the economics perspective and mostly focus on plantation areas of Terai, Dooars and Assam. Only few works have tried to cover the different aspect of the life of the Nepali laborers of Darjeeling region.

Khemraj Sharma in his *Socio-economic life of Cinchona Plantation Workers in India* published in 1997 has pointed that it is because of the establishment of the plantation industry that the traditional caste based occupation has been transformed into the industrial type, which resulted in the better living condition of the plantation laborers. But on the contrary Namrata Thapa in her research paper entitled *Employment Status And Human Development Of Tea Plantation Workers In West Bengal* (2012), points out that despite their employment status being relatively better than the casual workers and small growers, their asset ownership position and hence living standard was relatively poorer than the small growers. Thus, the wage workers in the estate irrespective of their permanent or casual work status were found to be worse in comparison to the small growers. Dr. Vimal Khawas has also conducted a similar research entitled *Status of Tea Garden Labourers In Eastern Himalaya: A Case of Darjeeling Tea Industry*. His work highlights the negligence and highhandedness of tea management towards the social and economic development of garden laborers. He also highlights the conditions of tea garden laborers in Darjeeling Hills in the context of wide spread crisis in Tea Industry Sector in the country and its consequent impact on the laborers. He further argues that most of the tea estates still operate in the colonial master-slave mode and the only goal of the planters and owners is to control the market and squeeze the primary producer (laborers) as much as possible.

Dr. Khemraj Sharma and T. C. Das in *Agony of Plantation Workers in North – East India* (2008), have pointed out that during the eighties of the nineteenth century the

production of tea in Darjeeling region went up to 13 million kilogram per year. But during 1999, the year of their survey the production fell down to ten million kilograms in the existing 70 tea gardens. The authors believed that it might be because of various reasons like deforestation, increasing population density, soil erosion and political commotion. Even today Darjeeling tea including cinchona industry is facing various problems. They further argue that emigrant workers, in spite of settlement in the plantation areas remained isolated even after 1947 because socially the wider society of the Himalaya still called them ‘*Kamanees*’ (garden) background people. However, after 1947 trade unions started penetrating the gardens and helped in mobilizing the workers for separate ethnic consciousness of the working class. They believed that the formation of trade union in the tea plantation areas in the Darjeeling region was an indirect outcome of the question of ethnic identity rather than having political background like elsewhere.

Another book by Khemraj Sharma and T. C. Das entitled *Globalization and Plantation Workers in North East India* published in 2009, has tried to analyze thoroughly the impacts of globalization among the plantation workers of Darjeeling tea industry along with the industry in relation to other regions of West Bengal and Assam of North East India. Their work highlights both positive and negative aspects of globalization process in the tea industry. Their work also tries to incorporate the changes that have taken place since the introduction of liberalization, privatization and globalization of Indian economy in tea industry of North-East India.

The authors have tried to highlight the new and important development of Indian tea industry i.e. the emergence and growth of the Small Growers Tea Plantations (SGTP)<sup>16</sup> since 1989. But sadly these small gardens do not have specific financial institution to finance them in appropriate time and they also do not get technical expertise services to assist them in their venture. Therefore the writers argue that if these problems

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<sup>16</sup> SGTP: The Small Growers Tea Plantation garden means the tea gardens having 8.09 hectares to 50 hectares of land under tea plantations without having processing or manufacturing factories or units. There were about 300 such gardens in North Bengal in 2008, more than 10,000 in West Bengal, 30,000 in Assam and another ten thousand in south India. They were producing about 10,000 lakhs kilograms green leaves in North India and about 22,90 lakhs kilograms of green leaves in South India in 1996.

are overcome specially in North Bengal there will be a good scope of its development in near future.

They further argue that the tea plantation workers of the North East India hardly appears to be the subject incorporated in the labour policy of the government. The garden workers are at times misguided either by the management or trade union or government agencies and sometimes also by the agencies of the society. The authors also mention that the socio-economic conditions of the workers are not uniform as it varies from one plantation to another. It again varies from one company to another due to their specific industrial philosophy. The government mechanisms also keep mum till any serious problem crops up at the garden giving simply vague justification. No one either from trade unions or management or the rank and file workers of the plantations happens to be transparent about the conditions of the plantation workers.

Dr. Debabrata Mitra in his *Globalization and Industrial Relations in Tea Plantation* published in 2010, tries to measure the impact of globalization on industrial relations. He argues that the Tea industry is one of the major components of plantation economy. The profitability of plantation economy in general and tea industry in particular has been largely affected due to the introduction of the new economic policy. Tea industry has been put under severe competition due to different reasons in the era of globalization. Challenges have been thrown up to the large tea estates. Due to their low profitability, many tea estates were and are not in a position to mitigate their responsibility towards their workers as stipulated by the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, as a result of which industrial relations in tea plantations have been adversely affected.

Basant B. Lama in his *The Story of Darjeeling – The Land of Indian Gorkha* published in 2008, points out the bitter fact that ever since its inception, tea gardens in Darjeeling District was the possession of people who are neither residents nor born in Darjeeling. He further points out that none of the local residents or Gorkhas owns any of the tea gardens in Darjeeling. He further argues that in the beginning, land in the district was made available on a straight purchase basis only to British “pioneer” tea planters as it was accordingly to the interest of the East India Company to encourage as many

Europeans as possible to invest in the tea industry. But even after independence, the condition was more or less the same. The Bengal government never encouraged local people to take charge of the tea gardens. It is sad but also the truth which we have to accept and live with.

Another important study that throws light on the sociological framework of the tea plantation is by S. Bhowmik entitled *Class formation in The Plantation System* published in 1981, where he argues that in the context of Indian plantations the role of the state has created a change in the system after Independence. The plantation system has to be understood not just in terms of the economic considerations but also the social relations that have shaped the plantation structure. He argues that the social process should not be dismissed while defining a plantation viz. the way in which people of certain social origins were transferred to a totally different production process. The larger social system is important in shaping or restructuring the plantation system. There is a change from the classical plantation system characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, isolation etc., due to a change in the social system brought about by the state. For example, political pressure led to welfare inputs, improvement in communication led to organization of the working class and so on. There is a continuous process of social change.

Through his work he has tried to understand the unity and class consciousness of the laborers of the tea plantation in India. He has given his approaches from Marxian perspective. He has attempted to investigate and analyze the different social forces which have helped to break down the isolation of the Adivasi worker like Oraon, Munda, Kharia, Santals etc. and bringing them in contact with the wider social system like organized political action within and outside the plantation and consequently leading them to a change in the plantation system. He further argues that the classes are not found ready-made anywhere rather they are created by consciousness and organized human action. He has pointed out that Adivasi plantation workers form a separate class being sellers of their labour power. Inter tribal divisions among the workers separate their "homogenous economic activity" as wage laborers from their "heterogeneous social life". This factor coupled with isolation of the plantation make the problem class formation

complex. He further argues that mere unity among the workers on the basis of economic activity is not enough. Their unity has to extend to their social life as well. Such a process is taking place as tribal barriers are now eroding, leading to greater interaction in the social life of Adivasi workers.

T. K. Ghosh in his work entitled *Tea Gardens of West Bengal: A Critical Study of Land Management* has basically highlighted the problems of the tea gardens in West Bengal since its inception and has identified the areas where improvements could enlarge the scope for its overall developments. He has pointed out that the major problems of tea industry in India are the results of lack of suitable land management policy.

Das Gupta in his *Labour in Tea Gardens* published in 1999, argues that the Darjeeling Dooars plantations of West Bengal cannot be called 'enclave economy' i.e. complete isolation from the mainland. According to him, an important aspect of an enclave theory is that 'growth of tea (or coffee) plantation results in pauperization of agriculture'. But in the case of the Darjeeling and Dooars Terai regions of North Bengal, tea plantations led to the growth of agriculture, rural settlements and other small-scale ancillary industries. The population grew with large migration. This resulted in a certain demographic transition, which created a new type of 'assimilation and socio-economic transformation'.

Rinju Rasaily in her Ph.D thesis (2003) entitled *Labour and Health In Tea Plantations: A Case Study Of Phuguri Tea Estate Darjeeling* throws light on some emerging issues of concern both for the tea industry and the workers. Her work also points out some recommendations and areas for further research. She argues that with the implementation of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and other legislations, the post independence period witnessed certain changes or improvements in the conditions of labour but her field realities present a different picture. A similar study has also been conducted by R.P. Rai in 1995, under the title *A Study of the Adequacy of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 in Protecting the Interest and Promoting the Welfare of the Tea Plantation Workers in West Bengal with Special Reference to North Tukvar Tea Garden Darjeeling*. Her study compares the existing field realities with the facilities provided

under the Plantation Labour Act and comes to the similar conclusion. Smritima Diksha Lama in her article *Darjeeling Tea Industry: Implications of Globalisation Triggered Fair-Trading* also highlights the failure of Fair Trade and Plantation Labour Act (1951) in solving the problems and untold sufferings of the plantation laborers.

Regarding the gender relation in the plantation areas Mita Bhadra's work entitled *Women workers of Tea Plantations of India* published in 1992 is worth mentioning. She has basically tried to highlight the position of women workers in the plantation hierarchy, their status and role in tea plantation society, their socio-economic background, their attitude and commitment towards plantation work etc. According to her, plantation workers are more committed workers despite the absence of promotional facilities to them. They are well adjusted to plantation society and do not find difficulty in performing dual role as house wives and bread winner. She further argues that women are always recruited as workers category. Upward occupational mobility is totally absent among the women laborers. But on the contrary Khemraj Sharma and T. C. Das in their *Globalization and Plantation Workers In North East India* (2009), have pointed out that from 1990s, the plantation management of the region have started recruiting female supervisory sub-staffs keeping in the view of the increasing female work force in the plantations. Many tea garden owners have also started to employ female Assistant Managers in their plantations so as to tackle the female work force of the gardens accordingly. They further argue that the days will come by 2020 A.D., when almost all the plantation workers will consist of female and female workers only because the tea garden males do not at all prefer the tea garden jobs in the globalized era. Thus the feminization process under the globalization policy shall have complete hold on tea industry of Darjeeling hills by 2020.

Besides these works by various scholars, on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2009, *The Government of India, Ministry of Labour and Employment Labour Bureau*, Chandigarh had also taken initiative to study about the socio economic condition of women workers in plantation industry. Its focus was on the major problems faced by the women laborers in various plantation states.



As mentioned earlier, that a number of scholars have already worked on the condition of plantation workers, but most of the works highlight their condition after independence and they mostly talk about their condition in general. None of the above mentioned works gives a complete picture of the condition of plantation workers in the Darjeeling region in particular. In addition, condition of the women laborers in both pre and post colonial period have not been studied in particular. Besides, there is a corpus of literature available on different aspects of tea plantations but at the same time there is also a dearth of comprehensive studies of a comparative nature on labour in the cinchona sector. There is still ample scope for research work on the topic because the development of plantation industry in the second half of the nineteenth century was an important chapter in the history of North Bengal in particular and the whole of India in general.

#### **1.4: OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

- To investigate the historical background of the introduction of the tea and cinchona gardens in Darjeeling District.
- To bring back the focus on the forgotten history of the Cinchona Plantation in the Darjeeling hills, as 2015 is its 150th anniversary. So, this work will be an attempt to revisit the past of Cinchona Plantation.
- To delineate gender relation and their role in the plantation areas of Darjeeling region.
- To observe and to look into the changes and continuity witnessed by the people living around the plantation area in terms of benefits and losses.
- To delineate the socio-cultural impact of the plantation industry in the life of the laborers working in the tea and cinchona gardens in Darjeeling District.
- To highlight the impacts of the declining plantation economy on the life of the laborers for example Cinchona (no longer a very lucrative industry as it used to be) in the final dissertation.

## **1.5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Methodology of any work is of great importance as it contributes the actual stages or consequences of study. It is an organization of reality, identifying the type of analytical techniques and appropriate instruments to be used. For this research, analytical methods of both primary and secondary sources have been undertaken. As the work surveys the history of plantation laborers, so this work is mostly dependent on secondary sources collected from the various published and unpublished works like governmental and nongovernmental documents, articles and journals along with field survey (oral sources and primary sources) in some cases, as the main objective of the study is to highlight the conditions of the workers in the tea and cinchona gardens. So, the lives and aspirations of the workers living in the plantation areas have been captured through interviews or primary method of data collection. In addition to this, various documents related with tea and cinchona plantation in Darjeeling have been explored and studied present at Darjeeling Planters Association (D.P.A), Planters Club, Indian Tea Association (I.T.A), Tea Board, Cinchona Directorate Office and other tea and cinchona related associations. Finally, all collected data have been analyzed and critically interpreted for the final dissertation.

## **1.6: CHAPTER STRUCTURE AND SCHEME**

The study is divided into six chapters including the introductory chapter and the chapter on conclusions.

Chapter I is introductory in nature and gives an overview on plantation industry and historical background of the study area i.e. Darjeeling. The chapter also reviews the major existing literature on the topic, objectives of the study and the methodology adopted in the study.

Chapter II deals with the historical background of the tea and tea industry in India, in general and Darjeeling region in particular. It also includes the role of the pioneer tea planters and entrepreneurs in establishing the tea plantation industry in Darjeeling region. The chapter also examines the labour recruitment problem and the recruitment system

adopted by the planters during the formative years of the introduction of the plantation industry in Darjeeling region.

Chapter III enlightens the glorious history of the Cinchona plantation in India and the world with special reference to Darjeeling region. The chapter also deals with the uses and different species of the plant including the labour migration in the region along with the growth and management of the cinchona plantation. These two chapter forms the base on which the superstructure of the analysis and investigation is built in the succeeding chapters.

Chapter IV focuses on the gender relations in the plantation areas of the region. Role and the participation of the women in both the tea and cinchona industry have also been thoroughly studied. Along with it disparity of wages among genders and disparity in other various fields of the plantation sector and the participation of women in trade unions have also been highlighted in the chapter.

Chapter V discusses about the continuity and changes witness by the people of Darjeeling in general and plantation laborers in particular. Moreover, it also covers the socio-cultural impact of the plantation industry in the Darjeeling region. The chapter tries to analyze critically both the positive and negative aspects of the plantation industry.

Finally Chapter VI ends with the conclusions and some suggestions on study for future research.

## **CHAPTER: 2**

### **2: DARJEELING TEA INDUSTRY**

According to the Oxford dictionary 'Tea' is defined as the dried leaves of a tropical evergreen shrub (*Camellia Sinensis*) and a hot drink prepared by infusing these leaves in boiling water is called 'Tea'. The Latin name for tea is *Camellia Sinensis*, literally meaning the Chinese Camellia. Besides being an agricultural crop, it also has an industrial base. The cultivation, maintenance, harvesting and processing of tea is labour-intensive and provides regular employment to millions. Tea industry is one of the chief foreign-exchange earners in most of the developing countries.

Tea is known to be as the 'Green Gold' of India. It is not only a much liked beverage of the people in the country but also fetches a good amount of foreign exchange. Being one of the world's largest producer, consumer and exporter of tea, India plays a significant role in the world tea trade.

#### **2. 1: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF TEA**

Although tea has been grown as a plantation crop for nearly two centuries now, its origin is still a big mystery. There is still considerable speculation about the place of its origin. It is generally believed that it originated somewhere in South-east Asia. However current distribution patterns of tea types or varieties suggest that tea possibly originated in the vicinity of the Irrawaddy basin from where it dispersed to South-east China, Indonesia, and Assam. Tea varieties specific to these three principal regions have characteristic biological features, but it is rarely that only one particular type is to be found in a particular locality.<sup>1</sup>

Another widely accepted theory regarding the origin of tea is that it was from China, that tea came and its origin there is lost in the mist of legends. Its legendary origin can be traced back to around 2737 B.C. when tea was ascribed to have medicinal properties. It was called a "divine healer" by the then Chinese emperor Shen Nung. It was

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<sup>1</sup> Barundeb Banerjee, *Tea Production and Processing*, Oxford and IBH Publishing Co.Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi, 1993, p1

a chance discovery when Shen Nung while camping in the countryside was resting against the trunk of a tea-tree and watched the cauldron boiling. Some leaves, disturbed by the breeze fell into the boiling-water. Intrigued by the aroma, he tested the concoction and discovered the most popular beverage called Tea.<sup>2</sup> That is how tea was discovered, according to the legends. It was believed that tea was certainly drunk in China well before the beginning of the Christian era. At least one container marked with the pictogram ch'a or tea, has been discovered in a tomb of the Han dynasty (206 B.C – 220 A.D).<sup>3</sup>

Tea as a wild plant might have grown from time immemorial but its original home is still a big mystery to the researchers. It is believed by some scholars that tea travelled to China from India, where wild tea bushes used to grow in Himalayan valleys since time unknown. The plants travelling to China were attributed to the Indian Buddhist Missionaries. Although credit goes to China for starting cultivation of tea for the first time, some authorities also believe that tea was known to some tribes in Shan state in Burma and Thailand as early as it was made use of in China.<sup>4</sup> In Columbian Encyclopedia, tea plant or *Thea Sinensis* is clearly described as 'Indigenous to Assam'. Chinese credit lies only in taking up the cultivation first and popularizing it. The commercial cultivation of tea started in China in about 8<sup>th</sup> century A.D. It is said that for centuries, Chinese people purposely kept the processes of tea manufacturing a secret to the world. Some of the Chinese Emperors even issued strict edicts for not revealing the secrets of tea production to any European. But some of the corrupt Chinese were bribed by the Britishers, to spell out the secrets of tea plantations.<sup>5</sup>

So it is likely that in both China and India tea bushes grew from time immemorial but gradually other countries like Japan, Sweden, America, Brazil, Java, Sri Lanka, Africa, France, Mauritius, Jamaica, Sumatra, Mexico, Kenya, Peru, Nepal, Bangladesh etc. started cultivation and production of tea.

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<sup>2</sup> Bala Subramaniam, *Tea in India*, Publications and Information Directorate, New Delhi, 1995, p5

<sup>3</sup> Gillian Wright, *The Darjeeling Tea Book*, Penguin Enterprise, New Delhi, 2011, p17

<sup>4</sup> A.G. Adikesavan, *Economic Product Gallery*, The Director of Museum, Government Museum – EGMOPE, Madras, 1975, p19

<sup>5</sup> Basant. B. Lama, *Through the Mists of Time: The Story of Darjeeling, The Land of Indian Gorkha*, Kurseong, 2008, p126

## 2. 2: TEA IN INDIA: THE CASE OF DARJEELING TEA

In India the oldest record of tea is found from the writings of Mandebelo in the year 1640.<sup>6</sup> Between 1818 and 1834, several private individuals and Government Officials took an initiative for the cultivation of tea in North East India. Discovery of wild tea plants in Assam around 1823 is a major landmark in the history of the introduction of tea industry in India. In 1821 Major Robert Bruce and in 1824 Mr. Scott, discovered the tea plants growing wild in Assam, but much expense and considerable delays were consequently incurred in bringing plant and seeds from China, and Chinese men to teach the people of India the art of growing and manufacturing tea. Because of the profits to be earned in future, the British Government itself undertook the formation of experimental plantations in Upper Assam and the districts of Kumaon and Garhwal; in 1839 private speculation took the field, and the Assam Tea Company was formed. But the Tea plantation in the real sense was first started in India about 1834.<sup>7</sup>

Tea plantation is a highly specialized commercial enterprise employing wage labour. It has many characters of modern factory except the fact that it is land based. In India, tea plantation as an organized industry came up around the middle of the nineteenth century. Tea is cultivated extensively in Assam and the two districts of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling of West Bengal. It is also grown in some parts of south India.

From the eighteenth century onwards, the British were drinking more tea than ever. By the year 1720, the British had acquired such an appetite for tea, that the East India Company imported one million pounds of tea in that year from China. Gradually the demand for the beverage grew to such phenomenal heights that five years later five million tons of tea was imported.<sup>8</sup> In 1773, British parliament passed the Regulating Act which gave the East India Company full monopoly of Tea trade with China. Again in 1813 the Charter Act was passed which although deprived the East India Company of its monopoly of trade in India but it was still enjoying its monopoly of trade with China and

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<sup>6</sup> R.N., Chakravorty, *Socio – Economic Development Of Plantation Workers In North East India*, N.L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, 1997, p28

<sup>7</sup> A.G. Adikesavan, *op. cit.*, p19

<sup>8</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, *Agony of Plantation Workers in North-East India*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2008, p119

trade in tea. This monopoly of the company finally came to an end by the Charter Act of 1833, which totally abolished the company's monopoly of trade in tea and trade with China.

Finally in 1834, considering its demand; Lord William Bentick, the then Governor-General of India appointed a committee to enquire into the prospects of tea cultivation in India. And in 1835, the British Government showed serious interest to start the tea cultivation in India. Historically, the district of Darjeeling was acquired by the Britishers from neighboring states of Sikkim, Nepal and Bhutan. By 1835, Darjeeling was ceded from the Sikkim Raja and Mr. Campbell became the Superintendent of Darjeeling. The credit of establishment of the tea industry in Darjeeling goes to the enterprise of Dr. Campbell, a civil surgeon of the Indian Medical Service in 1841.<sup>9</sup> Along with him Dr. Withecombe, another Civil Surgeon and Major Crommelin also started experimental tea plantation in Lower Valley called Lebong.<sup>10</sup> The results of these experiments were very satisfactory. But according to Dr. Hooker and few others, too much moisture and too little sun of Darjeeling at a height of 7,000 feet was not in favour of the large scale cultivation of tea in the area.<sup>11</sup> This was not the case of lower sites of Pankhabari and Kurseong,<sup>12</sup> where plantation of both tea and coffee was established by Mr. Martin. The British Government also established tea nurseries during the period, but commercial exploitation began during the 1850s. Before the transfer of Dr. Campbell to Darjeeling in 1839, the authorities had already given some consideration to the possibility of developing the cultivation and manufacture of tea in the region under the East India Company. In 1840, Dr. Campbell was transferred from Katmandu to Darjeeling, and soon he started the experimental growth of tea in Aloobari<sup>13</sup> area at an altitude of 7000 feet. Within a period of twenty years, several tea gardens appeared in Darjeeling. It is a matter

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<sup>9</sup> LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1907, p72

<sup>10</sup>Lebong - Lepcha word meaning, The tongue – like spur, a corruption of ali, a tongue and abong, a mouth.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1947, p113

<sup>12</sup> Kurseong – Has its origin in a Lepcha word. It has been suggested that this name is a corruption of Kurseon-rip, the small white orchid, which used to grow plentifully round Kurseong and that it means the place of white orchids. Another suggestion is that it refers to a cane which used to grow there in rich profusion and which the Lepchas in their “Rong-Ring”, as they term their own language, call ‘Kur’ and that ‘Seong’. There are still a few of these canes to be found in the forest behind Eagle’s Crag.

<sup>13</sup> Aloobari – Taken from a Nepali word meaning potato garden.

of some wonder as to how huge pieces of machinery for tea gardens were manhandled up the hill when a simple journey was so difficult at that time.

There is a debate regarding the reason why the East India Company selected North Bengal (Terai and Darjeeling District) for the plantation industry. The conventional theory is that the ecology and climate of this region were favorable for the plantation industry. But the post colonial researchers have raised certain question in regard to the selection of this region. According to them the ecology and climate of other hilly areas of India were also favorable for the plantation industry. They believe that the abundance of land was one of the major reasons for the selection of this region for plantation industry. Besides, these regions were sparsely populated; naturally the planters did not have to face any resistance from the local inhabitants. However the issue is not free from controversy.

### **2.3: IMPORTANCE OF DARJEELING TEA**

The history of Darjeeling presents a late chapter in the extension of British rule. The Britishers selected hill areas of Darjeeling for both bodily comfort and control over hill resources. The rapid growth of Darjeeling can be traced back to the introduction of Tea Plantation Industry in the hills which was followed by the introduction of Railways (1881), roads, ropeways and other Missionary activities like establishment of various educational institutions and other construction works.

Unlike most Indian tea, Darjeeling tea is normally made from the small-leaved Chinese variety of *Camellia sinensis var. sinensis*, rather than the large - leaved Assam plant (*Camellia sinensis var. assamica*). Among the different kinds of teas cultivated in India, the most celebrated one comes from the Darjeeling Himalayas. The best of India's prized Darjeeling Tea is considered the world's finest tea. The region has been cultivating, growing and producing tea for more than the last 160 years. The Darjeeling tea industry at present employs over 52 thousand people on a permanent basis while additional 15,000 persons are engaged during the plucking season which lasts from March to November.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> D.S. Bomjon, *Darjeeling – Dooars People And Place Under Bengal's Neo-Colonial Rule*, Bikash Jana Sahitya Kendra, Darjeeling, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Revised Updated and Enlarged Edition), 2008, p14



Darjeeling tea not only occupies a place of pride for Darjeeling but for the whole of India. The aroma and taste of Darjeeling orthodox tea is unparalleled in the world. There are at present a total of 87 tea estates in hills which have been accorded the status for its produce, as 'Darjeeling Tea' by the Tea Board of India.

Introduction and consolidation of the tea plantation industry in Darjeeling during the later half of the nineteenth century was geared to a demand abroad for an exotic drink. The tea gardens of Darjeeling Hills are one of the only industries which have survived for more than one and a half century. Although most of the tea bushes are more than a hundred years old they are still producing tea with '*Muscatal Flavor*' and '*Exquisite Bouquet*'. Tea from the Darjeeling region has traditionally been prized above all other 'Black Teas', especially in the United Kingdom and the countries comprising the former British Empire.

The credit for the introduction of tea plantation in Darjeeling entirely goes to Dr. Arthur Campbell, who was appointed as the first Superintendent of Darjeeling in 1839. For about a year he spent his time in Kurseong next to 'Constantian' and experimented with the planting of tea saplings obtained from the Calcutta Botanical Garden.<sup>15</sup> But in Darjeeling the first trial of tea plant was made only in 1841. By this time Dr. Campbell was also shifted to Darjeeling permanently and experimented with tea cultivation in his Beechwood Estate just below the Municipality Building of Darjeeling Town and proved that the area was ideal for the cultivation of tea on a large scale.<sup>16</sup>

Around the same time, a British army officer Captain Samler who had betrayed the crown was hiding in Kurseong along with his men occupied the present Makaibari<sup>17</sup> Tea Estate area and planted the saplings which they stole from Campbell. Samler was finally granted amnesty after he helped the British Crown during the Indian Rebellion of 1857 (Sepoy Munity). Later he became an agent of 'Darjeeling Tea Company' and also the legal owner of Makaibari Tea Estate. It is believed that Samler pioneered the cultivation of tea in Makaibari area which probably showed the real potential of tea in

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<sup>15</sup> Basant B. Lama, op. cit., p122.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p125

<sup>17</sup> Makaibari: Taken from a Nepali word meaning Maize farm.

Darjeeling. But there is no recognition of official records to establish the fact. In 1859 before he died, Samler sold the garden to G.C. Banerjee, his assistant. The Makaibari Tea Estate continued to be run by the Banerjee family, and was the only Garden in Darjeeling district which had a resident landlord until 2014, when it was sold off by the family.

Meanwhile Dr. Campbell after shifting out from Kurseong to Darjeeling kept his experimentation on. It was soon found that the plant thrived at the altitude where Darjeeling was situated (about 7,000ft). Having heard of this, many other tea planters from England started flocking into Darjeeling to make a fortune out of it.

The British government soon started distribution of seeds to those who desired to cultivate the plant. Writing in 1852, Mr. Jackson says in his Report on Darjeeling that “I have seen several plantations in various stages of advancement, both of Assam and China plant, and I have found the plants healthy and vigorous, showing that the soil is well adapted for the cultivation. In the garden of the Superintendent, Dr. Campbell, in Darjeeling, in more extensive plantations of Withecombe, the civil Surgeon, and major Crommelian, of the Engineers, in a Lower Valley called Lebong, the same satisfactory result has been obtained: the leaves, the blossom and the seeds are full and healthy; the reddish clay of the sides of the hill at Lebong seems to suit the plant better than the black loam of Darjeeling. This has been the result at and about Darjeeling itself, at a height of 7,000 feet ; but the opinion of Dr. Hooker and of others competent to judge seems to be that there is too much moisture and too little sun at Darjeeling to admit of the cultivation on a large scale becoming remunerative : this objection, however, does not apply to the lower sites of Pankhabari and Kurseong, where plantation of both tea and coffee has been established by Mr. Martin and the plants are now in a highly – thriving condition. In this tract of country, between the Morung and Darjeeling, every variety of elevation and aspect is to be found, and there seems to be little or no doubt that tea cultivation in that tract would answer”<sup>18</sup>.

These plantations appear to have been merely experimental plots, but by the year 1856 the industry began to be developed on an extensive scale, especially on the lower

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<sup>18</sup> Selections from the Records of the Bengal Government, No.18, mentioned in LSS O’Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1907, p73.

slopes, as it was believed that the elevation of Darjeeling was too high for the plant to be very productive. By January 1857 tea has been raised from seed at Takvar<sup>19</sup> by Captain Mason, at Kurseong by Mr. Smith, at Hope Town by a company, on the Kurseong flats by Mr. Martin and between Kurseong and Pankhabari by Captain Samler, agent of the Darjeeling Tea Concern. At this stage development was preceded at a rapid rate. In 1856 the Alubari tea garden was opened by the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company and another garden by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank on the Lebong spur. In 1859 the Dhutaria garden was started by Dr. Brougham and between 1860 and 1864 gardens at Ging,<sup>20</sup> Ambutia<sup>21</sup>, Takdah and Phubsering<sup>22</sup> were established by the Darjeeling Tea Company and at Takvar and Badamtam<sup>23</sup> by the Lebong Tea Company. Tea gardens like Makaibari, Pandam and Steinthal were also opened up during this period. In the Terai also experimental plantation was started and in 1862 the first garden in the Terai was opened out at Champta near Khaprail by Mr. James White who had previously laid out one of the largest gardens of the District at Singell near Kurseong. Other gardens had been opened in the Terai by 1866.<sup>24</sup>

The earlier planters, owing to want of experience, made many mistakes, and their ventures did not meet with success. But these mistakes were remedied later and in the next ten years steadily increasing prosperity was noticed.

The following table shows the number of gardens, extent of land cultivated with tea, together with the out-turn, etc, for each of the five years from 1866 to 1870 inclusive, for 1872 to 1874 and for 1885, 1895, 1905 and 2013.

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<sup>19</sup> Takvar: A corruption of Lepcha word tak, a hook-thread, and vor, a fish-hook, a name suggested by the curve of the land.

<sup>20</sup> Ging: Taken from a Tibetan word meaning the stretched-out slope.

<sup>21</sup> Ambutia: Taken from the Nepali word meaning the place of mango trees.

<sup>22</sup> Phubsering: The word is taken from the Tibetan word. The name is said to be that of a Bhotia Sardar, who first opened out the tea-garden now known by this designation. Properly it is Phurpusring i.e., Sring who was born on Thursday (Phurpu), It being a common practice to name Tibetan children after the day on which they are born.

<sup>23</sup> Badatam: The word is taken from a Lepcha word. The padam bamboo, the giant bamboo which furnishes the Lepchas with their milk jugs, water-vessels, etc. There was formerly a forest of these bamboos at the place known by this name.

<sup>24</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p113

**Table No: 2. 1****Comparative Table of Tea Operations in Darjeeling District, For Years 1866 – 1870, 1872 – 1874 and in 1885, 1895 and 1905 and 2013:**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of Gardens</b>	<b>Extent of Land Under Cultivation in Acres and Hectors</b>	<b>Out – Turn of Tea in Lbs. and kg</b>	<b>Number of Labourers Employed</b>
1866	39	10,392	4,33,715	Not Known
1867	40	9,214	5,82,640	Not Known
1868	44	10,067	8,51,549	6,859
1869	55	10,769	12,78,869	7,445
1870	56	11,046	16,89,186	8,347
1872	72	14,503	29,38,626	12,361
1873	87	15,695	29,56,710	14,019
1874	113	18,888	39,27,911	19,424
1885	175	38,499	90,90,298	Not Known
1895	186	48,692	1,17,14,551	Not Known
1905	148	50,618	1,24,47,471	Not Known
2013	87	17,818 (in hectors)	8.56 (million kg)	Not Known

Sources: W.W. Hunter: A Statistical Account of Bengal (for the year 1866 - 1874 figure), p149 and O' Malley: Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling (for the year 1885, 1895 and 1905 figure), p74, and I.T.A Report on Darjeeling Tea (Indian Tea Association Darjeeling Branch: for the year 2013)

It is evident from the above table is that, from 39 tea gardens in 1866, the numbers kept on increasing and went up to 186 gardens in 1895. But by 1905, the number of tea gardens started decreasing however, production went on increasing. This was mostly because of the fact that a numbers of gardens were merged together while the production was not affected adversely. By this time, tea trade became the staple means of livelihood of the people.<sup>25</sup> It is also noticed from the above table that after 1885 the workers were not taken into account on the ground that by then the industry did not require more laborers as they started to get sufficient workers from the local areas also. Secondly, the planters started introducing the system of *Hattta Bahira*.<sup>26</sup> Since 1940 production increased considerably in spite of difficulties with management, transportation and costs. In 1942 the output was 26,478,500 lbs of black tea and 1,24,200 lbs of green tea. In 1943, the amount of black tea produced was 25,593,000 lbs and 2,572,500 lbs of green tea.<sup>27</sup>

**Table No: 2. 2**

**Distribution of Tea Gardens in 1940**

<b>Thana</b>	<b>No of Tea Estates</b>
Darjeeling	19
Jorebungalow	16
Sukhiapokri	9
Pulbazar	2
Rangli Rangliot	9
Kurseong	25
Mirik	5
Siliguri	27
Kharibari	11
Phansidewa	13
Kalimpong	0

<sup>25</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, op. cit., p 200

<sup>26</sup> Hattta Bahira: Taken from a Nepali word meaning oust the workers after their superannuation.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p114.

Gorubathan	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>142</b>

Source: A.J. Dash: Bengal District Gazetteer, 1947, p 114.

Only in the Kalimpong Subdivision (which was taken from Bhutan in 1866) land was withheld from development under tea, as Government's policy was to reserve that area for forest and ordinary or other cultivation.

At present there are 87 tea gardens spread across roughly 19,000 hectares (46930 acres) of land area, employ about 52,000 permanent workers, and 15,000 contract employees who are mostly of Gorkha origin. The gardens collectively produce about 10 to 11 million kilograms i.e 22 million Pounds of tea every year.

**Table No: 2. 3**

**Valley Wise List of Gardens Producing Darjeeling Tea (2013)**

<b>Darjeeling East</b>	<b>Darjeeling West</b>	<b>Kurseong North</b>	<b>Kurseong South</b>	<b>Mirik</b>	<b>Rongbong</b>	<b>Teesta Valley</b>
Singtom	Badamtam	Rungmook	Longview	Gayabaree	Gopaldhara	Tukdah
Orange Valley	Ging	Oaks	Makaibari	Singbulli	Chamong	Rangli Rangliot
Reeshihal	Bannockburn	Ringtong	Goomtee	Phuguri	Selimbong	Namring
Chongtong	Phoobsering	Margaret's Hope	Jungpana	Soureni	Sungma	Geille
Lingia	Pandam	Singcll	Mahaldiram	Thurbo	Nagri	Teesta Valley
Tumsong	Tukvar	Monleviot	Mohan Majua	Okayti	Nagrilmarm	Samabeong
Mim	North Tukvar	Amboolia	Malootar	Seeyok	Avengrooe	Ambiok
Pussimbing	Vah Tukvar	Springside	Sivitar		Dhajea	Mission Hill
Dootcriah	Soom	Castleton	Nurbong		Turzum	Kumai

Kalej Valley	Happy Valley	Dilaram	Nabarda Majua			Upper Fagu
Poobong	Rungneet	Edenvale	Rohini			Glenburn
Moondakotee	Rangaroon	Balasan	Giddapahar			Peshok
Stienlhal	Aloobari		Tindharia			Lopchu
Liza Hill	Barnesbeg		Sepoydhura			
Arya			Selim Hill			
Mary Bong						

Source: To be published Status Report on Darjeeling Tea by J.P. Gurung, conducted by Gorkha Territorial Administration (G.T.A).

The largest tea concern in Darjeeling District was that of the Darjeeling Tea Company Limited which used to own about four gardens, established between 1860 and 1864. These gardens were Ambutia, Ging, Takda and Phubserang. The headquarters of the company was in London, its local management was vested in the hands of superintendent, with five European assistants. The total area held by the Company in 1872 was 8547 acres, of which 1300 acres were under plantation. The number of laborers employed on the Company's garden was on an average, one to every acre of cultivated ground. This was the average for the year, a larger number of hands were employed during the manufacturing season, from March to November, and a smaller number during the months when no tea was made. The laborers were paid at the rate of about Rs.3 per month for children, up to Rs.5 or Rs.5.8 for able-bodied men. As a rule the laborers were readily procurable; the majority was Nepali immigrants, the remainder being made up of Lepchas, Bhutias, and tribals/Adivasis from the plains. These people were encouraged to settle down permanently on Company's gardens, by assigning to them small plots of land unsuited for tea, for the cultivation of cereal crops, such as maize, millet etc.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> W.W. Hunter, *Statistical Account of Bengal*, Government Printing Press, Calcutta, 1874, p116.

The following table indicates the prices of Darjeeling tea from 1910 to 1940, which have been somewhat erratic. But at present the prices of Darjeeling tea varies from one tea estate to another, prices ranging from Rs.600 to Rs. 8,000 per kg approximately.<sup>29</sup>

**Table No: 2. 4**

**Prices of Darjeeling tea from 1910 to 1940**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Prices at Calcutta Auction Sales Per lb and Rs.</b>
1910	8.9 (6.5 to 10.3)
1915	10.9 (7.11 to 11.10)
1920	7.5
1925	16.0
1930	14.9
1935	12.2
1940	16.0

Source: A.J. Dash, Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling, 1947, p 115

Most of the tea plantation areas in Darjeeling have the China variety, which was for many years considered the only kind suited for the production of fine tea. Of late, the variety known as the “Assam indigenous” has been much in favour, and is certainly capable of producing the very finest tea; but is very delicate, and with anything like rough treatment soon becomes so weak as to be unremunerative. A good hybrid from these two varieties later proved most suitable all round. Some fields were even planted with the “Manipur indigenous” which was the most hardy of all the varieties, and gave a good yield, but the tea produced was almost invariably coarse and rank in flavor.<sup>30</sup>

All teas produced in the tea growing areas of India, including Darjeeling, are administered by the Tea Board, India under the Tea Act, 1953. Since its establishment, the Tea Board has sole control over the growing and exporting of Darjeeling tea and it is this control which has given rise to the reputation enjoyed by Darjeeling tea. The Tea

<sup>29</sup> Based on I.T.A (Indian Tea Association) Report, 2013

<sup>30</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit., p76.



Board has been engaged on a world-wide basis in the protection and preservation of this treasured icon of India's cultural heritage as a geographical indication. To assist the Tea Board in its role of authenticating regional origin of Darjeeling tea, it has developed the hallmark known as the Darjeeling Logo.

The Darjeeling logo is a hallmark of excellence launched in 1986. The Darjeeling logo has come to represent high quality muscatel flavored tea with the unmistakable class that only Darjeeling can offer. The logo is a significant landmark in the history of the tea industry. Conceptualized by the Association in Darjeeling and launched in International and Domestic markets by the Tea Board it guarantees genuine Darjeeling tea, tasted and packed for the connoisseurs of tea throughout the world.

#### **2. 4: PIONEER TEA PLANTERS AND ENTREPRENEURS:**

A meticulous study of the plantation industry of India and its spectacular growth shows that in the first phase the tea industry was pre-occupied by the Europeans Entrepreneurs. Amongst the European entrepreneurs it was the Scottish and British planters who have shown their extraordinary courage in founding the plantation industry in the region.

It is an obvious thing to question as to why would Britishers come all the way from England to a place like Darjeeling where no infrastructure was developed as such at that time. But one must notice a fact that in the early days, only those Englishmen who failed to make it as soldiers, sailors, clerks and by default, with nothing else to loose and nowhere to go, took up life as a "tea planter"<sup>31</sup>. But at the same time there were many British planters who did take a deep interest and pain in growing the gardens and genuine concern for the welfare of the laborers actually became the real pioneers of the Darjeeling Tea Industry.

Around 1841, a small band of Moravian (German) missionaries had come to Darjeeling to spread Christianity. Later they settled around the Tukvar area with the intention of funding their mission with the 'Sweat of their brow' but they just could not compete with local labour. After the death of their British sponsor Rev. William Stuart, a

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<sup>31</sup> Basant B. Lama, op. cit., p130

Baptist, who brought them to Darjeeling, these missionaries, in order to sustain their lives, began planting tea and unwittingly became pioneers in the Darjeeling tea industry. Their gardens are still known today as the “*Padre Kamans*” (Garden of Priests).<sup>32</sup>

It is believed that the Wernicke<sup>33</sup> family was the pioneers to introduce tea in the Darjeeling district on a commercial basis. One of the original ancestors of this family had personally visited China to obtain the seeds and plants.<sup>34</sup>

In 1919, after retirement from the Army Lt. Col. Hannangan began his career as a tea planter’s assistant to the late Mr. E.A Wernickle, managing Proprietor of the then Bannockburn Tea Estate. Slowly other missionary people also entered Darjeeling, Rev.W. Start was one of them, who actually made the first attempt to reach the hill people through English education. In 1840 he started his mission on the site where now lies by the manager’s bungalow of the Takvar Tea. Co. Ltd. Later he also opened a school for Lepchas in Darjeeling.<sup>35</sup> Soon other missionary groups like Niebels, the Stolkes and others also joined the Wernickes in the noble cause. Thus we can attribute the introduction of educational institutes in Darjeeling to the incoming of the plantation industry in the area.

Among the Indian planters Bipra Das was one of the pioneers named in the plantation of tea. Tea gardens like Gayabari, Tindharia and Mohurgang were entirely his own achievements. Bhagat Bir Rai also planted tea in 1845 in Samripani, which is a division of Dhootriah Tea Estate at present. In 1950 he secured the proper ties of Saurani and Phuguri and planted tea. But his descendants sold all the gardens to European Planters before 1910. Kamal Krishna Haldar of Barrackpur who was the first “Tahasildar” manager of Maharjadhiraja Bahadur Mahatab Chand of Burdwan in Darjeeling also planted Kamalpur Tea Estate near Bagdogra in Terai in late 1950s.

The role played by the pioneers of tea prior to independence of India in 1947, is a saga of courage, entrepreneurship and determination. Sir Percival Griffiths, in his

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p132

<sup>33</sup> Wernicke: The Wernickes were originally Moravian missionaries.

<sup>34</sup> D.G. Banerjee and Srijeet Banerjee, *Darjeeling Tea – The Golden Brew*, International Book Distributing Co, Lucknow, 2007, p11

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p14

‘History of the Indian Tea Industry’ (London, 1967) - describes the first planters as having had ‘to hew their way through track less Jungles to cope with disease and the ravages of wild beasts, to recruit and maintain the morale of the workers from distant provinces, and last, but not the least, to learn the technique of tea cultivation and manufacture’.

In conclusion, a word may be said about the planter, the man on whom the responsibility control of the manufacture, the management of the large labour force employed, the construction of roads in the Estates, and often the erection of the buildings. He must therefore combine, as far possible, the knowledge and skill of an agriculturist, engineer, architect, and even, to some extent, of a doctor; and above all, he must have firm control over his laborers; the art of management, and generally the power of conduct. In the hills they constitute the agency for the construction and repair of roads, the establishment of schools and the improvement of sanitation; and in the words of a former Lieutenant – Governor of Bengal, they are the backbone of the British Government in the district.<sup>36</sup>

## **2. 5: RECRUITMENT OF WORKERS**

One of the biggest problems faced by the planters at the time of the introduction of the tea industry was the recruitment of large numbers of laborers, as plantation industry is a labour intensive industry. During that time, Darjeeling region was sparsely populated. So the Britishers had to recruit laborers from various parts of India and the neighboring countries. Another reason for this was that the Sikkim Rajah had forbidden his subjects to work for the British and Lepchas were far too independent to bother about jobs as their needs were few their wants even fewer and were happy with their simple way of living. So, under compulsion Britishers forcibly rounded up natives from the Chotta Nagpur hill forest areas of the Deccan Plateau and brought them to Darjeeling as bonded labor to work on the tea plantations. As they came from the same altitude; the Britishers presumed that they could adapt to the weather, but they could not cope with the cold and damp of the Darjeeling hills so finally left from the hill areas and ultimately

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<sup>36</sup> LSS O’Malley, op. cit., p86

settle down in Terai areas and many of them went as far as Dooars region. Again the Britishers had to face labour problem. This time they turned to Nepal for Nepali workers who were known to be famous for their cheerful and hardworking nature.

But again because of poor sanitation, improper water supply and inadequate medical treatment, plantation workers used to run away from the gardens and managers went around the villages with money in bags to allure the workers and discourage them from running away from the gardens. This was the annual occurrence during the winter months as then having no bridges in the rivers, workers used to run away in winter times from the gardens.<sup>37</sup>

Recruitment system in the tea plantation of North Bengal region was different from that of Assam. The Labourers were never placed under any contract and in that sense they were free. Recruitment in this area was done mainly through garden *Sardars*. The *Arkattis* who were the intermediaries (recruiters) between the planters and the laborers played an important role in the recruitment of laborers. The *Sardars* on the other hand were tea garden laborers and not local recruiters like *Arkattis*. They were sent to the recruiting grounds in the recruiting season which generally began after the rains in October or November and ended in February.

Each garden had a team of *Sardars* and *Gallawalas* (labour recruiters) who went to Nepal and Sikkim to recruit laborers during the winter season. The Darjeeling Planters Association even had to bring out a standing order to stop enticement of workers of one garden for another garden. The recruiters used to get Rs.10 each respectively as recruiting bonus. After being brought to the gardens, the workers were tied down in such a way that they became almost like bonded labor. In order to achieve this end a para-military force known as North Bengal Mounted Rifles (N.B.M.R) was kept at the plantations.<sup>38</sup>

Around 1907, the average rate of wages for men was Rs.6, for women it was Rs.4 to 8 and for children Rs.3 to Rs.2 per month; but in addition to wages, they used to get living quarters in the garden, often with water laid on and free medical attendance and

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<sup>37</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, op. cit., p202

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p202

medicine.<sup>39</sup> But the present scenario is very different with workers being denied of even the basic facilities like plastic shoes (Gumboot), umbrellas made out of bamboo (*Ghum*), canvas to wrap their clothes during heavy rain (*Barsati*), basket to carry tea leaves (*Doko*) etc.

Ironical to the amount of inflation that has happened in the recent years, the tea garden laborers of Darjeeling region are only getting Rs. 90 per day as their wage. Several meetings and talks between labour unions, the tea garden management and the State Government are going on but still have failed to achieve anything for the laborers who are the heart and soul of the tea gardens of Darjeeling region.

Today more than 30% of Darjeeling's land is under tea plantation. The industry provides employment directly and indirectly to about 50% of the population in the district. And 50% of the directly employed workers are women.<sup>40</sup> Next to Assam, West Bengal is the second largest tea growing state accounting for 22% of the total area under tea cultivation and 22% of total production of the country.<sup>41</sup>

## **2. 6: CONCLUSION**

Tea was one of the most important items of the British consumption. And it is for this reason that the British government took extra effort in the development and promotion of it. But over the years especially after 1990s, Darjeeling tea is not only losing its position in the global market but also its colour and flavour. Various reasons have been attributed to it by Miss Smritima Diksha Lama in her article 'Darjeeling Tea Industry: Implications of Globalization Triggered Fair –Trading'. They are as follow:

- Emergence of new growers like Vietnam, Indonesia and Kenya resulting in an oversupply of tea in the international market.

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<sup>39</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit., p84.

<sup>40</sup> Roshan Rai and Subash Ranjan Chakroborty, 'Two Leaves and a Bud – Tea and Social Justice in Darjeeling', Bose, Pradip kumar and Das, Kumar Samir, *State Of Justice In India- Issues of social Justice*, Volume 1, SAGE Publication, India Pvt Ltd. New Delhi, 2009, p74

<sup>41</sup> Debabrata Mitra, *Globalization And Industrial Relations In Tea Plantations – A Study On Dooars Region Of West Bengal*, Abhijeet Publications, Delhi, 2010, p18.

- Indian tea is losing its position in the export market as a result of high production cost and poor quality.
- Higher production cost as a result of expenditure on fixed expenses like fuel, power and labor.
- Tea is mostly sold through auction in which price realization is doubtful as the brokers are said to be in cooperation with the big buyers to keep prices low.
- Existence of higher percentage of ageing bushes leading to decrease productivity and degradation in quality.
- There also appears to be a lack of sufficient and up-to date statistics regarding the tea sector without which proper planning and fund utilization is not possible.

Keeping this critical crisis situation of the Indian tea industry in perspective, when we look at the Darjeeling tea industry, we find that the Darjeeling tea industry has been facing much varied and localized crises that need very specific intervention and specialized redressal.<sup>42</sup>

The other problems faced by the tea plantation in the Darjeeling hills pertains to the tea garden workers who have been marginalized in many aspect of their social and economic life. During the British period, the tea plantation workers of Darjeeling hills were treated as '*Kamane* or *Coolies*'<sup>43</sup> living under the complete sovereignty of 'Gora Sahibs'<sup>44</sup> assisted by ignorant 'Sardars' who use to lure their respective caste and tribal workers from the agrarian belts of Darjeeling, Dooars, Terai, other places of Eastern Himalayas and even from Nepal. The Gorkha Sardars felt fortunate to get the post of Sardars at the plantations as they got '*Bakshis*'<sup>45</sup> for recruiting workers/laborers for the management. Even today the management indoctrinates the workers with the idea that the tea plantations are their colonies and estates where workers are taught to be the slaves of

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<sup>42</sup> Smritima Diksha Lama, 'Darjeeling Tea Industry: Implications of Globalisation Triggered Fair – Trading', in Mahendra P. Lama and others (ed), *Globalisation and Cultural Practices in Mountain Areas – Dynamics, Dimensions and Implication*, Sikkim university Press in Association with Indus Pub. Co., New Delhi, Gangtok, 2012, p129.

<sup>43</sup> Kamane or Coolies: Nepali term used to refer the Tea Garden Labourers.

<sup>44</sup> Gora Sahib: Nepali term used to refer to the European White Tea managers.

<sup>45</sup> Bakshis: Nepali term used to denote reward in terms of money or kind.

the managers.<sup>46</sup> In addition to this, the population in the plantation industry started growing and in order to meet the situation the planters started implementing ‘Contract Clause’ of Bengal Act III of 1915 which provided not only for the recruitment of laborers but also incorporated provisions of labour retrenchment. Thus from 1930 onwards, many workers were retrenched from tea plantations in the name of ‘*Hatta Bahira*’ system.<sup>47</sup> The system of *Hatta Bahira* might have thrown the laborers into more precarious condition. Although Darjeeling Plantations were not characterized with indentured labour like Assam but there existed to some extent, coerced labour.<sup>48</sup>

Theoretically Darjeeling tea industry is the mainstay of the economy in the hills and therefore promises to provide a rewarding way of life which provides to its workers a steady livelihood, housing, statutory benefits, allowance, incentives, crèches for infants of working mothers, children’s education, integrated residential medical facilities for employees and their families and many more. But in reality this is not the case. The laborers, who are the heart and the soul of the plantation industry still do not have the basic facilities like housing, education, allowance, incentives, and medical facilities, which they deserve. Although these people have been living in the areas for more than hundred years they still do not have any documents of their land holdings. So, if any worker goes against the management, they have the right to throw them from their land holdings. In 1951 government of India had tried to take an initiative by passing the Plantation Labour Act (P.L.A) in order to address the sufferings of the laborers, but it hardly had any effects on them. It is high time now that both central and state governments should work on the various issues of the plantation laborers and try to solve them.

Introduction of the Tea plantation industry in the later half of the nineteenth century was one of the major events in the history of the Darjeeling region. It was soon followed by the other major activities like introduction of Railways, construction of

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<sup>46</sup> Pawan Gurung, ‘Marginalization of Tea Workers in Darjeeling’, In Dinesh Chandra Ray and Bishal Chhetri, *Discourses on Darjeeling Hills*, (edited book) Gama Publication, Darjeeling, 2014, p157

<sup>47</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, op. cit., p203

<sup>48</sup> Rasaily, Rinju. *Labour and Health in Tea Plantations: A Case Study of Phuguri Tea Estate, Darjeeling*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 2003, p293

roads, ropeways, bridges etc and finally the establishment of missionary schools and colleges. The construction of the railways and roads in Darjeeling, as in other parts of the country was introduced by the British in order to enhance their economic benefits by being able to transport raw materials, cash crops and plantation crops from the remotest villages to the presidencies of British India. Thus we can say that the development of Darjeeling in the nineteenth century was largely due to the introduction of the plantation industry in the region by the Britishers, though they were only interested in the profit rather than the growth and development of the area. However, the present scenario reflects a sad picture, tea plantations which was the very reason to have initiated the development and modernization process to Darjeeling is now lagging behind as underdeveloped and marginalized in the Darjeeling region. The wages of the tea garden laborers remains a meager Rs 90 per day even after many efforts by the workers' union and political parties to increase the wages of the workers. It is high time that the state and the central government arise from their slumber and give Darjeeling Tea, the area and the Tea Garden workers the due that they deserve.



## **CHAPTER: 3**

### **3: CINCHONA PLANTATION**

Cinchona is one of the plantation crops which has a history of its own. It is also known as ‘Jesuit’s Bark’ and ‘Preuvian Bark’. Cinchona is a native plant of South America, chiefly Bolivia and Peru. The bark of the Cinchona plant has the miraculous power to cure Malaria. It is for this reason that the plant has earned its name in the world. Malaria is a disease caused by a parasite called Plasmodium, which is transmitted through the bites of infected mosquitoes. In human body, the parasites multiply in the liver, and then infect red blood cells. If not treated, malaria can become life threatening by disrupting the blood supply to vital organs. The disease is widespread in tropical and subtropical regions especially around the equator.

The bark of the cinchona plant is known as *Quinquina* in French based on its name Kinakina in the Quicha language of Inca tribes of South America and Cina in Spanish. In 1742, Swedish Botanist, Carolus Linnaeus named the plant as ‘Cinchona’ after the Second Countess of Cinchon, wife of the Spanish viceroy of Peru, who was cured by the bark of the plant from Malaria.<sup>1</sup>

#### **3. 1: USES OF CINCHONA**

There are several varieties of cinchona preparation such as quinine, the alkaloids cinchonine, cinchonidine and quinidine. It is used in various forms for diseases of an exhausting nature such as malaria, small pox, gangrene, carbuncle, dysentery, typhoid and pneumonia.

As a tonic, the bark in small doses is extensively employed in cases of debility with weak heart. Powdered bark is sometimes sprinkled over the surface of unhealthy ulcers. In such a case, it acts as astringent and antiseptic.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.mungpoo.org/2011/08/mungpoo-cinchona-plantation-brief.html](http://www.mungpoo.org/2011/08/mungpoo-cinchona-plantation-brief.html)

<sup>2</sup> A.G. Adikesavan, *Economic Product Gallery*, The Director of Museum, Government Museum – EGMOPE, Madras, 1975, p54

Cinchona Ledgeriana, Cinchona Officinalis and Cinchona Succirubra (Bengali: Cinchona or Quinine), is mostly cultivated in the cinchona plantations of the Darjeeling district between 1,000 – 5,000 ft. The bark of the mentioned varieties yields quinine which is very efficacious in malarial fever. Another variety called Cinchona Tamala is mostly found between 3,000 and 5,000 ft. The leaves of this variety are stimulant and used in rheumatism and diarrhea.<sup>3</sup>

### **3. 2: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CINCHONA PLANTATION**

There have been various speculations regarding the origin of Cinchona plant. However it is an accepted fact that the plant was originally known to the Inca tribes of Peru. It is for this reason that Cinchona plant is known as ‘Peruvian Bark’. It is also known as ‘Jesuit’s Bark’ because the antipyretic properties of the cinchona bark was probably first known to the Jesuit Missionaries in the north western part of South America.

Botanists and plant collectors have undergone great hardship to bring the plant into cultivation. The medical value of the plant first became known in 1638 when Countess Chinchon, wife of the Spanish viceroy of Peru, was cured by the use of Cinchona bark powder. Cinchona bark was obtained from several species of Cinchona, a genus of trees belonging to the family ‘Rubiaceae’ found truly wild only in South America, but is now extensively cultivated in other parts of the world too.<sup>4</sup>

It was a Dutch expedition to South America in 1853 under Hasskarl which resulted in the introduction of the plants and seeds into Java, while the fruits of a British expedition under Clements Markham in 1859 formed the basis of the Indian Plantations. For a long time the Dutch and Indian Plantations provided the only supplies of cinchona, but within a very short period its cultivation was also undertaken in a number of other countries the chief of which were East Africa, Central America, Malaya, Australia, New Zealand, France, India, China, Korea and Russia.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Birendra Kumar Bhattacharya and others, *West Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Published by Dr. Barun De, Honorary State Editor, Calcutta, 1980, p 219

<sup>4</sup> A.G. Adikesavan, *op.cit.*, p 53

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1947, p139

In 1739, La Condamine and Jessieu of the French Scientific Expedition, which was sent to Loxa in Ecuador, succeeded in discovering the localities; where the plant was grown; but their effort to send over some of these plants ended disastrously for the whole consignment was washed off the deck of the vessel during a severe storm. Their researches in this direction established that there were 14 or 15 different varieties of cinchona. Ecuador was the house of the 'Red Bark' (*Cinchona Succirubra*); Loxa produced its cinchona officinalis; further south the 'Grey Yielding Bark' (*Cinchona Calisaya*) came into prominence on the drug being extracted from it in 1820. A period of quiescence then followed until the eminent French Chemist Waddell, between the years 1843-1845 found the yellow bark tree indigenous in Bolivia and Brazil at an elevation of 6,000 and 5,000 feet, respectively.<sup>6</sup>

### **3. 3: HISTORY OF CINCHONA PLANTATION IN INDIA**

As early as 1819 Dr. Ainslie insisted upon the introduction of the cinchona plant into India but as usual the government of India took 99 years to wake up to its responsibilities in this direction. Again in 1839, Dr. Royle (the only exponent on the fibers of India) pressed its introduction into Bengal, but no action appears to have been taken until the year 1857 when the Secretary of State for India appointed Mr. Clements Robert Markham to obtain and furnish India with supplies of the cinchona tree<sup>7</sup>.

It must be noted that the establishment of the cinchona plantations in India was largely due to the efforts of Mr. Markham. With the outbreak of the Revolt of 1857 in India, thousands of British soldiers were dying not just due to war but also because of Malaria. Along with this the refusal of Dutch planters from Java to supply adequate cinchona products (medicines) to the colonial government, led Lord Canning the then Viceroy of India to direct Mr. Markham to start cinchona plantation in India.<sup>8</sup>

The bulk of the material from Markham's expedition was taken to Ootacamund (Uttakamund hills or Ooty) in the Nilgiris, where William Graham McIvor

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<sup>6</sup> E.C. Dozey, *A Concise History of The Darjeeling District Since 1835, With a Complete Itinerary of Tours in Sikkim and The District*, Bibliophil, Kolkata, 2012, p214

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p215

<sup>8</sup> Khemraj Sharma, 'Trade Union Movement in Cinchona Plantation of Darjeeling Hill', in R.K. Bhadra and Mita Bhadra ed., *Plantation Labours Of North-East India*, N.L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, 1997, p129

(Superintendent of the new Ootacamund Horticulture Gardens in Nilgiri Hills in 1848) with great zeal and energy set about the formation of a cinchona plantation.<sup>9</sup> Later on in 1871, the plants had to be shifted to Annamalai hills (South India) due to its favorable climate and availability of adequate labour force. In 1943, a factory was established at Annamalai. However, the tremendous efforts of the British Government to open Cinchona Plantations in the Khasi hills (Meghalaya) reaped no good harvest due to the non - availability of cheap labour force. It is believed that the local people of Khasi hills did not help the planters in providing adequate labour force in the plantations.<sup>10</sup>

### **3. 4. i: CINCHONA PLANTATION IN BENGAL WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DARJEELING**

The cultivation of cinchona in Darjeeling was commenced as early as in 1861 – 1862. In fact since 1835, the experiment of cultivating cinchona in the hills of the Bengal Presidency started. The first cinchona seeds received in Bengal were sent by Sir J. Hooker, in 1861, to Dr. Thomas Anderson, the then Superintendent of Royal Botanical Garden, Sibpur, Calcutta, who conducted all the cinchona experiment in Bengal until he left in 1869.<sup>11</sup> In 1861 he was deputed to Java to study the methods adopted by the Dutch for the plantation of cinchona. He returned with a large number of healthy plants, some of which were retained for Bengal, the rest being sent to Ootacamud. In the meantime plants were raised in Calcutta from the seeds supplied by the Royal Botanic Gardens. The Bengal experiment finally started with plants from Java, from Ootacamud and a few from the Calcutta gardens.<sup>12</sup>

Accordingly, Dr. Thomas Anderson tried to set up the project first at the Terai areas of Darjeeling District and Kurseong sub-division. After putting fruitless efforts in Kurseong sub-division, he went up to Darjeeling and started planting the plants at Senchal area. But due to its extreme cold weather conditions he had to remove the plants

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p139

<sup>10</sup> Khemraj Sharma, *Socio-Economic Life Of Cinchona Plantation Workers In India*, N.L. publishers, Dibrugarh, 1997, p2

<sup>11</sup> LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1907, p122

<sup>12</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p139

to Lebong spurs at the elevation of 6,000 feet.<sup>13</sup> There too, the plants could not survive. Here also the climate proved to be too rigorous for the plants and a substitute had to be looked for. The task proved difficult as most of the land in Darjeeling was, by then, already taken by the tea plantation.<sup>14</sup> During the first half of 1861, Dr. Anderson started surveying the areas east of Darjeeling town towards Ghoom, Jorebunglow, Ten Mile, Davaipani, Gimlang and finally in 1862 at Ranjuvalley spurs of Mungpoo region which was then under the ownership of a Kazi of Sikkim.<sup>15</sup> It proved to be a permanent plantation space that was present at twelve miles south east from Darjeeling, at Rangbi, on the south-eastern slope of a long spur projecting from Senchal at an elevation between 1,300 and 4,000 feet above the sea.<sup>16</sup>

Here the cultivation, on an extensive scale, of those species of cinchona which contain quinine and allied febrifuge alkaloids in their bark began in 1864. The plantation was started with one hundred plants each of *Cinchona Succirubra* and *Cinchona Officials*, and two plants of *Cinchona Calisaya*, at an elevation of about 4,000 feet. By 1864 there were only 523 plants in Mungpoo as against 1,65,000 in South India. But since then the Mungpoo plantation steadily expanded and a quinine making factory was also set up there from where quinine was supplied not only to the rest of Bengal but to various parts of India as well.<sup>17</sup> The stock of plants rapidly increased, so that ten years after the inception of the undertaking, there were nearly three million trees in existence, mostly of *Cinchona Succirubra*, and the original clearing on the slope of the Rangbi had been extended in a south easterly direction to the Rishop and Mungpoo ridges in the Rangjo valley, while new extensions, comprising in 1881 about 750 acres, had been opened at Labdah on the north and Sitong on the southern slope of the Rayeng Valley.<sup>18</sup>

The Ranju Valley therefore proved to be the most suitable place ecologically or otherwise because of the availability of adequate cheap labor force for clearing the dense

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<sup>13</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit., p122

<sup>14</sup> Karubaki Dutta, 'The Cinchona Plantation in Darjeeling – Its Introduction and the First Phase of Expansion. 1863-1924', in M. Das Gupta ed., *The Himalayan Miscellany*, Centre of Himalayan Studies, N.B.U., Volume 4, March 1990, p47

<sup>15</sup> Khemraj Sharma, op. cit., p3

<sup>16</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit., p122

<sup>17</sup> Karubaki Dutta, op. cit., p48

<sup>18</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit. p123

forests and cultivating the plants. However, after 1876, the Ranju Valley spur was to be completely abandoned for the fear of wild animals and it was shifted to Rambhi areas of Mungpoo region. Finally in 1874, a Quinine factory was established at Mungpoo.<sup>19</sup> Considering its increasing global popularity, other Cinchona plantations were also established in Monsong (1900), Rongo (1938) and Latpancher (1943) areas of Darjeeling hills.<sup>20</sup>

By the combined efforts of Markham and Anderson, Cinchona plantation was started in 1861 in the Nilgiris, and nurseries started at Dimsong in Sikkim and Senchal in Darjeeling in the following year. By 1878, the plot at Dimsong covered 2,200 acres and yielded a considerable amount of bark, the crop amounting to no less than 3,40,000 Ibs; at the latter the elevation proving unfavourable another habitation was allotted at Mungpoo (5,200 feet) in 1863 in the Riang Valley, which was 18 miles south east of Darjeeling and 5 miles east of Serail. Its cultivation was intensified in 1864 on Dr. Anderson assuming the charge of the Forest Department and in 1881 new plots was laid out at Labdah and Sitong on the southern slopes of the same valley. The cultivation was further increased owing to the great demand for quinine in Bengal. In 1890 there were about four and half million plants (some eventually attaining a height of 30 feet) yielding quinine and febrifuge. Yet with all these colossal numbers, the demands made on the bark were found to be insufficient for the needs of India, and so much bark was imported from Java up to the close of 1914.<sup>21</sup>

Because of the excessive demand of the plant, in the year 1887, a total of 300 acres of land was taken on lease at Rongchong valley situated opposite of the Mungpoo cinchona plantation, in addition to the 12,000 acres of land, already under cultivation of cinchona. Again in 1893, another 500 acres of land was purchased at Namring valley from the Bhutia Cinchona Association. Keeping in view of its importance and demand, in 1900 a new cinchona plantation was started at Munsong (Kalimpong) with 8,000 acres of land. Similarly, in 1938 the third cinchona plantation with 1,600 acres of land was

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<sup>19</sup> Khemraj Sharma, op. cit.,p3

<sup>20</sup> Khemraj Sharma, 'Trade Union Movement in Cinchona Plantation of Darjeeling Hill', in R.K. Bhadra and Mita Bhadra ed., *Plantation Labours Of North-East India*, N.L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, 1997, p130

<sup>21</sup> E.C. Dozey, op. cit., p216

established at the Rongo block of Kalimpong sub-division. Finally in 1943, the fourth cinchona plantation was opened at Latpancher (Kurseong) with 2,000 acres of land.<sup>22</sup>

Actually, the first phase of expansion was complete by the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet the amount was brought down till 1924 because the need for the Second phase of extension was considered for the first time in 1924 and it was affected only in 1930s when some new blocks were opened as already stated above.<sup>23</sup>

### **3. 4. ii: EXPANSION AND PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF THE PLANTATION**

The Cinchona plantation both in North and South India were initially owned by the Government. However, later the private growers were also allured by the prospects of profit that could be made from the Cinchona plantation. The Government encouraged the venture, freely distributed plants and seeds and provided facilities to the visitors to inspect the nurseries and plantation works. In the Wynad district of south India the coffee planters put out many trees of *Succiruba* as shade. However while some information is available about the private plantation in the South, Government publications are silent about the private growers in the North. But there is no doubt about the fact that Cinchona did attract the attention of the private growers in the North as well, specially the owners of the land in the neighborhood of the Government plantations. In some of the available documents of the period there is mention of a plantation financed by a private company that began almost simultaneously with that of Mungpoo. There are references to private plantations in both Bhutan and Sikkim too.<sup>24</sup>

The high profits yielded by cinchona led to a rush among the private planters and an enormous acreage was brought under it which was very much in excess to the actual requirements. Between 1880 and 1890 there was a tremendous overproduction of bark from these plantations which in turn led to a great drop in prices and a heavy decline in average. This was a global trend, the worst affected country being Ceylon where between 1885 and 1887 about 30 million lbs of bark were placed on the market and

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<sup>22</sup> Khemraj Sharma, *op. cit.*, p3

<sup>23</sup> Karubaki Dutta, *op. cit.*, p48

<sup>24</sup> A. Wilson and T. J. Mirchandani, Report on the Prospects of Cinchona Cultivation in India, 1939, p5, mentioned in Karubaki Dutta, *op. cit.*, p48

where 30,000 acres went out of cultivation after the crash. India did not remain unaffected by this global phenomenon. It is estimated that no less than 5000 acres of cinchona belonging to private enterprises went out of cultivation during this period. Since we do not have any reference to the private enterprises in Darjeeling but still it may not be wrong to assume that cinchona in those areas also went out of cultivation following this crash.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Government plantation at Mungpoo remained unaffected by the problems that closed down the private enterprises and the acreage under it was extended steadily during the period. As early as 1880 the land near the original plantation was found to be too small for the number of trees which were required to keep pace with the increasing demand for febrifuge and quinine and accordingly the first outlying plantation was started in Ranjung valley in Kalimpong, However, the rainfall here was found to be too heavy to let the plants grow successfully. Finally the plantation was exhausted and was given up in 1896. The possibility of extending the plantation in some other direction began to be considered since 1897. For this, the Government first considered the forest known as the Enggo block, which was till then held as a cinchona reserve. But when inspected, it was also proved to be unsatisfactory due to heavy rainfall and finally in 1899 it was decided to convert a portion of the Dumsong forest block into a cinchona reserve. After the decision was taken, commencement was at once made for an extension there of the Government plantation. This division was then renamed as the Munsong division.<sup>26</sup> Thus again the government took over the full responsibility of the Cinchona plantation of Darjeeling region and still is responsible for its growth and management.

### **3. 5: DIFFERENT SPECIES OF CINCHONA**

When the initial difficulties like proper land for cultivation and adequate supply of seeds were overcome, the plantation grew and small harvests of bark began to come in from the year 1869-70. The plantation had started with five species of cinchona such as *Succirubra*, *Officinalis*, *Panudiana*, *Micrantha* and *Calisaya*. At first, *Succirubra*

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p50

<sup>26</sup> Annual Report on the Government Cinchona Plantations and Factory in Bengal, 1897-98, p5, mentioned in Karubaki Dutta, op. cit., pp50-51



established itself as the most suitable species and this was the variety officially encouraged in Bengal, while in Java the Dutch were rapidly developing as the best yielder of quinine the 'Calisaya' and more especially a variety of it called the Ledgeriana. Subsequent experience established Ledgeriana also as a very suitable species for Bengal but Succirubra held the field until sometime between 1880 and 1890 when more attention was given to quinine as the best of the alkaloid drugs and to Ledgeriana as the best source of quinine, in preference to 'Cinchona Febrifuge' a mixture of all the alkaloids of the cinchona bark for which Succirubra was considered to be a more profitable source.

By the year 1947, the Bengal plantations concentrated mainly on Ledgeriana together with a small proportion of a hybrid of Ledgeriana and Succirubra which was obtained by cross breeding two species about the year 1900. In the Nilgiri Hills and other parts of Madras they had not been so successful with Ledgeriana, The species mainly cultivated being Robusta, Officinalis and Succirubra. Robusta was a good yielder and was specially adapted to higher elevations and its introduction into Bengal also gave a good result.<sup>27</sup>

### **3. 6: GOVERNMENT EFFORTS TOWARDS THE CINCHONA PLANTATION AND THEIR AIMS**

The main aim of the British government towards the maintenance and development of the cinchona plantations was to supply the hospitals and the people with a cheap remedy for Malarial fever, which had already started, consisted up to 1887 of the preparation of cinchona bark, called cinchona Febrifuge, a whitish powder composed of the alkaloids existing in the bark.<sup>28</sup>

In addition to this, the government officials were aware of the possibility of huge profit from the cinchona plantation. Between the years 1939 – 1944 the income from cinchona plantation of Mungpoo was rupees 20,00,775. And immediately after independence in the year 1948 the West Bengal Government had earned Rupees Thirty

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<sup>27</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p140

<sup>28</sup> LSS O'Malley, op. cit, 1907, p124

Lakhs from quinine alone. But after independence, the reign of administration of cinchona plantation of Mungpoo went into the hands of Babus at Writers Building (State Government). In spite of acquiring requisite knowledge and experience, the sons and daughters of the soil were denied of catching up with the helm of affairs in the management and policy decision in regard to the cinchona plantation.<sup>29</sup>

### **3. 7: EARLY YEARLY HARVESTS OF QUININE**

Quinine is a bitter alkaloid extracted from cinchona bark. Quinine occurs naturally in the bark of the cinchona tree, though nowadays it has also been synthesized in the laboratory. In 1887, the manufacture of sulphate of quinine was commenced in the Mungpoo factory by a process of extraction by fusel oil elaborated by Mr. Wood, formerly Quinologist, and Mr. Gammie, the Deputy Superintendent of the plantations. From 1887 onwards the factory has continued to produce, in addition to cinchona Febrifuge, sulphate of quinine increasing year after year; and in around 1907, the factory was even extended in order to reach the yearly target of a minimum of 20,000 pounds. The issue of sulphate of quinine in 1887 – 88 was about 250 lbs, and in 1905 – 06 the output was nearly 16,000 lbs. In 1892 a system of selling sulphate of quinine to the public through the post offices in small packets, containing 5 grains (subsequently increased to 7 grains) at the price of one *paise* per packet was instituted, so as to enable even the poorest native to purchase a dose of the drug. In 1892 – 93, 475 lbs, in 1900 – 01 3,400 lbs and in 1905 – 06, 4200 lbs of sulphate of quinine were issued for the purpose.<sup>30</sup>

### **3. 8: GROWTH AND MANAGEMENT**

Ever since its inception in 1864 Mungpoo Cinchona plantation was under the control and management of Botanical Garden of Calcutta (Sibpur). Then it went under the Control of Forest and Excise Department till 1945. In 1946, it was transferred to the Ministry of Trade and Commerce of Government of West Bengal.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> D. S. Bomjan, Darjeeling-Dooars People and Place under Bengal's Neo-Colonial Rule, Bikash Jana Sahitya Kendra, Darjeeling, 2008, p22

<sup>30</sup> LSS O'Malley, Op. cit., p124

<sup>31</sup> Khemraj Sharma, Op. cit., p22

The Superintendent of Mungpoo Cinchona plantation was the overall in charge of the plantation during the first two decades. There was only one Manager below the Superintendent in the plantation. The manager had to supervise with the help of Assistant Manager, Quinologist, *Sardar* and *Gallawalas* besides two office staff. There was an Assistant Manager who had to supervise the roles and responsibilities of the Sardars and Gallawalas. With the establishment of Mungpoo Cinchona plantation in 1900, there was a slight modification made in the management hierarchy. As a result Mungpoo was made the Directorate of Cinchona Plantations. After that a separate Manager was appointed for the Munsong division alone. Similarly, a new post of Assistant Superintendent was created at Mungpoo Cinchona Plantation. The Assistant Superintendent was to assist the Superintendent of Cinchona plantation at Mungpoo. Again in the year 1940, a new post of General Manager was created at Mungpoo Cinchona Plantation. It is quite interestingly noted that till 1937, all the top ranking managerial personnel were the Britishers from England. And it was only during the thirties of the twentieth century that a few clerical staff were nominated from Bengal and Bihar plains.<sup>32</sup> The following table gives a clear picture of the management of the cinchona plantation.

**Table No.: 3. 1: Superintendents of Cinchona Plantation, East India Company, Mungpoo**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Date of Joining	Date of Leaving
1	Dr. Thomas Anderson	Superintendent	1861	1869
2	Mr. C. B. Clarke	Superintendent	1869	1871
3	Captain George	Superintendent	1871	1897
4	Mr. David Prain	Superintendent	1897	1905
5	Lt. Col. Gage	Superintendent	1906	1923
6	Mr. C. C. Calder	Superintendent	1923	1937
7	Dr. K. Biswas	Superintendent (Pre-Independence)	1937	14 <sup>th</sup> Aug. 1947
8	Dr. K. Biswas	Superintendent (Post-Independence)	15 <sup>th</sup> Aug. 1947	1955

Source: Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants, Mungpoo

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p23

**Table No.: 3. 2****Directors after 1947 of Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants,  
Government of West Bengal, Mungpoo**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Date of Joining	Date of Leaving
1	Dr. J. C. Shah	Director	1955	1974
2	Dr. S. K. Chatterjee	Director	1974	1991
3	Shri. A. F. Ramsong	Director In-charge	1991	1 <sup>st</sup> April 1991
4	Shri. B. B. Basnet	Director In-charge	1 <sup>st</sup> April 1991	1996
5	Dr.Lala P. K. Roy	Director In-charge	1996	1999
6	Sri. Anil Barma, IAS	Director In-charge	1999	2000
7	Dr. H. Mohan, IAS	Director In-charge	2001	2003
8	Dr.ArifAftab, IAS	Director In-charge	2003	2006
9	Dr. P. K. Chettri, WBCS (Exe.)	Director In-charge	2006	2008
10	Dr. G. C. Subba	Director	01 <sup>st</sup> Sep. 2008	30 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2011
11	Dr. G. C. Subba	Director In-charge	30 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 2011	Oct. 2012

Source: Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants, Mungpoo

**Table No.: 3. 3****Directors of Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants, Gorkhaland  
Territorial Administration, Mungpoo**

Sl. No.	Name	Designation	Date of Joining	Date of Leaving
1	Dr. G. C. Subba	Director In-charge	Oct.2012	2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec. 2013
2	Dr. Samuel Rai	Director	2 <sup>nd</sup> Dec. 2013	To present

Source: Directorate of Cinchona and Other Medicinal Plants, Mungpoo, 2015

From the above tables we can notice that the title/designation of the head of the cinchona plantation was changed from time to time. From 1861 to 1955 it was known as Superintendent and from 1955 it came to be known as the Director. It is sad to note that

only after 1991 i.e. more than a century later of its inception that the local people got an opportunity to hold the post of Director. And till now only four from the local Nepali have got this opportunity.

### **3. 9: RECRUITMENT OF WORKERS IN THE CINCHONA PLANTATION**

The history of labour recruitment in the cinchona plantation area gives the history of a system known as *Sardari System*. In practice the Sardars were the overall in-charge of the plantation. Each Sardar was responsible for recruitment, employment, and supervision of his workers in his division who were mainly engaged with the respective caste *Dhura* (division) in the plantation areas. Unlike the recruitment policy which had been adopted in the tea plantations of the region by following the various acts of the British Government, the Cinchona had quite a separate system of labour recruitment of its own.

Shortly after the establishment of Cinchona plantation at Mungpoo in 1862, Dr. Anderson appointed some people as the Sardars who were assigned with the responsibilities of labour recruitment, their employment and settlement in Mungpoo Cinchona Plantation. The Sardars first tried to entice the local Lepchas. But since the Lepchas were shifting cultivators, the Sardars could not catch them for employing in the plantation. Secondly, the Sardars could not recruit the Lepchas or neighboring population of tea gardens forcefully because Mungpoo was an integral part of Darjeeling hills where the various acts made for Bengal could not be applied directly as it was an excluded area to the Government of Bengal. In this respect, a few such acts relating to the labour recruitment in the plantations of Assam, Dooars and Terai belts had no implication for Mungpoo Cinchona plantation though it was a government owned plantation. For instance, the Inland Emigration Act III of 1863 of the British Government which provided that all the labour recruiters should be licensed and that every intending immigrant should be closely supervised had no meaning in Mungpoo due to the shortage of labour in the plantation. Thus, the Act was not followed in the cinchona plantations of Darjeeling region. Other similar Acts such as Workmen's Breach of Contract (Act No. VII) was also not followed in the plantation. However, as per the recommendations of Labors Enquiry Commission of 1868, which advocated for the recruitment of laborers by

the plantation themselves through the agency of the plantation Sardars, the local Sardars also started recruiting laborers in the Mungpoo Cinchona plantation.<sup>33</sup>

Hence, the recruitment in Cinchona plantation of Mungpoo was the sole responsibilities of the Sardars. Unlike in the tea plantations of Assam and Dooars or Terai belts of Bengal where the laborers were indentured from the various parts of Ranchi, Santal Parganas of Bihar, Orissa and other parts of the country, with legal security provided by the various acts, the question of recruitment in Mungpoo Cinchona plantation was little difficult as the workers were to be enticed from across the Indian borders, i.e., Nepal and Sikkim (as Sikkim was not a part of the Union of India at that time). And it is for this reason that we hardly find any Hindi, Bengali, Adivasi or Bihari speaking population in the cinchona plantations of Darjeeling region especially in Mungpoo, heart of cinchona plantation of Darjeeling making Nepali speaking people the only inhabitant of the area, as far as the labour is concerned. In addition to this; few Bengalese also settled in and around the cinchona plantation areas, who were appointed as the officers in the plantation areas.

### **3. 10: RABINDRANATH TAGORE IN THE HEART OF THE CINCHONA PLANTATION: MUNGPOO**

Apart from the Bengali officers, eminent literary figure, poet and artist, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's name is also associated with the heart of the cinchona plantation: Mungpoo. There is an interesting story how he became so attached to this place so as to visit it four times during his life time. In 1938 when the poet had come to Kalimpong, he was invited by his ardent admirer, Mrs. Maitreyee Devi, the wife of the then Bengali Director, Dr. Manmohan Sen to visit Mungpoo. It is said that he went from Rambhi to 27th Mile by train (trains used to ply there at that time, although it is completely stopped now) and from there to Mungpoo in a palanquin. Once he was there, he became so attached to the natural beauty of the place; he visited it again in 1939 and in 1941. In fact, he visited Mungpoo twice in 1941. The house where he used to stay still exists and has become Rabindranath Tagore Personalia Museum. It has become a place of pilgrimage

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<sup>33</sup> Khemraj Sharma, op. cit., p58

for the admirers of the Poet Laureate. There we can still see the articles he used during his stay viz. chair, table, bed and other items like important letters, manuscripts (photocopy) rare photographs of Gurudev with his family and friends. We can also see his paintings, water colour box and paperweight. Unfortunately, they are not taken proper care of, since this Rabindra Bhavan does not fall under the purview of any department of the State Government.<sup>34</sup> Recently even the electricity has been cut down under the charges of nonpayment of the bills.

### 3. 11: MIGRATION OF LABOURERS INTO CINCHONA PLANTATIONS

There is no doubt in the fact that the phenomenal growth of the population of Darjeeling region especially after 1872 is due to the development of the plantation industry in this region. Although there are ample sources for the migration history of tea plantation area, there is hardly any record of labour migration history in the Cinchona plantation areas. Though O'Malley states that there were about 13,507 people in Mungpoo region in the year 1947, nothing has been clearly mentioned about the total working force of cinchona plantation in Mungpoo at that time.

The introduction of cinchona plantation at Mungpoo mainly attracted a few people of eastern Nepal and Sikkim and they migrated to the plantation in search of jobs. Rest of the working population was enticed from the local people. It was in the middle of the nineteenth century that the *Tagadharis* (Upper Caste people) migrated from Nepal while the earlier immigrants were the *Matwalis* (Lower Caste people) and few Chhetris who were mainly employed as the Sardars in the plantation areas.<sup>35</sup>

In the Nepali society the Tagadharis were basically the upper castes who used to do the priestly jobs and were allowed to wear the sacred thread, which includes Bahuns, Chhetris and Thakuri. While the Matwalis were the alcohol consumer which includes Rai, Limbu, Lepcha, Subba, Sherpa, Bhutia, Dukpa, Gurung, Tamang, Thapa, Bhujels, etc.

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<sup>34</sup> Monica Mukhia, *Shraddhanjali – A Tribute To Kaviguru Rabindranath Tagore*, Gama Publication, Darjeeling, 2013, p59

<sup>35</sup> Khemraj Sharma, 1997, op. cit., p4

Most of the *Matwali* population migrated to the cinchona plantation areas during the early nineteenth century, whereas the *Tagadharis* and Untouchables (Kami, Damai and Sarki) immigrated during 1940s. As regards to the *Matwali* immigration, it seems that a good number of factors have affected together and complement one another. They have immigrated to the plantation because they wanted to get rid of the problems of poverty, scarcity of land for cultivation, population pressure and above all the imposition of rigid Hindu Brahmanical rites which was strongly patronized by the law of the land in Nepal. Socially, *Matwalis* being alcohol consumers were looked down upon by the ruling castes of Nepal. While the Tagadhari immigration was caused by the changing political situation of Nepal during the forties of the nineteenth century when they along with other *Matwali* castes and tribes began to be treated as equals in the eyes of the law in terms of socio-economic relationships. Similarly, Kami, Damais and Sarkis migrated from Nepal, considering the facilities provided by the government of India for backward scheduled casts and scheduled tribes after the independence of the country (after 1950s). While Lepchas and Dukpas immigrated mostly after the Indo-Bhutan war in 1864 when Kalimpong came within the jurisdiction of Darjeeling District<sup>36</sup>. However we should also consider the fact that these migrated populations for the first time found a livelihood and a job security which was not found in their traditional agrarian society and this also might be the reason for their migration into the cinchona plantation areas.

### 3. 12: CONCLUSION

Other than tea industry introduced by Britishers, the Cinchona plantation of Darjeeling at Mangpo, Munsong, Latpancher and Rongon in the hill areas of Darjeeling district also has a story and history of its own. The Cinchona Plantation industry came into existence in the year 1865. At present other than cinchona, the Directorate of Cinchona & Other Medicinal Plants has taken commercial cultivation of some important medicinal plants like *Ipecac*, *Roulfia*, *Chirata*, and *Dioscorea*. Along with other commercial crops like Rubber, Oranges, Cardamom etc. The Directorate has also started producing *Emetine* and *Diosgenin* in its new factories. *Ipecac* (*Cephaelis ipecacuanha*) also known as the ‘green gold’ plant that has grown on plantation scale only by the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p161



Directorate in Darjeeling Hills, and nowhere else is worth mentioning. Recently *Dioscoreacomposita* and *Dioscorea floribunda* have also for the first time been acclimatized on a plantation scale in these regions.

Cinchona was the most flourishing industry in India since its inception as the demand of medicines made from it was much higher than the production. It was grown in the Darjeeling Hill in about twelve gardens, which is locally known as cinchona *Bagans* (Plantation). The available records show that in the year 1939 - 1944 the income from cinchona plantation of Mungpo was Rs. 20, 00,775. Immediately after independence in the year 1947 the West Bengal government had earned rupees thirty lakhs from Quinine alone. But after independence, the administration of cinchona plantation of Mungpo started being monitored by the Writers Building at Kolkata. And inspite of acquiring requisite knowledge and experiences, the sons and daughters of the soil are denied of catching up with the helm of affairs in the managements and policy decisions in regard to cinchona plantation. Especially now when, the factory has been close down from 1999.

At present Cinchona industry in Darjeeling region employs about 5,360 laborers and 1,260 official staff on a permanent basis and it is cultivated in about 26,000 acres (approximately) of land. Generally it is believed that cinchona plantation in Darjeeling region is declining day by day but the ground reality shows totally different picture. As because the laborers in the cinchona plantation are getting Rs. 205.65 per day, which is more than double what the tea gardens laborers are getting (Rs. 90). So, the laborers don't have any issues with the government. However, the locals don't have any say in the management and policy decisions in regard to the plantation. In addition to this the negligence of the management and mounting corruptions had also played huge role in its deteriorating condition. It is suggested by the Trade Union leaders that if the administrative section is separated from the plantation then only the socio-economic life of the Cinchona plantation workers can be improved.

## **Chapter: 4**

### **4: GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY**

Issues related to women have become an area of great interest among researchers in the field of social sciences as nearly half of the world's population constitute of women. Their contribution to different fields cannot be ignored. Unfortunately, women are still being suppressed and oppressed in different forms of social, economic and political spheres in many parts of the world. Consequent to the discrimination and marginalization of women in the society, these issues have become a constant topic of debate among social scientists, researchers, social reformers, planners and women activists at different levels.

It is said that, women in the Vedic period participated in all fields like men and took active part in every sphere of human life. Woman has been a man's best friend, his co-worker and never his inferior; she enjoyed property rights, discussed political and social problems and took part in all religious activities. There was no bar on the marriage of widows or women remaining unmarried. But with the passage of time, women in India had to bear the brunt of various problems related with social processes like purdah system, polygamy, child marriage, sati, dowry, and female feticides, deprivation of education and property rights.<sup>1</sup>

#### **4. 1: STATUS OF WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY**

It is not surprising that women in India are often described as having two sharply contrasting aspects. In a region famous for goddesses with multiple visages, identities and functions, the first facade is of the primordial Mother Great Goddess (*Devi*), Primal Energy (*Shakti*) and Nature (*Prakriti*), a gentle boon - giver who also slays demons. The other is the clouded face of the domestic handmaiden, trailing behind man in life expectancy, nutrition, health, education, pay and other rights. So, in order to trace the

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<sup>1</sup> Cerilia Khonglah, *Women in North-East India – An Annotated Bibliography*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008, ppxi-xiv

evolution of gender norms, it is imperative to re-examine Indian's complex historical tapestry and to re-create a new narrative concerning its women.<sup>2</sup>

Women were placed at very high positions in the Indian Hindu mythologies. The three important Hindu Goddesses – *Parvati*, Goddess of power; *Lakshmi*, Goddess of wealth; *Saraswati*, Goddess of learning – are all female. Manu, the great Hindu sage, author of *Manusmriti* wrote; “Where a woman is honoured, God feels delighted.”

Indian mythology sets the women on a pedestal but history speaks about their oppression, inequality, unjust and other derogatory practices against women. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), father of modern India and champion of women's rights and a feminist had to fight hard to stop *Satidaha* and introduce remarriage of widows. Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar was the champion in female education and legalized widow remarriage. Keshab Chandra Sen, a leader of Brahma Samaj, gave a modern touch among women through schools, prayer meetings etc. Swami Vivekananda tried to inculcate power among the women. Swami Dayananda Saraswati, founder of Arya Samaj encouraged women education and condemned those customs which degraded women. Lokmaya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi took up the cause of women in the promotion of female education, remarriage of women etc. There are many male social reformers and activists who fought for women's right and justice in the male dominated Indian society.

After Independence, India showed a remarkable change with respect to women's status in society. The UN General Assembly passed a number of resolutions advocating equal rights and dignity of women. The Indian Constitution was framed and amended with an objective of ensuring equal status of women in the country.<sup>3</sup>

The preamble of the Constitution of India declares equality of status and provides equal opportunities to all citizens, thereby making no difference between men and women. Article 14 ensures ‘Equality before law’ and article 15 prohibits any discrimination. Article 15(3) empowers the state to ‘*any special provision for women and children*’. State policy of the Directive Principles in Part IV of the Indian Constitution

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<sup>2</sup> Sita Anantha Raman, *Women In India – A Social And Cultural History*, Volume- 1, An imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, California, 2009, pxii

<sup>3</sup> D.C. Roy, *Status of Women Among The Lepchas*, Akansha Publishing House, New Delhi, 2010, pp6-7

pays concern to women directly and has a special bearing on their status. Article 39(a) provides Right to an adequate means of livelihood for men and women. But most of the women could not enjoy the benefits of the Articles of the Constitution due to tradition bound social evils in the society.<sup>4</sup>

Some changes in the women's status can be marked in the fields of economic, social and political arenas after Independence. But even after more than 67 years of independence it is found to be insufficient in improving the position of women as per their expectation and balancing them at par with the male members of the society. In spite of Constitutional guarantee, the Indian women are the victims of inequality in economic, social and political fields. Enactment of laws by the Parliament and Legislature and amendment of the Constitution shows the presence of inequality in the country even in the twenty first century.<sup>5</sup> In this backdrop it becomes important to understand the Gender relations within the plantation industry, which is one of the largest women employing industry.

#### **4. 2: NATURE OF ACTIVITIES IN TEA PLANTATION**

Before discussing about the various aspects of women working in the tea plantation sector, first we need to have a general idea about the nature of the different types of activities in a tea plantation.

In a plantation, which is mostly a productive unit, there are two types of activities. These are (i) the activities connected with growing and collection of tea leaves; and (ii) processing of tea leaves.

#### **GROWING, PLUCKING AND PROCESSING OF TEA LEAVES**

4. 2. A: *GROWING*: Generally, the activities connected with the growing of tea leaves are undertaken by male laborers. Such activities are as follows:

- a. Preparing of tea beds,

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<sup>4</sup> Tingneichong G. Kipgen, *Women's Role in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Manipure – A Historical Study*, Kalpaz Publications, Delhi, 2010, p16

<sup>5</sup> D.C. Roy, *Op.cit*, p7

- b. Preparing seedling and maintaining the nursery,
- c. Transplanting seedling and tipping,
- d. Pruning and forking,
- e. Weeding and digging,
- f. Manuring, and
- g. Spraying and pest control.

4. 2. B: *PLUCKING*: Collection or plucking of tea leaves is generally better suited to female laborers. It is an important operation, because the quality of the manufactured tea depends upon the care and attention with which the plucking is done. The proper plucking constitutes “two leaves and a bud”. Anything less than this is considered, is “Bine plucking” and inclusion of more leaves as “coarse plucking”. Proper plucking may be considered as a skilful art that demands tremendous patience on the part of the pluckers. May be for this reason, the task is believed to be more suited to women.

3. 2. C: *PROCESSING*: The operations undertaken in a factory have been briefly described as follows by Carter (1951). “After plucking, the leaf is placed on Withering lofts where it remains for 18 to 24 hours until it becomes completely flaccid. It is then ready for the second process and is sent to the rollers where a twist is imparted to the leaf. From the rollers the tea is sent to the fermenting room where it is spread thinly, either on the floors or on racks. It remains there for 3 to 4.5 hours, while certain chemical changes take place in the leaf. From the fermenting room, the tea goes to the firing machines, where it is dried. The object of this operation is to drive off all moisture; and during this process, the tea takes on its traditional black appearance. After firing, the tea is stored out into the various gardens required by the trade and is then packed into chests and dispatched for sale”.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Sarthak Sengupta, *The Tea Labourers Of North East India – An Anthro-Historical Perspective*, Sr. Molly Joseph, ‘Women Workers In Tea Plantation – A Brief Appraisal’, A Mittal Publications, New Delhi, 2009, pp64-65

### 4. 3: WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE PLANTATION SECTOR

One of the most important features of the plantation industries is that, it employs more women than any other organized industry. In addition to this the number of children employed is also proportionally larger in the plantation sector. As plantation is a labour intensive industry, the entire families of the workers are encouraged to work on the plantation area rather than just an individual.

The Indian plantation industry not only employs men but also women and children above the age of 12 years, and women have an important role to play in the plantation sector. The reasons for this are: (a) the plantation work is only a special kind of agricultural work and is therefore, familiar to Indian women, as the vast majority of whom live in rural areas, (b) facilities have been given to male workers to settle on, or in the vicinity of the plantations and to make their wives and families to work with them and (c) under the old system, labour contract was based on the principle of utilizing of every able bodied person of the family of a labour and fixing the wage rates accordingly; many women had to seek employment in order to balance the family budget. Although the system has been abolished, the wage system and the need for supplementary earnings still remain.<sup>7</sup>

The woman participation rate in economic activity varies from country to country and from place to place. In India, the average rate of woman labour force participation has been quite low. But a noteworthy point is that the woman participation has been typically the highest in Sikkim (62%), the second highest is Madhya Pradesh (44%), and the lowest being the state of West Bengal (only 4.4%). However West Bengal depicts a contrasting picture of woman labour force participation. The State average of the woman labour force participation is the minimum in India but in the three Hill subdivisions of Darjeeling district (that is, Darjeeling Sadar, Kalimpong and Kurseong), the northernmost district of West Bengal that varies from the rest in terms of topography, climate and the constituent habitation, the female work participation rate has been very high Almost 97% of the people residing in these three subdivisions are the Nepalese and in this community

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<sup>7</sup> I.L.O.(International Labour Organization), *Industrial Labour in India* , Series A, Industrial Relation, No. 41, Geneva, 1938, pp35-36

women are found to play a vital role in the society. But an alarming situation that has come up in the three hill subdivisions of Darjeeling District is that the woman participation rate has been on a declining trend over the years.<sup>8</sup>

What constitutes a women's work and her place in the society also affects the women's work participation rate. In India, a woman's place is considered at home. The woman's work in the house and farm, though necessary for family income, is not considered an economic contribution. Depending on the economic class she is also discouraged from actively seeking employment outside the home. But surprisingly the women in the Hill areas of Darjeeling district earn a position equal to men. Apart from nurturing the baby, cooking and the assignments in the fields in rural areas such as the transplantation of paddy seedlings during the monsoon in agricultural works, manuring, fetching grass for domestic animals, plucking the tea leaves in tea gardens, etc. are attributed almost completely to women. In addition to these the women here are involved in cutting and carrying huge loads of grass and fuel from the forest. Generally, the majority of the tedious and fatigue jobs have been assigned to women and for them there is no slack season, thus leading to a comparatively high rate of work participation for women.

It is to be noted that there have been more openings for the rural women to get some employment. Women in rural hilly areas are mostly uneducated and belong to the category of plantation workers in Tea and Cinchona gardens and agricultural communities. They work in the fields along with men of their families or sometimes independently, either as tenant or in their own holdings, as also in occupations allied to agriculture. They help in carrying manures to the fields, in transplanting, weeding, harvesting, thrashing, etc. The urban centers in the hill areas lack huge infrastructures where they can be absorbed for employment. In the urban areas the uneducated women are occupied as vegetable sellers, domestic servants, peons, sweepers, etc.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Shanti Chhetry and Padam Nepal, 'Of Work And Women: A Study Of The Women's Participation In Labour Force In The Economy Of Darjeeling Hill Areas' (1961-1981), in M. Yasin, ed., *Journal of Political Studies*, Volume-3, March,2009, p42

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp45-46

#### **4. 3. i: RECRUITMENT OF WOMEN IN THE PLANTATION AREAS OF DARJEELING REGION**

Maximum number of women's participation in hills can be attributed to the introduction of the plantation industry by the Britishers in the region. The initial stage of the recruitment policy in the plantation did not follow any disparity in recruiting men or women laborers as both were recruited in equal proportion in the plantation industry of the region.

Plantation is one of industry where huge amount of human labour is required. The rapid growth of tea plantation industry in the Darjeeling region at one point of a time faced the huge shortage of labour force. The introduction of Cinchona plantation in the region further added to the already consisting problem of the labour shortage to an acute level.

The labour crisis was then fulfilled by large scale immigration of people into the region. The immigrants were mainly Adivasis (Tribals) from Chotanagpur and Santhal Parganas of Bihar, Raigarh of Madhya Pradesh (Central Provinces), and from several feudatory states of Orissa along with an influx of labor from neighboring countries like Eastern Nepal and Bhutan. In the Terai region the population was mixed with a low proportion of Nepalese and a high proportion of immigrated Adivasi (Tribal) labors. Whereas in the Darjeeling plantation region maximum number of workers were from the Nepali community.

It is difficult to state the exact numbers of male and female workers separately during the different stages of migration as such data does not exist. However, W.H. Thompson, the Census Superintendent for Bengal for the 1921 Census, noted that there were 69,380 male workers and 64,661 female workers working in the tea plantation of Terai area in 1911. In 1921 the figures were 56,745 male and 65,938 female workers.<sup>10</sup>

For Darjeeling region also there is no systematic data available for the migration of laborers and their distribution on the basis of gender. According to the District Gazetteer, there were about 8,000 tea garden laborers in the Darjeeling region in around

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<sup>10</sup> Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*, People's Publishing House, 1981, p61



1870, it rose to 44,279 in 1921 and in 1940 it went up to 61,540. Actual population of tea gardens according to the 1941 census was 1,47,508.<sup>11</sup> That was distributed as follows:

**Table No 4. 1:**

**Distribution of population of Tea Garden Labourers in the four subdivisions around the year 1941:**

<b>Subdivision</b>	<b>Thana</b>	<b>Population</b>
Sadar Subdivision	Darjeeling Thana	24,048
	Jorebungalow Thana	21,594
	Sukhiapokri Thana	14,358
	Pulbazar Thana	3,321
	Rangli Rangliot Thana	13,202
Kurseong Subdivision	Kurseong Thana	20,596
	Mirik Thana	14,710
Kalimpong Subdivision	Kalimpong Thana	0
	Gorubathan Thana	6,094
Siliguri Subdivision	Siliguri Thana	13,867
	Kharibari Thana	5,999
	Phansidewa Thana	9719

Source: A.J. Dash: Bengal District Gazetteer, 1947, p 115.

**4. 3. ii: WOMEN IN PLANTATION AREAS OF DARJEELING**

“Things were horrible when I was instated as a first female field supervisor on the estate, with some of my male colleagues even threatening me to quit.”<sup>12</sup>

This view of Sheila Tamang, who was working as a field supervisor in the Makaibari Tea Estate in Kurseong (around July 2008), shows the hardships of a woman working in the plantation sector. She was one of the first woman field supervisors working in the plantation of Darjeeling hills. This revolutionary step was taken by Mr.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1947,p115

<sup>12</sup> Reported by Kalpana Pradhan in *The Rising Nepal – National Daily*, Kathmandu, July 29, 2008 (Shawan 14, 2065)

Raja Banerjee, owner of the Makaibari Tea Estate, well known for its organic teas. It is because of this step that he also had to face some opposition from male staff of the garden who even warned him of a lockdown. This reaction was not unexpected, as traditionally the job of the field supervisor in the tea gardens is reserved for men. It is very sad but we cannot ignore the fact that, like in other fields, the inequality on gender basis can also be noted in the plantation sector to a large extent.

Even in the cinchona plantation sector this kind of disparity among genders can be noticed as women are confined mostly to the field work and never allowed to do official work and hold higher posts. This is evident from the fact that even after 150 years of its introduction we do not notice a single woman holding the post of Director, Deputy Director, Quinologist, Manager or even the post of Assistant Manager. According to the recent survey the highest post held by a woman so far is the post of a Botanist under Research and Development section, who is presently working in the Mungpoo Cinchona plantation unit.

However, from the time of its inception we do not find any disparities amongst the genders working in the cinchona plantation as the recruitment of both men and women in the field work is almost on equal basis. On the other hand in the tea plantation areas it is always the women who do the plucking or field work. Whereas the daily work assigned to the laborers in the cinchona plantation is to attain the duties as directed by his/her immediate superior, which includes plantation activities like clearing the field around the cinchona tree with sickle, terracing, harvesting, planting etc. These duties are equally assigned to the laborers irrespective of their gender.

#### **4.4. REASONS FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF WOMEN IN THE PLANTATION**

Despite forming half the labour force, women workers have remained marginalized in the functioning of the plantation industry. The main reasons put forth by the employers for the high employment of women is that work in plantation is to a large extent gender specific. Women are considered more efficient in plucking of tea leaves while men are better at other type of work relating to maintenance of the plantation. Women are said to have more tender hands and their skill at plucking the perfect leaves is

considered better than that of men. Adolescents are engaged for spraying of pesticides and children are used for clearing the under growths. This is not very convincing because though women are mainly engaged in plucking of leaves, male and children too are engaged in these activity along with the other works given to them.

The more important reasons for the employment may be because of the family based employment system. The area most suited for the plantation in the north Bengal regions were sparsely populated and hence local labour was not easily available. Thus during the formative years plantation industries faced problems of acute labour shortage. So, the planters had to depend on migrant labour whose migration had to be induced by them.

The permanent settlement of workers in and around the plantation area is mainly because recruitment of workers in the early stages was family based. Workers were encouraged to migrate to the plantation area with their families. This served two purposes. Firstly, it provided cheap labour who would be permanently settled in the area. This was achieved by encouraging families rather than the individual to migrate. The entire family worked on the plantation on wages determined by the planters. Secondly, family migration ensured that labour could be reproduced which in turn would ease the problem of further recruitment in the future.<sup>13</sup>

#### **4. 5: THE NATURE OF WOMEN’S WORK**

The daily wage workers perform all types of manual work such as plucking of leaves, weeding, transplanting, hoeing, manuring, forking and cleaning soil, pruning tea bushes, taking care of nursery bed of young tea plants and clearing of tea stalks in the factory. Generally the operations performed by women in the plantation consist of plucking, weeding, transplanting, manuring, pruning, nursing young tea plants etc.

The period from May to November is generally regarded as the busy season in tea plantation. July to September is the peak period of the plucking season and the workers specially the women can earn entire wages from plucking over the required norm.

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<sup>13</sup>Kanchan Sarkar and Sharit K. Bhowmik, ‘Trade Unions and Women Workers in Tea Plantations’, *Economic and political Weekly*, vol 33, No. 52 (Dec. 26, 1998 – Jan. 1999), pp. L50-L52

December to March is the slack season in plantation when the earning of women workers as well as the average earning of a family remains generally lower. During the slack season the volume of work as well as working hours reduce considerably. Women workers remain busy at least for a large part of the year, while the men workers can enjoy leisure when work in the plantation is over.<sup>14</sup>

#### **4. 6: ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT**

Although the participation of women workers in trade unions of Darjeeling tea plantations forms a small percentage in comparison to the total number of working women, as they constitute more than fifty percentage of working force in the tea plantation of Darjeeling region, yet their participation in trade union activity is noteworthy.

The year 1946 is important in the history of the tea plantation in Darjeeling district, as the year was marked by the laborers uniting for the first time against the management. The 1952 general election offered the trade unions to make inroads into the gardens. The trade union leaders used the opportunity to hold mass meeting in the labour lines and prospect of gaining support in election led to the growth of multiplicity of trade unions with political overtones. The leaders initiated the laborers into several struggles for more wages and for betterment of their condition. As a result various tea gardens union were formed since then, such as Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union, Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha, National Union of Plantation Workers, Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union, Himalayan Plantation Workers Union etc.

Among these trade unions, Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers Union was the first trade union in the hills formed at the initiative of Sushil Chatterjee a veteran trade union leader of the Communist Party of India (CPI) Affiliated to the Communist Party of India, with Ratanlal Brahman and Debaprasad Ghosh as its first President and Secretary respectively.<sup>15</sup> Soon the initiative taken by it was followed by other trade unions too.

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<sup>14</sup> Mita Bhadra, 'Women Workers in Tea plantations', in R.K. Bkadra and Mita Bhadra, ed., *Plantation Labours of North-East India*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p190

<sup>15</sup> M.P. Lama and R.L. Sarkar, *Tea Plantation Workers In The Eastern Himalayas*, Atmaram and Sons Publications, New Delhi, 1986, p 16

From the very beginning, women workers have been trying to be actively involved in trade union activities. They have participated in agitational activity like strikes organized by the trade unions. In several cases, trade unions have deliberately kept women in the frontline while confronting the managerial staff and the police.

Among the early women activists was Mailee Chettri, a Nepali laborer, who worked in Denguajhar Tea Garden—a stronghold of Communist Party, was drawn in the labour movement in 1946. As an activist of the Union (Darjeeling Tea Garden Workers' Union) she mobilized men and women laborers, for demonstration march that came to Darjeeling town. When the Communist Party of India was banned in 1948, she went underground and died at an early age. Another noteworthy lady named Amrita Thapa, a Nepali laborer, who did not get cold feet when her husband was killed by the employers and mobilized around 350 female members in her garden union that had 600 members.<sup>16</sup>

It is actually from 1955 onwards that participation of women laborers increased considerably in the trade union activities. In Margaret's Hope Tea Estate six persons including two women were killed in police firing on 25th June 1955. This testifies the active participation of women in the union activities. Those brave women were Sobha Rai (Moulishova Raini-22 years) and Amrita Kumari Biswakarma (Amritmaya Kamini-18 years) of Margaret's Hope Tea Estate. Many female workers were arrested on charges of sabotage. The improvement of their living standard could be related to the labour movement that has made considerable progress since the 1955 Bonus Agitation.<sup>17</sup>

At present, women take keen interest in the activities of all the four important trade unions of Darjeeling district namely, 'Darjeeling district Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union', 'Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha', 'National Union of Plantation Workers' and 'Himalayan Plantation Workers' Union'. Over the years the trade unions have secured higher wages, bonus and rations for the laborers. In addition the provisions for housing, recreation and schools, etc. were made from time to time. The most

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<sup>16</sup> Sunil Sen, *The Working Women And Popular Movements In Bengal*, Calcutta, K.P. Bagchi and Company, 1985, pp77-78, mentioned by Indumati Rai in 'Role of Women In Trade Union Movement Of Darjeeling Tea Gardens', in R. Sahu, ed., *The Himalayan Miscellany*, Centre of Himalayan Studies, N.B.U., Vol 9, March 1995

<sup>17</sup> Indumati Rai, 'Role of Women In Trade Union Movement Of Darjeeling Tea Gardens', in R. Sahu, ed., *The Himalayan Miscellany*, Centre of Himalayan Studies, N.B.U., Vol 9, March 1995, p40

important point to note in this context is that due to consistent demand from women workers the wage disparities between male and female workers have been abolished by the Equal Remuneration Act of 1976. Maternity benefits were also expanded in 1961. Women protested through their trade unions and ultimately the wage differentiation which existed for more than hundred years was abolished. This was achieved by a long protracted struggle where women took a leading part through their trade unions. They have fought through various unions for an improvement in their standard of life and condition of work.<sup>18</sup>

From the above discussion it is evident that women laborers have been quite active members of the trade unions and have often participated in strikes, *gheraos*<sup>19</sup> and in other agitational activities. This has been possible due mainly to two reasons — (a) spread of education among the women laborers. This is a result of the PLA 1951 that made it compulsory for the management to provide primary education to the laborers irrespective of sex (b) Growth of political consciousness effected through a general spread of trade union activities. Yet it is also true that there are very few women in the top or in charge of the leadership of the trade union movement. Excepting a few cases, most of the important trade union leaders are male. Women are mostly found in the floor level leadership. Only in the women wing of different political parties, do they exercise effective power. Their role in the decision-making process of the union has still remained at the minimum. This is one of the main reasons why there has never been any pressure on the Management to fulfill the specific issue of women workers. The working women are always concerned with dual problems of the work-place as well as of home. Their idea of child care and housework take priority over their work outside. It is for this reason that they often do not get enough time to go through a political career after doing all the household chores and work in the garden. The general feeling is that they are indispensable in their home and to their children while someone else can always take over the charge of trade unions.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 41

<sup>19</sup> Gheraos: Gheraos is a Nepali term meaning a protest in which a group of people surrounds a politician, building etc, until demands are met. Lexicographical meaning of the word is 'encirclement'.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 45

No matter how much participation and their involvement in trade unions may be, women have always been playing a considerably important part in the trade union activities of Darjeeling region. In spite of several limitations and of their preoccupation with household duties, they joined the unions and continued to take part in meeting and demonstration to improve their standards of living. Thus, the female laborers working for years with male laborers in the same industry have become an integral part of the trade union movements.

#### **4. 7: DISPARITY OF WAGES AMONG THE PLANTATION LABOURERS**

From the time of its inception, in regard to the distribution of wages we can notice the huge amount of disparities among the sexes working in the both tea and cinchona plantations in the Darjeeling region. Till the remuneration act was passed in 1975, women workers were paid lower wages than their counterparts in both the plantation sectors. In order to have a clear picture in this regard we need to discuss both the plantation separately.

#### **4. 7. i: DISPARITY OF WAGES AMONG CINCHONA PLANTATION LABOURERS**

As already mentioned previously in the third chapter that right from its inception to 1945, the male (*Marad*), female (*Aurat*) and Child (*Chokra*) were unequally paid in the Cinchona plantations. According to the available sources the actual wages of male worker during the period between 1899 to 1945 was 5 Annas per day, while female worker and the child workers used to get only 4 Annas and 3 Annas.

**Table No: 4. 2**

**Categories of Cinchona Plantation Workers and Their Wages During 1899 - 1945**

Sl. No.	Category of Worker	Wages Per Day (in Annas)
1.	Male ( <i>Marad</i> )	5 Annas
2.	Female ( <i>Aurat</i> )	4 Annas

3.	Child ( <i>Chokra</i> )	3 Annas
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Source: Mungpoo Office; 1999, mention by Khemraj Sharma in Socio-Economic Life of Cinchona Plantation Workers In India, 1997, p62

However, nowadays we do not find this kind of disparity among sexes in the Cinchona Plantations of Darjeeling Region. At present both male and female workers are getting the equal wage of Rs. 205, which is more than double when compared to what tea garden laborers are getting. Another striking feature of the Cinchona plantation is that the recruitment of children in the fields has now completely stopped.

#### **4. 7. ii: DISPARITY OF WAGES AMONG TEA PLANTATION LABOURERS**

The differences in wages between male and female workers had remained since long even in the tea plantations. Earlier in the pre-independence period, the difference was greater with women earning three-fourths of what men earned. Before 1966 it was 14 *paise* but after the wage board recommendations the difference rose to 17 *paise* and it was pegged at that till the Equal Remuneration Act was passed in 1975. Therefore percentage wise the difference declined as the absolute difference remained the same. The trade unions have fought for long against this difference as it seemed irrational. The employers stubbornly refused to pay an equal wage. Even symbolically such a difference is detrimental to the campaign for equal status of working women with men, as it shows that women are not regarded as equal with men at the work place.

The argument in favour of maintaining this difference is that since women are given a lower volume of work than men this difference is necessary. The *thika*<sup>21</sup> assigned to women is less than that of men. In plucking, the *thika* for women is generally 3-4 kilograms less than that of men and in cultivation work it is around 20 per cent less. Women are also given lighter cultivation work. In late 1975 the central government passed the Equal Remuneration Act which sought to remove wage differences among the sexes in all industries. Even after the Act was passed, the employers refused to pay equal wages on the basis of the above mentioned argument. In fact the ITPA (Indian Tea

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<sup>21</sup> Thika: The tea garden workers were paid according to the task they performed. A worker was allotted a certain piece of work which he or she had to complete within a given period of time. This was known as his or her thika.



Planters Association) stated that giving women the same wages as men, and at the same time maintaining different workloads, would result in discrimination against men.<sup>22</sup>

According to District Gazetteers, A.J. Dash the basic wage rates per day in Darjeeling hills around 1940s was 5 annas for men, 4 annas for women, and 3 annas for children and in Terai plantations it was 4 annas for men, 3 annas for women and 1.5 annas for children. These basic rates have been prevalent for a long time.<sup>23</sup>

Even when the first increment of wages was introduced in 1962 in West Bengal, the increment was only 8 paise for men and 6 paise for women. The wages in the Terai plantations of West Bengal were Rs. 1.95 for men, Rs. 1.81 for women and Rs. 1.07 for children whereas in the Dooars plantations these were Rs. 1.98 for men, Rs. 1.84 for women and Rs.1.07 for children. In the plantations which were less than 500 acres in size workers get wages 3 paise less than the normal wages. The Central Wage Board recommended that wages for men, women and children be increased by 13 paise, 10 paise and 7 paise for men, women and children respectively from 1966.<sup>24</sup> This proves that even in the increment system disparity of sexes was evident in the tea plantations of North Bengal region.

From 1966 to 1975 wages gradually increased either through the recommendations of bipartite meetings or through the demand of the trade unions. From 1969 to 1970 the wages were Rs. 2.39, Rs. 2.22 and Rs. 1.29 for men, women and children respectively. From 1970 to 1971 it was raised to Rs. 2.48, Rs. 2.31 and Rs.1.33 for men, women and children respectively. From 1971 to 1972, the wages were raised to Rs. 2.71, Rs. 2.54 and Rs. 1.45 for men, women and children respectively. From 1972 to 1973, the wages were enhanced to Rs. 2.94, Rs. 2.77 and Rs. 1.56 for men, women and children respectively. Again, from 1973 to 1977, there was wage increase for four times. In 1978, there were wages of Rs. 5.24, Rs. 5.07 and Rs. 2.73 for men, women and children respectively according to the recommendation of the Minimum Wage Fixation Committee. This wage difference between the laborers according to their sexes was finally abolished in December, 1976. But many of the employers in West Bengal refused

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<sup>22</sup> Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation In The Plantation System*, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, p94

<sup>23</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, op. cit., p119

<sup>24</sup> Mitra Bhadra, 'Women Workers in Tea Plantations' in R.K. Bhadra and Mita Bhadra ed. *Plantation Labours of North-East India*, N.L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p192

to pay equal wages even after the equal wage for equal work act was passed.<sup>25</sup> It would not be wrong to say that it took quite a long time to accept the provision of the Remuneration Act of 1975 by the planters regarding the equality of wages among the two genders. At present both male and female workers are getting Rs.90 as their per day wage.

#### **4. 8: DISPARITY AMONG THE SEXES IN VARIOUS FIELDS IN THE PLANTATIONS**

Till the Equal Remuneration act was passed in 1975, women workers were paid lower wages than their counterparts. Apart from this women are always kept in the category of daily rated workers and are never promoted to the supervisory category known as sub staff. In the trade unions too, one rarely finds women worker as a leader. We have *Sardars* but no *Sardarnis* (female counterparts of Sardars). There are only few cases where women form the leadership of the plantation unit of a trade union and that is also because when there were no competent male leaders at that time. Hence division of sexes is prevalent in all aspects of the workers lives (from work load, wages to leadership).

One of the important reasons for their backwardness in every field is because of the low literacy rate among women in the plantation areas. A number of reasons are responsible for it. As the plantations were usually isolated and communications were not good, the only source of education for most of the workers' children was the primary school in the area. Most of these schools are badly maintained. They did not have adequate rooms, teachers and other basic facilities. Moreover, since most of the primary school teachers resided outside the plantation areas so they are irregular. Besides an additional burden of taking care of the needs of family is one of the main reasons for the lower literacy rate among the women in plantation areas. In many cases the girl child does not go to school or has to dropout because they have to take care of the younger children in the family. Although according to the Plantation Labour act of 1951 all the plantation areas employing 30 or more women should have a provision of creches but this

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p192

was hardly enforced in most of the plantation areas. As a result younger girls have little or no time for school before they start working on the plantation or elsewhere. The social status of women and their low level of literacy keep them in the inferior status.<sup>26</sup>

#### **4. 9: CONCLUSION**

Despite forming half the labour force, women workers have remained marginalized in the functioning of the plantation industry since its inception. Division of sexes is prevalent in all aspects of the lives of the women laborers of tea and cinchona plantation from work load, wages to leadership and so on.

Although the ground level works participation of women workers in both tea and cinchona plantation is more than fifty percentages yet their participation in management, policy decision and even in the trade union is marginalized. Except few cases, most of the important posts in the plantation offices are still occupied by their male counterparts. Women are mostly found in the ground level leadership. Only in the some minor wing of different political parties, they exercise effective power. Their role in the decision-making process of the trade union too has still remained at the minimum. This is one of the main reasons why there has never been any pressure on the Management to fulfill the specific issue of women workers. The working women are always concerned with dual problems of the work-place as well as of home. Their idea of child care and housework take priority over their work outside.

The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 lays down that plantation area must have primary schools, creches, water supply, toilets in the labour lines and recreational facilities for the workers. Unfortunately, most of these provisions are not enforced and the women workers are deprived of whatever little scope they have of improving their condition.

Women are the biggest force behind the running of the plantation industry. They have the potential for leadership which needs to be developed. Government must take an initiative in order to provide opportunities for them. This will not only improve the

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<sup>26</sup> Kanchan Sarkar and Sharit K. Bhowmik, Trade Unions and Women Workers in Tea Plantations, Economic and political Weekly, vol 33, No. 52 (Dec. 26, 1998 – Jan. 1999), pp. L50-L52

condition of women workers but will also give great impetus to the plantation industry as a whole.

## **Chapter 5:**

### **5: PLANTATION INDUSTRY OF DARJEELING REGION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGES**

It would not be wrong to say that the story of Darjeeling actually begins with the coming of the Britishers to the region. The main motive behind the selection of the area by the Britishers was to get rid of the hot and humid climate of Calcutta, which was then the capital of British India. Thus Darjeeling was selected by the Britishers for their bodily comfort as their summer capital. Immediately after their settlement of the region they realized the importance of the natural resources of the hills and started exploring and exploiting it.

Introduction of the plantation industry (Tea and Cinchona) in the later half of the nineteenth century was one of the major events in the history of the Darjeeling region. It was soon followed by the other major activities like introduction of Railways, construction of roads, ropeways, bridges etc and finally the establishment of missionary schools and colleges. The construction of the railways and roads in Darjeeling, as in other parts of the country was introduced by the British in order to enhance their economic benefits by being able to transport raw materials, cash crops and plantation crops from the remotest villages to the presidencies of British India, and to dump British manufactured goods to the markets of India. Thus we can say that the development of Darjeeling in the nineteenth century was largely due to the introduction of the plantation industry in the region by the Britishers, though they were only interested in the profit rather than the growth and development of the area.

#### **5. 1: IMPACT OF THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY ON DARJEELING REGION**

Before discussing the impact of the introduction of the plantation industry in the Darjeeling region it would be appropriate to discuss what exactly the term plantation is. Plantation can be defined as the kind of extensive farming wherein profitable crops are cultivated especially for marketing purposes. One of the striking features of the plantation industry is the use of extensive area of land and recruitment of huge labour force to work

in the plantation area. It is for this reason that Britishers had chosen a region like Darjeeling where large area of land was easily available. But as the area was sparsely populated, the recruitment of laborers was a huge problem for them at the initial stages of the introduction of the plantation industry.

### **5. 1. i: THE DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERN OF DARJEELING AND ITS OVERALL IMPACT ON THE SOCIETY AND CULTURE**

The introduction of the plantation industry in Darjeeling had a huge impact on the changing demographic pattern of the region. It was only after the annexation of Kalimpong subdivision with Darjeeling in 1866 that a rough census was taken in the hill areas in 1869. It was found that the population aggregated over 22,000 persons at that time. This was because of the tremendous growth of population within a span of thirty-four years, from between 1835 to 1869. The following table gives a clear picture of the growth of the population from 1850 to 1971 in the region.<sup>1</sup>

**Table No.: 5. 1**

#### **Growth of Population in the Hill Areas of Darjeeling (1950-1971)**

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Population</b>
1850	10,000 (according to Campbell) [excluding Kalimpong Subdivision, as it was annexed from Bhutan in 1865 in British India and in 1866 with Darjeeling District]
1869	22,000 (according to Hooker)
1881	92,141 (First Census)
1891	1,50,311 (Second Census)
1901	1,73,342 (Third Census)
1911	1,89,763 (Fourth Census)
1921	2,06,961 (Fifth Census)

<sup>1</sup> Manas Dasgupta, 'Demographic Pattern of the Hill Areas of Darjeeling District: A Study of the Census of 1971', in S.K. Chaube, ed., *The Himalayas – Profiles Of Modernisation and Adaptation*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi, 1985, p51

1931	2,39,377 (Sixth Census)
1941	2,86,355 (Seventh Census)
1951	3,28,785 (Eighth Census)
1961	4,04,792 (Ninth Census)
1971	4,79,978 (Tenth Census)

Source: Manas Dasgupta, Demographic Pattern of the Hill Areas of Darjeeling District: A Study of the Census of 1971, p52

From the above table it is evident that the growth of population between 1850 and 1891 in Darjeeling was very high. One of the main reasons for this growth of population was the introduction of the plantation industry in the region. As plantation was a labour intensive industry and the region was sparsely populated so, the Britishers started recruiting laborers from various parts of India like Jharkhand, Bihar, Orissa, Santhal Parganas etc and the neighboring countries like Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim (as Sikkim was not a part of the Union of India at that time). Thus in the formative phase, the plantation industry of Darjeeling region was largely dependent on the migrant laborers whose migration was induced by the planters. Different groups of people were recruited from different provinces like the Munda and Gond from Bihar; Santhal, Tanti and Bhumij from Bengal and Bihar; Oraon from Bihar and Orissa; Goala from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh; Lohar from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh; and Khond from Andhra Pradesh. These tribes were facing acute poverty because of infertility of soil, crude technology, recurrent drought and famine, and ruthless exploitation by the landlords and money-lenders in their original homelands.<sup>2</sup> So, these migrant laborers easily agreed to settle permanently with their entire family in the newly established plantation areas as indentured laborers. The employment of these indentured or slave labour ensured for the planters that the workers were bound to work on the plantation on whatever wage fixed by the planters.

Apart from these different Adivasi (tribal) groups from Bengal, Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh etc, many laborers belonging to various caste and community from Nepal and Sikkim along with few Bhutias and Tibetans also migrated into the plantation

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<sup>2</sup> R. K. Kar, 'Absenteeism Among Tea Labour: A Case Study In Cultural Ecology', in R.K. Bkadra and Mita Bhadra, ed., *Plantation Labours of North-East India*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p84

areas of Darjeeling region. But the migration of Bhutias and Tibetans was mainly for trade purposes. As these migrant laborers came from different parts of India and the neighboring countries, they made the plantation regions a meeting ground for various cultures, languages and ethnicity.

### **5. 1. ii: MADESIA AND PAHARIA – SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

As most of these tribal workers were from the plains or *madesh* they were known as ‘Madesia’. Although they appeared to be one homogeneous group, especially when compared to the Nepali workers who were known as ‘Paharia’ (meaning from hill areas, especially Nepali speaking people) in reality they were not a homogeneous group, but were divided into different tribes. One could easily distinguish *madesia* workers from *paharia* workers. As groups, there were many points of differences between *madesias* and *paharias*. Their appearance, language, food habits, and even their characteristic responses are totally in contrast to one another. *Paharias* were well dressed whereas *Adivasi* workers on the other hand were more conservative and shabbily dressed. At the same time, the *paharias* were thrifter than the *adivasis*. It might be because of this reason that even after the close down of some of the tea gardens along with the cinchona factory ( in 1999) in the Darjeeling region, we do not find any cases of malnutrition and suicides by the laborers, which is rampant in the other tea gardens of the Terai or plains. According to a report of Darjeeling Chronicle (17<sup>th</sup> August, 2014) a total of 46 tea garden workers died since October 2013, due to starvation in the Dooars<sup>3</sup> region. Apart from better social status there were also a greater proportion of educated people among *pahari* workers and were culturally conscious as well. Only one thing binds these laborers together, that is their economic activity and a common working environment in the plantation areas. Therefore, we can notice two different aspects of their lives firstly their homogeneous economic activity and secondly their heterogeneous social life.<sup>4</sup> These similarities and differences between the *madesia* and *pahari* plantation labour make the plantation areas of Darjeeling and Terai an interesting subject for any social science researcher.

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<sup>3</sup> Dooars: The word owes its origin to the Hindustani word *dwar* meaning gateway, as the area is the gateway to Bhutan. It was formerly a part of Bhutan before being annexed by the British in 1865.

<sup>4</sup> Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation In The Plantation System*, People’s Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, p106



### 5. 1. iii: CASTE HIERARCHY AND THE SOCIAL SYSTEM OF MADESIA AND PAHARIA WORKERS

A definite hierarchy existed among the madesia workers which were reflected in their social life. Some tribes felt that they were superior to others. It appeared that this hierarchy was based on the occupations of the tribes in their place of origin, if we trace the traditional occupation of each tribe we find that they can be placed in two categories—cultivating tribes and non-cultivating tribes. The former proclaimed themselves superior to the latter. Cultivating tribes were Oraon, Munda, and Kharia. The rest fell in the category of non-cultivating tribes. These included Lohars who were ironsmiths as their name suggests, and Ghasis who made musical instruments on which Mahalis performed. Mahalis also wove cane baskets, as also the Turis. Baraiks are believed to be tribalised Hindus who were weavers of cloth.<sup>5</sup>

Another striking feature of the tea plantations of Terai and Dooars is that the animistic tribals (Samsars) form the majority group which is followed by Christian tribals, Nepalis and other Hindu Castes thus forming a considerable degree of religious and cultural heterogeneity. The multi-ethnicity and co-existence of different religious believes obviously contribute to the heterogeneity of the plantation community as a whole.<sup>6</sup>

Even in the Nepali society a distinctive kind of caste hierarchy existed in the plantation areas. Earlier the Nepali social structure was based on three tier hierarchical classifications i.e (a) *Tagadhari Jat* (Caste), (b) *Matwali Jat* (Caste) and the (c) Untouchables

(a) *Tagadhari Jat*: Tgadharis were basically considered as the upper caste people in the Nepali society. Mainly castes like Bahun, Chhetri and Thakuri belongs to the tagadhari jat or caste. In Nepali the word '*taga*' means thread '*dhari*' means person who wears it. Actually the male members of the tagadhari caste used to wear the sacred thread (*Janai*) across their chests. It is regarded as a symbol of

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp107-108

<sup>6</sup> Mita Bhadra, 'Ethnicity And Inequality Among The Workers Of Tea Industry In West Bengal', in R.K. Bkadra and Mita Bhadra, ed., *Plantation Labours of North-East India*, N. L. Publishers, Dibrugarh, Assam, 1997, p266

purity of their caste. It is believed that the Tagadharis were supposed to be of Aryan origin and were considered superior caste.

(b) *Matwali Jat*: Matwalis were the middle caste people in the Nepali society. The word matwali in Nepali means the alcohol consumers and can be termed as the 'drinking castes'. Rai, Limbu, Subba, Lepcha, Mangar, Gurung, Tamang, Thapa, etc. belongs to the matwali jat or caste.

(c) *Untouchables*: Untouchables form the lowest tier in the Nepali society. Basically the Sunar, Kami, Sarki and Damai belong to this caste.

Usually the caste distinction was done on the basis of their traditional occupations, just like in the Madesia society. Among the Tagadharis the Bahuns were basically the priest, Thakuris were the aristocrats and the Chhetris belongs to the warrior class. Matwalis were usually the agriculturalist, businessmen, shepherds etc. And among the lowest tier, the Sunar were the goldsmiths, Kamis were ironsmith, Damais were the tailors and musicians and the Sarkis were the cobblers.

During the formative period of the plantation industry the rigid caste hierarchy used to prevail in the Nepali society but over a period of time due to the common dwellings in the industrial environment, the traditional three tier Nepali caste hierarchy started losing its implication in the society. Later a new concept like *Thulo jat* meaning higher or upper caste and *Sano jat* meaning lower or small caste started gaining importance in the Nepali Society. It was sometimes also referred to as *Pani Chalne Jat* or a caste from whose hand water can be accepted and the *Pani Na Chalne jat* meaning caste from whom water cannot be accepted by the upper caste. But nowadays the concept and practice like untouchability as such has no place in the plantation society in the Darjeeling region. Thus it would not be wrong to say that the kind of society that we have today in the Darjeeling region, without any caste prejudices, biases and practices like untouchability is one of the major contributions of the plantation industry which compelled the people from various castes and classes to work in a common environment.

One of the interesting facts to be noted here is that the Tagadharis were the later settlers in the plantation areas who were engaged mainly as the office staff along with

some who also served as laborers. And it is for this reason that socially the Tagadharis are also called as *Sukumbasis* meaning recent settlers and the Matwalis called themselves as *Raithanees* meaning the early settlers in the plantation areas of the Darjeeling.<sup>7</sup>

#### **5. 1. iv IMPACT OF THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY ON THE LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND EDUCATION**

Language as a binding force plays a pioneering role in the event of making people from divergent lingo-cultural background into a single composite unit. During the formative years of the introduction of the plantation industry the language of one tribe was not understood by another. Oraons speak Kuruk, a language belonging to Dravidian family which is basically different from the language or dialects spoken by other tribes. Mundas speak in Mundari language, while the other tribes such as Santal, Kheria, Ho, Turi, Mahali etc. traditionally speak in Mundari dialect. Thus the Oraon forms a linguistic group and the rest of the tribes who speak in Mundari or related dialect would have formed another group. Though the Oraon, Munda, Santal and Kheria forms a common status group in Terai and Dooars plantation they are linguistically different groups. Their commonness is probably due to their common place of origin and similar traditional occupation.<sup>8</sup> Most of these tribes came from different backgrounds and had their own respective cultures and dialects. But living and working together in a common environment obviously required a common means of exchanging ideas and thoughts among themselves. Thus it eventually led to the evolution of a *lingua franca*, which popularly came to be known as the Sadri language which is at present the *lingua franca* of the tribal workers of tea plantations in North Bengal. It is some sort of mixture of Hindi and tribal dialects. In some areas of Dooars and Terai there is an additional influence of Bengali language on Sadri. Though the Oraons retain their own language Kurukh as they are numerically dominant, the other tribes like the Munda, Kheria, Santal, Asur, Ho, Turi and rest of the minority groups of tea gardens gradually have forgotten their respective language. In this respect Oraons are bilingual and can speak two languages i.e. Kurukh and Sadri. In Terai they constitute almost 52 per cent of the

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<sup>7</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, *Agony of Plantation Workers in North-East India*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2008, p204

<sup>8</sup> Mita Bhadra, op. cit., p207

plantation laborers.<sup>9</sup>

It is to be noticed that while evolving the *lingua franca*, the question of respective languages of the divergent group of the tea garden laborers automatically becomes immaterial. The Sadri language is said to have originated in Chotanagpur region of Jharkhand where it is still prevalent. It may thus be said that the bulk of the laborers who originally came from Ranchi as a sequel of which their Sadri language ultimately got precedence over other tribal languages with little variation in its pronunciation from place to place. It is interesting to note that of late the articulate section of them if not all have already initiated the process of cultivating the Sadri language in Assamese script. In this context the version of the All Tea Tribes Students' Association (ATTSA, 1948) deserves mention which unequivocally maintained that they (i.e. the Tea Garden Labourers) have still retained their mother tongue of individual tribes and use *Sadri* or *Saadani* as *lingua franca* among the Tribes. Furthermore, the ATTSA strongly urged the Government of India seeking adequate facilities for the maintenance and preservation of their unique culture by broadcasting them through Radio and Television in *Sadri* language. In a similar vein an enlightened section of the Adivasis (Tea and Ex Tea Garden Labourers) too divulged opinion by calling upon their people to accept the *Sadri* language as the link language since it has been serving as the most effective means of cementing the bond of 'unity in diversity' among the heterogeneous tea garden laborers. The Sadri language has in fact gained such a momentum among the different tribal laborers of the tea plantation areas of Terai and Dooars including Assam, that nowadays they are raising the demand for its official recognition for its popular cultivation, development as well as conservation.<sup>10</sup>

Under the Darjeeling Tea plantation region, Sadri is mostly spoken only by the tribes of Malootar Tea Estate, Sivitar Tea Estate, Nabarda Majua Tea Estate, Rohini Tea Estate, Selim Hill Tea Estate etc. According to the recent report of Himali Darpan published on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015, a total of 26 different tribes living in the plantation areas

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<sup>9</sup> Sharit Bhowmik, op. cit., p109

<sup>10</sup> Sarthak Sengupta, *The Tea Labourers Of North East India*, Mittal Publication, New Delhi, 2009, p46

speak Sadri language in North Bengal region, which amounts to almost 26 lakhs people.<sup>11</sup> But even after being the most commonly used language in North Bengal region the State Government is still not ready to give recognition to the Sadri language.

A similar trend can be noticed in the Nepali society as well. Because of the mixture of various caste and tribal groups, from different background in the plantation areas Nepali<sup>12</sup> language has emerged as the common language or *lingua franca* between the laborers. And as a result their respective traditional dialect like Rai, Limbu, Subba, Lepcha, Newari etc have lost their prominence in the plantation regions. But on a positive note, Nepali Language and literature has flourished immensely in the region. Whole genres of Nepali literature have been influenced by the plantation society. This can be evident from the works of the eminent Nepali writers like Indra Sundas, Bhupal Subba, Nabin Subba, Nanda Hankim, Dhurba Chawhan, Asit Rai, Prakash Kovid, Madhav Burathawki, Mohan Thakuri, Surendra Thing, Ramika Thapa, Uday Thung, etc, whose novels; short stories and poetry are worth reading. In this regard Indra Sundas's 'Juneeli Rekha' and 'Sahara' (novel/upaniyas), Nanda Hankim's 'Chiyabarima' (khandakavya), Prakash Kovid's 'Tara Khahileh' (novel/upaniyas), Dhurba Chawhan's 'Nalekhiyeko Itihasharu' (short story), Nabin Subba's 'Chiyabari Mo Phasal', Bhupal Subba's 'Chiya Jiwan' (poetry), Madhav Burathawki's Chiyabari Pakha ka Kabitaharu (poetry) etc are note worthy. These genres of literature clearly reflect the plantation culture and the background as well as geographical landscape of most of the stories are plantation areas of the Darjeeling hills. Popular folk songs like "*chiya bari ma ho, chiya bari ma*", meaning in the tea gardens, became very popular and created waves of cultural unity among the people of the plantation areas in the Darjeeling hills in the late 1980s.

Apart from the growth of Nepali language and literature, development of educational institutions in Darjeeling region also has its root in the plantation industry. It was mainly after the coming of the Britishers into the area, that various educational

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<sup>11</sup> Report published on Himalaya Darpan, with the heading 'Sadri Bhasa Academy Avem Bhasa Manyatako Mang Uthayo SUSAR Association le', Siliguri, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2015

<sup>12</sup> Nepali: Nepali is one of the 'Constitutionally Recognized Language' of India. It was incorporated in the Eight Schedule of the Constitution in 1992. The language is also recognized by the States of West Bengal (In three subdivisions of Darjeeling, Kurseong and Kalimpong) and Sikkim as an official language. (Quoted from Barun Roy, *Gorkhas and Gorkhaland*, Parbati Roy Foundation, Darjeeling, 2013, p63)

institutions came into being like: Loreto Convent (1846), Darjeeling Government High School (1856), St. Paul's School (1864), Dow Hill School (1879), Scottish University Mission institute (1886), Pushparani High School (1887), St. Joseph's School (1888), St. Helens School (1890), Nepali Girls' Higher Secondary School (1890), Kalimpong Girls' School (1891), St. Alphonsus's School (1891), Mount Hermon School (1895), Dr. Graham's Homes Schools (1900), Turnbull High School (1906), Maharani Higher Secondary School (1908), Ghoom Boys' Higher Secondary School (1910), Municipal Boys' High School (1922), St. Michael's Higher Secondary School (1925), St. Teresa's Higher Secondary School (1925), Municipal Girls' High School (1936) etc. But most of these schools only provided primary education during its formative years and it was only in the later years that these schools got recognized as High schools and Higher Secondary school status. Initially these schools were not for the local people and were meant for the children of the British officials, but with the passage of time local children also got English education through these institutions and are still enlightening not just hill students but students from various parts of India and her neighboring countries.

But ironically these schools are not located in the main plantation areas. The main reason behind the establishment of these missionaries' schools in proper towns of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong was to provide education to the children of domiciled European and Anglo-Indian community only. So that their children could get the type of education and upbringing to which their parents had been accustomed in their native country.<sup>13</sup>

Although there might be few high schools in plantation areas now but the schools set up by the missionaries were mostly located in the main towns. So, during the initial phase of its establishment these schools totally remained unfeasible to the plantation workers to send their children to those schools both economically as well as distance wise. But still it would be unfair to say that these educational endeavors were designed to benefit European and Anglo-Indian children alone. Most of these schools later started enrolling the hill pupils, and these schools became part and parcel of the hill areas in the matter of English education even today.

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<sup>13</sup> D. K. Dewan, *Education In The Darjeeling Hills – A Historical Survey: 1835-1985*, Indus Publishing Company, New Delhi, 1991, p314

## 5. 1. v: EMERGENCE OF COMMON TRENDS AND CONCEPTS

With the establishment of plantations in the Darjeeling region, a common cultural trend started taking root in these areas. New concepts and understandings of certain procedures and processes came up. The concept like Sunday *hatts*/fairs is one of them. Actually the laborers work throughout the week from morning till evening in the plantation gardens, only on Sunday they get the time for shopping and other personal works. So in order to meet their needs, hats started being organized in the plantation areas. Local *haats* or Sunday *haats* were basically a weekly market organized in the plantation areas for the laborers where they could shop for their needs. It also served as the only means of entertainment for them, which remain true even today with many plantation *hatts* being organized to cater to the needs of the plantation workers. John Thomas, a traveler writes in *Himalayan Journey* (1944) that “Sunday is the day to visit the market. On Sunday mornings the hill folk come in with their produce and in this market place assembles a colorful collection of tribesmen- Nepalese, Bhutias, Lepchas etc. Many have brilliant native costumes, and all are hanging with jewellery. The market is bright with display of vegetables, fruits and grains in infinite variety.”<sup>14</sup>

Since the plantation laborers who were looked upon as backward people came to be tagged as the ‘Sundays’. Even today a person is termed ‘Sunday’ if he or she behaves or dresses in a backward manner. The plantation laborers are also labeled as ‘Kamanees’: belonging to the *Kamans*. Taken from the word *Kaman* meaning plantation area or gardens. But nowadays the concept of being ‘Sunday’ and ‘Kamanees’ in the Darjeeling hills actually signifies being backward like the people of the plantation areas. The very reason for the modernization and development of the Darjeeling hills: the plantation, areas are now a days, being looked down upon as backward and stagnant, as these areas lack many basic amenities and are still far away from the development that town areas have gone through.

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<sup>14</sup> John Thomas, *Travelling To Darjeeling in 1944*, ed by Fred Pinn Esq., Heritage Publication, Thacker & Co., LTD, Bombay, 1944, p54

### **5. 1. vi: BHATTI CULTURE**

Another striking feature of the plantation area is the emergence of the social evil known as the Bhatti<sup>15</sup> Culture. As because the workings in the plantation industry is so stressful and tiring that most of the workers automatically indulge into alcoholism. It is evident from the fact that they spend 50% of their income on liquor. It is because of this reason that the plantation society was once characterized as Batti Culture in which most the workers are found addicted to the local wine known as *Jhar, Rakshi or Chang*. Although drinking culture in the plantation areas developed as a means of relaxation but later on it proved to be a curse to some of the families as it ultimately led to the domestic violence in the areas.

### **5. 1. vii: AGONY OF LABORERS IN THE PLANTATION AREAS**

From the time of its inception, plantation areas have been the platform of exploitation of laborers by their planters and owners. Panthaman Rai aged 104 years, who was appointed as *chokra* (male child labour) at the age of 9 years (around 1920) to work in the Cinchona plantation, talks about the exploitation of the British officers. “When we were working under *Gora Sahibs* they never allowed us to walk on even the *kuchha* road, we used to hide in the jungles when we saw *sahibs* coming from the far. Besides we were not allowed to wear *Topi* (hat), *Jutta* (shoes) and use umbrella in their presence. It used to be considered as an insult to the Officers or *Sahibs*”.<sup>16</sup> Bhuddhiman Rai aged 84 years, who also served in the cinchona plantation as a labour and was one of the active members of the Cinchona Trade Union recalls his experience in the following words: “even for a mere mistake the supervisor used to beat us and deduct two days *Hajira* (dues). If anyone raised their voice or was found forming a group or union he used to get killed during the pre Independence period”<sup>17</sup>. Although after Independence these kind of cases stooped to a considerable extent but the *Sahibs* and *Naukar* (servant) relation between owners and the laborers still exists in the plantation areas.

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<sup>15</sup> Bhatti: In Nepali language ‘Bhatti’ means shop or a small restaurant where basically local liquor is served.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Panthaman Rai, resident and ex-cinchona garden worker of Mungpoo, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Bhuddhiman Rai. Resident and ex-cinchona garden worker of Mungpoo, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 2015



Apart from the unequal treatments, sexual exploitations of women and especially young girls (*Chokris*) by the planters and managers have been a part and parcel of the plantation areas. According to oral sources there have been many cases of sexual exploitation and violence against women, which have also become a basis of many Nepali Literary accounts based on the background of plantation society. There was a time when it was so rampant in the plantation areas that Nepali scholars have described the whole system as ‘Chokri System’. In this regard the works like ‘Juneeli Rekha’ and ‘Sahara’ (novel/*upaniyas*) of Indra Sundas are note worthy. Presence of few Anglo-Nepali people (might be the children and grand children born out of those illegitimate relationship) in the plantation areas even today, testifies the prevalence of these kinds of system in the tea garden areas. But there is a big controversy over the prevalence of ‘Chokri System’ as apart from local fiction none of the other documents testifies or mention anything about it. People from the plantation areas are not comfortable talking about this issue as they feel that it would bring a bad name to their society if they openly profess about their women folk being sexually exploited in the past.

Besides the above mentioned social taboos associated with the plantation areas, the biggest agony of the plantation laborers at present is the minimum amount of wage paid to the tea garden laborers which is about Rs. 90 in the Darjeeling Hills and Rs. 95 in Terai areas, whereas laborers working at cinchona gardens are getting Rs.205.65 per day. The amount of wages in the tea gardens is ironical to the amount of inflation that has happened in the recent years. Several rounds of tripartite talks between labour unions, the tea garden management and the State Government are going on but still have failed to achieve any breakthrough or come to any solutions regarding increase in the wages of the tea garden laborers.

## **5. 2: ROADS, RAILWAYS AND ROPEWAYS IN DARJEELING HILL: A BOON OF THE PLANTATION INDUSTRY**

Besides socio-cultural changes in the hills, plantation industry indirectly helped in the overall development of the area. As it was only after its introduction that overall development of the region actually started. The construction of roadways to Darjeeling hills had already started in 1839, and was completed in 1842 i.e. before the introduction

of the plantation industry in the region. But with the introduction of the heavy industry like tea and cinchona and because of the population pressure on the land it was felt that an alternate communication system should be built. And as a result Britishers thought of constructing a railway line in Darjeeling. Thus Darjeeling entered the phase of modernization.

Prior to British occupation of Darjeeling, the only roads that were there, were rough narrow tracks leading through dense forests and the only bridges were the-cane bridges spanning the torrents. The pioneers who came to open up Darjeeling after it had been ceded in 1835 were confronted with an arduous journey from Calcutta before they reached the hills. A guide to Darjeeling published in 1838 mentioned 98 hours as the journey time (walking) from Calcutta: - 54 hours from Calcutta to Malda, 16 hours from Malda to Dinajpur, 20 hours from Dinajpur to Titaliya and finally 8 hours from Titaliya to the foot of Darjeeling hills. The whole journey to Darjeeling lasted about five to six days and the discomfort and expense were graphically describe by Sir Joseph Hooker who in 1848 at a cost of Rs. 240 had the occasion to perform the journey from Karagola Ghat on the Ganges to the foothills of Darjeeling.<sup>18</sup> Thus, one of the first measures taken by the Britishers after they obtained Darjeeling from the rajah of Sikkim through the grant of 1835 was the establishment of better communication system between Darjeeling and the plains. As a result, between 1839 and 1842 Lord Napier of Magdala, then a lieutenant in the Engineers, was deputed to construct a road from Siliguri to Darjeeling. This road was laid out in the midst of thick forest and along the steep ridges for a length of 40 miles and came to be known as the Old Military Road.<sup>19</sup>

But with the passage of time Darjeeling area developed tremendously and the tea industry became firmly established, it was evident that Old Military Road, which was impracticable for wheeled traffic, was inadequate to supply its wants, and the need of having a cart road was realized. Government accordingly started constructing the new road known as Cart Road in 1861. The length from Darjeeling to Kurseong was open for traffic in 1864, and the whole road was completed in 1869. The construction of 126 miles

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<sup>18</sup> Arthur Jules Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteers*, Bengal Government Press, Alipore, Bengal, 1947, p179

<sup>19</sup> LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteers Darjeeling*, Logos Press, New Delhi, 1907, p132

was complicated at the cost of Rs. 14,68,000.<sup>20</sup>

Another breakthrough in the history of Darjeeling transportation and communication system came up in the year 1878 when the agent for the East Bengal Railways, Franklin Prestage, visited Darjeeling for the first time and thought a railway line would be much more feasible than the existing two day Tonga and Bullock Cart journey from Siliguri to Darjeeling. So he submitted a proposal to Government for the construction of a privately run train from Siliguri to Darjeeling and detailed the various advantages of such a project. But initially his proposal ran into trouble and it took several months to iron out all the objections before Government and finally on 8th April 1879 granted a sanction and the Darjeeling Steam Tramway Company was formed. For whatever reason a "Steam Tramway" was considered inappropriate and two years later on 15th September 1881 the company was renamed the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway Company (DHR) an appellation which has since endured. But it was still the steam that powered the engine.<sup>21</sup> Only recently, from 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1999<sup>22</sup> few of them were replaced by diesel locomotives for better speed and efficiency.

The construction of the railway line began immediately after the monsoons of 1879 and by March 1880 the twenty mile stretch (32 kilometers) from Siliguri to Tindharia was completed. Lord Lytton, then the Viceroy of India, inaugurated the line on 4<sup>th</sup> March 1880. He travelled up to Tindharia on the train with his wife. It was a tough job since no railways had ever been constructed in the hills and so there was no previous experience to draw from and the engineers were required to be innovative. Kurseong the next town 11 miles away was reached by August 1880 and the following year in February 1881 Sonada was linked, Ghoom in April 1881 and finally on 4th July 1881 it reached Darjeeling.<sup>23</sup>

Three of the most innovative engineering designs dominate the construction of the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway. The biggest obstacle while constructing the railway line

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp132-133

<sup>21</sup> Basant.B. Lama, *Through the Mists of Time: The Story of Darjeeling, The Land of Indian Gorkha*, Kurseong, 2008, p189

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mukbul Hussain, who was one of the main driver of the first diesel locomotive run from Darjeeling. At present he is retired from the job. 9<sup>th</sup> February, 2015

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p190

was the steep gradient of the hill road and it was found that at places the train was simply not moving. The only solution to the steep gradient was the construction of the ‘double loop’ at Chunbhatti and the ‘single loop’ at Agony point. Years later this technique was again applied in building the Batasia Loop, where the train takes a full 360 degree turn. But even this did not completely solve the problem. The contractor building the railways, Herbert Rumsey had confided with his wife the difficulties he was facing, whereupon she offered a startlingly simple solution. When at the ballroom dancing she said, it was permitted to make a reversal when backed up into a tight corner. So the problem of the unmanageable gradient was solved and the first of the reversals or zigzags was constructed. The third unique aspect to the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway is that upto an altitude of 7400 feet above sea level (Ghoom Station) there is not a single tunnel.<sup>24</sup>

Since its inception, the Darjeeling Himalayan Railways have proved to be the life line of Darjeeling, carrying the heavy poles, bars, machines for the construction of factories (Tea and Cinchona), bridges and buildings. It contributed a lot in the - development and making of modern Darjeeling. Besides carrying materials and provisions, the toy train was the means of communication for the people for reaching the Queen of the Hills. The well known leaders of socio-culture and spiritual renaissance of Bengal Swami Vivekananda, the legal and political luminary C.R. Das, the father of nation Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, Nobel laureate Mother Teresa and several others were carried to Darjeeling by the Toy Train. Thus the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway while moving on its tract from plain to empyrean knoll of Darjeeling has also created a glorious tract record, which is associated with modem history of India and also the Queen of Hills of the world.<sup>25</sup>

Explorer and writer K.C. Bhanja describes D.H.R as “a toy-like train leaves Siliguri and winding its way up the most romantic and the most crooked railroad in the world reaches Darjeeling without using cog-wheels. To a new-comer the beauty that

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p190

<sup>25</sup> D.S. Bomjon, *Darjeeling – Dooars People And Place Under Bengal’s Neo-Colonial Rule* ,Bikash Jana Sahitya Kendra, Darjeeling, 2<sup>nd</sup> (Revised Updated and Enlarged Edition), 2008, p26

reveals itself at every turn of this charming railway simply baffles description”.<sup>26</sup>

Other than the railways and roadways the ropeways in Darjeeling has a history of its own. It is believed that initially the ropeways were set up to cater to the tea gardens at the remote valleys below the main towns, which did not have any other access. Besides it was one of the important means of transporting tealeaves from the tea garden valleys to the upper reaches. The first ropeway in Darjeeling region was opened up in 1928 by the Kalimpong Ropeway Co. Ltd. It was mainly established for the purpose of transporting commodities between the town of Kalimpong and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway (D.H.R) in the Tista Valley.<sup>27</sup>

Soon the ropeways proved to be an efficient and economical form of transport. So the British Government started extending the ropeways in all directions, to the north to provide Sikkim and beyond with cheap and reliable transport facilities and to the south to connect with the railway at Sivok. Branch ropeways are also established in the Cinchona factory at Mungpoo and to the adjacent tea gardens for the extraction of timber, charcoal and produce materials from the surroundings.<sup>28</sup>

The first ropeway in Darjeeling was inaugurated in 7<sup>th</sup> January 1936 by Mr. A. S. Larkin (ICS, Deputy Commissioner). It was the result of the efforts of Nagarchand Goenka who submitted his proposal for the establishment of ropeways in Darjeeling as early as 1930s.<sup>29</sup> The ropeway connected Darjeeling with Bijanbari and had a length of 5 miles and was constructed on the Mono-cable ‘Breco’ system. It was owned by a public carrying company, the Darjeeling Ropeway Co. Ltd., and its managing agents were Messrs. Goenka and Co., Darjeeling. The ropeway was opened for traffic in January 1939. It had two intermediate stations at Singtom and Chungtong. It served Bijanbari which is an important centre for trade from Eastern Nepal and Western Sikkim and an important tea garden, forest and Khas Mahal area. In addition to the above public ropeway sanctioned under the Bengal Aerial Ropeways Act, 1923, a number of private

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<sup>26</sup> K. C. Bhanja, *History Of Darjeeling And The Sikkim Himalayas*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 1948

<sup>27</sup> A. J. Dash, op. cit., p196

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p197

<sup>29</sup> D. S. Rasaily, *Darjeeling Paharka Nagarpalicka Chetra Wikash Ra Khane Paniko Itihas Sangshipma - 1835 to 2012*, (in Nepali), Alaknanda, New Delhi, 2014

ropeways on tea gardens were established namely: Moonioti to Dbojea (1.5 miles, Oil engine), Brewery to Ringtong (2 miles, Electricity), Ringtong to Balasan (2 miles, Electricity), Balasan to Murmah (2 miles, Water power), Liza Hill Tea Estate (1 ½ miles, Water power), Thurbo Tea Estate ( ¾ miles, Hydro-electric), Gopaldhara Tea Estate (1 mile, Water power), Namring Tea Estate (3/8 miles, Hydro-electric), Pashok Tea Estate (3 miles, Hydro-electric), Gyabari Tea Estate to Tingling ( ½ , ¾ & 1 mile, Gravity), Phuguri Tea Estate ( ¾ mile, Gravity), Singballi Tea Estate ( ½ , ¾ & 1 mile, Gravity) etc.<sup>30</sup>

### **5. 3: CONCLUSION**

Thus from equal social status to development of better education and communication system of Darjeeling has its root in the plantation industry. So, it would not be wrong to say that the overall development of Darjeeling was commenced only after the introduction of the plantation industry in the region. However, the present scenario reflects a sad picture, plantation industry which was the very reason to have initiated the development and modernization process to Darjeeling is now lagging behind as underdeveloped and marginalized. It is high time that the state and the central government must arise from their slumber and give Darjeeling Tea and Cinchona its proper place and the laborers who are the heart and soul of the plantation industry the due that they deserve.

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<sup>30</sup> A. J. Dash, op. cit., pp197-198

## CHAPTER: 6

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

There is no documentary evidence to tell us about the exact condition of the laborers at the time of the introduction of the plantation industry in the Darjeeling region. However from the annual report of some of the tea estate from 1882-1911 we come to know that the Terai (foothills) and Darjeeling region was suffering from labour shortage during the initial years of plantation industry in these regions. The rate of mortality was very high. The living conditions were poor. The workers were not willing to work in the bad and unhygienic condition. Malaria, kala-ajar, dysentery etc., were very common diseases in these areas up to the period of Independence. Satyen Majumdar in his autobiography 'Amar Biplab Jiggasa' has pointed out that laborers in the plantation were badly treated but there were no organizations to ventilate their grievances. But at the same time, in Assam, Trade Unions actively started participating around 1920's. But in the Terai and Darjeeling region, laborers were completely cut off by the planters from mainstream life. It was said that only during the 'Haats' (weekly markets) they were permitted to have time for themselves but still they could not go beyond certain boundaries.

Besides, the planters always used to follow discriminatory policy towards the women. Despite forming half the labour force, women workers have remained marginalized in the functioning of the plantation industry from the time of its inception. In both tea and cinchona plantation sector women are confined mostly to the field work and never allowed to do official work and hold higher posts. In addition to it, up to the passing of the Remuneration Act in 1975, they were given less wages in comparison to the male laborers.

Although with the growth of trade unions, the condition of the workers had improved a lot, but as the days passed the situation of various tea and cinchona gardens remained the same. The condition of the laborers gradually became worse due to minimum wage payment, regular strikes, political movements (like the Gorkhaland movement of the 1980s and from 2007 onwards) and more than that many tea gardens being closed down along with the cinchona factory since 1999. As a result many people become jobless and they remain poor as before. Thus the

condition of the laborers never improved since the beginning of the plantation industry in this region. Although at present trade unions and various governmental and non-government organization came up to address the grievances of the workers but the ground realities related with the problems of the laborers remains the same. So, through this work an attempt has been made in order to sketch the history and journey of the tea and cinchona garden laborers.

There are many problems faced by the plantation laborers in the Darjeeling hills, who have been marginalized in many aspects of their social and economic life. During the British period, the plantation workers of Darjeeling region were treated as '*Kamanees* or *Coolies*' living under the complete sovereignty of 'Gora Sahibs' assisted by ignorant 'Sardars' who use to lure their respective caste and tribal workers from the agrarian belts of Darjeeling, Dooars, Terai, other places of Eastern Himalayas and even from Nepal. The Gorkha Sardars felt fortunate to get the post of Sardars at the plantations as they got '*Bakshis*' for recruiting workers/laborers for the management. Even today the management indoctrinates the workers with the idea that the plantations areas are their colonies and estates where workers are taught to be the slaves of the managers. In addition to this, the population in the plantation industry started growing and in order to meet the situation the planters started implementing 'Contract Clause' of Bengal Act III of 1915 which provided not only for the recruitment of laborers but also incorporated provisions of labour retrenchment. Thus from 1930 onwards, many workers were retrenched from tea plantations in the name of '*Hatta Bahira*' system.<sup>1</sup> The system of *Hatta Bahira* might have thrown the laborers into more precarious condition. Although Darjeeling Plantations were not characterized with indentured labour like Assam but there existed to some extent, coerced labour.<sup>2</sup>

The development of the plantation industry in the second half of the 19th century was an important chapter in the history of North Bengal / Darjeeling Region in particular and the whole of India in general. In the long run the introduction of the

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<sup>1</sup> Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das, *Agony of Plantation Workers in North-East India*, Kalpaz Publication, Delhi, 2008, p203

<sup>2</sup> Rasaily, Rinju. *Labour and Health in Tea Plantations: A Case Study of Phuguri Tea Estate, Darjeeling*, Unpublished PhD. Thesis submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University, Centre for Social Medicine and Community Health, School of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 2003, p293.



plantation industry not only affected the economy but also the cultural, social and political scenario of area. For example we can specifically mention that, in the political fields, as because the migrant plantation workers were the dominant community of Darjeeling district, so most of the people's representatives from the Panchayat to the Parliament are from the worker's group. In fact the entire political scenario was drastically altered. In the cultural field, we found the emergence of new dialect, known as 'Sadri' in the Terai area and some parts of the Darjeeling region. It is not a language but rather a *lingua- franca* of the different tribal groups. What is interesting is that this dialect is not found in their original homeland. On the other hand in the hill areas, *Nepali* language emerged as *lingua franca* between the laborers in the hill areas of Darjeeling region. And as a result their respective traditional dialect like Rai, Limbu, Subba, Lepcha, Newari etc lost their prominence in the plantation areas. But on a positive note, Nepali Language and literature has flourished immensely in the region. In regard to the society a new social group emerged known as *Madesia* and *Paharia*. As most of the migrant tribal workers were from the plains or *madesh* they were known as 'Madesia'. Although they appeared to be one homogeneous group, especially when compared to the Nepali workers who were known as 'Paharia'(meaning from hill areas, especially Nepali speaking people) in reality they were not a homogeneous group, but were divided into different tribes.

In addition to this the rigid caste hierarchy which used to prevail in the Nepali society started losing its predominance due to the common dwellings in the industrial environment. The traditional three tier Nepali caste hierarchy namely *Tagadhari Jat* (Caste), *Matwali Jat* (Caste) and the Untouchables started loosening its implication in the society. And a new concept like *Thulo jat* meaning higher or upper caste and *Sano jat* meaning lower or small caste started gaining its importance in the Nepali Society. It was sometimes also referred to as *Pani Chalne Jat* or a caste from whose hand water can be accepted and the *Pani Na Chalne jat* meaning caste from whom water cannot be accepted by the upper caste. The concept and practice like untouchability as such totally lost its place in the plantation society of Darjeeling region. Thus it would not be wrong to say that the kind of society that we have today in the Darjeeling region, without any caste prejudices, biases and practices like untouchability is one of the major contributions of the plantation industry which compelled the people from various caste and class to work in a common environment.

Besides socio-cultural changes in the hills, plantation industry indirectly helped in the overall development of the area. It would not be wrong to say that, it was only after the introduction of the plantation industry (tea and cinchona) that overall development of the region actually started. This was soon followed by the other major activities like introduction of Railways, construction of roads, ropeways, bridges etc and finally the establishment of missionary schools and colleges. Apart from these, earnings from plantation industry played a critical role in Britain's International Trade and capital flow relation and in the maintenance of the British Imperial System. Thus we can say that the development of Darjeeling in the nineteenth century was largely due to the introduction of the plantation industry in the region by the Britishers, though they were only interested in the profit rather than the growth and development of the area. However, the present scenario reflects a sad picture, plantation industry which was the very reason to have initiated the development and modernization process to Darjeeling is now lagging behind as underdeveloped and marginalized in the Darjeeling region. The wages of the tea garden laborers remains a meager Rs 90 per day even after many efforts by the workers' union and political parties to increase the wages of the workers. It is high time that the state and the central government arise from their slumber and give Darjeeling Tea, the area and the Tea Garden workers the due that they deserve.

Theoretically plantation industry of Darjeeling region is the mainstay of the economy in the hills and therefore promises to provide a rewarding way of life which provides to its workers a steady livelihood, housing, statutory benefits, allowance, incentives, crèches for infants of working mothers, children's education, integrated residential medical facilities for employees and their families and many more. But in reality this is not the case. The laborers, who are the heart and the soul of the plantation industry still do not have the basic facilities like housing, education, allowance, incentives, and medical facilities, which they deserve. Although these people have been living in the areas for more than hundred years they still do not have any documents of their land holdings. So, if any worker goes against the management, they have the right to throw them from their land holdings. In 1951 government of India had tried to take an initiative by passing the Plantation Labour Act in order to address the sufferings of the laborers, but it hardly had any effects on them. The Plantation Labour Act of 1951 lays down that plantation area must have primary

schools, creches, clean drinking water supply in the labour lines, recreational facilities for the workers etc. But unfortunately, most of these provisions are not enforced fully in any of the plantation areas of Darjeeling region, workers are still deprived of whatever little scope they have of improving their condition.

Plantation industry is really an issue of intensive study and research because the early entrepreneurs with the help of the laborers had developed the industry with many odds. But, the third generations of the planters were virtually disinterested in the Plantation. They were more interested in converting Tea Gardens and Cinchona gardens into Money Making Industry. It is high time now that both central and state governments have to work on the various issues of the plantation laborers and must provide at least basic requirements for them. In this regard first and the foremost, every plantation unit must implement the rules and regulations laid under the Plantation Labour Act of 1951, especially with regard to the working conditions, provision of protective gears, toilets, health centers and other immediate needs of the workers must be taken into consideration. The government and various authorities can organize vocational training for the tea and cinchona garden laborers to empower themselves, in addition to this infrastructure facilities must be provided to them and most importantly the wages of the laborers can be improved which in turn will improve the entire plantation industry. Tea and cinchona gardens can also be roped in to the tourism sector and these plantations can be included as the places of visits for tourists to understand the plantations and the history of these industries. Thus turning these plantations into heritage or eco-museum of the Darjeeling region for the better sustainability of the people of these areas.

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