

Chapter -2

Growth of Tea-plantation and Its Impact on Agrarian Economy.

Now- a- days, tea is well-known to all more or less and it is a fine energetic drinking of maximum number of people. Either poor or rich, aristocrat or ordinary, all of us like to take tea for different purposes. But it was not familiar to people before coming of the British. Among the many agro-based Industries of India Tea is by far the most important plantation crop. It not only is an organized industry, but also has a dominant role in the nation's economy. Apart from the other competitors like Jute, it fetches the highest amount of foreign exchange to the national exchequer.¹ 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.²

After expansion in the North Eastern region, particularly Assam and Bengal, the Britishers thought seriously about the region for commercial purposes how to be utilized as because this tract was full of natural resources, somewhere land was very fertile huge patit land or waste land was there. In the previous chapter it has been discussed about the land and land revenue system in Jalpaiguri district of the British. Now in this chapter it will be tried to analyze about the introductions of tea cultivation in the district and its impact on the society in changing scenario.

A real progress was recorded in 1834, in which year, Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor- General, appointed a committee, called "Tea committee to investigate the possibility for cultivating tea in India. In the opinion of P. J. Griffiths, Warren Hastings the then Governor General of India clearly realized that

the company would prosper if the Industry is developed in this country. With this view in mind in 1774, he made a provision for duty free sale of Bhutanese goods in North Bengal in return of which the lands in Bhutan would be utilized for tea cultivation.³

In 1778 Sir Joseph Banks was asked to prepare a series of notes for the cultivation of new crops, of which he advocated the cultivation of tea in India. On the basis of experience of China and Japan he suggested that black teas grew between the 26th and 30th parallel of latitude and teas between the 30th and 35th latitude.⁴ Early in 1839 the Bengal Tea Association was formed in Calcutta and a few weeks later preliminary steps were taken by a separate group of individuals for the formation of the Assam company in London.⁵

a. Land Acquisition for the Tea Plantation.

In the previous chapters it has been discussed how the English East India Company entered into Coochbehar as a dominant power and subsequently they captured the whole tract of the Duars from Bhutanese aggression in 1865 after second Anglo-Bhutanese war. After capturing this tract the British govt. thought seriously about the lands and resources. They started experiments and discussions how to utilize it for commercial purposes and gain financially. The British Govt. kept the Western Duars as a non-regulated area, the govt. himself was the proprietor of the lands and resources. So they started survey and settlement works from 1871, by Mr. Becket and subsequently it was going on. They divided the lands of the Duars into three categories – (1) Land for agricultural purpose giving lease to the jotedars and chukandars, (2) Land for reserve forest and (3) Land for tea cultivation.

It is mentioned in the Government Report “ In 1895 the Mech and Garo subjects in the Western Duars apprehending all the lands hitherto occupied by them were being taken up for tea cultivation ,

petitioned the settlement officer, Jalpaiguri, asking that some specific area might be reserved for them . The Deputy Commissioner of Jalpaiguri and the Commissioner of Rajshahi division supported the proposal and by the Government's notification, No.3203 L. R dated the 6th July, 1895 a block of land mesearing about 30.7 square mile situated in the Alipurduar Subdivision of Jalpaiguri district was declared not to be available for tea cultivation and was thus reserved exclusively for Mech and Garo colony.⁶ From the report it can be said that the lands of the Duars were brought under tea cultivation gradually for which it was necessary to reserve lands for the people of Mech and Garo communities as they were the tribal people who were habituated with shifting cultivation earliar and facing an identity crisis for the immigration of different communities and classes people in the Duars.

The Teagardens were extended in the Duars as well as in the hilly area of Darjeeling district mainly for two reasons- **firstly**, the soil and the relative matter such as climate, rainfall, temperature were favorable for the tea-cultivation, **2ndly**, the availability of lands easily as the Duars were non-regulated area that means the proprietor of the lands was Government himself and there were huge lands without any proprietors, so the Government easily could sanction lands for tea cultivation by lease and obtain rent from land.

As there were no shortages of lands in the Duars, the lands were easily available either in the agrarian sector or in the tea cultivation. At the initial stage, Govt. sanctioned land by lease for tea cultivation to interested tea cultivators by easy terms and condition at the minimum rent.

Grunning also pointed out, "It was soon found that the soil and climate of the Western Duars was suitable to the growth of tea;

Government offered land to the investors on favourable terms and the industry developed rapidly".⁷

The lands taken up for the cultivation of tea in the Western Duars were held direct under the Government, a set of rules specially framed for the purpose. The latest edition of this rules published on page 539 of the Calcutta gazette of 2nd May 1894.⁸

At first, a lease under the tea lease rules is granted for a term of five years. On the expiration for this period, and on the lessee fulfilling certain conditions, the lease was renewed for thirty years, and so on for similar periods in perpetuity. No rent was charged for the year of entry and the next first full years, upto end of the fifth years, the rate of rents varies from 3 annas to 12 annas per acre. On the expiration of the term of the first or preliminary lease, granted for five years, the lands were re-assessed according to the pargana rate. This rate remains unaltered for thirty years. By the terms of the first lease the lessee was bound to open out 15 per cent of the total area by the end of the fifth years. If at the end of that year it was found that the required area of 15 per cent had been opened out, the assessment was made at the rate for rupit land for only that area, and at the rate for homestead or basti for the land occupied by houses, coolie lines, & C. The remaining land is assessed as faringati or waste, as the case may be at rates considerable lower than rupit and basti.⁹

At the time of establishment of tea garden Government sanctioned land by lease to the planters on the following terms and conditions:-

- (1) That the applicant should under take to bring not less than 50 acres under the cultivation each year up to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the land
- (2) That if applicant should fail to bring $\frac{1}{4}$ of the land under cultivation within five years, the collector should be at liberty to withdraw the lease; and

- (3) That the rate of rent was to be for the first year rent free, six annas per acre for the 2nd year, twelve annas for the third year, one rupee two annas for the fourth year and full rate of one rupee eight annas from the fifth year until the resettlement.

But Govt. reserves the right to fix the rent, provided that it shall not be less than 12 annas an acre on the entire area of the land leased, nor exceed the rate of rent per acre, paid in the neighborhood at the time of renewal, for the highest clause of land under ordinary cultivation. the highest rates of rent are payable by tea gardens in the Maynaguri tahsil; land under tea is assessed at Rs. 2 an acre, homestead and bamboos at Rs. 3 an acre and waste land at 6 annas an acre¹⁰

Later on the amount of rent had been decreased and more facilities were given to the leasee and the rents were never higher than of the land for agricultural cultivation.

From the above terms and condition it is clear that the Government would give convenience to the investors of the tea cultivation, as because the Government accepted in principle that lands which yielded valuable crops should be taxed more highly than those which did not, inspite of that this principle was never applied in the case of the tea gardens of the Duars, and rents were never higher than for the land under rice.¹¹

The following table shows the area- paying revenue, the amount of revenue paid, the area held revenue, free and other grants :-¹²

Area actual ly under leasse	Area paying revenue and the amount of revenue paid							Area under lease not yet payin g reven ue	Area grante d and counte r parts not yet exchan ge	Area applied for, but prelimiona ries not yet campleted
	3 anas per aere	6 anas per acre	9 anas per acre	10 anas per acre	Area under renew ed lease	Total area payin g reven ue	Total reven ue			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Acres	Acr es	Acr es	Acr es	Acr es	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres	Acres
1397 1	224 38	616 4	452 3	248 43	78678	1360 08	8942 3	3053	13905	46408

Not only that, to get more facility in the lands Tea Association demanded to repeal the Act XVI of 1869 and introduce the Act X of 1859 in the Western Duars SEJ, Clarke, Esq, Secretary to the Indian Tea Association wrote to the Secretary to the Govornment of Bengal, Revenue Dept.

“The committee would, therefore, urge with all deference that an Act should be passed repealing Act. 1869, and inacting what Act of 1859 should come into force in the Duars, but that such Act should not apply two cases between Government and the holdars of grants or leases of waste land, which should be tried by the ordinary civil courts, and be governed by the ordinary law and the transfer of property Act.¹³

On the basis of the demand of the Tea Association, and the letter of the SEJ, Clarke, JP Hewett Esq. Cie, Offg. Secretary to the Govt. of India Home Dept. wrote a letter to the Secretary to the Govt. of Bengal, Revenue Dept.

“In reply I am to say that the Governor General in Council accept the proposal to repeal Act. XVI of 1869 and that his excellency the Governor General accords this sanction to the

necessary legislation being under take in the council of the Lt. Governor for making laws and regulation.”¹⁴

b. Tea-plantation under European and Indian proprietors.

The history of tea in India was not known clearly before 1774. But the development of tea in India was started with the discovery of wild plants, originally by the natives of Assam in the early 19th century. Around 1823 one major Robert Bruce discovered indigenous tea in Assam.¹⁵ The then Governor General appointed a scientific committee to study and recommend about tea cultivation in Assam and the committee recommended the cultivation of China type tea in upper Assam. The first shipment of Assam tea comprising of eight chests, to London was made in 1838 and the consignment was sold by auction on January 10, 1839.

In North East India tea was grown in four separate tracts of which the Brahma Putra valley in the largest accounting for two thirds of the total areas of North India. The other tea tract of Assam was in Cachar, south of the shilong plateau in the valley of tea river Barak. The third tea tract, Duars and Terai in a long narrow strip immediately to the south of Himalayan in the state of West Bengal and the fourth zone consisted of the mountainous tea district of Darjeeling also in West Bengal.¹⁶ Within very few years after possession of the Duars Britishers realised that the area of the Duars was suitable for tea cultivation, as it was high land, water would not be stored and most of the land was noman’s land which was not restricted to sanction for tea cultivatin. Grunning writes, “It was soon found that the soil and climate of the Western Duars was suitable to the growth of tea; Government offered land to investors on favourable terms and the Industry developed rapidly.¹⁷

In the Darjeeling district the Industry was first established as a commercial enterprise in 1856 and first garden in the Terai of Darjeeling district was opened out in 1862 at Champta, near khaprail by Mr. James white, and in the end of 1866 several other gardens had been opened out in the Terai. The first tea garden in the Jalpaiguri district was introduced at Gazoldoba in the Duars by the late Mr. Haugton, the pioneer of the tea industry in the Jalpaiguri district and the garden was owned by Dr. Broughan who had started, The Dhutaria garden in the Darjeeling district in 1859.¹⁸ The next tea garden was introduced in Fulbari by the late Mr. Pillans who gave his name to the market called Pillans Hat, and was owned by colonel Money. Bagrakot followed, opened out by the late Mr. North and owned by Mr. S. Cresswell. In the year 1876 six grants were issued including those for Fulbari, Gajoldoba, Bagrakot, Dalimkota and Rangatee.¹⁹

At the first stage, tea cultivation in the Duars and elsewhere in N.E. India was profitable because of the land availability easily, availability of labourers very chiefly and the demand of tea in Europe and many parts of the World. So, to be gained financially many Europeans obtained land by lease and started tea cultivation. In this way the number of tea gardens increased rapidly in the Jalpaiguri district. Grunning writes, "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 tea cultivation had increased seven times in five years."²⁰ The cultivation was very rapidly extended during the nineties, and in 1901 the number of grants had increased to 235, with a planted area of 119 square miles and a yield of over 31 million pounds.²¹

The Indians were not silent regarding the tea cultivation in the N. E. region, rather they came forward beside the Europeans proprietors of the tea-estates and invested in the tea cultivation. In 1877, Munshi Rahim Bakesh, a Peshkor of the Deputy

Commissioner, was taken a grant for the purpose of cultivation named Jaldhaka grant on 17-8-1877 and in the same year Baint Barrie, Bamandanga Ellenborrie, Dam Dim, Kumli and Washa Barrie Tea Estates were started.²² Mr. Johnson Took a grant on behalf of land Mortgage Bank, known as kalabari grant for 800 acres on 09.03.1878 and this grant was passed on to the hands of Dr. Nilratan Sarkar, the then eminent physician of Bengal and Smt. Sarojini Roy. Babu Kalimohan Roy and Smt. Durgabati Sen got Altadanga grant of 310 acres in 1878, but they transferred it to Sri Beharilal Ganguly.

A Joint Stock Company in Jalpaiguri was formed on 1879 and it was a milestone for the Indians tea cultivation. Late Bhagwan Chandra Bose, father of illustrious scientist Sri J. C. Bose was posted as a Deputy Magistrate in Jalpaiguri after two years from the inception of the district. Following the successful initiatives in the tea cultivation by the Europeans, Sri Bose pointed out that the Indian should come forward and take initiative. So, the first Indian tea garden named Mogalkata tea estates, Jalpaiguri Tea Company Ltd., a purely Indian concern was started in 1879, and it was pioneer and great initiative in the history of tea cultivation by the Indian in future.

The following table shows the Indian planters and details about their capital invested and land coverage under tea – estates:-²³

Original Capital	Present Capital	Name of the Company	Year of Origin	Gross acreage
50,000	7,00,000	Jalpaiguri Tea Co. Ltd.	1879	1495/560
1,00,000 •	4,00,000	Northern Bengal Tea Co. Ltd.	1882	898/520
85,400	8,41,600	Gurjangjhora	1882	800/612

		Tea Co. Ltd.		
2,25,000	7,75,000	Anjuman Tea Co. Ltd	1889	4026/1112
50,000	5,00,000	Chamurchi Tea Co. ltd.	1881	2190/877
75,000	7,87,500	Katalguri Tea Co. Ltd.	1895	2325/778
75,000	5,00,000	Chuniajhora Tea Co. Ltd	1896	1834/512
75,000	5,25,000	Atiabari Tea Co. Ltd.	1900	1823/1034
1,30,000	8,97,000	Ramjhora Tea Co. Ltd.	1907	1522/858
1,35,200	10,81,000	Devpara Tea Co. Ltd.	1909	1500/900
1,24,200	4,96,800	Diana Tea Co. Ltd	1910	1250/690
11,24,800	75,03,900			19663/8453

From the above table it is shown that the capital had increased tremendously with the heavy profit earned from tea estates and with these capitals the planters purchased more lands and started tea cultivation, some times they purchased old tea gardens. In this way tea cultivation in the district had going up. But, in spite of going up many tea gardens in the district and heavy profit obtained by the tea – planters the economic condition of the district particularly the condition of the general people as well as the labourers had not been improved because the planters did not invest the capital in the Industrial sector for the upliftment of the economy – rather they transferred the capital out side the district or North Bengal, mainly European planters sent their capital in their own Country.

On the other hand, for increasing the tea estates tremendously production had been increased than the demand of the international market as a result of which the market was collapsed. Grunning wrote, "Since the year 1897 the industry has gone through a period of severe depression. The high price and general prosperity, which were the features of the eighties and early nineties, led to reckless extensions of cultivation in India. Ceylon, and Java, with the result that the supply of tea became greater than the demand.²⁴

One point should be mentioned here that the European planters got more facilities than the Indian planters in different aspects such as land acquisition, recruitment of labourers, selling in the market etc. Ranjit Dasgupta writes, "A formidable hurdle faced by the Indians was the difficulty in getting lands for the plantation. rapid expansion of Indian plantation enterprise was a post 1910 phenomenon. But by 1910 all the available waste lands were leased out and most of these were leased out to the European planters. Under the circumstances, the new entrepreneurs, largely Indians had to seek jote lands for plantation. These lands once earmarked for ordinary peasant cultivation had been left uncultivated because of unsuitability for paddy or jute cultivation.²⁵

Dasgupta again writes, "But in 1914, presumably under pressure from the European planters, though on administration order the provincial Government prohibited clubbing of jote lands in a ring fence for the purpose of tea plantation. It meant that no land was available to enterprising Bengalis and other Indians for opening new tea gardens.²⁶

Year wise establishment of Tea Estates in the Dooars²⁷ List given

<u>1875</u>	Nagrakata
Gazul doba	<u>1981</u>
	Hahaipapha
	Oodlabari
<u>1876</u>	Neora Nuddy (Upper Neora)
Fulbari	Moghalkata
Rangatee	Bytagool
Bagrakot	
Gandhabheel	
Dalinkote	<u>1882</u>
	Needam
	Carron (Mujnai Grant)
<u>1877</u>	
Jaldhaka	<u>1883</u>
Baint bari	Toon bari
Baman danga	
Ellenbarie	
Damdim	<u>1884</u>
Kumlai	Youngtong
Washabari	Chalauni
	Nagaisuree
<u>1878</u>	Ingo
Kala bari	Zurantee
Good Hope (Sishu bari)	Moortee
Ranichara	Aibheel
Money hope (Phul bari)	Kilcott
Mana bari	Nedcem (Necdeem Tea Co. Ltd.)
Ballarie	Matelli
Altadauga	Chalsa
Chael and Pata Bari (Leash River)	Sundree
	Alston (Needeem tea Co. Ltd.)
<u>1879</u>	Banks(--- do ---)
Mogulakata	Sylee (-- do --)
Rupnee	Meenglass
Soon gachi	Chengli

Bhutta Barse	
Ranikhols	
Sathkhaya	<u>1888</u>
	Kujih (Carron)
	Huldi bari (Tallyhe Grent)
<u>1885</u>	
Baitguri	
Rangakotha	
Chengmari	
Kurti	<u>1889</u>
Nakhati	
Indong	
Chupaguri (Needeem Tea Co. Ltd.)	
	Chengmari
	Grassmore
	Saugaon (Bagrakote)
<u>1886</u>	<u>1890</u>
Springfield	
Sukha barec (Duars Tea Co. Ltd)	
Hope	
Tondoo	
Jitee	
Malnuddy	
Rangutee (Needeem)	
Gurjong Jhora	
Nagra kata	
Gatea	
Bhogatpur	
Looksan	
Forest Hill (Needeem)	
Chalauni	
	Telipara
	Gairkata (Augra bhara Hunta Para)
	Mujnai (Anjuman Co.)
	<u>1891</u>
	Makrapara (Anjuman Co.)
	Hantupara
	<u>1892</u>
	Bunda pani
	Lankapwa
	Chamurchi
	Totapara (Nuddia)
<u>1887</u>	
Glenco	
Patharjora	

<u>1894</u>	Lakhipara
Chunabhati	Reti
Hartalguri	Shyamjhora(?)
Newlands	Kalchini
Doodoomari (Assam Dooars)	Dalgaon
Gandrapra	Dalmoni (Meedeem)
Chuapara	Dalsingpara
	Bhuan Duars (x)
	Raidak
<u>1895</u>	
Nakhati	
Rangamatee (Jnperial Tea Co.)	<u>1898</u>
Chuapara	Binnaguri
Toorsa (Needeem)	Deb Para
Kathalguri	Lanka Para
Banarhat (Chapaguri Grant)	Ahabri
Karbala	Phaskowa (Kalikhola Grant)
Jointee	
<u>1896</u>	
Huldi bari (Assam Duars Tea Co.)	<u>1900</u>
Chunia jhora	Gandrapara
Baradighi	Chuapra
Drlah	Rangama tea (Central Duars Tea Co.)
Guabari	Dalsingpara
Palashbari 1st (New Duars)	Ranga tea 2 nd (?)
Hasimara (7 Grants)	
Kalchini	
Rahimabad	
Birpara (Birpiti& other grants)	<u>1902</u>
<u>1897</u>	Nagrakata
Garganda	Dimdima
Muktijhora	Baintbari (Neseem)
Mateejhora	Baradighi
	Gandabheel (Fulbari Tea Co.)

Chuniajhora	Turturi
Kalchini	Rajabhat
Hatipota Imperial Tea Co.	
Dhoala	
	<u>1911</u>
	Damdim
	Debpara
	Dina
	<u>1912</u>
	Lakhipara
	<u>1913</u>
	Gopalpur
	Hossainabad
	Jay birpara
	Dheklapara
	Nimtihora
	Palashbari
	Rhea bari
	Radharani
	<u>1915</u>
	Patkapara
	Dhaowlajhora
	Kohinoor
	<u>1917</u>
	Saraswasti pur (In Baikuatha Pur area)
	<u>1918</u>
	Sanny valley (Joypur)
	Karala valley
	<u>1910</u>
1903	
Tashati	
Dalmoni (Needssm)	
Bhatkhawa	
(Date of incorporation of the company 3.9.1900)	
Kumlai	
	<u>1904</u>
Emerabad (Assam Duars Tea Co. Ltd.)	
Rupai (?)	
Atiabari	
	<u>1906</u>
Bataigole	
	<u>1907</u>
Dumchipara	
	<u>1908</u>
Ambari	
	<u>1909</u>
Dima	
Dalmora	
Ramjhora	

<u>1919</u>	Malhati Anandapur Sreenath pur
Majher dabri	
Satali	
Mathura (Sarada)	
Bitri(Hantupara)	
Barron	<u>1928</u>
Moraghat	Kadam bini
<u>1922</u>	<u>1929</u>
Red Bank	Madhu Luxmi kanta
<u>1923</u>	Rahim pur
Nangdala	
<u>1924</u>	<u>1930</u>
Ethel bari	Saudamini
Hartal guri	Gopimohan
<u>1926</u>	<u>1933</u>
Bata bari	Nepu chapur
Jadabpur	
<u>1927</u>	<u>1934 – 1968</u>
	Surendra Nagar
	Dharani Pur

Though the Indian proprietor of the Tea garden played a significant role in the cultivation of tea as well as on the economy of the district, they had to face lot of hinderences for having different facilities and advantage. Firstly, DPA (Duars Plan Planters Association) where the memberships were opened only for the European planters till 1915. Even after 1915, when representation within the Association was allowed to Indian-owned gardens, the D.P.A was remained a predominantly European Association primarily looking after the interest of the European planters²⁸ 2ndly it was hard to Indian planters to have waste lands lease out by the govt. in this circumstances the new entrepreneurs had to seek jote lands for tea cultivation. But here also created problems by the European planters. They created pressure to Govt. not to be allowed tea cultivation in the jote lands as a result, Govt. prohibited tea cultivation in the jote lands . 3rdly European planters obtained financial help through Banking system, but the Indians had to depend on the Marwari businessmen, money lenders friend and relatives sometime it was on high interest, something it was not available in time. 4thly, Indian planters had to face many difficulties relating to Government's assistance such as labour supply, allotment of railway wagons, coal supply, store-management, carring of tea, auctions, ware hausing, tea tasting and broking, procurement of machinery and supply of tea chests.

Number of tea-gardens in the district and amount of land.²⁹

Year	No. of gardens	land under tea-garden (in cars)
1874	1	---
1876	13	818
1881	55	6230
1892	182	38583
1901	235	76403
1907	180	81338
1911	191	90859
1921	131	1,12,688
1931	151	131074
1941	189	131770
1951	158	134473

From the above table it is followed that the amount of lands under tea cultivation had been increasing gradually from 1874 to 1951, though the tea gardens decreased during 1901 to 1951. It proves that the tea cultivation in the district was heavy profitable for which lands were brought under tea cultivation newly in different times by different planters obtaining different grants (lease) from Government. After 1951 the motion was also upward as follows³⁰

1956 – 57 -----	53570.93 hectares
1957 – 58 -----	53,806.86 hectares
1958 – 59 -----	54,022.09 hectares
1959 – 60 -----	54,326.67 hectares
1960 – 61 -----	54,494.84 hectares

After independence, Land Reforms Programme could not be implemented successfully. Many problems were seen in the lands

occupied by the tea-planters. Debesh Roy wrote, "The amendment bill of the West Bengal Land Acquisition Act has been accepted in the last session of Assembly. The main motive is to acquire the surplus lands of tea estates in North Bengal. Earlier it would depend on the direction of Government for which no land was declared as surplus land of the tea estates in the reign of Congress Government. Whenever any Kind of dispute arised, Government stood by the owner of tea estate. So the article b(3) have saved the owners of tea estates.

So, by the amendment of the West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act, opened the way to reconsider the said matter. Now, Government can decide the amount land newly in the tea estates and acquire the surplus lands. So, this amendment will give the Government new power"³¹

There were some problems in acquisition and distribution of vested land in the tea estates areas. Firstly, the labourers themselves cultivated in the surplus lands of the tea estates. In this circumstance, an inner struggle might be take place between labourers and the peasants for the conspiracy of the owners of the lands. Secondly, no change has been brought in official organization of land and land revenue department. To be implemented in political preparation of the new hopes brought among the poor people by the United Front Government, the traditional technique of the land distribution have to be changed.³²

C. Imported Tea- labourers in the Duars and their condition

It has, already, been discussed about the introduction of the tea-cultivation in the district of Jalpaiguri, if is found that the number of tea gardens increased rapidly from 1874 to 1901, a problem of the paucity of labourers would have been face by the tea planters

both of Europeans and Indians. At the first stage Nepali labourers were recruited in the garden which was not sufficient, the indigenous people were not interested to work in the gardens as a tea labourer. Among the indigenous people Meches, a tribal community of the district and only the people who could accommodate in the unhealthy and intolerable condition affected by Malleria, Kalaazar and dysentery etc, were not interested to work as a labourer in the tea – garden, rather they preferred to live independently in the jungle depending on agriculture and hunting.

The Rajbansi people and Mohammedans (Converted from Rajbansi Hindus) were also not interested to work in the tea – gardens they also preferred to survive depending on agriculture. The residence of the tenant farmers surrounded by the homes of his relatives and farm labourers and perhaps a few under tenants. The result of this system in the absence of the functional castes; there were no village servants, barbers, washer men and sweepers who were imported from Behar or elsewhere; the washer men were nearly all Beharis and very few of the servants of the Europeans community were native of the district.

As the indigenous people were less interested to work in the tea garden, the tea planters looked for labourers from outside the Duars and it was found in Santal Parganas of Bihar and Chhotonagpur where large number of tribal people namely Santals, Oraons lived and faced an identity crisis losing their independent life in the 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 land they proved their labourious activities in the work of establishing Railway line in India by the Britishers. So the planters choose these laborious people for this hard task.

Other than these causes, the European planters were not interested to recruit local labourers inhabited in the neighbouring areas of tea gardens, rather they preferred to recruit labourers from

outside because recruiting labourers from out side was more convenience than the local labourers. They could not create problem like local labourers, they had to completely depend on the planters like prisoners. This policy was called 'Enclave Economy' which was seen in the other empires of the British out side India.

But the planters did not recruit labours from out side the district directly, rather to avoid the difficulties they preferred to recruit labourers indirectly through the 'Sardars'. A Sardar received a commission usually at the rate of one pice on each 'haziri' or task on the number of Coolies whom he sends to work daily.³³

To Nirmalendu Bhattacharerjee, for the Terai and the Doors the picture is however different. At the initial stage, the tea estates of the Western part of the Dooars employed Nepalese labour, but immediately it was realized that sufficient labour could not be obtained locally, or from the surrounding area. For this reason, the gardens situated in the Dooars and the Terai started from above 1880, recruiting from Chhotanagpur and Santal Parganas of Bihar. The recruitment was made through 'Sardar' who received commissions usually at the rate of one piece on each 'Haziri' or task on the number of workers whom he sent to the garden.³⁴

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.³⁵

So, tea labourers were imported from Chhotonagpur and Santal Pargana through the Sardars or their agents by provoking them many ways. S. Roy in his book writes, under the system of recruitment in the Doors a sardar or his deputy visited the recruiting district year after year and returned with new workers.

The workers were recruited from the some group of villages with which the recruiter was familiar and with which he had some personal connection.³⁶

The labourers had come in the Duars leaving their relatives in the houses taking advance from the Sardars which were given to cover road expenses, travel money and repayments of the worked existing debt. After recruiting the labourers, they had to depend on the Sardars which was the ultimate force that bound the workers to remain in the garden losing their legal freedom.

It is relevant to mention here that some differences are followed regarding recruitment of labours between Duars and Assam. It has been discussed about the recruitment of labourer in the Duars through the sardars, but in Assam labours were recruited through Arkatis and a intermediaries class was seen in this regard, these intermediaries obtained a lot of amount through recruiting labours. S. Roy writes, "While the total expense incurred in recruiting an Assam worked amounted to between Rs, 80 and 120. The actual expense of transit of a worker was only Rs, 30. The profit margin which the recruitment in Assam offered led to the proliferation of several layers of intermediaries in the system. The system in the Duars was by and large free from the interference and the malpractices which their presence entailed."³⁷

2ndly, the Duars labourers were free in the sense that they were not indenture labourers subject to penal measure.³⁸ Officially the Duars labourers could move one garden to another garden though it was hard practically, but in the Assam the labourers were bounded with agreement so that the labourers had not right to move according to their choose Apart from these, the missionaries took an important role to recruit labourers in the tea – garden of Assam from Chotangapur, Santal pargana and Orissa. Prof. Ram Krishna Chatterjee in his Article "Cristian Missionaries and labour Migration to Assam Tea Gardens in Colonial Times" tried

to show the role of Missionaries to recruit and migrate the labourers in Assam tea – gardens. Dr. Chatterjee writes, “There are numerous instances to show that the Missionaries of Chotanagpur, Santal Parganas, Orissa and various other missions of India considered migration as one of the means to release the tension of poverty – stricken rural India, arising out of the oppression of the land – lords and money – lenders in the given colonial frame work”³⁹ In order to encourage migration of the labourers, the Missionaries propagated that those who would immigrated to Assam would have the opportunities to settle in Government waste lands. Besides, they would not have to pay bet begari or suffer harassment of law suits; nor would they have to face oppression for the Zamindars etc.⁴⁰ But there were no such evidences to show the role in recruiting the labours in the Duars.

Tea – garden to the labourers in the district and else where in India was not bed of roses, as it has already been discussed that the labourers have been imported from outside the Duars (Nepalese from Nepal and Darjeeling district and oraons, Mundas and Santals from Santal Pargana and Chhotanagpur). So, labourers had to come leaving their own residence and relatives. They were suppressed and oppressed in different ways.

Sir, P. Griffiths pointed out that the labourer in the Duars were always free in the sense that they were not placed under any kind of contract and could live wherever it pleases.⁴¹ But this facility could have not been by the labourers in practical as because it was difficult for the labourer to move one garden to another garden freely for working purposes, Grunning wrote, “Labour in the Western Duars is free and the services of the Coolies are not secured by any form of agreement;..... There is no Government suppression over emigration to the Duars and the treatment of Coolies enroute to the gardens is not regulated by any special provision of law.⁴² Ranjit Dasgupta wrote in this context “On their arrival at the gardens, the labourers were put in a

concentration camp – like situation. The managers enjoying the explicit or implicit support of the colonial authority and the mystique of the Sahib were law unto themselves. Physical coercion beating, flogging – all these were quite common. Incidents of death from physical torture were not unknown. There are unrecorded accounts of troublesome workers being thrown into furnaces of garden factories.”⁴³

It is true that in some cases labourers had been given lands for cultivation for their livelihood apart from the working in the tea – gardens and in this context it seems to be a beneficial step to the labourer. Actually it was the technique to keep the labourer in the garden as there was no lack of land and easily available it.

The census report of 1881 shows that there were 210 Oraons smaller numbers of other immigrant tribal groups but the number of the labourer in the tea – garden had been increasing rapidly. The statistics are given below:- ⁴⁴

Number of labourer employed

Year	Permanent	Temporary	Total
1901	47,365	21,254	68,619
1911	56,693	18,622	75,315
1921	86,693	1871	88,564
1931	112,591	4,262	116,853
1941	136,491	4,896	141,387
1951	178,009

The life of the labourer always had on risk fighting against the ferocious animals on the other hand they had to suffer dangerous deceases Malaria, Kalazar, desentry etc, in addition with these they had to tolerate the intensive oppression of the Manager and the officials without any protest or objection. They had no way to flee from the confined life in the garden as they were always

guarded by Chaukidar (Guard). If any body tried to flee, he had been caught and given punishment. In this perspective Monahar Tirki, the minister of West Bengal wrote , “The torture on the tribal people was increasing. Besides the mental and physical torture, the tendency among the sahib to sexual enjoyment with the tribal women had also been increasing.⁴⁵

Sri Deben Sarkar wrote, “ 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.⁴⁶

Samir Chakraborty writes, “There was no account, how many people were killed affected by malaria, Kalazar etc! Physical torture and raped in the European tea garden of North Bengal was not rare though it was not regularize. In the Bengali tea garden physical torture, rape, conversion etc would not happen, though oppression was the same.”⁴⁷

There was no legal time – table for working of the labourer. Sunder wrote, “In the cold weather and rains plucking work was done from 7 am till about 6 pm with two hours leave.”⁴⁸

The wage of the labourer was not satisfactory. Though Sunder pointed out that the wages of an ordinary labourer in the Duars is not more than 4 annas a day or Rs 7 – 8 a month, the tea – garden coolies earn double this. In fact their earnings are so great that they often show a spirit of independence and insubordination which tries patience and good will of the managers of gardens very considerably.⁴⁹ But it was not the real picture of the labourers in the tea – garden. There are so many evidences of the oppressions of the labours in the district and else where in India which proves that the labourers in any where in the colonial period were not in comfortable condition. In the early 1890’s 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.” Official report shows that in the years between 1893 and 1908 there was a 66 percent rise in the price of rice, the stample food of the tea – garden labourers and more than that of wheat, but the wage rates remained unchanged.⁵⁰

Public health and education of the labourer were not satisfactory. At the first stage there were no responsibility of the planters about the health and education of the labourer. It was in 1912 the Duars labour Act was passed but it was concerned with government inspection only in the matters of sanitation and public health. The enactment was prompted by the high incidence of sickness resulting in absenteeism and heavy death toll among the workers due to various diseases, particularly malaria and black water fever. The sahibs too often felt prey to these scourges and actually felt the need for some measures to control these.⁵¹ Even after the independence the laborers had not been provided modern facility of the treatment. In most of the diseases were concerned, they had to depend on the local process of treatment by ojha or kabiraj, apart from this they had to depend on charlatan or quack, as because there were no M.B.B.S or qualified Doctors, as a result, the patients had to expire for the wrong treatment. Most of the gardens in the Duars had dispensaries and common medicines for treatment of their labourer.

Number of deaths from principal diseases in the tea – gardens during 1939 – 44 as follows⁵².

Year	Total population	Fever	Dysentery and Diarrhoea.....	Cholera	Phthisis	Chest complain	Kala zar	Black water Fever
1938-	2,85,789	1326	1175	20	477	1061	9	8

39									
1939-40	2,90.174	1228	1024	41	490	802	9	8	
1940-41	2,91.253	1314	950	5	541	736	10	9	
1941-42	2,85.877	1142	1065	9	528	648	20	5	
1942-43	2,89.239	1244	1104	8	517	765	48	8	
1943-44	2,75.398	1256	1181	144	543	241	28	11	

Though some schools were established in the garden area for the education of the children of labourers at the initial stage, but it was not satisfactory as because they were not conscious about the education other than these steps were not taken actively or cordially to educate the children of the labourers. The statistics of school in the Duars are given below:-⁵³

Year	Number of School	Number of pupils	Average daily attendance
1941	150	6,732	4,218
1942	146	6,723	4,569
1943	149	5,130	3,423

Beside these, the labourers were oppressed and cheated by the traders and shopkeepers. There were many Hats in the Duars which held in one or two days in a week near the garden where no rules and regulations were practically, no price control policy, as a result the labourers were cheated by purchasing essential things by double or re - double rate than the original rate. They were also victimized by the political leaders. The local leaders among them took the role of agent for the oppression of the labourers, rather the emancipator of them. In spite of all these intensive life the

labourers enjoy themselves with their folk songs, dances after taking Haria (local wine) and Cholai and observed different festivals forgetting the intensive life of sorrow and pain. Paritosh Dutta the leader of tea workers Association writes,

“Really the tea labourers perform all the dances songs and music of their own community. The rytham of this music send them in the world of imagination. The tune of oppression and suppression make a new wave – the folk artists involving with their regular struggle become the artists of the masses.”⁵⁴

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