

**THE CONDITION OF THE PLANTATION LABOURERS OF
DARJEELING AND THE SUB-HIMALAYAN REGION OF
NORTH BENGAL: THE ROLE OF TRADE UNION
MOVEMENT (1860's TO EARLY 21st CENTURY)**

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of Jadavpur University in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History

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**The Condition of the Plantation Labourers of Darjeeling and the
Sub-Himalayan region of North Bengal: The Role of Trade Union
Movement (1860's to Early 21st Century)**

Certificate that the Thesis entitled:

The Condition of the Plantation Labourers of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region of North Bengal: The Role of Trade Union Movement (1860's to Early 21st Century)

submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of **Dr. Rup Kumar Barman, Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University**, and that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

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Preface

Tea plantation regions has always attracted tourists from foreign region and also from within the country. The lush tea valleys in the Darjeeling hills and green open areas in the Sub-Himalayan plains have even attracted photographers and film makers from various parts of the world; as one cannot ignore the natural beauty of it. These tea plantations even attract businessmen from various parts of the country, as these lush tea bushes even provides them a huge amount of money as the tea leaves prepared from these plants are exported in a handsome amount. Behind these beauty and money their lies a large number of people who work here in the very plantations with hardship and very less amount of money which they receive as wage. The labourers working in these gardens are approximately fourth generation labourers, and sadly they are facing the problems quite similar to that of their forefathers who worked during the colonial regime. These labourers are the unseen face behind the tea gardens beauty and the big amount of money which the owners make. This research is dedicated to all the tea garden labourers of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region, who are the backbone of the “Tea” which is produced in these two regions; by this “Tea” these areas are known in the world. The socio-economic condition defines the standard of living of people, on this very note, this research has done a detailed study of the tea plantation labourers socio-economic condition. In order to understand the socio-economic condition of the labourers of tea plantations from the colonial period till present, this study has gone through every aspect which needs to be focused.

During the tenure of my research, interviews of both formal and informal aspects were done in a random basis. A questionnaire was made in order to collect information from the labourers. Compiling the sources from both primary and secondary source with interviews I have come up with various chapters which discusses different aspects of research which is required. The first chapter discusses the format of the research, which will be followed by

second chapter which presents the historical background of two regions of research and tea plantations. Third chapter discusses about the migration of the labourers in tea plantation, which is followed by the recruitment of the labourers in the fourth chapter. Fifth chapter discusses the socio-economic life of the labourers during the colonial period. Sixth chapter discusses the post-colonial state of the tea plantation labourers in a detailed manner. Lastly, conclusion and recommendations are presented in the final chapter. However, this work shall provide the required help to the scholars to acquire knowledge in this area of research.

Acknowledgment

Every successful work which one achieves is not achieved only with individual effort, but there are various hands some are visible and some are unseen which acts as the backbone for that individual. I would sincerely express my gratitude to all those persons who were there during the period of my research.

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I would like to convey my gratitude to Library officials, office staffs of Department of History, Jadavpur University, for providing me help in one way or the other. I would also like to express my gratitude to Central Library, Jadavpur University. I would also like to thank officials of West Bengal State Archive, Kolkata and National Library, Alipore.

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Abbreviation

E.I.C	East India Company
TDLA	Tea District Labour Association.
ITPA	Indian Tea Planters Association.
DPA	Dooars Planters Association.
USA	United States of America.
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.
MWA	Minimum Wage Act.
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly.
ILO	International Labour Organisation.
ITA	Indian Tea Association.
MWAC	Minimum Wage Advisory Committee.
PLA	Plantation Labour Act.
ILC	Indian Labour Conference.
CPI	Communist Party of India.
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India Marxist.
WPR	Workers Population Ratio.
NCRB	National Crime Records Bureau.
DDPL	Darjeeling Dooars Plantation Ltd.
PF	Provident Fund.
FAWLOI	Financial Assistant to the Workers of Locked Out Industries.
GDNS	Gorkha Dukha Niwarak Sammelan.
DDTGWU	Darjeeling District Tea Garden Worker's Union.
DDCKSS	Darjeeling District Chai Kaman Shramik Sangh.
BARRWU	Bengal-Assam Rail Road Workers' Union.

BDR	Bengal Dooars Railway.
ZCBMU	Zilla Cha Bagan Mazdur Union.
ECA	Essential Commodities Act.
ABGL	Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League.
AITUC	All India Trade Union Congress.
UTUC	United Trade Union Congress
HMS	Hind Mazdoor Sabha.
ICP	Industrial Committee of Plantation.
GNLF	Gorkha National Liberation Front.
DGHC	Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council.
HPWU	Himalayan Plantation Workers Union.
GJMM	Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha.
DTDPLU	Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union.
ABP	Adivasi Bikash Parishad.
PTWU	Progressive Tea Workers Union.
CCTPW	Central Committee of Tea Plantation Workers.

Glossary

<i>Singpho</i>	Name of Tribe in Assam who were found drinking tea before tea plantation started by the British.
<i>Jotedars</i>	Landlords.
<i>Jot/Jote</i>	Land.
<i>Annas</i>	Equals to 4 paise.
<i>Kalazar</i>	Black water fever.
<i>Taklars</i>	Chinese tea makers during early tea plantation working under British.
<i>Sardars</i>	Person who used to bring labourers.
<i>Marad</i>	Male.
<i>Aurat</i>	Female.
<i>Muglan</i>	People of Nepal used to call India with this name, which in actual meant Mughals Land.
<i>Matwali</i>	One who drinks alcohol.
<i>Tagadhari</i>	One who wears sacred thread body.
<i>Dikus</i>	Aliens
<i>Mahua</i>	Name of Tree.
<i>Paharia</i>	Hill People.
<i>Thanas</i>	Police Station.
<i>Sahib</i>	Sir.
<i>Lokra</i>	Children.
<i>Chokra</i>	Adolescent.
<i>Dhuras</i>	Lane or Areas.
<i>Kamane</i>	Of tea garden.
<i>Baksis</i>	Bonus
<i>Authi</i>	Ring.

<i>Ma-Baap</i>	Parental Authority.
<i>Chowkidar</i>	Guard.
<i>Kharcha</i>	Local name for Wage.
<i>Talab</i>	Local name for Salary.
<i>Bara Sahib</i>	Manager
<i>Chota Sahib</i>	Assistant Manager.
<i>Babus</i>	Local name for Bengali officers or staffs.
<i>Baidar</i>	Supervisor.
<i>Kotheybari</i>	Kitchen garden.
<i>Mardangi</i>	Masculinity.

Chapter: 1:

Introduction

Darjeeling situated in the northern side of West Bengal and Dooras and Terai which is known as the Sub-Himalayan region is situated from the foothills of Darjeeling and stretches to the plains of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar which are famous for its different varieties of tea and tourism. Darjeeling is known for its scenic beauty and cool climate where as the Sub-Himalayan region for its dense forest and many wildlife sanctuaries. The common history allied with both the regions are of the tea plantation. The tea plantation in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region has its history from the Colonial times. Like most of the plantation crops in British colonies tea was also one important export orientated product. The rapid expansion of tea cultivation in Assam was followed by the establishment of plantations in Darjeeling (1839), Terai (1862) and Dooars regions (1874) of North Bengal.

The colonialism introduced various plantation in the colonised countries, the plantation such as coffee, sugar, cotton, tea and others. The introduction of such plantation in a larger manner has affected the local agriculture, tradition, culture, and even the biodiversity in some cases. After the introduction of the plantation the colonisers were in need of labourers as major number of labourers are required in the plantation sector. To Bring the labourers in the plantation sector became a necessity as the plantations were mostly introduced in less populated areas and when the inhabitants of that area refused to work in the plantation. The above mentioned two factors fits in the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. In both the regions the some of the local inhabitants refused to work in the tea plantation under the colonisers and some of the inhabitants who all worked or were forced to work were not enough for the plantation. Hence the migration of the labourers was done from within the country and even from beyond the country borders. The colonial history of plantation has been related with the history of labour migration in the plantation areas, which has been the same in the tea plantation history of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. Therefore, this research has tried to study the labour history of the tea plantation regions of North Bengal.

It is important to understand the living condition of the tea plantation regions as after the migration to new place the socio-economic and cultural state of the people does change, hence the study tries to bring that of both the colonial and post-colonial period. The research tries to deal with whether the socio-economic condition of labourers has been changed with a

growth in their living condition or whether the situation has gone to a lower and gloomy state. The study of labourers has always been associated with the labour organisation and trade union in every plantation and the industrial sector. The study tries to bring the account of the role played by them for the development of labours condition, and will observe whether the condition of the labourers has improved or has been the same.

1.2: Statement of the Problem

The history of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region has always been connected with Tea Industry. These two regions have their distinct history but allied with the tea plantation introduced by the colonisers. The idea of tea plantation in these two regions by the colonisers did not occur suddenly, there are factors behind that idea. Hence the historical factors related with the idea of tea plantation which resulted in the introduction of tea plantation in India and in North Bengal region should be understood. The introduction of tea plantation has dragged the migration of labourers in the plantation region after facing the labour problem. The historical factors which pulled the labourers from various regions to the plantation area and the factor which pushed the labourers to migrate to the plantation area living their homes and lands must be understood and this study tries to bring those factors in a clear manner.

To bring the labourers in the tea plantation and recruit them in different tea plantations was not an easy task for the colonisers. The migration of the labourers was possible for the colonisers with the help of Sardars who worked as an agent to bring the labourers to the plantation areas. The process of how the labourers were brought in the tea plantation and the way in which they were recruited in the tea gardens has been studied in a historical manner in this research. The tea plantation labourers after being brought into plantation areas were settled in the garden itself. The process in which the labourers were settled in the tea gardens, changes in their socio cultural and economic status; whether the quality of it has improved in colonial control than that of when they were in their native places. The wage payment has become one of the important factor by which the labourers were controlled by the colonial planters in the tea gardens. The methods and changes in the wage and wage system during the colonial period has to be understood. This present study tries to bring such issues into light.

The colonial regime in India was removed after long fought independence movement, resulting in various changes in the country. Even after the colonisers left the country the tea plantation sector remained one of the important industry in India. In the tea plantation no big

changes were made after independence, mostly everything remained the same. The study on the socio-economic changes which has taken place in the post-colonial period in tea gardens of this two regions will be focused on. The study of the post-colonial state of the tea gardens especially during the late in the 21st century has to be brought into lime light. The change in the wage, the rate of increment in the wages, the quality of living condition which the planters has provided to the labourers has to be studies. In recent period many tea gardens are facing shut down and irregularities on running of tea gardens, the labourers have to face the consequences. The shutting down and abandonment of tea gardens has led to severe cases of death by hunger, malnutrition, lack of medical treatment, trafficking and others in the garden. Thus the study tries to bring into account such incidents related with the labour and tea plantation of the recent period.

Tea plantation and other labour intensive industry has always been associated with labour organisation and trade unions. The role played by the trade union in the tea gardens and in improving the living condition of the labourers has to be studied. The Plantation Labour Act being one of the primary weapon for the trade unions and labourers to fight for their rights and receive benefits is provided but the implementation of it has not taken place. Hence the study will try to understand the issue and look for the appropriate response.

1.3: Review of Literature:

A number of literature works has been done related to the tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region, some of which has been reviewed below. At first it is important to understand the history of the tea plantation regions of West Bengal. The literature which deals with the history of these two regions has been reviewed. Regarding the history of Darjeeling work by Sanjay Biswas and Sameer Roka¹ presents the history of Darjeeling mainly putting light on language, literature, history, culture, socio-political structure of Darjeeling before independence and so on.

Basant. B. Lama² in his book gives chronological records of the incidents occurred in Darjeeling. He has used the primary sources like letters and government records which makes it easier for the reader to understand.

L.S.S.O' Malley³ work has been used as one of the first gazetted source of Darjeeling. The collection of primary official data as a record by the British was done for their benefits but has turned as one of the first recorded and printed gazetteer for study related with the history

of Darjeeling. It has detailed information about the physical aspects, history, people, agriculture, tea industries, forest, administration, etc. Similarly, the other gazetteers which have recorded the official and primary documents of Darjeeling are works done by A.J. Dash⁴ and W.W. Hunter⁵.

The history of Darjeeling has not only been associated with the tea plantation but also has a political history which has various movement associated with it. Such political history has been presented in the works by Amiya K. Samanta,⁶ where he mentions about how the growth of a sense of ethnic exclusiveness came across the Indian Nepali or Gorkhas communities. This work presents the history of Darjeeling from the time it was handed over to the East India Company by the Raja of Sikkim. Further it has been shown that how the movement of autonomy emerged in this region and how it was taken forward by different regional political parties.

D.S. Bomjan⁷ also presents the brief history of Darjeeling and has given the account of the political development and the political movements which has taken place in Darjeeling. Bomjan being a member of Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxist (CPRM) has presented the scenario where he presents the role communist party and its members from Darjeeling in the various political turmoil's which has occurred in Darjeeling.

The early history of the Sub-Himalayan region has been mentioned in various works such as D.H.E. Sanders⁸ work, which presents the surveyed report of the settlement, and other aspects such as history, geography, agriculture, and all others. Such detailed works regarding the Sub-Himalayan region has even been done by others such as works of by J. F. Grunning⁹ and J.A. Milligan¹⁰ which presents the records of every aspect of the Sub-Himalayan region.

Sailen Debnath's¹¹ work presents the history of the Sub-Himalayan region from the early times. His work tries to bring the narrative of the unknown past of this region and analyses the historical transitions of the Dooars region. The historical establishment of Kamtapur kingdom of seventh century has been presented and the beginning and the expansion of the Koch Kingdom has also been presented. The historical transition of other aspects of Sub-Himalayan region such as socio-economic, political, cultural are been elaborated in this work.

While analysing the literature which deals with the tea plantation, Debabrata Mitra's¹² work deals with the history of tea plantation in West Bengal. He presents how tea plantation under British flourished in India, most importantly in West Bengal regions. Mitra presents

different phases of trade union movement from the colonial period to post-colonial phase which occurred in the tea plantations and even narrates about the formation of trade unions in the tea plantation regions. The industrial relation in the tea plantations in post independent period has also been debated in this work.

Khemraj Sharma¹³ writes about the parallel movement of the Trade Union and the Movement of ethnicity in Darjeeling hills. The focus has been made in how the different regional parties of Darjeeling mobilised the people with their party with the call of ethnic movement and even taking on the trade union forward mostly dealing with the problem of tea garden. The importance of the regional party's like CPRM, CPI(M), GJMM, AIGL, GNLF, to maintain trade union as well as to go forward with the movement of ethnicity was that whoever had the upper hand turned to be the power party of Darjeeling.

Sharit Bowmik,¹⁴ in his article writes about the unrest in Darjeeling and Dooars because of the Gorkhaland Movement and its impact in the trade union of the tea gardens. Even the focus has been made on how the rise of GNLF in 1986 and GJMM in 2007 made its control over the trade union of these two regions. He even puts light in the wage politics played in between GJMM, AVP and KPP.

Sharit K. Bhowmik and Virginus Xaxa¹⁵, work presents the narrative of how tea plantation being one of the largest employer in an organised sector. It further states this sector being one of the important foreign exchange sector, pay the lowest rate of wages to its labourers and are most exploited within any industrial sector. They also narrate the historical events of how the Plantation Labour Act 1951 was passed, even when it was being opposed by the planters. Unfortunately, the act has not been implied in the tea plantation sector till now. The similar narrative of how the women labourers had to fight for their right of Maternity Benefits which were not provided before.

Ranajit Das Gupta,¹⁶ in his article work deals with the transformation of peasants and tribesmen to plantation workers. He argues on how the labourers were brought into plantation from being peasants and tribesmen, in the plantations of Assam. He narrates that the labour mobilisation in tea plantation created a huge change in the life of tribal, semi-tribal and peasants as they were detached from their indigenous habitat and the style of work and were forced in totally different plantation work.

Vimal Khawas¹⁷ in his work discusses that Darjeeling produces highest quality of tea and generates good amount of foreign exchange, but still this plantation labour stays in the lowest economic strata. He further argues about the existing problems which are been faced by the tea garden labourers of Darjeeling even in the recent period the primary problems being the economic problems, electricity, proper roads, education facilities, are because of the negligence and authoritarian approach of tea management towards social and economic development of tea garden labourers.

Shyamal Chandra Sarkar,¹⁸ regarding the tea plantations of the Jalpaiguri has done a work in which he at first presents the historical background of tea plantation in Jalpaiguri, the Anglo-Bhutan War and the formation of Jalpaiguri district in 1869, which was followed by the first tea plantation in Jalpaiguri. He then presents the narration of the migration of labourers which took place in the Jalpaiguri district and the socio-economic condition of the labourers of the tea plantation of Jalpaiguri during the colonial period.

Sharit Bhowmik,¹⁹ in this work has discussed about the tea gardens of the Sub-Himalayan region, which were shut down mainly from the year 2006-07. Bhowmik has basically brought the plight of the labourers of these closed tea gardens and the insensitivity shown by the planters by shutting the gardens upon the fate of the labourers. Further he has shown the distressing living condition of the closed tea garden labourers.

Piya Chatterjee²⁰ in her book has provided an ethnographic, and historical critique on labour practices in the Indian plantation with sophisticated examination of the production, consumption, and circulation of tea. She argues how the image of women in the advertisement of tea has distracted the viewers and the consumers from terrible working conditions, low wages, and coercive labour practices enforced in the tea plantation. She even explores the global and political dimensions of local practices of gendered labour, which are prevalent in the tea plantation. She discusses the extended reflection on the cultures of hierarchy, power, gender differentiation in the plantation villages.

Manas Dasgupta²¹ in his work emphasises upon continuity and transformation in the labour condition of Darjeeling, Sub-Himalayan region and Terai tea gardens. He focuses on the changes in the economic condition of the labourers which has been the primary concern for the labourers.

Soma Chaudhuri,²² in her work brings the pain and plight of the Adivasi women tea plantation labours. Her main argument presents the connections between tea production and village level conflicts among the plantation workers that lead to women being targeted and persecuted in the name of witches in the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri. Women labourers after facing the hard system of work in the tea plantation even has to be victim of inhumane social dogma in which they are been tortured physically and mentally, which has been presented by Choudhuri by presenting various instances.

Percival Griffiths²³ work is probably the first work based on the tea plantation in India. Griffiths has given an account in this book as a business history but the detailed information about the tea plantation in India with an account on the history of tea and the myths related with its origin. He further presents the history of first tea plant found in India and chronological history of growth of tea plantation in India from the year 1830's to the end of 1960 has been presented. He discusses from the recruitment of labourers and till remuneration of labourers and its changes, and every aspect of history of tea in India. Being a British writer Griffiths work is not free from prejudice, as various aspects are not being mentioned in such volume of work.

Roy Moxham²⁴, presents the history of how tea as a drink became popular in Europe. He further presents the key events, and features related with the tea production and its consumption worldwide. He even presents the early tea plantation scenario in the tea plantation of Assam after a native tea plant was found, primarily he has presented nothing but the British experience of tea. The plight of the tea labourers and their lives has been unseen.

Literature plays an important role in placing the prevailing society of the particular period. In this context some of the novels written in nepali language has presented the scenario of tea gardens. Prakash Kovid²⁵ in his novel presents the society and people of Darjeeling and the tea garden area during the colonial period. After the successfully in the trail of tea the plantation kept on increasing, hence more plantation required larger number of labourers. The resistance shown by the by the aboriginal community of Darjeeling who are the Lepchas to work under colonisers as a result of which they were forced to leave their land has been presented. The inhumane system of *Chokri System*, *Hatta Bahar*, are presented. Balkrishna Thapa Mangar²⁶ in his novel presents more descriptively about *Hatta Bahar* system. The labour society in the tea plantation were facing the arduous system. Such kind of system and the labourers resistance has been shown by Ashit Rai²⁷ in his novel.

1.4: Research Gap:

Studies has been done in the tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region by various scholars of various fields of social sciences. Such research is done from the economics perspective, some are done from the sociological aspect, some has been done to understand the geographical importance of these places. Hence I have done this research from a historical aspect, I have tried to bring history of these plantation regions from its earliest time and to analyse how and what kind of changes or historical changes or incidents has taken place in these plantation regions which I found to be a gap in these area. As historians cannot write history without facts and sources, one can use the other works done by scholars from different schools of social science as their supporting sources or facts while writing the history or historical research; the only thing is how we present it, by writing this reminds me about E.H. Carr saying “Facts are Sacred but Opinion is Free.”

1.5: Significance of Research:

The Significance of this Research are:

- ❖ This research helps to understand the history of Tea Plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region.
- ❖ This research will bring the plight and sorrow of the labourers which are hidden behind the lush green tea plantation and big advertisement hoardings.
- ❖ Another significance of this research would be, this will help the future research scholars to understand the problems and prospect in these area of research in a historical manner.
- ❖ With the help of these kinds of research the concerned authority might get informed and take necessary actions on the required matters of the tea plantation labourers.

1.6: Research Area:

The research area for my research is limited within the tea plantation regions of West Bengal, or to be more precise the northern region of West Bengal which are the Darjeeling Hills and the Sub-Himalayan region also known as Bengal Dooars. Darjeeling district consists of hills, foothill plains and plains, tea plantation is found in all the three regions, but the authentic and orthodox Darjeeling tea of which Darjeeling is famous for comes from the hilly tracts. The Sub-Himalayan region are the alluvial flood plains which is situated in the foot bed of Bhutan

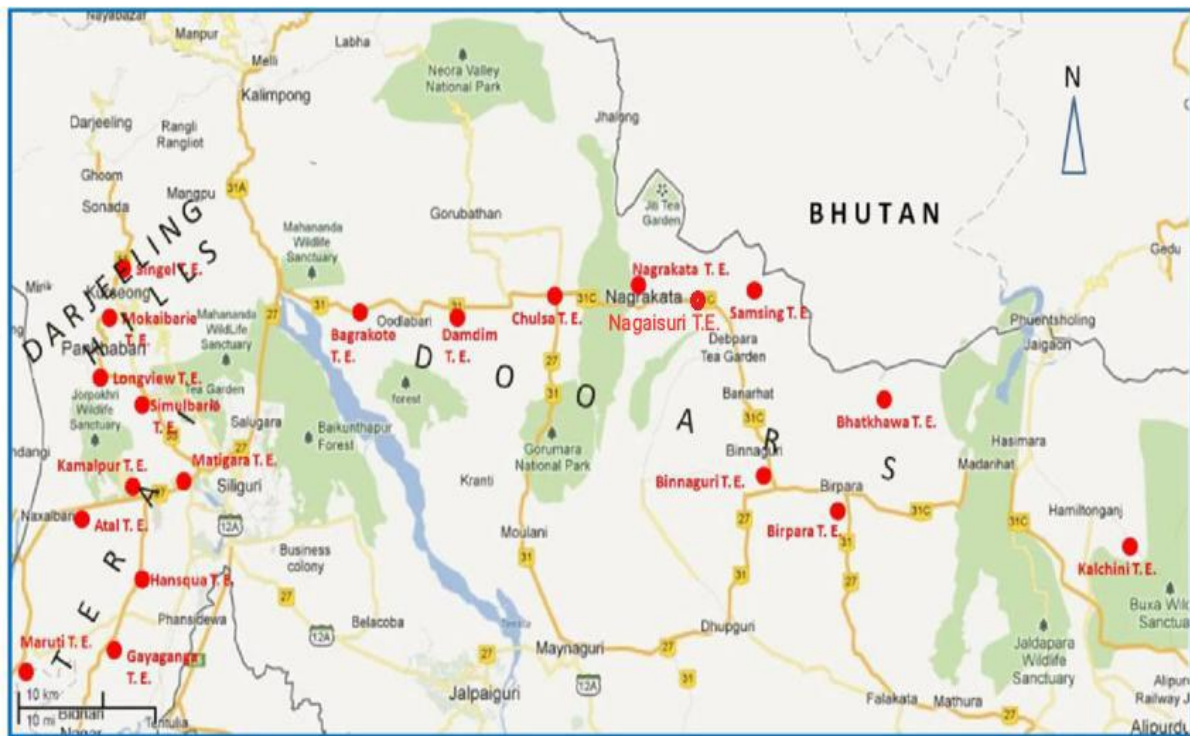
hills. This Sub-Himalayan region falls within the districts of Jalpaiguri and Alipurduar. This region consists of tea plantation, agricultural land and dense forest, this region is also the gateway to Bhutan hence commonly known as Dooars. This Sub-Himalayan region consists of largest number of tea gardens. To understand the geographical location of the tea plantation in both the regions two maps of both the region has been presented below.

Map 1: Tea Plantation Region in Darjeeling District.



Source: From Unpublished PhD Thesis of Pratima Chamling Rai, www.tea-centrum.sk, www.e-tea.eu.

Map 2: Tea Plantation Regions in the Sub-Himalayan Region.



Source: From Unpublished PhD Thesis of Pratima Chamling Rai, Research Article by D.Saha, A. Mukhopadhyay, M. Bahadur, 2013, p-93.

1.7: Research Time Period:

The time period in history plays a vital role, in history writing and in historical research it has an important part. Regarding my research, the time period is not fixed from one certain year to another which we usually see in other research. Rather, my period of research covers the colonial era during which the tea plantation flourished in these two regions of West Bengal. After that the period even covers the changing situations or the conditions of tea plantation and its labourers in the post-colonial era. One important factor for this long period, which covers many decades is that, any changes such as social, economic and political in the tea plantation regions does not occur in short period of time. Till now any such changes which has taken place have taken a long gap, which will be much clear to understand while going through my research.

1.8: Objectives of Study:

The objective of this research are:

- ❖ To understand the factors behind how the tea plantation came to India.
- ❖ To understand the process of how tea plantation flourished in different parts of India as a successful plantation.
- ❖ To analyse the factors and historical process of labour migration which took place in the tea plantation regions of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region.
- ❖ To learn about the historical process of labour recruitments which occurred in tea plantation of both the region.
- ❖ To analyse the socio-economic status of the labourers during the colonial period.
- ❖ To understand the remuneration process under which the labourers were paid in the colonial and post-colonial period.
- ❖ To study changes of the socio-economic life of the labourers in the post-colonial phase.
- ❖ To look at the changing scenario of labour present in the tea gardens.
- ❖ To analyse and identify the factor affecting the quality of life of the closed and sick tea gardens in the 21st century.
- ❖ To analyse the history and role of the trade unions and other labour organisations related with the tea plantation.

1.9: Research Questions:

The research question draws the basic understanding of research objective.

- ❖ Were there factors behind the introduction of tea plantation in India or was it a historical coincidence?
- ❖ What led to the migration of labourers in tea plantation? Was there a change in the demography of that place after that?
- ❖ What were the basis of recruitment of labour in the tea plantation?
- ❖ Was the living condition of labourers and the wages paid justifiable during the colonial period?
- ❖ Has the quality of living condition of tea labourers changed during the post-colonial period?
- ❖ The number of labourers in the tea gardens are declining gradually. Are the management and negligence of owners responsible for it?

- ❖ The pathetic social condition such as human trafficking, death by hunger, malnutrition and others has been call of the day in the closed and sick tea gardens, who are to be responsible for this?
- ❖ Has the trade union been able to solve the labour problems in tea plantation?

1.10: Methodology:

This research is an empirical study which include Primary Sources and Secondary Sources and even field works in order to present this research. Primary source includes various documents government records, newspapers, documents used by the trade unions during their various programmes, and manifestoes of various political party, trade unions, etc. In the Secondary Source books and articles relevant to this research topic has been used. The research also consists of the archival materials and even interviews with some personalities related to the topic for supplementary information.

In the methodology, I have followed various methods for my research. Firstly, I have studied the background history of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region and even the history of Tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region with the help of different primary and secondary sources. Secondly, the method of selecting the tea gardens on the basis of different owning companies and looking at its running situation has been done. Thirdly, field works were conducted where at first general information of the tea garden and its historical background were researched. In the another stage of my field work, the problems in the tea garden were been enquired by interviewing the tea garden labourers and some of the local trade union representatives.

In order to conduct the above field work questionnaires were prepared to understand the socio-economic, political situation of the garden, which was also followed by casual conversation regarding such issues. The interview was not limited to the labourers and the trade union representatives but also of the leaders of political party, writers, members of tea planters, academicians, tea labours rights activist, retired tea garden managers and other learned persons in this field. During the interview process with the above mentioned dignitaries the interview was conducted in an informal discussion and questions.

1.11: Chapter Division:

Chapter: 1: Introduction

This chapter consist of the introduction of my research which will consist of the synopsis of my research, literature reviews, statement of the problem, methodology and summary of the chapters.

Chapter: 2: History of Tea Plantation in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region from the Colonial times.

This chapter at first presents the history of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region before the introduction of tea plantation. It also tries to bring how tea became an integral part of the European culture after it was introduced in Europe by the Portuguese. Further the history and incidents related with the tea trade and its experiment in various places of India has been mentioned. In the last part the course of history on how the tea plantation was introduced in the Himalayan region of Darjeeling and later in the Sub-Himalayan region has been presented.

Chapter: 3: The Migration of Labourers in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region during the Early Tea Plantation Period.

This chapter deals with how after the introduction of tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region the scarcity of labourers compelled the colonial planters to search for more labourers, which resulted in the bringing the labourers from different parts of the country and from the nearby region. Further this chapter argues both the pull and push factors responsible for the migration of the labourers in both the regions. It then presents the entire migration process and the demographic change which occurred in both the tea plantation regions.

Chapter: 4: Recruitment of Labours in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan Region Tea Plantation.

After the migration of labourers in the tea gardens started, immediately their recruitment process in different tea gardens started too. This chapter presents the different kinds of recruitment process which the labourers had gone through. The system in which they were brought into tea gardens with the help of *Sardari* system and the *Arkatti* System has been explained. To understand the recruitment process of the two tea regions of West Bengal first a brief discussion on the labour recruitment which took in Assam has been presented, as the first labour migration and recruitment in tea plantation happens to be in Assam.

Chapter: 5: Socio-Economic Life of the Tea Plantation Labourers in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal During Colonial Period.

This chapter analyses and discuss the living condition, social life and the wages paid to the labourers during the colonial period. After the recruitment the labourers they were kept within the plantation area, hence this chapter tries to present the quality of living condition such as house, sanitation, hygiene etc., provided to the labourers by the colonial planters. This chapter even tries to discuss about the social life of the labourers and the social restrictions and inhumane social practices which the colonial planters used to imply on the labourers. This chapter presents the argument on the rate of which the labourers were paid and with such rate of payment how the labourers used to be controlled by the colonial planters.

Chapter: 6: The Post-Colonial State of the Tea Plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal.

This chapter deals with the tea plantation labourers living condition during the post-colonial period. The first part of this chapter presents the change in the ownership of tea gardens after independence of the country. The chapter even discusses about the hierarchy and the work associated with it in the tea gardens. In order to understand the change in the labourers living condition this chapter analyses the changes in wage rates, the rate in which the houses were provided to the labourers, the medical facilities provided. The discussion regarding the decreasing number of labour in the tea gardens has also been done. This chapter even discusses about the aspects like out-migration, human trafficking which are growing in closed, sick and even in the running gardens quite abruptly. The chapter even discusses about the living condition of closed and abandoned tea gardens of north Bengal. Pity living condition with very less earning, some with almost no earning, death by hunger, malnutrition, absence of medical facilities and other has been a daily call of these gardens, these kinds of situation has been brought into light in this chapter. Lastly, this chapter presents the historical factors related with the formation of trade union in the tea gardens of both the region. It also presents the labour movements under trade unions and its works in the past; the narrative of the trade union in the present days has also been discussed.

Chapter: 7: Concluding Observation.

This chapter comprises of the concluding discussion of every chapters of the research. It also discusses about my findings of this research which I have come through during the due course of my research. Further, this chapter presents the recommendations presented by myself as per the crisis and the area of improvement which I found was necessary in order to solve various issues of the tea plantation and their workers of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region.

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Chapter: 2:

History of Tea Plantation in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region from the Colonial times.

Tea plantation has a significant role for growth of the British economy in the colonial times. After the finest muslins and spices comes the tea, its plantation, production and marketing around the world was taken up by the British. Tea was not just a morning and evening drink but it can be termed as “Tea: the drink that changed the world” which I would like to call it upon, which John Griffiths has titled his work.¹ While discussing about the History of Tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region it would be kind to discuss a brief history of the two regions.

The History of Darjeeling presents a late chapter in the extension of British rule, for it was not until the beginning of the 19th century that the East India Company was brought into direct relations with the tract of the country which now bears the name.² Darjeeling lies between 26° 31’ and 27° 13’ north latitude, and between 87° 59’ and 88° 53’ east longitude, area is about 1200 square miles.³ The principal town and administrative headquarters of the district is Darjeeling town at 27° 3’ north latitude and 88 ° 16’ east longitudes.⁴ The Darjeeling district comprises of mountains and hills and has a plain region at its foothills known as Terai. The climate is mostly cold winter stays for around four months and monsoon is quite strong as the district receives a heavy rainfall, hot and warm weather is very short lived in the district. Darjeeling was a buffer zone between Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan before, it was never under one single ruler or under a single kingdom neither it was an independent region. Similarly, history of the Sub- Himalayan region or even know as Duars or Dooars (Bengal Duars) has a little distinct chapter in history, regarding how it came under the colonial rule and later how it became part of India. The Sub-Himalayan region or Duars region mostly falls under four districts of Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar and Kalimpong. The major regions of Duars comes under Jalpaiguri District, which lies between 26° 0’ and 27° 0’ north latitude, and between 88° 20’ and 89° 53’ east longitude, it contains an area of 2,961 square miles, and its population, which was 787,380 souls at the census of 1901.⁵ The figure regarding the population has changed in the years with the rise in population and the figure of area has been changed as well with the formation of new district, Alipurduar which was created by bifurcation of the Jalpaiguri district. The two regions Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region have a similar kind of history on how they came into the colonial grab. Darjeeling, Kalimpong,

Kurseong and Siliguri were historically part of Sikkim Kingdom, in the year 1706 Kalimpong was taken by Bhutan. Darjeeling, Kurseong and part of Siliguri was taken by Nepal in the year 1780 from Sikkim under “Treaty of Titaliya” and Nepal later went forward towards the eastern side of Sikkim and occupied the Terai regions as well. L.S.S. O’Malley brings into account in his gazetteer stating that, “After overrunning the hills and valleys of Nepal, they marched east of Sikkim in 1780; and during next 30 years the country suffered repeatedly from their inroads. At the end of this period, they had overrun Sikkim as far eastwards as the Tista River, and had conquered and annexed the Tarai, 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”.⁶

Invasion by Nepal in the north frontier belt of India was looked carefully by the East India Company, as they became insecure by the invasion and they attacked Nepal and war broke out, which resulted in the First Anglo-Nepal War 1814-1815 and the Second Anglo-Nepal War 1816 and the Treaty of Sugauli 1816 was signed to end the war. After the war was over the areas which were conquered by Nepal from Sikkim was handed over to Sikkim and guaranteed his sovereignty by the East India Company. The handing over the lost territory of Sikkim was not done by the EIC as a goodwill but made them signed a treaty; or in other way it was a chance for the company to expand their rule. Treaty of Titaliya was signed between the Raja of Sikkim and the EIC; the relevant part read as, “That he will refer to the arbitration of the British Government any dispute or question that may arise between his subjects and those of Nepal or any other neighbouring state, and to abide by the decision of the British government.”⁷

By this treaty Sikkim came into control of the East India Company regarding the external affairs. The arbitration clause soon became operational and struck another blow to Sikkim during the ‘Kotapa insurrection’ and the subsequent Unthoo dispute. In the year 1826 a dispute between the Lepchas and Bhutias of Sikkim resulted a murder of a powerful Lepcha chieftain, and then the other Lepcha chief fled to Unthoo (hill beyond Mirik (Darjeeling) present day Nepal). Cited in Aswant Katwal’s paper, read as, “In Sikkim the power feuds between the Lepcha and Bhutia camps saw the murder of the scion of a powerful Lepcha family under the instructions of the Chogyal in 1826. With the murder of Bolod, other Lepcha chiefs, fearing a similar fate, fled Sikkim along with around 800 houses of their tribes-men and took refuge at Unthoo beyond the hills of Mirik in present day Nepal. The Chogyal and the Bhutia camp were unable to pursue them since Nepal claimed Unthoo to be within its borders and Sikkim referred

the matter to the British (Pradhan 1991:143-44, Risley 1894:19)".⁸ Sikkim decided to handover the dispute to the British East India Company as per the treaty and it was at this juncture that, Lord William Bentick deputed Captain G.W. Lloyd and G.W. Grant in 1828 to investigate the dispute and the two officers visited the hills and came across 'the old Gorkha station of Dorjiling' and it is said that Captain Llyod spent six days at the old Gorkha Station Dorjiling (today's Darjeeling) in February 1829. The officers were mesmerised by the beauty, climatic condition and availability of virgin land; they recommended the same thing in Calcutta. The Governor-General instructed them for further possibilities in the Old Gorkha station which has been stated as, "They were charmed by the site and recommended to the Governor-General that Darjeeling would make an ideal health resort for European soldiers. Accordingly, in 1829 they were instructed to visit Sikkim once more, companied by a surveyor, Captain Herbert, to examine the full possibilities offered by the place. They remained at Darjeeling, and then deserted by the Lepchas, for some time. Their findings suggested to the government that the place would confer 'considerable political benefits' on the Company. The British then decided to carry the measure into effect."⁹

Governor-General started to put compression on Raja of Sikkim through various prospects. Darjeeling was not only looked as a sanatorium it was more than that if was so they would not have started plantation in majority of its land; trade was another motive behind. Apart from being setup as a sanatorium, Darjeeling had obvious attractions for the British for both commercial and strategic reasons. Darjeeling could emerge as the entry point of the trans-Himalayan trade, surrounded as it was by Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan, and Tibet (Sen, 1989: 21-69).¹⁰ After all the surveys and other diplomatic steps taken by the East India Company the Raja of Sikkim in 1st February 1835 handed over Darjeeling in the hands of the British East India Company by a deed phrased as, "The Governor General, having expressed his desire for the possession of the hill of Darjeeling on account of its cool climate, has been introduced, for the purpose of enabling the servants of his Government, suffering from sickness, to avail themselves of its advantages, I, the Sikkimputtee Rajah, out of friendship for the said Governor General, hereby present Darjeeling to the East India Company, that is, all the land South of the Great Rangit river, East of the Balasun, Kahail and Little Ranjit rivers and West of Rungno and Mahanadi rivers".¹¹

After this Darjeeling came into direct control of the British East India Company. After the grant relationship between Raja of Sikkim and East India Company started to deteriorate; adding fuel to the fire in November 1849 Sikkim imprisoned Sir Joseph Hooker and Dr.

Campbell while there visit to Sikkim, they were released in December 1849 but as a compensation the Terai region of Sikkim was annexed in 1850 which was added to Purnia district and later portion of land was added to Darjeeling district. This was followed by ‘Anglo-Bhutanese War’ and signing of ‘Treaty of *Sinchula* in 1864’ which added Kalimpong to Darjeeling district.

The Sub-Himalayan region of West Bengal which lies on the northern part of Bengal which is geographically described as ‘Dooars’ or ‘Duars’ acts as a gate way between the Indian plains and the Bhutan hills and vice-versa. It actual means the door and there are 18 Dooars or doors in between the Indian plains and the Bhutan hills; of which 11 dooars are in West Bengal and 7 in Assam. The history of this region is different from that of Darjeeling before the coming of British. Unlike Darjeeling the Sub-Himalayan region was ruled by various kingdoms which even makes clear that it was not a no-man’s land like Darjeeling having a very few populations. Various ethnic groups lived here from much earlier period in this region; later more ethnic groups were added after the advent of tea by the British in this region who were the labourers brought from Jharkhand and Nepal; only Lepchas are to be said the aboriginals of this region who all resided from generation in Kalimpong and was in communication with Dooars.

Since various ethnic groups are present in the Sub-Himalayan region or the Dooars this region is also called as the “Ethnological Museum of India” like that of Vincent Smith calling India as “The Ethnological Museum” of the world. The early history of Dooars or the Sub-Himalayan region has always faced experienced conflicts because of its geographical location; hence it has been a buffer zone between various kingdoms. The account of Dooars or the Sub-Himalayan region being a buffer zone has been accounted by Sailen Debnath stating, “For geographical reasons the Dooars constituted to be a buffer often between Gaur and Kamrup, and often it constituted to be a part of the more powerful side of the buffer; but whenever opportunity made a feasible provision, player of history used the Dooars as the safe haven for the creation of independent administrative unit. Thus the Dooars for long remained to be a part of Kamrup, then a seat as well as part of Kamtapur, for sometimes a part of the kingdom of Gaur, and then it became the seat of Koch Empire. While it was a part of the Koch kingdom; for its possession their ensued animosity between Cooch Behar (Koch Kingdom) and Bhutan; as a result of which after the discomfiture of Cooch Behar, the Dooars came under the domination of Bhutan. After the Second Anglo-Bhutan War in 1864-65, the Dooars was annexed to British India. Under the British it became a part of district of Jalpaiguri in 1869; and after the attainment of independence as a part of Jalpaiguri, the Dooars became a part of

West Bengal.”¹² Some are also of the view that the first mention of the Dooars can be found in the Indian epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata; the mentioning of the non-Aryan people namely Kiratas, Khambojas, Savars and Mutivs who were to be Kochs. After the annexation of Duars in November 1864, they were divided into the Eastern and Western Duars, the former of which now forms part of the district of Goalpara. The Western Duars was divided into three tahasils, viz: - the Sadar, comprising the tract of country between Tista and Torsa rivers with its head-quarters at Mainaguri; the Buxa tahsil extending from the Torsa to the Sankos river, with its head-quarters at Alipur; and Dalingkot tahsil, which includes the mountainous part of the annexed territory.¹³

2.2: History of tea in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan Region.

The history of tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region dates back from the colonial period but much later after the English East India Company and later the British Monarchy took over the major parts of India. The tea plantation was very new in India before it was colonised, even the British colonisers were not the first to take tea as a trading option rather it was the Portuguese who brought tea in Europe in 1580, which has been stated, “Tea arrived in Europe in 1580 when a Portuguese trader brought a chest of it along with other Chinese luxury goods- silk, spices, porcelain, lacquered objects. The Dutch and British followed, with the first tea reaching The Hague in 1610 and London about the same time”.¹⁴ The history of tea in India is associated with various myths and legends as well, likewise in China where the reference of tea in its history can be found century ago but used as a common drink cannot be traced to particular date as it was used for medicinal benefits. The first recorded mention of tea in India was grown in 1780 when a tea bushes from Canton were planted in Calcutta. But it could not survive long either for want of culture or due to unfavourable weather or soil conditions.¹⁵

Despite the failure of tea plantation in Calcutta, again possibilities of tea grew in India after tea was found wild in the Assam region in 1821 and in 1835 the Governor General, Lord William Bentinck appointed a committee to advice on introduction of tea culture in India. Later with various experiments the two variants of tea Assam and China variants were taken for plantation as both the variant did well in the region of Darjeeling. Dr. Campbell started his tea experiment in various parts of Darjeeling hills and its foot bed from the year 1839; plantation later developed nicely and advanced towards commercial stage and from 1856 tea was planted in various places of the hills. The experiment was further taken towards the foothills and it was

done in Champita tea garden of terai region in 1862 and in 1874 in Dooars region; like stated by Nilanjana Mitra, “The rapid expansion of tea cultivation in Assam was followed by the establishment of plantations in Darjeeling (1839), Terai (1862) and Dooars regions (1874) of north Bengal. Around the same time, tea cultivation took its root in the Nilgiris and spread to other districts of south India as well”.¹⁶ Before dealing with the history of tea in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region of West Bengal I would like to discuss about the history of tea in the world or how tea became such an important item for trade as well as how it became an important drink in the society of various nations.

2.3: Tea: History, Trade and Society.

While we talk about tea everyone has a good idea about its place of origin, which happens to be China. Various stories, different historical aspects and myths have been connected with the history of its origin. Tea came to be a special drink in China from many years ago, primarily taken for its medicinal benefits and medicinal use. Later, the popularity of tea in China continued to grow rapidly specially from the 4th Century and tea became valued for everyday pleasure and refreshment and rarely for its medicinal use. Tea plantations spread throughout China, tea merchants became rich, and expensive, elegant tea wares became the banner for the wealth and status of their owners. Koehler also states that it was during the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 B.C.), tea leaves began to be boiled and drunk without the addition of other herbs—that is, drunk as *tea* rather than a medicinal brew.¹⁷ Regarding the discovery of tea has still been a debatable matter, but majority has fully or partially accepted the Chinese myths as the first discovery or tea as a beverage. The earliest myth about the origin of tea goes as, Shen Nung a mythological emperor who is said to have been born in 28th century BCE; he is regarded as father of Chinese agriculture and renowned Herbalist and even knows as the father of Chinese herbal medicine. One day, as he boiled some water for drinking, a few stray leaves blew over from a nearby tree and fell into the water. Curious of the new aroma, Shen Nung decided to try some and found the brew both refreshing and tasty. The mysterious tree proved to be *Camellia sinensis*, the same plant from which tea is still made till today.¹⁸

During eight century, a Chinese scholar, Lu Yu, wrote a remarkable book, the *Ch'a Ching* or the Tea Book or The Classic of Tea.¹⁹ Lu Yu wrote about tea plantation, its making, its history and more in his book and has made various comments regarding tea. Jeff Koehler writes, “Around 780, he penned his brief but comprehensive masterpiece on tea. It contains such precise details on tea’s origin cultivation, processing, and preparation that a thousand

years later the British drew upon it when they started producing tea themselves”.²⁰ Regarding the history of tea Lu Yu states that, “Drinking tea was very popular in the T’ang Dynasty AD 620-907. In some parts of Honan, Sensi, Hunan and Szechwan the drink was universal. There is ordinary tea and ground tea. What is called cake tea is put in a jar or bottle after being pounded, and the boiling water is poured over it. Sometimes onion, ginger, ju-jube, orange peel, and peppermint are used and it is permitted to boil for some time before skimming off the froth. Alas! This is the slop water of a ditch”.²¹ As tea was regarded as a medicinal drink and even refreshing one, tea was even used as a drink for other purpose which was meditational stimulator. As written by Alan Watts in his book mentioned in Jeff Koehler stating, “Tea, Alan Watts noted in *The Way of Zen*, “so clarifies and invigorates the mind that it has been said, ‘The taste of Zen [*ch’an*] and the taste of tea [*ch’a*] are the same’”. Zen monks used tea as a meditation stimulant, and the drink became paramount in aiding long periods of deep concentration. “If Christianity is wine and Islam coffee,” Watts wrote, Buddhism is mostly certainly tea”.²² The origin of tea, its production, history and its myths have been written and has been published by many and of which some views of some authors may vary and some might be similar. Numbers of books were written mostly during the time when tea became one of the regular drinks in Europe. Till date no one has ever come across the true history of its origin and has remained as a debatable subject.

Tea first reached Europe via whispers. Perhaps first noticed by travellers to Japan in the mid-sixteenth century as a strange predilection for drinking ‘hot water’, the earliest definitive reference surfaced in the second volume of *Navigazioni et viaggi* (Voyages and Travels) by the powerful Venetian merchant-scholar Giovanni Battista Ramusio (1485-1557).²³ Ramusio later came to know about the mysterious leaf, used dried or fresh and be taken hot after boiling with water, from his trader friend Hajji Mohamed from Persia (present day Iran). By the time both the traders were discussing about the mysterious leaf the Portuguese who were pioneer in the eastern commercial expansion reached China and received the permission to settle in Macau. The Portuguese later in 1570s started exporting tea from China and in in due time brought tea to Europe with other luxury items for the first time. After tea was introduced in Europe its consumption spread as a wildfire. At first it is said that, in Europe tea was served only to the aristocratic people, it was quite later the price of tea was lowered and even the working class was allowed to drink tea. The working class took tea with mixing sugar which gave them energy and even protection from water born disease as the water was boiled for tea. In England tea and coffee was introduced nearly as same period, but the demand

of tea and its consumption increased many fold, it is said it was because of the introduction of Coffee Houses, this has been expressed by Percival Griffith in his book stating, “By a strange coincidence, tea and coffee were introduced into England at about the same time and the growth in the popularity of tea in the late seventeen and early eighteen centuries was largely due to the influence of the coffee houses. The first London coffee house seems to have been opened in St Michael’s Alley in 1652.”²⁴

With the advent of tea, the society and culture of England witnessed a long-term change and introduced a new sophisticated tea drinking fashion, the tea which was taken during afternoon, in between lunch and dinner came to be categorised as “Afternoon Tea” and tea which was taken during some events around 6pm with meat, bread, cheese and many other items came to be known as “High Tea”. It was even categorised based on gender, as afternoon tea was looked at more of a lady social gathering and high tea was seen as more of a man’s meal. Tea culture in England grew in such a fashion that the tea was even imported from the traders from other nations. The high demand of tea in England even gave rise to tea black-marketing, smuggling and adulteration. Since the duty levied on tea was very high as it was taken to be a luxury item, it later Government lowered the duty to lower the smuggling of tea, this has been mentioned by Griffith stating, “In a contemporary pamphlet, quoted by Mennell, it is stated that ‘the East India Company have been so far derived of their monopoly in tea, that upon the most moderate computation smugglers and the Company (in 1783) shared the tea trade equally between them; according to some calculations the smugglers had two-thirds of it’. To meet this situation, in 1784, the government substantially lowered the duty”.²⁵ Tea in England became luxurious item, a fashion and slowly became part of their culture, its import kept on growing. The record of the amount of tea imported in England can be found in “Tea: The drink that changed the world” by John Griffith, he writes, “Tea in England was a luxury commodity that had been deemed sufficiently exotic and rare for the East India Company to present the tea-drinking monarch Charles II in 1666 with 22 ¾ lb of it at 50 shillings per pound. By 1700 tea imports still stood at only 20,000lb, scarcely surprising when even six years later, at Thomas Twining’s Golden Lion in the Strand, a small cup – Chinese porcelain, presumably – cost a shilling”.²⁶ By 1721 in England, tea as a drink had spread over all classes and even was famous in nearby places of London which were Glasgow, Wales, and Ireland. Between 1721 and 1790 British official annual tea imports climbed from one million pounds to 16 million and doubled again by 1816 to 36 million.²⁷

With the growing consumption of tea in England, the import and consumption of sugar grew as well. Tea was usually taken without milk hence sugar was added to offset the bitter taste of tea leaves. The rise of the demand of sugar from the West Indian colonies of Britain went very high, from 4lb a head in 1690's to 24lb in 1790's.²⁸ Slavery gave a very cheap labour to the colonisers which gave larger amount of sugar in less investment. It can also be assumed that without sugar the tea culture in England and in other European countries would not have been taken place. Precisely in England drinking tea in the later years did not just stand as a luxury drink but it became a part of culture, a culture which the English people introduced themselves in their society; from a drinking commodity it became it turned into a commodity of desire which has been termed by Piya Chatterjee in her work.²⁹ Tea drinking was also taken as a ritual by them, there were various rituals for consuming the drink, the Chinese rituals and cultures of drinking tea were thus lived by the Europeans in their taste of rituals which became a culture of class for them. There are various illustrations of Europeans drinking tea with their certain customs, which shows wearing tidy dress while having tea, certain way of holding the tea cup carefully with the thumb and the index finger, placing costly looking tea pots, plates and other wares with some edibles in the table. Tea which was introduced by the traders for trade with not much of an importance in Europe at the beginning, later took a massive way on its own. The journey of tea leaf from Asia to Europe has been stated by Piya Chatterjee as, "In its journey from the mountains of southern China to the parlors of Georgian and Victorian England it became one of the most important commodities to circulate in the expanding trade on the ocean frontiers".³⁰

2.4: The East India Company and History of Tea in India.

Tea became the daily need for the Europeans and the demand was high for the Chinese tea leaf in Europe. But the East India Company was having problem with the Chinese empire from quite a time due to the illegal import of opium in China by the East India Company, which was causing issues on the tea trade which was much ignited during the various Opium wars. The issue of tea trade and fulfilling the European demand grew much more for the E.I.C and issue went worse after the 'Charter Act of 1833', brought to an end the East India Company's monopoly of trade between China and Britain came to an end. In the meantime, Japan was taking over the trade with the west, perhaps to fulfil the European demand for tea and to keep their trade superior the British through the East India Company considered to produce tea in India. The discussion regarding the potential of tea plantation in the India and its sub-continent

was taking place prior to the 'Charter Act of 1833' from 1780 onwards. Joseph Banks the famous botanist was given the responsibility regarding the study to look after the possibility of tea in India. Sir Joseph suggested that Bihar and Cooch Behar would be the most suitable areas for tea cultivation in India (Awasti, 1987).³¹ Discussing about the first sample tea plantation which was made in India was in the year 1780, regarding this Rai in her PhD thesis writes, "In India, the British tried to introduce tea from the middle of the 18th century. In 1780, tea seeds from China were brought by a captain of East India Company and were tried at Sibpur Botanical Garden in Calcutta by Lt. Kyd. On the basis of the result obtained at Sibpur, the first practical step to introduce tea in India was taken by Sir Joseph Banks in 1788."³² The intention behind the tea plantation in India by the company was not only to put down the monopoly of tea trade by China but even to make an upper hand in the trade and to receive a handsome return. In order to fulfil the goals, the company was in need of more tea seeds for plantation. In 1793 Lord Macartney was sent by the British government on a mission to Peking. After negotiation with the Chinese Emperor, Lord Macartney was able to convince the emperor and was allowed to take some tea seeds and plants. Macartney on his mission to Peking makes a statement about what he saw in China, he writes, "In crossing into Kiangsi we passed through tea plantations and were allowed by the Viceroy to take up several tea plants in a growing state with very large balls of earth adhering to them, which plants I flatter myself, I shall be able to transmit to Bengal."³³

Macartney send the tea plants and seeds to India of which the plants didn't survive but the seeds germinated in the Botanical Garden of Calcutta, but it is said that the tea plant could not flourish much because of the unfavourable climate of Calcutta for tea growth. After Macartney again Abel a botanist and Lord Amherst were sent to China on a mission; chief mission being transporting tea seeds and plants to India, but unfortunately the tea plants which were collected by them were lost in a ship named *Alceste* while returning. For few decades the tea mission and the experiment on possibilities of tea production in India by the East India Company were paused. It was in the year 1815 the story of Colonel Latter noticed the tea drinking habits of the *Singpo* tribe of Assam and subsequently in 1816 another story of tea tree bearing a height of ten foot in Kathmandu in Nepal was circulated around and then the officials looking after the possibilities of tea in India became actively involved in the matter again.

The narrative of tea drinking culture in by the *Singpo* tribe of Assam gave the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India a light of hope regarding the possibilities of tea cultivation in Indian sub-continent. Controversy of rivalry regarding the study of possibilities

of tea production in Indian sub-continent existed inside the Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India in between two British officers who were C.A. Bruce and Lieutenant Charlton; there have been arguments between them while they submitted their reports on the discovery of tea plant in Assam. The first European who came across the tea plant found in Assam and even used by the Singpho tribe was Robert Bruce in the year 1823. Robert Scottish adventurer, explorer, and businessman, was trading along the upper Brahmaputra Valley when he came across indigenous tea growing in the dense jungle. Local Singpho tribe pickled the leaves and ate them with oil and garlic and sometimes dried fish, much in the manner of Burmese dish *lahpet*, which is still popular today. The Singphos also made a primitive tea with the leaves.³⁴ Bruce became friend with the Singpho chief named Bisa Gam and arranged few plants and seeds, but the Anglo-Burmese War took place in 1824 in response of the high rate of Burmese infiltration in Assam which delayed in the sampling of it and later in the same year Robert Bruce who was then a major in the Bengal Artillery died. After the death of Robert Bruce, the work was taken by his brother Charles Alexander Bruce, he was informed earlier by his brother Robert about the tea plant found in Assam: hence C.A. Bruce collected the tea plant and seed from the Singpho chief and sent them to David Scott then agent of Governor General in Assam and he further sent it to Dr. Wallich, the botanist of the East India Company in the Botanical Garden of Calcutta. The Botanical Garden of Calcutta did not accept tea seeds and plants sent by Bruce for sampling to be the *Camellia sinensis* or the Chinese variant, but were from some other *Camellia* family. Subsequently another tea plant was discovered by Lieutenant Charlton in a place named Sadhiya or Suddyah in Assam, Charlton sent the sample to the Agricultural and Horticultural Society in Calcutta with the observation stating as, “The tea tree grows in the vicinity of Suddyah, the most remote of the British possessions towards the east, in Assam, and adjacent to British territory. Some of the native of Suddyah are in the habit of drinking an infusion of the dried leaves, but they do not prepare them in any particular manner. Although the leaves are devoid of fragrance in their green state, they acquire the smell and taste of Chinese tea when dried.”³⁵

Unfortunately, Charlton’s plants died soon and were denied of recognition. Though the Botanist of the East India Company was reluctant about the tea growing Assam; it was rather a mystery gone with him. Beside the botanist claiming the tea plant to be of some other *Camellia* variety and not the Chinese one, the Governor-General Lord William Bentinck appointed a “Tea Committee” in 1834. The committee was formed for the purpose of submitting a plan for the introduction of tea culture into India; after conducting more research

regarding tea. After the formation of tea committee, the imported tea seeds from China were distributed in the various places like Himalayan region of Nilgiri in South, Assam. The plant flourished well in the Himalayan region but the plant couldn't take the heat of the Assam plains. Though the Assam variety was discovered, it was considered inferior but later when the Chinese variety couldn't survive the heat of Assam unlike the Assam variety.

C.A. Bruce with the knowledge received from the Singpho's regarding the tea plantation and its making was conducting a survey of his own experimental nurseries, even taking help of some Chinese growers. In the year 1836 Bruce was made the superintendent of tea forest; it is said that he worked efficiently and brought a good results regarding the tea plantation in Assam. Regarding the work conducted by C.A. Bruce, I would like to refer from a PhD thesis by Riti Moktan, where she states that, "In 1836 C.A Bruce was made the superintendent of the tea forest and he performed outstanding task in the following five years which can be cited as follows: i) publication of pamphlets showing map of discoveries of the wild tea. ii) Establishment of China variety tea plantation at Jaipur and Chamba. iii) Setting up of three more tea gardens at Deohall, Chota Tingiri and Hutumpukiri. iv) Formulation of the Bengal Tea Company in Calcutta with the objective of purchasing East India Company's plantations in India for the purpose of developing them. v) Formation of another company in the same year in London with the same objectives and vi) Amalgamation of the two companies into Assam companies."³⁶

In 1838, for the first time Assam variety 12 chest of tea were sent to London as a sample to tea brokers, director's and others. Out of the 12 chests, on 10 January 1839, the balance of 350 lbs was auctioned. In the normal way, these teas would have made one or two shillings per lb, but in keen bidding the first lot fetched five shillings, and the last lot the huge amount of thirty-four shillings (£1.70) per lb.³⁷

2.5: Tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub Himalayan Region.

After receiving a very positive response and good sum by the Assam variety of tea in London, the merchants in London came together and formed the Assam Company in 1839 with an initial capital investment of £ 500,000. By 1841, 54,000 kilograms of Indian tea had been exported to London.³⁸ The successful tea from Assam variety gave the English more hope of tea plantation in other areas of India, the experiment in the hills as well as in the plains was taken continuously with both Assam and Chinese variety. While the experiments were done in the hilly tract the East India Company experimented in Darjeeling after they received this place from the Raja of

Sikkim through deed of 1835. In 1839 Dr. Archibald Campbell, a Scottish civil servant in the Indian Medical Service, was appointed as a Superintendent of Darjeeling District. Darjeeling at first was setup as a sanatorium for the Company's troops and servants to rid of the prickling heat of the plains and even for recovery of the persons who were suffering from malaria. In the year 1841 Dr. Campbell brought some Chinese variety seeds from Gordon's plantation at Kumaon from the Western Himalayas and planted the first tea in Darjeeling at the gardens of his residence, which was at around 7000ft of elevation which is said to be in today's Alubari and Jalpahar area of Darjeeling. The plant grew but was damaged and could not grow in a better way; hence the experiment did not provide a positive result because of the unfavourable climatic condition. Other European planters followed the example of Campbell and planted tea in somewhat lower elevations. Mr. Cronmelin planted in the Lebong which was approx 1000ft below Alubari and Jalpahar where Campbell planted at first, this gave a positive result. The positive result of the plants which were planted in the lower elevation gave inspiration for more plantations in Darjeeling, the company distributed more tea seeds for the plantation. Small companies were welcomed in Darjeeling and they started to clear the plots and opened more lands for tea plantation; some even took the plantation for individually. Small companies and the individual planters started to use the Nepali workers for clearing the large tracts.

By 1856 development had advanced from the experimental to a more extensive and commercial stage. The Rev.T. Boaz, LL.D., in January 1857 stated that tea had been raised from seed at Tukvar by Captain Masson, at Kurseong by Mr. Smith, at Hope Town by a Company, on the flats by Mr. Martin and between Kurseong and Pankhabari by Captain Samler, agent of the Darjeeling Tea Concern.³⁹ The rate of the tea plantation development in Darjeeling increased many folds, tea plantation in new lands were increasing day by day. The increasing growth rate of tea plantation in Darjeeling region has been recorded by L.S.S. O' Malley in his gazetteer stating, "The year 1856 may accordingly be taken as the date at which the industry was established as a commercial enterprise. In that year the Alubari tea garden was opened by the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company, and another on the Lebong spur by the Darjeeling Land Mortgage Bank; in 1859 the Dhutaria garden was started by Dr. Brougham; and between 1860 and 1864 four gardens, at Ging, Ambutia, Takdah and Phubsering were established by the Darjeeling Tea Company and the garden at Takvar and Badamtam by the Lebong Tea Company. Other gardens which were started at this early period were those now known as the Makaibari, Pandam and Steinthal tea estates."⁴⁰ The development of tea plantation in Darjeeling was rapid, which was similar case with Assam too. The quick growth and development of tea industry in Darjeeling hills and Assam was already looking for more place

to expand. The British opt for the foothills area of the Darjeeling district which is termed as Terai and further towards the fertile lands of the Sub-Himalayan region even commonly known as Dooars. The Terai region was part of Sikkim; it was annexed in the year 1850 and added with the district of Darjeeling. This region was mostly covered with dense forest, which was cleared and was brought under tea plantation.

The first tea plantation in the Terai was setup in Champita area near Khaprail in 1862. It was started by Mr. James White, who had previously planted Singell tea garden near Kurseong. After Terai region came under the British control it was easy for them to work as they at first widened and maintained the slope of the Hill Cart Road which connects Siliguri and Darjeeling (now known as National Highway- 55); after the roads were maintained and the Champita tea plantation gave a positive response by producing C.T.C and the Orthodox tea more planters were attracted towards Terai region, as a result of which by 1872 Terai had 14 and by 1874 it had 24 additional tea gardens respectively. The expansion of tea gardens was still on process and it was at this juncture Anglo- Bhutan War or Duar War was fought between the British and the Bhutanese ruler in 1864-65. After the War Bhutan had to pay a huge war compensation of which the primary compensation was handing over the Dooars region, both comprising of Assam Dooars and Bengal Dooars on a treaty of Sinchula. As the Dooars tract which was in the foothills of Bhutan was very much fertile for agricultural products and huge part was covered by forest, it turned to be a very useful tract to the British Empire for tea plantation. The first tea garden in Dooars was opened at Gazoldoba in the year 1874 by Dr. Brougham (opened Dhutaria tea garden in 1859 at Darjeeling hills) responding to Mr, Haugton, who is said to have been pioneer of tea industry in the Sub-Himalayan region. Tea garden in Gazoldoba was followed by tea garden in Fulbari Mr. Pillans and Colonel Money, at Bagrakot by Mr. North and S. Creswell and so on. Grunning in his gazetteer writes, "In 1876, two years after the Gazoldoba garden was planted, there were 13 gardens with an area of 818 acres and a yield of 29,520 lbs of tea. By 1881 the number of gardens had increased to 55 and the acreage under tea to 6,230 or, in other words, the number of gardens had more than quadrupled and the area under cultivation had increased more than seven times in five years."⁴¹

The production of tea in Darjeeling including Terai and in the Sub-Himalayan region kept on growing. With the rise in the number of tea gardens the production too increased many folds, which gave rise in the export of tea for the British. The increasing area for tea plantation, its production in various years can be understood by looking at the following table.

Table 2.1: Development of Darjeeling Tea Industry 1866-1940

Year	No. of Garden	Area under tea (in Acres)	Outturn of Tea in lbs (pounds)
1866	39	10,000	4,33,000
1870	56	11,000	1,7,00,000
1874	113	18,888	3,928,000
1885	175	38,499	9,090,500
1895	186	48,629	11,714,500
1905	148	50,618	12,447,500
1910	148	51,281	14,137,500
1915	148	54,024	20,203,500
1920	148	59,356	15,850,000
1925	148	59,356	18,732,500
1930	148	59,356	20,870,500
1935	148	59,356	20,798,000 (Black) 2,28,000 (Green)
1940	142	63,059	22,743,000 (Black) 9,78,500 (Green)

Source: LSS O'Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*,⁴² A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*⁴³ and Percival Griffiths, *History of Tea Industry*⁴⁴

The record of number of tea gardens in the year 1940 can also be found from its distribution under various Police Stations in local dialect called as *Thana*, it is distributed as follows:

Table 2.2: Police Station and Tea Gardens under its Jurisdiction.

Police Station (<i>Thana</i>)	Number of Tea Gardens
Darjeeling	19
Jorebungalow	16
Sukhiapokhari	09
Pulbazar	02
Rangli Rangliot	09
Kurseong	25
Mirik	05
Siliguri	27
Kharibari	11
Phasidewa	13
Kalimpong	00
Gorubathan	06
Total	142

Source: A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*.⁴⁵

After Darjeeling Hills and its foothills, the growth of tea gardens in Sub-Himalayan region too flourished quite well, its numbers grew in various years which can be seen in the following table.

Table 2.3: Number of tea gardens in the district of Jalpaiguri and the amount of land used from 1874 to 1941.

Year	No. of Tea Gardens	Land under tea gardens (in Acres)	Approximate yield in lbs (pound)
1874	01	N.A	N.A
1876	13	818	N.A
1881	55	6,230	N.A
1892	182	38,583	N.A
1901	235	76,403	31,087,537
1907	180	81,338	N.A
1911	191	90,859	48,820,637
1921	131	1,12,688	43,287,187
1931	151	1,31,074	66,447,715
1941	189	1,31,770	94,604,450

Source: J.F. Grunning, *Eastern Bengal And Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguri*⁴⁶ and Sailen Debnath, *The Dooars in Historical Transition*⁴⁷

The above tables present the progress and development of tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region of various years, till the time period before independence. By reading the table we find that the rate of growth of tea plantation was high and was spreading quickly, one of the reasons for quick spread was colonialism. The whole land was under the British which gave them the authority to clear the forest lands which were termed by them as “No Man’s Land” and put them under their jurisdiction, by doing so the land for tea plantation increased by time by using the cheap labours which they brought by fake promises and by luring them of having brighter days by working in tea plantation. While comparing the two tables we can see that growth of tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan Region started little later that of Darjeeling Hills. The disparity between the tea in Darjeeling Hills and the Sub-Himalayan Region are, firstly, the outturn of tea in Sub-Himalayan Region was much higher than of Darjeeling Hills. Secondly, though the outturn of Sub-Himalayan Region was higher

than that of Darjeeling hills, the quality of Darjeeling was much of appreciation in the European market, which is still prevalent till date. The growth of tea in such a positive way gave the British a huge amount of tea in a very cheap labours and lesser investment than other sector helped them to be a good competitor with China regarding tea in the world market. The opening of Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in 1881⁴⁸ deducted the English planters transport cost as the train was a coal driven machinery and the travel time was reduced as well. The green lush of tea plants which we see in both the places and the train runs by coal named as “Toy Train” which attracts lots of tourist in these two region were not the need of the people who were there nor were the things which they have planted and built for their benefits; rather all were done for the colonial benefit. The indigenous people were forced to leave their land and were forced into plantation and were made as similar to slaves of new form, which was totally new for them from what they did for living. As the time passed by during the post-independence period the British ownership of tea plantation was taken over by the Indians; unlike in some of the tea plantations of Sub-Himalayan Region the Indian entrepreneurs invested in the tea plantation and looked after various tea estates; though the ownership changed and was brought to the hands of the Indians, the problems and pains of tea plantation workers remained unchanged. In 1877 Munshi Rahim Rakesh was the first Indian to take over the Jaldhaka tea estate.⁴⁹ The demand of a drink which came from China and later got popular in Europe and its society, to fulfil the demands of a leafy drink in the European society the forests of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region was cleared and its topography was changed along with the livelihood of the natives. Hence, we can refer to the title of the book by John Griffith “Tea: The Drink That Changed The World”, for it was after the arrival of tea plantation in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan Region it changed various things which will be discussed further in the thesis; and if it would not have come the history of this two regions would have been different.

Observation:

Tea was not a native plant of the Himalayan region of Darjeeling and Terai nor of the Sub-Himalayan region. Coming of tea as a plant and beginning of tea plantation in these two regions has a long history associated with it. In order to understand the history of tea industry in these two regions it is important to know the history of these two regions. These two regions are associated with tea industry after the advent of British, but they have their own history associated with their regions. In order to understand the history of these two regions, the different historical incidents need to be focused; hence those incidents have been discussed

above. While discussing the history of tea plantation in India it is important to have a knowledge of history of tea as how it became an important drink in China. It is also important to understand the history and historical incidents related with the British East India Company, Tea and China. The tea as a drink not only became one of the important trading items for the East India Company from China but that tea became a sophisticated drink of the elite British classes; in fact, tea became part of British culture and life. These are the reason why tea became important item of trade for which they spent money for experiment in various places after China put ban on exporting tea after Opium War dispute. The tea plantation in India was trailed after Agricultural and Horticultural Society of India found tea drinking culture by Singpo tribe of Assam, which later was termed as *Camellia Sinensis Assamica* or the Assam variant tea. After this, various experiment for tea plantation was taken place in different hilly regions of India, where Darjeeling hills became part of it and later it was also done in the Sub-Himalayan region. The successful experiment the colonial planters came up with plantation in various parts of both these regions. While expanding tea plantation in these regions the colonisers came up with rampant use of lands in large manner, for which large forest areas were cleared off which changed the forest environment of this regions, as a result the ecosystem of floras and faunas of those lands were affected badly. ⁵⁰

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Chapter: 3:

Migration of Workers in the Tea Gardens of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region Under the Colonial Rule

Migration is a phenomenon which has been taking place in the world from before and which even takes place in recent times. Migration of animals and birds is a natural phenomenon as they move from one place to the other during seasonal change and other and it is mostly for the short period. But regarding the human migration things are different and there is a debate in what might be the definition of migration. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines migration as, “The process of people travelling to a new place to live, usually in large numbers”, and the Oxford English Dictionary defines as, “the movement of large numbers of people, birds, or animals from one place to another.” Some scholars have also given various definitions regarding migration of people. S.N. Eisenstadt, define migration as, “the physical transition of an individual or a group from one society to another. This transition normally involves abandoning one social setting and entering another, and different one. His emphasis is mainly on leaving a whole set of social life of a person’s residential region and establishing a new set of social life in a latter or new region where he migrated and decided to live.”¹ B.N. Ghosh defines migration as, “A change of place of living for almost a long stable period. It implies giving up of some political boundaries. When people leave one place and go to a new place for a temporary span of time it is no migration from the demographic point of view.”² Migration always has “Pull” and “Push” factors which paves the migration of people. In the context of the migration of the people in the tea plantations of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region during the colonial rule, both the push and pull factors were responsible for migration, which will be focused on this chapter. In the tea plantation of Colonial Bengal, the migration of one particular race or tribe is absent, rather multi-race, multi-tribal and multi-lingual migration is been recorded, which has been expressed in this chapter. Migrations in these two regions were not recorded in one particular period but various years’ records the migration and the numbers of people who all are migrated were always fluctuating, the demographic change after migration is also focused in this chapter.

3.2: The Early Phase of Tea Plantation in Colonial Bengal.

The splendid rise in the demand of tea in Europe created an opportunity for the European traders to supply more tea to Europe from China and to make a good amount of surplus. The

East India Company, being one prominent trading company from England, went for the tea trade in a larger scale. In the later years, the relation between the British and the Chinese Emperor had to face dispute due to the illegal trade of opium carried on by the British East India Company which led to the Opium War between them for two consecutive years, First Opium War (1839-1842) and Second Opium War (1856-1860). Due to the degrading relation between China and Britain, tea was very much restricted for British traders by Chinese Emperor, and even the things went hard on the British East India Company when the British monopoly of trade with China came to an end with the Charter of 1834. After this kind of issues prevailed, the British officials were forced to seek for the new place for plantation of tea and its possible area; the easy region for them was the South Asian and African colonies. As a result of the accessible land and favorable climatic conditions and secondly the discovery of Assam variety of tea plant in the Assam region paved way for the tea plantation in the regions of Assam and Bengal. Regarding the above mentioned historical incidents I have elaborately mentioned in the previous chapter.

The tea plantation in India increased in a rapid manner, particularly in Darjeeling hills and its Terai region and little later in the Dooars region or the Sub-Himalayan region of Bengal and before these places it flourished in various regions of Assam. In Assam after tea drinking habit of one *Singpho* tribe and even the tea plant was found in wild by the British officials in 1815 and after that research and experiment of tea was taken more precisely and planted the tea plant, later in 1838 from the same tea plant the Indian variety of tea was send to London for the first time. In the case of Darjeeling, Campbell planted the Chinese variety of tea in his residence area in Darjeeling which grew nicely and ignited the light of hope for other planters; after that many British planters came up with the tea plantation in different regions of Darjeeling Hills and little later at the Terai region of Darjeeling. The above mentioned historical events of tea plantation in Darjeeling have been explained in much detail in the previous chapter. The expansion of tea plantation required larger number of labour, primarily manual workers were required in maximum number to cut down the virgin dense forest, to prepare the surface suitable for plantation and other. At the initial stage of plantation, the planters especially in Assam region employed Chinese workers brought from China with high amount of wage as compared to the regional and migrated labours. Mishra, Upadhyay and Sarma writes, “After initial experiments with employing Chinese slaves and local labourers from Assam, labour in the tea gardens of Assam and Bengal were recruited from among the tribal people of central India.”³

After the successful experiment of tea plantation in Assam and Bengal, the tea planters were in need of large lands for the plantation. As a matter of fact, lands were sufficient in Assam and in Bengal but were under the governments glance. The areas interspersed with tea estates today, were earlier covered with wild bushes and jungles whose disposal for cultivation was the special prerogative of the government. Accordingly, two sets of rules were formulated from time to time for the purpose and these rules were known as waste land rules in the land and revenue administrative records.⁴ The Wasteland Rules was formulated in Assam in the year 1838 for the first time. The allocation of the waste land under the Wasteland Rules were of two categories, first, it was allocated for ordinary cultivation and secondly, for special cultivation of tea, coffee, cinchona, etc.

After the introduction of the Wasteland Rules, the lands were taken for plantation on the basis of this Wasteland Rule and the terms of this rule read as, the land was given for a lease of 45 years and free of rent for some years, after which the many companies and planters were attracted towards Assam and later in different regions of Bengal to buy lands for plantation. After few years of allocation of land under Wasteland Rules, the rise of the new enterprise in tea plantation sector provided concession and new lease policies to the planters; the concession was, the lease of the land for 15 years was kept free after the land was acquired, minimum of 500 acres of land was provided and the lease was extended for 99 years. The rent and the other benefits enjoyed by the planters were very much in planter's favor, Virginius Xaxa states that, "The Rent was on the whole low and even on the best quality of land; it was not at par with the rent extracted from the neighboring subsistence sector. On the contrary, rent governing the special cultivation was to be brought at par with rent in the subsistence sector only at the expiry of the lease. The terms and conditions of the grant under the rule were thus quite favorable to the planters."⁵

In the tea plantation region of Kangra, Himachal Pradesh the planters brought lands from the natives, they used to sell their surplus land or their homeland as well. Unlike Kangra valley in Darjeeling the issue was different, Darjeeling was termed as "wasteland" by the British officers, which made the tea planters work to increase tea plantation quite easy. Sarah Besky writes, "The various permutations of Wasteland Rules (in 1859, 1864, 1882, and 1898) made tea cultivation a financially lucrative venture. Wasteland rules granted ninety-nine-year renewable lease periods and rent-free settlement for large tracts of uncultivated land (the 1882 Darjeeling Wasteland Rules specifically granted rent-free tenancy for tea cultivators). These leaseholds were granted only to individuals who vowed to "improve" the land. Under the later

rewritings of the Wasteland Rules, property rights to leasehold became transferable between individuals. This enabled settler to sell their land tracts (and the materials on top of the land) and transfer their leases to new “owners.” This ability to transfer leaseholds and sell property enabled the development of the Darjeeling tea plantation landscape.”⁶ In Darjeeling the lands under waste land rule were issued from the year 1859, the land was put into auction at the set price of Rs 10 per acre; the land was given for the 20 years of lease after the purchase. Later in the 1861 Lord Canning issued a minute known as ‘Fee-Simple’ regarding the sale of land with some new terms after considering the steady success in the tea plantation, which gave high rise in the land purchase. The grant was replaced by the new Waste Land Rules of 1864, which provided the land for 30 years of lease after purchase, and which was renewable. This was followed by another set of rules which came with different changes in lease; they were brought in 1882 and 1898.

Since the tea plantation in Bengal was introduced later as compared to Assam plantation, the land allotment for plantation as compared to Assam the Darjeeling plantation was fairly similar but regarding the land allotment in the Sub-Himalayan region was little different. Virginius Xaxa writes, “The plantation in Jalpaiguri, being a late starter could not be governed by the rules that were in vogue in the province of Assam. Darjeeling plantations, on the other hand, were regulated by the same rules as those in Assam until about 1874 when Assam was carved out into a separate province. Since then, rules governing the waste land allocation in Assam and Bengal have been similar but not identical.”⁷ In the Sub-Himalayan region the agrarian economy was mostly controlled by the *Jotedars* from the various indigenous communities like Rajbanshis, Meches, Totos, Lepchas and Oraon and few Muslim *Jotedars*. Since the tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region was a lately introduced as compared to Darjeeling and its Terai region, the colonial planters came up with the different type of wasteland rules as it was before in Assam and later in Darjeeling, but the land rules introduced in the Sub-Himalayan region was little different than the former. The waste land rules that governed the development of plantation in North Bengal in general and Jalpaiguri in particular were very simple. Firstly, tea grants were obtained as a lease, initially for a period of five years. This was known as preliminary lease during which rent was free in the first year followed by an enhancement of rent at three *annas* per acre in the second year, and an additional three *annas* for each successive year remaining. The lease was also liable to be renewed after the expiry of 5 years for a period of 30 years, and to a similar renewal in perpetuity. The rent was to be assessed and fixed at each interval in the light of certain stipulated conditions. The

rent as per the regulation was neither to be less than 12 *annas* an acre nor to exceed the rate of rent per acre found in the neighboring areas for the highest class of land under ordinary cultivation.⁸ The lands in the Sub-Himalayan region were allocated to the British tea planters and the Indian entrepreneurs under the prevailing rule till the land were available easily. The *jot* land was safeguarded by the government by prohibiting its conversion into waste land, but later the growing scarcity of land the *jot* lands were brought into the waste land rule and were used further for the tea plantation. Rinju Rasaily writes, “Land from the autochthonous inhabitants like the *Rajbanshis*, *Meches*, *Totos* and *Lepchas* were taken through various means during the colonial period for the setting up of tea plantations in Dooars and Terai regions. From 1889-1895 and 1931-1935 there was a considerable decline in size of land holdings from among the autochthonous communities especially the *Rajbanshis* and *Meches* and the Muslim community and a likewise increase in land ownership among the *Marwaris* and *Europeans*”.⁹

The lands from the native people were annexed by the colonial government for the tea plantation and they were brought into small land holders or landless in most of the cases and were forced to work in the plantation sector. After the lands were taken for the plantation purpose the need of an hour for the planters became the labour recruitment, which became a serious concern for them as the area which was taken for plantation were very sparsely populated by the tribal communities living there from years. At the very initial period of tea plantation which required a large number of labour to clear the dense forest, the Britishers brought the Chinese labours from China despite having problems with the Chinese empire. The Chinese labours were brought with the motive that they have knowledge in preparation of the land for plantation and even skills and experience of plucking the leaf and preparing tea. The service of Chinese labours were used in the very initial stage of plantation in Assam and in Kangra (Chinese workers were used for long period, even after a decade of Assam plantation started using indenture labours) valley in Himachal Pradesh. In the latter days with the Chinese people been recruited as a labour, problem started to grow between the planters and the Chinese labours, Percival Griffith mentions about a letter by J.W. Masters who was then the superintendent of tea, he writes about the Chinese labours getting offended when they were asked anything related with the work, as the Chinese labours used to consider themselves as “they object to do anything else but to make tea”, while asked questioned or spoken on the issue, they used to threaten to leave the service if they are insulted by being asked to work.¹⁰ Secondary issue related with the Chinese tea labours were, they died from the tropical diseases like malaria and *Kalazar* (black water fever), the two reasons were the primary cause for the

decrease in the number of the Chinese labours later and the planters were compelled to recruit the local workers and the migrated labours in the plantation. In case of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region no records of Chinese labours working as a labour in the tea plantation and its preparation in the early days. In Assam the recruitment of local labours took place, they were paid low wage as compared to the Chinese labours and they were called as 'Taklars' or tea makers. Aritra De writes, "The newly recruited workers, mostly local Assamese, were paid lower wages than those of the Chinese workers. Moreover, the planters made attempts to train these local workers on the art of plucking by the Chinese who were professionals in this field. Such labourers were regarded by the owners as '*taklars*' or tea-makers. Unfortunate in their attempts to discipline and control these workers, the planters noted that the *taklars* were highly reluctant to work in the plantations with such meagre wages and would often desert their jobs without any prior notice. Few others who would remain in the plantations would often carry out demonstrations and strikes mostly during payment dates and created severe obstacles in the way of the successful functioning of the tea gardens."¹¹ The prevailing issues made the British planters to bring workers from the other region of nearby Assam; hence they made the tribal people of the Chottanagpur region the victim of their false promises and turned them to a bondage labour from a free and self-reliant tribal community.

After the allocation of land under the wasteland rule in Darjeeling, and the rise in the tea plantation in Darjeeling in the second half of the 19th century made the planters to look after large amount of labour force in the plantation. Some of the tribal communities denied to work in the plantation and shifted to new areas where they lived by their own primitive culture and primitive way of agriculture. In Assam the Naga Tribe from the upper region denied to work in the tea plantation, somehow few Nagas were made to work in the tea plantation but they used to leave the work and the garden without any notification or so, which created problem for the planters. Likewise, in Darjeeling tribal community who denied to work under the colonial planters and denied to be a bondage labour from free and self-reliant community was the "Lepchas". Lepchas were the aboriginals of the hilly tracts of Darjeeling; they were living there before Darjeeling was handed over to the British East India Company by the Raja of Sikkim in 1835. The presence of the Lepcha tribe in Darjeeling before the advent of the Britishers can be found in various writings of the English officials in their personal account, in some official records and even be found mentioning of them in the letters.

Jeff Koehler writes about the instances regarding the Lepcha habitant and their agricultural tradition which were recorded by the early British Officer Captain Lloyd, who is

also referred as person who discovered Darjeeling and J.D. Hooker, renowned British Botanist and who happens to be a friend of Charles Darwin; Hooker has written many letters mentioning about Darjeeling to Darwin during his stay in Darjeeling. The writings by the two British officers as mentioned by Jeff Koehler in his work are as follows, “Lloyd wrote, the Darjeeling tract, in an early report, had no villages and only twenty to thirty houses. Though sparsely inhabited, the land --- home to the Lepcha people --- was not uninhabited. When the British arrived, the Lepcha still practiced a type of migratory agriculture called jhum. Just before the rainy season, they would burn a tract of forest, making room to plant and also releasing nutrients in the ash. Once rain fell, and the ash had soaked into the earth, they planted. After intensely farming a plot for three years, which the land exhausted from rapid string of different crops, they abandoned the site and repeated the process elsewhere.”¹² The firing season made a spectacular displays, as J.D. Hooker who was the first to document Lepchas, mentions about it in his document of Lepcha agricultural traditions in detail, which records as, “The voice of the birds and insects being hushed, nothing is audible but the harsh roar of the rivers, and occasionally, rising far above it, that of the forest fires. At night we were literally surrounded by them; some smouldering, like shale-heaps at a colliery, others fitfully bursting forth, whilst others again stalked along with a steadily increasing and enlarging flame, shooting out great tongues of fire, which spared nothing as they advanced with irresistible might. Their triumph is in reaching a great bamboo clumps, when the noise of the flames drowns that of the torrents, and as the great stem-joints burst from the expansion of confined air, the report is as that of a salvo from a park of artillery. At Dorjiling the blaze is visible, and the deadened report of bamboos bursting is heard throughout the night; but in the valley and within a mile of the scene of destruction, the effect is the most grand, being heightened by the glare reflected from the masses of mist which hover above.”¹³

The presence of the Lepcha tribe in Darjeeling can be traced from the writings of the early British explorers, who were helped by the Lepchas as a guide to reach their destination in the new and dense Himalayan region. Jayeeta Sharma mentions about the early British explorer J.D. Herbert’s encounter with the Lepchas while he was sent to Sikkim from Calcutta; it was the time before Darjeeling was separated from Sikkim as a grant. Sharma writes, “In 1830, Captain J.D. Herbert, dispatched from Calcutta to Sikkim to asses a remote Himalayan hamlet’s potential as a colonial hill station for the East India Company, wrote appreciatively of the local guides on whom he depended to reach his mountain destination. His guides were the *Rong*, a people whose preferred name originated in the phrase *mutanchi rong kup rum kup*,

children of snowy peaks, or the Lepcha. The mightiest of those peaks was Kanchenjunga, also known as *Kongchen Kongchlo* (big stone), whose snows gave birth to the Rong ancestors, *Fudongthing* and *Nazong Nyu*.”¹⁴ While we can find the people from the Lepcha tribe helping the British officers in their way to the hills, however people from the same tribe were reluctant to work in the tea plantation and the British officials and planters couldn't bring them into their influence.

The resistance by the Lepcha to work in the tea plantation and because of that the deteriorating relation between Lepchas and the British can also be found in the Nepali novel titled “*Tara Kahiley?*” (But When? Translated by Author) by Prakash Kovid. This novel is written in a scenario of colonial Darjeeling tea garden, where the domination of the colonizers over the people was a daily activity. Various kind of heinous acts by the colonial masters towards the workers are been shown in this novel. The resistance by the Lepchas to work in the tea plantation can be found in the novel in a scene of Badamtam tea garden situated 10 to 12 kilometers from Darjeeling town. Here Prakash Kovid writes, “*Badamtamka adivasi Lepcha harulaisardar le pravaw parna sakenan, sahib haru ko lolopotoma lepcha haru poyiyenan, falat: bardo chiyabaganle tiniharuko khetibari pani michidai jadaocha, taskar banawne angrej bajadurko samu tiniharuko k sip lagcha ra. Yakhadhura ka Lepcha haru Rungdung khola pari manedara busty tira khediye au Kodong ra Chimli Lepcha khetika haru Jhepi pari chiyabaganka pheditira lakhetiye*”¹⁵ which means,” The original inhabitant Lepchas of Badamtam were not influenced by the *Sardars*, neither they were drawn in by British officers with various things, alas! The growing tea garden took away their agricultural land; at last the native Lepchas could not stand against the mighty British and had to give away their lands. The Lepchas residing in Yakhadhura were chased down beyond the Rungdung river to Manedara village and the Lepchas of Kodong and Chimli were chased down beyond the Jhepi river in the foothills of the tea gardens” (Translated by Author). By this we can find the prevailing condition of the colonial Darjeeling and the resistance by the Lepchas against the planters and the problems faced by the Lepchas as a result of the resistance. Another incident in the novel, in which a conversation between two friends of Badamtam named Laksham a Lepcha girl and Kritiman a Rai caste man who is a worker in a tea garden whose family was brought by the *Sardars*. In this conversation Laksham and her family are been the victim of the tea planters and have to leave their land as they resisted to work in the garden, here Laksham asks Kritiman about his number in the tea garden and says to Kritiman in a revolutionary manner, “we don't sell our names nor we exchange with the number for some money, neither

we have to work as a slave and get harassed and beaten by the British planters, rather we will grow our own food and eat whatever we have and live with pride.” Gradually the Lepcha the aboriginals of the region were slowly towards the area where tea plantation was absent. The original inhabitants, the Lepchas, were rapidly outnumbered by settlers from Nepal and Sikkim, and by 1850 population rose to 10,000 which again went up beyond 22,000 in 1869.¹⁶

3.3: Migration of Labourers in Darjeeling: A Historical Process.

Despite large land grants and generous lease terms, tea planting was plagued by the acute labour shortages exacerbated by the Wasteland Rules.¹⁷ In which the resistance by the Lepchas to work in the tea gardens in the Darjeeling region increased the demand of the workers in the tea plantation. Keeping the requirement of labour in the tea plantation the planters were convinced that importation of foreign labours was necessary, and with this purpose the first Tea Planters Association was formed. The British planters were aware regarding the workers in the tea plantation to be brought from the similar climatic condition of the plantation area. As in case of Assam they saw the deaths of the labourers during the transportation and even death and sickness by the un-favorable climatic condition. Therefore, the nearest place from where the labours could be brought with not much of a difficulty and the climatic condition was quite similar and the distance for transport of labours were not much elongated, indeed Nepal became the source of labours for the tea planters in Darjeeling and its adjoining areas. The British planters gave the duty of recruiting the labours in the plantation from Nepal to the informal recruiters known as “*Sardars*” who used to be the chief of the labours in all forms.

After 1850’s the labour migration from Nepal to India (Darjeeling tea plantation) started, the migration was a continuous one as the tea plantation was growing more and more in which large labour was required to prepare the lands for plantation. Regarding the migration from Nepal the Gurungs, Rais, Tamangs, and other ethnicities that poured across the border were deemed uniquely suited to the mountainous climes of Darjeeling. The British had found an ideal labour pool.¹⁸ The migration of labours from Nepal in a higher manner both push and pull factor, one of the push factors can be seen as the repressive rule of the Rana dynasty, acute caste oppression, heavy bondage of debt, high taxes, bondage, which paved the labours from Nepal to migrate towards India. The pull factor was the labours were given wage, food and shelter and little freedom as compared back it was in Nepal, and in later phases of migration the development of roads and markets gave them hope to do well and earn in Darjeeling. Rajendra Dhakal in his article writes, “Their migration did not trigger a ‘sudden change from

an average expectable environment to a strange and unpredictable one' because ecologically or otherwise, Sikkim and Darjeeling hills were no different from the middle hills of Nepal, from where they migrated. Though the new place had a different political set-up, it was less hostile compared to the feudal system under monarchy or the Ranas back home in Nepal. The opening of roads and transport ushered in hopes of a better life without having to give up 'familiar food, music, social customs and even one's language', or face an 'unfamiliar landscape' and people."¹⁹ The *Sardars* who were given the duty to recruit the labours from Nepal, used to make false promises and used to lure the labours so that they finally agree to go with the Sardar to work in the tea plantation. Khemraj Sharma writes, "The *Marad* and *Aurat* in the tea estates workers were lured with the local slogan as "*Chiya Ko Bot Ma Paisa Falcha*" meaning thereby the tea estates bushes fetches easy money for the workers."²⁰ The migration from Nepal to Darjeeling was not limited to certain ethnicity rather migration of various ethnicity, but they were separated by the British for different works. Rai, Limbu, Gurung and Mangar were mostly made to work in the tea plantation and the other section who were Chettri, Bahuns, Kami and Damais were included in the agricultural sector as they had good idea in farming and the Kami, Damai were skilled in making the equipment required in the agricultural sector and thus slowly the *Khas Kura* or the Nepali language became the lingua franca of the whole migrated labours working in both the sectors.

While migration of different communities took place, but the first to migrate from Nepal to Darjeeling were the Kirati community, Rai and Limbu are considered to be the descendants of ancient Kiratis. Manas Das Gupta also mentions about the Kiratis as, "The Kiratis, who used to live in the eastern part of Nepal, were the first migrants to Darjeeling so far as the existing records of labourers in the tea gardens could be scrutinized."²¹ Regarding the migration of the Kiratis there was a political push factor which made them to leave their land and was forced to migrate. The Kiratis were the inhabitants of the Eastern Nepal; it was an independent province by then before it was united by Prithivi Narayan Shah later on. The areas between the Dudh Koshi and Arun rivers were known as 'Middle Kirat' where the Rai community lived and the area east of Arun river known as 'Far Kirat' place where the Limbus resided. In the history of Nepal from 1772 a new event took place, Prithivi Narayan Shah after conquering the Katmandu valley and became the emperor which was ruled by the Newar kings. Shah's political ambition was to unite all the semi-independent and independent provinces of Nepal and with the same purpose he moved towards Eastern Nepal. After annexing eastern Nepal Shah was not able to put a strong control from Katmandu valley, as Shah was the upper

caste Hindu whereas the Kiratis were not which even created a point of difference, to overcome this issue Shah tried to confiscated the land of the Kiratis and gave it to the upper caste Hindus. Regarding this event Manas Das Gupta writes, “After “annexing” the eastern part of Nepal the Shah King tried to consolidate their positions in the eastern part of Nepal. This area was never “properly” controlled by the rulers of the valley of Katmandu. The Shah Kings were upper caste Hindus but the residents of Kirat country were not. In order to impose their law, the Shah Kings tried to settle the upper caste Hindus in the land held by Kiratis. In the old society, land is the only means of production and those who could own the ownership of land would control the society.”²² The annexation of land from the original inhabitants and handing over to the upper caste Hindus was followed by various taxes and a land tenure system known as “*Kipat*”.

Kipat was a land tenure system in which the individual holding the land obtains the right to hold or transfer the land, and it was recognized by the state as long as he pays the taxes, in order to pay the taxes, the land was transferred. Another land tenure system was known as “*Sonami*” in which the migrant who were the upper caste Hindus in this case where they received the land from. Later the government introduced another land tenure system in which the *Sonami* land was to be converted into “*Raikar*” land by which the land received by the upper caste hindu migrant were turned to be theirs permanently; and the Raikar land cannot be converted into *Sonami* land again; by such land tenure systems the original non-upper caste hindu land holders lost their lands. Such despotic rule by the Shah King towards non-hindu Kirats and other ethnic communities like Gurung, Mangar and Tamang, made them migrate towards Darjeeling in search of better place in political, social and economic prospect as promised by the recruiting *Sardars*.

Slavery in Nepal was another factor which led to the migration of people from Nepal. The failure in the payment of taxes levied by the Shah King resulted in rural indebtedness as the loans were taken to pay the taxes and in case of the failure to repay loans led to slavery. Kumar Pradhan writes, all this added considerably to the high incidence of rural indebtedness, while the failure or incapability to repay loans led to bondage and slavery. The non-conformity of tribal groups with principal of the rebels, tax defaulters or those who could not pay fines or repay loans was enslaved. G.B. Fraser, a British officer who visited Garhwal after the Nepal war in 1815, reported that during the Gorkha rule there a total of 200,000 people had been enslaved. A royal order to check slave traffic in Garhwal states that the people were reduced to slavery on charges of adultery. Adultery, or *chak chakui*, was punished by fining. However, in many cases, the woman’s nose was slit and she was enslaved. This form of punishment was

only for women of low castes and *matwali* tribes, or Mongoloids.²³ Another incident of slaves sold in different places is mentioned by an Englishman named Raper, while his visit to Garhwal in 1808 he saw the slaves been sold; he describes as slaves at a Gorkhali post in a pass leading to Har-ka-Pir, where ‘slaves were brought down from hills and exposed for sale’. ‘Many hundreds of these poor wretched,’ ‘of both the sexes, from three to thirty years of age, are annually disposed of in the way of traffic. These slaves are brought down from all parts of the interior of the hills and sold at Hardwar at from ten to one hundred and fifty rupees each.’ In 1877, a slave girl of the Damai caste, described as the grand-daughter of a slave woman, was sold for Rs 30, payable in two installments. A document of 1860 shows that a slave was gifted to a priest by his friend.²⁴ Such inhumane act of turning people into slave for mere amount of money and after which they were sold in the market prevailed in Nepal, which eventually became a push factor for migration and hence the people who were or were going to be victim of such system choose to migrate towards Darjeeling and its nearby region. In fact, they came under the hands of colonial exploiters after running away from the hands of feudal exploiters.

Another aspect which dominated the ethnic communities in Nepal was Sanskritised Nepali literacy, which stood as a medium of suppression for the upper caste Hindus towards the other communities, while dealing on land transfers and any other official works. Manas Das Gupta writes, “Literacy is a factor which worked to the advantage of the upper caste Hindus. Sanskritised Nepali written in Devanagari Script became the official language of the Kathmandu government. The Brahmins were noted for their learning and they picked up the Devanagari Script and Sanskritised Nepali quickly. But the Limbus (or the other ethnic groups like Gurung or the Tamangs) had their own language. In consequence they were required at the time of property divisions, land transactions and land disputes to rely on the Brahmins or the upper caste Hindus.”²⁵ The decrease in the size of land holds was lessening the agricultural outcome for Rai, Gurung and other communities and in addition to that they didn’t have opportunities in government services neither any other new occupation in Nepal, thus in Darjeeling they saw the opportunity in the tea plantation for financial support. Michael Hutt describes how Nepali peasants, enslaved, or landless, or over-taxed, or indebted, long sought better prospects in ‘*Muglan*’ (people of Nepal used this term, literal meaning being: the land of Mughals).²⁶

Beside the tea plantation the migration towards Darjeeling from Nepal took place after Darjeeling was made the recruiting center for the British army in 1890. To have a better life they came to work in the tea plantation, once they joined the plantation they came to know

about the limitation of their social and economic mobility, and on the other hand in joining British Gorkha army it was permanent and granted a good payment and good facilities of pensions and had a high status in the society. Dr. Rohit Sharma in his unpublished PhD thesis has mentioned that, “The British Army was impressed by the sterling quality of the Gorkhas in the ‘Anglo-Gorkha War (1814-16)’ and was looking forward for opportunities of picking up the Gorkhas with the prospect of strengthening the British Indian Army. The raising of the Gorkha forces into His Majesty's Gorkha Regiment Rifles, Kashmir Imperial Service Troops, Assam Rifles, Burma Rifles, and Eastern Frontier Rifles. The Military Police Battalions, the armed section of the Police Forces, Kumaon Regiment speaks itself of the immense immigration of the Nepalese into India.”²⁷ The British government however considered Mangar, Gurung, Limbu and Rai as natural martial races and it became one of the criteria to join the British army; hence after the retirement they settled in India and their generations also did not went back to their homeland in the later years.

Another area of migration beside plantation and army recruitment, largely took place in the agricultural sector. While Rai, Mangar, Gurung and Limbu were termed as the martial race, even termed as “*matwali*” meaning who drinks liquor, in similar fashion Chettri, Brahmans (*Bahun*) called as “*tagadharis*” (meaning who wears thread around their body) and Kami and other *Scheduled Caste* who were termed as untouchables by the upper caste Hindus belonged to the agricultural sector. The *Scheduled Caste* people were termed as the untouchables and were kept at the bottom of the caste formation of the Hindu community as per the “Manusmriti” by Mannu, but the *Scheduled Caste* people formed a special position in the agricultural sector as they were skilled in preparing all the equipment required in the agricultural field and devoid of which the upper caste Hindus i.e. Chettri and Bahuns were not able to perform their agricultural skills. The British planters from their early days of plantation were aware of the fact that while the tea plantation grows and the labourers increases the need of agricultural products will be high, hence to resolve that issue from the time of Dr. Campbell the early settlers were given forestlands to settle and conduct agriculture. Dr Rohit Sharma states, “Kalimpong or *Daling Cote* had a very nominal population of Bhutia and Lepcha races at the time of annexation (1865). In the ensuing decades, there was a pretty large immigration from Nepal into Kalimpong area. In the western side of Teesta, i.e. Darjeeling and Kurseong sub-division, most of the tea gardens are located and attracted most of the immigrants. The eastern side of Teesta had a different type of land- tenure system and considered as a “Khasmahal” area having cultivation as the main economy. Thus Darjeeling district having

similar ecological background produced dualistic economy- the unorganized sector and organized sector.”²⁸

Education in Darjeeling started with the starting up of print media in the Darjeeling, as with the coming of print media the mass literacy was the call of the world; such affect was seen in Darjeeling too, as a result of which European education was introduced in Darjeeling. The first school for Europeans was established in 1846, but by 1898, a number of primary, middle and a few high schools were opened for the local people.²⁹ The literacy rate increased in the later years in Darjeeling, though the local's education was mostly limited till primary level or secondary level, they limited the locals with in this so that they can employ them as plantation clerks and nothing more than that. The education was mostly looked after by the Christian Missionary, the most famous of which was the Scottish Presbyterians Missionary. The education too impacted the people from Nepal to migrate towards Darjeeling for better education. With the Education the Christian Missionaries brought with them Christianity as a religion, which they preached in Darjeeling hills and its adjoining areas. The Biblical classes were conducted in the schools looked after by the missionaries. The first attempt to introduce the doctrine of Christianity among the hill tribes was made in 1841 by Mr. Start, a Baptist who brought out from Europe a small band of German missionaries, and began work among the Lepchas in Darjeeling and its neighborhood, the head-quarters of the Mission being at Takvar.³⁰ Later on the other mongoloid and the lower caste people of Nepal too knew about the teachings of Christianity, where they found the absence of caste division, no heavy amount of religious taxes and saw every caste and race people as one under Christianity which too played a role in the migration of people from Nepal.

With the varied ‘pull’ and ‘push’ factor of migration which has taken place in the migration of labourers from Nepal to Darjeeling, in the tea plantation sector and some of them in the agricultural sector added a great number of people in Darjeeling; which can be termed as a new land where there were very less settlements and the larger tract was covered with virgin forest. Beside farmers, the growth of migrants in Darjeeling helped the growth of tea plantation a many fold, as this plantation required a large number of labour and in case of Darjeeling they were larger in number and cheaper in wage. Another important factor was the phenomenal growth of tea industry. The labour force was about 10,000 in 1870; it increased to 44,279 in 1921 and in 1941 it was 61,450. The actual population in the tea garden according to the 1941 census was 1, 46,508. In the census of 1901 it was pointed out that “the tea garden coolies and their children accounted for more than two-third of total population”.³¹

The following chart shows some records of immigration to Darjeeling in the following years.

Table 3.1: Immigration in Darjeeling 1891-1951

Year	Actual Population	Immigrants	%immigrants Population to actual
1891	2,23,314	1,19,670	53.59
1901	2,49,117	1,13,588	45.60
1911	2,49,550	1,11,269	41.90
1921	2,82,748	1,01,807	36.00
1931	3,19,635	1,00,700	31.50
1941	3,76,361	95,750	25.44
1951	4,45,260	1,00,311	22.53

Source: Manas Das Gupta, *Labour in Tea Garden*.³²

The migration of labours from Nepal, mainly from the eastern part of Nepal did change the demography of Darjeeling hills. More the land was expanded for tea plantation more the migration took place, which helped the colonial planters in many aspects. Hence the migration was not of one or two ethnic community of people but it was a mixer of various ethnic groups. Darjeeling a place where the population was very less and the only people found were the Lepchas; in other word Darjeeling from a singular ethnicity turned slowly into a multi-ethnic region. The table below presents the different ethnic communities who all migrated in Darjeeling hills in period of time.

Table 3.2: Composition of Different Ethnic Groups in Darjeeling Hills Areas (in percentage)

Ethnic Groups	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Kiratis (Rais, Subbas, Limbus)	32.50	34.70	32.41	33.87	32.47
Tamangs	18.68	17.07	17.80	20.34	21.61
Gurungs and Majars	5.84	6.05	5.67	5.85	6.67
Newars	3.86	4.34	5.11	5.40	5.28
Kamis, Damais, Sarkis	10.96	10.90	11.46	10.13	11.15
Upper Caste Brahmins	4.33	3.88	4.78	4.61	3.88
Other Nepali Groups	10.93	10.23	10.89	10.67	9.58
Lepchas	6.67	6.08	5.65	6.34	5.38
Bhutias	6.33	6.75	6.23	2.79	3.28

Note: Other Nepali Groups Include Sunwars, Thapas, Yakhas, Giris and others.

Source: Manas Das Gupta, *Labours in Tea Gardens*.³³

The migration of the people from Nepal in the tea plantation as well in the other laborious works in the Darjeeling district went on growing. Most of the communities preferred to stay in Darjeeling District and some went towards the Terai region and the Sub-Himalayan region which largely comes under the Jalpaiguri District. The population density of Darjeeling district chanced many fold after the migration of people different places, the record of the population of the various communities in the Darjeeling district (chiefly in the hill) of 40 years' span is been mentioned in the table below:

Table 3.3: Population of Various Communities in Darjeeling District from 1901 to 1941

Name of the Communities	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Rais	33,133	40,409	41,236	47,431	56,794
Brahmans	6,470	6,195	8,174	8,791	8,999
Mangars	11,912	12,451	14,934	16,299	17,262
Newars	5,770	6,927	8,751	10,235	12,242
Tamangs	24,465	27,226	30,450	33,481	43,114
Gurungs	8,738	9,628	9,575	11,154	15,455
Limbus	14,305	13,804	14,191	16,288	17,803
Sunuwars	4,428	3,820	3,691	4,055	4,822
Yakhas	1,143	1,119	N.A.	850	824
Damais	4,643	4,453	5,781	5,551	8,162
Kamis	9,826	10,939	11,719	11,331	16,272
Sarkis	1,823	1,992	2,036	2,432	2,778
Gharti	3,448	3,584	N.A.	2,053	496
Bhutias and Tibetans	9,315	10,768	10,710	5,334	7,612
Lepchas	9,972	9,708	9,669	12,101	12,470
Sherpa	3,450	N.A.	N.A.	5,295	6,929

Source: Compilation from A.J. Dash, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling* and Census of India from different years.

The migration of Nepali workers in the Darjeeling District took place in a larger manner in the hills and quite less in the Terai region and in the Siliguri Sub-division of this district. With the Nepali community other tribal community from the Chotanagpur and Santhal Paraganas too migrated in these regions of Darjeeling district, though the migration of these

tribes to this District was less as compared to the migration towards the Sub-Himalayan region or in the Jalpaiguri district. In Siliguri sub-division and in the Jalpaiguri district the Rajbanshi, Koch, Dhimal and Meches were residing from pre-colonial times, they were the aboriginals of this region. The tribal communities which immigrated later were the Santhals, Oraons and Mundas. The records of the population of the communities residing in the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district are been presented in the table below:

Table 3.4: Communities Residing in Siliguri Sub-Division of Darjeeling District in Different Years

Names of Communities	1872	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1941
Rajbanshi	23,124	N.A.	N.A.	29,460	28,944	23,191	26,969	17,991
Koch	N.A.	30,801	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	122	N.A.
Dhimal	873	N.A.	631	N.A.	444	N.A.	375	N.A.
Meches	893	N.A.	267	342	201	N.A.	379	275
Santhals	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	1,859	2,246	3,607	4,299	4,045
Oraons	1,648	N.A.	4,632	8,042	7,543	10,952	12,412	12,433
Mundas	N.A.	N.A.	255	3,980	3,365	5,322	5,062	4,993

Source: Compilation from Arther Jules Dash, Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling and Census of India of various years.

The above table shows that the demography of the Terai and the Siliguri sub-division of Darjeeling district too changes after the immigration of various communities and various inter cultural change can be seen in later years.

3.4: Migration of Labours in the Sub-Himalayan Region: An Overview.

The expansion of tea plantation in the eastern part of India went on increasing as a result of which after increasing plantation in Assam and Darjeeling region of Bengal, it later in 1872-74 the tea plantation took new areas of Dooars region. After the Anglo-Bhutan war the region of today's Bengal Dooars and Assam Dooars were handed over to the British by Bhutan and the *Treaty of Sinchula* 1865 was signed as a peace agreement. The Eastern part of the region was added to Assam which came to be known as Assam Dooars and the Western region was adjoined with Bengal and came to be known as Western Dooars. The Western Dooars was a vast area mostly covered with a forest containing large amount of flora and fauna and was

untouched with agricultural, though the larger area of this Sub-Himalayan region was known for agriculture. Unlike in Darjeeling the Sub-Himalayan region was not thinly populated, certain tribal community used to live in the area. Large amount of land was available in the region which was not in use, which became a perfect ground for the British planters to establish their tea plantation. After the Western Dooars was annexed by the Britishers it was amalgamated with the Jalpaiguri district there was large number of area which was untouched, this availability of land made the British planters to setup tea plantation in the Dooars area. In order to bring the forested land into plantation the British Government passed a rule under the Waste Land Rule to let the land for tea plantation. After the land was provided for plantation the planters were in need of labours as the land was mostly covered with forest hence required a large number of labours to clear the forest and to prepare it for plantation. Similar to Assam the local inhabitants were not willing to work in the tea plantation as they were self-reliant on what they were doing for living. Sailen Debnath writes, “The autochthonous people of the Dooars such as the Koch-Rajbanshis, the Bodos, the Rabhas, and the Lepchas as were well dependent on their traditional village economy of agriculture, weaving, fishing and often hunting and were accustomed in living in the community-cluster of houses together, showed their repugnance in responding to the allurements of work as labourers in the growing tea gardens of dooars. The tea planters had, therefore, no other way but to depend on labourers from outside.”³⁴

After the *Treaty of Sugauli* in 1816 the Gorkha or Nepalese were encouraged for immigration in Darjeeling and to work in tea plantation in Darjeeling by the British, similar step was taken by the Britishers in the Sub-Himalayan region after the *Treaty of Sinchula* in 1865. The intention of the British Government was to bring the Nepali labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region to send off the Bhutanese people similar to what they did in Darjeeling by bringing Nepalese in place of the Lepchas. The immigration of the Nepali workers took place in the Dooars region but unlike Darjeeling the land for plantation was much larger as compared to Darjeeling; to which the Nepalese labourers were not enough for the plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region, hence more labourers from other places were required to carry on the tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region; the most targeted region for the workers who were easier to be lured were Chotanagpur Plateau region of Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. Sailen Debnath writes, “As the Nepalese were not enough to man the demand of labourers in the Tea industry in the Dooars, the tea planters in collusion with the Government decided to bring labourers from the Santal Parganas and Chottanagpur plateau of Bihar where large

number of tribal as well as poor people namely Santals and Oraons lived without fixed and settled economy; and who, in fact, suffered the most because of the new land revenue systems and colonial economy introduced by the British Government.”³⁵ The flow of immigrant labourers, were mostly Nepalis, Santals, Oraons, Mundas, Malpaharis, Nagasias, Asurs, Kharia and others³⁶ from Nepal, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar region respectively. The coming of the immigrant labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region indeed changed the demographic scenario of the region and the region was turned into a place of multi-races and of multi-lingual.

Among the various migrated communities in the tea plantation of Assam, Darjeeling, Terai and Sub-Himalayan region the tribal's of Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh were the once who were the ones who had to travel long distances facing various health issues and other obstacles during their travel. The tea planters and the British government mainly relied in areas of Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh where the tribal population was in higher in number. The labours or “coolies” (as termed by the British) from Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh who were taken to Assam at first and later to the Sub-Himalayan region of Bengal were taken in a similar manner but the recruitment in Sub-Himalayan region was little different than that of Assam, the labours did not have to go through “The Workmen's Breach of Contract Act” in Dooars region they were rather free. Percival Griffith writes “Labour in the Dooars was always ‘free’ in the sense that the labourer was not placed under any kind of contract and could leave whenever he pleased. The colonial act of was introduced by the colonial government to support the colonial tea planters. The act was introduced to check on the labours that were leaving gardens after sometime. In the year 1859 the colonial government passed the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act, which was primarily applied in Assam. The act rendered the labourer liable to prosecution for any breach of contract, but gave him no protection against the employer and laid down no conditions with regard to the arrangements for his transit to the tea districts.”³⁷ The reasons for the difference between the Dooars and the Assam system is nowhere explicitly stated, but it was perhaps mainly due to the fact that the Dooars was much nearer than Assam to its principal recruiting ground.”³⁸ Though Percival Griffith states that the labours were free to leave whenever he pleased, but there are no such records of labourers who left the tea plantation and went back to their native place; not because they started to like the work in tea plantation or they were paid well and enjoyed the basic facilities but they were kept in strictly and they were always looked by the *Sardars* or by the one who was dear to the planters.

As mentioned earlier the planters in the Sub-Himalayan region had large track of land for which they required larger number of labourers too. Beside the fact that the locals did not want to work in the tea plantation, even the planters were not willing to employ the locals as they had better bargaining power. The planters were in need of large number of workers but in addition to that they wanted the workers to be cheap as well. At the vanguard of a labor-intensive industry, planters saw that reducing labour costs would considerably increase profits. Moreover, the planters needed to get the maximum work levels from the labour force. What this actually meant was that planters wanted cheap and hard-working labor under conditions of labour shortage. Such a situation seemed wishful thinking, but the planters managed to make it a reality.³⁹ The tea industry of Assam depends almost entirely on imported labour. The labour employed in it and to a certain extent in the Dooars and the Terai is recruited from great distances. Bihar contributes about a 50 per cent, of the recruits to Assam, the areas next in importance being Orissa and the Central Provinces.⁴⁰ The large migration of Nepalese labourers from Nepal mainly from the eastern part of Nepal towards Darjeeling and its nearby region to work in tea garden was paved by various internal and external factors which can be placed as pull and push factors for the migration. In case of the Sub-Himalayan region, the migrant labourers coming to the region other than from Nepal (as discussed in the matter of Darjeeling), labourers from Bihar, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh too had various issues in their social life which played as pull and push factor in their migration from their native places to the Sub-Himalayan region to work in the tea plantation.

The various communities of Eastern region of Nepal faced various social, political and economic repressions after Maharaja Chandra Jung Bahadur Rana became victorious all over Nepal fighting with other petty rulers and came to united Nepal as one nation. Similarly, the various tribal communities of Chottagpur region, Orissa and Madhya Pradesh too faced socio, cultural and economic repressions from the higher caste Hindus and the British government. The area of where the tribals were settled, mainly in the area of Chotanagpur (in Bihar previously) was in the turmoil, because of the several revolts and unrest during the nineteenth century. The traditions of the tribal community were in danger from before as many of their tribal chiefs converted themselves into Hindus. Sharit Bhowmik also writes, “The decay of their traditional society had started earlier, in the seventeenth century, when Hinduism crept into the ruling family. The Tribal *raja* of Chotanagpur elevated his status through the process of Hinduising himself. He no longer considers himself a Munda and traced his lineage to *Nag devata*, the serpent god.”⁴¹ The embracement of Hinduism by the tribal chiefs or *rajas* was

done to marry the women from Hindu princely families. The members of the princely family, after Hinduisation, were able to inter-marry with neighboring Hindu princely families.⁴²

With the growing relation between the princely family of the tribes and the other Hindu families even gave rise to the coming of the non-tribal mainly the Hindus in the tribal area. They were welcomed and were allowed to settle in those areas by the princely families, these non-tribal used to be from nearby areas of Bihar. The coming of the non-tribal in the tribal region and being settled there was very much welcomed and adored by the British, as the tribal community was acting like a throne in the way for them. The settlement of the Hindu people in the tribal dominated area became easy for the British to use them in their office as the non-tribal people had some rudimentary education as compared to the tribal people who were far from any kind of education be it Indian education which taught Sanskrit languages nor the western education. Davidson (The Governor General's Agent) mentions that, the hinduization of the royal family and on the hinduization of the royal family and on their regularly intermarrying with the neighbouring Hindu families, it became a great object with them to induce other Hindoos to settle in Nagpore. The royal administration came to be staffed not by the Kols or Oraons but by Kayasthas from outside.⁴³ The tribal community of Chotanagpur called the Hindus and the British officers as *dikus*, which meant as non-tribal or alien at first came to be used as an abuse or which represented the abusers. Though the leaders of the tribal community were converting himself into Hindu and bringing the ethnic culture into danger, but the tribal people were determined to safeguard their culture. The British planters and officers termed the tribal of Chotanagpur and Santhal Paragana as "*Jungli*" signified by the landscape where they belonged to which was mostly covered by forest known as 'jungle' as well. Some of the instances of being called as *jungli* which are been mentioned by Piya Chatterjee in her work are, "The most suitable workers for arduous tropical labour were classified as *junglis*, that is, emigrants from Chotanagpur Plateau and the Santhal Parganas", "It imputed to the various adivasi communities of the Chotanagpur plateaus the characteristics associated by the colonizing planter-self with a primitive, uncivilized, and laboring other", "We prefer paying the higher price for Chotanagpuris and keeping out North Westerners who are weakly, dirty and discontented. Though they still seem of weaker stamina than the *junglis*, they are comparatively free from sickness."⁴⁴

The non-tribal immigrant in the tribal area by the means of marriage and other reasons kept on increasing. The coming of the non-tribal's increased many folds when the Hinduised ruler Nagvanshi donated lands to the Hindu Brahmins, who had a strong influence over the new converts and even to the other non-tribal communities who mostly belonged to the

business class they were Muslims and Sikhs who used to trade various luxury goods, horses, shawls and many more, they were also donated land in place of cash to pay for some items brought from them by Nagvanshi.⁴⁵ The donation of land to the Brahmins and to the trading communities slowly gave rise to the *jagidars* in the tribal region; since the non-tribal community were educated than the tribal community so it took no longer time for them to take forward the step to register the donated lands in their name; donation of land in such a larger amount resulted in the alienation of the tribal community from their land. The problem of the land taken by the non-tribal and the struggle for it was still on the way, at this critical juncture the coming of the British East India Company into Bihar played as fuel into fire for the primitive tribe of the Chotanagpur and other tribal areas. After the Mughal Emperor Shah Alam II signed the Treaty of Allahabad in 1765 with Robert Clive of English East India Company after facing loss in the Battle of Buxar. This treaty gave the English East India Company a strong political hold in India. The Diwani right was provided to the British under the treaty of Allahabad, under Diwani right the provision was, "It gave Diwani rights or the right to collect taxes of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company". After the grant of Diwani the Chotanagpur and other tribal region of Bihar and Orissa too came under the British rule. After the advent of the English East India Company the mastery over the tribal region changed, the raja was replaced by the British official. The power of raja was curtailed at the beginning but later it was transferred to him with the land revenue settlement which was not less than a dummy raja. With the English other tradesmen and moneylenders too came to the tribal lands, after the *dikus* came to those areas the first thing they did was grabbed the tribal land for agriculture and other resources, which resulted in being outcaste from the own land for the tribal. The new masters or the new ruler or the government which the tribal community of this region faced was not turning to be advantageous for them as they were also the same kind of molester and tyrant ruler. There can be no doubt that the changes of government which had taken place were not beneficial to them. They were neglected by their new masters, oppressed by aliens and deprived of the means satisfied at his own loss of dignity and authority, gave but surly answers to complaints who came before him.⁴⁶ The tribals in many places lost their lands and were turned into mere landless agricultural labours after the lands were taken by the non-tribals. The influx of the non-tribal took in such a major way that the whole tribal agrarian system was destroyed which even affected in their culture. The taking away of tribal land by the *dikus* were not monitored by the new master the English Government, they were rather ignorant about the tribal culture and traditions, this were slowly igniting the spark of rebellion within the tribals because of such suppression. Among the tribals the Munda community followed a customary form of land tenure system known as "Khuntkatti", according to the

system the land belonged communally to the village and customary rights of cultivation differed from corporate possession. But with the intervention the Mughals, non-tribals i.e. the Mundas and later the British, the domination over the agrarian system went to the other owners which eventually affected the customary sharing of labours and finally the occupancy began to disintegrate.⁴⁷

The English East India Company introduced the infamous Permanent Settlement Act in the year 1793, the act was not applied in the Chotanagpur region initially, but later the act was imposed to the region too. According to the act zamindars were given the legal sanction of the land and who had to pay a fix sum to the East India Company; for which the zamindars used to levy high tax to the peasants when the land was provided them for agriculture. The Ancient tillage right of the tribal peasants was brought to the end. Manas Das Gupta writes, “The entire tribal agrarian system was ruthlessly destroyed. It shook the very foundation of the old tribal society. Never before has the sanctuary of the tribal society secluded form the rest of the world witnessed on such a scale influx of *dikus* (alien), who started progressive at the expense of the tribals. It was a hurricane that blew over the land.”⁴⁸ Various kinds of taxes were imposed to the tribals of the Chottanagpur and other tribal region by the zamindars and the English East India Company which was very much unbearable and was unplayable by the tribals. Within the various taxes, they even levied the tax on *Mahua* tree, which was regarded as a gift for the tribes by the nature. The *Mahua* tree is regarded as an important tree as it is used by the tribal people for various uses. *Mahua* tree was used by the tribals for multiple medicinal properties, which can be used for the treatment for a large number of diseases, the flower of this tree was used as vegetable, its seed was used to extract oil, the flower of the tree was even soaked in water and is fermented for 4to 5 days and alcohol was extracted from it by the distillation process and even the wood of the tree used for some furniture and even as a fire wood for various purposes.⁴⁹

After going through the suppression, being taken out of the lands and the land rights been destroyed by the zamindars, rajas, merchants and the English East India Company the Tribals of the Chotanagpur revolted against such tyranny, and in 1831 the first major revolt in the Chotanagpur region against the *dikus* took place which is known as the Kol Insurrection in Indian History. The rebellion was not taken by one tribe but it was joined by all the agricultural tribes like Mundas, Kharias, Hos, Oraons and others. The revolt went in a intense manner for two years but at last it was suppressed by the modernized ammunitions of the British, where the tribal’s were fighting with their old traditional weapons. The Kol revolt left a huge amount of impact on other tribal people from various regions in India as a result of which various

revolts by the tribals for their rights, against suppression by the landlords, merchants and the company was recorded in Indian history. While many tribal rebellions against the such inhumane state affairs were recorded in various parts of the country, two prominent tribal movement came up taking the light from the Kol revolt, both grew and made an impact in the history, they were the ‘Santal Revolt of 1858’ led by the infamous Sidhu and Kanu and the *Ulgulan* revolt led by Birsa Munda in 1899. The *Ulgulan* movement was against the landlord, money lenders and the company too but the additional resistance was against the foreign missionaries, in order to safeguard the tradition and belief of the Mundas. The final provocation, the figurative last straw, which gave rise to the *Ulgulan* came in 1893-94 when “all waste lands in villages, the ownership of which vested in the government, were constituted ‘protected forest’ under the ‘Indian Forest Act VII of 1878’, subject to the raiyats’ existing rights”.⁵⁰ The forest were protected under the act but the tribal were unable to understand the new rules and regulations under the protected acts, the rights of free fuel, grazing ground and other which the tribals used to enjoy previously were restricted , hence they lost their ancient rights from the lands and the forest. Bhowmik writes, “The tribal cultivator had lost practically all his possessions in the hand of the landlords and moneylenders. Work in the tea gardens was the only means left for him to recover his land, the ancient heritage of his ancestor. At least that is what the *arkatis* assured him!”⁵¹

The tribals were alienated from their land and were turned into peasants, all their rights were lost and their debt were increasing day by day which was to be paid to the zamindars, moneylenders and traders, and in such situation, India was hit by the natural calamity like famine and flood, which even directly hit the agricultural tribes. Various natural calamities came in various years, the first recorded famine was in 1868-1869, and the harsh one was experienced in the year 1896-97. In Bengal Province the death rate in the month of August in some tribal settled area were as in Palamau the death rate was 6.43, in Manbhum it was 4.49, in Hazaribagh it was 10.51 and in Lohardagga it was 12.07.⁵² The issues faced by the tribals from Hinduisation of their raja, getting suppressed and annihilated from their own land, the tyrannical rule by the Company and the zamindars and moneylenders; in addition to that the suppression of tribal revolt and lastly the natural calamities all played as a factors which took them out of their land and made them partially a slave in their own land. Similar to that of Eastern Nepal as all the ethnic communities lost their lands and even lost the political control which created a situation to migrate towards India to work in tea garden and search for better life, the tribal communities faced the similar kind of situation. The agricultural tribes couldn’t survive nor make some possession if they have no land, as land depicted the power, more the

land more the power. This kind of situation which they faced and with the hope of better life than in their homeland and after being promised by the recruiters the tribals migrated towards Assam tea plantation at first and later towards the Sub-Himalayan region and in the Terai of Bengal in a larger manner. The plantation in Assam began much earlier than that of Sub-Himalayan region; the migration in this region took place quite lately even after the tea plantation in this region started in the year 1874. Similar to that of Darjeeling tea plantation the labours in the Dooars region were conducted by the agents known as the *Sardars*. The difference between the migration of labours in Darjeeling as compared with that of Assam and the Dooars region was the former experienced migration from another nation and in latter two the migration took place within the nation. Therefore, the migration towards the Sub-Himalayan region took place slowly after the tea plantation was introduced, but the migration towards this region increased in a larger manner from the year 1891. In the Sub-Himalayan region, the migration of labour was not only limited to the tribals from Chotanagpur, Santhal Paragana and other but even the Nepali labours who were also known as the '*Paharia*' labours did migrated, but the climatic condition and the working circumstance were totally different than that of the hills so many have shifted themselves towards the hills and very less Nepali workers are found in the Sub-Himalayan region. The various tribal groups like Mundas, Santhals, Oroans and others migrated towards the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region leaving behind their lands, they settled slowly in the gardens as per the settlement provided by the planters. The demographic change in the Sub-Himalayan region took place, as the labours from different communities who all migrated were new and this region already consisted of Koch, Rajabangshi, Rabhas, Bodos and Lepchas, who were not mostly working in the tea plantation.

Table 3.5: Migration of Labours to Sub-Himalayan region from 1891 to 1941

Year	Actual Population	Immigrants
1891	4,33,334	44,329
1901	5,44,906	95,899
1911	6,61,282	1,52,174
1921	6,94,054	1,63,024
1931	7,39,160	1,58,757
1941	8,45,702	1,56,765

Source: Sharit Bhowmik, Class Formation in Plantation System. 48.

The emigration of the labourers from the Chottanagpur region towards the tea plantation of Sub-Himalayan region of Bengal can also be traced from the Census of India 1901, as it records as “On the Chotanagpur plateau and more especially in the districts of Chotanagpur, Ranchi and the Sonthal Parganas emigration was very active during the decade and the census shows a net increase of only 7.8 per cent. The collieries and tea gardens attract the labouring classes in increasing numbers. Northern Bengal has an increase of nearly 6 per cent. It is largest in Jalpaiguri (15.6) where ordinary cultivation has expanded and the tea gardens of the *thanas* in the Duars attract a foreign-born population of from 28 to 65 per cent. The increase of 11.5 per cent, in Darjeeling is due to the influx of cultivators from Nepal.”⁵³ The Census of India even provides records on the immigration of people from Chotanagpur region and the Santhal Paragana on the basis of their birth. Of those innumerate in Bengal nearly half come from the Chotanagpur Plateau, 59,000 being born in Santhal Parganas. While the great majority of emigrants to North Bengal come from North Bihar and the Chotanagpur Plateau.⁵⁴ Jalpaiguri receives as settlers for ordinary cultivation in the Dooars in the net excess of Immigrants from Cooch Behar, Rangpur and Purnea, especially the two former, but its great gain is from the Chottanagpur Plateau which supplies most of its tea garden coolies. Ranchi alone gives 80,000 coolies in this district and the Santhal Parganas 10,000.⁵⁵ Within seven years of the launching of the first garden, a trickle of Chhotanagpur labour started arriving in the Duars. The 1881 census recorded 210 Oraons and smaller numbers of other immigrant tribal groups. Ranajit Das Gupta writes, “The number grew rapidly in subsequent years and by 1901 a sizeable labour force was built up. While Nepali immigrants from the Darjeeling district continued to constitute a fair proportion of the labour force in the gardens located in the hilly areas of the Duars, the overwhelming majority was recruited from distant Chhotanagpur and the Santal Parganas. According to the 1901 Census Report, there were 1, 88, 223 immigrants in the district as a whole. The bulk of them were enumerated in the Duars and about half of the immigrants were tea garden coolies from Chhotanagpur and Santal Parganas’.”⁵⁶

The increase in the number of migrations in Bengal was not only due to the tea plantation in the regions of Sub-Himalayan region (Jalpaiguri District) and Darjeeling District but the immigration from other regions even took place because of the industrial districts like Hoogly, Howrah and by the coal field in Burdawan, 24- Parganas and Kolkata. The migration of the tribal people from the Santhal Pargana was not only limited to the tea plantation districts, their migration is recorded in various places of Bengal. The tribal people who migrated from the Santhal Pargana were composed of various tribes, they were Santhals, Mundas, Mal

Paharies, beside the tea plantation districts the tribal people migrated for laborious works. 2, 02,444 emigrants from Santhal Parganas are found in Bengal and 97 percent of this is claimed by the districts below: -

Table 3.6: Immigrants Claimed by the various Districts

Names of the Districts	Number of Immigrants claimed
Burdwan	28,042
Birbhum	22,231
Murshidabad	13,305
Malda	38,011
Rajshahi	15,081
Dinajpur	53,350
Jalpaiguri	14,866
Darjeeling	4,447
Rangpur	3,909
Bogra	3,308

Source: Census of India, 1921.⁵⁷

With the tribes from Santhal Pargana another group of people who migrated towards the Sub-Himalayan region were labours from Nepal, for tea plantation works and for other laborious works. Despite the fact that the labours from Nepal not only migrated towards the Sub-Himalayan region, their migration is even recorded towards Darjeeling district of Bengal and Sikkim state (the then an independent nation). The migration from Nepal towards Darjeeling, Sikkim and Jalpaiguri in different years is presented in table below:

Table 3.7: Number of Immigrants who migrated to Darjeeling, Sikkim and Jalpaiguri

Found in different years	1921	1911	1901	1891
Places				
Darjeeling	58,026	70,021	76,301	88,021
Sikkim	20,876	25,610	22,720	Not Available
Jalpaiguri	23,681	34,016	18,649	20,578

Source: Census of India, 1921.⁵⁸

The migration of labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region helped the tea planters to clear the forest area and enlarge the tea plantation and the migration of labours in non-tea plantation works like agriculture, porter and other manual works. The growth of people from other districts, other province and other state into the Sub-Himalayan region changed the demography of the region as well. Most importantly the growth of tea and the labour control grew in the area in a lateral manner.

Observation:

Successive experiment of tea plantation in Darjeeling and later in the Sub-Himalayan region attracted a larger number of tea planters in these regions of Bengal. Tea plantation was not done in a small area or within some portion of land rather it is a plantation which needs acres of land for it. After the successful experiment by Dr. Campbell larger number of tea planters were attracted towards this region hence the land was also required in a larger manner. As the colonizers had plenty of land which they termed as “Waste Land” and provided for the planters as they required. The colonial planters received as much land they wanted for plantation quite easily but they were facing problem of labour shortage. The local inhabitants of both Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region didn't want to work in the tea plantation, which I have even mentioned in this chapter. Hence, the planters required labours to work in the tea plantation from its early phase which was clearing of the forest, preparing the soil, planting the tea bush and later plucking and preparing the tea. The planters were not just looking for labours for work but they wanted workers to whom they could pay the lowest wage, the workers who were compelled to work in the tea plantation due to various reasons and they not only wanted one person from the family, instead the whole family were preferred as they could employ all the family members in the plantation with various wages. Co-incidentally the colonial planters received workers as they wished for the plantation, for plantation in Darjeeling the workers were emigrated from Nepal and later in the Sub-Himalayan region from the Chottanagpur region. Regarding the immigration of labours into the tea plantation of both the region, the emigrant labours had similar kind of oppression in their native places. The difference in migration towards these distinct plantation regions was, in Darjeeling the labours migrated from another nation and in Sub-Himalayan region the migration was within the country, but the incidents which made them migrate was quite similar. The oppression faced by the people of Eastern part of Nepal from the Shah King and the oppression faced by Tribals of

Chottanagpur and Santhal Paragana region turned to be the first reason for the migration. While the natives were facing the severe political, social and economic oppression from the new ruler of the land, they were in search of new place where they could live freely, the Sardars who were sent by the planters in search of labours used their situation and made promise of better life in the tea plantation and brought them into the plantation system. Hence, the labours were brought out from old tyranny to the modern colonial tyranny. The labour trade and the recruitment in the tea plantation were taken in larger manner in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. The study of the recruitment of labour and the settlement of the migrated labours in the new region will be further made in details in the next chapter.

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Chapter: 4:

Recruitment of Labours in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan Region Tea Plantation

The development and the probable boom of the tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region gave rise in the demand of the labourers in the plantation. The similar demands of labours were witness in the tea plantations of Assam, which paved the way for the labourers from various regions to ply towards Assam. The migrant labourers have been the main source of labour to be recruited in the plantation sector. With the demand of labours in Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region tea plantations migration of labourers were recorded from regions like Nepal, Chotanagpur, Bihar and Orissa. The primary region for the demand of immigrants were, firstly, the locals of both the regions were not willing to work in the plantation sector, secondly, the plantation land being a virgin land covered with forest larger areas and less settlement of people and thirdly, the socio-political situation of the labourers back in their native places, the above mentioned points have been defined in a descriptive manner in the previous chapter. The labours in the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region didn't migrate by themselves they were been brought by the persons or agency employed by the colonial planters likewise in Assam tea plantation, they were the agent of the colonial planters, who were commonly known as "*Arkattis*" and "*Sardars*".

The first labour migration and the labour recruitment took place in Assam in a very larger manner prior to Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region of West Bengal. There is a whole history of labour transport, recruitment and the situation the labours had to face in the early tea plantations in India. It would be fair enough to understand the early recruitments of labours in India which was specified in Assam in order to understand the labour recruitment and also to differentiate the recruitment process which took later in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region of West Bengal.

4.2. The Early Recruitments of Labours in Tea Plantation: A brief history of Assam plantation.

The first recruitment was done in Assam plantation, at initial phase of the plantation in Assam the British authority and the planters used the Chinese workers, after the Chinese workers left the plantation, they relied upon the local labourers. As the tea plantation flourished in a larger manner in Assam the number of local laborers was not sufficient for the colonial planters and

the authority. Since the tea plantation in Assam started to flourish quite swiftly, the hilly tracts and its foothills were to be used for further plantation but were densely populated with forest and were filled with various wild animals like tiger, elephants and snakes, above all the dangerous mosquitoes which were the reason for diseases like malaria and *kalaazar*, which took the life of many labourers. Hence the labour recruitment was started in Assam tea plantation. This situation in Assam has been mentioned by Amalendu Guha by stating, “The Assam Company in its early years paid its imported Chinese staff—some 70 workers at one stage—four to five times the wage rate paid to the corresponding categories of Assamese labour. After the services of the Chinese workers were dispensed with in 1843, the local people remained practically the sole source of labour for the industry till 1859.”¹ Another reason for the labour recruitment from outside Assam by the colonial planters was that the local labourers were free in the labour market; they had a strong bargaining power unlike the labours recruited from outside Assam who were indentured labour and were not less than serfdom. Amalendu Guha writes, “The wage rate generally varied between Rs 2.50 and Rs 3.50 per month in the 1840s and early 1850s, and it rose to Rs 4 immediately after the revolt of 1857. In the absence of indentured labour till then and in the given context, these wages, on the whole, were not unfair. This was because the local labour had bargaining power. It is on record that the labour of the Assam Company struck work in 1848 and *gheraoed* the superintendent’s office to realize three months’ wage arrears. They were able to secure an assurance about no default in payment of wage for a wage in the future. Again, in 1859, the Company’s *Kachari* labour struck work for a wage increase.”²

The colonial planters did not only seek for labourers, but they wanted to assure that the labourers were cheap and who could be kept in control quite easily with different manners. Despite the fact that the planters were in need of more labourers quite later but the Assam Company operated its labour recruiting process quite early in 1839. Roy Moxham states, “The Assam Company began recruiting Indians from outside Assam for manual works in 1839, its first year of operations. A number of Europeans were sent to likely areas to recruit contract. The first successes were close to the western border of Assam at Rangpur, where 400 labourers were recruited and then marched the 160 miles to Gauhati. Others were engaged in areas of Bengal west of Calcutta. At the end of 1839, W.S. Stewart went to Hazaribad and Ranchi, areas of Bihar that had been successful hunting grounds for the indigo planters. Three months later, Stewart started out with 637 coolies to march the 400 miles to Assam. Halfway there cholera broke out, and in the night all the coolies fled. The Assam Company lost 10,727 rupees.”³

4.2.1. Recruitment under *Arkatti* System and the Indentured Labours in Assam.

The Assam Company after not being successful in recruiting the labourers by themselves decided to provide contract of labour recruiting to various contractor or the agents even known as *arkattis*; they had to supply and recruit labours in the tea plantation of Assam from various places be it Indians outside Assam or labours beyond the British India border. This system of recruitment of labour came to be known as the “*Arkatti* System”. By providing the agents or the contractors the contract of labour recruitment the company was not accountable for the physical condition of the labours nor they were to bare the losses if the labours flew away or they die in between the transportation process. The labour contractors were paid on the basis of the numbers of labourers brought into the tea estate. To make as much profit they can the agents or the contractors brought larger number of labours from regions outside Assam. The labourers were mainly brought from the places where the tribals were in majority, they are Bihar, Chottanagpur, Madhya Pradesh and Orrisa.

The labourers after the recruitment were made to work in very unsafe and unhygienic places, they were made to clear the dense forest with much of any proper safety equipment's and they were not provided any proper medical aid; these led to death by malaria, cholera, snake bites and an attack by wild animals. Many of the labours did run away from the plantation area without the contract was over after not being able to bare those harsh situations. The *arkattis* were ordered by the planters for more and more labours as the tea plantation was growing very rapidly, to full fill the demand and to make more money the *arkattis* used to recruit the labours by various means. In order to get labourers easily and in larger number the *arkattis* used to select the tribal people of such regions which were hit by famine, bad harvest, scarcity of food, oppressive land revenue system. They used to deceive the people by promising various things which was absent in their region, it is also said that sometimes they used to kidnap the person of a family in order to make them go with them. Wives were kidnapped from their husbands, and husbands from their families, leaving the members destitute and poverty-stricken.⁴ For such dubious instances the *arkattis* were not liked by the tribal people, they were abusively known as “coolie-catchers”⁵; these people had earned so much notoriety that the local people regarded them as the “scum of the earth” and “heartless scoundrels” and they were feared as much as a “man-eating tiger.”⁶

The labour recruitment business of the *arkattis* went so well that they became so rich even to the extent that they were able to keep other sub-contractors. John Griffith writes, “As their business grew the labour contractors became very wealthy. One of them owned the first motor car in Purulia, a major recruiting town, and had petrol brought up the 150 miles from Calcutta at 10 rupees a gallon (about £44 at today’s value). Such was their success that they could afford to employ licensed sub-contractors, *arkattis*.”⁷ The *arkattis* were not native to the area where the plantation was going to take place neither they were to settle in the tea estates, The *arkattis* were mainly Baraiks or Ghasis who were landless craftsmen living in the villages, some of them were also Hindus and Muslims.⁸ *Arkattis* have earned a bad reputation in front of the labourers, regarding their way of recruitment and the treatment towards the labourers. Regarding this, the Superintendent F. Harrington Tucker of the Indian Police Service in 1888 was sent to Bihar to investigate, as there were many complaints against the *arkattis*. After the investigation Tucker in his report stated *arkattis* as, “as a rule, the scum of the country, and unscrupulous to a degree. Amongst them have been found ex-convicts, burglars, thieves, dacoits (bandits), and notorious badmashas (bad characters), all of the deepest dye, and who resort to every vile practice to obtain their ends, i.e. a poor unfortunate coolie.”⁹ Tusker further gave the list of the malpractices adopted by the recruiters and *arkattis*. The list is as follows:

- a. Enticing men away under promise of getting them service where they will be paid, not mentioning Assam and Cachar.
- b. Enticing away girls under the promise that they would be provided with well-to-do husbands, jewellery, etc.
- c. Enticing away girls and women under promise of marriage and deserting them after putting them on board the steamer at Dhubri.
- d. Assuming various disguises by which they induce men and women to join them in pretended enterprises, and somehow getting them under pecuniary obligations and taking them to recruiting depots, and there making their victims over to contractors who ship them off to Assam etc.¹⁰

The labourers after being brought into tea estates were knowingly and unknowingly were brought into contract with the planters by providing them little advance and by paying the *arkattis* for the labourers, hence the labourers became the “Indentured labourers” in the tea estates. The hazardous situation in plantation work, no proper health and sanitation, housing facility was inadequate; this entire problem faced by the labours made them run away from the plantation work, the number of labours who fled from the plantation went increasing. To

overcome the situation, the British Government on an appeal of the planters brought an act to control the labour fleeing from the plantation which was adequately affecting the planters with some financial losses. The Act came to be known as the Workmen's Breach of Contract Act 1859, it was introduced in 4th May 1859, and it was an act to provide punishment of breach of contract by Artificers, Workman and Labourers in certain cases. The rationale of the act was clear in its very first preamble, which read as, "Whereas much loss and inconvenience are sustained by manufacturers, tradesmen and others in the several Presidency towns of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay and in other places, from fundamental breach of contract on the part of the artificers, workmen and labourers who have received money in advance on account of work which they have contracted to perform and whereas the remedy by suit in the Civil Courts for the recovery of damages is wholly insufficient, and it is just and proper that persons guilty of such fraudulent breach of contract should be subject to punishment."¹¹ Further under this act there were various features under which the control of labours with the help of magistrate, punishments if the labours were found breaching the work and more were mentioned in the act. The labourers who fled away were searched and who ever were caught were punished severely and were kept in such a way that they were kept under close watch by the faithful *chawkidars* of the colonial planters.

The labourers who all were brought into tea plantation were brought by making them various false promises like they will get a good life in tea plantation; they will be paid well, and so on. If a person did not agree to leave his place even after all this temptation, he would be carried away by force which was the inhuman means like kidnapping and intoxicating the labourers and taking them with them. The labourers were transported in a very appalling condition, they were transported in foot and in boats in such a manner that many of the labourers died even before reaching various tea estates, among the labourers who survived the journey; their condition was hardly could be termed as good as majority were quite sick. The labourers who were brought were taken as a non-living consignment; their health, their needs and life were not taken seriously as a result death of many labourers has been recorded. After being taken from their native place, before they reach the tea plantations, large numbers of men and women died every year due to the bad sanitary conditions which they had to live while travelling. Those who luckily managed to reach the gardens, were reduced to such physical state that they could hardly move about and work. This state of affairs has hardly any parallel in history except that of slave trade. Even in England, storms of protest were raised by the public from time to time against such barbarous and inhuman practices.¹²

After knowing about such incidents and by the pressure of the protest, government felt that the things were going really bad and a special commission was set up in 1861 to understand and study about the condition regarding the labour trade. Such background and reports prepared by the special commission issued by the government, colonial government had to pass an act which was the first Plantation act, titled as “The Transport of Native Labourers Act of 1863”. The central object of this Act was to make sure that the labourers understood what they were to do after the recruitment was done and to reduce the mortality of the labourers previous to the arrival at the tea districts. The labourers were brought under a contract by this act hence this was also known as the ‘Contract System of Recruitment’ of the labours. Even after the act was passed for the safeguard of the immigrant labourers the record of the labour condition was not quite good. In just under five years from 1863, to the north-east alone—Assam, Cachar and Sylhet—108,980 coolies were dispatched. In spite of the new Act not all of these reached the estates. There were 4,250 deaths, mostly from cholera. Another 759 managed to escape.¹³ The Act of 1863 regularized the ongoing system of recruitment through the *arkattis* and neither the wages of the workers were increased or any. Sanath Kumar Bose states that, “The objects for which Act III of 1863 was passed were never to be fulfilled. *Instead what it achieved was only the legalisation of the system of contract labour for 5 years*, issuing licenses for this purpose to the recruiting agents. Although the Act did mention bad sanitary conditions and high mortality rates on the journeys, it did nothing to prevent them. So we find that, even after this Act was passed, *about 31,876 coolies out of 84,915 died in the three years from 1st May 1863 to 1st May 1866*. Agents continued to seduce men for the tea gardens; in the gardens, the coolies continued to be at the mercy of the managers. The Act did nothing to tackle these important questions. The planter remained the supreme judge on all affairs regarding the coolies and there was no appeal—as there was no law. He looked upon the coolie as an ordinary beast of burden, whom he had bought and whom he could therefore use like any other commodity.”¹⁴

Even after the act of 1863 was passed it didn’t work for the labours, their wages were not increased and neither other facilities were improved, the planters were not letting the labourers to become a free labour, hence the coercion and hardship were laid on the labourers. The *arkattis* while bringing the labourers in the plantation of Assam, they were paid on per labourers basis; hence they brought people for labour work without much check in their fitness. The planters who had put money on them were not going to let the labourers who were not fit in a simply, those unfit people were also made to work in the plantation. The planters tried to take maximum return from those labours, in case of labour being unable to do work as ordered

they were beaten mercilessly. Sanat Bose writes, “Tying up and flogging were very common types of punishment which could be at times awfully severe too! This is borne out by the various accounts published in *Parliamentary Reports* of the House Commons. Here is one such typical report: ‘In a report to the Government of Bengal, Lt. Col. H. Hopkinson, Commissioner of Assam wrote [On the 9th of April, 1866], ‘I was far from supposing that anywhere in the province coolies could be treated with the cold-blooded revolting cruelty which the papers herewith forwarded disclose’.”¹⁵

After arriving in the tea garden, the labourers didn’t find what they were promised after being recruited in the tea plantation work. They came to know about the real state of affair which was going on in every tea plantation. The first thing they thought of was to run away from the tea plantation, and some even tried to do so but they were checked by the *chowkidars* (guards) and were caught. Sanath Bose mentions about such kind of incident, stating that, “his only desire was to run away from the clutches of the planter. He would look for opportunities and whenever he got one, tried to make the best out of it. But the planter was well aware of this. He did not spend his money on the coolie for nothing. So, he used to post *chowkidars* (guards) “at every possible outlet from the *coolie*-lines. Rewards were granted to anyone who would catch a runaway coolie, savages were sent to track out fugitives”, and even dogs were trained for this purpose. If a runaway coolie was thus caught, he would be flogged and beaten almost to death. The reward granted for his capture was, of course, deducted from his salary!”¹⁶

The act of 1861 which was passed keeping eye on the situation of the labourers during their transportation period and their stay in the tea plantation after recruitment, but it failed to improve in the entire sector. The failure of the Act to regulate the conditions of labour and the rates of wages on plantations left many abuses unmitigated. To deal with those abuses, the Act was amended in 1865. By this amendment, the terms of contract were reduced to three years, the monthly rates of wages were fixed, appointment of protectors of labour was provided, contracts were made voidable in the case of unhealthy gardens, and indolence and planters were empowered to arrest absconders without warrants within the limits of the district.¹⁷ The amendment of the act in 1865 couldn’t provide the labourers the safety and protection neither it could solve the existing issues of wages and other. The act rather provided the planters the legal authority to arrest the labours in cases of indolence and desertion. Thus, with the regulation of the Act of 1863 and its amendment in 1865 can be marked as the beginning of the indentured system in the tea plantations in Assam and in India as a whole.

4.2.2 The *Sardari* System and the Amendments of the Labour Act in Assam.

Although the planters were continuously enjoying their power to arrest the deserting labourers and were punished by them, which was not controlled by the act and neither the labourers were provided protection from by this act amended in 1865. Hence, the act was again amended in 1870. Under the Amendment Act of 1870, the *Sardari* system of recruitment was recognized, though not allowed to replace forthwith the *arkatti* (licensed recruiter) system.¹⁸ This amendment did not end the *arkatti* system but the monopoly of the licensed contractors or *arkattis* was brought in control in some manner after the introduction of *Sardari* or garden *Sardari* System. The act even brought a new clause which stated the cancellation of a contract after a deserter has been imprisoned amounting for six months. Both the recruiters the *arkattis* and the *Sardars* were recruiting the labours side by side. Thus, the planters were not using the *arkattis* for labour need as the *arkattis* were raising high price for the labours. In such scenario with the amendment of Act VI of 1865 was done and by the Act 1870 the *Sardari* System was introduced. The main feature of this amendment was the recognition of garden *Sardars* as labour recruiting agents. Previously, only recognised local agents operating in the recruiting districts could collect labour for tea gardens. These local agents and *arkattis*, as we have seen, artificially raised the labour-price, to the great annoyance of the planters. So, the latter, in order to avoid their dependence on this class for labour, began to send some selected men from the gardens (*Sardars*) to their respective home districts to recruit labour there and bring them back.¹⁹

However, the amendment of the act was taking place very frequently, Labour Act was again amended in the year 1873, which introduced the free recruitment of labours. The Garden *Sardars* were given the work of labour recruitment, as they were allowed to recruit without license, the number of labourers was set for them, and they could recruit only 20 labours at a time, the government legalized this system too as they wanted this system as they were facing high rate of labourers from the *arkattis*. The free recruitment did not mean that the labourers were free to decide where they wanted to work rather it was the planters who were free from depending on the *arkattis* for the recruitment. However, the situation of the labourers remained unchanged, situation in any sector for the labourers were not improved. The labourers who were recruited were not made to sign the contract during the recruiting time from their regional place rather they were recruited freely in such a manner that they had choices after reaching the plantation area. Sanath Bose writes, “Those who were thus recruited, did not have to sign

their contract at the time of recruitment (before a local Magistrate), as was the procedure in the case of recruitment through ordinary agents. They were required to sign the contract only after arriving at the gardens.”²⁰ After reaching the tea garden they didn’t had any choices rather than signing at the contract. Though the act failed to make an effect as this didn’t improved anything for the labours and the planters were not at any cost were willing to make labours free in the labour market rather they would try to create a new system of slavery.

The tea plantation was continuously growing in Assam and even in Darjeeling, it Terai and Sub Himalayan region, which was in need of more and more workers. In 1880 new Commission of Enquiry was appointed to draft a new bill. The commission gave its report in January 20, 1881, the findings of the commission were: (1) lack of encouragement to free emigration, (2) unnecessary restriction of the *Sardari* recruitment, (3) absence of provisions for the enforcement of contracts outside the Act, and (4) insufficient protection against absence, idleness, and desertion of labourers.²¹ On basis of the report a new act was passed in 1882 which came to be known as “The Inland Immigration Act”. The primary provisions of this act were the free recruitment of labour, execution of contracts in any labour district and legal recognition of local agents in recruiting districts. The free recruitment method came to be problematic, regarding such recruitments and its effect Rajani Kanta Das writes, “Uncontrolled recruitment led to some of the grossest scandals, of which the most important was heavy mortality among the recruits on their way to labour districts.”²² The amendment of the Act VI took place 1889 which made some changes on it. The labourers were facing abuses during the recruitment and in the tea gardens even after various amendment in the act were made, the wage paid to them were low and from several years it was not increased, the wages which the tea garden labourers were receiving was half of what the other labourers in the agricultural sector were receiving. With the rise in wage being the main background the Chief Commissioner of Assam Sir Henry Cotton recommended in 1895 for reconsideration of the Act VI of 1882, and after several changes Act VI of 1901 was introduced. The main provisions of Act VI were: (i) Local Governments were empowered to close any area to recruitment except in accordance with the provisions for licensed contractors and certified garden *Sardars*; and (ii) Local Governments were granted option to relax any provisions relating to recruitment by garden *Sardars* working under approved agencies, or associations.²³

Even after the amendment of the act was done the act was quite abusive towards the labourers, hence Sir Henry Cotton recommended the complete abolition of such kind of recruitment, although the planters were totally against the Chief Commissioner. It is said that

Sir Henry Cotton supported the labours and he did many things in support of the labourers and even voiced for them. Roy Moxham in his book writes “Sir Henry Cotton was Chief Commissioner of Assam from 1896 to 1902. At first, he had been an ardent supporter of the planters, and it was only when he started to investigate conditions on the estates closely that he realized how exploited the coolies were. Even on the most respectable estates he found evidence of whippings and beatings..... the coolies saw Sir Henry Cotton as their saviour. When he visited Cachar in 1901 the roads were lined for fifteen miles by coolies holding lanterns and shouting ‘Cotton *Sahib ki jay!*’ (Long live Cotton). On his tour of East Bengal later that year, the roads were lined with banners– ‘Mr Cotton, the Protector of the Dumb Coolie.’.....He returned to Britain, became a Liberal Member of Parliament, and from there continued to fight for the coolies.”²⁴ Some riots and protests by the labourers were also recorded in Assam in the year 1903, to this the support from the Liberal leaders like Sir Henry Cotton in the British Parliament the Act VI was amended in which the Right of Private Arrest was abolished and the recruitment by unlicensed contractors were prohibited. Further in the year 1915 the Indentured System came to an end with the introduction of Assam Labour and Immigration (Amendment) Act (VIII). Members of Parliament, missionaries and liberal opinion in Britain and India kept up pressure on the governments of both Britain and India to abolish it....in 1915 coolie contractors had their licences terminated and recruitment could thereafter only be done by estate *Sardars*.²⁵ The number of the labour immigration was declining as the labourers were not willing to get recruited in the tea plantation like earlier and after 1915 it was going to be much difficult for the planters to get more number of labours for the growing tea plantation. To overcome such labour crisis planters for their interest went on to improve the labour conditions in the tea garden and pay little higher to attract the labours to work in the tea plantation.

The labourers in Assam tea plantation had to face many difficulties, laws and acts some of which were inhumane in nature. The various amendments which were made in the different acts were in a true nature never for the labourers; rather it favoured the planters from one side or the other. Though the Act VIII did end the indentured system and abolished the coolie contractor system, the development of the living condition and other socio-economic abuses did prevail for long period which even exists till date in a different form.

4.3. Recruitment of Labours in the Tea Plantation of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal.

After the year 1839 the tea plantation in Darjeeling flourished promptly, similar was the situation in the Sub-Himalayan region after the year 1874. The growth of tea plantation in both the region were in need of more labours to work in the plantation as the local labours were not much willing to work in the tea plantation under the colonial planters; and another reason was that the area where the new tea plantation was planned to be set up the near adjoining regions were very less populated hence it was quite difficult to get larger number of labour to work in the plantation. The large recruitment of labourers in Assam which took place before Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region was the first labour recruitment in tea plantation in India. The colonial planters after they found the Assam variety of tea large area of Assam were brought into plantation, which required larger number of labourers, hence the labour recruitment through various means were done as mentioned above. The labours in Darjeeling and in the Sub-Himalayan region has migrated in various years with various pull and push factors, which has been presented in my previous chapter. Migration has been taken place in quite a large number in both the regions and before that the system of bringing the labourers into the tea gardens of both the region; which was the recruitment process, will be discussed below.

4.3.1: Recruitment of Labourers in Tea Plantation of Darjeeling.

After the grant of Darjeeling by the Raja of Sikkim to the British, the region was mainly used for rehabilitation center to the British officers who used to get sick by various diseases which they came across while working in the hot plains, and secondly it was also used as a summer retreat to get rid of prickling heat during summer. Much later when the East India Company had issues with China over tea export, they were in search of suitable place for the tea plantation and for which Darjeeling Hills turned to be a suitable region for tea plantation for the Chinese variety of tea. The Darjeeling hills were very scarcely populated as most of the land was covered with virgin forest; this has also been mentioned by the early colonial visitors to Darjeeling. Arther Jules Dash states, “When the East India Company in 1835 first acquired the nucleus of the Darjeeling District from Raja of Sikkim, it was almost entirely under forest and practically uninhabited. Although it was stated to have been uninhabited probably a more accurate estimate was that this hill tract of 138 square miles contained a population of 100.”²⁶

The migration of the labourers into Darjeeling took place not only after the tea plantation, rather the migration started before the tea plantation started in a commercial manner. Percival Griffiths writes, “In 1839 Dr. Campbell of the Indian Medical Service, a remarkable man and a true pioneer, was transferred from Kathmandu to Darjeeling as Superintendent of the new territory. His first problem was to attract settlers and in this he was so successful that by 1849 ten thousand (10,000) immigrants had come from Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan.”²⁷ As Campbell mentions about those 10,000 immigrants, they were made to work as labourers in clearing the dense forests and prepare for plantation, porters and some in agricultural field. Before the plantation in Darjeeling started the local inhabitants were the Lepcha community even known as ‘*Rongpa*’ was present in the Darjeeling region. They were of Indo-Chinese origin and used to live in a pretty nomadic way by hunting and fishing, but settled in a particular area. Other local community who were present in Darjeeling before plantation is said to be Bhutia and Sherpa who in matter of trade came here and some of them have settled in this region. These communities didn’t will to work in the plantation sector and too under the colonial masters or under any master, as they were living there in a free manner as they wanted. Later in 1856 when the tea plantation in Darjeeling started to take place in a commercial manner, more land was to be prepared for the tea plantation for which larger number of labourers were required, hence the recruitment of labourers from nearby region were started in order to increase the number of labourers which were required in the tea plantation of Darjeeling hills.

In Darjeeling the labour recruitment process was quite similar to that of Assam plantation but was not alike. Since Darjeeling tea plantation was next to that of Assam plantation and the similar kind of rules and labour act prevented here in some manner, until 1870 and 1915 from where the laws were amended and humanized acts were passed for the labours that were facing various harsh working conditions and were facing abuses. One factor which was existed in Darjeeling which was different than of Assam and Dooars plantation was the Nepali immigrants flocked towards Darjeeling even before the plantation was flourishing because of the political situation of Nepal, even when the labour immigration from Nepal was made illegal there. The recruitment of labourers in Darjeeling tea plantation did took place but not in a larger manner as the labourers was already immigrated before the plantation started. Griffiths writes, “In the Darjeeling hills, no recruitment problem existed. Population in Nepal was rising rapidly, and economic pressure compelled it to find an outlet. Nepalese flocked to Darjeeling in considerable numbers and garden had all the labour they wanted without

formalities and without the cost of importing it.”²⁸ This writing by Percival Griffiths states “no recruitment problem existed” that didn’t mean no recruitment was taken place but the system of recruitment was mostly given to those who had migrated from Nepal before, they went and brought their families and relative hence later they were termed as ‘*Sardars*’. In Darjeeling the issue of from where the labourers were to be recruited was not much of a problem as the immigrants from Nepal lived in a similar kind of weather, climate and altitude as compared to Darjeeling, because of which they didn’t have problem working here. Labourers from the Chota Nagpur were brought to work in the plantation in the hills²⁹ but couldn’t match with the cold weather climate and were made to work in the tea plantation of the Terai region.

The immigration of labours from Nepal in a larger manner was not only by the pull factor which was the development of tea plantation and rise of market in a new region but there was also a push factor which was the political and economic conflict which took place in Nepal during those periods; the details of the factors related to this has been mentioned in the previous chapter. In Darjeeling after the rapid growth of commercial tea plantation the need of more cheap labours increased, hence the *Sardars* employed them in the tea estates.³⁰ The recruitment of the cheap labourers by the *Sardars* increased in a very high manner and despite the ban on the labour migration from Nepal the immigration took place in a very rapid manner. In the tea plantation of Assam various tribal communities like Santal, Mundas, Oraons were recruited in the tea plantation, in Darjeeling it was not tribals but were the indigenous communities of Nepal like Rai, Limbu, Mangar and other. Unlike in the tea plantation of Assam the labourers in plantation in Darjeeling were comparatively free and they didn’t have to sign any contract. This has also been mentioned by O’Malley stating that, “The labour is free, i.e., it is not controlled by any special legislative enactment, as in Assam. There are no agreements, labourers being free to come and go as they like.”³¹

In Darjeeling with the recruitment of the labourers in tea garden the immigration in the town, agricultural area and other non-plantation took place in a parallel manner, hence the exact number of labourers recruited in the tea plantation cannot be presented in a specifically. The increase in the population in Darjeeling after the plantation started can only be traced from the different census record and other, which comprises population of the tea plantation area and the non-tea plantation area. The first record can be traced from the report of Dr. Campbell stating that the number of inhabitants had risen to 10,000. In 1869 a rough census was taken in which it was found that the inhabitant’s population increased over 22,000. O’Malley states about the regular census which were taken in different years, he states, “The first regular census

of the district as now constituted was carried out in the cold weather of 1871-72 and the result gave a total population of 94, 712 persons, and the average density of the population being 81 per square mile. When the next census was taken in 1881, the population had increased to 1, 55,179 or by more than 63 percent.”³² The very high percent of rise in the population has also been argued that the first census of 1871-72 inaccurate and imperfect, but in the other hand in between the year 1881 the number of tea garden also increased, as it has risen to 153 from 74 in the year 1872, the area of the garden too increased from 14,000 acres to 30,000 acres, if we consider this growth of tea plantation, the rise of population too might be considerable as the expansion of tea plantation required more number of labours, hence more recruitment might have taken place. The next census was taken place after 10 years which was in 1891, where substantial influx of labourers could be found as the population was increased by 43.4 percent which amounted to 2,23,314 persons. It was also found that from the total number of populations of 1891, 88,000 residents of Darjeeling were born in Nepal. This census was followed by 1901 census, where the growth of population by 11.5 percent can be seen amounting to 2, 49,117 persons.

Table 4.1: Records of Growth of Population in Different Years after Flourishing of Tea Plantation.

Sl. No.	Year	Number of Population	Percentage Increase in Population
1	1850	10,000	N.A.
2	1869	22,000	N.A.
3	1871	94,712	N.A.
4	1881	1,55,179	63
5	1891	2,23,314	43.4
6	1901	2,49,117	11.5

Source: L.S.S.O’ Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer: Darjeeling*.³³

In the above table we can see the percentage increase in population been decreasing from 63% to 11.5% in between 20 years of difference. The reason for the decrease in the percentage increased in Darjeeling might be because of the family recruitment process. The planters favored the recruitment of family rather than of an individual in the tea plantation. Firstly, by doing this they don’t have to go for new recruitment process again after certain period which will be costly. Secondly, by recruiting the family the wage payment was distributed among the

different labours of the family where the rate of wage payment varied. Thirdly, after recruiting the whole family the population in the tea garden increased automatically which will relieve the planters from new recruitment and settlement of the labours. By recruiting families in the tea plantation, the immigrating of labours was not much conducted by the planters as the labour required were being fulfilled by the number of labours presented in Darjeeling at that time. Another reason for the decrease in the labour immigration was that the labourers came to know about the harsh working condition in the tea plantation and different forms of harsh laws and abuses which existed in the tea plantation. Thus because of such reasons the immigration of labours in tea plantation decreased in later years.

In the tea plantation of Darjeeling the record of total labour force was quite hard to distinguish from the record of total population. Though Manas Das Gupta has given a record of labour force of few years, Manas Das Gupta states, “Another important factor was the phenomenal growth of tea industry. The labour force at that time was about 10,000 in 1870; it increased to 44,279 in 1921 and in 1941 it was 61,450. The actual population in the tea garden according to 1941 census was 1, 46,508. In the census of 1901 it was pointed out that the tea garden coolies and their children accounted for more than two-thirds of population.”³⁴

4.3.2: *Sardari* Recruitment in Tea plantations of Darjeeling.

Tea plantation is one of the agro-based industries and the industrial and agricultural work went parallel. The immigration of labours from Nepal towards Darjeeling took place before the tea plantation, some joined the tea plantation and some went with the agricultural work. The requirement of more labours made the planters to appoint a ‘*Sardars*’ to recruit the labourers. The *Sardars* were ordered by the planters for the need of workers in the tea plantation and they make a contract according to which the *Sardar* was paid by the planters on bringing the labours in the plantation and per head payments were to be made. As the commission was based on per person the *Sardars* tried to bring as many labours they could and for this they used various methods. In fact, families received *Sardari* commission till the year 1986 at the rate of one *paisa* per coolie every week as in Phuguri T.E. in Darjeeling as our narratives illustrate.³⁵ The recruitment of labours by the *Sardars* were mostly conducted once a year mainly from the month of October to February, this might be done as during this period of the year the weather in Darjeeling and Nepal were relatively pleasant than other months. Since the recruitment under the *Sardari* system was free for the labourers, the labour while they were recruited they were recruited in either permanent or in a temporary basis. In the early phase of the expansion of tea

plantations across Darjeeling, the labourers were recruited even for the cultivation season, and they would migrate back to their home (mainly Nepal) when the season ended. These labourers would most probably be men, as they could make the journey both ways. Later when more and more plantations sprung up, and more lands were brought under tea plantation, the demand for a larger labour force was sensed.

Table 4.2: Statistics of Labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling (1901-1941)

Year	Permanent	Temporary	Total
1901	24,257	16,194	40,451
1911	26,510	13,051	39,561
1921	45,977	2,733	48,710
1931	61,572	2,093	63,665
1941	67,838	1,861	69,699

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951: West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, West Bengal Government Press, West Bengal, 1954.³⁶

The *Sardars* were from the tea plantation itself and they were also migrants, so in this scenario the *Sardars* went to their families back in Nepal and to the places where people from their caste were present, which proved to be easy for them to gain their trust and bring to Darjeeling for works. Regarding this Khemraj Sharma writes, “Each *Sardar* having a caste background could easily attract the fellow kins. In this way *Sardars* used to bring plantation workers from Nepal and Sikkim in Darjeeling hills. They were assisted by the *gallawala* who were deputed at the various places in Nepal and Sikkim from October to February every year for recruiting, enticing and even indenturing labourers. A sort of competition ensued among the *Sardars* in respect of commission known as Recruiting Bonus from the management”³⁷ The planters preferred the recruitment of a family rather than an individual, the *Sardars* used to lure the labours saying that even the women and children can work in the plantation and would get paid and supplement the family and the whole family were brought in the plantation. The *Sardars* used to make statements like money comes easily in Darjeeling, as they would pluck money from the ‘two leaves and a bud’ in nepali it was termed as ‘*Dui Patey Ek Siuro*’. Hence the family-based recruitment was taken place and the family was recruited in the plantation as

marad (male worker), *aurat* (female worker), *lokra* (children) and *chokra* (adolescent) workers. They were paid on the basis of their recruitment which were rupees 6 for male, rupees 4-8 for female, rupees 3 for children and rupees 2 for the adolescent.³⁸ The *Sardars* when failed to bring the families for the recruitment, very often the *Sardars* would intoxicate the labourers and forced the unmarried male and female labourers to get married on the way from Nepal and even Sikkim before reaching the tea estates. The rise in the number of family recruitment in the tea plantation for a permanent basis, the number of temporary labourers in the tea plantation decreased in different years which can be seen in the table 4.2.

Manas Das Gupta in his book mentions about details of *Sardari* (Sardary) System which has been found in a torn book probably written before First World War, it states, “In districts where the labour is entirely non-agreement it has been found necessary to adopt what is called the *Sardary* System, under which the individual coolies are engaged by a *Sardar* and supplied by him to the estate, his remuneration being usually one pice per day for each coolie actually at work. The *Sardar* exercises no supervision over the Coolies at work but it is merely in the position of a contractor who supplies the labour. On the estate employing a thousand of coolies there are perhaps ten to thirty of the *Sardars*, some supplying fifteen and some as many as two hundred or more coolies. The most suitable number for any *Sardar* to have is about fifty; because he can live comfortably on the commission from that number, without temptation to swindle them out of any portion of their wages; if on the other hand, he has a larger number than this he may become too influential and powerful for the peaceful working of the estate. Further, the *Sardar* is responsible to the manager for the money advanced to him and the coolies are responsible to the *Sardar*. When the coolies began to earn wages the money is paid in lump sum to the *Sardar* less a portion of the debt which is thus recovered and the *Sardar*, who keeps a separate account for each coolie, distributes the money as earned. When special sums are required for marriage, the estates advance through the *Sardar* as before.”³⁹

The role of caste of the *Sardar* and the labourers played a vital role on keeping the labourers together in one place of settlement and under the guidance of the *Sardar* from their caste. Rinju Rasaily states, “There existed some form of familial ties between the *Sardars* and the workers. The *Sardar* mostly belonged to the same caste or tribe as the labourer and was even a village headman. The entire responsibility of the workers fell in the hands of the *Sardars*.

Planters were never directly involved in the lives of the workers. Initially, labour was scarce and 'coolie stealing' was high between *Sardars* who lured the coolies by promising higher wages. *Sardars* or recruiters were directly responsible for the supply of 'coolies' although they too were part of the wage-labour. These jobbers were in charge of the 'coolie gangs' and were responsible for the continued labour movements into the plantations. Caste and familial relationship played an important part in the supply of labour to the plantations.”⁴⁰ The *Sardars* were made as the ‘headmen’ of the labours, *Sardars* of the same caste were made the headmen of those labours, the headmen experienced a power over the labours and constituted as an important layer of indirect rule in the plantation. The intention of the colonial planters behind keeping the *sardars* as headmen was that it was easy to contact with one person than many deals with many coolies. The best way of working with the nature of the coolie class is to deal with them through headmen who understand their likes and dislikes in a way which no European can do.⁴¹

As compared to Assam the labours in the tea plantation in Darjeeling were free to some extent and they were free to come and go in the tea plantation work as they were bound by any contract. In order to check the labours from leaving the plantation work one method of controlling the labourers with the help of *Sardars* were by keeping the labourers in debt. *Sardar* played the role of middle men where the planters and big Marwari’s gave loans to the *Sardars* and the *Sardars* gave the loans to the labourers and the rate of interest being very high the labourers would take many years to pay back the loan, hence in such way the labourers were controlled by the *Sardars*. In Darjeeling the Sardari system was the influential recruiting system and the Sardari system turned to be hereditary, even the commissions were received by the family descendants of the *Sardars*. Rohit Sharma in his unpublished PhD thesis provides a list of *Sardars* of the Nagari Farm Tea Estate whose descendants received commission till that date. The list states below:

Table 4.3: List of Garden Sardars of Nagari farm Tea Estates

Sl.No.	Name of Sardar	Labourers Recruited (Male/Female)
1.	Akardhoj Gurung	42
2.	Bahadur Mangar	53
3.	Biroo Pradhan	14
4.	Chandralal Sanyashi	57
5.	Dharamlal Giri	22
6.	Dhandrabir Sunwar	07
7.	Dikbir Tamang	27
8.	Dalamardhan Rai	30
9.	Gakul	36
10.	Jitman Moktan	154
11.	Kaziman Pradhan	12
12.	Kaloo Rai	87
13.	Lachhuman Tamang	24
14.	Lal Bahadur Chettri	27
15.	Gopilal Khawas	14
16.	Setu Chettri	N.A.
17.	Tiring Lepcha	23
18.	Woozir Singh Khawas	53

Source: Office Records- Nagari Farm Tea Estate.⁴²

Hence the Sardari recruitment in the tea plantation of Darjeeling was free in theory but the labourers were bound in many other ties and even the various abuses existed with it, though the recruitment of labourers took place with such circumstances. The expansion of tea plantation went on expanding and the labour immigration too via labour recruitment was done. The Sardari System came to an end in the year 1933 with the coming of Tea District Emigrants Labour Act, though the expansion of tea plantation in Darjeeling took place till 1950's and after 1950's the labour migration for employment was brought to an end.

4.3.3: Recruitment of Labourers in Sub-Himalayan Region.

The expansion of tea plantation in Darjeeling hills came to point where the planters were in need of more land for plantation, for which they opted for the foothill area the Terai. The terai region was not quite large, hence for the new plantation the planters choose the Sub-Himalayan

Region which is commonly known as Dooars. The Sub-Himalayan region falls presently under the district of Jalpaiguri, Alipuduar, Kalimpong and Cooch Behar. The land in this region was covered with the forest and the population was not dense. The first tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region was done in 1874 at Gazeldoba, which is close to the Darjeeling hills. The population of this region was very thin, the paucity of the population in this region called for the recruitment of the labours. Similar to that of Assam and Darjeeling the local people were not willing to join the plantation work in the Sub-Himalayan region, the natives of this region were the Meches and Rajbanshis; they preferred to rely on agricultural and other works for living rather than joining the plantation work. As the local labours denied working in the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region, Grunning states "...the tea industry started in the Western Duars the coolies employed were Nepalis, but it was soon found that sufficient labour could not be obtained locally."⁴³ The tea gardens in the Darjeeling hills rely only on the Nepali labours but in the Sub-Himalayan region it was difficult to supplement only by Nepali labourers, and in addition to this some of the Nepali labourers could not bear the heat of the Sub-Himalayan plains hence they went back to the hills. The planters of the Sub-Himalayan region depended on the regions like Chota Nagpur and Santhal Paraganas of present-day Jharkhand. The tribal communities were targeted for the plantation as they were being recruited in the tea plantation of Assam too; due to their various problems the tribal people were easily lured by the recruiters. Kartik Chandra Sutradhar writes, "it was found that in Santhal Paraganas of Bihar and Chotanagpur where large number of tribal people namely Santhals, Oraons lived and faced an identity crisis losing their independent life in jungle called '*Damin-i-koha*' this tribal people were laborious and daring who showed their efficiency at the time of clearing jungles and preparing land for agricultural cultivation, on the other hand they proved their laborious activities in the work of establishing railway line in India by the Britishers. So, the planters choose these laborious people for this hard task."⁴⁴

In the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region the recruitment of the labours was done through the *Sardari* System similar to that of Darjeeling plantation. The Sardars were paid on the basis of per labour during recruitment and also received from the daily *hajiri* of the labour. Grunnings states, "A *Sardar* receive a commission, usually at the rate of one pice on each *haviri* (*hajiri*), or task on the number of coolies whom he sends to work daily.... If the recruiters are successful, the *Sardar* benefits by getting his daily commission on the Coolies

earnings and he also received a commission of Rs 2 to Rs 5 a head. On the other hand, if a recruiter selected by him fails to return, the *Sardar* had to refund the advances made to them.”⁴⁵ During the recruitment of the labours from Chotanagpur and from Santhal Paraganas, the labourers were transported through road, but here the transport was done by train as it saves time and even the risk of labour deaths with cholera and other diseases were very less. The problem in the tea plantation of Sub-Himalayan region were that the labour in 1890’s chooses to work in other industries rather than tea plantation, the rise of coal mines, railways and docks used to pay little more than that of tea plantation and hence the labours preferred to work there.

The recruitment of labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region via *Sardari* system was not bounded by any contract like Darjeeling plantation and unlike Assam plantation. Percival Griffiths states, “Labour in the Dooars was always ‘free’ in the sense that the labourers was not placed under any kind of contract and could leave whenever he pleased.”⁴⁶ The reason for the system being free do not have concrete rationale, Percival Griffiths has termed as the distance of the recruiting grounds i.e. Chotanagpur and Santhal Paragana was nearer to Sub-Himalayan region than that of Assam. The labourers were annually recruited in the Sub-Himalayan region and in addition to that the individual tea gardens sent their own *Sardars* to the different recruitment zones. A majority of the workers were drawn from the Oraon, Munda, Kharia and Santhal races, but there was also a sprinkling of the semi-hinduised castes of Chotanagpur, such as Lohas (Lohars), Baraiks, Bhogtas and so on.⁴⁷ Similar to that of Darjeeling the *Sardars* of the Sub-Himalayan region the *Sardars* went to the recruiting ground and started the recruiting season after the rains in October or November and ended in February. The reasons of recruiting the labours during these months of the year are, firstly, the weather mainly dry and warm and secondly, another reason is that in tea plantation during these months not much labourers were required as labour centric work of plucking was not done during these periods. During the recruitment period when the *Sardars* went to bring the labours they were accompanied by the garden supervisor to keep eye on the *Sardars*, they feared that the *Sardar* may run away and never come back with the money he has taken from the planters to provide as an advance to the labourers for luring them. Sharit Bhowmik mentions, “The *Sardari* system may have been a more efficient method of recruitment, but often planters found it expensive as it meant that they had to send both *Sardars* and someone from the management to supervise to the recruiting districts.”⁴⁸ There were some tea gardens in the Sub-Himalayan region which

were run by the Indian owners, the recruitment process used by them were little different than the colonial planters. The Indian planters did not enjoy the facility of the Tea Districts Labour Association (TDLA); the TDLA was also looking after the recruitment of the Dooars. The Indian owners took help of the private agents the *arkattis* to recruit the labours. The Indian owners used to send their clerk (commonly known as *babus* who mostly happened to be Bengali), to enter an agreement with the recruiting agencies for labours. The agency used to send labourers to the Indian owned gardens for work and they had to pay the agency, in some cases the Indian owners failed to pay the agency and they used to abandon the labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region and leave the garden.

The plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region also experienced the recruitment of the labourers on a temporary and permanent basis. During the early phase of the tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region the labourers were brought and they were sent back home during the off season of the plantation work. In the later days of plantation to cut the cost the planters used to employ the labourers in a permanent basis and were given areas to settle with in the tea plantation. There was not much of a difference between the Sardari system of recruitment of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region tea plantation. The labour indebtedness was quite common in the Sub-Himalayan region too. The Sardar used to take money from the planters, Marwaris and other money lenders, and from him the labourers loans it too, hence the interest rate was quite high so the loan payment used to take quite a long time to clear. J.F Grunning mentions, "Among the Chotanagpur and Santhal coolies, who form the bulk of the labour force in the Duars, indebtedness is not a serious evil. The usual rate of interest charged by Marwaris and the shop-keepers is Rs 5 percent per mensem on loans of Rs 100 or more and one anna in the rupee per mensem if the sum borrowed is less than Rs. 100; these rates are equivalent to 60 and 75 percent per annum."⁴⁹ The loans taken by the labourers made them work in the tea plantation for long period of time to clear the loans; this even helped the planters as there was no fear of labour loss.

In the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region another migration of labourers from their original homeland to the plantation was also because of the role of Christian missionaries. There were the Catholics and Protestant missionaries, who were generally denoted by the locals as Romaniya (Roman Catholic) and Germania (Protestant, denoting the German Mission).⁵⁰ It is said that the Christian missionaries used to promised the labourers to provide them good life

in the place they will be taken too and who were later been recruited in the plantation and they were converted before migration. But these records cannot be found in official records, the officials might not have recorded this to keep the church away from humiliation. Bhowmik mentions, “The priest had formed their own labour bureau, Catholic Labour Bureau at Ranchi, to help the TDLA in recruiting labour and perhaps to have a share in the recruiting fees.”⁵¹

Despite of the harsh life, abuses and low wages paid the recruitment of the tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region took place in a larger manner which helped the planters to take forward their plantation. The recruited labourers were mostly settled in the tea plantation area rather than the towns. The coming of the recruited labourers changed the demography of the Sub-Himalayan region too.

The number of labourers who were recruited by the number of *Sardars* in various years in the Sub-Himalayan region is present in the table below.

Table 4.4: Labourers Recruited by Sardars 1918-19 to 1928-29

Years	Authorised Sardars	Labourers
1918-19	45,112	1,72,096
1919-20	28,721	53,034
1920-21	6,388	16,188
1921-22	14,148	16,192
1922-23	19,796	20,183
1923-24	30,880	36,685
1924-25	26,425	22,681
1925-26	26,736	29,710
1926-27	30,100	32,500
1927-28	30,209	35,412
1928-29	35,763	60,023

Source: *Industrial Relation in Tea Plantation*, An Unpublished PhD Thesis by Sukendra Narayan Shah.⁵²

The tea industry of the Sub-Himalayan region used to recruit tea labourers in both permanent and temporary basis during different years; this has been presented in the table below.

Table 4.5: Records of the Permanent and Temporary Labours in the Tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan Region from 1901-1951

Years	No.of Gardens	Acreage under tea	Permanent Labour	Temporary Labour	Total
1901	235	7,6403	4,7365	21,254	68,619
1911	191	30,859	5,6693	18,622	75,315
1921	131	1,12,688	8,6693	1,871	88,564
1931	151	1,32,074	1,12,591	4,262	1,16,853
1941	189	1,31,770	1,36,491	4,896	1,41,387
1951	158	1,34,473	————	————	1,76,196

Source: Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*.⁵³

Observation.

The denial by the native people of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region to work under the colonial planters in the tea plantation forced the colonial planters to bring labourers from other regions. This similar situation also existed in tea plantation of Assam. Hence it becomes important to understand the recruitment system which took place in Assam. Tea plantation required huge number of labourers for the work, and in addition to that for the fresh new plantation the colonial planters were clearing the huge areas of forests which required major number of labourers. The recruitment of labourers and expanding of tea plantation areas affected the native people, their settlement and their economy. Lands of native people of both the region was taken by the colonial planters. The recruitment process and the labour settlement took place in such a manner that the labourers were unknowingly brought under the control of the planters; it was not less than of slave.

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Chapter: 5:

Socio-Economic Life of the Tea Plantation Labourers in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal during Colonial Period.

The thriving of tea plantation in the two regions of West Bengal namely Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region brought with it a larger number of labourers from different parts of India and even from regions outside India. There were various historical incidents and facts related to how the labourers were brought to the tea plantation region. The process of migration, its factors which led the migration of labourers towards these two tea plantation regions has been mentioned in an elaborative manner in the previous chapter. The migration of labourers in the tea plantation region was done through a certain recruitment process; which were *Sardari* and *Arkatti* system of recruitments. The recruitment of labourers in the tea plantation was not done only once and were not done in a small manner rather it was a planned and the recruitment was conducted in a bulk with certain criteria's, this has also been enlightened in a previous chapter. The need of larger number of labourers in the tea plantation from the time of its early land preparation phase of clearing dense forest and tilling of mass land, till the period of the boom of tea market which required more labourers for quick preparation of tea the labourers were brought into plantation. During the time of labour migration and recruitment labourers from different region, bearing different caste, language, culture was brought in the tea plantation region, hence with the increase of population the mingling of people bearing many differences had taken place in the plantation. The labourers were brought to the new place from there different comfort of living to completely new place under new system, hence here new social, cultural and economic changes might have taken place, which will be the prime theme in this current chapter.

Plantation requires two important aspects to flourish they are firstly large area of land and secondly large labour force mainly cheap labours. Since Britain had already colonized India, acquiring large portion of land was not a problem at all. The latter aspect the need of labour force needed a little work for the planters as the areas where the plantation was suitable the population was very less in number and in addition to that the natives didn't want to work under the colonial masters. The immigration of large number of labours in the plantation work was obtained by the colonial planters with the help of local and the Indian middlemen; the whole process has been presented in the previous chapter. After the labourers are brought to

the tea plantation they were left under the direct control of the planters. The *Sardars* and the *Arkattis* after recruiting the labours they mostly left them in the gardens where they were recruited or being brought into contract; or in other words they were sold to the planters. The planters used to keep the *Sardars* in the tea plantation, providing him land within the plantation area or in the nearby area, in return the *sardar* had to look after and control the labourers and the work too in the tea garden.

5.2. Early Life of the tea plantation workers in tea plantation.

Plantation was introduced in many parts of the world as a result of colonialism, the major plantations like tea, rubber, sugarcane flourished in the colonial countries. The Europeans after colonizing South American, Latin American, African, Caribbean's, Asian countries they not only administered the country and looted it; they went on establishing different plantations. The main plantation crops were cotton (in the early stages in the southern United States), sugar cane (Caribbean Islands, northern part of Latin America, Mauritius, Fiji, etc.), tobacco (in the southern United States, Indonesia, and elsewhere), tea (India, China, Indonesia), coffee (Brazil), rubber (Malaysia), and cocoa (Ghana).¹ Since the tea plantation was a labour intensive one, the large number was required and as mentioned above there was a labour shortage in the plantation area as the locals didn't want to work in the plantation and the planters were not in a favour to attract the locals by raising the wage, as they wanted the labour market to stay low, therefore they can make more profit by less investment. In such a situation of labour shortage the planters were in search cheap and hardworking labours which seemed to be hard to find; but the colonial planters managed to get workers from outside India and even within India. In the plantation sector the planters always wanted to make greater profit; to make this happen they had to control the wage, if the demand of labour increases and supply decreases then the possibility of wage rise is always present, hence to prevail over such situation the planters imported larger number of labours in very low wage. This was made possible because of the socio-political and economic situation which existed during that period in native places of the labours both in Nepal and the Chotanagpur region of India, which has been discussed in one of the previous chapters.

Earlier the labourer in the colonial countries where the plantation was established was brought as slaves. The slave trade was quite predominant especially in Europe which started long back in 15th century by the Portuguese. During the time when the labourers were brought into tea plantation was abolished by Britain in the year 1834 by introducing Slavery Abolition Act, which was followed by other European colonisers as well. Hence the labour imports in

the plantation were done by Indenture system. Sharit K. Bhowmik writes, “These immigrants were initially imported as slaves and later as indentured servants. The cotton plantations in the southern United States, the sugar plantations in the Caribbean Islands and in other places such as Guyana, Mauritius, and Fiji were all run on slave labor from Africa in their early stages of growth. After the abolition of slavery, indentured labour from Asia was used.”² The concept of plantation was new in India after it was first introduced by the Britishers in Assam and later taken to Darjeeling, the Sub-Himalayan region and other. Plantation in India was a novel concept that was introduced by the British as it “began as a colonial enterprise of the European powers in the subtropical and tropical regions, growing world market staples and accruing profit from the same.”³ The land which was to be brought into plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region were mostly covered with dense forest, hence the planters needed the labourers in a larger manner, as the work in the plantation was hard and continuous one, and the planters wanted the labourers to stay in the plantation area itself. This demand of the colonial planters was helped with the indentured system of recruitment, not only the planters got a cheap labourer but the labour force even came under the total control of the planter and the labour had to stay in the plantation itself.

By 1860 quite a number of tea plantations were established in Darjeeling and Terai region and by 1874 plantation started in the Sub-Himalayan as well. In the initial period the labourers were usually given some money as an advance for the early expenses with some other basic necessities like utensils and other, the advance provided was later cut-off slowly from the wage. The amount of money which was given as an advance cannot be specifically mentioned regarding the labourers of Darjeeling. Hence, regarding the labourers brought from Chottanagpur and Santhal Paragana before the Second World War it was 25 rupees and after Second World War it was 36 rupees as per the report of the Rege Commission of 1944.⁴ The important concern regarding the condition of existence or the early settlement of labour in the tea plantation lacks documented evidence. Some mentions can be found in some books, articles and even in nobles but the primary documents with records are still quite difficult to find, hence the whole pattern and feature of early labour settlement in a chronological manner is quite absent. The oral narrative regarding the life in tea plantation can be found in some tea gardens which has been narrated to one generation to another, or in some cases the same old person who had worked during the colonial period even prior to 1947 can be met very fortunately who could narrate the incidents he or she has seen in the tea plantation.

During the initial period of tea plantation, the large number of labourers used was temporary, they were brought into plantation in a seasonal basis or when the planters required.

They used to migrate to the plantation district during season and went back to their native place. The seasonal migration and transport of labourers was expensive for the planters and even the health of the labourers had a risk of worsening. Rajworshi Chakraborty in his unpublished M. Phil dissertation writes, “As more and more plantations sprung up, and lands were brought under cultivation, the demand for a larger working force was felt. Eventually, the role of women and children became important in the plantations. This resulted in the numbers of migrants to increase. With the women and children, migration after every seasonal cultivation was an arduous task. Alongside, the avenue to have settlements within the plantations was a good incentive to keep these migrants closer to the source of work. On a sociological scale, one of the main reasons for a migrant labourer to return home is to reunite with the family. Thus, when the criteria were fulfilled in the plantation itself, by having whole families to work in the tea-gardens, the reasons to return home were negligible. As a result, the tea garden labour in Darjeeling stabilized, and settled in family patterns.”⁵ With this the labourers were settled in the tea plantations itself. With the settlement of whole family in the tea plantation the labour force of the whole family was used in the plantation as labour in different categories. Despite the fact that the labourers were kept in the tea plantation in permanently, however, the temporary labourers brought from outside tea plantation were not removed abruptly. This mention can be estimated through the records presented by D. Chaman Lall in one of his writing; the table of record is presented below,

Table 5.1: Persons Employed in Tea Plantation in 1919 (Daily Average)

Province	Garden Labour (Permanent)	Outside Labour (Permanent)	Outside Labour (Temporarily)
Assam	6,34,310	26,164	45,113
Bengal	1,50,270	4,861	6,251
Bihar & Orissa	695	1,267	45
United Provinces	2,339	2,211	1,301
Punjab	1,201	3,228	10,203
Madras	13,160	12,423	4,837
Travancore	44,677	697	4,840
Burmah	3,225	70
Total	8,46,652	54,046	72,660

Source: D. Chaman Lall, *Coolie: The Story of Labour and Capital in India*⁶

In traditional plantation the number of labourers required were based on the seasons and the work force required in the tea plantation differed. February is the peak month where more labour is required: cultivation work is then heavy and the male labourer's attendance is higher. Subsequently, between the two flushing periods from March to April and September to November, the requirement of female labour is higher in the tea plantation. Similarly, in tea plantations of Darjeeling the same procedure was followed, as a result of which, during the peak period in the plantation the temporary labourers were brought for work and after the season was over they had to return to their native place. This practice of bringing the labourers during the peak period in tea plantation was slowly reduced as the labourers were given place to settle in the plantation itself and secondly the increase in the area of plantation too required more labourers hence they were kept in a permanent manner. The record of this can be seen in the table below:

Table 5.2: Statistics of Permanent and Temporary Labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling in different years:

Years	Permanent	Temporary	Total
1901	24,257	16,194	40,451
1911	26,510	13,051	39,561
1921	45,977	2,733	48,710
1931	61,572	2,093	63,665
1941	67,838	1,861	69,699

Source: A. Mitra, *Census 1951 : West Bengal District Handbooks (Darjeeling)*, 1954.⁷

The above table presents the figures from the year 1901 to 1941, which can be seen as the peak point of tea plantation and time when Darjeeling tea was recognized around the world. The figure from the late 19th century when tea plantation was at its initial phase of flourishing in Darjeeling is quite absent regarding the permanent and temporary labourers. From the above table we can figure out the changing pattern of statistics in the 20th century where the numbers of permanent labourers were rising while the numbers of temporary labourers were diminishing in the tea plantations of Darjeeling. Other reasons beside the expansion of tea plantation and labour transport cost, the labourers went back to their native place in between because the labourers were peasants and they went back to work in their agricultural field and another one was the recruitment of the Gorkha soldiers in the British Indian Army, where they were paid well as compared to that of tea plantation, hence they deserted the tea plantation to get recruited

in there. Jayeeta Sharma writes regarding these two aspects as, “However, this was not yet a permanent or even a settled workforce. Tea managers unhappy with such patterns of movement accused tea workers of running away to Nepal so as to default on moneylender’s debts. In reality, their workforce included many peasant’s eagers to earn tea wages during winter when their fields were fallow, but had no compunction when they deserted at spring time to plant back home. Even when tea workers moved more or less permanently across the border, they often were inspired to do so by the lure of another colonial enterprise, the Gurkha regiments of the British Indian Army”.⁸

In the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region the labourers in the plantation were present in a similar fashion. Labourers were kept in the tea plantation in a lesser manner and the labourers were brought from the Chottanagpur region and Santhal Paraganas and some from Nepal, during the peak period. From the time when the tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region flourished the need of labour both permanent and temporary were brought in the tea plantation. Likewise, of Darjeeling the records of the labourers from the late 19th century is hard to find, but from the record of early 20th century we can figure out the records required; the record is present in the table below:

Table5.3: Permanent and Temporary Labourers in the Sub-Himalayan Region in Different Years

Year	No.of Gardens	Acreage under Tea	Labour		
			Permanent	Temporary	Total
1901	235	76,403	47,365	21,254	68,619
1911	191	90,859	56,693	18,622	75,315
1921	131	1,12,688	86,693	1,871	88,564
1931	151	1,32,074	1,12,591	4,262	1,16,853
1941	189	1,31,770	1,36,491	4,896	1,41,387

Source: A.K. Mitra, *Census of India1951, Vol. VI, Part IA (West Bengal, Sikkim and Chandernagore)*, 1953.⁹

From the above table 5.3 we can see the change in the statistics of the labour in the tea plantation region of the Sub-Himalayan region. Similar to that of tea plantation of Darjeeling (as the tea plantation in different parts of India mostly follows similar pattern), in Sub-Himalayan region with the expansion of tea plantation area the numbers of temporary labourers have decreased and at the same time the number of the permanent labourers has been rising

many folds. From the above two tables 5.2 and 5.3 which provides the record of the numbers of labourers in tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region, we can figure out that the planters in their later years preferred to keep more of permanent labourers than temporary once. The labourers were kept in the plantation by the planters, but the stay was not free from coercion, control and other repression by the colonial planters, which will be further stated in this chapter below.

5.2.2: The Social Life of the labourers under the colonial master.

The labourers were given a portion of land in the tea plantation where they were given a *kaccha* house for shelter. The settlement of the labourers was not only concentrated in one place but it was done in different areas of the large tea estate. The land for labour settlement in the tea gardens had similar kind of pattern in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. The labourers in the tea plantation who migrated and settled here did not belong to one particular community, caste or tribe. In Darjeeling Hills the labourers brought were mostly Rai, Limbu, Mangar, Gurungs, Dewans and others and in the Sub-Himalayan region were the Santhals, Oraons, Mundas and others. The record of the exact numbers of labourers from different caste and tribe who migrated in both the region is not present precisely. The labourers after they were brought and given place to settle in the tea plantation settled on the basis of their caste and tribe. These tribes and caste people were from different regions and had different culture; therefore, the people immigrated carried with them varieties of cultural differences. The dialect also varied between caste to caste and tribe to tribe; which was totally diverse from one another. The difference in culture and dialect between the labourers from different caste and tribe existed in both the regions of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region. The planters of the tea gardens took an advantage of these existing differences. They arranged the settlement of the labourers on the basis of caste and tribes; they kept the labourers belonging to one certain ethnicity in one section and in another they set the other group of labourers. Khemraj Sharma writes, “The estate had certain specific characteristics of its own. The estate had therefore undergone with different nomenclatures in peculiar ways in various periods of its growth and development. The first was the formation of Labour *Dhuras* (labour lines) according to the caste and tribal backgrounds of the workers so that a caste or tribe could not entertain relationships with other castes or tribe in terms of its socio-economic parlance. Each *Dhura* had to maintain its distinct socio-cultural heritage of its places of origin.”¹⁰ The settlement of the plantation is been shaped to meet the plantation benefits; hence the system of plantation is

structured in such a way which paves them benefit even by controlling the life of the labourers. The formation of labour lines was not only limited to save guard the socio-culture of indigenous caste or tribes, but it was also built to restrict the intercultural exchange between the labourers of different caste and tribe, in order to maintain this the marriage between boy or girl from one labour line was not allowed to marry to person from another labour line.

Other important factor in formation of different labour line and which separate the labourers from one another was the dialect. The dialect between the labourers differed as they were from different region from the place they were brought. In matter of Darjeeling hills the labourers who were brought from Nepal came from different regions from Nepal. The immigrant labourers from Nepal comprised of various communities like Rai, Limbu (Subba), Mangar (Thapa), Tamang, Gurungs and others who all had their own respective dialect in which they communicated. Nepali or Khas language (dialect used by the upper caste and the Saha Dynasty of Nepal) was used in Nepal as an official language after 1743 or which is called as Unification of Nepal by Prithivinarayan Saha. Before 1743, Nepal comprised of small petty kingdoms, which were formed on the basis of their culture and language. The Rai and Limbu community had their own respective kingdoms known as Khambuan (Rai) and Limbuan (Limbu) which came under the large Kirat region of Eastern Nepal and with them another community the Yakhas or even known as Dewans resided in the Kirat region. Kumar Pradhan writes, "Central Kirat is called Khambuan just as the region further towards the east is Limbuan. The Khambus (or Rais) and the Limbus constituted the majority of the population till the Gorkha conquest."¹¹ Similarly Sunuwar, Tamang, Yolmo, Thami were the inhabitants of Near Kirat of Western Nepal and Sherpas resided in the north of the Rai settlement known as *Majh* Kirat which is now a day's known as Solu-Khumbu.¹²

The migration of labourers from Nepal towards tea plantation in Darjeeling started much after Nepali language came into force in Nepal, however the non-brahmin communities preferred their own language as there were no institutions to teach Nepali or *Khas*¹³ language to other communities neither the ruling caste wanted them to learn as it was helping the upper-castes to take over the lands of the other non-bramanical by illegally as the papers in which they were made to put stamp were written in Nepali. Similarly, in the tea plantations of Sub-Himalayan region the immigrant labourers who were brought from, Sannthal Paraganas and Chottanagpur regions of India had their own respective dialect. The tribal communities which were brought from this region the Santhals, Mundas, Oraons, Meches, Dhimals and others used their own indigenous dialect for communication. These communities settled in different parts

of present-day Bihar, Orissa, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. These communities were tribal labourers and their culture, society, dialect was totally different than that of other communities and even differed between the tribal communities. The migration of these labourers to the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region took place before independence, therefore Hindi as a common language spoken by majority of Indians as of now was absent during that time, so they found difficult to communicate between each other. Since having diverse dialect, the labourers were having problem communicating with labourers from another community but it turned to be very handy for the planters to divide them into different *dhuras*; as “lesser the communication between the labourers lesser the danger of unity” was followed by the colonial planters. Like Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, has said that "change is the only constant in life", likewise in the tea plantation the planters and the *sardars* could not resist the labourers on the basis of a dialect. As with the changing time, the labourers slowly started to communicate through one common dialect of which they had a little knowledge about. Hence, as a result of which in the tea plantations of Darjeeling hills Nepali became the lingua franca of the labourers of different communities and in the tea plantations of Sub-Himalayan region Hindi came to be the lingua franca for the labour communities residing there. Despite the fact that Nepali and Hindi became the lingua franca of the tea plantation labourers of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region consecutively, but there were some changes in both the language as some of the words came from some other dialect which was mixed with Nepali and Hindi and the pronunciation differed too. The basic reason for such mixture of different dialects with Nepali and Hindi might be the lack of education, as during the initial phase the basic educational facilities were absent in the tea plantation, and the labourers spoke those languages just by listening, hence there was no space for proper grammar too. These modified languages came to be known as Garden Language; in Darjeeling it was known as ‘*Kamane Nepali*’ or ‘Garden Nepali’ and in the Sub-Himalayan region it was known as ‘Garden Hindi’ respectively.

The management was somehow successful in searching some person who know a little bit of the dialects of certain tribe and caste and could make a communication between that certain community and the management, hence, those persons were made the *Sardars* or the supervisor of that certain community and of that labour line. These *Sardars* controlled the labourers in all the aspects, they controlled them in the plantation work, socio-economic control was also done by the Sardars and even the movement of the labourers were controlled and restricted by the Sardars. By maintaining a good control and keeping the labourers in indirect

captivity the Sardars used to get a reward or *Baksis* from the colonial planters during the time of festivals.¹⁴ The planters from all the aspect were suppressing the labourers in the work field and the suppression was even involved in the personal life of the labourers. There was no limitation as such regarding the suppression and restriction made by the colonial masters towards the labourers. The planters acted as the King of the tea plantation, he should be respected all the time and his words would be the final words as there will be no question raised and if done so those labourers were punished, hence the labourers of the tea plantation were not free. The lives of the workers are absolutely controlled by the owners of the estates right from the modes of recruitment to the form of organization and absolute labour control. This was true in the case of the British colonial capitalists and now that has very well found its way even in the post-colonial era in the plantation industry.¹⁵

In between the labourers of one community and another felling of an adversary were created by the owners and the *sardars* by stating many false statements about one another and by organizing various competitions and other. Khemraj Sharma mentions about such incidents of how and what kind of competitions were organized by the *sardars* and the planters in the tea plantation between the labourers of different *dhuras*. Khemraj Sharma writes, “Once in a year, the owner/manager as kings of his tea estate could come to show his artificial participation with the workers during the *Dasai* (Dashara) festival in course of organizing a cultural program. In such occasion, the planter as the king of the tea estate used to throw golden ring (*Authi*) from the stage upstairs and used to instruct their Sardars to order their caste or tribal workers to fight among themselves to win the golden ring. The planters along with their family members used to enjoy the bull fighting among the workers for the golden ring. During this, many workers had to suffer serious injuries. Even some of the workers used to become physically handicapped later on forever. After this bull fighting, the workers of a Labour *Dhura* used to think the fellow workers of other Labour *Dhuras* as their enemies.”¹⁶ This kind of competition between the different labour lines in the tea gardens even prevails till date, unlike colonial time though. I, who have been growing up in a village but covered both the sides by tea gardens, have experienced such competition in the tea gardens in between the labour *dhuras*. I have experienced football match which was played in the tea gardens in which only the teams of the different labour *dhuras* of that particular tea garden will compete with each other. By mentioning this what I am expressing is, with the passage of time though the competition between the labour *dhuras* are not violently played nor it has been inhumanely organized by the owners and the managers, but the system of the competition between the labour *dhuras* was

a colonial construct and knowingly or unknowingly it is followed and has been a kind of garden culture.

After conducting all this type of inhumane acts, the labourers were continuously kept under surveillance; surveillance was done as to check whether the labourers were interacting with each other frequently or is there anything such as unity growing between the labourers. In the early phases of settlement in the tea plantation the workers were not provided with the entire facilities in their place of stay and even in the work place especially where the new plantation was done by clearing dense forest they were not provided the basic safety and other facilities. When the labourers tried to keep their problems it was not heard, rather they were threatened of various things, such as cut down of wage, extra work with no pay, they were even flogged by the belting belt (said by the old labourers in the tea garden while they recollected their past in the tea garden) and they were even done *Hatta bahar* (taken out of the tea garden with whole family). Rajeshwi Pradhan in her journal has also mentioned about such incidents in the tea garden, Pradhan writes, “The workers are under surveillance as they live in the plantations and their lives are totally controlled by the management. Even if they try to place their grievances, instead of their problems being redressed they are victimized and, in this way, discipline is internalized in the workers. The workers know that they are under constant surveillance and therefore they do not go against the management.”¹⁷ The labourers of the tea plantation of West Bengal were living a very harsh and dreadful life, on one hand their nation was under the colonial rule where their political rights were shattered by the British and by the British planters there socio-cultural and economic life were been exploited. Rajeshwi Pradhan even mentions that, “Therefore plantations are authoritarian political institutions where power is invested in the planter for their economic benefit. Plantation requires cheap and abundant labour subject to strict discipline to carry out the productive activities of the plantation and cheap and abundant labour has been ensured by the peculiar characteristics of the plantation.”¹⁸ The condition of the labourers has also been defined by Deben Sarkar which has been mentioned in a book by Kartik Ch. Sutradhar, stating that, “The tea labourers had been accommodated as serfs long before the independence. Only a small room was their dwelling place. There was no right of any trade union leaders or political leaders to enter into the line of labourers dwelling place. The manager of the tea garden was all in all.”¹⁹

Despite the positive rise of the tea plantation and its rising demand in England and other parts of Europe with a very high price, the labourers of the tea plantation did not get to enjoy a portion of that profit. Instead they were deprived of fair wage, absence of basic facility,

education, health and hygiene and other rights. There was no organization or a union during that period through which the labourers could keep the grievances. The plantation requires large number of cheap labourers which helps the planters to gain profit and here it was not just a planter but a colonial planter, the repression and other inhumane activities were more. Rohit Sharma in his Ph.D. thesis writes, “Poverty, large-scale illiteracy ignorance and many other social evils were prevalent amongst the labourers. It is seen that the distribution of income was always in favour of capital at the expense of labour. This was a part of the colonial philosophy in which the economic features of the plantation industry were created. The workers were denied social and natural justice and were treated as door-mates, and inflicted upon them untold suffering and pain.”²⁰ The graph of profit in tea plantation has generally gone above during the early phases of tea plantation. The increase in the tea production can be observed from the writing of Samuel Baidon, where Baidon mention that, “The production of Indian tea has increased from twenty pounds in 1840, to a probable of fifty million of pounds in 1881.”²¹ By this statement we can understand that the production has increased many folds and the fact is the production increases only when the demand rises. Though, the labourers did not receive any increment in their wages from such profits.

Baidon writes about the planters of the tea gardens, he has written about the hardship of the planters, good deeds of the planters, in fact he has defended the planters in all forms; he has failed to write about the labourers or coolies of the tea plantation. Writer like Baidon has went to the extent that he presents the planters as a perfect good man and the labourers as not being respectful towards the planter. Baidon writes, “...at about the same interval Government sends round an Inspector to see that the coolies are treating their Sahibs properly.”²² By this statement Baidon tries to prove that the coolies misbehave with the planter and even go against the orders of the planters in order to check that the government send the police. But he completely covers up and ignores the inhumane treatment which the planters used to do to the labours. Baidon even goes to the extent where he writes, “ Such men were allowed to go to the factories; and the consequence was that in many cases planters found themselves surrounded by a number of totally useless coolies, skilled, some of them, in the art of rebellion, deceived, all of them, by the official passing them as fit for the life before them: and by degrees, constant warfare resulted, in which the coolies sought to beat the Sahib and the Sahib, seeing the odds against him, strove to maintain his position and to get his work done, by such means as were at hand.”²³ Baidon has written about such incidents which were not the actual incident which could have taken place in the plantation. The workers couldn't think about beating the

planters as which was quite an impossible task for them; in such condition where they were fined, beaten and being kicked out of the tea garden in small mistakes, where the planters were the law and the king, how can the coolies think about taking such steps. Hence the incidents mentioned by Baidon in his work are very much biased.

The writings of Baidon can be countered by the writings of Nitin Varma regarding the aggressiveness and torture by the planter towards the labours in the early phases of tea plantation, though Varma has mentioned the incidents of Assam plantation but the similar social scenario existed in the tea plantation of every region be it Assam, Darjeeling or the Sub-Himalayan region. Varma writes, “This self-assumption of the planter/manager as the dispenser of order and justice motivated calls for even greater “latitude” and “freedom” on the modes of punishment. By the late 1860s and early 1870s, planters were aggressively pitching for ‘discretionary magisterial authority over workmen...whereby he (planter/manager) may exercise a beneficial influence by threats, and in emergencies slaps, to keep up that state of discipline that always exists in a well-regulated factory where the bane of court prosecutions has not penetrated’.”²⁴ The planters took the power which they enjoyed to such a degree that they counted themselves as in the top of the order, and they could use their power in any form in the name of controlling the labours in the tea plantation. Varma writes, “They drew sustenance from the standard ‘Assam is exceptional’ premise: ‘that with so few magistrates in the district, it must be planter himself that we must look to for the maintenance of order among these large bodies of labourers’. In fact, the jury convicting Richard Dunn for his “excesses” pronounced that many of the plantations in Assam are located twenty to forty miles distant from the nearest court of justice and therefore ‘the employers of labour had great difficulty in having recourse to legal means for enforcing the fulfillment of the agreements made and were often tempted to take the law into their hands’.”²⁵

The incidents of labour torture or physically abusing labourers were a common during the colonial period in the tea plantation. During the time of my field work the oral story of physical of the labourers by the colonial planters even in a minute issues were present in many of the tea gardens, sadly those were not recorded in an official manner. D.Chaman Lall also mentions about various incidents of the labourers being physically abused in the tea gardens of Assam. He mentions about the incident of Japlong Tea plantation of the then Assam province now in Bangladesh. In April 23rd 1928, a coolie named Madhu approached the Assistant Manager Mr. Yorkstou for a leave on occasion of his son’s marriage which was refused and the Assistant Manager was again approached by Madhu’s elder son Naba, while approaching

the Assistant Manager in anger slapped Naba and when Madhu protested against the abuse by the Assistant Manager he was slapped too and tied by the Chowkidars and Babus and the Assistant Manager started to beat him and in between this he kicked Madhu in his face and he felt unconscious and blood oozed out of Madhu's mouth. After knowing about this incident, the garden labourers reported the matter to the police.²⁶ There are more records of physical assaults by the planters and the managers towards the labourers, which were being taken to police and were being heard by the Districts Magistrate, which are mentioned by Chaman Lall. In one of the incidents which came before the Deputy Commissioner of Jorhat against a European Manager. The complaint was that a coolie was not been able to attend his duty due to illness and when he went to dispensary for medical treatment, that time he was taken to the manager's bungalow and the manager ordered his chowkidars and baboo to hold the coolie and started beating. The manager beat the coolie so pathetically that he fell unconscious and his hands were fractured so severely that it became useless for any further works.²⁷

During the time of my field work, I came across one incident of physical assault by the European manager in the tea plantation of Darjeeling; the incident was in an oral form. I recorded the oral incident and I presented in a seminar in 2020 and later have been published as a chapter in an edited book in 2022. I recorded this incident in the Hope Town tea garden, Sonada region of Darjeeling; it was orally narrated to me by a senior person named Adipman Rai who was in his 90's when I met him. He worked in the Hope Town tea garden during the colonial period as a Chokra; he worked for 45 years. Sadly, during the time, he retired from his work the tea garden was shut down and officially he didn't retire and because of that till that time he has not received his Gratuity and Provident Fund from the tea garden. Mr. Adipman Rai remembered freshly about an incident in Tumsong tea garden where an European manager saw one labour walking with a neat and clean dress, hair well combed, that time the European manager caught the worker by his neck and submerged the labour in a dirty drain and warned him not to wear good and comb hair.²⁸ Adipman Rai and other labourers whom I met during the field work said that the labourers were not allowed to smoke, chew tobacco, wear shoes, carry umbrella and couldn't wear white half pants; all these were restricted by the European managers and if found doing any of these then the labour was punished. The labourers even had to pay tax if they domesticated cows and even had to pay for cutting grass, during the colonial regime. Such kind of harsh and inhumane physical torture were laid upon by the colonial managers and planters, unlike in Assam no such police complaints were filed and in some cases the managers were brought into trails. There are many stories of the torture and

harassments which the labourers had to face from the planters and managers of the tea plantation during the colonial period and even after the colonial period as well; all these oral stories need to be brought into written form through proper method.

The managers of the tea plantation during the colonial period did not only manage the production of tea, labours, the tea plant in the plantation and other; rather they maintained their raj in the tea plantation. The raj of the manager did not only remain within the tea factory of in the field, but his raj was over the socio-economic life of the labourers and even the political freedom was controlled by the manager. The manager of the tea plantation took themselves as a sole authority of the plantation he is heading as a parental authority; therefore, the word *Ma-Baap* was used to describe the manager. The managerial raj over the plantation even occurred in the Jute mills of West Bengal which was a growing industry during second half of 1800's and in the 1900's. Unlike the tea plantation industry, the jute mills were stationed in urban area of Bengal; though the workers of the mills came from the villages and settled in the towns in slums. Similar to the tea plantation managers, the manager of the mill acted as a sole representative of the mill workers and controlled the life of the workers too. The managerial raj over jute mill which is quite relatable with that of tea plantation has been presented by Subho Basu in his work titled, "Does Class Matters? Colonial Capital and Workers' Resistance in Bengal (1890-1937)". The raj by the manager has been shown by Basu in one incident, where he mentions, "In 1918, David Mudie, manager of a local jute mill and chairman of the Bhatpara mill municipality, wrote to his superiors advising against the introduction of elections to the local municipal board arguing that the labour class form the majority of its population who are unfit to exercise an election franchise and who are quite fitly represented by the managers of the mills they work in. Mudie was merely echoing the common opinion of mill managers in the industrial towns of Bengal that workers were best represented by their managers. In their self-perception managers regarded themselves as *ma-baap* (parental authority) of their employees, believing that they should exercise corrective influence over the 'irrational' but 'simple', 'child-like' mill hands."²⁹ The managers of both tea plantation and the jute mills in Bengal used to have a good tune with the officials of municipal boards, police and of the judiciary which helped them to keep their domination over the workers. Basu even mentions that, thus the local administration of mill towns, dominated by the Scottish mill managers and propertied Indians, tried to control the social life of the urban residents, mainly industrial workers, through sanitary measures, municipal taxation, and police supervision.³⁰ The above-mentioned line by Basu resembles the similar situation of the tea plantation too.

In the tea gardens the trade and rule went hand in hand. The tea planters were not only planting tea and taking forward trade but they were ruling not only the tea plantation but larger part of India too; despite the fact that the Britishers came to India as a merchant. To keep the domination and control over the labourers they took every possible measure. The Britishers were not only suppressing and looting from tea plantation but they were looting the country from every possible area as the country had many materials which were expensive and had a good price in the world market and were taken by the Britishers by every means. The value of India and its sub-continent for the colonizers can be observed from the statement made by Lord Curzon in 1901 stating that, “As long as we rule India we are the greatest power in the world, if we lose it; we shall drop straight-away to a third-rate power.”³¹ Every mean were adopted by the colonial ruler to rule and to keep in control the labourers of tea plantation; one of which was the system of *hatta bahar*, which will be discussed below.

5.2.3: The Inhumane System of *Hatta bahar* in the tea plantation.

To keep the domination and control over the labourers the colonial planters used to apply the rule of *Hatta bahar*. This system of *hatta bahar* was an inhumane rule which mostly prevailed in the tea gardens of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region of West Bengal. According to this rule the labourers with their whole family were thrown out of the tea plantation when the labourers went against the statement of the planters or whenever the labourers broke the rules and laws of the tea garden. But in many cases the *hatta bahar* was used by the planters as a weapon to create fear of being thrown out of the work and tea plantation and hence the planters used to black mail the labourers. This rule was very inhumane in nature as when the labourers were thrown out of the tea plantation as per the *hatta bahar*, they had to leave their home with their whole family and the tea plantation with all their belongings at a given time. A notice was sent to every tea garden regarding those family after which they were not allowed to enter and settle in any of the tea garden. The saddening part regarding the system of *hatta bahar* was that this system existed even after India gained its independence and existed till 1955-56. No such steps by Central and State governments of that time were taken to eradicate such inhumane system.

The oppression by the colonial planters and even by the Indian planters and officials of the tea plantation by using the system of *hatta bahar* can be found in many of the literary works related to the tea plantations of Darjeeling. As the literature has a relation with history, as the literature even presents the society of the past. I would like to mention about nobles written in

Nepali language in which the system of *hatta bahar* has been shown and the implement of *hatta bahar* in various ways by the planters towards the labourers. In a Nepali noble titled *Tara Kahile?*, literal meaning being “But When?” written by Prakash Kovid has mentioned an incident where how the system of *hatta bahar* were implied to the labourers in the tea plantation in a forceful manner. Prakash Kovid in his noble mentions about an incident stating, “*Timi haru lai thahai hola, Birkha bahadur le Bagan ma School kholchu vanda sahed le chabuk lagayeko, hatta bahira ko notice diyeko...*”³² meaning “You all may know that when Birkha Bahadur said he will open a School in the tea garden, the Saheb (Planter/ Manager) beat him and even a notice of *hatta bahar* was set.” (Translated by Author) From this sentence we can see how the labourers in the tea gardens were beaten and *hatta bahar* were done to them, and even the labourers and their children were deprived of education too. In the same novel Prakash Kovid has brought a scenario in which the system of *hatta bahar* and the system of *Chokri* has been mentioned. The *chokri* system in the tea plantation was where young girls of the tea plantation were called by the planters in their cottage in name of manual work in the cottage, but they were forcefully molested and forceful physical relation were done with the girls. The girls had to stay in the planter’s cottage until the planter permits them to leave. Prakash Kovid mentions about how a planter orders a girl named Sima to come to the planter’s cottage for work, but when the girl and her brother resists the order of the colonial planter, the brother was beaten until he faints and a *hatta bahar* was set in their name at that time. At this point of time the girl begs for her brother’s dear life and job in tea garden and agrees to come to planter’s cottage.³³

Another novel in which how the *hatta bahar* was put forcefully on the labourers is novel named ‘*Hatta Bahira*’, literal meaning being “Move Out” by Balkrishna Thapa Mangar. In this novel a character Phulmaya, a tea garden labourer has been shown, who is little rebellious towards the system of oppression in tea plantation and against the behavior of managers and the planters. One day she goes against the order of the manager regarding taking the raw tea leaves at home by the workers for tea; she tries to take one pound of raw tea leaves in front of the guards. Regarding this behavior an action was taken but she still opposes the system and a demand regarding the providing of tea leaves for the workers but the managers denies that. After looking at her protest and with the fear that the labourers might unite and protest Phulmaya was arrested by the police in allegation of theft and her whole family was done *hatta bahar*. The character Phulmaya represents every women labourers of the tea plantation, the hard work they do and the hardship they go through to look after the family is the everyday life especially during the colonial and early independent India.³⁴ The above mentioned two Nepali

novels have actually presented the socio-economic life of the tea plantation workers during the colonial period. The novels put light on the economic crisis, social problems and the oppression by the managers and the planters of the tea plantation. The incidents mentioned in these two novels were quite relatable with the oral stories which were there with the labourers of tea gardens especially with the elderly retired workers, some of whom had even worked during the colonial period too, with whom I meet during by field work in different tea gardens. This system of *hatta bahar* was abolished from the tea plantations in the year 1955-1956. As Jawaharlal Nehru in his inaugural speech on the eve of Independence of nation, states, “A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance.”³⁵ Nehru here speaks about change from old colonial regime and coming of new independent nation and change in the age old colonial system and coming of new one; sadly the tea plantation labourers were not freed from the old colonial system and didn’t felt the change of and age from old to new until 1955-1956. The end of the age-old inhumane system of *hatta bahar* and other were achieved by the tea plantation labourers by sacrificing many innocent labours, in the 1955 shootout at Margaret’s Hope tea garden, their blood and soul were behind the abolition; the details of the incident will be presented in the next chapter.

5.3: Remuneration of the Labourers During the Colonial Period.

The labourers in the tea plantation area were brought from their native places with after being promised of various things, one of which was the fair amount of wage; but the wages which they were provided after coming to the tea plantation was very low as compared to the wages in other industries and plantation. After tea became one of the important exporting items for the colonial planters from India and which had a high demand in the European market the number of tea plantation increased as well as the number of labourers in the tea plantation. The tea planters and the companies made a heavy amount of revenue from tea, but the wages of the labourers didn’t increase even when the revenue grew many folds. The amount of wage which was paid to the labourers during the early phase of the tea plantation which was from 1850’s has not much of actual evidence; though in the 1860’s the rate of wages could be found. Manas Das Gupta even writes, “In the context of plantation industry which made its beginning in the year between 1852 and 1859, no concrete evidence can be found as to how low the wage was for the day labourers, employed in different plantation but a general idea of wage change in the early period could be found from the observations of Dr. Buchanan who found that wages of

unskilled workers increased throughout India as a result of establishment of plantations, building of railways and opening of factories and mines. But the wages of plantation were generally lower than other sectors.”³⁶

In the tea plantation of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region the English planters advocated for the labour to reside in the plantation quite early as compared to the tea plantation of Assam. While the labourers resided in the tea plantation itself, the labourers immigrated with family which consisted of members of different ages. The English planters took the advantage of this and they insisted on the employment of the members of the family in the plantation in variety of works required in the tea production or preparation of tea. And in addition to that in tea plantation of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region the distance was not that much of an issue as the labourers came from quite a nearby regions of Nepal, Chottanagpur and Santhal Paraganas; unlike in Assam the labourers were from distant region, because of this the transportation of labourers and their families for the planters did not turned costly. The employment of family in the plantation was debated by the colonizers as this system will reduce the feeling of poverty and will increase the family earning, but this thought by the colonizers were not practical as the rate in which they paid the wage was very low. The Royal Commission on Labour 1931 in their report has expressed the colonial view regarding the employment of family in the plantation as, “the migration to Assam is one of families rather than of individuals, since the gardens offer employment to women and children as well as to men. In most other industries the scope for the employment of women and children is limited, and in consequence the worker usually leaves his family behind in his village, remitting money for its maintenance. On the plantations nearly all the members of a worker’s family are wage earners and even children of tender age come out with their parents to increase the family earnings. There are thus comparatively few non-working dependents in a working-class family. The effect of this on the standard of living is important for, even with low individual earnings, the total family income may be sufficiently high to prevent the worker from feeling the pinch of poverty.”³⁷

In the early time the wages of the labourers were paid by the planters via *Sardars*, who besides receiving a commission from the planter used to take commission from the labour wages, having known about this the method of payment was changed later on. R.L. Sarkar writes, “During the British period payment was made by the garden *sardars* who usually received a commission from the tea estate. Corruption in the form of a compulsory commission taken by the *sardar* led to the curtailment of this method of payment. Now payment is made directly by the manager.”³⁸

The tea plantation workers were paid on the basis of how much work they perform in the plantation. The tea plantation followed the *hazri*, *thika* or *ticca* and unit system, on this basis the labourers were paid during the colonial period. These three systems are being described by Griffiths stating, “The *hazri* represented a specific task which might be expected to take the field worker, according to his or her diligence, about four to five hours to perform and for this task the standard daily wage was paid. After the completion of the *hazri*, provided the manager was able to make more work available, the labourer was allowed to perform a further task, known as *ticca*, usually at a higher rate of payment.”³⁹ During the plucking period of tea leaves, the planters wanted more works to be done and the plucking of the leaf on time was very important. At this time the labourers after completing their *hazri*, were encouraged by the manager to pluck more leaf on which they will be paid on leaf *pice* or one *pice* for every seer which is around a kilogram on the additional leaves plucked, this system was later called as unit system. Bhowmik writes, “The worker could, however increase his income by completing more than one *thika* in a day. If worker was engaged in plucking he got an incentive of one pie for every seer (roughly one kilogram) of leaves plucked above the *thika*. This incentive was known as doubly.”⁴⁰ The labourers were also allowed to increase the doubly by working more, doubly were increased by two or three doubly. When the cost of living increased for the tea plantation labourers and they demanded for the rise in the wages, the planters did not increase the daily *hazri*, but gave the opportunity to the labourers to make money by completing more *hazri* as the planters decreased the *thika*. According to the Royal Commission, in the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region the *thika* was decreased and the new *hazri* system in which up to three *hazri* system in various payment rate was introduced, unlike in Darjeeling the implementation of this rule was not found and the system of *hazri* and *thika* was little different. Royal Commission mentions that, “With the rapid increase in the cost of living the planter preferred not to increase the rate of wages, but to decrease the task by introducing the system of a second and even a third *hazira*. The general rate of payment for the *hazira* is 4 annas for men and 3 annas for women and children. It was stated that, on an average, a worker now takes about $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours and $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours respectively to complete the first and second *hazira*; the completion of three *haziras* normally requires about $8\frac{1}{2}$ hours, but in a few instances, workers are said to be able to complete 4 or even 5 *haziras* in one day. The labourers work in gangs under a *sardar* who, in addition to a monthly wage, receives from the planter a commission of one *pice* for each *hazira* worked by his men.”⁴¹ The payment of the first *hazira* was paid in a

monthly basis and the extra *hazira* were paid in a weekly basis. In Darjeeling the wages were fixed and were paid weekly.

In Assam during the early period of plantation the wage rates were not fixed, the payments were based on the planter and it differed in various tea gardens, it was later by coming of Act of 1865 the wages in the tea plantation were fixed. Rajani Kanta Das writes “The rate of wages of Act or contract labourers on Assam gardens was first prescribed by the Act of 1865, which fixed the monthly wages at Rs. 5 for a man, Rs. 4 for woman and Rs. 3 for a child.”⁴² Even after the wage rates were fixed in the tea plantation of Assam, labour shortage became one of the problems for the planters of Assam as the other employers especially the works under Public Works Departments were paying much more than the plantation hence the new labourers were not attracted towards tea plantation. The planters at that time were so desperate for labours that they have to pressure the government to bring a new policy by which they can get the labourers. Sanat Kumar Bose writes, “The Public Works Department was employing a large number of local labourers at a higher wage-rate than was paid by the planters and so they preferred to work under the P.W.D. This irritated the planters as they were not prepared to pay according to the P.W.D. wage-rate. They demanded of the Government that they reduce their rates. Some planters even went so far as to suggest “the increase of the land revenue as one means of bringing new labour into the market.” This view was also supported by many local officers and the Bengal Government by a resolution, dated 5th November, 1867, “Sanctioned a ten years’ settlement, and the adoption of the higher rent-rates per *bigah*, proposed by the Commissioner of Assam, in substitution of the existing rates.” The aim of this Act was to drive a section of the cultivators off their land and force them to work under the planters at a cheaper wage.”⁴³ In Assam after the Act of 1865, variation in wage rates took place in different years, which were the Act of 1872 where an increase of one rupee, by the Act of 1901 again a wage were increased for men and women which are mentioned by Rajani Kanta Das one of his work.⁴⁴ In Assam the majority of labourers were migrant workers and the fear of labour shortage existed, this might be one of the reasons for the raise in wage rate in different years, as the new rate of wage applied only to the immigrant labourers, and was not effective in Plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. Regarding this issue Griffith writes, “It must be realized that these minima applied only to immigrant labourers to Assam, Chachar and the Surma Valley. They did not directly affect the considerable proportion of labourers governed by Act XIII of 1859, nor did they apply in the Dooars and Darjeeling.”⁴⁵

5.3.1: Colonial Remuneration System in the Sub-Himalayan region and Darjeeling Tea Plantation.

The labourers of the Sub-Himalayan region used to get the basic *hazri* of rupees 4 *annas* for man, 3 *annas* for woman and children as described by the Royal Commission for Labour 1931.⁴⁶ The rate in which the wage was paid earlier in the Su-Himalayan region might not be present in the manner in which the Assam tea plantation does, but few records are mentioned by various writers. Ranajit Das Gupta mentions, “In the early 1890s on the tea gardens the average wage rates were Rs 6 a month for men, Rs 4.8 to Rs 5 for women, and Rs 2.8 to Rs 3 for children. In a report written in 1900 the Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri estimated that the average earnings of the most industrious male labour were not more than Rs 60 a year.”⁴⁷ In a record provided by the Dooars Planters’ Association as mentioned by Sharit Bhowmik in his work, states that “in 1923 the average monthly earnings was between 9 and 12 rupees for males, between 4 and 9 rupees for females, and children a few rupees.”⁴⁸ In an another report presented by Bhowmik in his same work was by the ITPA (Indian Tea Planters Association), which states that, “the daily wage of a ‘good working adult male’ was between one (1) rupee and four (4) *annas*, and one (1) rupee and eight (8) *annas* during the plucking season, and between twelve (12) *annas* and one (1) rupee during the off (cold) season. Females earned between fifteen (15) *annas* and two (2) rupees four (4) *annas* in season, and between nine (9) *annas* and twelve (12) *annas* during off seasons. Children earned between four (4) *annas* and six (6) *annas* per day. This wage rate may represent the upper limit and not the average as it is confined to ‘good working’ labourers.”⁴⁹ In the report of the Royal Commission on Labour, it has been mentioned that, “No official statistics of average earnings are available, but we were informed by the representatives of the Dooars Planters’ Association that the average monthly earnings in 1929 were Rs. 14-4-1 for men, Rs. 10-5-8 for women and Rs. 2-14-5 for children.”⁵⁰ Though the Dooars Planters Association report came in 1933 where the above report was motioned regarding the wage rate of 1929 in the Sub-Himalayan region, although the Royal Commission on Labours presented that record in 1931 itself. The another record of the wages has been presented by the Rege Commission, stating that, “The *hazira* rate in Dooars and Terai in Bengal for men, women and child is as 4 *annas*, 3 and 2 respectively although in some gardens children are paid only as 1-6 (1/6). The rate in Darjeeling is higher by one *anna*, in each case, by the task takes more time to finish. Unlike Assam, plucking is paid on the *hazira* basis, in Bengal for a fixed weight of leaf plucked in the majority of the gardens.”⁵¹ The wage rates in the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region were maintained by the Dooars

Planters' Association and the ITPA, the workers were in no position to bargain the wages. This has been expressed by Bhowmik in his work stating, "It must be mentioned that wages were arbitrarily fixed by the planters through their organizations, i.e. DPA and ITPA. The workers had no say in the matter. This is the reason why the Royal Commission strongly recommended that wage fixing machinery be established in the tea industry, even though the planters felt that there was no need for it and that fixing of minimum wages was absolutely necessary."⁵² Even after the recommendation of Royal Commission on Labourers and Rege Commission, the wages in the Sub-Himalayan region were not improved as per the basis standard of living of the labourers, hence the recommendations remained in paper.

The early proper records of the wage rates regarding the tea plantation of Darjeeling are not present likewise of Assam plantation. The records of the wages and *hazira*'s can be collaborated from the various reports and other sources of different years. In the hilly areas of plantation, the other form of payment system exists too other than *hazira* and *thika*, it is known as *bigha* system. The work during winter which included the task for sickling, pruning, hoeing or deep-forking was so arranged that the basic *haziri* was earned by 5 or 6 hours work and this were paid on piece work or the *bigha* work system. The *hazira* rate in Darjeeling was 0-5-0, 0-4-0, and 0-2-6 for men, women and children respectively, for a period of 11 years, from 1939 to 1950.⁵³ By the given record we can clearly see that the wage of the tea labourers in Darjeeling stood stagnant for 11 years, not even a *pice* was increased. R.L Sarkar mentions that, "According to Rege Committee, in some gardens in Darjeeling the normal *hazira* rates were reduced by 0-0-6 but 6 pies per day were given to workers, if they were present for at least five days in a week. For a group of other gardens, the basic rates were 0-3-8, 0-3-1 and 8-2-3 for men, women and children respectively, but an attendance bonus for Re. 1 per month was given to all workers for full attendance. If the attendance rate falls below 14 days per month, no bonus was given. This splitting of *hazira* rates was common in some gardens from 1939 to 1960s."⁵⁴ The time taken to complete one *hazira* in Darjeeling hills was higher than that of time taken in Terai and Sub-Himalayan region, because geographically the landscapes are totally different as one has the hilly slopes with higher altitude which even affects the breathing as the oxygen content is lesser than in plains and the other two regions are in the plains where the work can be done little quicker. The time taken by the labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region were around $3\frac{1}{2}$ to 4 hours whereas due to the difficulty of slopes the labourers used to take 6 hours to complete one *hazira*. In some of the tea gardens the payment was made on the basis of pies per lb (pound), in which the rate was 3 pies per pound, this rate prevailed from 1939 till 1955.

R.L Sarkar mentions about the rate of task as, “The task was usually 20 to 24 lbs. for men, 16 to 20 lbs. for women and 12 to 16 lbs. for children. For the extra leaf plucked over and above the task, payment was made at the rate of 3 pies per lb.”⁵⁵ The labourers in the tea garden earn little more during the plucking season as the green tea leafs should be plucked in time to avoid the leaf to get more mature which might not produce better tea, in these case the planters and managers are willing to pay for the amount of work the labours does and they do not keep any limitations for the labourers on plucking. Plucking was mostly done by women than men, the women plucks as much leaf as they could, in order to earn a little more. From the amount of tea leaf the labourers pluck after facing all the hardship, which are rainfall, leaches, insects, snakes, etc, which are active during the plucking season, the weights are deducted from the leafs plucked on account of moisture present in the leaves, thus the deduction was done from the rates of 5% to 15% or depending on the manager, which was not justified for the labourers.

The amount of tea leafs for the daily *hazira* differed due to the change in the climate. The average amount of green leaf to be plucked for *hazira* amounted to 8kg a day and it even dropped to as low as 2kg during autumn and rose to as high as 12 kg in the rainy season flush, even the average of 8 kg varied from garden to garden depending on the climate.⁵⁶ The labourers wages were paid in a weekly basis, on Saturday, the wages were distributed by the manager but in few tea gardens Darjeeling the method of payment were done through the *Sardars*. The *sardars* even after receiving commission from the tea garden kept 0.0.3 per rupee from the labour wage as their commission illegally; this system was strongly condemned by the Rege Commission too.⁵⁷ The payment of the staffs of the tea plantation that were, chowkidar, daffadar, supervisor and clerical staff and others were paid in a monthly basis. The wage of the week and the earning of the week by the labourers depend upon the number of extra work which is the *thika* and another is the number of days and weeks which the labourers work in the plantation. Absenteeism of the permanent labourers was quite prevalent in the plantations of Darjeeling, which affected the labour wage as no work no pay system existed in the plantation; hence the *hazira* was not counted. The Indian Tea Association presented the report of the absenteeism percentage of the labourers of Darjeeling from 33 different tea gardens in between 1938 and 1944, the report is as follows:

Table 5.4: Absenteeism of the labourers in tea plantation of Darjeeling in between the year 1938 to 1944

Category	Percentage of Absenteeism
Men	34.0
Women	24.7
Children	24.9
Total	27.6

Source: R.L. Sarkar and M.P. Lama (ed), *Tea Plantation Workers in the Eastern Himalayas*.⁵⁸

The absenteeism of the labourers did affected the earning of the labourers, in the other hand the planters too feared that the work in plantation especially during the plucking period the absenteeism of labourers will delay the work and the tea preparing process.

As mentioned earlier that the earning of the tea plantation labourers of Darjeeling raised not because of the rise in the daily wage i.e. the *hazri*, but the little rise was made by doing overtime, *thika* and other incentive. But the *thika* and second *hazri* like which prevailed in the plantation of the Sub-Himalayan region was absent in Darjeeling because of the topography and climate. To have an idea of the average monthly earnings by the labourers of the Darjeeling tea plantation I would like to refer to the researched table presented by R.L. Sarkar and M.P. Lama in their work, by taking 5 tea gardens as a sample, and the earning records are collected from two different years, which is 1939 and 1944. The table is as follows:

Table 5.5: Average Monthly Earnings in 5 selected Tea Gardens in Darjeeling in the year 1939 and 1944

	1939			1944		
Estates	Men	Women	Children	Men	Women	Children
A	8-5-1	6-1-0	4-5-0	10-9-5	7-6-1	5-4-4
B	8-2-1	6-8-0	3-4-0	9-12-0	8-2-1	4-1-0
C	8-9-5	6-9-3	3-5-9	13-6-1	11-8-0	6-8-0
D	8-7-0	6-12-0	2-12-10	13-8-0	10-2-1	5-1-0
E	6-13-9	5-7-6	3-5-9	8-12-0	6-14-7	3-13-9

Source: R.L. Sarkar and M.P. Lama (ed), *Tea Plantation Workers in the Eastern Himalayas*.⁵⁹

From the table 5.5 we can see that the average earnings of the tea plantation labourers of all three categories men, women and children respectively, in Darjeeling has increased in the year

1944 from what it was in 1939, irrespective of any rise in the wage rates. This shows that the labourers were forced to work for extra earnings which were *thika*, overtime and other to fulfill their needs as per the rising product value. Another noticeable point from the above table is that the average earnings of the 5 sample tea gardens differ from each other. The wages paid to the labourers were very less while compared with the then existing product values in the market, the planters were paying the labourers so less that the labourers could hardly think of any other things in which they could use their money on as the amount of wages they received were limited while getting food items for themselves and the family. An Anonymous planter in his work has still defended the planters and has even mentioned about the wages paid to the labourers were very much justice able. Planter has mentioned about the wages paid in the early period in Darjeeling plantation while mentioning about the wages, planter states, “The coolies are too well paid in Darjeeling, and if they were paid a lower rate, they would turn out to work better. As Indian corn is sold at 80 lbs. for the rupee, if one child turns out to work every day, he can earn enough to feed a family of 4 or 5 people. Of course, if they want extra clothes or jewelry, it is different, but many of the coolies are covered with jewelry either gold or silver and are altogether too well off.”⁶⁰ By the statement given by the anonymous planter in his work we can clearly see that the wage paid to the labours in the tea plantation was done only for the purpose of the labour to eat food and stay alive to work in the plantation and other recruitment were not of their concern.

The low remuneration rate provided to the labourers was not sufficient enough for them to think about other expenses besides buying the basic needs and foods. The Nepali labourers of the Darjeeling hills and the different tribal labourers of the Sub-Himalayan region has a colourful culture, where they celebrate various festivals and the rituals of marriage where social gathering and providing food in the gatherings takes place from the period they were migrated from their native places, even now the culture goes the same way with few modernizations. The labourers to follow their culture celebrate their festivals and to conduct the marriage customs they used to lend money from the money lenders in a very high rate. Hence to return the money with interest the labourers used to take very long period of time and since they didn't have any other source of income they had to rely on the garden work. Such incident has been mentioned by L.S.S. O' Malley and even by an anonymous planter in their works. Malley mentions, that “A cooly earning Rs 6 a month usually spends about Rs. 50 upon his wedding, and occasionally a similar amount upon a funeral, all borrowed money. The cooly looks to the

sardar for an advance, and the *sardar* to the manager. The latter lends without interest; and if he will not, the cooly and *sardar* turn to the Marwari, the Shylock of the hills, who commonly charges 75 percent interest. In that case their financial slavery is assured, and they rarely escape the toils of the money lenders.”⁶¹ Malley statesrarely escapes the toils of the money lender in the above statement, in fact the labourers couldn’t escape the toils of the money lenders and because of that the labourers couldn’t escape from the clutches of the tea plantation and its planters too; we can even state that this kind of financial slavery was created by the colonial masters itself with intent. Another mention regarding such money lending has been done by an anonymous planter in his work stating that, “It is a mistake to allow the kyeys on the estate at all, as it is a great temptation to the coolies to buy unnecessary clothes &c, if they have not to pay ready money, These shop-keepers charge most exorbitant rates of interest, generally 1 anna in the rupee per month, or 75 per cent., and work the interest up in an extraordinary way, so that very often a coolie finds that after paying Rs. 50 on an original debt of Rs. 10, he still owes 20 rupees or more, and as the Nepalese are always afraid of going to Court, the Kyah does as he likes.”⁶² In the above statement the writer has mentioned the word ‘Kyah’ which is a local dialect used for Marwari in Darjeeling. Here the anonymous planter has stated that the labourers tempted to by good cloths and others, but the writer has not mentioned about the cultures, festivals and customs which they follow and has not mentioned about the low wage paid, rather the writer has defended the low wage paid as being more than enough to live for the planters, which I have discussed above in this chapter.

5.4: Houses, Sanitation and Health facilities provided to the labourers.

The labourers of the tea plantation were provided with other basic facilities by the planters after the daily wages. The other basic facilities included housing, sanitation, food items, medical facilities and others. In the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region too these facilities were provided by the planters but differed in some manner. The very first basic facility provided by the planters to the labourers from the early period from when the labourers resided in the plantation was housing; this housing accommodation provided was free, or can be termed as a condition of service provided to the planters. The reason for providing housing might be that during the early labour recruitment period the labourers came into plantation to earn money, which means they couldn’t afford to build the house and in addition to that they even didn’t had land too in the new place. Even the planters found it rational enough to build house for them rather than providing them the land to stay as which might cause trouble in future.

The houses provided by the planters were mostly Kuchcha houses built by mud, thatched roof, muddy floor and fenced by bamboos. The above description was mostly found in the plantations of the Sub-Himalayan region, in the plantation of Darjeeling the houses were built with stone walls in place of bamboos and plastered by mud, this kind of houses can still be seen in some of the tea gardens, some are still in use and some are abandoned. The houses provided were of very dreadful condition to live in. The space provided was very small that as the family of the labourers grew, they had to live in a congested manner. As the houses had thatched roof, which were not strong as the steel roof, during rainfall water used to drenched inside the house. The housing condition has even been mentioned and has been recommended for upgrade by the report of Royal Commission on Labour and R.G. Griffins who was a Special Officer. The R.G. Griffins statement as referred from an article by Sharit Bhowmik, states, “Ordinary thatched or some tin roof huts are provided. They are generally overcrowded owing to insufficiency of accommodation in comparison with the number of people living in them. The houses are not laid out with any idea as to utilizing sunlight for drying the immediate surroundings and plinths do not exist or are insufficient. In many cases where water is scarce and deep wells have to be sunk; labour tends to become congested, as coolies' houses are congregated in the immediate neighborhood”⁶³ The report of the Royal Commission on Labour in 1931 has also described about the condition of the housing stating that, “Most of the houses are constructed of mud plaster with thatched roofs, and necessary repairs are carried out by the labourers themselves during the slack season, thatch being provided free. It has been the custom for employers to erect houses in long blocks of 8 to 12 rooms, but these should be suitably spaced out and should never be built back to back. The addition of suitable verandahs would also give some degree of privacy, a feature which is much appreciated, but has received too little consideration in the housing of labour in the past. A more recent type we have seen meets all requirements in regard to space, light and ventilation, the houses being built in blocks of two rooms. Small families are allotted one room, but where the numbers necessitate additional space, both rooms are given over to the one family. We commend this method of construction to managers proposing to erect new housing for their workers.”⁶⁴

The report of the condition of the labour housing during the colonial period has also been provided by D.V. Rege in his Report of the Labour Investigation Committee. The report has not only provided the condition of the houses but we can even find the structural differences of the houses of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region, it states that, “In the Dooars, the

houses are built in barrack lines scattered over the gardens, each house usually having its own separate compound. In many cases the houses are built in, rows one near the other with about 20 feet space between two rows. The houses are made with bamboo or iron, frame, have bamboo matting plastered with mud for walls and have thatched roofs. In many cases, the walls are made of pieces of plywood sheets from discarded, tea, chests or rusty tin sheets nailed haphazardly to the bamboo frame. The average size of a house is 225 sq. ft. The length varies from 14' to 26' and the breadth from 11' to 14'. One house is given to each labour and no rent is charged. The houses have usually a plinth of 3" to 16". The roofs are low and the light is insufficient. Windows, where provided, are usually kept closed with a view either to shut out the cold winds or evil spirits or both. The houses in, the Terai, are similar, to those in the Dooars except, that they have practically no plinth. In Darjeeling, the pre-war constructions are of wooden plank walls and corrugated iron sheet roof. Since 1939, however houses are made of bamboo and mud walls, with thatched roofs, as wooden planks and iron sheets have become very scarce."⁶⁵ There are some houses for labourers built in a long shape, this kind of houses were mostly built in the Sub-Himalayan region and Terai plains, Darjeeling being a hilly slope land, this kind of houses were only seen in few small flat lands. This kind of houses has also been mentioned by an anonymous planter in his work, planter states, "A 100 feet long by 16 feet; wide cutcha brick coolie line will cost about Ks. 550, including masonry, timbers, and carpenters work, but exclusive of iron."⁶⁶ This kind of houses commonly known as coolie line were built in a quarter system in which there were many rooms and one room was given to one family of a labour, this kind of labour lines can still be seen in few tea gardens some functioning till date some of it in an abandoned form.

There was no proper drainage system in the housing settlement of both Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region, because of which in the Sub-Himalayan region water logging during rainfall became a problem. The water accumulated area became a breeding ground for the mosquitoes causing malaria and other water born sickness as the accumulated water even affected the wells used for drinking water. Regarding the wells not being covered by cement walls and not building a proper plinth and the water getting into the well has been mentioned by Griffins as recorded by Sharit Bhowmik stating, "Wells were of two types, pucca (with cemented sides) and kuchcha (without cemented sides). The latter were generally badly maintained. Plinths, if present, were in dilapidated condition and the puddle area around the wells would invariably overflow into the well. This presented a health hazard as "many of the

cholera epidemics are traceable to uncontrolled water-supply being infected.”⁶⁷ No proper drainage created in erosion of the land in Darjeeling as during rain the downward flow of water in the hills gain quite a momentum which even used to enter the houses of the labour creating a flood like situation. Nearby the houses of the labourers wells were built for drinking and other purpose, they were either Kuchcha or Pukka wells. In Darjeeling digging of land in order to use ground water was not possible, hence the water had to be supplied from various sources, but no arrangements were done by the planters. The workers used some small water springs to fetch water, but during the dry season it used to dry up causing problems for the labourers.

The lack of proper drainage and sanitation was a concerning issue for the labourers in the tea plantation of both the regions. The absence of proper drainage and sanitation led to various illnesses in the tea plantation which even took over lives of the labourers. R.G. Griffin mentions that, “there is hardly any drainage system and no latrine system exist. The workers used the garden area as their easing grounds. Eighteen years later, in 1938, the DPA again admitted that sanitation in the tea gardens was "rather primitive" but was being improved.”⁶⁸ The planters of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region were not concerned with the sanitation and hygiene of the labourers in particular and even planters of Assam in general. As R.G. Griffin has mentioned above that the labourers used the garden area as their easing ground, which shows that there was lack of proper sanitation, there were lack of proper latrines, which became a ground for transmission of diseases and create an unhealthy surrounding. Percival Griffith writes, “As early as 1917 the Sanitary Commission had issued a pamphlet calling attention to ‘the substantial improvement which may be expected in the health of the labour force by introducing a system of conservancy’. Managers were divided on this issue. Many held that coolies would not use latrines, while more progressive managers were convinced that if latrines were built and kept clean, labour could soon be taught sanitary habits. It is interesting to note that the same argument was still going on when the author first became connected with the tea industry in 1937, though experience was beginning to establish beyond doubt the popularity of individual latrines in labourers houses.”⁶⁹ The Royal Commission on Labour has also mentioned about the existing scenario regarding the sanitation of the labourers and the disease which was spreading the infection. The Royal Commission mentions, “Under certain conditions infection may be rapidly followed by hookworm disease. A number of managers, on the recommendation of their medical officers, have carried out animal mass treatment of their labour forces, and we recommend the general adoption of this method. With a resident

labour force, no great difficult need he anticipate. It is to be remembered, however, that even periodical mass treatment will not stamp out this infection, unless suitable latrine accommodations provided simultaneously and the sanitary disposal of excreta effected. The provision and use of latrines ensures a much higher standard of sanitation, which is quickly reflected in a general improvement in the health of the whole community. In most plantation areas, however, latrines are uncommon, and although it may be impracticable to have these dotted over a plantation for the use of the working gangs, it should be possible to provide a sufficient number near the house lines and in the vicinity of the tea factory. In this connection we deprecate the wholesale exemption of the Assam and Bengal tea factories from compliance with section 13 of the Factories Act on the grounds that such factories are seasonal and built on open spaces where the workers have free access to the jungle. We advocate the early withdrawal of this exemption and recommend that adequate latrine accommodation be required in all such factories within a reasonable period to be specified by the local Government.”⁷⁰

The carelessness regarding the proper sanitation by not providing latrines to the labourers and continuing the old method of open defecation, not only affected the labourers with various diseases but the planters and managers too had to suffer with the disease. Death due to malaria and kala azar were very common and in high rates in the Sub-Himalayan region as compared to the hilly plantation region of Darjeeling. The planters were very much concerned regarding the health of the managers and planters and less concerned with the lives of the labourers. Sharit Bhowmik writes, “The planters had labeled the area “white man’s grave”, but they did not mention of course, that it was also the adivasis hell-hole.”⁷¹ The planters after getting affected by the diseases like malaria and kala azar, they were mostly taken to the hill stations for recovery, hence hospitals in the hills were built, but accessible for the planters, managers and other European officials only.

The medical facilities in the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region were in a very frail status during the colonial period. The colonizers from the earliest time when they started to explore the Terai, Dooars and the Himalayan region knew about the diseases which are present in these regions. More than hills of Darjeeling the plains of Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region were very dense and very infectious to diseases. L.S.S.O’ Malley terms Terai as “The Tarai is a tract which nature has marked out as the home of fever.”⁷² Malley even mentions about the European planters being sick of the diseases and even causing death by it, but some planters were there who could stay in these areas which not much of trouble and

getting sick by using certain protection methods. Malley writes, “Many of the European planters, moreover, manage to live in the Tarai without the robustness of their constitutions, to the construction of their pile-built bungalows and their situation in clear open ground, and to their careful regard of elementary hygienic rules, such as constant physical exercise, good ventilation and suitable clothing.”⁷³ From the above mentioned we can figure it that the planters knew the steps to resist the diseases in the plains of Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region but all this methods were not followed while building the labour houses. The houses were not built in an open space, no proper ventilation was provided in the houses, no proper clothing was given to the labourers and the surrounding was filthy because of the lack of proper drainage and sanitation. This clearly presents the negligence by the Colonial planters towards the health of the labourers.

In the plantation of the Darjeeling hills major diseases like Malaria, Kala Azar and Black Water Fever were not present in a larger manner, only the common flu, fever because of cold were present. Unlike in the hills the Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region suffered from all these diseases. The spread of these diseases in a larger manner was because of the negligence by the planters. In the hilly regions of Darjeeling mosquitoes are present especially during the summer time the number increases but the presence of mosquitoes causing malaria were not there as information given by Dr. A.D. Humphry, Civil Medical Officer, Kurseong.⁷⁴ In the Terai region death due to various diseases like malaria, kala azar, black water fever, diarrhea caused by intestinal worms were quite common. O’Mallay writes, “The death-rate is sapped by fever and are far from virile. The death-rate is appalling, the average mortality being nearly 60 per 1,000 in the ten years ending in 1900, while it exceeded 71 per 1,000 in that year; and on the other hand, the average birth-rate in the decade was only 19.4 per annum. In 1905 the death-rate was 57.70 per mille, and the average for the previous five years was 60 per mille.”⁷⁵

In the Sub-Himalayan region too malaria, kala-azar, black water fever and diarrhea due to intestinal worms and others, were very endemic and spread very quickly within the planters. All these diseases took many lives of the tea plantation labourers and their children. Professional medical Doctors were present only in few tea gardens and in some of the tea plantations non-qualified, trained under medical doctors were present, who could only deal with common flu but couldn’t diagnose some serious medical conditions. The death record in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region of certain years can be observed from the table given below in table 5.6.

Table 5.6: Number of deaths from principal diseases in the Dooars tea gardens, from 1939-44

Year	Total Population	Fever	Dysentery & Diarrhea	Cholera	Phthisis	Chest Complication	Kala-Azar	Black Water Fever
1938-39	285789	1326	1175	26	477	1061	9	8
1939-40	200174	1228	1024	41	490	802	9	8
1940-41	291253	1314	950	5	541	736	10	9
1941-42	285877	1142	1065	9	528	648	20	5
1942-43	289239	12244	1104	8	517	765	48	8
1943-44	275398	1256	1181	144	543	241	28	11

Source: B.C. Ghosh, *The Development of Tea Industry in the District of Jalpaiguri 1869-1968*.⁷⁶

From the above table 5.6 we can see that the population in between the year 1938 to 1940 went decreasing as the number of death due to primary diseases increased, again in the year 1941-42 and 1943-44 the population has gone decreasing. We can even see the death by all the mentioned primary diseases has not gone declining rather it has been in similar average from the year 1938 to 1944, rather the death by Dysentery and Diarrhea and Phthisis is on little rising side. The above mentioned table and figures shows that the labourers in the Sub-Himalayan region were very much neglected by the colonial planters regarding health and sanitation issue; hence it is worthy to call as “Adivasis Hell-Hole” as termed by Sharit Bhowmik.⁷⁷

Related with the labourers health, an act termed as Fatal Accident Act was passed in 1895 by the government, to ensure that the labourers will receive compensation in place of any accident takes place while working in the tea plantation. As in Darjeeling the hilly slopes in some places were too steep in some places and while plucking the labourers might slip and some mishap might take place, as the plucking is done during the rainy season and the soil during this time is really slippery and other kinds of accidents might also take place. In the Sub-Himalayan region tea plantation area is connected with dense forest and the attack by wild animals like elephant, tiger and other takes place which are quite common these days too and even the presence of poisonous snakes in the tea plantation is quite common and a bite from it even takes one’s life. Keeping all these kinds of accidents in mind the act was passed but was hardly applied in the tea gardens. Another similar act known as Workman’s Compensation Act

was passed in 1923, with a motive that the labourers will receive compensation if accidents take place but similar to the previous act this act was also hardly followed and provided in the tea plantation. Regarding the above mentioned two acts Manas Das Gupta writes, “Fatal Accident Act was passed in 1895 by the Government of India. This Act empowered the kith and kin of the labourers involved in fatal accident to sue employer for compensation in a Court of Law. But this act was never operative in the tea gardens. After a long lapse of 28 years the Workman’s Compensation Act of 1923 was passed. This Act was supposed to be applied in the tea gardens. According to this Act the employer was required to pay the compensation to the workers involved in accident during and course of work. But the amount of compensation to be paid was extremely meager.”⁷⁸

Observation:

The socio-economic life of the planters has always been controlled by the colonial planters in many ways. After the labourers were recruited in the tea plantation they were settled in the gardens itself. The settlement was done in such a manner that the labourers were not able to get rid of the colonial clutches nor the labourers were able to resist the suppression done by the planters. The settlement of labourers in labour line and distinguishing them on the basis of caste and tribe and keeping check on them by recruiting *chowkidars* in the gardens to look at the labourers shows a clear picture of the colonial suppression. The system which prevailed in the tea gardens like *Hatta Bahar* and *chokri* system can be seen as the inhumane treatment by the colonial planters and the managers towards the labourers. The wages paid to the labourers were very less as compared to the other industries and in other agricultural sector. The low rate of wage payment to the labourers were done to restrict the labourers within the garden so that the labourers could not leave the tea garden as the low wage paid forced the labourers to take money from the money lenders. The money lenders used to provide money in a very high interest and the labourers while returning the money had to pay for long period and could not afford to leave the tea garden. The planters used to provide houses to the labourers but the other facilities like drinking water, proper drainage, sanitation were very poorly managed as a result of this the labourers were affected with diseases like malaria, kala-azar, dysentery and other, which led to the death of many labourers of the tea gardens specially labourers of the Sub-Himalayan region and the Terai region. From this chapter we can see the suppression and negligence by the planters towards the tea plantation labourers who were actually the chief machinery for the planters who provided the world renowned tea for the planter, from which they received highest number of profit.

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- ⁷¹ Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, 62.
- ⁷² Malley, *Bengal District Gazetteer*, 53.
- ⁷³ Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, 54.
- ⁷⁴ Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, 54-55.
- ⁷⁵ Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, 53-54.
- ⁷⁶ B.C Ghosh, *The Development of Tea Industry in the District of Jalpaiguri 1869-1968* (Siliguri: N.L. Publishers, 2013 Reprint), 48.
- ⁷⁷ Bhowmik, *Class Formation*, 62.
- ⁷⁸ Gupta, *Labour in Tea*, 62-63.

Chapter: 6:

The Post-Colonial State of the Tea Plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal.

With the famous speech by Jawaharlal Nehru on the midnight of Independence on an address to the Constituent Assembly of India, notably known as the ‘Tryst with Destiny’, where he states, “Long years ago, we made a tryst with destiny; and now the time comes when we shall redeem our pledge, not wholly or in full measure, but very substantially. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom”¹, with this speech India breaks the year’s long chain of colonialism and gains Independence. After 15th of August 1947, the Britishers left India in every section and India turned into an Independent country from then. While the Britishers ruled India the tea plantation sector was totally in their hand in the early period hence the tea plantation was a private firm and some of the measures were taken totally in a way of business. While the colonizers left India from 15th August 1947, and handed over every sector, offices, and others but the situation with the ownership of tea plantation was totally different. The ownership of the tea plantation and the company had even been transferred from European to Indian much before the independence, and some European planters owned the tea plantation for many years even after 1947, which were transferred later. The owners in the plantation did changed but the rule and law in the garden stood the same, even after the new government of independent India brought acts and rules for the betterment of the labourers. The changing scenario in the tea plantation and the labour organization through trade union, and other will be discussed in the chapter below.

6.2: The Post-Colonial State of Tea Plantation in India.

The early post-colonial phase in India was a period where the country had to grow by itself in every section which were economic, political, cultural and social and others. The growth of nation was never easy as the world politics was very wobbly because of the Cold War going between the two super powers USA and the USSR, for the supremacy over the world, former advocating capitalism and the later advocating communist ideas. The world was divided into two fractions of ideas, but India with some other newly independent countries chooses the middle path of Non-Alignment. The newly formed government of India introduced various plans and acts to develop India in the field which were primary during the early nation building

process. The government even introduced various acts for the improvement of labour life, which even includes various changes in the plantation sector.

While we discuss about the historical events in the 1940's we mostly remind of the Second World War (1939-1945), Freedom Movement in India and its different phases and events, but what we don't remember in between this larger historical incidents are the micro-historical incidents. The micro-historical or historical incidents related with the tea plantation in the 1940's was the formation of the trade union in the plantation, the post-colonial changes in the plantation and the transfer of ownership from European to Indian, though the change in the ownership has even taken place much before which was in the 1920's. The plantation was the outcome of colonialism in every colonized country. Sharit Bhowmik writes, "Though plantations are historically linked with colonialism, this linkage is not structural or inevitable. As colonies free themselves from colonial rule and become independent states, a new set of production relations develops."² The government during the initial period of decolonization of country began to give protection to the labourers of all the industrial and plantation sector by bringing various acts. The government introducing the protection for working class was not only a political call but it was a necessity during the early post-colonial stage as the country had introduced various factories be it private sector or in a public one, as per the five years plan which was required for the nation building during that period. The introduction of the new acts for labour protection was not just a sudden outcome but the background goes back to the pre-independence period. In the 1920's especially after the communist groups came in India, the mobilization of working class became a serious thing. From the period 1921-1925 an average of 400,000 workers in a year were involved in strikes in the different parts of India. The year 1928 witness strikes throughout the country, the strikes in Bombay there were strikes in the jute mills in Calcutta and in the Eastern Railways too. The records of strikes during the 1920's have been presented in a detail manner by Susan Wolcott.³ All these working class strikes in different parts of India forced the colonial government to setup enquiry commissions like the Royal Commission on Labour 1931 and later in 1946 another report which was headed by D.V. Rege was submitted on the enquiry on labours, titled as "Report of the Labour Investigation Committee".

As per the reports of these enquiry committees which presented the areas where the working class of both industrial and plantation were facing problems. On the basis of these reports the post-colonial government put on a political pressure which made them to introduce regulations to protect the labourers. The attainment of independence not only gave a political

freedom to India but the freedom was achieved in a larger area like decision making, socio-economic change, foreign relation and other. Hence, with these freedoms the government's approach towards the labourers of the plantation workers too changed, which made the labourers feel that now they are no more in the colonial clutches. Sharit Bhowmik writes, "After India attained independence in 1947, the character of the state changed. The new government's attitude toward the working class was more favorable than that of the earlier colonial regime. It tried to impose some regulations on the class of employers while granting some protection to the workers, and hence tried to mediate between the two."⁴ Unlike other industries the tea plantation and its ownership has a different history, the ownership of the other industries was mostly transferred after 1947 or just before the independence was attained. But regarding the tea plantation ownership of some tea gardens were transferred much before 1947 whereas ownership of some of the tea gardens were transferred much later after the independence.

6.2.1: Transfer of Ownership of Tea Gardens.

The tea plantation has been associated with the colonizers from the time it was first planted and the way it grew in Darjeeling hills, Sub-Himalayan region and in the Terai region of West Bengal. The change of ownership was not done suddenly nor was it similar to that of handing all the government offices and other sectors related with the government in the hands of the Indians by the British Empire. In fact, the ownership of some of the tea plantation was done before India's independence. The tea industry in India flourished in a very faster rate and in a positive aspect, after the successful Assam tea plantation it was followed by the tea plantation in Darjeeling and its Terai region and which was followed by the plantation large area of Sub-Himalayan plains of West Bengal. Tea not just became an item for export for the Europeans rather it was an expensive and exotic item for export. The sudden boom in the tea export and demand in Europe, forced the European planters to open more new tea plantations in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. The price of tea was rising and the demand was growing continuously, but all this came to a halt as the World War I took place. The First World War became one factor which created a scenario in which the European had to transfer the ownership of their tea garden to the non-Europeans. After the First World War ended in 1918, the tea companies couldn't rise up suddenly as the world immediately faced the aftermath of war which was the world economic recession, though the situation didn't exist for long, but it had damaged the tea companies in their finance. Rohit Sharma in his unpublished PhD thesis writes, "In 1919 and 1920, a serious slump occurred owing to excessive supply and steep fall

in prices. This compelled the sterling companies to reduce their number of estates by transferring them to the Indian companies. Between 1911 and 1921, the number of tea estates owned by foreign public limited companies in India fell from 66% to 55% of the total and the number owned privately from 19% to 11%.”⁵ On the basis of what Sharma has mentioned the transfer of the ownership of tea gardens took place from 1911 onwards. To supplement the statement made by Sharma I would like to put the figure which D.H. Buchanan has shown as taken from the census of 1921, and he also mentions about the transfer of the ownership from European to the hands of Indian. Buchanan writes, “Ownership is tending definitely to pass into the Indian hands. The Census of 1921 showed a considerable shift from the situation in 1911.”⁶ Buchanan provides a comparative table regarding the ownership of tea gardens in Bengal, which is as follows:

Table 6.1: Comparison of Ownership of the Tea Gardens in 1911 and 1921.

Tea gardens Controlled By	1911		1921	
	No.	Percentage	No.	Percentage
<u>Companies with European Directors</u>	158	65.8	184	54.1
<u>Companies with Indian Directors</u>	18	7.5	82	24.1
<u>Companies with Mixed Board</u>	N.A	N.A	11	3.3
<u>Privately Owned by Europeans</u>	46	19.2	36	10.6
<u>Privately Owned by Indians</u>	18	7.5	27	17.9
Total	240	100	340	100

Source: D.H Buchanan, *The Development of Capitalistic Enterprise in India*.⁷

The great economic depression of 1929 or notably called as the great depression of 1929 was a period in the history where the economy of many countries including United States and the European countries, the economy fell so drastically which completely broke the economic structure of the countries. The depression started from Tuesday 29th of October 1929 when the stock market fell terribly, which directly affected the employment, industrial

production, investment and so on, this is why this day is also known as the “Black Tuesday”. Since economy is the primary feature to run an industry or a plantation, the economic depression affected the tea companies running by European in India too. It was because of this some of the European planters and companies sold the ownership to the Indians. Rohit Sharma also writes, “The situation was further aggravated when the world trade depression of 1929 reduced consumption of tea. The stocks continued to pile up till 1932. The market was so depressed that it was unremunerative to all who were engaged in tea industry. Some of the foreign tea companies were sold out to Indians.”⁸ In the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills the ownership change during the great depression was not prevalent, as mentioned by Supam Biswas in his work.⁹ The main factor which the European owners were facing during this period was the decreasing price of tea in London and other European cities where tea was an important daily beverage.

The next phase where the ownership of tea gardens in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region was transferred from the Europeans to the Indians due to certain factors was with the beginning of World War II which started from 1939 and which ended in 1945 with the surrender of Germany and Japan. During this war period some European planters and companies felt quite hard to fulfill the cost and development which tea plantation required as the war affected the trade all over the world. The wages were not paid on time, the re-plantation of bushes was not done and other requirements to maintain the tea plants were not done which lead to less production and decrease in quality. In between the war period Bengal faced a horrifying famine as the consequence of the war. During this period many of the European planters couldn't take forward the tea plantation and provide the labourers their needs, hence they sold the garden to the Indians having good amount of wealth. The mention of transfer of ownership of tea plantation during the World War II can be found in Report of Plantation Enquiry Commission 1956, which states, “One of the points which the representatives of labours brought to our notice was that since the termination of World War II, a good many tea estates in the ownership of foreign companies and individuals have been purchased by Indian nationals and that in the majority of the estates sold which include also marginal ones..”¹⁰

The above mention of the ownership transfer of the tea plantation were due to various factors which made the European owners to sell the tea gardens but regarding the plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region particularly in Jalpaiguri district the tea garden owner was Indian itself during the time of its launch. This has been mentioned by Ranajit Das Gupta in his work where he states, “Thus, within four years of the launching of the Dooars tea plantation industry, actually in 1877, the first Indian garden, Jaldhacca Tea Estate, was started. Jalpaiguri Tea Co.

Ltd., the first Indian joint stock company was launched in 1879.”¹¹ The Indian owned tea company from the time of its launch can be seen only in the Sub-Himalayan region, as in other areas of India where the tea plantation is present is predominantly owned by the Europeans, most specifically by the British owners and companies. After Jaldhacca (or Jaldhaka) tea estate other tea gardens in this area were launched by the Indian owners, thus time was taken. Ranajit Das Gupta thus states that, “However, in the thirty-one years between 1879 and 1910 only eleven Indian-owned companies were launched. By 1930 the Indian entrepreneurs came to own forty-seven gardens in Jalpaiguri and about 37 percent of the total capital of Rs. 200 million invested in the Jalpaiguri industry.”¹² The growth of Indian owners in the Sub-Himalayan region before 1947 was because those Indians had worked with the British planters when they were in need of some legal agents related to the matter of land for the expansion of plantation. The Indians who came forward to work with the Britishers regarding their legal matters were mostly Bengalis. These Bengali people were learned persons in law, small scale business holder, contractors and others and belonged to both Hindu and Muslim communities; thus, they migrated to Jalpaiguri districts from the Eastern part of Bengal more precisely from the undivided Bengal. While working with the European planters this Bengali people started to have an idea regarding how the tea plantation are being handled and how does the plantation industry work? These gave them the idea of forming small tea gardens or buying the gardens from the Europeans. Supam Biswas writes, “Almost all of the first group of Bengali pleaders were law agents of the European Tea Companies. This experience helped them to establish a tea estate of their own in future. They started with very small capitals which they could gather. Practically it was an association of poor men determined to do a big thing.”¹³

The coming of Indian owners of tea plantation in the Sub-Himalayan region was not easy for them; they had to manage financial and other relations within the circle of the tea garden owners to work in a proper way as they had the mighty British planters and the British administrators as an opposition. Even though the Indian owners had owned the tea garden and were functioning, their path was not clear and smooth as the British planters were growing and were taking over new lands for plantation the Indian owners were struggling. Ranajit Das Gupta mentions about the growing of the British gardens in the Sub-Himalayan region which was a threat to the Indian owners, stating that, “Though the Indian entrepreneurship of Jalpaiguri was fairly well-established by the end of the 1920s, it had a subordinate position within the plantation system. From the data with regard to the share of Indians in the capital invested in the Jalpaiguri tea industry it is found that the British owned 63 percent of it. Further, as late as around 1947-48 they owned and managed 64.5 percent of the total gardens and 81

percent of total tea garden area in Jalpaiguri.”¹⁴ Such kind of competition was faced by the Indian owners in managing, marketing and financing tea gardens in the Sub-Himalayan region. Positioned in such a situation and to compete against the British planters and the administration the Indian owners of this region came together under umbrella by forming Indian Tea Planters Association (ITPA) in 1918. To plaster the problem of finance, to produce extra tea and to manufacture tea faster than the Britishers to get in the market, the Indian owners pressurized the labourers working in the garden. Even though the planters were Indian and so do the labourers the labour and master relation existed in the Indian owned tea garden; even the rules and laws in the tea garden was the same old colonial one, which was similar to that of the garden owned by the British owners.

After 15th of August 1947 there was a radical change in India in every sector, be it industrial, commercial, private, public and so on, after India gained its hard-fought independence, this made the European business personals to slowly depart from keeping industries in India as many new rules and were introduced by the Indian government which were turning to be costly for the European owners. Regarding the tea plantation sector, it is said that the tea owners were aware of the fact that the tea plantation was growing old and the re-plantation of the tea bushes and maintenance of the tea factories and all will be costly. This point of discussion has also been made by Manas Das Gupta stating that, “The British owners were aware that most of the bushes planted in the 1870’s was at the point of crossing their productive age and that bulk investment was immediately called for. The result would be further erosion of profit in the immediate future.”¹⁵ After the independence many acts were introduced by the Indian government which checked and controlled many the products which were imported and exported and even various tariffs were levied on it. On this subject it has been stated that, “The Capital Issues (Control) Act 1947 imposed restrictions for all companies registered in India or abroad in respect of bonus issues in all types of securities”. The Foreign Exchange Regulation Act 1947 and Import-Export Control Act of 1947 further affected the foreign tea companies by controlling foreign exchange operation and restricting import of any commodity required for tea processing and manufacturing. The act secured the domestic market for local producers and utilized the foreign exchange in national manner.”¹⁶ This kind of situation brought the European owners in such a situation which made them to sell the tea gardens.

During the colonial period many agency houses came in the tea plantation regions, they used to look after the plantation but the actual owner was some European mainly British persons who had not even visited the tea gardens but they own the gardens after buying from

the agency houses. In simple term the agency houses acted as a middle man who sold one garden to one owner and another to another one; the agency houses even managed all the managerial works of the tea garden for which they would take some amount of commission from the owner, hence this system created many absentee owners in the tea gardens. After independence the gardens owned by these absentee owners too had difficult time regarding the ownership of tea gardens, some sold the gardens and some have even stopped showing interest in their tea garden. Another important feature after the independence related with the ownership of the tea plantation is the decline of the London Auction Market and which was transferred to Kolkata or the then Calcutta. Regarding this incident Manas Das Gupta writes, "The decline of the London Auction Market and the coming up of the Calcutta Auction Market in 1947, were interpreted as a warning for the British planters to leave. The setting up of the Tea Board in 1950 implied the end of the unrestricted freedom or laissez faire of the earlier years."¹⁷ These kinds of features created a problem for the British owners and the environment for the ownership transfer was produced.

The ownership of the tea gardens changed in a significant manner from 1947 in India. As mentioned earlier in the Sub-Himalayan regions there were some tea gardens which were started by the Indian owners and even after World War I, Economic Depression of 1929 and after World War II the ownership of few tea garden had changed due to various circumstances and in addition to this the ownership of tea gardens in Darjeeling did not went on the hands of Bengalis similar to the tea gardens of Jalpaiguri district of Sub-Himalayan region. In the tea gardens of Darjeeling ownership transfer can be seen from 1947 onwards. Supam Biswas writes, "Though the ownership of European tea estates in Darjeeling hill changed hands to the non-Bengalis (among them the Marwaris, Gujratis ranked first) during the Word economic depression of the 1930's no serious changes took place in the field of ownership until 1947."¹⁸

In history of India from 1920's India witness's rise of various trade unions or the labour unions took birth for the rights of the labourers of the country. From that time various trade unions in different sectors started to take place, even in the tea plantation different trade union came into begin. The trade unions of the tea plantation region were demanding for the basic rights, wages and for other benefits which the labours were deprived of. As soon as India got independence, the government brought changes for betterment of labours with the seer pressure from the trade unions which were there even before the independence. The government introduced The Minimum Wages Act 1948 and The Factory Act of 1948, for the betterment of the labourers. According to Minimum Wages Act the wages of the labourers were to be maintained as per the government states and the Factory Act provide the certain hours of work

which the labours worked in the industry. In addition to these acts the labour protest with the help of the trade union was in rise, they were doing gheraos and other as a protest against the owners. The very situation made the European owners think that their way of work which included domination over the labourers and in every section and making large amount of profits from it, this dominating control by the foreign owners were controlled by the Minimum Wages and Factory Acts, which made the European owners to slowly leave the tea gardens. Even after various restrictions, rules and regulations the foreign owners did not leave the tea garden all of a certain but some of the foreign companies sold their gardens after 1970's, and at this time of 1960's to 1970's the number of Indian owners grew and within Indians the Marwaris and the Gujaratis were the ones who bought the larger number of tea gardens. Manas Das Gupta mentions that by 1970 the ownership of the tea plantation have significantly changed and mentions of having two significant features of this change which are as follows: "1) Indianisation took place in case of the estates owned and controlled by the British, and 2) Within the Indian Sector, ownership and control passed from one community to another."¹⁹ The change in ownership from 1947 to 1970 can be illustrated more from the table given below:

Table 6.2: Change In Ownership From 1947 to 1970

Categories	Ownership in 1947		Ownership in 1970	
	Indian	Non-Indian	Indian	Non-Indian
Proprietary	31	8	32	—
Private	1	—	12	—
Public Ltd.	11	10	41	—
Sterling	—	40	—	16
	43	58	85	16
Total	101		101	

Source: Manas Das Gupta, *Labour in Tea Gardens*.²⁰

As mentioned earlier the ownership change of Darjeeling tea plantation has mainly taken place from 1947, the Indian owners recorded in Darjeeling are mainly people coming from business background. As Darjeeling tea was famous for its taste and variety around the world thus knowing its value in the world market the business communities of India came forward to buy the tea gardens of the Darjeeling hills, unlike in Sub-Himalayan region where local Bengali became owners, where as in Darjeeling people of local community were absent in owning tea gardens. In Darjeeling hills great number of rise of Indian owners and fall of foreign owners

can be seen in between 1947 to 1970, from writings of Manas Das Gupta. Gupta mentions, “An analysis of 27 joint stock companies of Darjeeling reveals that between 1940 and 1970 while the number of non-Indian directors declined from 112 to only 11, the number of Indian directors showed a corresponding increase from 6 to 85 in the same period. Of these Indian directors the number of directors with “merchant” background shot up from 2 in 1940 to 83 in 1970.”²¹ After 1970’s the ownership of the tea plantations of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region came in the hand of the Indians in independent India. Whole country was liberated from the colonial clutches and everyone form leaders, businessmen, labourers and everyone who dreamt of new independent India, where everything were Indian and for Indians. But the dream of the tea plantation labourers did not changed entirely; as the owners did changed but the system, work of management, low wages received by the labourers and other problem stood same as that of the colonial system.

The record of the transfer of ownership from foreign to Indian owner of tea plantations of West Bengal from the year 1946 to 1957 is mentioned below in the table 6.3:

Table 6.3: Transfer of Ownership of Tea Gardens in Different Tea District of West Bengal.

Sl.No.	Name of Estate	District	Sub-Division	Area In Hector	Effective Date of Sale
1.	Makaibari	Darjeeling	Kurseong	312.96	01/11/1948
2.	Goomtee	Darjeeling	Kurseong	139.51	20/03/1950
3.	Moondakothi	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	520.27	01/12/1954
4.	Chongtong	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	431.17	01/12/1954
5.	Dooteriah	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	525.54	01/12/1954
6.	Kalej Valley	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	266.60	01/12/1954
7.	Ambootia	Darjeeling	Kurseong	309.91	12/03/1954
8.	Phuguri	Darjeeling	Kurseong	240.29	01/12/1954
9.	Kumai	Darjeeling	Kalimpong	287.05	01/01/1954
10.	Good Hope	Jalpaiguri	Jalpaiguri	406.47	01/01/1954
11.	Rangliot	Darjeeling	Darjeeling	75.22	30/06/1956

Source: Record collected from Cost Account Section, Tea Board, Kolkata. Referred from Rohit Sharma’s PhD Thesis titled “Trade Union Movement in the Tea Gardens of Darjeeling Hills”.²²

6.3: Condition of the Tea Plantation Labourers in Post-Colonial Bengal.

“With the advent of industrial revolution in Europe, in the 18th and 19th centuries, a new class of factory workers was emerged in the world economy. Capital and labour were main factors of production in the production processes of industrial revolution. Consequently, producers or owners and workers were emerged in the private economy. So far as welfare of the society is concerned, it was necessary to maintain labour standards for workers and provide them welfare facilities as per labour standards. Therefore, the International Labour Organization was established in 1919, under the treaty of Versailles. After the second war period, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The most important fundamental international instrument informing much social, economic and political policies of many developed and developing countries in the world is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948.”²³ From the above mentioned statement we can figure out that the after capital labour were the main factor in the industrial revolution, hence the labourers became one of the important factor and they had to be maintained in a standard manner. To maintain and provide the labourers the necessary welfare facilities as per the labour standard the International Labour Organisations was also formed in 1919. However, Britain was also one member during the Treaty of Versailles under which the ILO was formed, but as the things was stated in the Part XIII of the Peace Treaty, where it states about removal of injustice, hardship of the labourers,²⁴ all these mentioned in the peace treaty were not followed by the British planters in the tea plantation in particular and in India in general. The system of labour management which was followed in the tea plantations of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region by the colonial planters decided the socio-economic life of the tea labourers of these two regions. The management and the owners of the tea plantation did change and came in the hand of the Indians, but sadly the labour management process and labour control stood the same, the colonial system was followed with only some changes.

In post-colonial India the status of the labourers of the tea plantation did not changed nor got a respectful upgradation. As mentioned above the labour management and the wages provided to the labourers directly affect and even frame the socio-economic and even cultural life of the labourers, this was clearly seen in the tea plantations. The socio-economic changes, labour protest and other issues related with the labourers in the post-colonial period will be further discussed. The socio-economic condition of an individual or a family is measured by looking at the education, income and occupation, within which comes other indicators like

house, availability of nutritional food, kinds of education and educational institution the person goes to, neighbourhood and few more.²⁵ The factors of socio-economic status as mentioned by Elizabeth H Baker will be one primary feature to be analysed in this chapter. The wages paid to the labourers were similar to that of the colonial period, the daily wage of the labourers was calculated and were paid weekly or in 15 days, this minimum daily wage is known as *hazri*. The labourers are also provided specific amount of work within the garden especially during the plucking period after his *hazri* time is over or within the *hazri* working time and the payment made for this is known as *thikka*.

6.3.1: The Working Hierarchy in the Tea Plantation.

In the plantation system the wages differ between the categories of workers, the *hazri* and *thikka* system of payment is limited to the labourers and the rate of amount paid is also the lowest among them. The different categories in the plantation system in a hierarchical manner are: 1) Management, 2) Staff, 3) Sub-Staff and 4) Coolies or Workers.²⁶ This hierarchy in the tea plantation not only differentiates its work and facilities they enjoy but even differs the amount to payable to them for their work; the amount payable to the labourers are wages (*Kharcha*: the locally used term in tea gardens), and the amount received by the management to sub-staffs are termed as salary (*Talab*: the local word used in the tea gardens), generally from management to sub-staffs they are paid in a monthly basis, but the pay scale between the managers and assistant manager, staffs and sub-staffs differs immensely. The difference of pay scale between all the different hierarchy in the tea plantation system emerged from the colonial period and which is still prevalent in the tea plantations.

Before discussing further about the different categories in the tea plantation hierarchy, we need to understand the two different administrative differences which prevailed in the tea plantation in the early phase of the post-independence period. In the early independent period the tea plantations were mostly taken over by the Indian owners from the colonial ones. But there were some tea gardens which were owned by Indians even before independence or before the transfer of ownership took place; this type of planters was mostly existed in the Sub-Himalayan region than the tea gardens in the hills. In the early independent period in tea plantation after the colonial tea gardens were taken over by Indians, after that there existed two different administrative structure, the transferred and some tea gardens having some Indians shares and run by big companies followed British structured administration, whereas in the tea gardens already ran by Indians followed the Indian administrative structure in their tea garden.

The difference between these two types of administrative structure in the tea gardens is discussed by Sharit Bhowmik in a clear approach. Sharit Bhowmik mentions, “The British types of gardens are owned by large companies like Duncan Brothers, Andrew Yule, Jardine and Henderson, Macneill & Magor, Davenport and so on. These companies own a large number of tea gardens. They may not be Sterling concerns, as quite a few have their controlling shares in the hands of Indians (e.g. Duncans, Andrew Yule, Macneill & Magor, Daveport, etc). They have however maintained the old structure as under the British owners. The term “British administrative structure” is not meant to be equated with British ownership. Gardens with an Indian administrative structure is those which are owned by Indian companies. These companies individually owned the gardens that the ‘British type’ as mentioned earlier.”²⁷

While comparing the two the tea gardens owned by the Indians were smaller in size and mostly run individually whereas the British administrative structured tea gardens were larger in number and in size. The organisation of the small Indian owners came to be known as the Indian Tea Planters Association later known as Tea Association of India and the British style of companies were associated as the Indian Tea Association. On the question of why the different category within the plantation system is termed as hierarchy can be better explained with what Sharit Bhowmik has mentioned in his work. Bhowmik mentions, “Another distinguishing factor between the British type of gardens and the Indian type is that the former maintains the administrative hierarchy more rigidly. For instance, in such gardens a person in the management category generally cannot have social intercourse with the other categories. An assistant manager does not entertain a member of the staff inside his house. The staff member may not go beyond the verandah of the house. Workers are not allowed into the verandah, they cannot go beyond the lawns of the house. In Indian type such rigidity is generally not maintained. The relations between management and staff are less formal. This is because income cases the members of the management may have been staff members earlier. The pay-scale of the management in these two types of gardens differs vastly. The British type of the garden provides more pay and also attractive perquisites to its manager. These include lavishly furnished, palatial houses, allowances for entertainment and transport, and so on. The Indian type gardens do not provide so many benefits to their management.”²⁸ The Indian type gardens which we have discussed are found in the tea plantation of Sub-Himalayan region, and are not quite present in the tea plantations of Darjeeling hills. In the tea plantation of Darjeeling the administrative structure was mainly the British one, with the administrative other things like the bungalow provided to the manager and assistant manager are constructed during the British

period, which are kept as it is, even the facilities of gardens and some agricultural lands, vehicles and others are there. The manager was treated as the one and only head and the labourers did try to please the managers by work, by updating about other workers, providing vegetables or meats and so on. David Wilson Fletcher writes, “A tea garden in the Darjeeling hills is run on tradition, the whole structure founded on the ideals laid down by the pioneer planters who set out the estates and introduced the industry into the district at the turn of the century..... So, when a new manager or assistant moves in, all the coolies feel a vague resentment and a desire to impress on the intruder their own small part in the making of the garden's tea. Once they are convinced, however, that the new Sahib is a sound and strong character, they accept his authority without question, and every year they become more firmly attached to his methods. They are amenable to discipline once they are sure of impartiality. Because the manufacture of tea at remunerative prices is largely dependent upon cheap, unskilled labour, the relations between garden coolies and estate managers are the single most important factor in the production of tea.”²⁹

Within the different hierarchical categorical structure in the plantation there are different posts or ranks according to which the works have been distinguished. Management is in the top most strata of this structure, in which the manager occupies the highest rank in the tea garden. Some companies have a board of directors or similar to this above the manager but they are not mostly present in the tea gardens. The manager is commonly known as *Bara Sahib* which is frequently mispronounced as *Bara Saip* in the garden language. The manager looks after all the matter in a day-to-day basis of garden and keeps update of each and every section from administration to the work in the garden, factory and regarding the tea plants with the help of other staffs in the garden. Manager also represents the company which runs the garden, because of this when the company changes in the garden the manager is also changed only in few cases the same manager is kept by the new company which takes over the garden. If any disputes in the tea garden occurs in the tea garden the manager has to settle it with the help of local authority, if the dispute is regarding the labour or labour protest for their demand's manager takes the help of the labour officers; because of this the tea garden manager keeps a good bond with the labour officers.

The manager is assisted by assistant manager commonly known as *Chotta Sahib* in the daily work of the tea garden. The assistant manager supervises the work going on in factory and even divides the labourers in the field and supervises the works and the quality of the leaves plucked. The number of assistant managers depends on how much large area the tea garden

consists, if the area is large the company keeps two assistant managers in one garden, which is not applied to the manager. As the area in tea plantation are quite big and the work might not only take place in one area and it will be difficult for the assistant manager to handle all the area and work at once, for this assistant manager is assisted by the garden assistant and factory assistant commonly known as *bagan babu* and factory *babu* (also known as *kaul babu*; *kaul* means factory in Bengali). The term *babu* is a Bengali word used while calling person with respect which terms as sir, master, gentleman, etc. But in the tea gardens word *babu* is the term used for clerk, hence the word *bara babu* meaning head clerk who works in the office and manages all the paper works, whereas the factory and garden assistants do not work in the office.

In the early independence period all the management post and the post of staffs which are different *babus* were dominated by one Indian community who were the Bengali community. No other community were there in these post in the tea plantation, this kind of domination in these posts was present around the early 2000, which has been normalised to some extent with the representation in the posts of staff and sub-staffs by regional persons or from within the tea garden; but these do not apply in the post of manager and assistant manager. The Bengali staffs were not looked up in a good way by the labourers, they were mostly termed as puppet of the manager and even the ethnicity between those Bengali staffs and the workers who were Nepali and Adivasi (in majority) in Darjeeling hills and in the Sub-Himalayan region, which created a direct difference between them. In addition to this the Bengali staffs who worked in the tea gardens were mostly of upper caste or Brahmin families, who used to see the labourers of both the region as of lower caste and of tribal nature; hence the differentiation was there. During my field work in one of the tea garden in Darjeeling hills one person (name not mentioned because of privacy), mentioned that, when there were British staffs or manager in the tea garden (as some ownership were transferred lately in 1980's) they used to walk closely with the labourers, they sometimes used to eat from labour's tiffin and even used to touch the labourers but the Bengali staffs and managers used to treat very differently as they did not allowed the labourers to go close by, used to feel disgust with the labourers as they used to eat pork and beef meats, and eating with them was far off thing. All these kinds of issues created a gap between the Bengali origin staffs and the labourers, and even created an anti-Bengali feeling among the workers. These issues are even mentioned by Sharit Bhowmik where he states, "Work in the tea garden office has become regulated during the last fifteen years or so. This is a result of unionisation of the *babus* and their participation in the working-class

movement along with the workers. The participation of *babus* in the working-class movement marks a qualitative change both in the trade union movement and in attitudes of the workers and the staff. Before this trend set in, the workers and the staff were hostile to each other. The *babus* were viewed as the agents of management who helped in victimising the workers. The workers also suspected the *babus* of cheating them of their dues, namely, wage, rations and other facilities. These suspicions were not entirely ill-founded as *babus* were guilty of such activities. The *babus* also maintained their distance with the workers and treated them with disdain, as ignorant tribals.”³⁰

Below the category of staffs there is another category which is of sub-staffs, under which there are various hierarchical post, and these posts were even achieved by promotion and the local people i.e. Nepali's in the hills and the Adivasi's in the Sub-Himalayan regional were recruited in these posts. Like the management and staffs, the sub-staffs received little more facilities and wages in a monthly and were little higher than that of the labourers. On a hierarchical basis the different posts or ranks within sub-staffs are *Munshi*, *Chaprasi*, *Factory Sardar*, *Baidar*, *Daffadar*, *Chowkidar*, *Paniwalla* and *Davaiwalla*. All these ranks have a different works assigned, the *munshi* are in the top in the hierarchy and factory *sardars* are also termed as equal to the *munshis*, as both of them work just below the *bagan babu* and factory *babu*, in other words they assist them in their work. *Chaprasi* are similar to *munshi*, they perform similar work in the garden, but one garden there will be either *munshi* or *chaprasi* except the gardens which are large in size has both *munshi* and *chaprasi*. The work of *baidar* is to take attendance of the labourers, the labourers are given instruction to work in particular areas of garden and are divided into several groups; mostly the work and groups are announced a day earlier at the end of work. As it will be time consuming and difficult to take attendance of the labourers at one place, the *baidar* goes around with his attendance sheet or register to the places where the workers are being employed (placed employed is known as *mela* in the tea garden language) and at last submits all the attendance in the office. In the rank of *baidar* 2 *baidar* one male and one female were recruited in the gardens; female was commonly called *baidarni*. Another rank of worker in the sub-staff category is the *dafadar*, in other word he is the supervisor who supervises a group of labourers employed in the tea garden. In the field *dafadar* has a pivotal role as he not only supervises the labourers in work but even guides the labourers on what kind of work is needed in that certain garden area from the plucking of leaves to grafting of it. *Dafadars* call for the variety of work required in the plantation determines the quality of tea leaves. After *dafadar* there is *chowkidar* whose work is to look after the tea

garden so that no other human or animals enters the plantations and harms it, to look after the factory as it has various expensive machines and other essentials basically he has to guard the tea garden. Only during the colonial time, they had to look after the labourers too so that they might not run away, different labour *dhuras* (lines) labour might not unite and so on. Another two ranks are *paniwalla* whose basic work is to take drinking water in the place where the workers are employed; this post is not much common in the tea gardens of hills. Later is the *davaiwala*, who basically assists the doctor and keeps the basic medicine and first aid and provides to the labourers when required.

In the lowest strata of the plantation hierarchy are the labourers/ workers/ coolies, which ever we are comfortable using. Labourers are the most important and fundamental group in the plantation structure of tea, in other words they are the base of the tea plantation structure. In the feudal structure of Europe, the peasants were in the lowest strata facing all the hardship but were also the fundamental group and in larger in number, labourers are in the similar position in the plantation structure. Unlike the above-mentioned ranks and position of managements, staffs and sub-staffs which were works for single person but the labourers work take place in group. The works are allotted to labourers in group as per required in the particular area in the garden, and are headed or supervised by the *daffadars* (even known as *kamdari* in the tea garden language) as discussed in the above paragraph. The labourers are the ones who perform all the physical works required in the tea gardens. From plucking of tea leaves, grafting, clearing the weeds and unwanted bushes in the garden, maintaining small paths in between the tea bushes which are mostly swept away by floods in plains and by minor lands slides in the hills during the monsoon season and so on.

The labourers in the tea plantation consist of both male and female. The plucking of tea leaves is mostly given to female as their hands while plucking are said to move quite swiftly than of male and the quality of the leaves are also maintained by their plucking, overall women labourers are more efficient than male labourers in plucking. While discussing about the swiftness of hand of female workers I came across a reason for it during my field work in a tea garden by a women labour. The women labour of that particular tea garden stated that, “we women use our hand swiftly than the heavy hands of male workers, and it is said that our hands are soft and light so naturally our hands moves fast, this might be true but there is another reason as well we women not only have to work in the garden, after we finish our work our another work of daily life starts too, we have to cook food, wash cloths and look after some domesticated animals too. We have to cut grass and feed them, and many other, this works has

been done by our mothers and now we are doing the same, to get the work done fast so that we can have time for other works they worked fast and seems like it has passed to us hereditarily, she adds but our hands are not soft plucking has made our hands firm, she laughs.”³¹ What that women labourers said can be perfectly true, from early morning the women labourers from making tea, preparing food they starts their work and at the end of the day they end with looking after domesticated animals (if any), preparing dinner and other household works. The women labourers are not much helped in the household work by their counter parts. Even during my field work I saw some women labourers as they have plucked quite a tea leaves which will fulfil her days *hazira*, after working swiftly she manages to get some time and at that time she cuts grasses in that area which she carries with her to her home to feed the domesticated animals. If labourers have a tough life and hard work in the gardens the women labourers face much tougher and faces more hardship in her daily life. The labourers who are the base and performs hardest work in the tea plantation structure are the ones who receives the lowest of the wages, and not in a monthly basis but in a 15 days’ basis which are also not given properly in most of the tea gardens and not to mention about the basic facilities which are provided in an irregular basis and sometimes not even provided.

6.3.2. Labour and Tea Plantation in the Post-Colonial Period.

The tea plantation and its production in India has not only been a product of trade but it also represents the country in the global level with its quality and its price in the world trade has always been on a higher side. Tea plantation was one industry where the government of independent India didn’t have to work on its upgradation nor had to worry about its export and market because from the colonial period this industry had set itself in the world market on a safer side. Tea plantation sector is one of the organised sectors in India, with trade it also attracts lots of tourism in India mostly after independence; in addition to this the tea plantation set in the hills were the summer stations for the Britishers where they had built quite a number of buildings which are seen as the colonial heritage and attracts a number of tourists. The coming of tourist helps the economy of the region but it mostly prospers the town economy rather than of rural tea garden areas.

In the tea plantation the first problem which has been there since independence is regarding the low wage paid to the labourers, especially in the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. Because of the low wages paid and the irregular supply of basic facilities and basic needs, many disputes have taken place between the management and the

labourers, which will be discussed further. Sharit Bhowmik writes, “Wages of tea garden workers are the lowest in the organised sector. There are 2,13,000 tea garden workers in the three tea growing areas in the state namely, Dooars in Jalpaiguri district, Darjeeling Hills and Terai in Darjeeling district. Dooars is the largest of the three, having two-thirds of the area under tea and employing 146055 workers. At present, the daily wages for males are Rs 9 in Dooars, Rs 8.94 in Terai and Rs 8.62 in Darjeeling Hills. Women, who form half the labour force, get 17 paise less in Dooars and Terai and 11 paise less in Darjeeling Hills.”³² The referred quote from Sharit Bhowmik, which has been published in 1982 where he states the ‘at present while writing about the wages, hence we can figure out that the wage rate which he has mentions is of the 1980’s. After money capital the planters and the tea company the labourers are the human capital for them, they are most important for tea production and are the main moving force behind the world-famous tea production. The industrial and technological development may bring various new machineries and even high yielding variety (H.Y.V) of seeds; all these will not be able to reinstate the labourers. But the same labourers were facing the dispute of low wages.

During the colonial period the British planters used to pay the labour wage in own manner, the Planter’s Association were given the responsibility of fixing labour wages, which I have even mentioned in the previous chapter. Regarding this Sarkar writes, “Before the Industrial Disputes Act 1947, Minimum Wages Act 1948 and Committee on Fair Wages in 1949, the British Planters during the days of British Raj were generally influenced by the policy of the *laissez faire* adopted by the Government. This policy precluded State intervention in disputes relating to wages. During this period the wage fixation was left to the dictates of the Planter’s Association in Darjeeling Hills and as a consequence, no principle or criterion was in evidence in the process of time-to-time revision of wages.”³³ In 1931 The Royal Commission on the Labourers in India was formed and after its survey a report was produced in which the rise in the wage of labourers to improve the condition of labour was mentioned but did not made a principle where the hike in wages were to be made in certain period, more than wage the focus was made in the improvement of health and sanitations of labourers, which I have mentioned in the previous chapter.

The government of independent India came up with an act for the welfare of the labourers in the country; the act came to be known as The Minimum Wage Act, 1948. This act brought the idea of minimum wage for the first time, under this act the wages were to be fixed in the industries for all skilled and unskilled labourers. The states of India had to come up with

their State Minimum Wage Act to monitor that the Minimum Wage Act of 1948 is effectively and properly in use in the particular state. In 1949 Government of India formed a committee to study on the wages, with a motive to see if any changes or wage fixation is required in the plantation sector and industrial sector, the committee was known as the Committee on Fair Wage, 1949. The Committee on Fair Wages gave its report which consisted of various issues; the one important issue which they brought was the explanation of different kinds of wage systems. The explanation has been mentioned by R.L. Sarkar in his work, Sarkar writes,

“(a) *Living Wage*: This represents the ultimate goal in wage policy. A living wage was defined to provide for a standard of living that would ensure good health for the worker and his family, as well as a measure of decency, comfort, education of children, and safeguards against misfortunes. The implication of the level of living wage is a high level of living.

(b) *A Minimum Wage*: It should provide for subsistence of the worker’s family, for his efficiency, for the education of his family, for medical care and some basic amenities. Much difference does not exist between a living wage and the minimum wage. The Committee recommended that the employer’s ability to pay is irrelevant in respect of this minimum wage.

(c) *A Fair Wage*: In between the minimum wage and the living wage, the committee introduced a middle stage, called a “fair wage” which would depend on labour productivity, prevailing rates of wages in the area and comparable occupation, level of national income and the place of industry in the national economy.”³⁴

The above-mentioned Living wage, a minimum wage and a fair wage has been taken as the main fascinating concepts by the labour leaders or the trade union leaders in the tea plantation, and has made these concepts as the primary demands from many times till date, but they have not been able to achieve it till date.

The West Bengal state government also took some measures to safe guard the labourers and to make that the wages which they receive is justified to them. The state government set up an advisory committee for the tea plantation to survey on the matter of wages of the tea plantation workers. Sharit Bhowmik writes, “In March 1950, the state government appointed the Minimum Wages Advisory Committee for Tea Plantations. The recommendations of this committee came into effect into early 1952. The committee noted that a minimum wage must not merely be a subsistence wage, but should help the workers provide for education, health

and other facilities.”³⁵ This committee was also known as the Modak Committee, after the report submitted by this committee the minimum wage was fixed at Rs 1.19 for males and Rs 1.06 for female labourers in the Dooars region. The increase of minimum wage after the committee report did not affected the wages of labour in the Darjeeling Hills as the wage board was looked after by Indian Tea Association and Indian Tea Planters Association and the workers organisation in the hills accepted the idea of ITA and ITPA on the matter of necessary arbitration according to the committee report. The ITA and ITPA made a remark that the hill labourers are happy with meagre income they were getting and it were the labour leaders who wants more and more.”³⁶ Hence the increase of wage was not made by the planters and the discussion of the minimum wage in the hills did not come into one proper decision. The differential treatment towards the tea plantation labourers was felt by the labourers of the hill plantation.

The minimum wage act was one of the first involvements by the government for the labour welfare. The wage act not only stated about the wage but even stated about the other privileges for labourers. The primary recommendations of the committee had various implications for the labourers such as,

- 1) The wage increase was to be general: it was not sufficient to bring people (i.e. labourers) upto the minimum wage level; even those above the level were to be granted increments proportionate to the increase of the lowliest workers.
- 2) Work was to be on the old scale: there was to be no casualisation of attendance and the new wage was to be earned for the old work, no matter how few hours it looks.
- 3) Wages were not to be pro-rate to work done, but the workers families were to be given cheap food by the garden management.³⁷

The Planters Association objected the minimum wage act; they were not ready to accept the concept, the planters also kept their points to be added in the act if they had to imply that, they were:

- 1) That there should be a reduction in the present wage of the workers.
- 2) That all should work minimum eight hours a day without leave.
- 3) That the price at which foodstuffs are sold to labour be increased without a corresponding increase in the labourer’s wage.³⁸

After the recommendation by the Modak committee was applied in the tea gardens in the wage payments, after few months the planters went for wage cut off with the reason of the crisis in the tea industry. Looking at the matter the state government formed a second Minimum Wage Committee to study the situation and to provide a recommendation as per required and be justifiable. The committee provided its recommendation with some changes made, which has been explained by Sharit Bhowmik in his work where he writes, “In November 1953 the second Minimum Wages Committee (2nd MWC), known as the Banerjee Committee was appointed by the state government to examine whether the steps taken by the planters was justified or not. The committee recommended that the minimum wages laid down by the Modak Committee be restored. At the same time, certain benefits which the workers received in kind were sought to be curtailed. Foodgrains, which were being supplied to the workers at a concessional rate of Rs 5.00 per maund (1 maund/mann=4 kg), was to be increased to Rs 15 per maund. Workers were also getting certain essential commodities such as pulses, mustard oil, sugar, jaggery, and kerosene at slight concession, a practice which had started since the Second World War. These concessions were to be withdrawn. The workers were to be given an additional 34 paise per day as cash conversion for these facilities.”³⁹ The other salient features of the Banerjee Committee’s recommendation which are mentioned by Manas Das Gupta are as follows:

- 1) The price of concessional cereals purchased by the labourers shall be raised from Rs. 5 to Rs. 15 a maund in Duars and Terai and more in Darjeeling.
- 2) Six days of a week shall be offered to all workers and there shall be no further retrenchment. Where there had been retrenchment (in December 1952 and January 1953) such cases shall be reviewed.
- 3) In lieu of the increased issue price of concessional cereals and in lieu of the discontinuance of the supply of food stuffs other than cereals, the workers will be paid an additional sum.
 - a) In gardens over 500 acres: two and a half annas per diem for adult workers and one and a quarter annas per diem for minor workers.
 - b) In gardens under 500 acres: two annas per diem for adult workers and of one anna per diem for minor worker.⁴⁰

As mentioned by the committee and according to the act the employers had to increase the price of cereals paid to the labourers of Rs 15 per mound from the previous level of Rs 5 mound

in the Sub-Himalayan region and in the Terai, but in case of Darjeeling hills plantation the amount had to be increased to Rs 17.50 per mound from the previous level of Rs 8 per mound.

The above discussed issues of the minimum wages act 1952 which was introduced for the benefits of labourers of the tea plantation but the employers provided the minimum wage as per recommended but cut off other amenities of the labourers. The employers some way or other did not gave the labourers to benefit the required demands nor did they want the economic stability of the labourers as they wanted them to be always on the economic crisis so they would not demand more than the minimum required and it will be easy for the employers to negotiate their way if any disputes arise.

The Government after being notified about the condition of the plantation labourers which were really in an awful situation, after a long discussion and debates the government introduced a bill in the parliament and the bill became act on 1951. The act passed in Indian Parliament came to be known as Plantation Labour Act 1951. The act was introduced for the plantation sector of India which includes tea, coffee, rubber, cinchona and later cardamom was added later when it was amended. The Plantations Labour Act [PLA] which sought to provide for the welfare of labour and to regulate the conditions of workers in plantations. Under this law, the State Governments have been empowered to take all feasible steps to improve the lot of the plantation workers. The passing of PLA brought some improvements in the plantations sector. It also helped in creating conditions for organising the workers and the rise of trade unions. The act also mentioned the facilities like medicinal facilities, latrines, drinking water, canteen, crèches and other which the employer had to provide to the labourers.⁴¹ The act even has the provision of Chief Investigation Officer appointed by the government who will look after if the PLA is been implemented properly or not in the plantation.⁴² The Chief Investigating Officer has the right to file a complaint if he finds the violation of PLA in the plantation and the employers are made to pay fines as per the clause 36 of PLA,⁴³ but the labourers are not liable to file a complaint against the employer even when the PLA norms are violated. The primary statutory provisions introduced by the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 for the labour welfare of the plantation sector are mentioned briefly in the list below:

- 1) Compulsory housing construction for the labourers,
- 2) Right and duty of the Government Inspectors to look into the problems of tea gardens and supply information to the government,
- 3) Provision for crèches and conservancy for the children of the women workers,

- 4) Display of proper notices regarding the period of work of the labourers,
- 5) Appointment of welfare officers in the gardens employing more than 300 labourers,
- 6) Provision for canteen and recreational facilities for the workers,
- 7) Provision for medical facilities within the gardens and construction of a Group Hospital by 1957,
- 8) Provision for sickness and maternity benefits to the workers,
- 9) Supply of umbrellas, blankets and raincoats to the labourers, and
- 10) Maintenance of registers and returns for inspection by the Government.⁴⁴

The PLA was very much opposed and various objections were raised by the employers/Planters in the tea plantation in particular. They did not want the PLA to be enforced in the tea gardens, for that they started to criticise some parts and sometimes even the whole norms of PLA to delay its enforcement. Sadly, with all the norms which are present in the PLA for the labour the act has not been implemented in tea gardens of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region to the fullest manner, whether the labourers in the tea gardens are unaware of the PLA norms or the trade unions who all represent them are failing in the implementation of PLA or both of them are being ignorant about it. The complaint by the Chief Investigation Officer who is mostly the Labour officers has not been able to file such complaints against the employers on the violation, with some meetings between them the matters are settled all the time. The acts introduced by both the state government and the central government during the early phase of independent India for the benefits of the labours had mostly resulted in a failure. Even in the recent period same acts and its norms are been used in the tea plantation with some changes with few amendments, but still the acts are not been able to function fully in the tea gardens for the labour welfare, either they are been rejected or they are compromised with some consideration or curtailment of other subject. This has been the sad reality of the tea garden labourers.

The labour wages were incremented in its daily wages by 18 paise in the year 1955 and in the year 1959 of 13 paise. Bhowmik has mentioned this much clearly that, “there were two ad hoc increments in the daily wage rates. The first was in 1955 of 18 paise as there was a boom in the tea market in India as a result of the Korean War. The other was in 1959 of 13 paise when the state government notified that there should be a rise in the dearness allowance as a result of the rise in the price index.”⁴⁵ From the minimum wage act of 1952 and in the two ad hoc increase of wage which was done by the pressure of the government and one by the

employers after receiving huge profit, we can find the difference in the wage which was increased in between nearly a decade; the difference is easier to see by the table below.

Table 6.4: Increment Difference of Wages in between 1952 to 1959.

	1st minimum wage committee 1952	2nd minimum wage committee 1953	Ad hoc increase (18 paise) 1955	Ad hoc increase (13 paise) 1959
Male	1.19	1.53	1.71	1.84
Female	1.06	1.39	1.57	1.70
Children	N. A	0.83	0.92	1.00

Source: Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*.⁴⁶

The minimum wage act of 1951 and its second recommendation in 1953 on the basis of which the wages were incremented by few rupees, the recommendation of those increase of wage to be provided to the labourers were on a guaranteed minimum wage. One significant change came in the year 1957, as during the 15th session of the Indian Labour Conference (ILC) on July 1957 an agreement was made which stated that the workers in the major industries of the country will not only have a guaranteed minimum wage but a need-based minimum wage, and therefore the central government was put under lots of pressure in the parliament for these changes. After being pressurised much by opposition in the parliament regarding the changed passed by the 15th session of ILC that year, the government appointed a wage board for 22 industries, in different time frame. Within the 22 industries the wage board for tea the wage board for tea plantation was appointed in December 1960, three and half year after the announcement by the government.

The recommendation by the wage board for tea plantation was provided in the year 1966, which was after five years and six months and whereas the wage boards of other 21 industries came within four years. During the tenure of wage board for tea the board declared an interim increase of wage, as stated by Bagaram Tulpule a veteran trade unionist in his work stating that, “the tea plantation wage board recommended a measly interim increase of 8 to 15 paise per day in December 1961 and gave its final report more than four years later.”⁴⁷ The final recommendation by the wage board for tea was presented on 1st April 1966, in which the recommendation by the board was that, “the wages for men, women, and children be increased by 13 paise, 10 paise and 7 paise respectively from 1st January 1966 and a further increase of

2 paise for men and women and 1 paise for children from 1st April 1966.”⁴⁸ The main rationale of the wage board while fixing the wages for the labourers was on the basis of need-base. More precisely the main method of fixing the need-base wage was to take 3 units of consumption for every adult male worker among other things. The 3 units of consumption were taken as the basic units for all the 21 industries but in the tea plantation industry the unit was taken into half which was 1.5 units. Further the employers did not agree as per the recommendation and argued that since the employment in tea was family based and the ratio of 1:3 was too high for the industry. The board did not validate the argument made by the employers stating that the family system is not unique in the tea plantation.

Even though the board found the employers’ argument baseless, while giving the final recommendation, the board further mentioned that “it was not in a position to recommend wages in keeping with the present cost of living and in terms of the wages in keeping with the present cost of living and in terms of need-based wage formula of the 15th Indian Labour Conference. That the board has taken an extremely practical view and did not ignore the family system of employment in tea plantations is also apparent from the board’s recommendations.”⁴⁹ The workers representative had to put signatures on the recommendation after its publication to maintain the unanimity on the recommendation as the central government had declared before that the recommendation would only be accepted when there is unanimity on the final recommendation. Hence with the fear of getting the recommendation rejected or the employers may decrease the wage increase and negotiate with the board if resistance being put on the recommendation which might make the labourers receive less facility, might have made the labour representatives bound to sign while having dissatisfaction with it. The recommendation by the wage board for tea is said to be not very fair from the worker’s side. Two main points are taken to be the point of dissatisfaction for the labourers, Firstly, the board has clearly not followed the primary purpose on which the wage boards were formed which is the need-base minimum wage, which was not granted as the board has clearly mentioned in the recommendation too which has been referred above. Secondly, the wage difference between the female labour and the male labour was further increased to 17 paise from 14 paise, and one must note that the women labourers are the major and primary labour force in the tea plantation. The increase of the wages during the first phase of wage board are been stated in the table below.

Table 6.5: Increments of Wages in the First Phase of Wage Board for Tea

	Interim Increments	Final Recommendations	
		01.01.1966	& 01.04.1966
Male	1.98	2.11	2.13
Female	1.84	1.94	1.96
Children	1.07	1.14	1.15

Source: Sharit Bhowmik, *Class Formation in the Plantation System*⁵⁰

The wage board's recommendation for the wage of labourers was not a rewarding for the labourers in one way but in other way the labourers and the trade unions saw the opportunity of bargaining and raising the demand of wage increment in the tea garden. Particularly in the state of West Bengal the trade unions became strong and more active after Communist Party of India (CPI) came into power, which was seen as the political party for the working class. The constant gheraos, strike and stoppage of work increased manifold with the trade unions affiliated to CPI or having communist ideology. Looking at the intensity of the situation the state government in April 1973 introduced the second minimum wage fixation committee for tea plantation. The union of major trade unions in the tea plantation demanded the wage to be paid on the basis of need-base, and the wage would double to Rs 7.40 per day from the prevailing wage of Rs 3.14 per day. The employers like before did not accepted the need-base wage increment, rather they were willing to increase the wage by 7 paise. The trade unions opposed the decision of the employers and continued with their strikes and demonstration as a result of which the employers had to increase the wage by 25 paise instead of 7 paise.

In the year the tea industry experienced a boom in the tea market. The price of tea went on increasing, the price in both domestic and international or in export started to increase. It is said that the price of tea in auction went three-fold the existing price. Looking at the immense price rise of tea the labour side asked for the revision of the wage to the second wage fixation committee. The employers agreed for the revision of wage and the second wage fixation committee announced in its final recommendation that, "the daily wages were to increase by one rupee from August 1977 and a further increase of one rupee from July 1978. The *doubly* (extra leaf) was increased from 7 paise per kg to 10 paise."⁵¹ The increase of wage was not an interim one, if the price of tea goes down even then the wage was not to be bring into consideration. In respect to the wages of the labourers, with the pressure by the women members in the parliament the government passed the Equal Remuneration Act in 1976, which abolished the difference of wage between the male and women labourers. After the minimum

wage recommendation by the wage board the difference of wage between the men and women increased from 14paise to 17 paise. But the employers opposed the act and made various issues to defend their arguments. In some tea gardens where the wage was brought into equal footing the workload for the women workers were raised. On this matter the Labour Ministry clarified that, “the Equal Remuneration Act applied to ‘equal nature of work’ and not to the ‘volume of work’. Hence the increase of *thika* was illegal.”⁵² Rationally when we look at the tea plantation the women are the primary work force and more precisely in plucking of tea they are indispensable, but still the employers argued against the equal pay between two sexes and rather brought more and more flimsy reasons to debate. During this period wage difference between two sexes existed in the tea plantation, the difference in basic wage and even in the interim rise can be seen. To get a clear understanding of the differences a comparison of wages of 1966-67 and 1975-76 has been presented.

Table: 6.6: The Details of the Wages paid to the Labourers in the years 1966-67 and 1975-76.

1966-67						1975-76							
In Darjeeling Hills Tea Gardens													
Basic (in Rupees)		Dearness Allowance (in Rupees)		Total Wage (with interim increase) in Rupees		Basic (in Rupees)		Dearness Allowance (in Rupees)		Total Wage (in Rupees)			
<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>		
1.05	1.00	0.40	0.40	1.60	1.52	3.29	3.18	18	18	3.47	3.36		
1966-67						1975-76							
In Tea Gardens of Sub Himalayan Region													
Hazri (in Rupees)		Dublie (in Rupees)		Dearness Allowance (in Rupees)		Total Wage (with interim increase) in Rupees		Basic (in Rupees)		Dearness Allowance (in Rupees)		Total Wage (in Rupees)	
<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
0.63	0.57	0.62	0.56	0.56	0.56	1.95	1.81	3.64	3.47	18	18	3.82	3.65

Note: 1. M stands for Male and F stands for Female.

2. The Interim increase of wage in 1966-67 was 0.9 and 0.6 for male and 0.7 and 0.5 for female labourer in Darjeeling and 0.8 and 0.6 for male and 0.7 and 0.5 for female in the Sub-Himalayan region.

Source: Compliment of Tea Statics Published by Tea Board for two different years of 1966-67⁵³ and 1975-76⁵⁴.

From the above mentioned table, we can clearly see the difference of basic wage, hazri, dublie, interim hike in wage and the total wage between the male and female labourers of the tea gardens of both Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. Which shows that the gender differentiation and gender domination does exists in the tea plantation.

The central and state government introduced various wage review committees, with the motive to of presenting wage justice for the labourers, as the result of this the wage board was also formed. In a bitter note all the above discussed committees for wages and acts have presented an unsatisfactory report for the labourers even though the wages were increased in various time. The wages increased were not as per the market economic rate where the labourers would survive smoothly and could save some earnings, lead a minimum standard life, provide good education to children and stay away from taking money from money lenders. The committees and wage acts had some loop holes because of which they could not provide facilities and wage as they had proclaimed earlier in the act of recommendation. Likewise, the wage board formed in 1960 which gave its final recommendation on 1966 had various defects, some of its main defects as mentioned by Sarkar in his work. The defects are stated as follows:

- a) The time taken by the Wage Board (or Minimum Wage Board) in its decision making process is unduly long,
- b) There are difficulties regarding implementation of recommendations. Many tea gardens are slow to implement them even after the official announcement of increases in wage rates,
- c) The Wage Board has a failure on two fronts: it can't consider the rise in wages in accordance with the need-based criterion, as far the workers are concerned; on the other hand, it can't suit their recommendations to the capacity of industry to pay,
- d) It has failed to adjust wage differentials with a view to providing incentives for advancing skills,
- e) It has not encouraged and system of incentive payments or payment by result,
- f) It has not succeeded in ensuring industrial peace by evolving rational and scientific wage structures. The view that the wage board should be made statutory, so that their recommendations can be made statutory, so that their recommendations can be made legally binding, is subject to some comments.⁵⁵

Regarding the wages of the labourers from 1980 onwards a tripartite agreement was conducted, in which the Government acted as an arbitrator. In this agreement the representative

of the employers, labourers and government will be present in the conference and henceforth decide the wages of the labourers after all three representatives agree on the outcome of the conference. This tripartite formula for discussion on wage increment and providing bonus has been followed till date. While the negotiation has been held between the three representatives in the conference concerning the wages the concept of minimum wage as defined by the Honourable Supreme Court is not followed. Supreme Court has approved that, “the fair wage concept as being a wage above the minimum and limited only by the capacity of the industry to pay. The actual level of wages would depend on four criteria:

- 1) The labour productivity,
- 2) The prevailing rates of wage in the same or similar occupation in the same neighbouring localities,
- 3) The level of national income, and
- 4) The place of industry in the economy.⁵⁶

However, during the negotiations concerning wages all three representatives confined themselves to two criteria, namely the financial capacity of the tea estates and the concept of need-based wages, this is one of the reasons because of which the labour wages has always been in the lowest side within the organised industrial sector. From 1970's onwards the negotiation regarding the labour wage was done under the presence of the government, government acted as an umpire in between the employer's representation and the labour's representation. After the interference of the government the wage increment has taken place in the tea plantations of West Bengal, i.e. Darjeeling region, Terai and Dooars regions. In West Bengal it is seen as the government was run by the communist party which is seen as the party supporting the labours and due to which the wage increments after every three years were possible, but it is as matter of debate on for and against. Though the raise in the daily wage was done in every three years after a tripartite meeting and agreement, but it was never done in such a level where the labourers way of living was lifted to a minimum standard but to a bare minimum where the labourers would survive with the market value of the daily products.

The different amount of wage hike which was made in the different period after every three years, the wage hike was not done in one go but it was done in the different phases with different instalment within the three years. The rate of increase of the wage between the adult labourers and the child labour are never same as the work load for the child labourers was lower

than the adult. Some records of hike of daily wage in the different period of the tea garden labourers are compiled mentioned below in the table 6.5.

Table 6.7: Wage Hike in the Different Period and the Rate of Hike

Period of Wage Hike	Rate of Increase in the Daily Wage	
	Adult	Child
7 th July 1975 to March 1976	45p	22.50
1 st April 1976 to June 1977	45p	22.50p
1 st July 1977 to 30 th June 1978	1Rs	0.50p
1 st July 1978 to 30 th June 1979	1Rs	0.50p
1 st July 1979 to 30 th June 1980	90p	45p
1 st July 1980 to 30 th June 1981	90p	45p
1 st July 1981 to 30 th June 1982	90p	45p
1 st August 1983 to 30 th July 1984	75p	38p
1 st August 1984 to 30 th July 1985	75p	38p
1 st August 1985 to 30 th June 1986	75p	38p
1 st June 1987 to 31 st May 1988	85p	43p
1 st June 1988 to 31 st May 1989	85p	43p
1 st June 1989 to 31 st May 1990	85p	43p

Source: Compiled from different tables from Labour in Tea Gardens by Manas Das Gupta.⁵⁷

From the above table we come to know about the rates of the wage hike taken place in different period till 1990. The employers whenever they increase the wages they always argue that the increase in wage has caused a fall in productivity as Bhowmik⁵⁸ has mentioned and even they argue that the wage increment has been done even without the increase of profit on tea selling, and they always feel that the labourers are paid higher than the actual wage should be hence they would never accept that the wage paid to the labourers are low. As discussed in the above regarding the different Acts and Wage Boards which were formed with an idea of providing a justifiable wage to the labourers for their work, we have discussed the labourers wage and its increment in different phases from around 1950's to 1990's. The increase of the wage is very less as compared to the profit earned by the tea companies, the production of tea in West Bengal did increased and mostly the production increases while the demand increases, the production of tea in West Bengal increased around 40 percent as stated by Sharit Bhowmik which states, "Production of tea in West Bengal increased from 78,158,000 kgs in 1951 to 129,188,000 kgs in 1980."⁵⁹ The intermediate hike in wage in different phases in the tea plantation did changed the daily wages in the different years R.L. Sarkar has presented an average daily wage of the

tea plantation region of Darjeeling hills and the Sub-Himalayan Region (an average of the Terai tea gardens and Dooars tea gardens has been presented as plains), which has been presented in table 6.6.

Table 6.8: An Average Daily Wages of the Tea Plantation Labourers of Darjeeling Hills and the Plains of Terai and Dooars or Sub-Himalayan Region of West Bengal (In Rupees).

Year	Darjeeling Hills	Plains of Terai and Sub-Himalaya (Average)
1961	1.41	1.72
1962	1.59	1.78
1963	1.58	1.79
1964	1.68	1.86
1965	1.69	1.86
1966	1.90	2.00
1967	2.01	2.04
1968	2.11	2.11
1969	2.34	2.15
1970	2.38	2.37
1971	2.57	2.53
1972	2.89	2.68
1973	3.15	2.75
1974	3.79	2.93
1975	5.19	3.31
1976	5.17	3.75
1977	5.37	4.41
1978	5.92	5.17
1979	5.92	6.27
1980	6.82	7.17
1981	7.72	8.07
1982	8.62	7.17
1983	9.37	10.62
1984	9.37	10.62

Note: Average daily wage in plains is the computed average of wages in Dooars and Terai in West Bengal.

Source: “Trends in Wages and Money Earning,” R.L. Sarkar in Sarkar R.L. and Lama M.P. ed. *Tea Plantation Workers in The Eastern Himalayas*.⁶⁰

Other than wages there are other basic facilities which are a necessary for the labourers while working in the tea plantation. These necessary items are umbrellas, aprons, basket (mostly made of bamboo), sickle and blankets; with this additional house hold items like fuel, woods were provided as per the Plantation Labour Act 1951. Other primary essential benefit which the employers had to provide to the labourers are Housing, Medical facilities and other. Housing and Medical facilities are more of a social welfare which the employers had to provide to their labourers on a humanitarian ground, they are provided by the employers but in most of the tea gardens it was in a very bad situation or just for name sake and just to execute as the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 states, this kind of situation still prevails in the tea gardens. The rule 47 of the West Bengal Plantation Labour Rules of 1956, the employers has to build a pukka house every year in the tea gardens for minimum of 8% of its permanent residents residing in the garden. Even Plantation Labour Act of 1951 in its Welfare facilities to be provided by the employers in rule 15 states about providing proper housing. The rule is read as:

15. Housing facilities. -- It shall be the duty of every employer to provide and maintain necessary housing accommodation- (a)For every worker (including his family) residing in the plantation; (b)For every worker (including his family) residing outside the plantation, who has put in six months of continuous service in such plantation and who has expressed a desire in writing to reside in the plantation: Provided that the requirement of continuous service of six months under this clause shall not apply to a worker who is a member of the family, of a deceased worker who, immediately before his death, was residing in the plantation.]⁶¹

A data from the Office of Labour Commissioner, Siliguri, presents a data on the construction of houses in 1991 in the tea gardens of West Bengal, which has been presented by Manas Das Gupta. The data contents of the percentage of houses built in the tea gardens of Terai, Dooars or Sub-Himalayan region and Darjeeling. The data presents the construction of houses in 273 tea estates of West Bengal. The collection of data is present in table below.

Table 6.9: Construction of Houses in 273 Tea Estates in West Bengal up to 1991

Percentage of Construction of Total Requirement	Terai	Duars/ Dooars or Sub-Himalayan region	Darjeeling	Total
Construction upto 10%	3(5.26)	7(4.64)	2(3.13)	12(4.40)
Construction upto 11-20%	1(1.75)	4(2.63)	1(1.56)	6(2.20)
Construction upto 21-30%	5(8.77)	4(2.63)	3(4.69)	12(4.40)
Construction upto 31-40%	5(8.77)	5(3.29)	2(3.13)	12(4.40)
Construction upto 41-50%	2(3.50)	9(5.92)	1(1.56)	12(4.40)
Construction upto 51-60%	7(12.28)	13(8.55)	2(3.13)	22(8.05)
Construction upto 61-70%	5(8.77)	21(13.82)	8(12.5)	34(12.45)
Construction upto 71-80%	10(17.54)	12(7.89)	7(10.62)	29(10.62)
Construction upto 81-90%	4(7.03)	27(17.76)	11(17.94)	42(11.38)
Construction upto 91-100%	15(26.33)	50(32.90)	27(42.19)	92(33.69)
Total Number of Houses Constructed	57(100)	152(100)	64(100)	273(100)

Source of Data: Office of Labour Commissioner, Siliguri, 1993.

Source: Manas Das Gupta, *Labour In Tea gardens*.⁶²

According to the data of table 6.7, out of 273 tea gardens in 12 tea gardens of West Bengal the construction of houses was in very awfully poor condition and the rate of progress

in the construction of houses are within 10 percent. In the Sub-Himalayan region alone out of 152 tea gardens only 30 gardens completed the construction of houses up to 50 percent, as a whole in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region only 1/3rd of the gardens have fulfilled the requirements at a low percent rate, and 2/3rd of the tea garden still lacked the statutory requirements. In the tea gardens of Darjeeling the data of construction of houses are little better than that of Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region. As per the data construction of houses in Darjeeling which has completed more than 90 percent is 42.19 percent as compared to 26.33 percent and 32.90 percent of Terai and Sub-Himalayan region respectively. Even if the rates of construction of houses in Darjeeling are higher than other two regions the rate of pukka houses was little low. In the tea gardens the houses now days are mostly maintained by the labourers themselves which will be discussed further in this chapter.

After housing another important facility which the employer had to provide to the labourers is the health benefits. The facility of health to be provided by the employers has also been mentioned in the Plantation Labour Act of 1951 in its clause 10, which states,

10. Medical Facilities: -

- (1) In every plantation there shall be provided and maintained so as to be readily available such medical facilities for the workers [and their families]¹ as may be prescribed by the State Government.
- (2) If in any plantation medical facilities are not provided and maintained as required by sub-section (1) the chief inspector may cause to be provided and maintained therein such medical facilities, and recover the cost thereof from the defaulting employer.
- (3) For the purposes of such recovery the chief inspector may certify the costs to be recovered to the collector, who may recover the amount as an arrear of land revenue.⁶³

The health facilities to the labour is an important matter as most of the tea gardens are situated quite far from the urban towns, even the roads of tea gardens are narrow and vehicles were not found easily, hence in case of any accidents or any other sickness a health facility with Doctors and other medical staffs are required in the tea gardens. I would like to refer to a table below which provides a data of medical officers required for the tea garden labourers. The data comprises from the year 1985 to 1989, on the basis of number of medical officials per thousand (1000) labourers of the tea gardens in West Bengal.

Table 6.10: Medical Facilities Available Per 1000 Person in West Bengal Tea Gardens from 1985 to 1989

Year	Doctors	Beds	Mid-Wives	Nurses	Compounders	Health Assistants
1985	0.29	5.64	0.35	0.37	0.32	0.16
1986	0.32	5.31	0.39	0.35	0.28	0.15
1987	0.31	5.20	0.36	0.31	0.33	0.16
1988	0.30	4.98	0.32	0.31	0.31	0.17
1989	0.29	4.86	0.33	0.32	0.29	0.16

Source: Manas Das Gupta, *Labour in Tea Gardens*.⁶⁴

According to the data from the above table we find that in the year 1985 the number of doctors, mid-wives, nurses, compounders and health assistant all are less than one for 1000 tea garden labourers. Further data of other years till 1989 hasn't improved rather it has been going down in an awful manner. The number of all the medical assistance for every 1000 labourers as per this data is nothing more that the employers being extremely careless and being neglecting the health of the labourers.

The struggle and fight for one standard wage hike was made by the labourers in a continuous manner, as the wage problem was never taken to even a compromising position, and the minimum wage and the norm of plantation labour act were never followed.

6.4: The Condition in the Tea Plantations of West Bengal in 21st Century.

1st January 2001, was the day from when the world celebrated the beginning of the 21st century, which people even term as the beginning of another modern period in the human civilization. In the tea plantations of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region noting was new and nothing changed with the advent of 21st century. The situation, problem and struggle for the labourers remained the same and the employers were not leaving behind any stone unturned to make profit from the tea plantation. The labourers demand for a minimum wage or a hike in wages continued in this century as well, which has not been done on the standard level where the labourers desire it to be as per the minimum wage acts and the plantation labour acts. In this

portion of this chapter the focus will be made on the problems the labourers which they have been facing and the problem the tea plantation as such is going through in this century.

6.4.1: The Decline of the Labourers in the Tea Gardens.

The tea plantation has constantly been seen as a sector which is characterised by the low wages, appalling socio-economic condition of the labourers, because of which various remonstrations by the labourers has been arising for betterment of wage and their living condition; which is very true. The system of employment which is followed in tea garden is the family based employment which we have discussed before and this system is the same system used by the colonial employers. As discussed earlier the tea plantation requires a fair amount of capital to function and the second one is the large amount of labourers, without whom the tea plantation doesn't function in a smooth manner. In the year 2000 the number of labourers working in the tea regions of North Bengal, which are Darjeeling, Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region were around 2, 29, 185 as per the data given by K.R. Sharma and T.C. Das. The population of different tea garden in 2000 has been presented in the table below;

Table 6.11: Number of Tea Plantation and Labourers in the Three Tea Regions of North Bengal in the Year 2000.

Sl. No.	Tea Region	Number of Tea Plantations	Number of Labourers
1.	Darjeeling Hills	72	43,259
2.	Terai	46	30,800
3.	Sub-Himalayan Region	158	1,55,126
Total	—	276	2,29,185

Source: K.R. Sharma and T.C. Das, *Globalisation and Plantation Workers in North-East India*.⁶⁵

Tea plantation is facing the scarcity of labourers now days, this problem of decreasing labour number in the tea gardens did not occur recently or suddenly but it started years before; in the early phase of 21st century the process has already started. A data presented by Khemraj Sharma on the tea plantation of the Darjeeling hill presents the decreasing number of the labourers, which can be seen as a general issue prevailing in every tea garden. The table presents as:

Table 6.12: Tea Plantation Workers in Darjeeling Himalaya

Year	Permanent Workers			Casual Workers			Production	Labour
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	In Mil. Kg	Per hectare
2000 A.D	52,013	25,228	27,685	3053	2025	1025	12 mil. kg	3.74
Percentage	—	47.7	52.3	—	66.3	33.7	—	—
2007 A.D.	47,106	16,494	30,602	19,757	1,119	18,638	10 mil. kg	4.50
Percentage	—	35.1	64.9	—	5.7	94.4	—	—

Source: K.R. Sharma and T.C. Das, *Globalisation and Plantation Workers in North-East India*.⁶⁶

From the above table we can clearly see the fluctuation of labourers in the tea gardens within the time span of seven years. The number of women labourers of both the categories of permanent and casual labourers has increased from 52.3 to 64.9 % and 33.7 to 94.4 % respectively in 2000 and 2007. Whereas the number of male workers has decreased drastically, it has gone from 47.7 to 35.1 % regarding the permanent labourers and from 66.3 to 5.7% regarding the casual labourers in between 2000 and 2007. The decrease of male labourers in the tea gardens is because of the mobility of these male labourers towards the non-plantation sector. Tea plantation of both the region of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region is facing this issue of decrease of male labourers. Most of these male labourers tend to work in other sectors mainly in the construction areas as manual workers, they do not get any benefits of provident fund and other basic facilities but the wage paid is much higher than of the tea gardens. Especially in 2000's Darjeeling town and the plains of Siliguri saw a massive rise in the development of buildings and roads, where large number of labourers were required hence the male labourers from the tea gardens of both the region went to work in those sectors, while their female counter parts worked in the tea garden.

Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das in their work *Globalisation and Plantation Workers in North-East India*, has mentioned about various other issues in the tea plantation which falls under the socio-economic condition of the labourers. Within this they have mentioned about the workers and their land holding pattern in tea plantations of Darjeeling tea gardens, where they have mentioned about labourers holding land outside tea garden and the male workers are engaged in the agricultural work hence he gives less importance to the garden work.⁶⁷ The small land holding known as *kotheybari* which means a Kitchen garden, can be seen in the tea gardens where the labourers grow vegetables in small and self-sufficient manner, which are also not registered in their name like the area of house where they stay. With such low wages

especially when the writers are giving data two different of years that is 2000 and 2007, the land holding by the labourers outside the tea garden for agricultural purpose is quite a questionable mention; as during my study and personal experience I have not known about any labourers having their own land outside the tea gardens which is used for agriculture. Further they have mentioned about the labourers purchasing more lands outside the tea garden and keeping vehicles,⁶⁸ on this matter we must see whether the person purchasing land outside the tea garden and keeping vehicles are labourers or not, as some persons living in tea garden and working in some government offices and private sectors in a higher post whose parents were the labourers might purchase such, in this kind of situation we cannot count them as labourers of tea garden.

In the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills especially the young generation are mostly not willing to work in the tea plantation, the main reason being the low wages and less benefit provided. As we have given the data of the difference of the labourers of both male and female working in tea gardens in two different years which is 2000 and 2007, with in this the different aged labourers who are working in the tea plantation can be looked at to understand which age group labourers are decreasing in the tea plantation. The two tables below (Table 6.11 A & 6.11B) provide the data of the age structure of the labourers in the same two different years of 2000 and 2007:

Table 6.13 A: Age Structure of the Labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling in year 2000.

Different age spans	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total Labourers
20-30	6632	26.3%	8800	31.8%	15432
31-40	7711	30.6%	6072	21.9%	13783
41-50	8009	31.7%	10110	36.5%	18119
51-60	1876	7.4%	1980	7.1%	3856
60+	1000	4.0%	723	2.7%	1723
Total	25,228	48%	27,685	52.0%	52,913

Source: K.R. Sharma and T.C. Das, *Globalisation and Plantation Workers in North-East India*.⁶⁹

Table 6.13 B: Age Structure of the Labourers in Tea Gardens of Darjeeling in year 2007.

Different Age Span	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage	Total Labourers
20-30	4433	26.9%	5380	17.6%	9813
31-40	3208	19.4%	14,720	48.1%	17,928
41-50	6331	38.4%	3800	12.4%	10,131
51-60	2080	12.6%	4387	14.3%	6467
60+	442	2.7%	2315	7.6%	2757
Total	16,494	35%	30,602	65.0%	47,096

Source: K.R. Sharma and T.C. Das, *Globalisation and Plantation Workers in North-East India*.⁷⁰

From the above mentioned two tables we can see that the decrease in the number of labourers of 20 to 30 age group and the age group of 31 to 40 in male category from 6632 to 4433 and from 7711 to 3208 respectively. Regarding the female labourers, the decrease can be seen in the age group of 20 to 30 from 8800 to 5380 but in other age group there is an increase of labourers. Every above discussed subject and the data presented in the different tables give us the material regarding the decreasing labour number in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills, which started from the early 2000's.

The role of women in the tea plantation has remained very significant from the colonial period onwards. Women labourers are the main moving force behind the tea plantation as they are engaged in the primary work of plucking the tea leaves as required for the best quality and in addition to that the plucking must be done swiftly within certain period to maintain the quality. The period of plucking is done during the hardest weather condition in the state of West Bengal. The tea plantation region of West Bengal receives heavy rainfall and the work becomes very hard for the women labourers. After such hard nature of women's service for tea plantation in such extreme weather condition the wage they receive at the end is very low and unsatisfactory for the labourers. Therefore, the decline in the number of the women labourers in the tea plantation sector are seen undoubtedly. The declining rate of the tea gardens women labourers are increasing day by day, unless and until the employers come with a permanent and satisfying facility for the labourers the rate will keep on increasing. As mentioned by Khemraj Sharma and T.C. Das in their data of 2007 where they have shown a rise of female labourers of age between 31 to 40 years, the number may have increase in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills but the rate of increase is low as there is a decline of female labourers having age group

of 20 to 30 years, and in many tea gardens the women labour capacity are not fulfilled; this situation exists in maximum tea gardens in recent years. The increase of only female labourers (especially in between 31 to 40 age) during this period has other factors too, the factors can be seen as firstly, the females were not allowed to go outside or faraway places to earn money; the society was not liberal enough to let the women go and earn from faraway place no matter how much the earning would be. Hence, working in the tea garden was the only option to earn. Secondly, the gender superiority might have been one factor too, the male counterpart of the family would not entertain the women to earn more than him that too by going out of the tea garden, it would bring disgrace to his so called male superiority or locally known as “*Mardangi*”. Thirdly, after the earning the women labourers had another work of managing the family and all the works linked with it, which compelled the female labourers to work in the tea garden as they could earn even though in small amount; hence the increase in the number of female labourers is fair enough. This kind of factor is also mentioned by Rinju Rasaily in her work, she states, “Also the reason why women are compelled into paid labour reflects both the social relations of production within plantation life and intra-household gender dynamics.”⁷¹

The women labourers not only play a significant role in the tea plantation but their role is important in other plantations of the country which are Coffee, Rubber and others. The decline of in the number of women labourers always alarms for a wobble in that certain plantation. In pan India basis the number of female labourers has gone down in every plantation, hence the effect was also felt by the tea plantation of West Bengal. The decline of the female labourers in different tea plantation regions of India have been recorded, which has been stated by Rinju Rasaily, which states, “In tune with the all-India pattern and that observed in the case of larger tea-producing states, like Assam, there has been a significant decline of 18.7 percent of women in employment during 2000-2008, Largest reduction was recorded in Tripura where it has almost halved and in Kerala the observed decline was 54 percent. West Bengal and Tamil Nadu recorded a lower decline of 12.8 percent and 55 percent respectively.”⁷² While discussing about the decline of labourers in the tea plantation we have discussed earlier that the decline of male labourers are larger than the female labourers, to understand more clearly about the decline or the instability in the number of labourers in West Bengal I would like to refer from a data presented by Rinju Rasaily by compiling data’s from various records from the year 1998 to 2010. The data is presented in the table below:

Table 6.14: Average Daily Employment in the Tea Plantations in West Bengal from 1998 to 2010.

Year	Male	Female
1998	101,897 (47.64)	105,645 (49.40)
1999	78,518 (46.99)	84,081 (50.32)
2000	96,620 (47.31)	102,888 (50.38)
2001	97,575 (47.11)	104,689 (50.55)
2002	80,992 (46.20)	90,719 (51.75)
2003	75,917 (46.73)	83,046 (51.12)
2004	61,531 (46.26)	68,851 (51.77)
2005	71,785 (46.61)	79,568 (51.67)
2006	NA	NA
2007	78,392 (46.26)	89,950 (53.08)
2008	77,549 (45.38)	92,209 (53.96)
2009	82,703 (45.56)	97,567 (53.74)
2010	73,542 (44.70)	90,006 (54.71)

Source: Rinju Rasaily, *Women's Labour in Tea Sector*.⁷³

While referring to the table above we find a decline of the male labourers, regarding the female labourer one can notice that there is a decline in the year 1999 and 2002 from its previous years. There is variation in the number of female labourers; hence the increase is very marginal. However, the Worker Population Ratio (WPR) of female labourers in the case of the organised estate sector per se has declined as mentioned by Rinju Rasaily.⁷⁴ From the table above we can see the declining labour participation in the tea plantation of West Bengal since 1998 to 2010. There has been a rise of female labourers in some years if we refer to the above-mentioned table and in the table 6.11 A&B, but the growth rate of labourers as a whole has been very minimal, the table presented below gives us the picture of annual growth rates of labourers employed in tea gardens of West Bengal in different years.

Table 6.15: Annual Growth Rates of Labourers Employed in Tea Plantations in West Bengal from 1950 to 2006.

Region	1950	1950-1960	1960-1970	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990-2000	2000-2006	Growth Rate
West Bengal	329,034	197,165	200,280	228,705	248,174	253,459	262,039	-0.41
All India	948,598	845,166	759,646	846,659	986,781	1,210,055	1,259,950	0.50

Source: Namrata Thapa, *Employment Status and Human Development of Tea Plantation Workers in West Bengal*.⁷⁵

From the above table we can see that the growth rate of labourers in the tea plantation of West Bengal as whole has gone down into negative rate. As compared to the growth rate of labourers in all India figure it is quite lower than it. This shows that the employers are not been able to generate employment with better facilities and the lower wages paid as compared to all other organised sector has been the key factor for the labour decline in the tea plantation of West Bengal. The decreasing rate of labourers in the tea garden of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region are taking place even in the present year. The labour crisis in the tea plantation has given rise of the seasonal labourers in the plantation; they are mainly employed during the plucking period, which is the crucial period in tea plantation.

6.4.2: Scenario of Tea Plantations in the Recent Years.

The natural view of the tea plantation within the valleys and even in the plain looks very peaceful and the lush green plant which looks like a green sheet covering large area seems soothing. The scenario behind the lush green tea plantations is not silent as it looks and there is nothing soothing rather the life out there is rough. The problem of wage has been the primary problem in the tea plantation but it not only the one; there are many other issues and problems which exists there. In this section of writing I will be focusing on the issues and problem existing in the tea plantation which I found while conducting my field study. The study is mostly done by random sampling, interview with the different personals related with the tea plantation and labourers.

6.4.2.1: Out-Migration in Tea Gardens.

The decline of labourers in the tea gardens is prevalent even in present days. As mentioned in the earlier section of this chapter the decrease in the labour numbers started from around the early 2000. As the primary reason for decrease in labour number in the tea gardens is the payment of low wages and of other facilities, therefore keeping this as the prime reason we can discuss the other consequences in the tea garden. The labourers now days prefer to work in other sectors like construction, small industries, manual labour in river beds, and so on where they receive a higher wage than in the tea gardens, though with no other basic facilities, no Provident fund and gratuity. While conducting my field work I found that the labourers in the have started to work in the construction sectors like construction of buildings, construction of road walls (especially in the NH 110 or the Hill Cart Road) and other mainly under a contractor who has the tender of the P.W.D. works. Since the industries other that tea plantation are absent

in the hilly regions of Darjeeling so the labourers do not have option for industrial works. In the Terai and the Sub-Himalayan regions the labourers who have left working in the tea plantation tend to work in the industries and other sectors present in the nearby urban area mainly in Siliguri. The labourers in the plains choose to work in the river bed areas during the time when the water levels in rivers are low. They mostly do the works such as collecting sands, collecting boulders and chipping stones (which are mostly done by women labourers). The above-mentioned works which the labourers have taken over are mostly from the sick tea gardens and the closed ones.

The labourers from sick, closed and even from running tea gardens used to work in the other sectors quite near by the garden and mostly returned home the same day. But from recent time onwards a trend of out-migration of labourers or the family members specially the youths; who were the son and daughter of the tea garden labourers has been taking place in a speedy manner. The out-migration of the labourers from the tea gardens has both pros and cons in their life, in the society and in the tea production. This out migration has been taking place in the tea gardens of both the regions of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region. The labourers and the youths of the tea gardens are mostly leaving the tea gardens and their home towns in search of better work and to earn. They mostly go to the cities like Delhi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Bangalore, Chennai, Kerala, and so others. As they are not much qualified with some degrees specialising in some areas, they have to work in hotels, shopping malls, guards and other works. In more recent period the trend of going to the Middle Eastern countries for jobs has been going on. Even the people from the tea gardens are been leaving to those countries in search of better life, though the rate of people leaving to these countries are quite low, as the early cost to go to those countries are very high, some manage it by taking huge amount of loans from different sources, which they have to repay afterwards. As mentioned earlier the out-migration to these places has both pros and cons in the society of tea garden regions. The positive part of it is that the person after starts working becomes able to lift certain financial burden of his or her family, built houses and maintain one standard living which was not there before. One of the saddening things is that they have to live far away from family and the working condition or the work environment is not good all the time. There are many cases of the people who have gone for work in other places, had to face racism, bullies and in some cases the person returning home dead. There are many more issues both negative and positive regarding this issue which needs to be researched and analysed separately. The out migration from the tea gardens are prevalent nowadays too, rather they are increasing day by day.

The out migration of labourers will hamper the tea production, as the number of work force especially during the peak period of plucking will be low. The out migration of tea plantation labourers with such pace as it is going now days will reach to certain point one day where the labourers in the tea gardens will not even be half of what they have today. If such situation becomes true, then the future of tea plantation will be in a danger. The circumstances for the out migration of people from the tea garden or not willing to work in the tea plantation have been created by the management itself. The management and tea association has failed terribly on maintaining the labourers, tea production, tea plants and so on which are the primary requirement in the tea plantations. The failure of the management and the tea companies has resulted in many tea gardens to be in sick condition, some are shut down permanently, some are opened after several years and mismanaged, some only open during the plucking season, and thus the labourers and their next generation are not willing to work in the tea gardens.

6.4.2.2: Tea Gardens being the Hotbed for Human Trafficking.

With the out migration of labourers and other people from tea plantation areas another very concerning issue in the tea gardens is the issue of human trafficking. The people from tea plantations in search of better work tends to go outside in different places and taking this issue as an advantage the traffickers lures the people from tea gardens with hope and dreams of good jobs and standard payment, hence they make them an easy prey of trafficking. In the tea plantation regions of West Bengal, the people from the tea gardens in plains are been trafficked in larger manner; there are not much cases of trafficking from the hills as compared with the Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region. Various cases of trafficking have been brought upon by NGO's, they have been continuously checking the trafficking and tracing the victims and, in some cases, they have been rescued but many of them were not lucky enough to get rescued, as once they have been trafficked specially into sex trade it is very hard for the NGO's to track them. Girls and boys both are been the victim of the trafficking; they are taken for domestic works in different places of country. Girls are the ones who becomes the victim of trafficking into sex trade. The people or the youths of abandoned, closed and sick tea gardens are mostly taken as the prime target for trafficking as their economic situation are very weak and are willing to do other works even by going faraway places. In an editorial of Economic and Political Weekly journal of the year 2014 it has been mentioned that, "A number of studies have shown light on the conditions of the workers of closed and abandoned tea gardens in the Dooars in West Bengal. Many of the women and children have been lured by promises of

steady incomes to work as domestic workers in the metropolitan cities. Many of these migrant workers find themselves caught in human trafficking, whether for the sex trade or domestic work where they are made to work as virtual house slaves by domestic service agencies. Not surprisingly, their wages are low and their health begins to suffer. The media increasingly carries reports of such domestic workers trying to “escape” from their employers.”⁷⁶

On the question of why tea gardens have been the prime area of human trafficking? There are various reasons which are leading the people of tea garden areas for being the victim of human trafficking even after many cases which has come in front. One of the prime factors which are leading the people from tea gardens to migrate and become the easy prey of human trafficking is there poor economic condition. Keeping in mind the hope and dreams of good earning and one standard life they tend to migrate to cities for better opportunity, and with the urge of earning more they get easily lured by the traffickers. Another factor can be seen as lack of education and information regarding human trafficking, how do they work and what might be the consequences. This is because the maximum victims of human trafficking are the people from the Sub-Himalayan region and to be precise the Adivasi community are been targeted for trafficking as compared to others they have low level of literacy rate and hence lacks information regarding human trafficking. Biswajit Ghosh writes, “The prime targets of trafficking are mostly adivasi children, both boys and girls, belonging mainly to the Oraon, Munda and Santal tribes. Poverty seems to be the major reason for this. Moreover, the average size of adivasi families being five, pecuniary constraints force parents to send their children to work from an early age. The low level of literacy of the tribal boys and girls prevents them from looking for alternative job options. Agents try to lure fathers by gifting them alcohol and/or cash as an advance. A family that tacitly accepts money from an agent for transportation of their child loses the moral rights to involve the community against any misdeed, at least initially.”⁷⁷ The work by Ghosh is not only the one which has stated about the adivasi community being the prime victim of human trafficking, there are other works too and NGO’s who all have mentioned about trafficking issue of this community. In some cases, the parents were aware of where their children were working, most of it would be in cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and other, but after sometimes contacts with them had been lost and the child is being missing. One of the factors of having very less information about human trafficking within the adivasi community is that the victim’s family do not file complaints, with the fear of no social support, losing prestige in society, fear of police and court cases regarding

it, fear of agents and other stigmas. Lesser the complaints and actions lower the law of awareness resulting in higher the risk of trafficking.

In an online article published by Video Volunteers written by Alankrita Anand,⁷⁸ she has written about trafficking case of one minor girl of age 13 from Chuapara Tea Estate, Alipurduar in 2013. She has been rescued after being trafficked to Srinagar and sold to a placement agency named City Service. She was a victim of exploitative domestic labour. The girl was brought back home with the efforts of NGO's like *Kripa* and *Bachpan Bachao Andolan*. She was lucky enough to be rescued but there are many more minor and adult girls and boys who are not lucky enough and are still the victim of such trafficking. Anand further mentions that, "Trafficking is an organised crime, across domestic and international borders. The numbers from the latest *National Crime Records Bureau* data, speak for themselves. 8,057 persons were reported to be trafficked in 2016. 44% of the cases were reported from West Bengal, and of these, the largest proportion was of minor girls."⁷⁹ We only come to know few cases of trafficking which is on-record, as there are various cases which are not recorded because of various stigmas as mentioned above. The victims of trafficking are not only minor girls and boys, in some cases the adults also become the victim of it. In one trafficking case of Panighatta Tea Estate which lies in the foothills of Darjeeling (Terai), it is a closed tea garden and some adults from this garden were trafficked to Mumbai. This whole incident of trafficking has been mentioned in a very clear manner by Ambika Rai in her article. She has stated that, "The migrants leave their home with a dream and hope of earning money so that they can provide a comfortable life to their family. But there are times when they unfortunately fall into the trap of traffickers. This happened with 12 people of Panighatta Tea Estate. Rangu Souriya, the chairperson of Khanchanjungha Uddhar Kendra, an NGO that fights against human trafficking crime against woman and children and child labour, is also one of the residents of Panighatta Tea Estate. She related some instances of trafficking from the tea belts of North Bengal, not only from the closed gardens but from the running gardens as well. On September 2016, her NGO rescued 12 bonded labourers (all men) of Panighatta from Mumbai. All these men were local residents of Panighatta Tea Estate. They were sent to Mumbai by an agent who also happens to be a local resident. These men were promised to be given Rs.15, 000 a month with free food and lodging facilities. They were told that they had to work as labourer in the sea port for loading and unloading of goods. But they were taken to some other place which was far from the sea. They were kept in a warehouse and were asked to carry big gunny bags for Rs.2 per sack. The family members of these trafficked men somehow got to know about

the situation and came to Rangu Souriya seeking her help. Then after few days the NGO rescued those men. The family members of these trafficked men did not file any complaint in the Police Station as the agent was from the garden. They did not want to drag the issue further.”⁸⁰ These above-mentioned cases of trafficking are only few to mention and which are recorded, there are various cases which are off the record of police and also of the NGO’s who all are working to restrict these kinds of trafficking especially from the tea garden regions.

Sudip Chakraborty has also done his field survey regarding the human trafficking in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan regions, and he states that the primary factor is due to lack of jobs due to non-operation of tea gardens, and the push factors are trouble free railway connectivity which makes the traffickers to transport the victim easily, weak enforcement and fragile child protection services in the tea garden areas.⁸¹ Chakraborty has further given the report of his survey where he took 14 tea estates from the Sub-Himalayan region; he surveyed 98 labouring families and 209 children for the survey. He has stated that according to his study 52.64% were the victims of trafficking and potential victim. This kind of human trafficking especially of young girls and boys are not only limited with the closed and abandoned tea gardens but the cases has also been seen from the running tea gardens too.

The tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region have mostly become a hotbed of human trafficking, the primary reason being the shutdown of tea gardens for prolonged period. The closure of tea garden for such period forced the tea gardens labourers to opt for other works as they went through a severe financial distress. The out migration of labourers to various regions in search of work was not only limited to the regions within Bengal and India but they even went to other countries and hence became the victim of human trafficking. In an article in The Wire, which is an online news and opinion website, written by Tanmoy Bhaduri⁸² has presented the cases of human trafficking of the tea garden labourers after the garden was shutdown. Tanmoy mentions about a girl named Suchitra who was trafficked to Delhi by a boy named Rahul who was neighbor, she was initially working as a domestic helper later she worked in a private school; she lived inside the school and during Diwali of 2016 she was raped and got pregnant and came back home but was not accepted by her family.⁸³ Another case of trafficking was of a 37 years old women Binu Tamang of Dalmore Tea Garden when the garden was closed in 2011, she went to Saudi Arabia through a local agent by making forged documents from Nepal and Nepal’s passport. According to her daughter she was in contact till 2015 and she was working as a domestic helper, but since September 2015 she has not contacted her family and even her mobile number was switched off hence she is totally out of contact. The

family of Binu has not put any complaint over her missing as she went by making forged documents of Nepal, therefore with the fear of other difficulties with police is there.⁸⁴ Another very similar case of a 40 years old women named Santa Darji of Makrapara Tea Garden has been mentioned too, where she was trafficked by her neighbor Kala Chettri. This incident has also taken in the same year as before in 2011 after the garden was closed Santa in search of work went to Saudi Arabia by making forged documents from Nepal. Family members of Santa contacted her for the last time in 2015, since then they are not been able to contact her.⁸⁵ Very Similar incident of another woman named Gita Biswakarma of age 41 of Makrapara Tea Garden, migrated to Saudi Arabia, she is also out of contact since 2015.⁸⁶ The above mentioned cases are the ones which have come into light, as there are various similar cases which are been kept hidden by the victim's family. In all the above cases the primary reason for such migration is due to financial problem which has affected the labourers and their family in a very severe manner after the shutdown of tea gardens. Another issue is that in all the cases no missing complaints has been registered as all the woman went by making a forged document from Nepal, hence the fear of other legal action over the family is always there. Hence the family members are forced to stay with a hope that they might return one day, as could not take any legal help to find their dear ones.

This kind of trafficking are being heard by the management or the tea companies running the gardens but they mostly act as they have no idea regarding it and if they come to know by any chance they would simply term it as this is the issue of police or the local administration. The tea companies are there in the gardens just to make profit, and they simply don't care about the labourers and their families who all stay in the gardens. The companies never set a strict check and balance if they feel like there is a sense of trafficking in the garden with some new person coming or with some person with in the garden and take measures regarding that. The tea companies or the management remaining ignorant on such matters reminded me of one old person whom I meet during my field work in a sick tea garden, he said, *“mailey ailey jun aileko sahib haru dekchu malai British sahib thik lagcha, uniharu strick thea sramik lai gali garthea kutthea kaam ma, tara bagan lai maya gartheo ani sramik lai nava Kaman ma kai vayo vani yaad gartheo ani agi awtheo”*, which means, “ When I see the recent tea garden owners I start getting a feeling that the British owners were nice, they were strict, they used to shout at the labourers and even beat them during the work in the garden, but they used to love the tea garden and whenever something happened in the garden or the labourers had some issue they used to come forward and do the needful.” (Translated by Author) By the

referring the statement of that old person of the sick garden whose Provident Fund and Gratuity were pending, I am not supporting the colonial slavery but trying to bring out the situation created by the tea garden companies because of which the labourers desperately start to find the colonial domination good enough than being left with haphazard manner. This trafficking has found its way in largely in the Sub-Himalayan tea regions primarily because of the very poor economic situation which is mainly created by the sudden shut down, sick and abandonment of the tea gardens by the profit seeking owners.

6.4.3: Situation Closed and Abandoned Tea Gardens of the North Bengal Region.

Once a very thriving tea gardens which were producing the finest qualities of tea. The garden was filled with lush green tea plant and by the labourers working on it. Even though the wages paid is the lowest among the organized sector the labourers were still working in the garden to make some earning for living and for the affection they have for gardens. It is a fact that the tea plantation sector is facing some crisis in the market sector. There are various factors which led to this crisis, primary factor being the quality of tea produced, as the planters they do not come with new plantation as the plants are more than 160 years old. The companies who run the tea plantation are not only dependent upon the tea plantation but they have other industries or other business sector, and hence in tea garden one has to invest and wait with some patience for better profit, but the planters fail to do so as they want a high and quick amount of profit. Another factor which I personally feel is important in the tea plantation sector is that the planters or the companies fail to make a social relation with the labourers, to make things worse the management in various occasion pay the labourers in after long gap and in addition the other basic facilities are not provided. The crisis in tea market, failing to produce the best quality tea, conflict with the labourers or the trade unions on wages, and failing in other business sector, the company or the planters to overcome all these factors they come up with the sudden shutting down of tea gardens by leaving the labourers in a miserable condition in both economic and social section.

The shutdown or abandonment of tea gardens by the owners has become one of the growing problems in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills, Terai and the Sub-Himalayan region. In some cases, the closer of the garden are done after various meetings where the management let know the labour representatives or the trade unions or even directly to the labourers, and in every case the owner ends by saying that the garden will be opened soon after some matters

are solved. But in most of the cases the garden remains closed for very long periods sometimes for decade, in some cases the owner abandoned the garden and in many cases the owner only opens the garden during the plucking period and closes again, hence living the garden in sick situation; which is one of the growing problems in recent times. Whatever way the closer have taken place or whenever this kind of situation arises in the garden the labourers are in the receiving end of it. The shutting down of tea gardens is not the new thing which came in the 20th or during the 21st century, rather it started since the end of 19th century as mentioned by N.C. Roy and Debasish Biswas in their work, they have stated that, “Since the end of the nineteenth century, it has been found that there has been a steady trend of the closure of tea estates in the sub-Himalayan region of Bengal.”⁸⁷

6.4.3.1: Irregular Functioning of Gardens.

Quite a number of tea gardens are there in North Bengal region which are closed for most of the month in a year and are opened during the plucking season. The owners of these gardens are the profit centric owners, they only open the garden when they are going to be benefit from the tea. These owners and the management convince the labourers about opening the garden continuously after that particular season tea are sold well in the market, for which they ask the labourers to join the work. The labourers are forced to join the work as they have no other earning ways and they hope that the garden will function further after the plucking and preparation of tea is done well. After the season ends the gardens are mostly closed again, only few owners keep the garden functioning. Another factor because of which the gardens runs irregularly is because of the changing ownership of the garden. In recent times the ownership of garden has been changing frequently. The change of ownership of the gardens are shifting from one owner to another is not taking place in the running tea gardens, but this is taking place in closed and sick gardens predominantly, only in very few cases the ownership is changed after the lease is over. In most of the situation in the closed and abandoned tea gardens the management and the owner leave the tea garden overnight without any notification. Hence in such situations the garden is counted as running in the government record, however the government cannot cancel the lease and hand the garden to some other unless and until some legal procedures are done with the owner. In such situation the owner himself sell his remaining lease and the ownership of the certain garden and resumes the garden. The new owner runs the garden for some year makes profit and if that owner or company feels that maintenance is required for more profit then again, the gardens are closed or the ownerships are changed.

This kind of situation has taken place in the tea gardens of the Sub-Himalayan region like Bundapani, Dheklapara and other. Bundapani tea garden is closed from 2013, after the higher officials of management ran away and garden was left abandoned. In an article Sayantan Bera in an online fortnightly have covered the issues of Bundapani tea garden, Bera writes, “Bundapani, for instance, was run by Darjeeling Dooars Plantation Ltd (DDPL) till 1996, when it was handed over to Alipurduar Enterprises (aka Mohta Enterprises), says S M Tamang, head clerk at the estate for 30 years. The lease expired in 2006. However, this did not prevent a money marketing company, Sarada Pleasure and Adventure Ltd, to take it over in 2010. Sarada had no experience in tea and allegedly came to make quick bucks after paying Rs 2.5 crore to Mohta Enterprises in an illegal deal. Both Mohta and Sarada defaulted on workers provident fund (PF) deposits and bank loans.”⁸⁸ From this we can understand that the profit centric business doers changed hands over Bundapani garden because of which the delayed in wage payment, rations supply, and other benefits, and most importantly the Provident Fund and Gratuity of the labourers were defaulted. Because of all this problem the sickness in Bundapani garden arise and hence in the year 2012 all the facilities including wages were stopped by the owner and from 13th July 2013 the garden was officially shutdown when the labourers found the missing of top management. Bera have further mentioned that, “Today, the tea garden has financial liabilities of a whopping Rs 12 crore, according to the coordination committee of labour unions. This includes PF, gratuity and wage dues to workers and unpaid bank loans. Production of tea also reduced from 800,000 kg a year during DDPL to a measly 300,000 kg a year when the garden was abandoned by Sarada.”⁸⁹ Recently in 25th July Bundapani tea garden has re-opened after 9 years of closer, the lease of previous company was cancelled and this time the garden has been owned by Merico Agro Industries Pvt. Ltd. Md. Rizwan the Joint Labour Commissioner has stated that, “Bonus arrears will be paid in three instalments, one at the time of the opening of the garden; second instalment during the Durga pujas and the last in March 2024. Payment of gratuity will start from April 2023 and be completed by March 2024. PF will commence from the day the garden reopens. The factory which is in a dilapidated state will be made functional by March 2024.”⁹⁰

Another tea garden of the Sub-Himalayan region which became the prey of the changing ownership for business purpose which eventually led to the closure of tea garden is the Dheklapara Tea Estate. Bera writes, “Dheklapara Tea Estate, abandoned since 2002, had found a new owner in one Gopinath Das, who opened the estate with much fanfare in July 2005, flying down starlets from Mumbai. Das took bank loans of over Rs 8 crore only to

abandon the estate in three months. He purchased the estate from hotelier Pintu Ghosh, who had shut shop in 2002 after availing bank loans of Rs 4 crore.”⁹¹ Dheklapara tea garden after shutdown as Pintu Ghosh became unable to run the garden; the Mumbai based person Gopinath Das just brought the garden to get the loan of rupees 8 crore, the sickness of the garden can be seen clearly from the owners side, no matter how much the owners charge labourers and their demands and protest to be the reason for the sickness. However, Dheklapara tea estate has now reopened very recently on 13th of March 2023, after 20 years of closure, Banglajhar Tea Private Limited in Siliguri has taken over the ownership of the Dheklapara tea estate, the new company gave labourers rupees 1000 as advance and assured pay the due bonus, but nothing has been mentioned regarding the wage arrears and Provident Fund and Gratuity.⁹²

In the Darjeeling hills Ringtong Hope Town tea garden was closed for 18 years, this tea garden became the victim of the fight between the owners for which the labourers had to suffer for 18 years. During my field work in this tea garden I came to know about the situation of this tea garden from the labourers of the garden. The matter of this garden is presented totally on field work basis as I could not find works regarding this particular garden; though on the basis of field work I have published an article in an edited book published in 2022 form Manohar Publication. The story of Ringtong Hope Town tea garden goes like this; this garden was handed over in the hands of Indian owners in 1960 from the British owner. In the initial period the garden was run as a one big company which covered the whole Ringtong Tea garden area, the owners were Mintri, Detraj, Dalchand and Kamala Prasad (field source taken from T.L. Dewan a retired labour and a trade unionist, interview taken on 22nd June 2019). Later the tea garden was divided individually Detraj received the Ringtong Hope Town garden. The garden was running smoothly unless in 1980 the garden was first shutdown for two months regarding the conflict between two sons of Detraj namely Sushil Choudhury and Binod Choudhury. In the 90’s the wages of the labourers were paid in an irregular basis, many protests were made. The Choudhury brothers were in financial strain, but as per Dewan it is said that the financial strain was not because of the problem in the production of tea as the tea was growing very well, but the Choudhury brothers had put their money in some other sector which went through tragic loss and in order to compensate that they did the cost cutting by cutting down of wages and other facilities of the tea garden labourers. While the protest was going on the labourers found that the owner was not paying Provident Fund of the workers though it had been deducted from their wages from the year 1992 to 1996.⁹³ After this news spread between the labourers the labour protest went on intensifying. In morning of 1996 the Ringtong Hopetown tea garden

was abruptly shut down by the owners without any prior notice.⁹⁴ The workers were anguished by the steps taken by the owner and the agitation went on and in between this in the same year some mishap took place in which the tea factory was put on fire by few angered workers. After the factory fire the owner put the entire blame on the labourers. The labourers of this garden were at the receiving end of it, they suffered a huge economic crisis, as this tea garden is situated very far from towns and there were no road facilities too (till date there is no proper road facility). T.L. Dewan and other of this tea garden states that the factory fire was a planned incident by the owner himself, in order to claim the insurance. They are of the view that, they paid few labourers with good amount of money to lit the fire in the factory but the plan was to put fire only in one side of the factory but the fire took a massive turn hence the miscreant could not control as a result of which the whole garden was gulfed on fire. They further added that, “The allegation on the workers is entirely unfounded as it was not only the source of their bread and butter but also, to put it in his (T.L. Dewan) own words, ‘the heart of the workers’.”⁹⁵ The Ringtown Hope Town tea garden opened after 18 years in 2014 but still the condition of the labourers have not improved and the labourers have not been able to trust the owner as the new owner is Sanjay Choudhury son of Sushil Choudhury, who left the labourers of this garden in a miserable condition.

Another similar issue exists in Peshok Tea Garden; this tea garden is situated in the Rangli Rangliot CD block in the Darjeeling Sadar subdivision. This tea garden was looked after by Alchemist Group of Companies; this is not only the tea gardens run by this company, Dhotrea tea garden and Kallej valley are also run by them. This tea garden was shut down in around 1996. Much before the shut down the labourers wages, Provident Fund and Gratuity were pending; the owners of the tea garden closed the garden suddenly without even paying the dues. The labourers of this tea garden were deprived of the financial assistance provided by the West Bengal government under FAWLOI as the owner had shut down the garden without noticing the government and hence the tea garden was shown running in the government papers. The long period of shut down forced the labourers to pluck the green tea leaves by them self under Biga system and they sold the tea to various tea factories in a very low price. On 1st December 2006 the Alchemist Group reopened the garden assuring the workers that they will be paid in time, with their pending wages. But the garden was again closed down in 2014, leaving behind the workers and the factory in an orphan situation, with additional dues of wages, provident fund and gratuity.⁹⁶ The labourers continue to work in the garden from 2014 to 2016 without any payment, with the hope of garden might reopen. Like before the labourers

were not provided financial assistance from the government under FAWLOI, as the garden was functioning in the government papers. The labourers resumed the Biga System in order to earn for living, they used to pluck the green leaves at the rate of 42 rupees per kilogram for the first flush and 32 rupees per kilogram for the second flush. Despite such hardship, one committee running the Biga system gave bonus in the year 2018 at the rate of 15.75 percent.⁹⁷ The labourers used to make 1000 to 1500 rupees fortnightly as their wage. During the field work in Peshok tea garden I came across one retired person named D.B. Gurung, who retired in the year 2014, he has not been paid his wage, provident fund and gratuity till the time when I meet him, hence he was forced to work in the Biga system. The labourers even mentioned that many labourers passed away without receiving their pending payments. The financial hardship which the labourers of Peshok tea garden has forced them to opt for other jobs. The most taken job for the labourers of this area has been opening eatery shops in the Peshok road connecting Darjeeling with Kalimpong and Sikkim through National Highway 10, as the vehicle tends to stop in this place. The irregular functioning of tea gardens has made the labourers to stay working in other sectors of work, as a result of which the number of labourers has been decreased in the Peshok tea garden.

6.4.4: Plight of the Tea Plantation Labourers in Closed Gardens of West Bengal.

The labourers of the closed tea gardens have been facing various difficulties in every aspect. The living condition has been seriously affected by the closing down of tea gardens. The tea plantations from the North Bengal region provide the best and large amount of tea, but this same region also has the most people affected by the closure of gardens. Both the permanent and temporary workers have been facing the effect of the closure; the temporary labourers are the ones who have been affected more as the permanent labourers are receiving the amount of 1000 to 1500 per month under the state government policy of FAWLOI, which is not provided to the temporary labourers.

The extreme effect of the garden closure has been faced mainly by the labourers of the Sub-Himalayan region as compared to the tea plantations of Darjeeling hills. The main reason behind this might be that the tea gardens of Darjeeling are situated much closer to the towns, which makes the labourers to search for other jobs a little easier, whereas the closed tea gardens of the Sub-Himalayan region are situated much far from the towns and hence the labourers cannot afford to travel far for jobs. The tea plantation labourers after working so long in the tea

plantation have gained the skill in the works related with the tea plantation, other than any other skilled works. This is one of the reasons that the tea plantation labourers take time to adjust and learn other works. The labourers of the closed tea gardens of Darjeeling hills are mostly engaged with other works such as in construction, in hotels, in shops and other, after the gardens were closed. The labourers of the tea plantation of the Sub-Himalayan regions has been engaged in working in the river sides in crushing and collecting stones and sands and waiting for the trucks to come and sells those in very low amounts. Since Bhutan is quite near from some of the tea gardens which are closed, the labourers search some manual works there.

Major closure of tea gardens has taken place in the Sub-Himalayan region as compared to Darjeeling. Beside the closure some of the tea gardens in both the regions has been experiencing various shut downs in between when even the issue of pending wages, bonus and basic facilities has been raised by the labourer. The Sub-Himalayan region experiences the major effect in the life of the tea plantation labourers. The socio-economic life of the labourers has been severely affected, resulting in various number of death due to ill health, malnutrition and hunger. More than six tea gardens have been closed till now and many others are facing various short period shutdowns. In a report by the Pinak Priya Bhattacharya and Jayan Gupta of The Times of India has reported that “A sea change has taken place in the Dooars region of North Bengal where tea gardens flourish till few decades ago. Today, six of these gardens are closed and several others are struggling. The tea workers were never a happy lot, with low wages, poor quality rations and inadequate medical facilities. But things were never this bad. Death and disease have now become a part of the ‘Coolie’ lines.”⁹⁸

Various deaths have been recorded in this closed tea gardens of North Bengal region. The managements and the government officials record these deaths as natural death, but the primary cause of death has occurred from malnutrition or death by hunger. The long-term malnutrition has led to Tuberculosis, which is rampant in the tea gardens; and even other illnesses has become very common. The Times of India reports that “There are three gardens owned by Redbank Group. Apart from Redbank TE, there are Surendranagar Tea Estate and Dharanipur Tea Estate. Nearly 2,200 workers were left to fend for themselves after they shut down in 2013. Workers claim that starvation and malnutrition have claimed nearly 17 lives in the last eight months since the gardens closed down.”⁹⁹ The Redbank tea garden was abandoned by the owner in October 2013 and the state government cancelled its lease only in November 2014, only after this the permanent labourers received an amount of rupees 1500, from state

governments policy of FAWLOI, but the temporary labourers did not received any amount. The temporary labourers were facing more financial difficulty.

Incident of death and suicide by the labourers of the Redbank Tea Estate has been reported in The Telegraph. It reports, “Mahesh Mahali, a 42-year-old temporary worker of Redbank, killed himself as he had to run a 10-member family..... He was the sole earning member of the family. Ever since the garden was closed, he was doing odd jobs to earn money. But his income was too inadequate to run the family. There were quarrels in the family quite often as he was frustrated over not being able to earn enough for us,” Rosa, Mahali's wife, said today.... Yesterday afternoon, Mahali collected a bottle of petrol and set himself on fire at his home in the Salboni division of Redbank estate. He was rushed to Jalpaiguri district hospital where he died later at night.”¹⁰⁰ The death of Mahali was termed as unnatural death by the Kotwali police, but the post mortem and the police investigation could not see or feel the amount of stress labourers like Mahali are going through in every aspect such as financial, social, mental and other. There are other reports of death in this tea garden by various ailments mostly caused by un-nutritional food, no-proper drinking water and no proper sanitation, they all died because of the lack of treatments.

The suicide by the labourer has also been reported in Chungthung tea garden of Darjeeling district. Chungthung tea garden is one of the gardens which has been facing several shut downs in between, the dues on labour wage and delay of payment has always been there. The suicide by a retired labour named Babu Ram Dewan aged 61, was done as a form of protest against the owner and questioning the administration and the level of oppression the labourers of this tea garden have to face. The company was not being able to pay the labourers wage on a regular basis and as a protest for this kind of continuous attitude of the owners Babu Ram did suicide with a note hanging in his chest. While the company could not pay the labourers wage; but were able to make a deal of corers, which has been reported in the Telegraph. It states that, “On the one hand, 62 year old Baburam Dewan, a social activist and former worker of Darjeeling’s Chungthung tea estate, committed suicide to protest against the closure of the garden. On the other the owner of the Terai Group of Companies, which runs Chungthung is the highest bidder for Siliguri’s second township, a venture of Siliguri Jalpaiguri Development Authority to come up on 232.4 acres near the third Mahananda bridge. Amit Agarwal, joint managing director of the Terai Group has bid 210 crores for the project, the contract for which is yet to be awarded. The tenders were opened in the middle of February.”¹⁰¹ It is said that the

40 percent of the money had to be paid within 15 days and it is said that it was paid on time; but they cannot pay the labourers wage on time.

Death by malnutrition and ailments caused by it has been reported majorly in the tea gardens run by Duncan Goenka Group. In a report by the Telegraph of 14th May 2015 mentions about three deaths at Nagaisuree Tea Estate in Metelli block, Jalpaiguri, which is run by Duncans. It is said that the three deaths of Rajesh Kharia 45 years, Rima Thapa 19 years and Oli Oraon 5 years died in past three days. It is reported as, "Rajesh's wife Rashmita said: "As payment of wages and disbursement of rations have stopped, we do not have money. My husband was trying to do odd jobs and with whatever he would earn, he would buy food for the children. Since Friday, he did not have food and slept after drinking a glass of water. On Monday, he went to a stream for a bath and fell near the bank because of weakness. We took him to a hospital and the doctors declared him dead. On Friday, Rima Thapa, who was pregnant, was taken to Chulsa, Malbazar and North Bengal Medical College and Hospital, around 80km from the garden, for treatment. "Because of travelling and lack of proper food she was weak. Doctors said we would have to buy some medicines and gave a list to her family. They could not buy those. She died on Sunday," Oraon said. Oli had fever and she died in her home on Monday, as the family could not take her to Malbazar hospital because they did not have money."'¹⁰²

Further report of death in tea gardens run by Duncans, after the closure has been reported in The Week magazine of 16th October 2016. The magazine reports the death of labourers and their family members due to scarcity of food and money which resulted in starvation and lack of medical treatment. Hantapara tea garden is another garden shutdown by the Duncans and the people of this gardens have gone through various problems. In this report the death of 50 years old Barun Dorji who was confined to his bed after he meet with an accident, his wife was Reshmi who worked in the garden. The report states, "The family had been starving for more than a year, after the plantation was closed down. They started receiving government rations only a fortnight before Barun's death and that, too, because of the assembly elections. 'Once we got the rations, I tried to feed him. But his body could not take food because for a long time he did not eat at all,' said Reshmi"'¹⁰³ Regarding the death of Barun, Ranabir Chowdhury, a doctor from Kolkata stated, "The symptoms of starvation death are: the body would bend, movements will stop and finally there will be no vision," he said. And Reshmi said her husband showed all those symptoms."'¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, death of labourers from another Duncans abandoned tea garden which is the Dunchipara tea gardens has also been recorded. It

reports the death of “Dukini Munda a tribal woman, who was the only bread winner at home after her husband deserted her with three children, she used to work in the tea garden for earning. Dukini died with starvation after she became on her deathbed after suffering from anaemia. Another death of Sankar Meher’s son Birendra who contracted pulmonary tuberculosis; due to lack of proper health care in nearby region and lack of money to take him to good hospitals in cities Sankar lost his son.”¹⁰⁵ Another report of death is from Birpara tea garden abandoned by the Duncans, which reports, “the death of Ratna Subba, 50 years old, after gall bladder cancer, she used to work in the garden and despite suffering from cancer she used to break gravels in the river for living. She was looked after by her son Umang Subba, but Umang too contracted tuberculosis and needed treatment. At last Umang could recover but her mother couldn’t and hence she passed away.”¹⁰⁶

The above-mentioned deaths of labourers of the shutdown tea gardens are only the ones that has been recorded by various medias via newspapers, magazines and by some social media news. Very seldom we find all this been reported or recorded by the government authority. If they would have recorded, we might have seen the required legal actions against the owners been taken. The total death of labourers and their family members with starvation, malnutrition and ailment related with it which are off the record might be even more than presented above. It is stated that, “Between 2002 and 2007, managements had shut down 17 gardens. As a consequence, approximately 1,200 people in the tea gardens are estimated to have died of hunger.”¹⁰⁷ The number of labourers and their family members being caught by various ailments, malnutrition, starvation, financial difficulties, lack of medical treatment, school dropout of their children, and other, are still counting in this closed tea gardens and it might add on and on if no proper measures been taken. Sadly, once the green lush tea gardens producing 35 percent of India’s tea has now been turned into a valley of death.

6.5: Trade Union and the Tea Plantation.

The definition of the trade union in a simple form is that, it is an organization or an association of workers of some various professions such as, industrial workers, trade, and others, which is formed to protect the rights and take forward their interest together. Or it can also be defined as an organized instrument of defense formed by the workers in order to protect their economic and social interests from their employees in case of any exploitation. Trade union in another

word can be considered as the product of industrial development which took place in various parts of the world as a process of industrial advancement in the modern world, from the Industrial Revolution in Britain onwards. A.S. Mathur and J.S. Mathur writes, “The Industrial Revolution in Great Britain and later on in other countries brought about a sudden and drastic change in the economic sphere. These changes were so sudden and quick that it was very difficult to bring about a complete social, economic and political adjustment. The Industrial Revolution completely undermined the old order of society, the old ways of maintaining order and discipline without at the same time replacing them by new ones.”¹⁰⁸ Similarly the advent of tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region did not only changed the economic, cultural, social and its demography of these regions but even undermined the existing old system and further the living pattern of the labourers brought to work in the gardens were changed. Hence, the labour problem started from quite early time in both these tea plantation regions but the organized labour protest was totally absent due to various reasons such as, lack of communication, lack of education, lack of historical labour resistance, strict labour control by the planters and others. As a result of which the organized labour resistance and labour union in tea gardens of these two regions can only be seen in the 1940’s.

6.5.1: History Behind the Formation of Trade Unions in Tea Plantations.

The trade union movement in India is said to have started or flourished in a proper manner after the First World War 1914-1918. The development of factories in rapid manner in India even gave birth of various trade unions in different sectors. Prior to this there were labour associations like Bombay Mill Hands Associations formed in 1890 and few others which were the first organized association to protect the rights of the workers; these kinds of associations laid the foundation for the trade unions to form in India. Before the formation of the trade union the workers were guided by the Factory Act of 1881, which was passed after the first labour agitation which took place in Bombay under the guidance of S.S. Bengalee; though the act was not able to protect the interest of the workers in a complete manner.

The trade unions in the tea plantation regions of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region was formed only in the 1940’s, but the process of trade union movement in India started much earlier, which can be differentiated under various phases. The first phase is termed as the prior 1918 phase where the labourers came in a small group and agitated or labour movement took place though in small scale, which did pave the idea of formation of trade union in future. The phase after 1918 is mainly termed as the modern time in matter of trade union movement

as this was the phase from where the idea of an organized trade union began and the formation of various trade unions in different sectors started. Mathur and Mathur states the objective of the trade unions of modern times in their work, it is stated that, “The objectives of the trade union movement in modern times may be re-stated as follows: (i) Defending or improving the wages and conditions of labour, (ii) raising the status of the worker as a citizen of industry and of society, and (iii) extending the area of social control of the nation’s economic life and participating in that control.”¹⁰⁹ The various protest and demands were made in order to secure the rights of the workers and protect their interest by various unions as a result of which The Trade Union Act 1926 was introduced in India. After this more unions with different situations and with different ideologies came into begin in various sectors in India. Further Mathur and Mathur states, “Modern trade unionism is essentially an outcome of the factory system of production and the capitalistic order of society.”¹¹⁰ Forming of trade union was not an easy task for the labourers in any sector, it was with the guidance and sacrifices of various labour leaders of those periods such as B.P. Wadia, N.M. Joshi, S.V. Deshpandey and others it became a success. Though later in history the division of trade unions because on the basis of ideological clash, the political party run trade union trying to impose their ideas and increase their influence and with various other can be seen. Even with various clashes the trend of forming of different trade union both big and small continued, though it did affect the bargaining strength and even made easy for the employers whenever the labourers made demands.

The tea plantation in the two regions of West Bengal started much earlier in 1850’s (commercially), but there was absent of trade union for long period of time, despite various labour unrest and labour revolutions which took in the history of mankind this plantation was untouched by those. The labourers of these plantations were not organized and were unaware of collective bargaining for their rights. They were illiterate and were not in touched with the world outside. In the meantime, the planters were organized and were fully aware of the labour agitations mainly in the time when whole country was covered with the nationalist movement for independence. Hence, they put all their efforts to prevent such labour agitations and forming of trade unions in the tea plantations. To maintain full check in the garden the planters recruited the *chowkidars* and they even maintained a private army or force known as “North Bengal Mounted Rifles”, to suppress the labour uprising in the plantation. The planters were successful in controlling the labour agitation and forming of trade unions backed by any political parties in the tea gardens with their power and suppression for a long period but in the 1940’s when

the country was in the verge of achieving freedom they were not able to hold hence the trade union came into being.

The formation of trade union in the tea plantation of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region did not occur suddenly it had some other reasons which influenced the formation process directly or indirectly. In between two regions of the tea gardens of Darjeeling first experienced the wave of labour agitation and formation of trade union. In 1900's Darjeeling was witnessing formation of various political and social association mainly based in town areas. As a result of this social consciousness a group of youths formed a social association named Gorkha Dukha Nivarak Sammelan (G.D.N.S) in Darjeeling. This group was formed Ratanlal Brahmin, Dhanbir Mukhia, Harshadwaj Lama, Jitbahadur Khadka, Lalu Pradhan, Man Bahadur Mukhia and others.¹¹¹ This association indulge them with social works, mainly during that time if someone died in the road or person belonging to lower caste died in hospital or in road their dead bodies were not even touched for days until the municipal staff came and dragged them like dead dogs were done and were cremated without any ceremony. The GDNS members began to cremate the dead bodies with certain Nepali ceremony and took ill people to hospitals. Ratanlal Brahmin along with his friends came up to help the needy during the Great Bengal Famine of 1943, but not in the name of GDNS. The famine had hit Bengal really severely hunger and death due to starvation was seen every day. The effect of the famine was also seen in Darjeeling towns, tea gardens and in villages, the price of food grains were sky high and were very hard to find. The shop keepers were keeping the food items in the godowns in order to sell in very high price, the common people were finding it very difficult. It was at this time Ratanlal Brahmin and his friends went to possible places where the shopkeeper had stock food items and threatened them, and in Chowk Bazar of Darjeeling a big poster was placed by Ratanlal Brahmin and his associates against the shopkeeper who were hiding food items in the moment of crisis, the poster stated, "Till the day that food stock in our town, hidden in the godowns of the merchants, last, we do not choose to die of starvation. Nor do we choose to allow of our people to die. Disburse the goods at reasonable rates or else we shall break open your doors to claim the stocks and distribute as we see fit."¹¹² During this famine the Communist Party of India was also initiating various relief in different parts of Bengal, and it was at this point of time the CPI leaders got interested towards the works of Ratanlal Brahmin and his friends and thus Sushil Chatterji came to visit Ratanlal Brahmin and convinced him to join CPI after various meets, hence the Communist Party of India Darjeeling branch was formed in 1943.

After the formation of CPI in Darjeeling Ratanlal Brahmin first formed various trade unions in Darjeeling. R.B Rai in his one of the works written Nepali states that, “*Maila Baje ko aghuwai ma saabvanda pahile driver union khara vayo. Tais pachi garimaan union, rikshaw-wala union, din majdoor union, chattra federation, mahila samity, kishan sangathan ekpachi arko banina thaleo*”.¹¹³ (At first under the guidance of Ratanlal Brahmin the communist party in Darjeeling formed different unions such as, Driver Union was the first one to be formed followed by Rikshaw-man Union, Gariman Union, Din Majdoor Union, Chattra Federation, Mahila Samity and Kisan Sabha one after another). (Translated by Author). Ratanlal Brahmin knew that the situation of labourers was not good in the tea plantation, therefore a union is required in the tea gardens too; but the planters were strictly not allowing any political leaders mainly the communist trade unionists to enter the garden area. Despite such restriction in the tea gardens Ratanlal Brahmin and his fellow member of CPI entered the gardens at night and did small house meeting and as a result of which in the 1945 the first trade union in the tea gardens of Darjeeling was formed, which was named as “Darjeeling District Tea Garden Worker’s Union” which was later named as “Darjeeling District Chia Camman Mazdur Union” in 1952. Ratanlal Brahmin was the president and Bhadra Bahadur Hamal was its general secretary. In 1950’s another trade union was founded in the tea gardens of Darjeeling which was known as “Darjeeling District Chai Kaman Shramik Sangh” formed by the local political party Gorkha League.

The Sub-Himalayan region was untouched by the formation of trade unions or labour organizations in the tea gardens. The planters used to control every section in the gardens of this region. Like in the tea gardens of Darjeeling no person from any trade union were permitted to enter the tea garden. The colonial planters even had an army in this region known as North Bengal Mounted Rifles (which was banned on 14th August 1947) in order to check entry of outsiders and to maintain the law and order. The tea labourers of this region were kept such an order that the national movement for independence impacted very less or no impact in certain regions can be seen. The tea labourers of this region were not receiving any from the national movement as they were under the mercy of the planters. Few protests by the labourers in the tea garden did took place but were not done in an organized and united way with a mass issues, hence the protest went unheard and in addition to that those individuals had to face harassment from the managers.

Things differed in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region from 1946 when Bengal-Assam Rail Road Workers’ Union (BARRWU) tried to help the labourers to form a union in

the garden. Sharit Bhowmik mentions the following by stating, “The workers of the Dooars showed signs of collective action only after the trade union organisers of the Bengal-Assam Rail Road Workers’ Union (BARRWU) made an attempt to organized them in early 1946.”¹¹⁴ The BARRWU also included the workers from the Bengal Dooars Railway (BDR), along with them few labourers from various tea gardens tried to form a union in the Sub-Himalayan region. The BARRWU was in fact called as a non-political union but the they were hugely backing the communist idea and following them. Similar to that of Darjeeling they organized small meetings during night time in a small number in order to spread the idea of trade union and even the idea of the communist party (which were at that period of history stood the political party for the workers). One incident in the tea garden of Haihaipathar now named as Sonali tea garden ignited the interest of the labourers towards the communist party under which labour unions were being formed. The incident has been recorded by Sharit Bhowmik in his work. He states the incidents as follows, “The manager of Haihaipathar was one such communist baiter. He was also unduly harsh to his workers. One day a group of workers went up to him to complain about the poor quality of ropes given to them to repair their huts. The manager refused to entertain their complaints. Instead he abused them, called them followers of the red flag who wanted to harass their employers as the workers in the railways and jute mills were doing. These workers were now curious to know more about this red flag organization which was hated so much by the employers who were oppressing them.”¹¹⁵ After this incident not only the members of BDR but the labourers of the different tea gardens wanted to meet them and join the red flag as termed by the manager. Such incident played as the final and strong link between the labourers and the BDR members in forming the trade union in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region.

The nation-wide railway strike of 1946 played as an immediate effect towards the labourers on their understanding the importance of the labour union and adopting the communist way of forming the labour unions. The railway strike was done in a very larger manner for their demand of higher pay, fair price shops, better service condition and others. The intensity of the strike and the worker’s participation was so high and organized that the authority acknowledged their demands. This strike and its fruit from it were been noticed by the tea labourers of the Sub-Himalayan region, they learned the importance of labour unity and the effect of labour organization. Therefore, various meetings to organize the labourers under one trade union intensified in various tea gardens after inspired by the railway strike of 1946. As a result of this Zilla Cha Bagan Mazdur Union was formed in 1946 in the Sub-Himalayan

region. In the later year's various trade unions in the tea gardens under various political parties grew in this region.

6.5.2: Labour Protest Under Trade Union in the Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan Region.

After the formation of trade unions in the tea gardens of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan few labour protests has taken place under the banner of trade unions led by various political parties. Small labour protest in the tea gardens before the formation of trade union were present in the gardens but were not turning to be effective enough. Some labour movement which took place after the formation of trade union which made some impact are mentioned below.

After the formation of trade union, in the year 1946 the labourers of Dhajea tea garden went on demanding their rights and benefits which were not provided by the owners of the tea gardens. They were organizing strikes, gate meeting and were not following the orders of the managers and the work in the garden was slowed down. The protest by the labourers went to be so intense that the owners went on to lock-out the garden from April 1947 and with the help of police arrested the leaders and trade unionist from Dhajea tea garden and also the leaders associated with the agitation. The garden was lock-out for 15 months. This movement in the Dhajea tea garden was not successful but the labourers from this tea garden and also other tea gardens saw the importance and impact of labour movement for their rights which helped them to put forward other demands in future. The owners though suppressed the labour protest with the use of police, but they realized the power and impact of the labour agitation for their rights.

Another very important tea labour agitation in Darjeeling is the 1955 labour agitation which took place in Margarets Hope tea garden situated below Sonada region of Kurseong Sub-Division. In 1951 the Plantation Labour Act was passed, being implemented this was to bring a change in the tea plantation labourers lives. In fact, only from April 1954 in a very few manners some of its clauses were implemented. As a protest against the non-implementation of PLA a joint movement by all the unions were made not only in Darjeeling but also in the Sub-Himalayan region. Things became much worse when the price of the essential items were growing as India was facing scarcity of food grains production, country was at this point of time importing certain food grains as ECA (Essential Commodities Act)¹¹⁶ was legislated at that point of time. The rise in essential food commodities acted as fuel on fire, and hence it intensified the movement.

The two trade unions from the hills The Darjeeling District Chia Kaman Mazdoor Union (name reconstituted in 1951) of Communist Party of India (CPI) and Darjeeling Chia Kaman Shramik Sangha, the union of Akhil Bharatiya Gorkha League (ABGL) of came jointly with 14 points demands for the labourers of tea gardens. These demands were not only to be fulfilled by the owners but even the role of government was required. The joint unions gave them the ultimatum to fulfill the demands by May 1955, if not all the 14, the vital 5 points were to be fulfilled by given ultimatum. The five vital demands were:

1. Wages of workers in tea plantations in Darjeeling Hill Section to be increased to Rs. 1/11/6 for men (One rupee, eleven paise and six annas).
2. Bonus for 3 months must be awarded to workers and staff based on the profit made in 1954.
3. Amendment of the present Standing Orders.
4. Compensation for the period of closure of tea gardens in 1951 and 1952.
5. The scale of pay for the staff in all tea gardens to be increased.¹¹⁷

The owners and the government did not respond on the demands made by the joint unions even after the date of ultimatum was crossed. On 5th June a joint meeting was called and was discussed that if no further response from owner and government is made from 22nd of June 1955 a mass strike will be conducted in every tea garden as a protest. The labour agitation took a massive turn and in 25th of June labourers from various tea gardens gathered in Margarets Hope tea garden where a peaceful rally was conducted as a protest against the nearby tea gardens of Dilaram and Maharani where with the help of police the managers were forcefully making the labourers work. The rally of labourers was obstructed by the police but the labourers were adamant about their protest rally. In between this the police opened firing against the unarmed labourers which left several wounded with bullets, many of them were arrested and took away lives of six labourers.

The labourers who were killed by firing were Amrita Kamini 18 years, Moulisova Rai 23 years who was pregnant, Kancha Sunuwar 22 years, Padam Bahadur Kami 25 years, Kalay Limbo 14 years, Jitman Tamang alias Majhi. The very next day after the incident section 144 was enforced in Darjeeling by the then government. Despite the enforcement of section 144 huge number of people came in Darjeeling town as a protest of the incident. The tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region were shut down by the labourers on 29th June as a protest to the incident. After the protest the basic demands were accepted except the demand for bonus, the

Hatta Bahar system was abolished and 1 Rupee 7 anna was termed as the new wage. These demands were fulfilled as a result of various sweats and bloods and six lives of the labourers.

In 1955 the joint movement in the Sub-Himalayan region was also taking place with the demands like compulsory minimum bonus, to make the labourers get their rightful share from the huge profit which the tea companies made in the year 1954. The movement was led by the joint unions of Communist led AITUC and RSP led UTUC and other unions. The movement was also joined by the white-collar unions of clerks with their demands. The unions made a call for strike from the month of August, the state government tried to settle the matter but was not able to settle. The matter went to Delhi and the Industrial Committee took the issue in their hand and called the unions to withdraw the strike and settle but the labourers and the unions stood adamant and became firm with their demands. To counter the strike, the employers too took a joint stand on not to fulfill the demands of labourers. The strike intensified, the HMS also joined the movement but in few tea gardens the labourers withdrew from the strike may be because of the pressure and threats from the management or due to financial hardship. The movement took place at Terai and Sub-Himalayan region at the same time, but in Terai region the intensity cooled down early and they withdrew from the movement. Manas Das Gupta writes, “The experience of Duars and Terai in this respect was somewhat different. The strike in the Duars was total or near total but not so in the Terai. In some gardens Adivasi Christians, a new organization at that time did not participate in the strike. In many gardens in Terai, Adibasi Christians were in majority, therefore they resumed the work after a few days or did not participate at all. In Terai the strike ended on the 9th day but in Duars the strike continued for eighteen days.”¹¹⁸ The leaders of all the trade unions were being arrested in order to weaken the movement, but the labourers continue to take forward the strike. The strike was done during the peak period of tea plantation, due to which the labourers and the unions were able to create more pressure to the owners and the government. The strike was called off after the Chairman of the Industrial Committee of Plantation (ICP) gave an assurance to the union leaders and the labourers and further requested the unions and the owners to come to an agreement.

The joint movement of 1955 in the Sub-Himalayan region came to an end where the unions and the labourers were victorious as they fought for their rightful demand. Finally, the union government had to intervene and took steps for the labourers. Manas Das Gupta writes, “Ultimately, the Labour Minister of the Union Government and the Commerce Minister intervened and laid down a formula for the quantum of “bonus” for three years from 1953 to

1956.”¹¹⁹ The payment of bonus to the plantation labourers was done for the first time in any plantation in India, which has been mentioned by Sharit Bhowmik as, “The agreement to give a bonus to plantation workers created a record in the plantation industry, for India became the first country to accept the principle of payment of bonus to plantation workers out of profits.”¹²⁰

The second wave of mass labour movement in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan regions was experienced in the year 1969. The second mass labour movement took place with the demands such as employment in the vacant posts in the gardens, increase of wage as the cost of living was growing high, implementation of Plantation Labour Act and others. During this movement the government in the state was the second United Front which consisted the majority party being pro-labour. Like in the previous movement the employers refused to fulfill the demands raised. The labourers called for general strike from August 1969, which happens to be the peak time for plucking the tea leaves. The strike went for sixteen days and the companies suffered loss. In order to restrict the loss, the company and the trade union sat for agreement where the employers agreed to fulfill the vacant seats in the gardens and the wage was revived in which the extra leaf price or *doubly* was raised to 7 paise per kilogram from 5.5 paise per kilogram. The fruit of this movement was not only limited to the Sub-Himalayan region but it was also experienced in the tea gardens of Darjeeling hills too.

The above-mentioned labour movement signifies how after the formation of labour unions in the tea gardens the fight for the rights of labourers were fought in an organized way. The trade unions run by any political party joined hands with each other for the labour problems despite their ideological differences. The formation of trade union even gave the labourers courage and idea of how an organized fight is fought and it even warned the employers that the time has changed and if they suppress and oppress the labourers in any way they will also have experience the backlash of their own deeds.

6.5.3: Trade Unions in Later Years.

The after math of the above-mentioned labour movement not only gave the labourers their demands but also provided them the strong basic knowledge of collective demands and agreement meetings. After 1969 various other tripartite meetings and agreements between the union, labour department representing government and the employers were held. The tripartite meetings were done more than it used do in the past, the meetings were called when the unions made demands like increase in wage, improvement of basic facilities, proper house, drinking water, improved child and health system and so on.

The growing political scenario changed the politics of trade unions too. The increasing discontentment among the political parties even created differences in the trade unions of tea gardens. The presence of multi trade union in the tea gardens was seen as an important and affective feature was slowly turning as a problem. The split in the Communist party on 1964 was already created fraction in the trade union too. After the CPI(M) came into power in West Bengal in 1977, its trade union became one of the dominant unions too, which was creating small disputes within the other small unions. Further, the CPI (M) party which termed themselves as a pro-labour party started to respond to the tea labourers and their problems from the government perspective. The political party which used to keep the demands of the labourers on a strong footing started to compromise the demands, hence they did not want to create problematic relation with the owners.

The strong and united movement by the labourers in the year 1955 and in 1969 were the movements in Darjeeling hills and the Sub-Himalayan region where a joint leadership and union was experienced and which even provided the labourers their rightful demands. After this two movements no further, joint mass movements for the demands such as wage increment, implementation of Plantation Labour Act, improvement of medical facilities, construction of pukka houses and many others has been recorded. These demands are raised by the trade unions affiliated with different political parties during the time of elections, hence the demand keeps on repeating on every election and sadly the demands have only been an election manifesto of the political parties.

The political change in Darjeeling in the 1980's changed the control over trade union by the political parties having communist ideas. The communist clutches over trade union of tea plantation were brought into minimal presence and politically the party was on the verge of erosion from the hills. The identity movement ignited during this period in Darjeeling as a result various issues faced by the Nepali speaking people of Darjeeling who are even termed as Gorkhas. The issues such as the statement given by the then Prime Minister Morarji Desai where he termed Nepali Language as a foreign language, the eviction of Nepali speaking people from the North-East states of Assam and Meghalaya, the growing political consciousness in the hills and other acted as the prime issues. All the issues were growing day by day and in 1986 under the leadership of Subash Ghising with his political party Gorkha National Liberation Front agitated with the call for separate state of "Gorkhaland". After two years of agitation the GNLFF and Ghising settled with Darjeeling Hill Council (DGHC) and even formed the trade union named as Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (HPWU). The formation of

this union decentralized the power of communist led trade unions in the hills and the HPWU dominated the trade unions.

Similarly, in 2007 the political rise of Bimal Gurung and his party Gorkha Jan Mukti Morcha (GJMM) with the call of Gorkhaland in Darjeeling again changed the scenario in the hills. Once a loyal and strong cadre of Ghising replaced him politically and even came up with the new administrative set up in the hills named Gorkhaland Territorial Administration (GTA). The new political party established its new trade union named Darjeeling Terai Dooars Plantation Labour Union (DTDPLU) and hence replaced HPWU as a dominating union. The power show between the trade unions and their ego fight between them weakened the fight for the rights and demands of the labourers. Inter-union rivalries within the tea garden are present in the tea gardens from many years, which has also resulted in killings of labour by another in tea gardens. The existing political party in power has always affected the trade unions work in the Darjeeling region. In fact, the two political leaders Ghising and Gurung both of them belong from tea garden areas and has gained their political rise with the help of the mass from tea gardens. The agitation led by these two leaders for separate state in 1986 led by Ghising and agitation of 2007, 2010 and 2017 led by Gurung has taken lives of many people from the hills and major martyrs of this agitations come from tea gardens. Even after such situation where the labourers of tea gardens lose lives for the cause and that certain political party but the same party in matter of labour and their problem hasn't taken required strong steps. The political parties have mixed the labours issues and identity movement and used the labourers in order to rise in the power; one should understand the difference between the labour problem and identity movement. The political parties directly involve itself in the matter of tea plantation labourers and trade unions issues, mainly the leaders of one particular party does meetings with the owners and fixes the matter without the consent of other trade unions. This kind of issues weakens the labour movement and gives the loop whole for bargain to the owners. Debabrata Mitra also mentions about the involvement by the political party affects the working of trade unions, he states, "The interference of political parties to their relative gain is also adversely affecting the functioning of trade union movements across Darjeeling hills."¹²¹

The rise of GJMM under Bimal Gurung even changed the scenario in the Sub-Himalayan region. The inclusion of larger areas of Sub-Himalayan region in the proposed map of Gorkhaland created a dispute in this region among the Nepali speaking people and the Adivasi community of the tea plantation areas; as the matter of fact things took a political turn. Previously during the 1986 agitation the area proposed was mostly the area north of Sub-Himalayan region and were dominated by Nepali speaking people. The GJMM included major

areas of this region in their proposed map even where the Adivasi community were in majority. This created an insecurity within the Adivasi community and dispute between GJMM and Adivasi Vikas Parishad (AVP) began. This political factor led to the conflict between the Nepali and Adivasi labourers within the tea gardens and in functioning of trade unions. The large number of Nepali labourers joined GJMM becoming conscious about their fight for identity, after which more discontentment between the two community was raised. The fraction within the trade union also took place. Sharit Bhowmik writes, "A large section of Nepalis in the tea gardens in Dooars supported the GJMM though they did not leave their respective trade unions to join the GJMM sponsored union. On the other hand, a section of the Adivasis left their traditional unions to join a union formed by the AVP - Progressive Tea Workers Union (PTWU)."¹²² Politically Gurung was not been able to conduct any public meetings in the tea gardens of this regions, they were resisted by the Adivasi community with bows and arrows. The political discontentment affected the working of trade union and the labourers movement very severely.

In 2010 the PTWU announced that the daily wage of the tea plantation labourers, should be 250 rupees, as the daily wage during that time was 67 rupees. The wage paid during this period was very low from the need based minimum wage, even though no specific reason for such high wage was provided by PTWU, the demand was announced without concerning other trade unions. The employers' association was totally against such demand and therefore no changes were made in the wage in order to compensate on the said demand. AVP backed PTWU called the other trade unions to support the demand; the other trade unions were in two minds, if they support the demand it will create the image of PTWU as the only union and the other unions might lose their importance, if goes against the raise they might be termed as anti-working class. Despite such situation meeting was called where all the trade unions were called and Central Committee of Tea Plantation Workers (CCTPW) made a call for rupees 165 as the daily wage looking at the current situation. The decision by CCTPW and PTWU were still on discussion the trade unions of Darjeeling made an agreement of wage at rupees 100 as the daily wage. The agreement was initiated by GJMM run trade union, this clearly showed that in Darjeeling hills trade union of GJMM was having a strong hold and were even misusing their power.

This escalated more problem in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region and even in the hills as inter union conflict again took place; in the tea gardens of Sub-Himalayan region the Nepali labourers were termed as traitors. The Nepali labourers themselves were not supporting the decision of GJMM, neither they said the demand by PTWU and CCTPW were

right, as it may sound them as anti-GJMM. The decision of political parties with their greed of power, mainly without the consent of the tea labourers or their local leaders and even by the bribes (off record) taken by the party in power from the owners in order to settle the movements weakened the labour movements in present days. Whenever any movements with certain demands are raised either the owners will deny the issue or settle in very low from the standard of demand or directly shut down the garden. By doing this the owners have created fear in the mind of labourers of garden getting closed which will in turn hamper their living or their economy.

Observation:

15th August 1947, marked a change from colonial to independent India. Various other changes were associated after this day. Tea plantation which was a colonial construct even experienced few changes, the primary one being the transfer of ownership of tea plantations from non-Indians to Indians. This change was not a sudden one as some of the foreign planters were present till 1980's. One of the primary things which the tea plantation did not experience was the socio-economic life and the functioning of tea gardens. The labour problems, hierarchy, the remuneration process and others remained mostly same for certain years. Changes were experienced in the tea gardens in very less manner and after many years. Increments in the labourers wage took place after long span of time; sometimes it took decade for a rise of few paise or a rupee. This kind of increment system are experienced even in the recent years where after various protest 20 to 50 rupees are increased in the daily wages. The ownership did change and came in the hands of Indians but the system of functioning and controlling the tea gardens and its labourers are still on the basis of the colonial setup. Beside the wages and its increment, the tea plantation labourer had always been facing problem with the basic facilities which the owners and the management has to provide them. Labourers nowadays are provided with cash in place of kind for all the basic facilities like gumboots, bamboo baskets, raincoat, umbrella and others which are required in while working in the garden. The cash provided are very low as compared with the price of those items in the market. Which forces the labourers to take some money from others or money lenders and they even buy in instalment where they have to pay little higher.

The system in which the tea gardens are running, it has paved for the declining numbers of labourers in the gardens. In the globalized era where various private sectors have grown various places attracts the labourers to work where they are paid higher as compared to the tea gardens, all this are leading to labour shortage in the tea gardens. The declining of labour in

the tea gardens are related with the out-migration of the labourers (mainly the youths). Certain number of people from tea garden areas work in the nearby towns in various sector and return back home at the end of the day but larger number of people from tea gardens have migrated to various places with in the country and outside the country for better earnings. This outmigration is the result of less wages paid, very less increment and various labour problems which the owners and government has failed to deal with in a positive manner. The continuous financial burden and mismanagement by the tea planters has led to the need of better earning and work in the tea plantation regions, this leads to migration to other regions and some of whom becomes the victim of Human Trafficking. The rate of human trafficking has become so high in the country nowadays and tea gardens of Darjeeling and Sub-Himalayan region has become a hotbed for trafficking. The dream of better earning and lack of education make the labourers and their young one an easy prey of trafficking for the traffickers. The irregular functioning of tea gardens, frequent shut down and abandonment of the garden has been a severe problem in the tea gardens. Malnutrition, death by hunger, prone with various diseases and sickness has been growing in the shutdown gardens.

Trade Unions in the tea garden of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region has its history since 1940's. Some political party's formation and early political footing is associated with the tea plantation and its labourers. The growth of trade unions in the tea gardens and history associated with has to be understood. The trade unions which has to be the front face of the labourers and voice their problems have turned into the representative of certain political party and speaks the word of the party rather than of labourers. This kind of issues has hampered the labour movement on keeping their demands and raising their problems. The tea garden has the largest number of labourers in an organized sector and even has the highest number of trade unions associated with various national, state and local political parties. After having numerous trade unions, they have not been able to stand in a single ground for the labourers. The domination by the trade union whose political party is in power always exists and hence they have never been able to make a huge difference in the lives of tea gardens labours in the matter of wages and other. Hence, such a large number of union has not been able to bring the Plantation Labour Act in force which has been passed in 1951 for the rights and benefits of tea garden labourers; which has been continuously denied by the owners to bring into force.

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- ¹⁹ Gupta, *Labour in Tea*, 120.

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- ⁴⁰ Gupta, *Labour in Tea*, 145.
- ⁴¹ The facilities mentioned are present in the Clause 8,9,10, 11, 12,13,14,15 of the *Plantation Labour Act of 1951*.
- ⁴² The appointment of the Inspecting Officer is mentioned in Clause 4 of the *Plantation Labour Act 1951*.

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- ⁴³ Clause 36 of Plantation Labour Act reads as, *Clause 36: Other offences*. -Whoever contravenes any of the provisions of this Act or of any rules made there under for which no other penalty is elsewhere provided by or under this Act shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine which may extend to five hundred rupees, or with both.
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Chapter: 7:

Concluding Observation.

The tea plantation has become one of the most important industry in India from the colonial period. This industry has grown as one of the highest foreign exchange industries and exports its product annually. Tea industry has its history related with the colonialism as it was the product of colonialism. During the colonial period the tea regions of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region experienced various changes. The colonisers used the land and every resources of the tea plantation region in order to set the tea plantation. With the use of land and other resources the colonisers also used the local people in the plantation, but later the labourers from other regions were brought to the plantation area when the lack of labour power and resistance by local labourers to work under the colonisers were experienced. The colonisers faced various difficulty in the early phase of tea plantation in both the tea regions, as a result of which they went through every hard and fast steps and implied various rule in the tea garden. The labourers were the worst suffers of such harsh rules implied in the tea plantation.

This research observes that, while discussing the history of tea plantation in India it is important to have a knowledge of history of how tea became an important item of trade for the East India Company and other history and historical incidents related with the British East India Company, Tea and China. After having a knowledge of this history one can understand the introduction of tea plantation in India in a clear manner. This research also finds that after the introduction of tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region, the colonisers during their expansion of tea plantation has manhandled the local natives of these places. In Darjeeling hills the natives were the Lepchas, Mangars and few others, and in the Sub-Himalayan region were the Rajbanshis, Koches, Meches, Lepchas and others. They were removed from their lands when they resisted to work under the colonial planters. The expansion of tea plantation for their economic purpose did affected the natives of these two regions. The expansion of tea plantation in such a large manner also affected the local habitats of flora and fauna to certain extent.

Tea plantation is a labour-intensive industry, in various kinds of work till now machineries cannot be used in place of human labour. The denial by the local labourers to work under the colonisers created a huge problem of labour scarcity for the colonial planters. In order to overcome the labour scarcity, the colonisers brought the labourers from various regions,

these regions include the Chottanagpur regions, Orissa, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh and even from Nepal mainly in the tea plantation region of Darjeeling hills. This research finds that the migration of labourers in the tea plantation regions has taken place during the colonial period as the situation of that period did call for it. Though the migration of labourers in the tea plantation had both pull and push factors which needs to be understood and which has been mentioned in this thesis. The migration of labourers in such a larger manner which took place for years have also brought change in the demography of the tea plantation region and also the living pattern of all the caste and tribes who all migrated had experienced a change.

After the labourers were brought into the tea plantation regions they were recruited in different tea gardens. A recruitment process was taken forward where the Sardar who brought the labourers and the colonial planters went into agreement where the labourers had no much idea about it. This research finds that the recruitment process which took place was unknown to the labourers. They were put into an agreement which was not less than of a slave. In other words, the labourers were sold to the planters by the Sardars, as the Sardars received commission on the numbers of labourers brought and, in many cases, they used to take commission even from the labourers from the money they received as an advance from the planter. The huge section of lands near tea garden area under the name of Sardars can still be seen in these regions which are the living examples of the commission taken by the Sardars.

The colonial planters not only used the labourers in the tea plantation in an intensive manner but they also treated them with harsh rules and some inhumane system. This research finds that, the colonial planters had controlled the socio-economic life of the labourers from every aspect. The settlement was done in such a manner that the labourers were not able to get rid of the colonial clutches nor the labourers were able to resist the suppression done by the planters. The settlement of labourers in the labour line and distinguishing them on the basis of caste and tribe and keeping check on them by recruiting *chowkidars* in the gardens to look at the labourers shows a clear picture of the colonial suppression. The system which prevailed in the tea gardens like *Hatta Bahar* and *chokri* system can be seen as the inhumane treatment by the colonial planters and the managers towards the labourers.

The research also brings in its findings that the colonial planters controlled the labourers through their economy by providing them a very lesser rate of wage. The wages paid to the labourers were very less as compared to the other industries and in another agricultural sector. The low rate of wage payment to the labourers were done to restrict the labourers within the

garden so that the labourers could not leave the tea garden as the low wage paid forced the labourers to take money from the money lenders. The money lenders used to provide money in a very high interest and the labourers while returning the money had to pay for long period and could not afford to leave the tea garden. The colonial planters did not provide the basic facilities of water, houses, sanitation in a better way to the labourers which can even be seen in the Report of Royal Commission on Labour 1931.

This research also finds that during the post-colonial phase the early change seen in the tea garden was the change of ownership. No genuine changes favoring the labourers in the section of wage, living condition and other basic facilities can be seen. The continuous voices raised by labourers, protest by Trade Unions, the Plantation Labour Act 1951 formed for the labours rights has not even been able to solve the matter in a complete manner. The sluggish and very less rate of labour wage rise has been one factor which the planters have been using to keep the labourers under their control by not letting them rise up in the economic section. This shows that the owners and management of the tea gardens still follows the remuneration process based on the old colonial system.

This research focuses on the decreasing numbers of labourers in the tea gardens as an issue of concern in the recent days. This research finds that this labour intensive plantation is losing its labourers in a very quick rate, this will directly affect the labourers who's life depends totally on the tea plantation work, no matter how low rate of wages provided as well as it will affect the owners. The primary reason for out migration in the low wage paid in the tea gardens and blooming of various private sectors in nearby cities which gave the opportunity for jobs with much higher wage and less physical intensive jobs, such as jobs in shopping malls, call centers, consultancies, hotels and resorts and others.

The finding of this research also includes the recent situation regarding the basic facilities which are provided to the labourers by the owners. The basic facilities which used to be provided to the labourers before has come down to the lowest worst rate ever. The labourers are provided with cash in place of the kind regarding the basic items. It is found that they pay rupees 90-100 for gumboots which in market its price is above 300 to 350 for the lowest quality one. For the *Tokri* or bamboo basket (mostly used in hills) they pay rupees 50 where the price of the basket is above 300 rupees. Similarly, all the cash rate provided for the basic items are provided in a very low rate.

The finding also includes the low average in educational qualification in tea gardens as the parents could not afford higher educations; the average education qualification in the tea gardens today is class 12 passed. This is because of the government and semi-government schools in the regions. The rate of school dropout is the highest in the tea plantation region.

This research also brings out the issues of delay in the wage payment and payment in instalments which have become one issue in the tea gardens. Bonus payment to the labourers during the festive season has always been bargained by the owners. The bonus which has been fixed by the labour representatives and the planters association at the rate of 20% rate are mostly not paid at once. It is found that the owners try to deduct the percentage or states to pay in different instalments, if not agreed they threaten to shut the tea gardens. Hence, the labourers have to accept one or the other offers by the owners with the fear of getting nothing. The research also finds the shutting down of tea gardens while the festivals are approaching soon, this takes place in the tea gardens every year. Mostly the tea gardens run by companies such as, Goenka, Lemon Grass and others has the record of conducting such immoral act. Every single one or other tea garden labourers face this problem from the owners.

This research also finds that human trafficking has become one of the hazards in the tea gardens now days. The management and the local authority not being vocal enough has been the loose point. The victims of trafficking who all have been rescued till date has been done by the Non-Government Organisations (NGO's).

The living condition of the shutdown tea gardens are very saddening. The government should interfere here in a strong manner. The research finds that The Financial Assistance to the Workers of Locked Out Industries (FAWLOI) rate amount of rupees 1500 per month (payed only to the Permanent Workers) will not be sufficient in order to bring those labourers from malnutrition. In the gardens where the death by hunger has taken place, suicide due to depression from lockout has taken place, those owners of the then garden should be taken a strong legal action; sadly, which are still absent.

This research also finds that the trade unions in the tea gardens has not been able to imply the Plantation Labour Act nor they have been able to bring one permanent solution regarding the wages of labourers. Due to the different political affiliations, the different trade unions hardly come together to raise the labour issues. The trade unions whose political party is in power mostly dominates the trade unions. Hence, the trade union mainly having power in state acts as a negotiator rather than the defender of labourers issues and needs.

Appendices

Appendix:1 Questionnaire.

Questions for research

Saurav Chettri

PhD Scholar

Jadavpur University

Name of the worker:

Date:

Name of the tea garden:

Name of the owner of the garden or under taken by:

- 1) For how many years he/she is working in the tea garden?
- 2) He/ She belongs to which generation? And from where did their ancestors came from?
- 3) What is the change you have seen or experienced in the tea garden till date?
- 4) Do you have any idea in what sum the tea you have plucked is sold in the world market?
- 5) Do you have idea about the Minimum Wage Act?
- 6) How many persons works in the garden from your family?
- 7) Is the wage you receive is enough for your family to run in today's market?
- 8) Is there any extra source of income in your family?
- 9) Do you receive the other basic facilities (Wood, Boot, Raincoat, Blanket, etc) in regular time interval?
- 10) Do you receive the ration regularly? And how is the quality of it?
- 11) What are the educational qualifications of the family members in your family?

- 12) Have you experienced the situation where one had to sacrifice education, health, food, one had to go away for job and other, because of the economic problems?
- 13) Can you think of anything extra for the family like some household accessories or to visit any place with the wage you receive or with the total family income?
- 14) What are the facilities after retirement?
- 15) What is the kind of house do you have? Kaccha or Pukka? Does the roof leaks during the rainy season?
- 16) Is there a good and hygienic sanitation facility in your house and locality?
- 17) Do you receive any facilities or economic assistance for house and sanitation from government scheme or any NGO's? (if yes what are they?)
- 18) Do you or anyone from your family work in the government schemed jobs like 100 days job?
- 19) Do you face any problem while you or anyone from your family goes to work in the govt. schemed jobs? If you and the job contractor/ supervisor belong to the political party which you don't support? (If yes then describe the incident)
- 20) Which is the currently functioning Trade Union in your tea garden?
- 21) Do you find the work of the trade union affective?
- 22) Do you feel that till now the trade union has been able to look after the tea garden's problem?
- 23) Do you feel that the trade unions runned by the local political parties has been affective in taking forward their problems?
- 24) What you have to say on "does the economy play a role in the social bonding in the society"?
- 25) Is your family in Debt?
- 26) Do you enjoy working in the tea garden?

- 27) Do you sometimes feel like I wish I could change the profession?
- 28) Do you want your up comings to work in the tea garden?
- 29) What is your opinion regarding a separate state?
- 30) Do you feel that separate state will solve the tea worker's problem?
- 31) What comes ahead Identity after the state is achieve or a good solution for the tea garden worker's problems (i.e. increase in wage and so on)?
- 32) What is the only thing you want from the tea planters for the workers, so that you will work in the garden without any issues after that?
- 33) Are you emotionally attached with the tea garden?
- 34) Number of family member working outside tea garden.
- 35) Has any family member gone missing after going to work in faraway places?

Appendix: 2: Photos of Tea Gardens.



Note: Photos taken by Author.

Picture of Marionbarie Tea Garden and Ambootia Tea Garden.

Appendix: 3: Women Plucking Tea in Tea Garden.



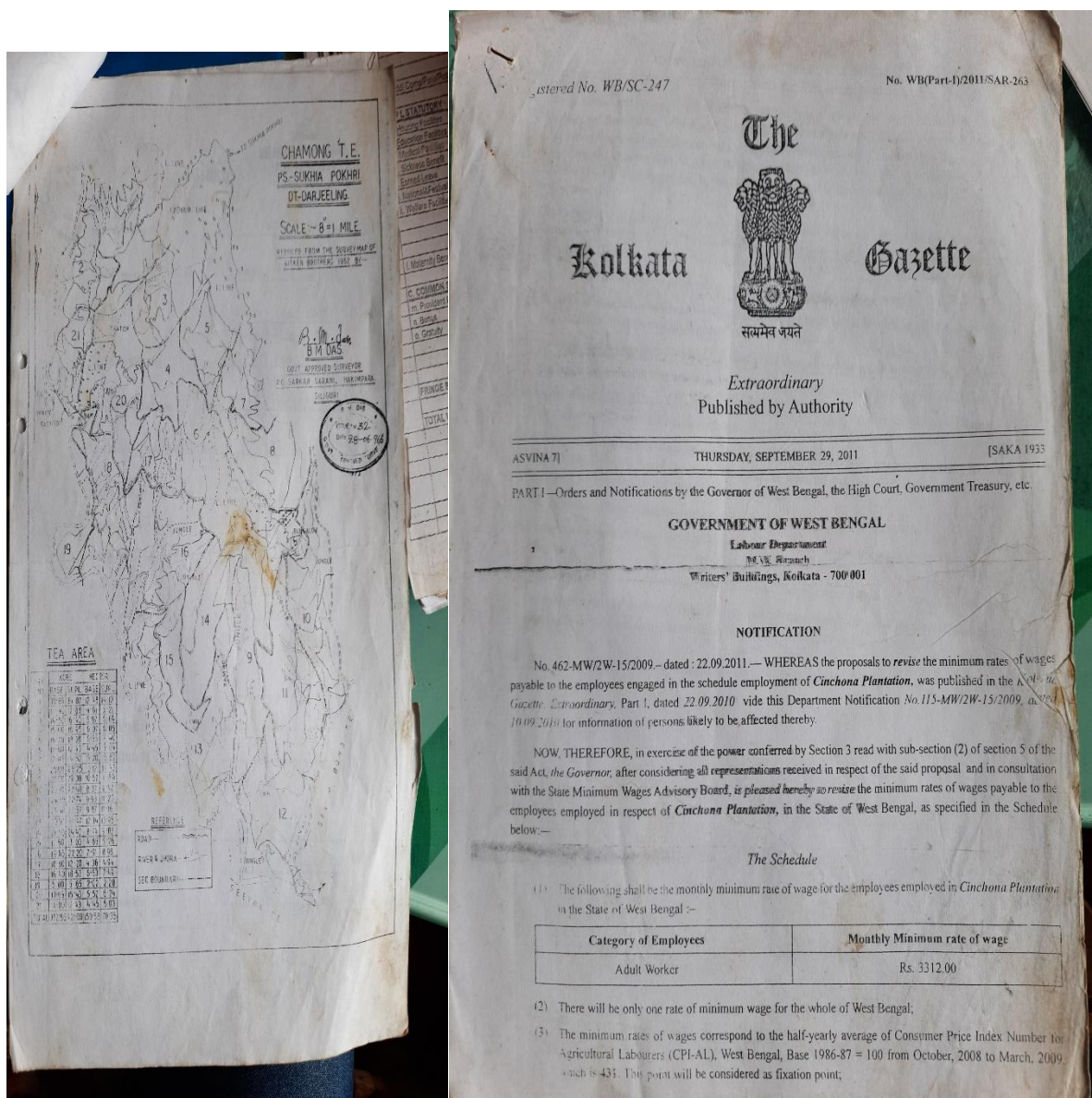
Note: Photo taken by Author. Picture of Singel Tea Garden.

Appendix: 4: Drinking water facility in Tea Garden which was not functioning.



Note: Photo taken by Author. Picture taken at Ambootia Tea Garden

Appendix: 5: Some pictures of materials collected during field work.



Note: Picture taken by author at Selimbong Tea Garden.

TEA BUSH AREA OF CHAMONG TEA ESTATE/ RANGBHANG.		
Sec No.	Hectre	ACRE.
1 A	5.25	12.97
1 B	6.28	15.52
2	4.47	11.04
3	5.39	13.32
4	5.12	12.65
5	6.07	14.99
6	3.84	9.48
7	4.68	11.56
8 A	5.00	12.35
8 B	4.97	12.28
9 A	4.45	10.99
9 B	4.74	11.71
10	2.00	4.94
11	9.11	22.50
12	9.11	22.50
13 A	5.26	12.99
13 B	6.26	15.46
14	8.59	21.22
15	4.49	11.09
16	6.79	16.77
17	3.87	9.56
18	6.39	15.78
19	2.02	4.99
20	5.24	12.95
21	4.35	10.74
10 YT	5.86	14.47
RANGBHANG :		
26 A	5.00	12.35
26 B	5.00	12.35
26 C	5.40	13.33
Total:	155.00	382.85

Note: Picture taken by Author at Selimbong Tea Garden.

भारतको पहिलो रङ्गीन नेपाली / गोरखा दैनिक

हिमालय दर्प

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मूल्य : ५.०० रुपियाँ

Vol: XIV

शुक्रवार वि.सं. २०७२ माघ २२ गते

काम गरेको दाम समयमा नपाएपछि घरमा चुल्हा जलाउन सोच्नुपर्ने स्थिति

दार्जीलिङ, ४ फाबरी (हिस): मालिकवर्गले समयमा काम गरेको पैसा नदिएपछि ती कतिपय चिया बगानहरू बाँकीमा नै चलि रहेका छन्। बगानदेखि निकारखाना अनि बगानका कार्यालयहरूमा सबै काम हुने हुन्छ तर श्रमिक तथा कर्मचारीहरूले काम गरेको पैसा समयमा पाउन सकिनेका छैनन्। क्षेत्रीय स्तरदेखि उर्दो राज्य हुँदै केन्द्रीय स्तरसम्म पुगिसकेका चिया श्रमिकहरूको समस्या समाधानको निम्ति ठोस पहल हुन नसकेको यसको मार भुक्तभोगी श्रमिक परिवारहरूमाथि पर्छ। मालिकवर्गले तिर्नुपर्ने ऋणको कारणले नै चियाबगानहरूमा समस्याहरूले विकराल रूप लिँदै गइरहेको छ।

यसका कतिपय चियाबगानहरू पनि कोमामा पुगेको अवस्था छ। बगानमाथि श्रमिक अनि कर्मचारीले काम गरेको दाम समयमा नपाएपछि घरमा नै चुल्हा जलाउन दशपल्ट सोच्नुपर्ने अवस्था छ। अलगाव गृप अधीनस्थ पहाडमा सञ्चालनमा रहेका ५ वटा चियाबगानमा गत तीन महिनादेखि काम गरेको दाम नदिएपछि बगानको काममाथि आश्रित श्रमिक तथा कर्मचारीहरूको चुल्हा जलाउन दशपल्ट सोच्नुपर्ने स्थिति सिर्जना भइरहेको भुक्तभोगीहरूको भनाइ छ।

अलगाव गृप अधीनस्थ पहाडमा चलि रहेको चियाबगानमा ३ महिनादेखि खर्चपानी, राशनपानी केही नदिएका मोर्चाको श्रमिक संगठन दार्जीलिङ तराई इन्डस्ट्रियल लेबर युनियनका केन्द्रीय अध्यक्ष रमेश शर्माले बताए। उनीअनुसार लगभग सबै मिलाएर काम गर्ने मालिकले अनुमानित लगभग ६ करोड तिर्नु पर्छ। यसरी नै इन्डस्ट्रियल कम्पनीको



अधिनमा पहाडमा रहेको एकमात्र रंगली चियाबारीमा पनि काम गरेको दाम अनि राशनपानी मालिकपक्षले समयमा नदिएको गुनासो छ। समयमा काम गरेको दाम नपाउँदा यसको असर धेरै परिवारमाथि पर्छ। पीटी शेर्पाले बताएअनुसार रंगली चियाबारीमा ६ लाख ८४ हजार ३ सय २० रुपियाँ स्थायी अनि अस्थायी श्रमिकहरूले पाउनुपर्ने बाँकी छ। यसरी नै स्टाफ र सव् स्टाफहरूको एरियरको पैसा १५ लाख २१ हजार ६ सय ४०, गत १ जनवरी २०१२ देखि २०१६ सम्म ग्राजुटीको पैसा ४३ लाख ५४ हजार ३ सय ५९, कर्मचारी तथा श्रमिकहरूबाट काटिएको पीएफको पैसा १ लाख ७२ हजार

८ सय १४ मालिकवर्गले तिरेका छैनन्, जसमा अझ मालिकपक्षले ११२४९१० रुपियाँ धेरै बुझाउनुपर्नेछ। यसबाहेक २९ अप्रैल २०११देखि २८ जनवरी २०१६ सम्म राशनको पैसा ८ लाख ४० हजार दिएको छैन भने अस्थायी कर्मचारीहरूको वार्षिक छुट्टीको पैसा १ लाख ४७ हजार ८ सय ३९ मालिकवर्गले तिर्नुपर्छ। यसबाहेक अधिबाटै किस्तीको ५ प्रतिशत बोनस थापिसकेका रंगली चियाबारीका श्रमिक तथा कर्मचारीहरूले अझ रहल प्रतिशतको बोनसको रुपियाँ ९ लाख ५२ हजार ६ सय ८३ पाउन बाँकी छ। उन रहल बोनसको पैसा जुलाई महिनासम्ममा

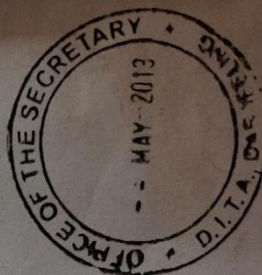
Note: Picture taken by author at Selimbong Tea Garden.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS BOOKLET

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2013



Group I – Clerical, Medical Staff and Technician 'A'Page No.1-5.

Group II – Technicians 'B' and 'C' StaffPage No.6-8.

Group III – OMRE Sub-StaffPage No.9-12.

Group IV – Daily Rated EmployeesPage No.13-15.

Notes of RationingPage No.16.

Note: Picture taken by Author at Selimbong Tea Garden.

Appendix: 6: Memorial of the Martyrs of 1955 Margarets Hope Tea Garden Historical Incident.



Note: Picture taken by Author in Margaret's Hope Tea Garden.

सोनादा II
(सी. पी. आर्ह. राम)

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