

### CHAPTER - III

#### BACKGROUND OF THE TEA PLANTATION

In the foregoing chapters I have discussed theoretical approaches to the study of women as well as place of women workers in the labour force in India in general and particularly in the plantation system. The present chapter, firstly, deals with the growth of plantation industry in West Bengal, and secondly, it describes the basic features of a tea plantation industry of Darjeeling district along with its population, hierarchical system, characteristics of the men and women workers and their ethnic background, religion, literacy and migration.

#### GROWTH OF TEA PLANTATION IN WEST BENGAL

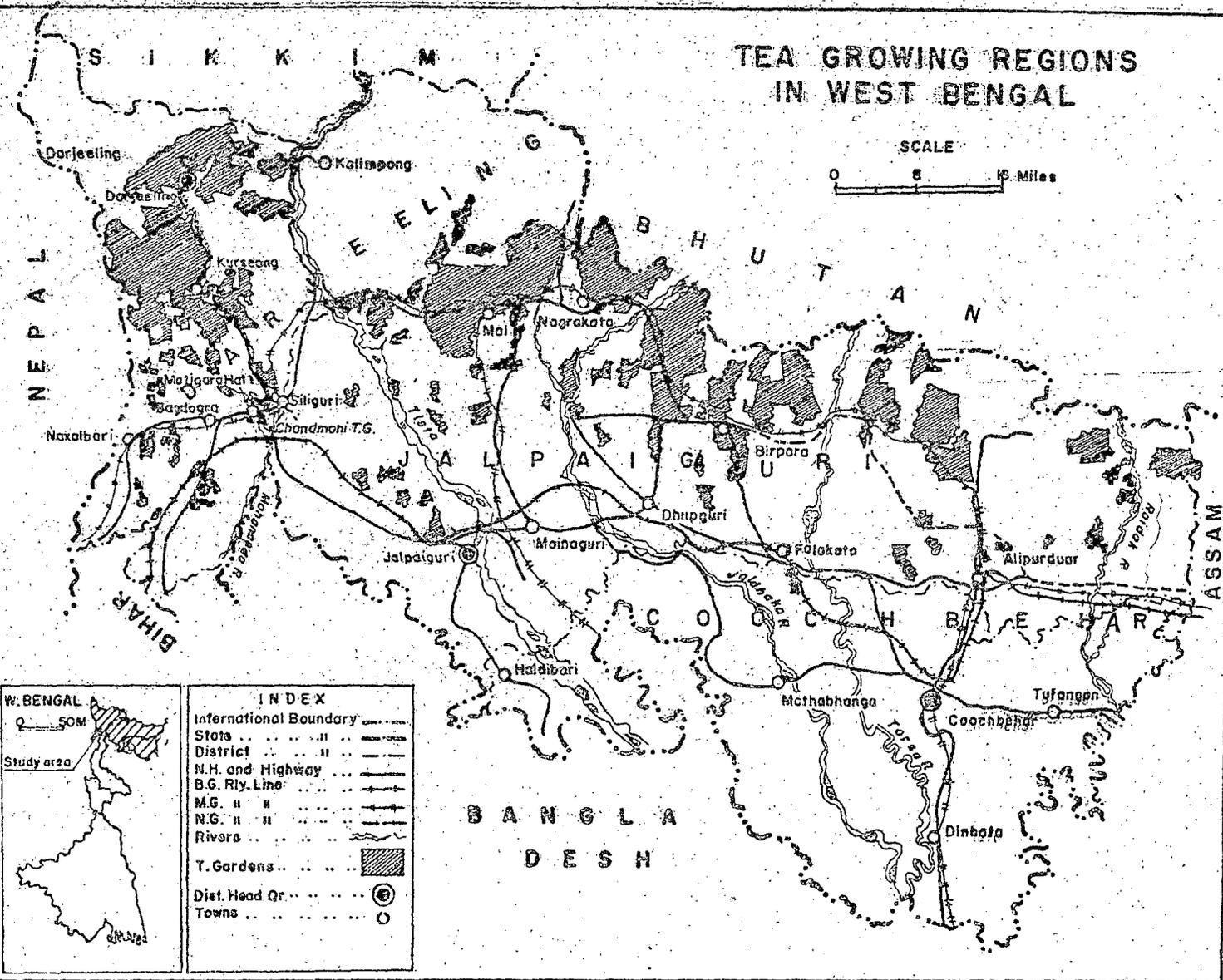
The history of tea industry in India goes back to 1820 when tea plant was discovered growing wild in Assam. In 1835, the first tea plantation was started in Assam by the British Government.<sup>1</sup> Gradually West Bengal was found suitable for tea cultivation and experimental tea plantations were established. The tea producing area in West Bengal are Darjeeling, Dooars and Terai regions. In Darjeeling district the Kurseong and Darjeeling Tea Company opened the first tea

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1. Gait, E., A History of Assam, Thacker Spink & Co, Calcutta, 1935, pp. 411-412.

# TEA GROWING REGIONS IN WEST BENGAL

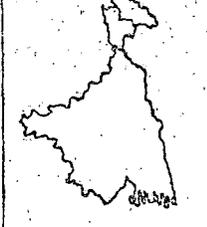
SCALE  
0 5 10 Miles



W. BENGAL

0 50 M

Study area



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garden known as Alubari in 1856 and in Jalpaiguri district Gazelduba garden was started in Dooars in 1874. In the Terai region of Darjeeling district the first tea garden was started in Champita near Khaprail in 1862 and by 1866 many other plantations were opened in this region.<sup>2</sup> In this year there was 39 tea plantations occupying 10,000 acres of land of the district. There was a regular increase in the number of plantations. In 1895 there came up 186 plantations with 48,692 acres of land. Since 1896 there had been a continuous decrease in the number of plantations and in 1935 it came down to 148 plantations which occupied 59,356 acres of land. Again there was a fall in the number and in 1940 their number was recorded as 142 occupying 63,059 acres of land. The area occupied by the plantations increased upto 63,227 acres in 1943.<sup>3</sup> Therefore it is revealed that while the number of tea gardens had been decreased the acreage under tea had increased between 1896 and 1943. Such decrease in the number of tea gardens was perhaps due to the fact that some small gardens merged with one another or with a bigger one. However, most of the gardens had increased the acreage under tea cultivation.

The development of tea plantations required two basic requisites : a large area for cultivation and a large

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2. Dash, A.J., Bengal Gazetteers, Darjeeling, 1947, p. 113.

3. Ibid., p. 114.

labour force. The tea regions of West Bengal were either sparsely populated or the local people rarely worked on plantation because of the low wages offered by the planters. In 1931 the basic wage rates in Darjeeling hills was 5 annas for men, 4 annas for women and 3 annas for children and in Terai plantations it was 4 annas for men, 3 annas for women and 1½ annas for children.<sup>4</sup> It was 4 annas for men, 3 annas for women and 3 annas for children in Dooars.<sup>5</sup> Such basic wages were prevalent for a long time. It was reported that the local agricultural labourers in adjoining villages earned more without difficulty. Perhaps these people would not have liked to give up their independent holdings to work on tea garden.<sup>6</sup> Since local labourers were not willing to work on plantations, the planters had to look elsewhere for the supply of cheap and hardworking labourers.

The plantation all over the world is survived on imported labourers which are comparatively cheaper than the local labourers. In tea plantation, planters had to depend on indentured labourers from outside. Thus the immigrant

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4. Ibid., p. 119.

5. Griffiths, P., The History of Indian Tea Industry, Weidenfel and Nicolson, London, 1967, p. 30.

6. Bhowmik, S.K., "Recruitment policy of tea plantations" in North-East Quarterly, Vol. I, No.2., 1982.

labourers become an inseparable part of the plantation system. Plantation is by and large associated with a resident labour force which is of alien origin.

Rapid growth of tea plantations within a very short period experienced a labour crisis in this region. In Darjeeling district there were not only tea plantations but also a number of Chincona plantations on the hills. Chincona plantations further added to the labour crisis in the region. This demand was then fulfilled by a large scale immigration into the tea districts. The immigrants were mainly Adivasis (tribals) from Chotanagpur region of Bihar, Raigarh of Madhya Pradesh and from several feudatory states of Orissa. In the hill regions the majority were Nepali immigrants. In the Terai region the population was mixed with a low proportion of Nepalis and a high proportion of immigrated Adivasi people. The local people like Meches, Rajbansis, etc. rarely worked in tea plantations. Low wages and hazardous conditions of work provided strong disincentives for the local population. Therefore the industry had to look elsewhere for supply of labour.

It was not possible to state the exact number of men and women workers separately during the different stages of migration of tea labourers in Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts as no such systematic data were available. However, Dash noted that in tea industry of Darjeeling district

there were 8,000 members in 1870, 44,279 were employed in 1921<sup>7</sup> and 61,540 were in 1940.

Like Dooars almost entire labour force in the tea plantations in Terai consisted of immigrants and their descendants. The plantation workers in Terai were never placed under any contract. In this sense they were 'free' labourers as found in Dooars. But in Assam they were like bondage labourers. Some garden managers frequently tried to entice workers from other gardens to avoid the recruiting costs. In order to prevent such enticement of labourers some code was formed by the Terai Planters Association.

In Darjeeling district there was 56 gardens in 1870 out of which 44 in the hills and 12 in the Terai region. The total labourers were 8347 of whom 4484 were men, 2935 were women and 928 were children. During the four years following 1870 the tea industry in Darjeeling continued to develop and by 1874 the number of plantations had increased from 56 to 113. The cultivated area rose from 11,046 acres to 18,888 acres and the labourers employed rose from 8347 to 19,424. During that period the increase of labourers was very satisfactory. It was seen that within the years between 1866 and 1874 the number of gardens under tea plantations had almost exactly trebled, and the area under tea cultivation had increased by 82 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

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7. Dash, A.J., op.cit., p. 115.

8. Hunter, W.W., A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.X (Reprinted), D.K.Publishing House, New Delhi, 1974, pp. 166-172.

The problem of shortage of labour existed for nearly eighty years since the foundation of tea industry in the Darjeeling district in 1866. The tea industry was rapidly expanding as the number of tea garden increased ( Table : 9 ).

Table : 9

Tea industry in the Darjeeling District,  
1866 - 1874

Year	Number of Gardens	Area in Acres	No of labourers employed
1866	39	10,392	Not known
1867	40	9,214	"
1868	44	10,067	6,859
1869	55	10,769	7,445
1870	56	11,046	8,347
1871	—	—	—
1872	74	14,508	12,361
1873	87	15,695	14,019
1874	113	18,888	19,424

A striking feature of the labour force in plantation in the country in 1944, about which the Labour

9. Ibid., pp. 164-165.

Investigation Committee had made a specific mention, was the employment of women and children in large numbers in all the centres. In Assam and Bengal the labour force comprised an almost equal number of men and women, and in south India women outnumbered men workers. It was significant to note that women workers outnumbered men in all the regions of the country. The main reasons were as follows. The recruitment of workers was on a family basis rather than on an individual basis. The work in plantations was akin to that of agriculture, and women workers hailing from rural areas had no difficulty in picking up the work. Migration of workers along with their families placed almost an obligation on management to provide work to members of worker's family as well. For this reason all the previous data available on plantation were based on workers in general. Women workers were never treated as a distinct group of workers in the light of historical evidences. Therefore, a very little data were available on the historical background leading to the employment of women in tea industry of Terai though they were asset to this industry.

However, the number of women workers was found to be remained constant or slightly increased. It was found that their number was more in comparison to the men workers. In 1939, of the working population in the tea plantation in Darjeeling district, 39 per cent were men, 43 per cent were

women and 18 per cent were children. Figure for 1943 showed that men made up 34 per cent, women 49 per cent and children 17 per cent.<sup>10</sup> Gradually the number of workers increased and the planters overcome the crisis of labour shortage. Since migration was family-based, and since very few people returned to their places of origin, the children of the workers soon became the job-seekers. However, tea industry in Darjeeling district was expanding till 1950's. After 1950's the industry stopped migration as there were surplus labourers. In 1952 the Plantation Labour Act was passed to protect the men and women workers in plantation. Now the feudalistic relations between planters and the workers changed to a relationship of employers and employees. The plantation workers were given some legal protection and there was scope to form their own association. Since the Plantation Labour Act was effective for permanent workers, the planters wanted to reduce the number of permanent workers as this would decrease the overhead costs. Consequently, there was a reduction in the labour force since the passing of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. However no exact data were available for particularly the women plantation workers although the Tea Board of India maintained systematic data on plantation labourers of West Bengal as well as of different states of the country. Only after 1960 district-wise data on men, women and children workers were available. The table : 10 shows a clear trend of decreasing labour force in West Bengal upto the year 1977.

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10. Dash, A.J., op.cit., p.119.

Table : 10

Declining plantation labour force  
in West Bengal and India,  
1950 - 1977

Year	West Bengal	India
1950	329,034	1,033,090
1951	265,064	1,017,989
1952	322,679	1,054,295
1953	266,753	969,610
1954	223,593	993,594
1955	273,163	989,656
1956	268,671	1,004,683
1957	261,384	997,421
1958	251,145	980,238
1959	236,674	919,405
1960	N.A	N.A.
1961	N.A	N.A
1962	159,968	816,262
1963	196,404	847,372
1964	195,046	818,783
1965	191,702	806,152
1966	191,593	804,135
1967	187,612	775,183
1968	189,745	755,729
1969	187,840	747,835
1970	200,250	759,646
1971	198,074	766,593
1972	194,901	761,919
1973	196,159	766,036
1974	199,793	771,717
1975	200,130	774,897
1976	200,049	776,162
1977	205,466	778,673

Source : Tea Statistics, Tea Board of India, Calcutta,  
1957, p. 49; 1959, p. 53; 1968-69, p. 89;  
1969-70, p. 92; 1977-78, pp. 102-103; 1978-79,  
pp. 106-109.

In 1970 there was an increase in the number of labour employed in tea plantations. This was due to the extensive labour movement in West Bengal in 1969. A major demand in that strike was that the number of labour force of the tea gardens should be increased. The trade unions demanded for a land-labour ratio of 1 :1.5 for every acre of land. Lastly there was a compromise at 1 : 1.1. In 1977 in West Bengal the number of tea estate was 298 and the area under tea cultivation was 89,253 hectares and the average number of labourers were 205,466. The average labour per hectre was 2.3 ( Table : 11 ).

Recent statistics of tea plantation also showed that women workers still outnumbered men workers at the all India level. In 1977 men workers were 345,438 and women workers were 359,006 in tea plantation in India. In this year West Bengal, Tripura, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala showed a similar trend in employment pattern in tea plantations. In 1977 number of women workers in tea plantations of West Bengal was 96,255 ( Table : 12 ). In West Bengal in this year number of plantation women workers was higher in the Darjeeling and Terai regions while in Doars, West Dinajpur and Cooch Bihar men workers were more than the women workers ( Table : 13 ).

During the year 1977 field labourers employed in Terai plantations were 7099 men, 3690 women, 427 adolescent and 1490 children. Among the factory labourers there were

1600 men, 288 women and 14 children.<sup>11</sup> From this it was revealed that the number of women workers in tea plantation was higher than that of men workers and in case of field labourers it was higher than factory labourers.

Table : 11

Number of tea plantation, area and labourers employed in different states of India in 1977

States	Number of tea estate	Area in hectre	Estimated average daily number of labourers	Labour per hectre
Assam	756	190,621	410,520	2.15
West Bengal	298	89,253	205,466	2.30
Tripura	56	5,600	8,380	1.50
Bihar	3	459	223	.49
Uttar Pradesh	31	1,799	1,259	.70
Himachal Pradesh	1,385	4,183	8,139	1.95
Tamil Nadu	6,561	36,333	80,499	2.22
Karnataka	15	1,824	3,855	2.10
Kerala	4,124	36,194	70,332	1.94
All India	13,229	366,276	788,673	2.15

Source : Tea Statistics 1978-79, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, pp. 116-117.

11. Tea Statistics, 1978-79, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, pp. 110-111.

Table : 12

Statewise and categorywise estimated average daily number of labour employed in tea industry during the year 1977.

Estimated average daily number of labour employed					
State	Male	Female	Adolescent	Children	Total
Assam	182,836	178,241	14,513	39,930	410,520
West Bengal	87,289	96,255	8,003	13,919	205,466
Tripura	3,405	4,104	97	774	8,380
Bihar	73	150	-	-	223
Uttar Pradesh	374	854	-	31	1,259
Himachal Pradesh	3,381	3,927	323	508	8,139
Tamil Nadu	36,000	41,460	2,904	135	80,499
Karnataka	1,779	1,823	192	61	3,855
Kerala	30,301	37,192	2,094	945	70,532
All India	3,45,438	359,006	28,126	56,103	788,673

Source : Tea Statistics 1978-79, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, pp. 112,115.

Table : 13

Districtwise and category wise estimated average daily number of labour employed in tea industry of West Bengal during the year 1977.

District	Estimated average daily number of labour employed				
	Male	Female	Adolescent	Children	Total
Darjeeling	15,612	27,550	1,167	1,988	46,312
Terai	8,699	8,978	427	1,504	19,608
Dooars	62,432	59,330	6,407	10,432	138,601
West Dinajpur	352	244	-	-	596
Cooch Bihar	194	153	2	-	349
<b>Total</b>	<b>87,289</b>	<b>98,255</b>	<b>8,003</b>	<b>13,919</b>	<b>205,466</b>

Source : Tea Statistics 1978-79, Tea Board of India, Calcutta, p. 112.

CHANDMONI TEA ESTATE

The plantation under study known as Chandmoni Tea Estate was established in 1922. It is situated in the Terai area just at the fringe of the Siliguri town of Darjeeling district and by the side of the National High Way No. 31 on which buses ply frequently. Due to its location near the urban centre Adivasi workers of the plantation have been considerably influenced by the urban way of life.

Population

The area under tea cultivation in Chandmoni is about 450.94 acres, but the total area of the plantation is slightly more. The total number of households is 293 of which 276 belong to the workers having a population of 1252 and 17 to the non-managerial and managerial staff having a population of 75. The number of men and women workers engaged permanently in the plantation is 515. Out of 276 labour households 246 ( 89.13 per cent ) belong to Adivasi communities having a population of 1098 ( 87.70 per cent ) and 30 ( 10.87 per cent ) belong to the non-tribal communities having a population of 154 ( 12.30 per cent ) ( Tables : 14, 15 and 16 ).

Population of the plantation consists of multi-ethnic communities ( Table : 14 ). The workers belong to

SILIGURI SUB DIVISION SHOWING THE LOCATION OF CHANDMONI TEA ESTATE

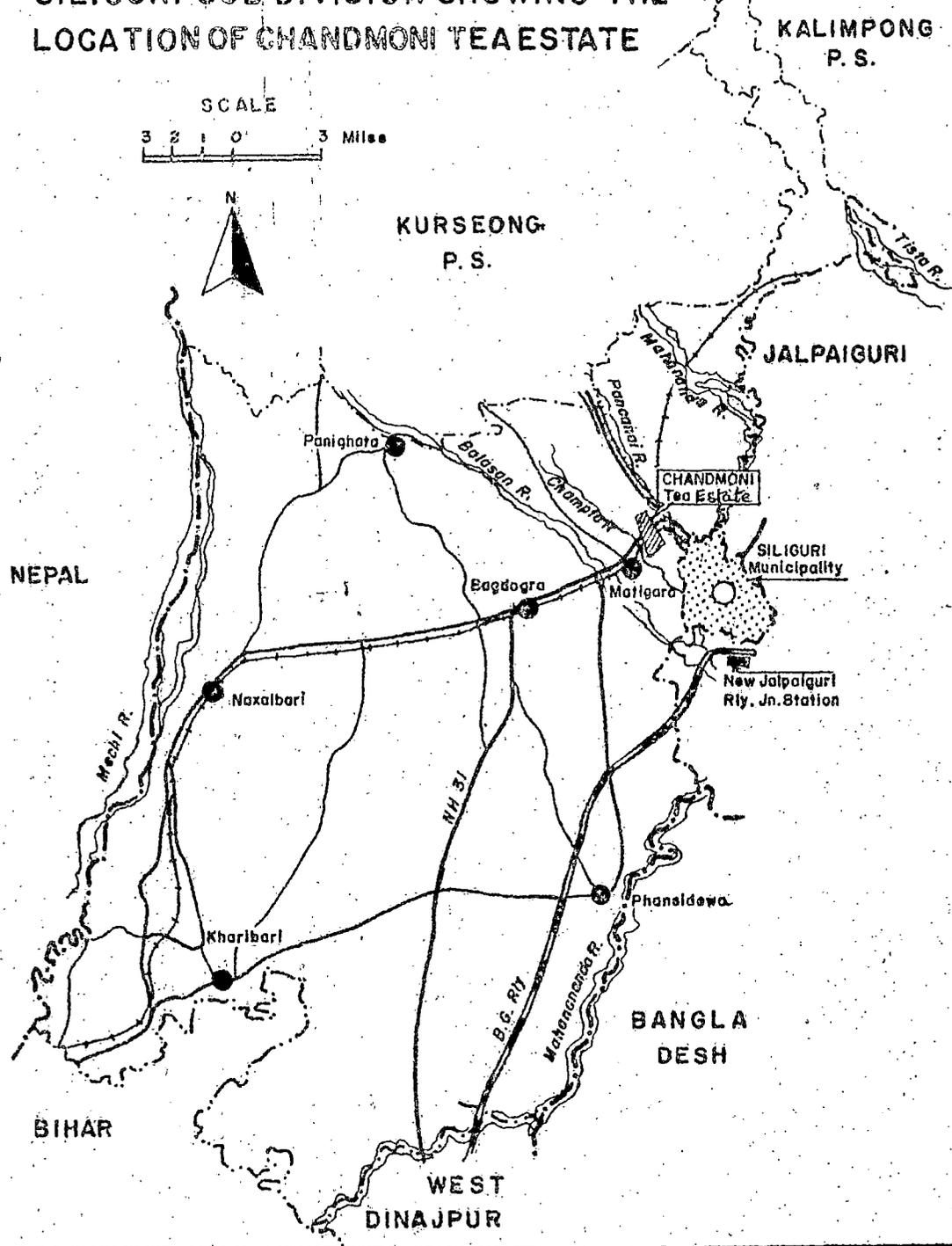


Fig-2

various Adivasi communities of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Orissa origin. Besides, there are a few Beharis, Bengalis and Nepalis. Among the Adivasis there are 90 ( 36.58 per cent ) households of Oraons, 53 ( 21.54 per cent ) of Mundas, 8 ( 3.25 per cent ) of Kherias, 17 ( 6.91 per cent ) of Baraiks, 19 ( 7.72 per cent ) of Ghasis, 10 ( 4.06 per cent ) of Malpaharis, 7 ( 2.84 per cent ) of Mahalis, 6 ( 2.44 per cent ) each of Korwas and Lohars, 5 ( 2.03 per cent ) each of Saosis and Goswanis, 4 ( 1.63 per cent ) each of Bhoktas, Turis and Goalas, 2 ( 0.81 per cent ) each of Mehers and Bairagis and 1 ( 0.40 per cent ) each of Gonds, Bhuiyans, Routias and Ores. Among the non-Adivasis there are 1 ( 3.33 per cent ) Bengali, 9 ( 30.00 per cent ) Bihari and 20 ( 66.66 per cent ) Nepali households ( Tables : 14, 15, 16 ).

Table : 14

Distribution of Adivasi Workers

Ethnic groups	Number of households	%	Population				%
			Male	Female	Children	Total	
Orach	90	36.58	132	133	153	428	38.97
Munda	53	21.54	85	72	89	246	22.40
Kheria	8	3.25	15	12	9	36	3.27
Meher	2	0.81	4	3	3	10	0.91
Gond	1	0.40	2	1	1	4	0.36
Baraik	17	6.91	29	21	18	68	6.19
Goswami	5	2.03	6	6	5	17	1.54
Saosi	5	2.03	6	6	5	17	1.54
Bairagi	2	0.81	3	3	4	10	0.91
Goala	4	1.63	5	2	1	8	0.72
Malpahari	10	4.06	11	15	11	37	3.36
Mahali	7	2.84	10	10	12	32	2.91
Bhokta	4	1.63	5	8	4	17	1.54
Ghasi	19	7.72	32	23	31	86	7.83
Korwa	6	2.44	8	8	11	27	2.45
Routia	1	0.40	1	2	2	5	0.45
Bhuiyan	1	0.40	1	-	-	1	0.09
Lohar	6	2.44	10	10	12	32	2.91
Turi	4	1.63	6	3	5	14	1.27
Ore	1	0.40	2	1	-	3	0.27
<b>Total</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>339</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>1098</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Table : 15

Distribution of caste workers

Caste groups	Number of households	%	Population				%
			Male	Female	Children	Total	
<u>Bengali</u>							
Brahmin	1	3.33	1	-	-	1	0.64
<u>Behari</u>							
Khusbaha	1	3.33	1	-	-	1	0.64
Muchi	1	3.33	4	2	-	6	3.89
Hazam	1	3.33	2	1	1	4	2.59
Kurmi	1	3.33	3	3	-	6	3.89
Routh	1	3.33	1	2	5	8	5.19
Brahmin	4	13.33	9	3	-	12	7.79
<u>Nepali</u>							
Kami	4	13.33	8	7	14	29	18.83
Thami	2	6.66	2	6	-	8	5.19
Rai	3	10.00	6	5	2	13	8.44
Prodhan	1	3.33	3	4	-	7	4.54
Chhettri	5	16.66	12	8	15	35	22.72
Brahmin	5	16.66	6	8	10	24	15.58
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>(100.00)</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>(100.00)</b>

Table : 16

Total labour population (Adivasi and caste)

Social group	Number of household	%	Population				%
			Male	Female	Children	Total	
Adivasi	246	89.13	373	339	386	1098	87.70
Caste	30	10.87	58	49	47	154	12.30
<b>Total</b>	<b>276</b>	<b>(100.00)</b>	<b>431</b>	<b>388</b>	<b>433</b>	<b>1252</b>	<b>(100.00)</b>

## Residence

The plantation provides ten residential areas for the workers known as "labour lines" where housing facilities are available for the workers' families. Only in the two residential areas there are brick houses and in the rest of the residential areas there are mud houses. At the centre of the plantation there is the residential area having brick building for the managerial and other office staff of the plantation. It is noticed that similar to other industrial communities the plantation has a heterogenous population who live interspersed in the labour lines. Therefore, there is no residential segregation according to tribal and caste communities in the plantation. Only the Behari caste groups are segregated in the Gudam Line situated very near to the manager's bungalow. Such multi-ethnic residential pattern is non-traditional.

The distribution of houses in the ten residential blocks, i.e., the 'labour lines' is not equal. The highest concentration of houses is found in the Bara Line which has 110 households followed by Itabhatta Line 40, Champta Line 34, Dibroo Line 30, Hospital Line 20, Philip Line 19, Matigara Line 9, Gudam Line 7, Tetul Line 5 and Dhansera Line 2 households. However there is some concentration of ethnic groups in these residential lines. In Bara Line majority are Oraons. Bhoktas are concentrated in Matigara Line, Biharis are in Gudam Line, Nepalis are in Bara line and Itabhatta Line.

## Households

The data on the households of the plantation reveal the complexity of identifying their types as well as their composition. It is found that some individuals who live in a family in certain cases are unrelated members. However, without going into details of the definition and composition of the two types of families, namely, nuclear and joint, which are beyond the scope of the present study, it is better to discuss the distribution of the households of the plantation into these two types of family. The average size of the workers' households is 4.53 members and the size of the family varies from 1 to 10 members. On an average there are 2.43 workers per family.

In the plantation there are 276 workers' households of which 60 (21.74 per cent) are of joint type and 208 (75.36 per cent) are of nuclear type and 8 (2.90 per cent) are unclassified. Among the Malpharis, Baraiks, Oraons, Ghasis, Nepalis, Mundas, etc. nuclear families are predominantly found. All the households of the Malpaharis are nuclear. About 82.35 per cent, 80.00 per cent, 74.44 per cent, 73.68 per cent, and 67.92 per cent of the households of the Baraiks, Nepalis, Oraons, Ghasis, and Mundas respectively are nuclear ( Table : 17 ).

Table : 17

Ethnic groups and household types

Ethnic groups	Number of households	Types of household		
		Joint	Nuclear	Unclassified
<u>Adivasi</u>				
Oraon	90	22	67	1
Munda	53	14	36	3
Kheria	3	2	6	•
Meher	2	1	1	•
Gond	1	-	1	•
Baraik	17	3	14	•
Goswami	5	1	4	-
Saosi	5	•	5	-
Bairagi	2	1	1	-
Goala	4	•	4	-
Malpahari	10	•	10	-
Mahali	7	1	6	-
Bhokta	4	2	2	-
Ghasi	19	5	14	-
Koywa	6	1	5	-
Routia	1	•	1	-
Bhuiyan	1	•	•	1
Lohar	6	1	5	•
Turi	4	•	3	1
Ore	1	•	1	•
<u>Castes</u>				
Bengali castes	1	•	•	1
Behari castes	9	2	6	1
Nepali castes	20	4	16	•
<u>Total</u>	<u>276(100.00)</u>	<u>60(21.74)</u>	<u>208(75.36)</u>	<u>8(2.90)</u>

It is revealed from the above table that majority of the households are of nuclear type. Out of the total workers' households of 276 there are 208 ( 75.36 per cent ) nuclear families. The nuclear families comprise of parents and unmarried children. There are 8 other households which are the residual form of nuclear families and may be categorised as unclassified. Five of these households have single member of each. The other three household have two members of each. One of them is comprised of two brothers; other is comprised of a brother and a sister, and the third is comprised of a boy with his father's sister. The joint families include married couples, unmarried and married children along with their relatives.

Nuclear family is commonly found in any industrial society. Similarly, in the plantation, workers prefer to live in the nuclear families. The plantation system also influences the workers to live in the nuclear families, because the houses which are provided to them are suitable for nuclear family. Besides, there are other facilities which encourage nuclearisation of the workers' families in the plantation.<sup>12</sup> However, these I shall discuss in some details in the Chapter:5.

### Literacy

The plantation workers of Chandmoni Tea Estate as

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12. Bhowmik, S.J. Class Formation in the Plantation System, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1981, pp.116,117.

well as of other plantations in Dooars and Terai are mostly Adivasi origin. Most of them are traditionally agriculturists and illiterate. Today even most of the women workers are illiterate and only a few have primary education. Out of total population of 1252, 815 ( 65.09 per cent ) are illiterate of whom 382 ( 30.51 per cent ) are men and 433 ( 34.58 per cent ) are women. There are 203 children under 6 years of age who are automatically excluded from the sample. The rest 234 persons ( 18.69 per cent ) are only literate of whom 187 ( 14.94 per cent ) are men and 47 ( 3.75 per cent ) are women. Out of 187 literate men only 108 ( 8.63 per cent ) have primary education and 79 ( 6.31 per cent ) have secondary education ( Table : 18 ). Out of 47 literate women 38 ( 3.04 per cent ) have primary education and 9 ( 0.72 per cent ) have secondary education. The number of literates among the Adivasis are 179 of which 142 ( 12.93 per cent ) are men and 37 ( 3.36 per cent ) are women. In case of non-Adivasis the number of literate men are 45 ( 39.22 per cent ) and literate women are 10 ( 6.49 per cent ). Among the 142 literate Adivasi men only 94 ( 66.19 per cent ) have primary education and only 48 ( 33.8 per cent ) have secondary education but none of them are matriculate. In case of 37 literate Adivasi women only 30 ( 81.08 per cent ) have primary education and 7 ( 18.91 per cent ) have secondary education. None of the women are matriculate. Among the 45 non-Adivasi literate men only

Table : 18

Ethnic groups and literacy  
(Persons included above 6 years of age )

Ethnic groups	Number of literate persons					Number of illiterate persons				Persons under 6 years	
	Primary M	Primary F	Secondary M	Secondary F	Total %	M	F	Total %			
<u>Adivasis</u>											
Oraon	34	13	25	4	76	32.67	131	137	268	32.88	24
Munda	19	10	16	-	45	19.23	73	85	158	19.38	43
Kheria	1	2	4	2	9	3.84	12	13	25	3.05	2
Meher	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	4	9	1.10	1
Gond	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	0.49	-
Baraik	12	3	1	-	16	6.83	23	24	47	5.76	5
Goswami	3	1	1	-	5	2.13	3	5	8	0.98	4
Saosi	1	-	-	-	1	0.42	5	9	14	1.71	2
Bairagi	2	-	-	-	2	0.85	2	4	6	0.73	2
Goala	1	-	-	-	1	0.42	5	2	7	0.85	-
Malpahari	1	-	-	-	1	0.42	12	16	28	3.43	8
Mahali	3	-	-	-	3	1.23	10	13	23	2.82	6
Bhokta	2	-	-	1	3	1.23	3	9	12	1.47	2
Chasi	12	1	1	-	14	5.98	29	28	57	6.99	15
Korowa	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	11	22	2.69	5
Routia	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	2	5	0.61	-
Bhuiyan	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	0.12	-
Lohar	1	-	-	-	1	0.42	13	15	28	3.43	3
Turi	2	-	-	-	2	0.85	5	4	9	1.10	3
Ore	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	1	3	0.36	-
<u>Castes</u>											
Bengali	-	-	1	-	1	0.42	-	-	-	-	-
Bihari	1	-	9	-	10	4.27	11	13	24	2.94	3
Nepali	13	8	21	2	44	18.80	20	37	57	6.99	15
<b>Total</b>	<b>108</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>382</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>815</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>203</b>

N.B. M for Male and F for female.

14 ( 31.11 per cent ) have primary education and 31 ( 68.88 per cent ) have secondary education of whom only 3 ( 6.6 per cent ) are matriculates. In case of 10 non-Adivasi literate women 8 ( 80.0 per cent ) have primary education and only 2 ( 20.00 per cent ) have secondary education without a matriculation degree.

From the above discussion it is observed that workers with higher education are generally from the males and non-Adivasi groups. Such educated persons are from the present generation and they are mostly employed in Railways and Military services. The rate of female education is very low in this plantation. Among the Adivasis the Christians are more educated than the Saonsars (non-Christians professing tribal religion). Though there is a primary school run by the plantation authority, most of the students are outsiders. Proportion of the students belonging to the families of plantation workers is very low. The Christian workers prefer to send their children to the nearby Missionary Schools. Four Oraon families have sent their sons to a boarding school. The Christians, in general, appear to be more eager to educate their children than the non-Christian Adivasis.

### Religion

The majority of the Adivasis of the tea plantation still adhere to their own traditional religion. They are

locally known as Saonsars. Religious conversion has recently appeared as an important phenomenon among the plantation workers belonging to various Adivasi groups. Christianity has considerably affected the Adivasi religion. Compared to this, Hinduisation is not prominent among them as the process of conversion is very slow. It might take several generations to become Hindus. In West Bengal the Christian plantation workers are nearly ten per cent of the total plantation workers. They belong to the Roman Catholic and Protestant sects. However, Christian Adivasi workers of Chandmoni Tea Estate belong to Roman Catholic sect only. The Adivasi plantation workers of Chandmoni Tea Estate can broadly be divided into two religions groups, namely, the Adivasi Saonsars ( 76.42 per cent ) and the Adivasi Christians ( 23.57 per cent ). The Saonsars are actually those Adivasis who profess their traditional religion.

Christianity has affected Oraons, Mundas and Kherias of Chandmoni plantation. But the conversion mainly took place one or two generation ago, except a few who have recently converted themselves under the influence of the Christian Mission or through marriage with the Christians. Christianity is found to a larger extent among the Oraons than among other Adivasi workers of the region. In this plantation out of 90 families of the Oraons 49 ( 54.44 per cent ) are followers of Christianity and 41 ( 45.55 per cent ) are Saonsar (Table:19).

The Mundas and Kherias in this plantation show less Christianity as out of 53 families of the Mundas only 6 ( 11.32 per cent ) are Saonsars, and of 8 Kheria families 3 ( 37.5 per cent ) are Christians and 5 (62.5 per cent ) are Saonsars.

Table : 19

Ethnicity and religion of the Adivasi workers

Ethnic groups	Number of households	Number of households	
		Adivasi Saonsar	Adivasi Christian
Oraon	90	41	49
Munda	53	47	6
Kheria	8	5	3
Meher	2	2	•
Gond	1	1	•
Baraik	17	17	•
Goswami	5	5	•
Saosi	5	5	•
Bairagi	2	2	•
Goala	4	4	•
Malpahari	10	10	•
Mahali	7	7	•
Bhokta	4	4	•
Ghasi	19	19	•
Korowa	6	6	•
Routia	1	1	•
Bhuiyan	1	1	•
Lohar	6	6	•
Turi	4	4	•
Ore	1	1	•
<b>Total</b>	<b>246(100.00)</b>	<b>188(76.42)</b>	<b>58(23.58)</b>

A few Adivasis has adopted some Hindu rituals and customs. They are Goswamis, Bairagis, Goalas and Bhoktas

having a total household of 13. There are a few castes of Bengali, Bihari and Nepali communities who are Hindus. Altogether they constitute 30 ( 10.87 per cent ) households.

### Migration

Tea plantation was always associated with a resident labour force who were originally slave labourers or indentured labourers. At the beginning of tea plantations in the state much difficulty was faced in the recruitment of labourers from among the indigenous people. To meet the labour crisis large number of Adivasi people were brought from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and from within West Bengal. Almost the entire labour force in tea plantations of Terai of Darjeeling district and Dooars of Jalpaiguri district consisted of immigrant labourers and their descendants. Under the Amendment Act of 1870 the Sardari system of recruitment was introduced. From that time till 1952 both Sardari system and Arkatti (licensed recruiter) system of recruitment were in vogue. Since 1952 there has been no recruitment in plantation at least officially through this system. However, the system of recruitment will be discussed in some details in the next chapter.

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13. For the nature of Sardari and Arkatti recruitment see A.Guha, Planter-Raj to Swaraj, ICHR, New Delhi, 1977, pp. 17-18.

Immigration of tea labourers was considerably high in West Bengal between 1860 and 1881. In Terai the first garden was established in 1862 and other gardens were opened by 1866. Between 1896 and 1901 tea price fell greatly in Britain. Consequently a number of gardens reduced their labour force. During 1901 to 1911 the plantation population showed a decline in its number.<sup>14</sup> Migration to the tea gardens of the state was mainly family based. The nature of the tea industry required both male and female labourers. At the same time the planters wanted cheap labour. So they encouraged families to migrate from different parts of the country, specially from Chotanagpur and to settle permanently in the tea gardens. Thus the Adivasi families from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh form a new settlement in plantations.

In Chandmoni Tea Estate, workers belong to various ethnic groups who are not indigenous people. During the field-work it has been found that out of total population of 1252 only 461 ( 36.82 per cent ) persons have immigrated from different places. The rest of the population, i.e., 791 ( 63.17 per cent ) persons are born in Chandmoni whose forefathers had immigrated one or two generations ago. In Chandmoni 405 persons ( 36.88 per cent ), out of the total Adivasi population of 1098, are the immigrants from Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and other

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14. Census of India, 1961, West Bengal, District Census Handbook, Darjeeling, p. 24.

parts of West Bengal. Fifty six persons, i.e., 36.36 per cent, of the 154 non-Adivasis are migrants from Bangladesh, Bihar and Nepal ( Table : 20 ).

In the present population structure of Chandmoni the Adivasi labourers recruited through the Sardari system is very low. The total number of immigrants recruited directly through this system is 93 ( 8.46 per cent ) of which 59 ( 5.37 per cent ) are male and 34 ( 3.09 per cent ) are female. As Chandmoni plantation was established in 1922 recruitment through this system was not very necessary because already at that time there was surplus labourers in the tea plantations of West Bengal. It is needless to say that the surplus labourers were either immigrants or their descendants. In Chandmoni no non-Adivasis were recruited through this system as most of them came after Independence.

During the pre-Independence period inter-garden labour movement was very high. The surplus labourers in the plantations encouraged inter-garden movement of the labourers to a considerable extent. In Chandmoni 170 ( 15.48 per cent ) persons belonging to the different Adivasi groups have come from other gardens and settled either as workers or as their permanent dependants. Out of 170 such workers there are 63 ( 5.73 per cent ) men and 107 ( 9.74 per cent ) women. It has been noticed that movement of Adivasi workers from other garden has taken place mainly due to marriage. Out of 107 women, 74 ( 69.15 per cent ) have come to this garden to live

with their husbands after marriage. Only 8 ( 12.69 per cent ) men are found to have sifted to this garden after their marriage with girls belonging to this garden. It is important to note that while female are moving to this garden through marriage the male also show the similar trend of movement though at a lower scale, into this garden. In respect of the latter group it is particularly due to the higher incidence of Ghar-damad customs among the Ghasis and Baraiks where a man after marriage takes up residence with his father-in-law. No inter-garden movement has occurred among the non-Adivasis on such a ground.

About 123 ( 9.82 per cent ) persons have come to this garden from various places, namely, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Nepal and Bangladesh. Of 123 persons there are 63 men and 60 women, and 80 belong to the different Adivasi communities and 43 to the non-Adivasi communities. Most of the immigrated non-Adivasis have come from Nepal and Bihar. Only 1 Bengali male has come from Bangladesh. This immigrant population have either come to this garden themselves in search of jobs as workers or as the permanent dependants of the workers. Their recruitment have taken place directly by the garden authority. They were not brought through the Sardari or Arkatti system.

There are other group of workers belonging to Adivasi and non-Adivasi groups who have come from several villages of West Bengal. But they are not the indigenous population of West Bengal. Their forefathers had immigrated to

Table : 20

Adivasi and non-Adivasi migration in Chandmoni Tea Estate

Ethnic-groups	Number of migrants from outside West Bengal by contract		Number of migrants from other plantations		Number of migrants from villages of West Bengal		Number of migrants from outside West Bengal		Total number of migrants	Persons born in Chandmoni	Total population of Chandmoni
	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	M %	F %	%	%	%
Adivasi	59 5.37	34 3.09	63 5.73	107 9.74	22 2.00	40 3.64	39 3.55	41 3.73	405 36.88	693 63.11	1098 100.00
Non-Adivasi	-	-	-	-	2 1.29	11 7.14	24 15.58	19 12.33	56 36.36	98 63.64	154 100.00
	59 4.71	34 2.71	63 5.03	107 8.54	24 1.91	51 4.07	63 5.03	60 4.79	461 36.82	791 63.18	1252 100.00

N.B. M for male & F for female.

West Bengal one or two generations ago from Bihar and Nepal and settled down in different villages. Altogether they are 75 ( 5.99 per cent ) in number ( 24 male and 51 female ). There are 62 Adivasis and 13 non-Adivasis among these immigrant labourers. Some of them are recruited in this plantation directly by the garden authority and others have come as permanent dependants of workers already employed in the garden.

Before 1952 the migration took place in an organised way. But in the post-Independence period there is no such organised migration. One can not give the exact date when the migration of the workers in Terai plantation has actually stopped. According to Indian Tea Association ( ITA ) and Indian Tea Planters Association ( ITPA ) reports there has been no direct recruitment of workers since 1952. As the formation of labour unions have taken place in every garden after 1952 all the recruitment are now made through the unions from the bonafide dependants of the workers.

#### BUREAUCRACY IN THE TEA INDUSTRY

Like any well organised industry a plantation has also an organisation of work and a hierarchy of staff. The organisation of work includes distribution of work among the various categories of staff, keeping attendance registrar, paying salaries and ration and doing other types of work.

The hierarchy of staff includes all types of employees of the plantation right from the manager to the wage labourers. All the employees could be differentiated into four categories, namely, (i) Managerial staff, (ii) Office-staff (iii) Sub-staff and (iv) Workers. This staffing pattern is mainly found among the plantations run by Indian owners.

Chandmoni Tea Estate is owned by a public limited company. All the responsibilities of this company is vested in a manager. There are four managerial staff of which manager occupies the top position in the plantation hierarchy. Below the manager there are two assistant managers and one medical officer. In the plantation hierarchy the medical officer also occupies a position in the managerial staff. In the history of plantation no women has ever been appointed to occupy a position in the managerial category. So also in Chandmoni Tea Estate all the four managerial staff are males.

Below the category of the managerial staff there is a category of staff consisting of seventeen minor officials. Two of them are garden supervisors ( Bagan Babu ), one each is a factory supervisor ( Factory Babu ) and a pharmacist ( Dava-walli), a driver, a fitter, an engine driver and rest are clerks in the office. Out of 17 staff members of this category only one is a women who works as a clerk in the office. The categories of the managerial and office staffs consist of Bengalis with the exception of a Bihari who is employed as a clerk.

In Chandmoni there are 55 sub-staff members who are just below the category of the staff in the plantation hierarchy. They are mainly from among the Adivasi groups which contribute 46 sub-staff members. Among the Adivasi sub-staff Oraons, Mundas and Baraiks provide the majority while there is none of this category from the Goswamis, Saosis, Kowwas, Ores, Turis, ~~Meheras~~ Mehers and Gonds. Besides, 12 sub-staff members belong to the Bengali, Bihari and Nepali caste groups. The Bihari sub-staff belong to Brahmin, Rout and Khusbaha castes; the Nepali sub-staff belong to the Chhetri caste while the Bengali sub-staff belong to the Brahmin caste ( Table : 21 and 22 ).

The category of the sub-staff consists of junior supervisory staff and non-supervisory staff ( Table : 21 ). Among the junior supervisory staff there are Munsis ( field supervisor ), whose position in the hierarchy is higher than that of the garden labourers. Next to the Munsis there are Chaprasis. Both Munsis and Chaprasi supervise the works of the other sub-staff below them. In Chandmoni there are only 1 Munsis and 1 Chaprasi.

Next in the hierarchy there are Boidars who keep attendance of the workers and the sub-staff who are engaged in the field. There is one Boidar for the men workers and another Boidar for the women workers.

Table : 21

Sub-staff workers of Chandmoni Tea Estate,  
1978-79

Local categories	Number	Ethnic group
1. Munshi (Junior Supervisor Grade I)	1	Nepali - 1.
2. Chaprasi (Junior Supervisor Grade II)	1	Oraon - 1.
3. Boidar (Workers' attendance keeper)	2	Munda - 1. Ghasi - 1.
4. Dafadar (Field supervisor)	6	Mahali - 1 Malpahari - 1 Bairagi - 1 Baraik - 1 Oraon - 2
5. Sardar (Block leader)	12	Lohar - 1 Bhokta - 1 Nepali - 1 Munda - 4 Baraik - 2 Oraon - 3
6. Chowkidar (Watch man)	18	Oraon - 5 Baraik - 2 Nepali - 2 Bihari - 6 Munda - 3
7. Peon	1	Oraon - 1
8. Paniwalla (Water carrier)	7	Bhuiyan - 1 Ghasi - 2 Kheria - 1 Oraon - 1 Munda - 2 Kheria - 1
9. Davawalla (Health assistant)	1	Kheria - 1
10. Factory worker- Skilled and 5 and unskilled	5	Bengali - 1 Munda - 3 Baraik - 1 Bihari - 1
11. Mistri (Carpenter)	1	Bihari - 1

Dafadars and Sardars come next to the Boidars who mainly supervise fieldworks of the workers. According to the order of the assistant managers or garden Babu they assign works to the workers, supervise directly on the spot, guide them in the action, and if necessary show the actual action of works in practice. Munnis and Chaprasis also order them for the works to be done. Sardars' position as well as duties are similar to that of Dafadars. Both of them are involved to check the quality of the works of the labourers when they are in cultivation work. The Dafadar guides the workers along with the correct lines ( Mela ). In Chandmoni there are 6 Dafadars and 12 Sardars.

Next position is occupied by Chowkidars, Peons and Paniwallas whose duties are to watch on the plantation properties, bringing letters from the post office and to carry water to the field while the workers are on duty respectively. There are 18 Chowkidars, 1 Peon and 7 Paniwallas in Chandmoni.

Paniwalla also carries water for every households of the managerial and other staff. Besides, 1 Davawalla ( health assistant ), 5 factory workers and carpenter are employed as sub-staff.

The sub-staff of Chandmoni Tea Estate are always drawing a better wages than that of ordinary workers and are also given some additional facilities.

While the office-staff are recruited from both men and women, sub-staff are exclusively from men. This is because

the plantation authority likes to recruit men only for these positions, whom they think can effectively command workers in the garden. Moreover, the nature of duties of the supervisory and non-supervisory workers in the garden are considered unsuitable for the women. The sub-staff are generally promoted from the ordinary workers and only men workers are considered eligible for such promotions. Women workers are deprived of such promotion opportunities. The sub-staff are considered positionally higher than the ordinary workers, and they receive a fixed monthly wage. The ordinary workers get daily wages.

The workers play the most important role in the production system and they form the totality of the labour force in the plantation. They are commonly referred to as 'Coolies' in the plantation societies of West Bengal and Assam. They directly involve themselves in the production. They do all types of manual labours, i.e., plucking, hoeing, clearing weeds, pruning, etc. In this sense they are the actual producers in the mode of production of the plantation system who sell their labour power and earn their livelihood. Except the workers the rest of the persons in the plantation are not directly involved in the various production process.

Generally in a tea plantation there are two types of workers who can be separated on the basis of the mode of payment of their wages. One of the types is the daily rated and other is the monthly rated workers. All the monthly rated workers are considered as sub-staff of the plantation. The

Monthly rated workers or the sub-staff are considered slightly superior to the ordinary workers as they get little higher monthly wages. However, only the men can occupy this position and women are not considered eligible. The daily rated workers are ordinary workers appointed on daily wages. The monthly and daily wages of the workers will be discussed in some details in the following chapter. The daily rated workers are more important for tea production in a plantation. This category of plantation workers are also generally grouped by the management into male, female and children. Only in this category of workers women are employed. In Chandmoni Tea Estate there are 203 male, 221 female and 36 child workers who are paid daily wages ( Table : 22 ). There are only 55 male who are paid monthly wages. None of the females and children are monthly rated. Both male and female groups of workers belong to the age group of 18 years and above. Children workers belong to the age group of 12 to 16 years. They get lesser wages than the adult men and women workers. Upto 1979 there was another category of workers consisting of both men and women who occupied a position in between adult and children workers. They were known in the plantation as 'adolescent' workers who belonged to the age group of 16 - 18 years. They received lower wages than that of the adult men workers, but equal to wages of the women workers. In October 1975 Equal Remuneration Act was passed which sought to remove wage differences between the

Table - 22

Men, women and children workers including  
monthly rated sub-staff in 1978-79

Adivasi/ Caste	Men		Women	Children	Total
	Monthly rated	Daily rated	Daily rated	Daily rated	
<u>Adivasis</u>					
Oraon	13	71	80	12	176
Munda	13	40	47	6	106
Kheria	2	5	5	2	14
Meher	•	1	1	1	3
Gond	•	1	1	•	2
Baraik	6	13	11	3	33
Goswami	•	4	4	1	9
Saosi	•	4	4	•	8
Bairagi	1	2	2	•	5
Goala	•	3	2	•	5
Malpahari	1	7	9	1	18
Mahali	1	5	6	1	13
Bhokta	1	1	3	•	5
Chasi	3	14	14	3	34
Koowa	•	5	5	•	10
Routia	•	1	2	•	3
Bhuiyan	1	•	•	•	1
Lehar	1	5	6	•	12
Turi	•	3	2	•	5
Ore	•	1	1	•	2
<u>Castes</u>					
Bengali	1	•	•	•	1
Bihari	7	5	2	1	15
Nepali	4	12	14	5	35
	55	203	221	36	515
	10.62	39.42	42.91	6.99	100.00

sexes. Thus there is equal wage for men and women workers. Previously the work load and wages of adolescent workers were same as female workers. After 1978 the adolescent category of workers was abolished. However, in Chandmoni Tea Estate there are only three categories of workers - men, women and children.