

## **Abstract**

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 this 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 this 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.

Similar to various other plantations introduced by the colonisers, tea plantation has its history linked with the colonialism. Tea plantation in Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region is by the effort of the British colonisers, who introduced it for their own benefit, where the natives of these regions have no involvement on it. The introduction of tea plantation and its flourishing has affected the natives of these regions regarding their culture, tradition, agriculture and even in the biodiversity of the region. Hence, this research has tried to bring such issues into focus in the research thesis.

The colonial planters used every resources of the tea plantation region during the experiment period and much more after the tea plantation started to flourish. They first used the lands as getting land for them was not a hard thing, and with that they even used the native people for their purpose. Research in such issues has also been focused in this thesis. Denial by the native people led to bringing of labourers from various other regions which include Chottanagpur region, Orrisa, Bihar, Jharkhand and Nepal. The whole process of bringing of labourers, their migration and recruitment has to studied in a detailed manner, hence this research work has dealt on such matters.

The 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.

After the labour recruitment process, the settlement of labourers were done in such a manner where the labourers of one labour line took labourers of another labour line as enemy. The social lives of the labourers were totally controlled by the colonial planters. The labourers were made to follow various rule and regulation some of which were of inhumane character. Such matters need to be researched and presented in a proper manner, and this study has brought those matters and presented in this research.

The colonial planters controlled the labourers even in the economic aspect. The planters kept the remuneration rate in such a low rate that the labourers could never go beyond their basic requirements which is food. The rate of wage being so low the labourers were bound to take money from the money lenders to celebrate festivals or during marriage functions. The money lenders used to put a very high rate of interest on the given money, the labourers took years to return it and hence they could never get rid of the clutches of money lenders and could not leave the tea plantation work. Such economic control on labourers and the rates of wages paid to the labourers has been presented in this thesis.

The tea plantation in India is one of the important industry which even exchanges highest foreign currency and has been one of the pioneers in exporting finest tea. This colonial industry has been growing economically in the post-colonial phase in a very strong manner. Even after such higher growth the labourers of this plantation has been facing the similar problems of low wage and other issues, this has been presented in this research. The post-colonial phase of tea plantation has been facing various problems. The low rate of wage payments has always been there; increments has been taking place in between but the rate of increment has also been very low. Other than wages the labourers and the owners are having disputes over payment of festival bonus and over basic facilities because of which various strikes and discussion between the trade unions and the managements has taken place which has been discussed in this research.

The post-colonial tea plantation is also facing various other issues such as death and malnutrition due to hunger. This problem has been rampant in the closed and sick tea gardens. Some of the labourers after being frustrated and depressed with the shutdown of tea garden for long period of time and not been able to work elsewhere has also committed suicides. Another

major problem of human trafficking has been taking place in the tea gardens day by day, this is a major issue to be dealt by the tea garden management and the local authority. Decreasing numbers of labourers in the tea gardens has been one of the major matter of concern in the recent times. The rates of decreasing labourers and reasons for such decrease has to be studied in order to understand the matter. Such incidents are required to be researched and put forward; and this research has brought this issues into light.

Trade union in the tea gardens has been with the tea plantation since 1940's with the intend of organizing the labourers under one umbrella. The formation of this trade unions in the tea gardens of Darjeeling and the Sub-Himalayan region was not a simple task. Hence, it has its history which needs to be presented in order to study the trade unions in tea plantation. Such history and historical incidents has been presented in this research thesis. The post-colonial working status especially focusing in the recent years of history has also been presented in this research thesis. In short, from the period of the growth of trade union till the recent period has been summarized in this research thesis.

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