

Chapter I

Growth of Cinchona Plantations

The present study is an attempt to explore the socio-economic life of the Cinchona plantation workers in the hill areas of Darjeeling District, in the state of West Bengal, India. Besides tea, Cinchona is one of the most important industries of this area.

Stating the origin of Cinchona plantation in the world, Watt (1894:302) has very clearly mentioned the fact that Inca tribes of South America were well acquainted with the plants which were taken to Spain in 1532 by the Spanish Vicerine of Peru (Rai:1972:2-3, Dozey:1989:216). The plant was introduced with different names such as Kina-Kina in Spain, Quin-Quine in France and finally Cinchona for the entire world (King : 1908).

Later in the beginning of the eighteenth century, the plant was grown in Indonesia, New Zealand, French, Indo-China, Malaya, Australia, East Africa, Central America, Korea, Russia and India (O'Malley : 1907:139). However, Cinchona plantations were mainly introduced and expanded in India and Indonesia successfully due to their suitable climate and availability of cheap labour force (O'Malley:1947:139, Thapa: 1984: 56, Dozey : 1989:216).

Cinchona Plantations in India

Interestingly enough, the introduction of Cinchona plantation in the Indian sub-continent has found to have been

done only after the British expeditions to South America under the leadership of Mr. Markham in 1859. This had to be done on the suggestions of Dr Royale (Superintendent of Royal Botanical Garden, Calcutta) long back in 1835 and the emergence of Sepoy Mutiny in 1857 (Watt : 1894:303) in which thousands of British soldiers died of malaria (Rai : 1972:26, Thapa : 1984:25). Further, the Director of Royal Kew Botanical Garden of London, guided Mr. Markham who out of his 29 years of tireless efforts could introduce Cinchona plantations in an experimental basis in Nilgiri (Uttakamund) hills of South India (Dozey : 1989:217) under the supervision of Mr McIver (O'Malley : 1907:139) in 1859. Later on in 1871, the plant had to be shifted to Annamalai hills (South India) due to its favourable climate and availability of adequate labour force (Rai : 1972:27). A factory was established at Annamalai in 1943. However, the tremendous efforts of the British Government to open Cinchona plantations in the Khasi hills (Meghalaya) reaped no good harvest due to the non-availability of cheap labour force. The local people of Khasi hills did not help the planters in providing adequate labour force in the plantations (Sanyasi : 1990:4).

Cinchona Plantations in Bengal

By 1850, the entire hill areas of Darjeeling located west of the river Teesta had witnessed a favourable zone for cultivating the Cinchona plants. The areas were developing at a very fast pace especially due to the colonial policy of British

Government and her encouragements for the Nepali migration from Nepal and Sikkim as the plantation workers at Mungpoo.

The seizure of the entire hill areas of Darjeeling from the Sikkim king by the British Government in 1850 (O'Malley: 1907:25) and following the suggestions of Sr J. Hooker (Botanist) in the region, the British Government started planning to set up a project for cultivating Cinchona plants in the hill areas of Darjeeling District. In this venture, Dr. Thomas Anderson (the then Superintendent of Royal Botanical Garden, Sibpur, Calcutta) had been entrusted with the job by the Lady Canning (Vicerine of India) to start an experimental nursery of Cinchona plants in Darjeeling hills with the plants which were grown and multiplied in Sibpur, Calcutta (O'Malley : 1947:122).

Accordingly, Dr. Thomas Anderson tried to set up the project first at the Terai area of Darjeeling District and Kurseong sub-division. After putting fruitless efforts in Kurseong sub-division, he went up to Darjeeling and started planting the plants at Senchal area (Ibid: 122, Rai: 1972:29, Thapa : 1984:27). But due to its extreme coldness he had to remove the plants to Lebong spurs at an elevation of 6,000 ft. There too, the plants could not survive and during the first half of 1861, Dr. Anderson started surveying the areas east of Darjeeling town towards Ghoom, Jorebunglow, Ten Mile, Davaipani, Gimlang and finally in 1862 at Ranjuvalley spurs of Mungpoo (Rai : 1972:29) region which was then under the ownership of a Kazi of Sikkim (Hunter:1876:114).

The Ranjuvalley (one of the five divisions of present Government Cinchona Plantation of Mungpoo) was therefore proved to be the suitable place ecologically or otherwise because of the availability of adequate cheap labour force for clearing the dense forests and cultivating the plants. However, after 1876, the Ranjuvalley spur was to be completely abandoned for the fear of wild animals and it was shifted to Rambhi areas of Mungpoo region (Rai : 1972:65). In 1874, a Quinine factory was established at Mungpoo.

In 1887, to expand the plantation areas (12,000 acres), a total of 300 acres of land were taken in lease at Rongchong valley (opposite to Mungpoo Cinchona plantation). Again, in 1893, another 500 acres of land were purchased at Namring valley from a Bhutia Cinchona Association.

Keeping in view of its importance, in 1900, a new Cinchona plantation was started at Munsong (Kalimpong) with 8,000 acres of land. Similarly, in 1938, the third Cinchona plantation with 1,600 acres of land was established at the Rongo block of Kalimpong sub-division. Finally, in 1943, the fourth Cinchona plantation was opened at Latpancher (Kurseong) with 2,000 acres of land (Ibid).

After the independence of the country, an experimental nursery of Cinchona plants was opened at Ambotia (Kurseong) by the Government of West Bengal with 120 acres of land (Chatterjee: 1990:3). Similarly, in 1984, a Diosgenin factory was established

at Gairibas (Kalimpong) and an experimental nursery of Tung Oil seeds had also been started at Tung area of Kurseong subdivision in 1991 to acclimatise the higher altitude growing medicinal crops of other varieties to substantiate the Cinchona products in the international sphere during the post-modernisation periods of Cinchona plantation industry (Ibid) of Darjeeling hills.

Migration in Cinchona Plantations

Nowhere in the administrative reports or Darjeeling District Gazetters or travellers' reports, any mention of the migration patterns of the Nepalis in Cinchona plantations of Darjeeling hills, is mentioned. However, there were merely 13,507 population in Mungpoo region of the hill areas of Darjeeling District as per the statistical reports of O'Malley (1947:55). But he has not mentioned anything about the total working force of Cinchona plantation in Mungpoo at that time. It was however clearly mentioned that there were 97% of Nepali population and 3% of other hill tribes in the Mungpoo region (Ibid). But he has not stated anything about the caste or tribal background of Cinchona plantation workers. This has to be taken into notice that the percentage which O'Malley has given is most probably consisting of all the population including the rural masses of Mungpoo region. This argument can be supported by the fact that even today Mungpoo is consisting of villages numbering not less than thirty to forty clusters. The villages

do not come under the Directorate of Cinchona plantations. Moreover, there were some forest villages which had been found around the plantation. However, the evidences that I could collect from the plantation, proved that in those days the village statistics and the plantation figure were compiled together and the same is done by O'Malley also. So, it did not reflect the actual working population of Mungpoo Cinchona plantation.

The introduction of Cinchona plantation at Mungpoo mainly attracted a few people of eastern Nepal (Kansakar: 1985: 5) and Sikkim and they migrated to the plantation in search of jobs. Rest of the working population were enticed from the local people. The people in the eastern Nepal prepared to immigrate into the Indian hills like Darjeeling, Shimla besides Sikkim and Bhutan due to the similar ecological niche (Ibid : 6). However, to quote Sukumol Sen (1977 : 59), 'In Darjeeling District, local agricultural labourers and those from Nepal furnished a sturdy and tractable labouring force'. He seems to be correct to mention that a few people mainly the Tagadharis were migrating from Nepal in the beginning of 19th century while the earlier immigrants were the Matwalis and a few Chhetris who were mainly employed as the Sardars in the plantation. Later in 1883 and still later a few Rai and Limbu families migrated from Panthar and Limbuan areas of eastern Nepal (Caplan: 1970:6). Further, Caplan (Ibid) stated the reasons for the

migration as 'pressure on land was recognised as the principal cause of immigration as early as 1890's to Sikkim'. Similarly, O'Malley (1907:29) considered that the continued migration from eastern Nepal was due to the pressure on the land there. Further, Haimendorf (1977:4) has also reiterated the ideas that the population pressure and scarcity of land in east Nepal were important factors for causing immigration from Nepal. Pradhan (1991:168), on the other hand stated that these two Castes (Rai and Limbus) along with other Matwali castes (Caplan ; 1978:60, Hofer: 1978: 180) emigrated from eastern Nepal due to religious reasons. They were beef eaters which was directly against the Brahmanical rites of Nepal and it was strongly prohibited by the laws of the land.

Next to Rai and Limbu castes, Tamangs are found to be the most dominant population in the plantation. The Tamangs mostly emigrated in the plantation as they were ousted by the Hindus (Bahuns and Chhetris) from western Nepal (Pradhan:1991:179). Moreover, these castes were ousted by the Nepal Government which had adopted the policy of introducing the Raiker land tenure system against the traditional type known as Kipst system (Hofer: 1978 :179). This might have been one of the reasons for migration of Tamangs who are found in the Cinchona plantations today in the Darjeeling hills as workers.

It is however explored from the field work in Mungpoo that the management used to select one or two Sardars from among the different castes and asked them to entice their respective

caste members who were to be brought in the plantation from Nepal. It had double benefits to the management. One of the benefits was the intercaste rivalries among the castes which could also take place here having their distinct dialects and cultures of Nepal. Another obvious reason for bringing such divergent castes in the plantation was to have an easy way to exploit the workers as far as the planters could do. In this way, a Rai Sardar brought persons from among his own caste group from eastern Nepal and made them settled in Mungpoo division of the plantation. The same method was adopted by Tamang, Limbu and later on by Bahun and Chhetri Sardars in enticing the workers from Nepal and Sikkim and made them settled in the respective caste Dhuras (blocks). In Labdha division, for instance, mainly Tamangs were emigrated and settled down. Similar process was followed in case of Sittong where mainly the Bhujels were emigrated.

In Latpancher, mostly the Bhujels emigrated from Nepal and Dooars areas of Jalpaiguri District of West Bengal while in Munsong Cinchona plantation, it was mostly the Tamangs as the daily rated workers from Nepal. In the same manner, in Rongo Medicinal Plantation, the workers were mostly consisting of the immigrants from Burma.

It can be safely said that even today they do have commitments directly or indirectly towards Nepal. Most of the families have some sort of relations with Nepal both socially or otherwise as evidently many persons from the families of the workers have been working in the Nepal Government and Semi-Government agencies of Nepal.

In this way, it can be said without hesitations that Cinchona plantation workers belonging to the Matwali castes were mainly the immigrants from eastern Nepal due to their poverty and exploitation during the Rana regime (Pradhan; 1991: 193). But Kumar Pradhan (Ibid:93-95), while stating the reasons for outmigration of Mongoloids from eastern Nepal has also stated that the pressure on land is not the decisive factor nor the unscrupulous labour agents (Sardars and Gallawalas) from India could entice so many people for such a long period of the time for emigrating and providing cheap labour outside. In his work "Thatched Huts and Stucco Palaces", Regmi (1978:135) diagnoses the phenomenon of a large scale emigration of people from hill areas of Nepal to Bengal and elsewhere was due to the progressive proletarianization of small peasants in Nepal. However, Pradhan (1991:200) has clearly mentioned in his work "Gorkha Conquest" that there were some internal social conditions for outmigration of Mongoloids (Matwalis) to Darjeeling. Further, while stating the reasons for outmigration of the Matwalis, he has strongly mentioned, "The real cause was the economic hardship and social discrimination suffered as a result of political, social and economic domination of high caste Tagadharis over the Matwalis of Mongoloid origin and untouchable low castes who constituted the overwhelming majority of the humble toiling folk". This may be the strong reason why the Matwalis form the most dominant social groups in the Cinchona plantation today. A question may arise here from the foregoing discussion that as to why the

Tagadharis did not immigrate to the plantation though there were a lot of small peasants among them in eastern Nepal at that time. One of the plausible reasons may be that they were successful agriculturists in Nepal Himalayas (Hitchcock : 1978:114) which helped them to settle in the Terai belt of Nepal and Khas Mahals of Kalimpong sub-division of Darjeeling District. To Pradhan (1991:194), the Bahuns and the Chhetris are described as successful cultivators both in Nepal and India. However, the trace of such Tagadharis was not found in Darjeeling Himalayas till 1931. Only the Census of India, 1931 has put the figure of the Tagadharis at 8,299. The migration of the Tagadharis in the plantation started only after 1940. It is also found that the Tagadharis who were mainly the marginal peasants in Nepal started investing money in the rural areas of Darjeeling and Kalimpong by selling their marginal holdings of Nepal. In this way, they gave secondary importance to the plantation works in the region. Moreover, by 1861, Darjeeling had already been well developed with the resources and thus there was no question of inter-regional migration of the Nepalis in the hill areas of Darjeeling. Whatever the percentage of Lepcha and Bhutia were there in the region, only a few of them accepted the works in Mungpoo Cinchona plantation. It was because of the fact that the Lepchas were mainly shifting cultivators and Bhutias were petty businessmen who were concentrated mainly in the urban areas of Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Kurseong.

The migration into the Cinchona plantation was family based and thus their socio-economic life was shaped and moulded by the plantation system (Bhowmik : 1981). This was a life of Kammanee (plantation dwellers) though slowly a linguistic homogeneity (Hitchcock : 1978:117) was growing among the various Tagadhari and Matwali castes in the plantation after 1940. Yet, the Tagadhari-Matwali dichotomy in their social life over the century had been continuing undisturbed. The dichotomy is noticed through the process of Matwalisation and Hinduisation. The two terms used in the study refer to two cultures which the Tagadharis and the Matwalis had inherited from their place of origins. Matwalisation is being equated with tribalisation by which there is rather horizontal division in their social structure (Caplan : 1978:62-63) while in the Hinduisation, there is always the vertical hierarchy of the society based on caste system. The Matwalisation among the various tribal groups such as Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Thami, Sherpa, Lepcha and Bhutia could completely flourish in the plantation till the Tagadharis arrived there in the late forties of the present century. Along with the Tagadharis, the occupational castes such as Kami, Damai and Sarki also started migrating in the plantation after 1940. Of the two later immigrant groups, the occupational castes seem to have been well accommodated in the process of Matwalisation (Caplan: 1978:63) though they along with other Matwalis are Hindus by religion and untouchables for the Tagadharis only.

The Problem of the Study

The Sociological study of the Cinchona plantation workers is completely a new area that will add a new dimension in the study of plantation society in India. So far, no study on the Cinchona plantation has been done. The plantation has a dual characters of agriculture and industry with modern technological apparatus and scientific laboratories of its own.

As the title suggests, this is a Sociological study of Cinchona plantation workers in Darjeeling hills. It is revealed from the foregoing discussion that they are migrants from the peasant background of Nepal and Sikkim to an industrial environment. Work in the plantation is a continuous process of production relations and it involves certain rules and regulations which are to be obeyed by all. This is a changed situation of work culture from that of the past. The works in the agrarian sector were mainly done for consumption purpose of the families and did not observe any rules and regulations in carrying out the agricultural pursuits while here the working hours are to be strictly followed as per the provisions of the Plantation labour Act, 1951 so that the production process is continued throughout the year. This makes the workers permanent residents of the plantation industry.

The permanent settlement in the plantation assures the workers of their wages, housing, khetland, medical benefits and other welfare incentives of an industrial society. Such a job

security could not be expected in the agrarian society of Nepal and Sikkim. So, it is completely a new situation with an alien economic activity. It is a situation of distinct form of production relations of the plantation organisation which gives rise to certain relations. Heterogeneity in the economic activity of the past as self-supporting cultivators and landless masses to the homogeneous work force by selling their labour in the plantation organisation makes the migrant workers as industrial labours.

Hence, the plantation as a new environment guides, shapes and moulds the life of the workers in a different fashion. In this way, it has its own peculiarity from that of other big industries of the country such as Steel, Iron, Textile etc. Most writers, while defining the plantation tend to overlook such socio-economic relations. They have either explained its production process or they are merely interested with the production unit itself. But such definitions do not seem to have adequate justification for the Cinchona plantation as it is a "life Saving Drug" producing industry of the country.

The International Labour Organisation notes the term 'Plantation' at first as a group of settlers or the political units formed by it, under the British colonialism especially in North America and in West Indies (ILO : 1950:6). Hla Myint (1973:40) distinguished the plantation from peasant agriculture by its large scale enterprises which normally requires more labour per unit of land. Again, William O. Jones (1968:54) defines a plantation as economic unit producing agricultural commodities

for sale and employing relatively large number of unskilled labourers whose activities are closely supervised. It differs from other kinds of farms in which the factors of production primarily management and labour are combined. There is a vertical hierarchy in the plantation with skilled Director, Managers, Divisional Officers etc. directing production undertaken by the unskilled daily rated plantation workers whose primary skill is to follow others. The definition of Jones stands little bit true for the plantation workers.

Another feature of the plantation is that it is not associated with resident people of the region. The original tribe known as Lepcha of the region did not involve in the plantation works due to the fear of destroying their cultural norms of the region (Wolf : 1959:136). The Nepali migrants as the wage labourers not only transformed the shifting cultivation of the Lepchas to settled cultivation but the whole lot of tribal culture of the Lepchas had also been transformed.

Isolation from the mainland especially the urban towns such as Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Kurseong and Siliguri enabled the planters to barricade the plantation in the past. To maintain this, even a para-military force known as North Bengal Mounted Rifles (Sarkar and Lama : 1986:19) was kept in the plantation. By doing so, the workers were barricaded within the jurisdiction of the plantation alone. There were clear cut instructions to the top ranking managerial cadres not to mix up with the workers except in the working hours of the industry. This could be possible due

to the colonial policy of the British Government which adopted a position which would favour the plantation owners only. But later on specially after the attainment of independence of the country, the Government passed labour laws protecting the plantation workers. The laws also provide conditions for growth of the plantation workers' organisations to fight for better conditions in jobs and pressurised the Government to release the stringent laws.

Therefore, while attempting to conceptualise the plantation, an elucidation of its economic characters alone is not enough. It does not explain the uniqueness of the plantation. The social relations in continuity and change that are taking place in the inter personal and inter community relations are to be taken into account due to the factors such as the changing caste structure, commensal relations, family structure, inter-personal relations in the family, marriage pattern, health and hygiene, religious structure, trade union organisations, mobilisation from one group to another between the Tagadharis and the Matwalis etc. form an integral part of its elucidation.

The Nepali society in the Cinchona plantation is heterogeneous in nature having various castes and tribes, while it was a homogeneous caste village in Nepal. Each village was understood to be a caste village which could maintain its exclusiveness from another caste village in terms of its socio-economic relations. Migration to the plantation makes the society oriented towards

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multi-caste and multi-ethnic social structure having a hierarchy of its own. Economically, a distinct occupational hierarchy has also been emerged among the plantation workers. The caste hierarchy of the past along with the occupational hierarchy of the plantation industry has influenced to form a distinct form of social structure of its own. The traditional three tier classification of Nepali society as conceptualised by the scholars like Haimendorf (1966:18) and Caplan (1970) into Tagadhari, Matwali and Untouchable of Nepal does not have much relevance in the plantation as the implications of the so-called untouchability of the past is considered to be an illegal phenomenon from the point of view of the Prohibition of Untouchability Act, 1961 of Government of India. Secondly, the so-called traditional occupational castes (Untouchables) such as Kami, Damai and Sarki were untouchables for Bahuns and Chhetris only in Nepal while the other castes such as Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Mangor, Newar, Sherpa, Bhutia, Tamang, Thami and Lepcha have never accepted the concept of untouchability in Nepal (Fisher : 1978:48) and the same is found in the plantation also. Therefore, in the present study, the Nepali society is classified into the Tagadhari and the Matwali categories. Each group has been further sub-classified into two groups. For instance, Tagadharis are of two types, viz., (a) Jharra and (b) Thimaha. Again, the Matwalis have also been sub-classified into (a) Setho and (b) Kalo types. Conceptually, the Tagadhari castes such as Bahun, Thakuri and Chhetri do wear sacred threads (Janai) and they are not suppose to use or drink wines (Haimendorf : 1966:18, Morris : 1985:125).

Further, among the Tagadharis, the Bahuns are conceptualised as Jharra (Pure) and the caste like Chhetri, Thakuri and Bihari are treated as Thimaha (Non-Jharra) type.

The Matwali castes such as Rai, Limbu, Manger, Gurung, Tamang, Thami, Sunuwar, Lepcha, Dukpa (Bhutia) and Sherpa are considered to be the Setho Matwalis who have purely Mongoloid characters and drink wine or use wine in their rituals. While the Kalo Matwalis such as Kami, Damai and Sarki though Aryans in appearance do drink or use wine in observing their rituals. Thus, the traditional untouchable castes appear to have been culturally well mobilised with other Matwali castes of the plantation. Numerically, the Matwalis form a dominant population of the plantation while previously they were exploited class in Nepal. Such a change in the social structure has affected the total inter-caste relations in terms of commensality, food habits and caste endogamy.

A peculiar type of commensal relations among the workers of the Tagadhari and the Matwali castes and tribes have been evolved in the plantation. The traditional concept of Pani-Chal Ne-Jats (castes from whose hands water can be taken) and Pani-Na-Chal-Ne-Jats (castes from whose hands water can not be taken) as existed in Nepal are rather loosely observed among the Tagadharis who do priestly jobs. It is due to common dwelling in an industrial environment which does not differentiate a Bahun from a Kami, Sarki or Damai and due to the adoption of Kalo Matwalis with Setho category. These may be the obvious reasons

why no separate dining arrangement is being made for Kami, Sarki and Damai castes in the occasion like death, marriage and pujas. The traditional concept of Jat (Tagadhari), Ajat (Matwalis) and Kujat (Untouchables) do not have much implications here rather a concept of Thulo and Sano (higher and lower) castes has emerged here with a prominent impact on the socio-cultural life of the workers.

The structural changes in the Nepali caste system has also affected the family structure and inter-personal relations in the plantation. Migration to the plantation industry was family based. A single family with husband, wife and children was encouraged by the planters so that they could be easily accommodated in the smaller huts. Hence, they had migrated here with their families which were of joint nature in Nepal. But after living in an industrial environment, they prefer to live in nuclear families which are treated by the Government as a standard unit with husband, wife and children. Further, the nuclear family is created by the plantation as per its hardship theory according to which the fresh recruitments are to be done from the among the families which have more than six dependent members to the single earning member of a family. This has caused not only the structural changes of the families of the workers (Weibe : 1979:81) but also affected tremendously the sexual roles of the family members due to their exposure to the world outside the families. Females and males are equally treated as both are to be considered as part and parcel of working force

of the plantation. The traditional role of a female as house wife to an industrial worker having various interactions with industry, trade union, Mahila Samity and society as a whole has certainly affected the interpersonal relations among the other members of the family.

Due to migration to the plantation industry, their traditional system of exogamy has been changing to a great extent. Occurrence of inter-caste marriages among them has been taking place within the plantation enclave only. Such inter-caste marriages have been done mostly among the Matwalis though a few Tagadharis have also married to other castes (Hitchcock :1978: 117-118). Now such marriages are locally considered as an accepted phenomenon. The basic criteria for such caste endogamy and village exogamy of the past have been replaced by other emerging criteria such as education, job, family background etc. of the couples.

Traditionally, only the Bahuns were allowed to attend schools of Sanskrit education in Nepal and no Matwali was allowed for such education for they were treated as Shudras (Mongoloids) in the Nepali society (Caplan : 1978:60, Hofer : 1978: 182, Pradhan : 1991:168). The introduction of western education in the plantation since the late forties of the present century not only brought about a change in the economic life of the workers of all castes but also determined a separate social status for them.

While migrating to the plantation, most of the Matwalis had Buddhist backgrounds in Nepal (Dozey: 1989:40) but they had strongly tintured with Brahmanical rites. The animistic philosophy of the Matwalis with Hinduised religion of the past had once again interacted with the Tibetan Buddhism in the region. This has resulted into the religious conversion in the plantation. Unlike in Nepal, religion has become a secular aspect of their life. Any worker can change his/her religious sect overnight.

The change of the environment from peasant to industrial has also helped for changes in their preference for traditional and modern means of medical treatment. The extent for such preference in using the traditional methods of treatment has also been changed in the plantation. However, the Jhankri system of the past is still persisting among all the castes to some extent.

Ideally, the Tagadharis were supposed to be the vegetarians in their food habits in the past while the Matwalis were non-vegetarians. Now, the food habits of the workers depend to a great extent on their personal choice though socially the Tagadharis are not supposed to take meat and wine in exercising rituals which are compulsory items among the Matwalis.

The Tagadharis had occupied the uppermost positions in the political life of the villages and the national life of Nepal through her Panchayati Raj administration. Such Panchayat system is not found in the plantation today. The political leadership along with the responsibilities of a village panchayat of the past has been wielded over by the trade union leaders.

The traditional roles of village Mukhias, Mandals, Karbaris etc. have also been taken up by the trade union leaders. However, to identify and strengthen the cultural life of the various Matwali castes a few caste associations (samajs) have emerged in the plantation today. But interestingly, such associations being an extra-legal phenomenon have not been able to exert any pressure on the management nor do they solve any problem of the plantation workers. The management does not grant any official recognition to the associations; neither any member of the associations (caste Samajs) are invited for solving the problems of the plantation workers. So, the trade union is completely a new phenomenon for the plantation workers. It comprises of all castes and tribes as well as all communities. While the traditional village panchayat mainly consists of members of a single caste. The existence of trade unions in the plantation has not only affected the economic life of the workers but also their social life has been tremendously affected during the present era.

Considering the above situations, the study of socio-economic dimension of Cinchona plantation workers provides us the process how a society adjust to the plantation industrial setting after coming from a traditional peasant background. The economy of the plantation industry has far reaching effects on the socio-cultural life of the plantation workers at Mungpoo. However, in the changing process, a few aspects of the cultural life of the workers have still persisting while others have changed considerably. Caste as a social institution has been

still persisting though its principles have been tremendously losing ground in the multi-caste social structure of the plantation. The changes in the principles of the caste system has also immensely affected the principles of commensality, endogamy, hereditary occupation, family composition, marriage pattern and inter-personal relations among the family members. The authority structure of the families has also been changing though the parents and elders are respected in day to day life of the workers (Haimendorf: 1966:46, Bennet : 1978:122). In spite of the changes in the socio-economic life of the plantation workers certain socio-cultural traits of the past have been still continuing today.

Objectives of the Study

It is known from the above discussion that the Nepali society was not homogeneous. It was consisting of many Mongoloid tribes and castes with more than thirty languages (Pradhan: 1991: 5). However, the society was predominantly agrarian in nature. Excepting Bahuns, Chhetris, Thakuris, Gurungs and Mangers, all other communities such as Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, Newar, Tamang, Sherpa, Lepcha and Thami were the original inhabitants of the hill areas of eastern Nepal. They were corporately known as Kiratis (Ibid:39) and were closely associated with Mongoloid races of South East Asia.

Land had played an important role in the socio-economic life of the people in Nepal. Since land became the chief symbol

of social prestige among the tribes, their main occupations became more and more agrarian with their own system of communal ownership (Hofer: 1978:180).

However, due to variation of land type in the hill areas of Nepal, the various tribes had to make use of their land in different ways. For instance, Rai, Limbu, Yakha, Mager, Thami and Sunuwar used their land for cultivation of crops. In the process, they choose dry land to cultivate maize and millet at the higher altitudes, while Sherpa, Gurung and Tamang used the land as a means of their pastoral economy. In the same way, Bahuns, Chhetris and Thakuris became priests, soldiers and aristocrats respectively. Again, those three castes were supposed to be beaurocrats in Nepal (Caplan : 1978:68). They also owned fertile low land of rice fields. But all the menial works were to be done by the tribes (Hitchcock:1978:115) who were also known as Matwalis while Bahuns, Chhetris and Thakuris were known as Tagadharis (Sinha: 1975:8). Again, there were occupational castes such as Kami, Damai and Sarki who were known as untouchable castes. In this way, the Nepali society was divided into three broad hierarchical divisions in Nepal.

Another notable feature of the Nepali society was the predominance of joint families. It was a male dominated society. As Bennet (1978:121) stated that under the male dominated society the role of women folks was to be sub-merged with the interests of male members of the family. So, female had low social status. Each family was understood to be the aggregate of grand parents,

parents, sons, daughter-in-laws, grand sons and grand daughters (Haimendorf:1966:42).

In regard to marriage types, the intra-caste marriage which was known as Jat Bibaha was invariably favoured. However, the intercaste marriage which was known as Ajat Bibaha was also to some extent tolerated but the Kujat Bibaha or the marriage between touchable and untouchable castes were strongly condemned (Hitchcock:1978:115). In case of the intercaste marriage, a Jat Dandha or penalty for breach of caste endogamy was made. The low caste members had to pay Jat Dandha to a high caste if a male member of the former married a female member of the latter. If a male member of a touchable caste married to an untouchable female, the touchable male could be declared as untouchable. Again, the offsprings of hypergamous marriages used to enjoy degraded status equivalent to their mothers.

Excepting Bahuns, Chhetris and Thakuris, the Nepali tribes had animism (Haimendorf:1966:143) as their religion though they were under the influence of Hindu fundamentalism of Nepal (Allan:1978:8, Hitchcock:1978:115). O'Malley (1907: 48) and Fisher (1978:45) have also shared this view.

Jhankris were only the means to get rid of diseases or misfortunes in the family among all the castes and tribes in Nepal. A Jhankri was a medium, a magician or a Shaman, diviner or a priest or a sacrificer (Hitchcock:1967:157, 1978:27-31, Fournier : 1978:167).

In the traditional political institution of the Nepalis, the Mandal, Karbari or Mukhia were known as village headmen (Caplan:1978:58, Rose:1978:221). Each caste had its own headmen who had to settle all types of disputes occurred within the respective caste group. They had also to collect taxes for the government. They were also known as "Pancha" or the members of Gram Panchayat. The office inherited from father to eldest son (Sinha:1975:47-48, Hofer : 1978:180).

The migration of the above traditional castes and tribes from Nepal to the Cinchona plantation industry from peasant environment calls for several propositions to be explored and analysed. Wage earning in the Cinchona plantation is their primary occupation. The change in the occupational structure from the heterogeneous types of agrarian society to the homogeneous category as wage earners in the industry has brought about some changes in the socio-economic life of the workers. Some of the pertinent questions which the present study intends to investigate are : (i) what is the nature of the plantation economy? (ii) why the workers of the various castes preferred to migrate here and settled permanently? (iii) why they feel better adjusted here than in Nepal? (iv) What is the position of the plantation workers in the occupational hierarchy of the industry? (v) what is the nature of recruitment procedures, promotion and other job facilities for the workers? (vi) Which caste/castes group is economically better off than the others?

The change in the economy from the traditional agrarian type to the plantation industrial type has some interesting features. The plantation industry is agro-based industry which possesses both industrial and agrarian characters. The plantation itself is based on cultivation of Cinchona and other medicinal plants on the one hand and its management provides Khetland to their workers for cultivation and income which is added to their daily wages. This Khetland is also known as Kothe-Bari. Providing Khetland to the workers appeared to be the main pull factor for migration of the marginal and landless peasants from east Nepal to the plantation in the past. The Khetland agriculture cultivation is to some extent different from their traditional peasant agriculture. The present study will be on the following aspects: What is the nature and characteristic features of Khetland agriculture, how far income from this economy add to their family income, on what terms and conditions the land is given to the workers by the management, what are the nature of changes in the agricultural practices of the peasant community.

The new hierarchy which has emerged is due to industrial framework, rules and regulations. The study also explore the nature of evolution and growth of Cinchona plantation in the historical perspective.

The demography of the plantation industry, nature of work and cultivation in the plantation as well as the attitudes of the workers towards the plantation works are the other aspects of the study.

The industrial way of life has also given rise to the emergence of modern society. The education which the plantation provides to the children of the workers opens the avenues for competing in the higher posts both in and outside the plantation. The crops which are produced in the Khetland and other lands (outside the plantation) are cash crops. All these may have certainly affected their style of life and income distribution. Here, we want to see the degree of adaptation among the Tagadhari and Matwali groups in the industrial environment.

The change in the economic activity also enhances change in the social life of the workers. In fact, migration itself is an impact because the workers prefer to settle down in the industrial set up. Unlike in Nepal, the workers of the various castes and tribes call themselves as Nepalis in the plantation. The settlement in the new environment also cause for the occurrence of changes in other aspects of socio-cultural life of the workers. The study tries to answer the following questions: (i) What happened to their traditional type of family? (ii) whether traditional type of authority structure of family is really replaced by the modern industrial type? (iii) what happened to the traditional social value of paying respect to the elders? (iv) What are the criteria (principles) or social values rendered for having marriages today in the plantation? (v) whether traditional rituals are completely ignored? (vi) What is the magnitude of inter-caste and intra-caste marriages in the industrial environment? (vii) What has happened to the traditional caste

hierarchy here? (viii) whether a new caste hierarchy has emerged? (ix) whether the present caste hierarchy of the plantation workers is completely different from the traditional occupational hierarchy which was more or less an agrarian in nature? (x) How the religious commitments of the workers have been changed? (xi) What are the factors responsible for the religious conversions? (xii) What happened to the traditional religious structure? (xiii) Whether the religious practices and rituals have been completely changed? (xiv) Whether there is any continuity in the religious practices? (xv) Whether they prefer traditional way of treatment for curing the diseases or the modern types available in the plantation?

The plantation industry does not permit for the existence of joint families because to have more and more joint families means to provide more and more houses, Khetland and other welfare facilities to the workers. Moreover, the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 of Government of India has very clearly stated that a family is to be considered of husband, wife and children only. The plantation has been very particular with the provisions of the Act of 1951 while providing the facilities like Khetland, house, ration, medical and other facilities. Under the situation, the plantation workers have no way out but to prefer nuclear families. With the structural change of the family, there may have been the changes in the inter-personal relationship among the members of the family. Here we want to see the extent of the persistence of traditional type of family in the industrial environment.

Another aspect of the social life of the workers is marriage : its type and pattern in the industry. Unlike the traditional type of single caste village, the present habitation is consisted of more than nineteen castes. Dwelling in such hill ecology, the traditional concept of caste endogamy may not be completely sustained (Hitchcock : 1978:117). Moreover, the industrial way of life does not provide any sanctity to the caste endogamy in day to day life of the workers. Further, the secular constitution of the country does not permit for the adherence to caste endogamy in regard to marriages.

The change of occupational hierarchy among the Nepali castes has certain implications in the caste hierarchy. The traditional concept of untouchability has no pragmatic meaning (Dewan:1991:41) over here as all the traditional occupational castes such as Kami, Damai and Sarki (Ironsmith, Tailor and Cobbler) along with other castes are just wage earners. The change of occupational structure may have affected the changes in the inter-caste relationship in terms of commensality especially while observing rituals and festivals. The plantation is mainly the Matwali dominated society which does not accept the concept of Pani-Chal-Ne-Jats and Pani-Na-Chal-Ne-Jats of the past.

Migration from Nepal, a Hindu country to the secular country like India, the religious life of the Nepali migrants may have completely changed or the religious commitments of the workers may not have been as rigid as it was in Nepal.

Excepting Bahuns, all the Nepali castes and tribes had deep commitments to the traditional methods of treatment of diseases in Nepal. Living in the medicinal plantation industry, the plantation workers might have been influenced considerably by the concept of modern methods of medical treatment. The study also tries to explain the concept and meaning of diseases : their causes and remedies.

Being the industrial workers, they may have certain grievances in regard to their socio-economic welfare. To realise the proper justice for having better living conditions in the plantation industry, the workers have formed trade unions. It is a new phenomenon which could not be found in the Nepali agrarian society. Rather they had caste panchayats in Nepal. The study tries to describe the trade union movement in the plantation, nature and composition of trade union, activities of trade unions etc. It will also try to answer as to what happened to their traditional caste panchayats. Whether the caste samajs which have emerged among the Matwalis are really able to control power in the plantation today as of Nepal?

Finally, the plantation workers having various Nepali caste and tribal backgrounds, may certainly interact with their cultural milieus of the past.

To sum up, the present analytical study concentrates on the following dimensions of the Cinchona plantation workers:-

(I) To study the plantation workers in the industrial environment - Its work organisation and evolution, nature of work, attitudes of the workers to their wages, housing, material life, Khetland, occupational structure, educational structure, income, landholding, medical and other welfare facilities, trade union movement, structure and functions of trade unions, attitudes of the workers towards their trade unions etc.

(II) To study the plantation workers in the social universe: Its family structure, interpersonal relations in the family, marriage types and patterns, caste ~~system~~, dichotomy of society into Tagadhari-Matwali caste groups and commensality, caste and food habits, religious composition, religious conversion, religious festivals, rituals and food items, concept and meaning of diseases and treatment, continuity in some cultural aspects etc.

(III) To study the process of adaptation and adjustment of diverse caste groups having agrarian social structure into the industrial environment of the Cinchona plantation.

Some of the possible hypotheses for the present study are drawn from the above discussion and they are noted as below:

- (i) Migration may bring changes in the socio-economic and cultural life.
- (II) Migration may help to forgo traditional occupations and take up new jobs.
- (III) Migration helps to form a new social structure of some multi-ethnic groups.

- (IV) Migration helps to bring about the process of assimilation, integration and adjustment among the diverse social groups.
- (V) Migration helps changes in the political structure and the leadership pattern.
- (VI) Migration brings changes in the religious practices.
- (VII) Migration shapes new outlook to the health and hygiene aspects of life.
- (VIII) Migration has brought about a process of adjustment between traditional and modern socio-economic values.

Methodology

After a preliminary visit to all the four plantations, viz., Mungpoo, Munsong, Latpancher and Rongo in the hill areas of Darjeeling District, the Mungpoo was selected for the purpose of studying the socio-economic life of the Cinchona plantation workers. The rationale behind the selection of Mungpoo among the four plantations of the region was that only the Mungpoo was found to be the most representative one due to its distinct industrial characters which differentiate it from other three plantations. Mungpoo represented a real Cinchona producing industry while the other three plantations, though under the Directorate of Mungpoo Cinchona, producing mainly other medicinal plants. Again, Mungpoo was the oldest Cinchona plantation having diverse social structure with multi-caste and tribal groups which could make the study more meaningful with ample Sociological

orientations. While the other three plantations were mainly comprising of only two or three Nepali castes such as Rai, Limbu, Tamang or Bhujels (Matwalis). Above all, Mungpoo had three manufacturing factories with an elaborate work hierarchy ranging from the skilled Director, Deputy Director, Manager, Assistant Manager, Chief Chemist, Production Chemist, Divisional Officer, Establishment staff to the semi-skilled factory workers and unskilled daily rated plantation workers. The manufacturing process with the elaborate work hierarchy was considered to be the basic criteria for considering it as an industry. Such industrial characters were not found in other three plantations which were purely the large agricultural estates growing mainly the other medicinal plants such as Epecac, Dioscorrea, Tung Oil seeds etc. Moreover, Mungpoo was the headquarter of all the trade unions. Hence, face to face interactions of an industrial society between the trade unions and the management as well as the workers and the management could most apparently be observed in the plantation only. Such interactions were not found in the remaining three other plantations of the region. Further, more than two thousand workers including the casuals were working in Mungpoo Cinchona plantation, while the number of the working population in other three plantations was very low. It was because of these reasons, the Mungpoo Cinchona plantation was selected to be most representative one in so far as the Cinchona plantation workers were concerned for studying their socio-economic life in the industrial environment.

The data were collected from the published materials and field work. The published materials were used for writing the first chapter while for the remaining chapter two, three, four and five various official records of the Directorate and trade union offices were consulted. To obtain the first hand data, a field work of about one year was conducted in the Government Cinchona plantation, Mungpoo during 1991-92. For the primary information, a Census enumeration schedule was used. After that an intensive interview was done with an interview schedule.

There were thirteen Nepali castes, three Nepali Scheduled castes and three Scheduled tribes in the plantation. Altogether there were 1071 households with a total of 1172 plantation workers. All the workers were interviewed with the interview schedule. So, no sampling method was followed for interviewing the workers. Besides 1172 plantation workers, monthly rated factory workers, casual workers (male and female), trade union leaders and managerial staff were also interviewed for the present study with an interview schedule having specific questions relating to the socio-economic, political, religious and health and hygiene aspects of the workers.

Besides the interview, several case studies were also conducted relating to the specific aspects of the socio-economic life of the workers. Further, the data collected by the interview and case studies were supplemented by the data collected through observation. Since the study concentrated on the general socio-economic life of the plantation workers as a whole, both male and female workers were considered for interview. However, in some

cases, other people were also interviewed with an interview guide specially for collecting data on the social aspects such as caste structure, caste and commensality etc. For collecting data on trade union and trade union movement, the rank and file and outside leaders of the trade unions were interviewed.

Similarly, the leaders of caste associations were also interviewed to compare the caste associations with trade unions. All the interviews were taken place in informants' house and quite often in the working place also.

A few old persons were also separately interviewed to collect data on cultural aspects of the traditional Nepali society which helped me much in analysing the continuity and change of cultural traits of the Nepali society at Mungpoo. Finally, all the collected data were qualitatively analysed and interpreted for writing the present study.