

## CHAPTER V

### Trade Unions and Workers Participation

In the present chapter, an attempt has been made to study the trade union movement in the Cinchona plantation, its structure and functions, its leadership pattern, nature of participation by the workers etc.

#### Trade Union Movement in the Plantation: A Historical Perspective

Discussing the trade union movement in the plantation, a mention is always to be made of certain social organisations which were already formed prior to 1940 in Darjeeling such as Hillmen's Association (1921), Nebula (1934) and Gurkha Dukha Niwarak Sangh (Darjeeling) in 1932 (Pradhan: 1935:12, Dandha and Bagchi:1982: 339-348). Those organisations could directly or indirectly helped the plantation workers to unite themselves into a common organisation of their own to fight for their social justice. A branch of Gurkha Dukha Niwarak Sangh was also formed in Mungpoo in 1932. Besides the workers and the Sardars of the plantation, the persons like Rupnarayan Sinha, an advocate of the Darjeeling District Court, Dal Bahadur Giri, a Freedom Fighter of Darjeeling and a few Bengali Babus of the plantation had actively encouraged the workers for formation of the organisation at Mungpoo. The first meeting of of the organisation was held at Saraswati Pustakalaya (now a Higher Secondary School) in a closed door room without any agenda and

resolution. The organisation had to fight for twin objectives during the period, viz, (a) struggle for independence of the country and (b) rendering socio-economic justice to the plantation workers.

In spite of the efforts of the organisation, the socio-economic life of the workers had further deteriorating during the forties of the present century. This caused abandoning of the plantation by the workers who settled in nearby villages and jungles. Many workers of the plantation had cleared the Pobong Forest (other side of the Rambhi Jhora) and settled there for ever.

The situation was *apso facto* on which suddenly in a fine morning of the 18th May, 1943, as usual, the workers went to the factory for their rations and other necessary goods. Dr. M. Sen (Quinologist) denied to supply them the rations. The behaviour of the Quinologist resulted into a violence in which the workers were headed by Khairate Rai, Bharne Rai, Rame Thakuri, B.B. Barailly, B.B. Rai, Sher Bahadur Gurung etc. In the meantime, Shri Thomas, the General Manager and Shri Richard, the manager of the plantation, rushed immediately to the Superintendent's bungalow. The managers could however manage the situation very tactfully and sympathetically. Finally at 9 P.M., the workers withdrew their agitation and they were given rations.

The May Day incident of Mungpoo Cinchona plantation is considerably recognised by the subsequent generations as the landmark of trade union movement in the hill areas of Darjeeling District. However, the incident was promptly reported to the government and

people at large. To pacify the moods of the workers and to assess the situation at Mungpoo, the government of West Bengal instructed the District Police headquarter (Darjeeling) for a judicial enquiry and accordingly the issue was resolved with the help of Shri Damber Singh Gurung (Member of Legislative Assembly, West Bengal) from Kalimpong sub-division.

With the formation of Cinchona Employees' Union in 1943, Shri N.B. Gurung, General Secretary and Mr. M.B. Rai, Advisor demanded for appointment of a Nepali knowing officer who could understand the socio-economic grievances of the workers. However, the union was considered to be an illegal organisation by the management and all the top ranking leaders like L.M. Sharma, Hari Sharma, Kancha Bagee and B.B. Barailly were transferred to Rongo Cinchona plantation.

With the initiative of Cinchona Employees' Union, the Maternity benefits had started to be given and a few workers such as Chaukidar, Chaprasi, Munsii, Daffadar, Gangman, Blacksmith, Carpenter, Foreman and Chargeman were brought under the purview of the monthly rated workers. The trade union however, could not work properly as per its objectives.

#### Growth of Trade Unions at Mungpoo

Following the reports of the Indian Labour Conference, 1946, the plantation workers were assured to bring them into the mainstream of the national life by passing the Plantation Labour, 1951. In the

beginning of 1952, under the initiative of All India Gurkha League and untiring efforts of Shri Shiv Kumar Rai (the then Deputy Minister of Government of West Bengal), D.B. Rai, Deo Prakash Rai (Setho Matwalis) and Hari Sharma (Jharra Tagadhari), a public meeting was held at Rongo Cinchona plantation and a trade union which was known as Darjeeling Kulain Bagan Shramik Sangh was formed on 28.4.1952 and its branches were also formed at Mungpoo, Munsong, Latpancher and Gairibas divisions of the plantation in the same year. The trade union was an independent organisation which had no affiliation to any political party though it was guided at different times by the leaders of various political parties.

The top leadership of the trade union was in the hands of D.B. Rai, N.B. Gurung, Prakash Rai, Dulal Pradhan and Deo Prakash Rai. Thus, it revealed the fact that mostly the Matwali castes had control over the trade union. This was completely a changed situation in the plantation from that of their place of origin where the top leadership of the village and National level Panchayats could come from the Tagadhari castes only (Pradhan ; 1991;165). The structure of the trade union remained same till 1957 when Shri T. Manen , L.B. Thapa (Matwalis), R.T. Ali (Muslim) and B.B. Barailly (Kalo Matwali) became President, General Secretary, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer respectively. The trade union had to face a lot of challenges relating to the issues like abolition of Hatta Bahira system, introduction of Badli system, implementation of Provident Fund scheme and expansion of Cinchona plantation so as to employ more and more unemployed youths in the plantation.

In 1962, the leadership of the trade union went to the hands of Deo Prakash Rai, C.K. Khaling, D.L. Rai, H.B. Thapa (Setho Matwalis) and B.B. Barailly (Kalo Matwali) as President, General Secretary, Vice-President, Assistant Secretary and Treasurer respectively. They remained in the position till 1967.

Again, in 1967, N.L. Gurung (President), D.L. Rai (Vice-President), R.N. Dahal (General Secretary), B.B. Barailly (Assistant Secretary) and M.D. Thapa (Treasurer) became the leaders of the trade union. Here also, excepting a Thimaha Tagadhari as General Secretary, all the executive members of the trade union were Matwalis. During the period, the trade union could not work successfully in the direction of abolition of Hatta Bahira system and introduction of Badli system of works as well as the Provident Fund scheme. However, latter on in 1970, the trade union became successful in implementing project on Rehabilitation of the plantation workers by abolishing Hatta Bahira system and the Provident Fund Scheme.

After the State election of 1972, the structure of the trade union had also undergone a change. Shri N.L. Gurung (President), Hari Sharma (Vice-President), L.M. Sharma (General Secretary), K.D. Thapa (Assistant Secretary) and G.L. Moktan (Tamang) became the leaders of the trade union. One of the significant changes in the structure of the trade union was the induction of two Jharra Tagadharis in the executive committee of the trade union for the first time in the history of trade union movement in the Cinchona plantation. The two Jharra Tagadharis were teachers in a high school at Rongo who due to their educational background got elected in the trade union.

In 1976 again, the executive committee of the trade union had undergone another drastic change as the trade union was completely dominated by the Congress members alone such as Madan Thapa (President), C.B. Gurung (Vice-President), L.K. Tamang (General Secretary), N.B. Gurung (Advisor) and B.B. Barailly (Treasurer). It is observed from the structure that all the executive members of the trade union were elected from the Matwali group only and the two Tagadharis of the past were ousted from the executive committee. During the period, the trade union had been suffering from a great set back due to the emergence of national emergency on the one hand and intra-union rivalries on the other. The dissolution of the trade union in 1978, helped to emerge another trade union known as Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union with its affiliation to the Centre of Indian Trade Union with Man Bahadur Sotang as Assistant Secretary, Anand Pathak as President and Rama Sankar Prasad as the General Secretary.

The Darjeeling Kulain Bagan Shramik Sangh was again reoriented with the induction of Renuleena Subba (President), Hari Sharma (Vice-President), L.M. Sharma (General Secretary), B.B. Barailly (Assistant Secretary) and Ashman Rai (Treasurer) in the executive committee of the union. The same structure had been still continuing in the plantation. The special feature of the trade union was that all the executive members belonged to Gurkha League Party of the region.

In early 1980's, a Congress Party supported trade union namely National Union of Plantation Workers was formed with Shri L.K. Tamang (General Secretary), Dawa Norbula (President) and R.T. Ali (Advisor) in the plantation. During the agitation led by Gurkha National Liberation Front from 1984 to 1988, all the trade unions had to keep silent in the plantation in so far as their activities were concerned.

After the formation of Darjeeling Gurkha Hill Council in 1988, a new trade union known as Himalayan Plantation Workers Union was formed in the plantation with its affiliation to the Gurkha National Liberation Front Party having Shri N.B. Chhettri (President), N.K. Kumai (General Secretary), C.B. Gurung (Assistant Secretary) and K.B. Sanyasi (Treasurer) of the executive committee of the trade union. Interestingly, it is observed that most of the top leadership of the trade union had been hailing from the Tagadhari group.

One of the important activities of the trade unions during the period commencing from 1972 to 1984 was the establishment of two new divisions one at Ranjuvalley and another at Ramphu areas of the plantation. The enhancement of Dearness Allowance, Medical Allowance, Bonus, Winter Allowance, casualisation of 700 workers of Ranjuvalley division, electrification of the plantation, Gratuity as per the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972, firewood allowance, labour housing project, extension of area under Cinchona plants, and finally the reorganisation of the plantation industry were some of the significant activities of the trade unions during the period.

### Trade Unions and Workers in the Plantation

After discussing the trade union movement in the plantation from 1943 to the present day, let us see the structure and activities of the trade unions today. Here, an attempt has been made to compare and contrast the traditional and modern organisations. The trade union consciousness among the workers has also been studied in the section. There were mainly two trade unions operating in the plantation. The Centre of Indian Trade Union led Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union was one which had started reviving its activities nicely after 1990 in the plantation. While the Darjeeling Kulain Bagan Shramik Sangh (Gurkha League) of the past had no hold in the plantation. The Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (G.N.L.F.) was another strong trade union in the plantation.

It is apparent from the table 43 that the percentage of the Bahuns in the CITU led trade union i.e., Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union (D.C.B.M.U.) is 12.5% while their percentage in G.N.L.F. led Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (H.P.W.U.) is 87.5%. The percentage of Chhetris in the CITU led trade union is 38.0% whereas 62.0% of the Chhetris belong to GNLIF led trade union but all the Thakuris belong to Himalayan Plantation Workers Union.

Interestingly, 77.8% of the Biharis belong to CITU led trade union and only 22.2% of them belong to HPWU. Similarly, 77.8% of the Newars belong to CITU led trade union and 22.2% of them belong to the Himalayan Plantation Workers Union. In the same way, 71.4% of the Gurungs belong to CITU led trade union and 28.6% of them belong to HPWU. The percentage of Rais belonging to the CITU led



Table 43Caste/Community and Trade Union Membership

Sl. No.	Caste	D. C. B. M. U. *	%	H. P. W. U. **	%	Total
1.	Bahun	16	2.0	112	27.1	128
2.	Chhetri	52	6.4	85	20.5	137
3.	Thakuri	-	-	9	2.2	9
4.	Bihari	7	0.9	2	0.5	9
5.	Newar	21	2.6	6	1.4	27
6.	Mangar	32	3.9	19	4.6	51
7.	Gurung	15	1.8	6	1.4	21
8.	Rai	313	38.3	62	15.0	375
9.	Limbu	81	9.9	20	4.8	101
10.	Bhujel	8	1.0	1	0.2	9
11.	Thami	5	0.6	1	0.2	6
12.	Sunuwar	2	0.2	1	0.2	3
13.	Tamang	83	10.1	31	7.5	114
14.	Sherpa	36	4.4	8	1.9	44
15.	Lepcha	69	8.4	29	7.0	98
16.	Dukpa	16	2.0	7	1.7	23
17.	Kami	48	5.9	9	2.2	57
18.	Damai	11	1.3	6	1.4	17
19.	Sarki	3	0.4	-	-	3
Total		818	66.4	414	33.6	1232

\* Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union

\*\* Himalayan Plantation Workers Union.

trade union is 83.5% while it is only 16.5% to HPWU.

Again, 80.2% of the Limbus belong to the CITU led trade union and only 19.8% of them belong to the HPWU. The percentage

of Thamis belonging to the CITU led trade union is 83.3% and 16.7% of them belong to the HPWU. Similarly, the percentage of Sunuwars belonging to the CITU led trade union is 72.8% and only 27.2% of them belong to HPWU. The 81.8% of the Sherpas belong to the CITU led trade union and only 18.2% of them belong to HPWU, 70.4% of the Lepchas belong to the CITU led trade union and 29.6% of them belong to HPWU. In the same way, 84.2% of the Kamis belong to the CITU led trade union and 15.8% of them belong to HPWU. Again, 64.7% of the Damais belong to the CITU led trade union and only 36.3% of them belong to HPWU and all the Sarkis belong to CITU trade union.

On the whole, 66.4% of the Cinchona plantation workers belong to the CITU led trade union and only 33.6% of them belong to HPWU. If we compare from the point of view of Tagadhari-Matwali dichotomy, it is seen that 9.2% of the Tagadharis belong to CITU led Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union and 90.8% of them belong to the Himalayan Plantation Workers Union while 90.8% of the Matwalis belong to the CITU led trade union and only 9.2% of them belong to HPWU at Mungpoo Cinchona plantation.

Thus, mostly Tagadharis appeared to have been the supporters of the G.N.L.F. led Himalayan Plantation Workers Union. The rationale behind this is that traditionally the Tagadharis used to contend themselves as real Gurkha (protector or worshipper of cows) people (Northey and Morris;1976:123, Pradhan:1991:159). Such a legacy has helped them to be the staunch supporters of the G.N.L.F. led trade union though the top leadership of it is in the hands of Matwalis.

Secondly, Tagadharis, though in reality they are Sukumbasis, have along with Matwalis been declared as an integral part of Gurkha Community of the region by the Gurkha National Liberation Front. So, their safety and security is assured as they cannot be retrenched as in the past (Deo Prakash Rai : 1963) from the plantation in the light of the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Act, 1947 which stressed for "Last Come First Go".

The historical and cultural background of the Matwalis (Tribes) who had nothing to do with cow worship in Nepal might have direct bearings on them for being members mostly in the CITU led trade union just to acquire maximum benefits from the Trade and Commerce Ministry of Government of West Bengal headed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) and CITU as its affiliated trade union organisation. Secondly, unlike Tagadharis, they have nothing to do with the retrenchment issue raised by the government as they are Raithanees here ever since the early 18th century.

The top leadership of both the trade unions was not of the working class origin. The General Secretary of D.C.B.M.U. (CITU) is now Bikash Gotamee who is a primary school teacher in Mungpoo. Similarly, the President of this union is Ananda Pathak (ex-member of the Parliament). In the same manner, the top leaders of the H.P.W.U. (GNLF) are also hailing from outside the Cinchona plantation. Shri N.B. Chhetri (present Member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly) is the Secretary of this union and Shri N.K. Kumai (MLA from Darjeeling) is the President. Both of them are working as school teachers in Darjeeling. The same picture is also found in case of Darjeeling Kulain Bagan Shramik Sangh, though dysfunctional,

which had its heart core leaders from outside the plantation. The leaders like Shri Dawa Norbula (N.U.P.W.), Smt. Reenuleena Subba (ex-MLA of Gurkha League party from Kalimpong), Shri Madan Thapa (N.U.P.W.), Shri N.G. Gurung (Gurkha league) etc. were leaders of the trade union. Though the trade union is not able to mobilise the rank and file of the workers in the plantation today, its top ranking leadership is at the hands of Smt. Reenuleena Subba.

The need for outside leadership among the Cinchona plantation workers arises mainly because they are not yet prepared to handle the trade union activities on their own. One of the obvious reasons for this is due to their ignorance and illiteracy of the families of the workers who do not seem to have working class consciousness. Moreover, the other sections of the plantation workers and industry are supporting the outside leaders who have been given top portfolios in the trade unions. They are of the opinion that such literate leaders can only do proper bargaining with the management in logical understanding and if such bargaining fails, they can appeal to the Government and Ministry for justice. Here in this context, the Director of the plantation has of his opinion that the outside leaders are rather professional trade unionists who have spoiled their labourers and use to meek and submissive. Another reason seems to have encouraging for the outside leaders in the plantation is due to its isolation from the urban centres and its "Kamane Culture" which is considered to be a backward working class or coolies.

The enactment of labour laws and their interpretations are hardly understood by the plantation workers. So, to bargain and attend various labour tribunals they have to seek the outside intellectuals who mostly hail from the middle class of the region but have strong political support from other regions of Darjeeling hills and Calcutta.

It is noted through the discussion with the management and workers that they are the leaders who are not actually associated with the life and labour of the workers. However, it is wholeheartedly accepted by all the the outside leaders have a long hand with the various political parties of the country.

However, it is also found that of the two trade unions CITU is the employer supported trade union and HPWU seems to have been the employees supported trade union. It is also stressed by the management that rank and file leadership can be borne provided the workers are ready to undergo training relating to the trade union philosophy in the real sense of the term. This is also the view of many workers who express that even the local leaders like K.B. Sanyasi (H.P.W.U.), B.B. Barailly (D.K.B.M.S.), D.B. Barailly (CITU) are not the actual trade union leaders since they work in the offices as government servants and thus their commitments are duly camouflaged by the management and hence they are the supporters of the management. To both the trade unions, the workers simply come to complain for some demands and on the moment the demands are fulfilled the wokrrers forget the trade unions till next demands come up.

To conclude, the leaders like B.B. Barailly (Clerk), D.B. Barailly (Head Clerk) etc. have always found assisting the management as "Mutual Committed" personalities of trade unions while the workers are simply considered as "Mutual Compliance" working force as they always complain the management for this or that grievances being not fulfilled. Both the trade union leaders and the management agreed that these days the rank and file of workers of the plantation are day by day going to be more and more lethargic with their duties and responsibilities of the plantation industry.

#### Activities of the Trade Unions

The trade union movement can best be understood from their activities in the industrial set up of the country. The trade unions which have emerged in the plantation can be well evaluated from their activities which they have done for the cause of the plantation workers. The activities include many things such as collection of fund, conducting meeting regularly, collective bargaining for the workers, suggesting the management regarding the progress of the industry etc. Let us be little bit elaborate to see the various activities of the trade unions.

Collection of Funds: Membership subscription is the main source of trade union funds. Each worker has to pay Rs. 5/- per month and Rs. 20/- during the Dasai (Dashara) festival (October-November) every year. Besides this, the trade unions collect emergency funds at the time of need. In one of such occasions in 1990, CITU collected Rs. 25/-

from each member to meet the expenses of delegates who were to be sent to Calcutta for representing the workers in the Cinchona Bachao Abhiyan (Save Cinchona Industry) agitation. The other sources of fund are gifts, donations and bribes from the management and public .

Nature of Fund Collection: The monthly subscriptions are collected in the pay day of the workers. Normally, it is collected fortnightly payment day at the respective divisional offices. The Treasurers of the trade unions use to sit in the divisional offices and collect subscriptions. The amount of the subscriptions vary from one group of workers to another. The daily-rated workers have to contribute Rs. 5/- per month whereas Rs. 10/- per month are paid by the factory worker and the establishment staff. The advance subscriptions are taken only for one year. The Puja subscriptions at the rate of Rs. 20/- from daily rated worker and Rs. 30/- from the factory worker and establishment staff are collected at the time of payment of Ad hoc Bonus during the Puja festival. In every time, a sum of Rs. 1/- is deducted from the subscription of each worker and handed over to the management for Labour Welfare Fund of the plantation.

Enrolment of the Workers: The workers who have crossed their age of 15 years are entitled for enrolling their names in the membership register of the trade unions. No member below the age of 15 years are treated as the member of the trade unions. Each trade union maintains its membership register which is always kept open for inspections by the officers or Assistant Labour Commissioner, Darjeeling.

Appointment of Honorary Members: There are a few honorary members in all the trade unions of the plantation. Theoretically, the honorary member do not enjoy the same rights which are enjoyed by the ordinary members. But in reality, it is noted that honorary members are found all in all in the matters of the trade union activities.

### Union Administration

As per the provision of the Trade Union Act, 1926, each trade union has its 'Executive Committee' consisting of one President, one Vice-President, a General Secretary, one Assistant Secretary and a Treasurer. All the executive members should be above the age of 18 years. The General Secretary is the convener of the meetings of the trade union. One third of the members form a quorum for the meetings. Each division of the plantation has a 'Primary Unit' of administration. Each unit office of trade unions administers the primary unit. One member of the primary unit represents 200 workers of the unit. The members of all the divisional sub-committees form the 'General Committee' of the trade unions in the plantation. The General Committees can only formulate the policy and programmes of the trade unions.

Each unit committee can retain 25% of the total fund collected in the unit and remaining 75% of it is to be given to the Central Committee of the trade unions at the headquarter, Mungpoo. The President and the Treasurer can draw the amount of the trade union from the banks. The trade union funds are to be audited in every two years.



### Annual General Meeting

Every year after 31st March, the trade unions held General Meeting of the General Body. The quorum is to be 3/5 of the total strength. The voting of the trade unions is done either by secret ballot or by showing of hands. The General Meeting discusses the general policy of the trade unions including the amendments, verification, rescissions of rules of the trade unions. The notice of changes of executive members are reported to the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Darjeeling. The induction or removal of executive or ordinary members is also done in the General Meeting.

### Dissolution of Trade Union

The trade unions are not dissolved except by the decisions of the majority of the members assembled at the meeting specially called for the purpose. The quorum for the meeting is 4/5 of the total members. Even after the notice of dissolution of the trade unions is communicated to the Assistant Labour Commissioner, Darjeeling in a prescribed form under the Trade Union Act, 1926, the dissolution can not be accepted till the Register (A. I. C.) issues the certificates of dissolution of trade unions.

### Other Activities of Trade Union

Though most of the grievances of the workers are solved through the tripartite body consisting of the representatives of trade unions, management and Government, the trade unions very often do gate meetings, occasional meetings with management people relating to the various urgent problems of the workers. One of the

significant achievements of the trade unions during the last ten years was that the workers could fight for permanent nomination of two trade union leaders in the Minimum Wages Board of Government of West Bengal from the plantation. Due to this reason, the board meets in every two years and revise the wages of the plantation workers. Moreover, very recently the trade unions are trying to exert pressures on the management to save the Cinchona plantation industry from being sick in the hill areas of Darjeeling District.

Cinchona Bachao Abhiyan of Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union

During 1990-91, one of the most important activities of Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union through its three tier structure viz., Central Committee, Zonal Committee and Unit Committee, was to struggle hard for saving the Cinchona plantations from its deteriorating conditions. To achieve this, the union had launched an agitation and placed very important memorandum to the management, Government besides a few other developmental agencies of the region. Among the memorandums submitted the most noteworthy was the copy served to the management which had stated the real reasons for the sickness of the plantation industry. Let us be sketchy with the memorandum.

The trade union stated the fact that the management engaged five to seven daily rated workers in the officers' bungalows which would be one of the reasons for decreasing productivity in the Cinchona plantation industry. Again, the negligence of officers in their duties was another reason for deteriorating condition of the plantation. They do not visit the work places where a large number

of workers work for 8 hours a day. The shortage of infrastructural facilities relating to the production and manufacturing of Cinchona and other medicinal plants was still another factor for sickness of the industry.

In spite of the provision of the Wage Board relating to the maintenance of land-labour ratio to 1:6 i.e. 6 workers per acre, no effort has been done by the management in this direction which is another reason for sickness of the plantation.

There is a lack of coordination between the Government of West Bengal and Government of India in regard to making rules which can fill the gap between the cost of production and sale of production both inside and out of the country.

It is noticed later on during the year 1991 that the Director of Cinchona and other medicinal plants, Mungpoo had really appreciated the approaches of the trade union for its agitation and memorandum and assured the workers that the matters would be considered seriously during the eight five year plan commencing from 1992.

To expedite the Cinchona Bachao Abhiyan further, the trade union also submitted a memorandum to the Government with 23 points suggestion for saving the Cinchona plantation (Gotamee:1990:1-7). Again, in the same year (1991), the trade union also submitted another memorandum to the Darjeeling Gurkha Hill Council with 12 points suggestion for saving the Cinchona plantation from dying stage of its development and growth.

### Caste and Community Associations

During the late eighties of the present century, the plantation workers started forming their respective caste associations (Samajs) in the Cinchona plantation, Mungpoo. To realise and preserve the caste and community identities mostly among the Matwali castes such Samajs have been formed so that they can continue with their tradition on the one hand and safeguard their caste members on the other. While the Tagadhari castes do not have such Samajs in the plantation. This was due to the fact that each caste was circumscribed by the changing socio-economic situations of the plantation in Darjeeling hills. There was a socio-cultural association known as Nebula (combination of Nepali, Bhutia and Lepcha) during 1934. The Prantha Parisad and Gurkha National Liberation Front also influenced the people in forming such caste associations.

As we know that previously there was a restriction in the shift of residence by the workers from one Dhura to another which were mainly caste Dhuras though the management had nothing to do with caste configuration in the plantation. But this helped to emerge the sense of caste inclusiveness within the Dhuras and this had been further facilitated by the dissolution of Nebula in 1952 (Dandha/Bagchi:1982:347). Thus, after 1952, the various castes and communities started forming their respective caste Samajs in the plantation. In the process, the association like Kiranti Samaj, Tamang Samaj, Newar Samaj, Kami-Damai Samaj, Bhutia Samaj and Lepcha Samaj and very recently a Scheduled Castes/Tribes Samaj have emerged in the Cinchona plantation.

To countermand the situations, the Tagadharis have also established a Pranami Mandir just above the Saraswati Higher Secondary School at Mungpoo. The Pranamis are the followers of Lord Krishna and they claimed themselves as Sadhus who do not take meats and liquors and theoretically they do not have caste inclusiveness among themselves as the inter caste marriages have frequently taken place among them in the plantation.

#### Kiranti Association (Samaj)

The association is consisting of caste like Rai, Limbu, Mangar, Gurung, Bhujel, and Thami. It has an executive committee of its own. The President of the association is a Rai working as a clerk in the plantation. In 1990-91, it had about 500 members in the plantation.

The executive committee meets once in every month to discuss the welfare programmes of the association. The General body meeting of the association is held at least once in six months. Sometimes, the association plan to organise some cultural programmes. Each member contributes a sum of Rs. 25/- every year to the association besides the emergency subscriptions that are collected quite often every year to meet some problems of the members and the plantation. The fund is spent for assisting poor members in times of death, marriage or on other occasions. Sometimes the association spends some of its amounts to other poor people who face some sort of financial problems. To celebrate Gaon Puja (plantation god), the association spent Rs. 500/- in 1991.

### Tamang Association

Tamangs are only the members of the association. Interestingly, all the Tamang households are found to be the members of the association in the plantation. It has a General Secretary, President, two Assistant Secretaries, one Vice-President and a Treasurer. They are all Tamangs by caste. It collects a sum of Rs. 50/- as subscription per member per year, besides the association also collect occasional fund for meeting some urgent problems of the members. In 1991, the association spent a sum of Rs. 2,000/- in celebrating a Tamang Puja known as Damang in the local Tamang Gumba (Darjeeling). Besides this, in such other occasions as deaths and marriages of the members or of the poor people of the plantation, it spends some money from its welfare fund. The Samaj had organised a Mela in 1991 at the local play ground of the plantation. The Secretary told that a sum of Rs. 5,000/- had been collected from the Mela and the amount was deposited in the local bank (Gramin Khetriya Bank Resep Bazar) of Mungpoo Cinchona plantation.

### Scheduled Castes/Tribes Association

Among the Nepalis, Kami, Damai and Sarki are scheduled castes and Lepcha, Bhutia, Sherpa and Dukpa are the scheduled tribes. In 1990, these castes and tribes together also formed an association known as Scheduled Castes/Tribes Association. The President of the association was a Lepcha working as a Chowkidar and the General Secretary was a Sherpa working as a clerk. There were two Assistant Secretaries of which one was a Kami, another was a Dukpa by castes.

The Treasurer was a Lepcha working as a clerk in the plantation. The association collected a sum of Rs. 30/- as annual subscription from each member per year. The association also collects Chanda (contribution) occasionally from its members of the plantation.

The major objectives of the association is to uplift the socio-economic life of the members of the association. It was observed during my field work that the association had mainly economic consideration to fight for their employment prospect. It raised the issue of 30% reservation policy of the Government for Scheduled castes and Tribes of the plantation.

However, the Matwali castes feel that Tagadhari are Batho Jats (Cunning castes) and they consider themselves as Latto Jats (Innocent castes). So, to adjust themselves with Batho Jats in their socio-economic life, they want to unite themselves in the banner of their associations having no respective caste boundaries in the traditional sense. Thus, the traditional type of caste association and its principle has nothing to do with the formation of such caste Samajs in the plantation today.

#### Interactions between Caste Associations and Trade Unions

So far as the recognition of caste associations and trade unions is concerned, the former do not have any legal base while the later is considered as a legal organisation formed as per the provisions of the Indian Trade Union Act, 1926. Hence the trade unionists call the caste associations as communal associations. It is communal in the sense that they keep everything secret. In other

words, the caste associations maintain a sort of secrecy and even some of the ordinary members of the associations are ignorant of such secrecies. In one of the seminars of Kiranti Samaj held in 1990 in the plantation, a literate social worker (K.P. Sharma) was not allowed to attend the seminar simply because he was a Bahun by caste. The act of the Kiranti Association in this respect was vehemently criticised by other castes later on as such act was rather a hindrance to the working class solidarity in the industrial environment of the Cinchona plantation.

On the whole, it is revealed from the above discussion that the trade unions are only the organisations of the workers which have ample right to consult the management, workers and government relating to the questions of labour recruitment, promotions, appointments and other problems and prospects of the plantation industry such as production, productivity etc. Moreover, the trade unions are supported by the national and international organisations including the various political parties of the country.

At the social parlence also, each association has been formed differently from that of the traditional ways as it is consisting of other castes/jats also. This is a spectacular feature of change in the structure of caste association in the plantation environment. Take for instance, the Kiranti Association is consisting of other Matwali castes besides Rai and Limbu (traditional Kiranti castes) who have divergent traditional animistic practices and customs. By Kiranti, previously it was meant for Rais and Limbus only (Pradhan:1991:51). While today it is the composite of all the



Matwali castes since it is observed that even Kami, Lepcha, Sherpa or any other Matwalis can become the members of the Kiranti Association. But interestingly, no Tagadhari is found in the association.

To the trade unions, the way how the caste associations are formed in the plantation is simply a dubious approach that has labelled against the adaptation and adjustment process of the various Nepali castes in the changing socio-economic life of the Cinchona plantation workers in Mungpoo region of Darjeeling hills. Socially, the Nepali society is the composite whole of various castes and tribes in their viable and balanced adaptation milieus of their own in the industrial environment.

#### Workers Participation in Trade Unions

In the present section, I have tried to explore the participation of Cinchona plantation workers in the trade unions in the post-modernisation period (1984-1992). The majority of the workers were found as supporters of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). As the Himalayan Plantation Workers Union (G.N.L.F.) was a new trade union, most of the workers did not know much about the nature of its activities. It was found to have been sponsored by Gurkha National Liberation Front. Its President, Shri N.K. Kumai (the then M.L.A.) and the General Secretary (another M.L.A.) were mainly found busy with other activities of the party in Darjeeling town.

The Darjeeling Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union was a management sponsored union. It was also observed that whenever any meeting was convened by the management, the General Secretary of the union had

been found attending the meeting. A substantial amount of the union fund had been collected from the management.

Besides these two trade unions, there was a National Union of Plantation Workers (affiliated to INTUC) but it had no members.

Basically there were only two rival trade unions in the plantation. Both the trade unions were always in competition with each other and both the unions were trying to have control over the workers. In the present analysis, I have tried to see the participation of workers in their trade unions in the level of paying subscriptions, attending meetings, processions, strikes and the trade union awareness. The rationale behind the selection of such parameters in studying the trade unions is to examine their evaluation of the organisations and their participation in the various activities of trade union organisations.

Very interestingly, it was found that none of the plantation workers know the actual name of their own trade unions; they simply know the emblems of their trade unions. In general, ninety five percent of the workers did not know the actual functions of trade unions. The obvious reasons behind this was illiteracy and poor world view of the workers (Bhadra:1983:185). They could simply equate trade unions with political parties. Actually they could know their trade unions by flags. Only the remaining five percent of them were well aware of it. The workers frequently use the term party instead of the name of the union. They do not know the basic objectives of the trade unions neither they have clear idea about their political ideologies and functions of the trade unions. They

did not know the District in which they were residing then.

Normally, the subscriptions of the workers were collected on the pay day in the plantation office itself. But since January 1991, the members started to pay their subscription in their respective trade union offices. The Treasurer of Cinchona Bagan Mazdoor Union told that 90% of its members were paying monthly subscriptions of Rs. 5/- within the first week of every month while the remaining 10% of the workers were found irregular in this respect. On the other hand, the Treasurer of the Himalayan Plantation Workers Union told that only 78% of the members were paying their monthly subscriptions regularly while the remaining twenty two percent of them were irregular.

It was noticed that ordinary members of the trade unions could hardly afford themselves to increase the membership strength of their trade unions as they were mostly found busy at leisure in their Khetland. Hardly thirty to thirty five percent of members were found present in the meetings of trade union. Except in time of personal needs, no member was found to have been visiting the offices of their trade unions. In such occasions such as processions, strikes, gate meetings, their participation was found to have been nominal. In this way, their involvement in the trade union movement was quite passive and they could be termed as the passive supporters of their trade unions.

The workers were asked to name the most important four functions of the trade unions such as economic, improving conditions, building socio-cultural solidarity and changing the political and

social system of the country (Ibid:186). In spite of being unaware of the detail functions of the trade unions, eighty percent of the workers told me that economic bargaining was the most important function of trade unions while remaining eleven percent of them gave very vague ideas about the general functions of trade unions. Twenty eight percent of the workers told that the unions were meant for the safety and security of their services. All the plantation workers were treated as unskilled daily rated workers as per the provisions of the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. They were mostly found to have concerned with their wages but hardly they bothered about their long term benefits. They had been found grumbling on their trade unions regarding the issues such as bonus, gratuity, provident fund, Khetland etc.

In the plantation, both the rival trade unions had been found unanimous in their demands relating to the issue of land-labour ratio and the decasualisation of the plantation workers. But the rank and file workers were not aware of such issues. Yet whenever the trade unions asked them to go on procession for the issues they could participate simply for the sake of their passive participation and to show the majority before the management.

On the whole, it reveals from the above discussion that the real motive behind the enrolment of the workers in the trade unions meant for the workers to fulfil the desire to acquire more and more benefits both in cash and kind like Bonus, Winter Allowances and arrear of enhanced wages in the form of Dearness Allowances. Thus, the economic consideration of the plantation workers through the

trade union activities coupled with the low level of technology led to characterise the trade unions as economic unionism. The situation is totally different in other advanced industrial society whose interests are multi-facet involving the question of overall national development. The plantation workers have in this manner failed to join the trade union movement as grown in far and wide corner of the country (Sharma;1991:17). They do not have working class consciousness as they are ignorant about their working conditions and exploitation in the plantation.

There are generally two types of labour-management relations. One is characterised by the confrontation (Mutual Compliance) where the workers always fight for the safeguard of their rights and benefits. The other involves policy of accommodation (Mutual Commitments) in which the management tries to consider the problems through peaceful settlement. Previously upto the late seventies of the present century, the labour-management relations were the relations of confrontation due to unstable position of Cinchona Plantation industry at Mungpoo. The industry was about to close down (see Chapter II). But after the modernisation of the Cinchona plantation industry, the labour-management relations have become more and more accommodative as the basic rights and benefits of the workers are fulfilled through peaceful settlement. To make the relations more and more congenial, mostly the clerical and managerial posts have been filled up from the working class of the plantation according to their experience and qualifications. Among the top managerial officials, Dr. Lala (Quinologist) is found very popular among the plantation workers. One of the plausible reasons of his gaining

popularity is due to the fact that he visits workers colonies or in work fields every day.

The management's view is that the trade union leaders hail- ing from outside the plantation have ruined the innocent and submissive workers. This has resulted into the negligence of duties on the part of the workers. One of the managers told me that now- a-days it has become very difficult for the management to control the workers especially the young workers who have become very much indisciplined and non-committed to the plantation works.

However, the concept and meaning of labour-management rela- tions are very differently viewed by the various types of workers in the plantation. Those who are permanent staff and factory workers in the plantation industry feel that the management is very accommo- dative while to the daily rated plantation workers, the management is rather bound by the laws of the Government to provide the minimum facilities of the workers.

The informants were asked to reply on the question whether the productivity of the industry is increasing or decreasing after the modernisation of the industry. The eighty percent of the workers said that it was decreasing due to the negligence of the management and mounting corruptions. On the other hand, remaining twenty percent of the workers and establishment staff were of the opinions that those days every worker had become very violent and lazy and hence the productivity was going down every year.

It means that the changes from the previous labour-management relations of confrontation (Mutual Compliance) characterised by the relation of Kamanees and Sahibs to the present relations of accommodation (Mutual Commitment) (Walton:1991:33) or the employer-employee cooperation seems to have a negative implication in the Cinchona plantation in so far as the productivity is concerned. This has caused a cold war between the management and trade unions. Previously, the management always tried to put down the expected commitments of the trade unions. With the emergence of the Left Front Government in the State of West Bengal, the trade unions are asked to represent the workers' grievances and hence their commitments have been taken into due considerations.

To a trade union leader, productivity can be increased if the administrative section is separated from the plantation and thereby the socio-economic life of the daily rated plantation workers can be improved.

Another trade union leader suggested that there should be an added provision in the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 regarding the training of the workers in the line of ideal trade unionism and productivity. Moreover, there should be a constant coordination between research section and the plantation workers who are to train in the new methods as explored in the research section for the field.

To another trade union leader, the social factor responsible for decreasing productivity is that the management think the workers as illiterates with whom they cannot be freely mixed up in day to day socio-economic life. The Deputy Director (Administration) of

the Directorate expressed the real reason for running the industry at a loss of Rs. 8 crores was due to the dual characters of the industry as industry and plantation and its management policy of the Government. On the one hand, the sector is running by the Government of West Bengal through its rules and regulations and the price of the Cinchona products are determined by the Central Drug Board of the Government of India on the other by which the prices of the Cinchona products are determined by considering the international situations taking it as a "Life Saving Drug" industry. The objective conditions of the cost of production of the Cinchona products in the region has been viewed by the subjective considerations of the international perspective. Hence, the involvement of these two governments simultaneously in the same industry seems to have been responsible for incurring heavy losses in the industry.