

CHAPTER - III

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3.1. Labour of Tea Industry

3.1.1 Structure of Organization of a Tea Estate:

Tea is a labour intensive industry. Thousands of people are directly and indirectly employed in this industry and earn their livelihood. Apart from its own workforce of more than 12.5 lakh workers (Tea – statistics, 2005-06) throughout India it also looks after more than 3 million dependents. Apart from this a large section of people are engaged in various kinds of activities indirectly, Such as selling and distribution, packaging, transporting etc related with the tea industry.

This structure of organization of is more or less same in most of the tea gardens. The gardens which are under the management of big tea companies employ both labour welfare officers and qualified doctors, which comparatively smaller gardens do not have. Each of the areas as stated in the hierarchy has well defined system of functioning with specifically designed role.

On the basis of the structure the employees can be classified mainly in four categories. They are (1) Management (2) Staff (3) Sub-Staff and (4) Workers. There is hardly any chance to get promotion from one category to the next.

The manager of a tea garden occupies the highest rank in the garden hierarchy and has immense power and liability to perform the garden works with the co-operation of the sub ordinate staff.

The assistant managers occupy the second rank in the hierarchy and assist the manager as when needed performing the assigned duties and responsibilities.

In the tea gardens the manager and assistant managers are popularly known as “Bara saheb“ and “Chhoto Saheb”.

The category staffs are placed between the assistant managers and the workers. A number of ‘babus’ are there to help the assistant managers and

responsible to discharge the various official works of the garden. The 'bagan babu' and the 'factory babu' who do not work in the office.

After independence various laws were passed in favour of the workers. Naturally the office organization had to change for instance, the provident fund and family pension scheme requires the employment of a clerk who has required knowledge regarding those matters.

The next category is sub staff and this category consist mainly the supervisory staff. The people of this category are promoted from the workers. The highest rank in this category is field staff and factory staff. They are known as 'munshi' and 'sardar'. Next to munshi there comes 'chaprasi'. The person who takes attendance of the workers is known as 'baider' and his position is next to chaprasi. Then comes 'dafadar' and he acts a very important role. He is in charge of a group of workers and makes a bridge between the management and the workers. The next two ranks are 'chowkidar' and the 'paniwalla'.

Besides these ranks, there are other sub staffs also. Such as 'davawalla'(health assistant), drivers, cleaners etc. and sometimes the manager's cook is also regarded as a sub staff.

The final and the last category in the hierarchy are the workers, and the most important human resource of this plantation sector. Because in this labour intensive industry their performance and motivation the success of the industry is highly dependent. It is already mentioned, these hard working but poverty striker people who used to come to the tea gardens supporting their place of origin are employed in large numbers. These labours are paid daily rated wages and other benefits as par Plantation Labour Act, 1951. Protective measures are also provided to them with the help of other various acts and legislations developed from time to time by the central and the state governments for the benefits of the workers¹.

3.1.2. Origin and growth of Labour in the Tea Industry:-

The unique feature of tea industry is employment of large numbers of labour force in all sphere of work in tea estate. The tea workers constitute a very special kind of labour force with a colonial past, Used to live in 'basti' called labour line, lack of education and very low literacy level and in true sense who had no alternative employment opportunity.

Development of plantations necessitated to basic requirement, one is large areas of land and another is large number of labour force and both were rarely available at the same time. [When the British selected the places suitable for tea plantation in Assam and in West Bengal, these areas was thinly scattered populated. As a result the planters had no alternative but to depend on migrated labour force whose migration had to be induced through foul and fair means.]

Shortage of labour was a tremendous problem not only in tea plantation but in other plantation sectors also in different parts of the world. History says, labour force were migrated from the different parts of the world to work in the early cotton plantation in the southern of USA, Tobacco plantation in Indonesia, Sugar plantation in Guyana, the Caribbean and the Mauritius, rubber plantation in Malaysia and tea plantation in India and Sri Lanka.

The British and French slave traders used to supply this labour force in plantation works of USA, Caribbean Islands and Guyana. This ugly system of labour supply was abolished by Britain in 1848 and by France 1856. This humanitarian move forced the planters to start indentured labour².

Assam is the pioneer tea producing state of India. In the nineteenth century the laborers were migrated in Assam from various parts of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh etc. These workers had diverse traits and attributes of language and culture. Gradually these people became influenced by the local culture and by the process of assimilation they developed a unique different kind of culture in the tea gardens area of the state.

With the growth and development of tea industry the demand for labours also started to increase at a higher pace. As the local people were not interested to do job in the tea gardens, the tea estates were forced to import labourers from other states. To collect labours the Assam Tea Company introduced various systems. The two main systems were “Sardari” and “Thikadari”.

In the “Sardari” system the “Sardar” known as head man of a group of workers was entrusted with the job of collecting labours from the respective places. The tea companies used to bear the collecting expenses. The sardars collected people on false promise violating the legal provisions of recruitment and it was simply impossible to return to thus place of origin once they were sent to the tea gardens which were situated in isolated places.

In “Thikadari” system labours were collected from impoverished areas with false promise of prosperity of Assam by the commission agents. These agents employed contractors to work on behalf of them to bring labours from Chota Nagpur, Singbhum, Ranchi, Telengana etc. Where famine took place and used the poor people to work in the tea gardens with false hopes and promise³.

3.1.3 Employment of tea workers in the Tea Industry of West Bengal:-

In West Bengal almost the entire labour force in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai were immigrants and their descendants originated mainly from Choto Nagpur and santhal parganas in Bihar. In Darjeeling hills area the labours were recruited mainly from Nepal.

Later on in Dooars and also in Terai tribal from Orissa, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh were also employed as tea garden labourers.

In the beginning of the tea industry recruitment of labours was done with the help of private agencies and garden “Sardar”, The Tea District Labours Association (TDLA) an organization formed by the Assam planters extended their co-operation for recruiting labour in the tea gardens of Dooars through their agents. This system of recruiting labour force was adopted by the British owned tea estates. The Indian

owned garden used to follow a slightly different system, where recruitment was done through private agencies with the help of some people known as “arkatis”.

The tea workers came in the tea plantations uprooting their place of origin with a view to enjoy better life and earn more money. Some of them also came not because of poverty but out of spirit of adventure. In the days of inception tea gardens were isolated one far away from locality. It was a dense forest area with wild animals, besides disease like malaria and kalazar which was common in those days.

In the early phase of tea industry, when the tea plantations were about to start, the Christian people used to live in those areas. The church too played effective role to migrate people to be recruited in the tea gardens. It was known nearly ten percent of the tea workers of Dooars were Christians, either catholic (Roman Catholic) or Protestants (German mission) ⁴.

3.1.4 - Recruitment and employment conditions of legal provisions for recruiting labour force in the beginning of tea plantation :

The employers caused many abuses and false promises in the course of recruitment of workers in the tea estate as the colonial Government expressed its support by enacting legislation which legalized the system indenture. In 1859 the workers breach of contract Act was passed which stipulated that a worker had to work for a minimum period of five years once recruited.

In 1861 the British Government appointed a committee to enquire about the policy of recruitment under which the emigration of labour was conducted.

In 1863, the first Indian Emigration Act came into force replacing the workers Breach of contract Act. The Act provided that all recruiters were to be licensed and every emigrant was to be registered before the District Magistrate and the period of contract for work reduced to four years instead of five as framed in the previous Act. But the Act favoured the planters including the right to arrest erring

workers. The employers treated with the workers in a cruel manner if they tried to leave or if their work was found unsatisfactory⁵.

In the early period of tea plantations the tea garden owners encouraged families rather than individuals to migrate to tea estate to minimize the recruitment costs.

The planters preferred to employ a family of four members – Husband, Wife and two children instead of working four workers of different families. The planters in the later casa would not only have to bear the recruiting costs but would also provide housing for each of them. Another important point was the family based migration ensured that labour could be reproduced and in this way solving to some extent the supply of labour force in future. In the primary stage of tea plantation the planters imitation was to enjoy maximum economical benefits at the cost of the labour. It is found from the plantation history that coercion, low wages and immigrant labour were initially the three inseparable components of the plantation system, and this system ensured the planters to earn high rate of profits. As the plantation industry is purely labour intensive, so a reduction in wage rate would increase the profit label. The three properties – sacrifice, toil and hard work of this labour force since the beginning of the plantation in India as well as in West Bengal with lot of heart rending sufferings gave a proper shape of tea industry of Dooars, Terai and Darjeeling hill area.

In course of time these people of different parts of India forgot their roots and through a process of influence and counter influence with the local Bengali community, a unique culture have being engaged and these people have become an integral part of the greater Bengali community⁶.

3.1.5- Specific feature of tea plantation workers:-

Two specific features of tea industry are, firstly the high proportion of Women in the labour force and secondly, the employment of child labours. Women constitute more than fifty percent labour force in this industry which is quite

contrary to the trend in other industries in the organized sector of the economy. The agro based, less mechanization of tea industry suits the physical strength of workers. The other reasons may be , employment of family based labours. Migration traditionally accepted low wage rates and subsequent nature of tribal Women are also important factors. Another reason which is very popular in tea plantations that is believed, Women are more efficient than the Men in plucking tea leaves that is 'two buds and a leaf'.

Child labour is another important feature of tea industry of India which is a result of the practice in the colonial period of employing the family based workers to save recruitment costs and to motivate the workers on their job. The child workers are treated as permanent workers and they have the rights to get all the statutory benefits legislated by the rules and laws from time to time.

Women workers are never found in the managerial, supervisory or clerical posts or any allied positions in the tea estates. In true sense the female workers have no promotions facilities. Men workers are employed in better positions which are often better paid⁷.

3.1.6 – Permanent and casual workers:-

In tea industry workers are employed on both permanent and temporary basis. Temporary workers are known as casual labour or "bigha workers". In the tea gardens of West Bengal mainly in Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling hills regions, casual workers are small in number and vary from season to season. The peak season in tea plantation are denoted the time spun May to November when tea leaves are plucked for production of made tea. During this time maximum number of work force is needed according to plantation area of the respective gardens. These casual or 'bigha workers' usually belong to the family members of the existing tea workers. Sometimes outsiders also are employed as casual workers as per requirements. The trend of employment of labour force and average annual growth rate of labour between the period 1980 to 1990 is presented by the following table.

Table No- 3.1

Trend of employment in tea plantations in India, mainly in West Bengal .

State/Region	Average daily number of workers		% increase over 1980	Annual growth rate
	1980	1990		
Darjeeling	45987	48116	4.63	0.41
Terai	23290	37875	62.62	4.52
Dooars	149571	162680	8.76	0.77
West Bengal	218848	248671	13.63	1.17
Assam	448949	541661	20.65	1.72
Tamil Nadu	86359	102786	19.02	1.60
Kerala	71086	74388	4.65	0.41
Karnataka	4000	4217	5.43	0.48
All India	846659	986781	16.55	1.40

Source: Tea statistics, published by Tea Board of India

Year: 1980 – 81 and 1990 – 91.

$$\text{Growth rate} = \left(\sqrt[n]{A/P} - 1 \right) \times 100$$

A= value of variable in final year

P=value of variable in initial year

n= No. of years

It is evident from the Table no. 3.1 that, employment of labour in the tea gardens of West Bengal showed a moderate growth of 1.17 percent during the '10 year' time span between 1980 and 1990. Maximum numbers of workers were employed in the tea gardens of Terai region where annual growth rate was more than 4.5 % in the same period. Not only that this growth rate was for ahead than the all India level of 1.4 percent.

The other two tea producing zone of West Bengal that is Darjeeling hill and Dooars, the growth rate of employment is negligible which is less than one percent. The two prime tea producing states of North India and South India, Assam and Tamil Nadu registered a consistent growth rate of 1.72 and 1.60 respectively.

Table No – 3.2

Labour Force employed in the tea estates of West Bengal since 1991-1998

States/Region	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Darjeeling	47637	45638	46586	58814	58887	53740	52218	50289
Terai	40539	36646	35997	39.113	39207	38472	37016	36119
Dooars	164944	160598	160693	160521	160085	159891	160493	161176
All West Bengal	253120	243882	243276	258448	258159	252103	249727	247584
North India	821031	818467	816265	834770	841769	840788		853341
South India	175704	173237	174754	193924	187018	188863		192060
All India	996735	991704	991019	1028694	1028787	1029651	1032267	1045401

Source: Tea Statistic, published by Tea Board of India of Different years.

[1981 – 82, 1990 – 91, 2003 – 04, 2004 – 05, 2005 – 06]

It is evident from the table that the strength of permanent workforce in the tea estates of West Bengal has more or less remained unaltered since the year 1991. In Terai region and Darjeeling Hill area, the number of labour force had decreased by a small number but the Dooars region reflected the opposite result.

A large number of workforces are required in the tea plantation industry. So, tea workers play a very important role for the all round development of this important industry of India, mainly in the economy of North Bengal, because tea is the only organized industry of North Bengal.

Table No- 3.3

Growth rate of employment of tea garden labour in West Bengal and all India level.

States/Region	Estimated number of labours 1991	Estimated number of labours 1998	Yearly growth rate (G)
Darjeeling	47637	50289	0.77
Terai	40539	36119	(-) 1.63
Dooars	164944	161176	(-) 0.32
West Bengal	253120	247584	(-) 0.31
North India	821031	853341	0.55
South India	175704	192060	1.27
All India	996735	1045401	0.68

Source: Tea Statistics, Published By Tea Board of India. (1992 – 93 and 2003 – 04).

$$\text{Growth Rate (G)} = \sqrt[n]{A/P} - 1 \times 100.$$

A = Value of variable in final year

P = Value of variable in initial year

n = no of years

G = Compound Annual growth rate.

Growth rate of employment in the tea estates of West Bengal and all India level as shown by the Table no. 3.3 reveals that during the period 1991 to 1998 the industry of West Bengal witnessed a negative growth rate. Dooars region of Jalpaiguri and Terai region of plain area of Darjeeling both the region experienced negative growth rate. Only Darjeeling hills region enjoyed a positive growth of less than one percent.

During that period South Indian tea producing states showed a positive growth rate of more than one percent, where as its center part North India witnessed a growth rate of almost half percent.

So, the employment of labour in the tea gardens of West Bengal decreased during the period of 1991 and 1998, In that period the area under tea in West Bengal was as follows:-

Area under Tea in West Bengal and in India (in Hectares)

Table No – 3.4

States/Region	Area 1991	Area 1998	Growth rate (G) (yearly)
Darjeeling	20085	17604	(-) 2.02
Terai	13783	20118	5.55
Dooars	68054	69708	0.34
West Bengal	101922	107430	0.75
North India	345182	382130	1.46
South India	75288	108070	5.29
All India	420470	490200	2.21

Source: Tea Statistics, Published by Tea Board of India (1991 – 92 and 2002 – 2003)

Table No – 3.4 Shows, there had been a positive growth rate of area under tea in Terai and which was significant. In Terai yearly growth rate of area under tea was 5.5 %, but the growth rate of area under tea in Dooars was a negligible one. On the other side Darjeeling hills region witnessed a negative growth rate of more than 2 percent. Interestingly, in spite of recording positive growth rate in area under tea, both Terai and Dooars registered a negative growth rate of employment and in case of Darjeeling hill area the situation was just opposite during the period 1991 and 1998.

3.2 Wages in Tea Plantation

Wages of tea plantation labours are the lowest in comparison to other organized sectors. According to industry wise bipartite or tripartite agreement and not the basis of productivity of the workers, it is determined on the bargaining capacity of the workers and the wishes of the management wages are fixed in the tea industry of West Bengal. The wage rates of two prime tea producing states of India, Assam and West Bengal which collectively produce more or less 75 percent of total production of tea in India are lower than their counterparts of two southern states Tamil Nadu and Kerala. One of the important features of two northern tea producing states, Assam and West Bengal, is supply of rations of food grains at a highly subsidized rate is formed a part wage of the tea workers. Each worker and

his/her dependents get 2.25 kg of rice and wheat per week at Re 0.40 per kg. if the worker is absent during the week the quantity of ration is reduced proportionately. Workers in South Indian tea plantation purchase their requirements from ration shops in the plantations at a slightly lower than the market rates.

Besides the daily wages, the workers who are employed for plucking tea leaves enjoy an incentive wage for plucking above the fixed daily quota. This definitely enhances the total wage of the workers. The rate of incentive wage is fixed by the agreement between the management and the workers like the settlement of daily wage rate. The fixed daily quota of plucking tea leaves is varied from season to season and from plantation to plantation.⁸

3.2.1 Wage pattern in the pre-independence period of the tea workers

“The question of wage policy is of great concern to labour, management and government. Of all the problems that face the worker, that of wages is the most pressing and persistent”- thus was the observation of ex-president of India, V.V. Giri.

There are differences between the wage structure of plantation industry, specially in tea industry and other industrial sectors. Besides basic wage, plantation labours enjoy certain amenities and opportunities which considerably improve their standard of living.

The pre-independence period was considered as a pathetic time for the plantation workers. The helpless and unorganized workers had no legal protection and they had to live as a bonded labour under the mercy of the cruel planters. They were paid a very poor wage rate and had to work from sunrise to sunset under such deplorable conditions. The wage rate of other industries such as jute, cotton, textiles etc. was fairly higher than this plantation sector.

The remuneration of the plantation workers is a combination of cash wage and wage in kinds. So, the tea workers are paid cash wage and are entitled to get food grains at subsidized rate as a part of their remuneration.⁹

3.2.2 Post independence period-a changing scenario

After attaining independence in the year 1947, the Indian government took some considerable measures in favour of the depressed plantation workers. Some protective measures were granted to the workers by passing a number of acts, and took steps for increasing the wage rate.

In 1952, for the first time in West Bengal, the statutory minimum wages were fixed for the tea workers. After long twenty one years the second minimum wage fixation committee was formed in 1973 to settle the new wage rate of the tea workers.

Form the Table it is observed that low wages has always been the distinctive feature of the plantation industry. In the post-independence period also the employers of tea estates of Bengal had not maintained a uniform consistent wage and ignored the provisions of payment of wage act, 1936. During that time the central as well the state government adopted several steps to fix a rational wage policy for the tea workers, but they were not successful.

3.2.3. Formation of wage committee, wage board and the trend of wage rate.

In March 1950 the West Bengal Government setup the minimum wages advisory committee, known as Modok committee. The committee recommended the minimum wage should not only be restricted to cash wage but should also cover certain welfare measures, such as health, education and other essential amenities for living.

After such recommendations the management resorted to a wage cut on the ground that the tea industry had been passing through a crisis. To enquire about the justification of the decision taken by the employers, the second minimum wage

committee, known as Banerjee committee was formed. The committee recommended that the decision of the Modak Committee “be resorted”.

3.2.4 Formation of Central Wage Board:-

The 15th session of the Indian Labour conference held in July 1957 decided that the workers of all major industries should get a need based minimum wage besides a guaranteed minimum wage. The Central Government formed wage boards of 22 industries and the wage board for tea plantation was set up in December 1960.

The recommendations of the wage board came into force on 1 April 1966 and two interim wage increments were sanctioned.

Daily wage rate of tea workers since 1952

Table No-3.5

Workers	1952	1953	1955	1959	1966	1969	1970	1972	1973	1976	1977	1978
Male	1.19	1.53	1.71	1.84	2.13	2.48	2.48	2.71	3.00	4.30	5.30	6.50
Female	1.06	1.39	1.57	1.70	1.96	2.31	2.31	2.54	2.83	4.13	5.13	6.50
Children	0.62	0.83	0.92	1.00	1.15	1.33	1.33	1.45	1.50	2.15	3.15	4.15

Source:-[Bhowmik, Class Formation, pp-86-93, Mitra Bhadra, pp-62-63]

From The Table No 3.5 it is evident the daily wage rate of the tea workers had been kept increasing since 1952, but the rate of increase was very poor. Formation of Wage Committee, in the year 1950, and Central Wage Board in 1957 acted in favour of the workers. The Committee took some positive steps to increase the wage rate. After independence the workers started to become organize and trade union movements in the tea estates had been began to spread their activities to motivate the workers about their rights. Various acts, particularly the Plantation Labour Act, 1951 supported the movements of the workers to increase the wage rate by the employers.

The general strike held in 1969 had a great impact on labour movement in tea plantation that forced the employers of the tea estates to think in a positive way to favour the workers.

In 1973, the second Minimum Wage Fixation Committee for tea plantations was set up by the Government of West Bengal and the wage rate of the daily rated workers increased after their recommendation.

The difference in wage rate between male and female workers was abolished in the year 1976. In spite of introduction necessary rules in respect of that many tea employers of West Bengal did not implement it before 1978 which is reflected from the above table ¹⁰.

Table No.3.5 presents the increasing trend of daily wage rate in the tea plantation sector of West Bengal since 1952. It is evident from the table that though the tea plantation sectors witnessed a rising trend of wage still the workers were paid at poor rate..

The labour movement of 1969 followed by establishment of Second Minimum Wage Committee forced the tea garden employers to increase the daily wages rate. The wage rate between the periods 1970 to 1978 was increased by nearly 162% in case of male workers, whereas in respect of female and children it was 181.38% and 212% respectively.

The communists had a contribution in developing and spreading trade union movements among the illiterate and unorganized tea workers. The Left form government came into power in West Bengal in the year 1977. So the bargaining power of the workers increased and may be there is a reflection of strong labour movement in the wage agreement held in 1977.

3.2.5. Agreements in Tea Plantation and Fixation of wage rate of Daily Rated Workers

It is already stated the planters of tea sector were organized since its beginning, but the workers started to become organize mainly after Indian independence from British Rule in 1947 due to influence and counter influence of Indian National Movement and development of trade union activities in the tea garden areas. Now the labour force and tea estate owners both are organized, hence industry-wide problems are solved either through bipartite and tripartite agreements, which are mostly signed every three years.

On the basis of this agreement the wage rate of the tea workers is settled tri-annually.

The two major joint organizations of trade unions, such as the Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers, (CCTPW) West Bengal and Defense Committee of Plantations Workers Rights (DCPWR) take part in the agreements on behalf of the workers and employers association represent through Consultative Committee of Plantation Association (CCPA).

Agreements on wage rate in tea plantation sectors in West Bengal from 1969-1982.

Date of agreement	Rat of increase		w.e.f	Rate of extra leaf plucked
	Adult Rs/P.	Child Rs/P.		
2 nd September, 1969	23 paisa	11.5paisa	From 1.4.71 to 31.5.72	
			From 1.6.72 to 30.6.73	
	23paisa	11.5paisa		
21 st May, 1975	45paisa	22.50paisa	From 1.7.75 to 31.3.76	
			From 1.4.76	

	45paise	22.50paise	to 30.6.76	
3 rd August, 1977	Re1	050	From 1.7.77 to 30.6.78	
			From 1.7.78 to 30.6.79	
	Re1	0.50		
6 th May, 1980	0.90	0.45	From 1.7.70 to 30.6.80	Extra leaf price was increased from 10 paise to 13 paise per kg.
	0.90	0.45	From 1.7.80 to 30.6.81	
	0.90	0.45	From 1.7.81 to 30.6.82	
27 th June, 1983	0.75	0.38	From 1.7.83	Extra leaf price was hiked from 13 paise to 16 paise per kg.
	0.75	0.38	From 1.7.84	
	0.75	0.38	From 1.7.85	
10 th June, 1989	0.85	0.43	From 1.6.87	Extra leaf price was increased from 16 paise to 19 paise per kg. w.e.f 1.6.87.
	0.85	0.43	From 1.6.88	
	0.85	0.43	From 1.6.89	

[Source : Tea – Industry Wise Agreement Book in West Bengal From 1956-2007]

3.2.6. Wage agreement in the era of New Economic Policy

The Indian economy had been passing through a critical phase since the beginning of 90s. Collapse of Soviet Union and East Europe Socialist economy and the gulf war were highly responsible for global economic power imbalance. India was fallen in deep trouble in respect of balance of payment crisis fall in exports, declining trend in domestic production of crude oil, agriculture and industrial outputs. To get rid out of this gloomy situation India adopted the policies of globalization, liberalization and privatization and market economy in the year 1991. As a result various structural changes have been taken place in the field of trade,

commerce and industry. Naturally tea industry is not an exception to this change, the new economic policy has though some adverse effect in the tea industry¹¹.

In the era of new economic policy government contest on trade and business has been liberalized and encouragement of private sectors and foreign capital in the Indian market provide sector employers multinationals have become more powerful. As a result the bargaining power of the workers has reduced to a considerable extent. In spite of that for increasing the wage rate and fulfilling the other welfare measures the tea workers had been organized agitation, observed strikes and gate meetings garden wise or collectively from time to time and new agreements have been signed between the management and the workers.

Agreements in the tea estates in respect of daily wage rate of the tea workers in the age of liberalized economy.

Agreement Date	Amount of increment (Rs.)		With effect from (w.e.f)	Extra leaf price
	Adult Labour	Child Labour		
10 th May, 1993	2.70	1.35	1.6.90	Extra leaf price was increased from 19 paisa to 25 paisa per kg.
	1.40	0.70	1.6.91	
	1.40	0.70	1.6.92	
20 th July, 1994	2.50	1.25	1.4.94	Extra leaf price was enhanced from 25 paisa per kg. To 32 paisa per kg.
	2.50	1.25	1.4.95	
	2.00	1.00	1.4.96	
7 th November, 1997	3.00		1.4.97	
	3.00		1.4.98	
	2.50		1.4.99	

[Source: Tea – Industry Wise Agreement Book in West Bengal from 1956 to 2007]

Edited by Murari Mitra

The wage rate of the daily rated workers in the period 1991-1998 is given by the following table.

Table No-3.6.

Year	Daily Wage (Rs.)
1991	17.89
1992	19.29
1993	19.29
1994	21.79
1995	24.30
1996	26.30
1997	29.30
1998	32.30

[Source: Supplied by Dooars Branch of Indian Tea Association (DBITA).]

From the table no 3.6, it is evident that the daily wage rate of the workers of the tea garden of West Bengal has been increased as per agreement which is settled between the management and the workers. The wage rate is increased by 80.54% in the year 1998 over the period 1991.

3.3. Labour Welfare in the Tea Industry of West Bengal:-

3.3.1 Welfare Measures-In the days of beginning:-

“While we are planning to increase our production and exports, we cannot lose sight of another important aspect of the industry and that is labour welfare. No industry today can justify itself if it does not address itself to the social and economic betterment of this important partner in the process of production.” Ex-President of India , M. V.V. Giri observed this when he used to deliver speech in a National Seminar on Tea, In New Delhi on 15th December, 1973.

It is already stated in the beginning of tea plantation history of Indian labourers were migrated from different states of India, such as Bihar ,Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh and afterwards from Nepal mainly for the cultivation of tea in the Darjeeling hilly area.

In those days of inception the location of the tea industry was an isolated place, surrounded by deep forest. These workers had to fight with the wild animals as well as with various kinds of diseases, such as malaria. Due to climatic and environmental change, the workers and their families who came from distant places had ill effects on their health, especially among children and young people.

In this situation for their own interest planters realized the need to provide certain amenities to safeguard the health of these migrated people in the stabilization of labour force, because in those days availability of labour was an acute problem and to ensure the success of this new venture and of course to protect their capital.

So though the planters were unsympathetic towards the tea workers and had a tendency to exploit them, but they provided some medical assistance to keep the workers stable for the benefit of their own .That can be regarded as the welfare measures provided to the workers by the employers in the early days of tea plantations in India.

3.3.2 Legislative Measures:-Implementation of Act and Formation of Commission

The Medical facility Act, VI of 1861 was enacted and the act provided for the appointment of a Medical Officer for every tea garden. The provision and health facilities of the tea estates and careful attention to hygiene and sanitation, and some sorts of maternity benefits and some other measures had considerably reduced the death rate in the tea gardens and sent a positive message to the workers.

The Commission 1868:- With a view to extend better medical service among the inhabitants of the tea gardens, the commission recommended the appointments European Medical Officers to supervise the medical facilities rendered by the planters.

The Royal Commission on Labour:- During the period 1928-29 ,The Royal Commission I India observed the death of and infantile mortality rates had been reduced considerably and recommended the establishment of Central hospitals to bring a number of Gardens under the umbrella of providing better medical facilities. But this was not implemented due to lack of coordination between the garden authorities government .In the year 1930 ,the Ross Institute tropical Hygiene was opened in Assam, under the directorship of Dr. Ramsay and this institute had done commendable job I controlling the epidemic disease infesting the tea gardens of Assam and some parts of Dooars region.

3.3.3 The Second World War and after:-

The impact of Second World War slowed down the development process of extending medical facilities in the tea gardens of India. In New Delhi, in January 1947 the Government of India proposed collection of money by implementing cess for funding in the tea gardens but the proposal was turned down by the employers. Ultimately it became the government's responsibility to lay down standard and insist on their observance.

During the time period around 1948 the Indian constitution was upon the anvil with its provisions for a welfare state and Directive Principles of State Policy. This view had a great impact on the provisions of the Plantation labour Bill. The Bill was placed before the Third Session of the Industrial Committee in 1950.¹²

3.3.4 Achievement of Indian Independence and direction of welfare measures for plantation workers.

The tea garden workers who were migrated from tribal areas to remote places of Assam and West Bengal in the beginning of tea plantations and setting up tea industries had to face innumerable difficulties to cope with the new

environments .During the early days of tea plantation history the poverty stricken workers had been under the darkness and ignorance about their rights as a worker. They were totally unorganised and helpless. The Indian Independence movement enlightened them gradually about the collective movement against the exploitive attitude of the employers. After achieving independence in the year 1947 the Indian government took some effective measures to improve the social and economic conditions of the plantation workers. Several legislations have been passed since independence to protect the interests of the workers and among them Plantation Labour Act 1951 has been provided a number of welfare measures for the upliftment of the life of the plantation workers. The main provisions of the Act dealt with the health and welfare, housing facilities to the workers, working hours ,schooling facilities to the children of the workers, supply of drinking water etc. along with sickness and maternity benefits and other form of social security measures .The other important legislative steps adopted by the government were Payment of Bonus Act(1964), Payment of Gratuity Act(1972) and Industrial Dispute Act(1948).

3.3.5 Plantation Labour Act, 1951-An effective step towards plantation labour welfare:-

The conditions of plantation workers in India were simply miserable during the British regime. After independence, the situation began to improve when the Indian government wished to implement well defined protective measures for the plantation workers in the form of Plantation Labour Act. The Act was passed in the year 1951 and its provisions were enforced in the tea producing states of India gradually. The act is administered by the state governments. The state governments are however free to declare any plantation land less than 5 hectares or less than 15 employed persons to be covered by the act

The PLA, 1951 has a number of provisions for the welfare of the plantation workers. They are as follows:-

- 1) Medical facilities (u/s 10)-the act provides adequate medical facilities for the labourers. Under this provision each plantation is required to provide medical facilities to a worker and his/her family. The act states that every garden where at least 1000 workers are employed must have a hospital with full time doctor and adequate pre-medical staff. Where the number of employees is less than 1000, there must be a dispensary with proper qualified personnel. The act also recommended there should be group medical hospitals, covering a group of plantations where specialised treatment facilities are available to the workers. It is ironic that such group hospitals had existed till 1970's but thereafter the facilities was dismantled by the Planters' Association.
- 2) Housing facilities (as per section 15)- According to PLA,1951 each plantation has to provide accommodation to the plantation workers/employers/staff resident within the estate premises. During the period of inception of tea industry workers were allotted lands within the plantation area with basic materials for constructing the house with the help of family labour. These "kuchaa" houses were made of bamboo and mud and the roof were of thatch. But the act clearly stated that the plantation workers should be housed in permanent construction with walls made of bricks and mortar and the roofs be made of either tiles or corrugated iron sheets or asbestos. The Act also provides at least 8% of the houses of each plantation should be converted to "pucca" houses each year. Besides this, in every plantation there should be proper sanitation system with sufficient latrines and bathrooms for the workers.
- 3) Primary Education to the children of the workers- Section 14 of the act clearly stated that every estate should provide free education to the workers' children, between the age group 6 to 12. School Buildings and necessary infrastructure facilities related to such education have to be maintained by the respective estates. As per rule the teachers' be appointed in the ratio of one per every 40 students. In West Bengal in tea estates the teachers are appointed by the State Government.

- 4) Supply of pure drinking water- The PLA, 1951 under section 8 stipulates that in every plantation proper and effective arrangements for supply of drinking water should be provided by the employer. The act provides that this facility be maintained at convenient places in the plantation so that sufficient supply of potable drinking water for all workers can be possible.
- 5) Canteen Facility- According to Sec-II the state government may frame rule mentioning that in every plantation wherein 150 workers are ordinarily employed, canteen facility should be provided and maintained by the employer for the benefit of the workers.
- 6) Maintain of Crèches- Section 12 of the PLA, 1951 provides that every plantation with 50 or more women workers or the number of children of women workers is twenty or more is required to maintain crèches for these children at suitable places near the work place.
- 7) Recreational Facilities- Every tea estate is required to provide recreational facilities for the workers and their family members in the garden area to make them mentally healthier, under section 13 of the plantation act.
- 8) Non-Statutory Benefits- Besides these statutory benefits certain other welfare measures are also provided by the management of the tea gardens according to the charter of demands submitted by the trade unions and which are settled through the Tripartite Level Meetings. The following non-statutory benefits are generally provided in the tea gardens.
 - a) Supply of food grains at a subsidised rate:- The management of tea estates of North India is liable to supply weekly ration at a subsidised rate to the workers which is regarded as a part of their daily wage. The workers get rice, wheat and kerosene oil at a concessional rate.
 - b) Fuels (Firewood):- The tea industry in North India is required to provide free fuel to all employees resident in the estate. Fuel is supplied in the form of firewood/coal briquettes for workers and gas cylinders for staff employees.
 - c) Supply of umbrella, slippers:-every year generally in the rainy season the management is liable to supply umbrella and slippers to the employees.

- d) Supply of tarpaulin and blankets:- The management of the tea estate also bears the responsibility to supply tarpaulin and blankets to the workers as per the necessity¹³

3.3.6 View of a study team about Welfare Measures:-

In the year 1996, a study was conducted by Sharit Bhowmick(West Bengal), V. Xaxa(Assam) and M. A. Kalam(Tamil Nadu) to take a view what welfare measures were taken by the managements of the tea estates of West Bengal, Assam and Tamil Nadu to implement the provisions as laid down in the Plantation Labour Act(1951) The study revealed that 30% of labour quarters in Assam and 25% in West Bengal were found to be temporary(kuchha). In comparison the condition of Tamil Nadu was approximately better. In that tea producing state of South India most of the houses of tea plantation workers were permanent and maintenance work had been done from time to time.

The study team had a bitter experience regarding sanitary facilities of the labour lines in Assam and West Bengal. Required number of latrines and bathrooms, mainly for the female workers were not provided as per the PLA, 1951 in many gardens. Naturally the workers had to live in unhygienic conditions .The situation of the South Indian state was found to be better in comparison to its counter parts two North Indian states, as the sanitary system was adequate as each house or two houses share a toilet .The Plantation Labour Rules framed by the government of Kerala makes it mandatory for each house to have a toilet.

It was revealed by the study group that the medical facilities in the three states, Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu were inadequate and provisions of the act were not followed properly. In most of the gardens having more than 1000 workers there was no full time doctors. Interestingly the managements of these tea estates preferred to employ part time doctors who used to visit the garden for a few hours twice or thrice a week. Shortage of nursing staff and non availability of prescribed medicines made the workers' condition more pathetic. Most of the tea

estates had either reduced the budgeted expenditure on health of the workers or kept them constant.

The study also found out that in Dooars, Terai and Darjeeling hilly area of West Bengal used to maintain crèches for the children of the workers but they were not maintained in a proper way. The condition of Assam in this respect was found improper as they were small in size and the children were not properly care of. In fact it is a common sight in the tea gardens of West Bengal and Assam that the mothers used to pluck the tea leaves carrying their babies on their back by making a sling out of cloth and strap the baby to it. The team found the condition of Tamil Nadu was just opposite. The crèches were well maintained and in many cases the employers provide two sets of clothes to the children every year.

The study team realized the employers paid least attention to provide better education facilities in these three tea producing states. Less number of schools, lack of teaching staff and inadequate place had put barriers to expand the opportunity of education among the children of workers. Here the situation of Tamil Nadu too was as similar as West Bengal. As the teachers were appointed in the tea gardens of Assam, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, there might be a possibility of lack of co ordination between management and the government and the workers suffer.

Interestingly the condition is better in Darjeeling hill and that is due to activities of the then Gorkha Hill Council. The organization had full control over the hilly area. The Gorkha Hill Council ensured that it would provide all the infrastructural facilities for running the primary schools in the tea plantations situated in the hilly areas if necessary.

It was also revealed by the study that the children of the tea gardens used to face problems in post primary situations. As most of the tea gardens are situated in isolated places the students had to travel a long distance to reach the secondary or higher secondary schools. Though some estates of the Dooars and Terai provided transport but the facilities were not provided in Assam.

So though there are laws, rules, and various acts for the welfare of plantation workers, but in reality they are not implemented properly and the workers are still deprived of having their rights. These things definitely lead towards unhealthy industrial relations in the tea gardens of North Bengal and other states.¹⁴

Before independence the condition of the tea plantation workers were simply miserable. They were migrated from the different places, mainly from Bihar, Madhya Pradesh etc. and were employed in the remotest places of West Bengal in the district of Jalpaiguri and Darjeeling where tea gardens were established. In the days of inception, these workers were treated like a bonded labourer. After independence, the situation started to improve and a number of legislative measures mainly The Plantation Labour Act, 1951 was introduced to improve the social and economical conditions of the workers. From the above discussions, it is found, though there are number of acts for the welfare of the workers. But still the conditions of the workers have not improved considerably as the tea garden owners do not pay necessary attention for implementing the provisions laid in the PLA 1951.

We visited sampled tea gardens to observe the condition of the workers and the degree of implementation of the welfare measures by the respective tea gardens. The observations of our study are presented in the next Chapter.

TRADE UNION MOVEMENT IN TEA PLANTATION

INDUSTRY

3.4 Brief History of Trade Union Movement:

In a very simple sense, the meaning of trade union can be described as a combined force to achieve common goals, such as remuneration of works in the form of salary or wages, fixation of scheduled working hours, better working conditions etc.

The industrial revolution of 18th century in Great Britain not only opened the avenues of industrial development but it had also developed the sense of organized labour movement in the various sector of industry and commerce. The new production system forced the industrialist and employers to change their mind set and they started to realize the importance of maintain a rather cordial relationship with the workers.

Before that the workers had no alternative lent to work in highly unfavorable working conditions. They were paid a very poor rate of wage. Industrial revolution made a change in the socio-economic conditions of the workers. No doubt the birth of trade union movement had a direct impact for changing the condition of the workers towards better directions.

History says it was an controversial issue whether the first trade union activities was started in England, that was in Manchester in 1829 or it was begin in Philadelphia in America, it was recognized that the first trade union in the world was organized in Philadelphia in the year 1827 named as “Mechanics union of Trade Association”. But both the unions of England and America were short lived mainly due to political reason and in the year 1833 again the trade union movement was emerged in News York when “General Trade Unions” was formed to establish the workers right”¹⁵

3.4.1. History and Development of Trade Union Movement in India. Growth of Movement during (1850-1900):

Industrialization in India started long back in 1850. The establishment of textiles in Bombay (new Mumbai) and jute mills in Bengal and lying of the railways opened the avenues of industrial movements in India. The setting up of first cotton mill in Bombay in 1851 and first jute mill in Bengal in the year 1885 paved the way of industrial activities in India and in town labour movement. In the year 1875 the country witnessed the first labour movement under the leadership of Mr. S. S. Bangalee known as a social activist of philanthropist in Bombay to protect the labourers from the miserable working conditions who were poorly paid. As a result the first factor commission was appointed in 1875 and the Indian Factories Act was enacted in the year 1881 for the first time to regulate the working conditions including the working hours of the workers. Thereafter in the period of initial stage labour movement started to accelerate stage lay stage and in 1890. The Bombay mill hands association was set up under the leadership of Mr. Lokhande may be recognized to be the founder of organized labours movement in India¹⁶.

3.4.2. Developmental Phase (1900-1946) :

During this era trade union movement got momentum as the workers under the leadership of quality leaders and realizing the demand of the situation started to unite to organize collective movement. As a result the printers union of Calcutta (1905), the Madras and Calcutta Postal Union (1907) and the Kamger Hiwasdhak Sabha (1910) were established with a new to promoting welfare measures and spreading literacy among other workers¹⁷.

The outbreak of First World War in the year 1918, particularly the post war economic and political situation forced the workers to be awakening about class consciousness and to organize collective movement to face the challengers. As a result a number of trade unions were formed; they were Ahmedabad Textile Labour Association (1917) Under the leadership of Shrimati Ansuyaben Sarbhai, other

Madras Labour Union (1918), led by B. P. Wadia, Indians Seamen's Union, Calcutta Clerk's Union and All India Postal and RMS Association were formed. The establishment of International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1919 also gave a boost up towards labour movement world wide as well as in India¹⁸.

During this time span under the great leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, Spinners' Union and Weavers' Union were formed which later on transformed into industrial union known as Textile Labour Association in 1920. The passing of the Trade Union Act 1926 gave a formal recognition to the workers' right and to organize the movement under the umbrella of a legal status and encouraged a lot to advance the trade union movement in India.¹⁹

With the growing consciousness of the workers, nature and character of trade union movement started to change towards aggressive form. Militancy and revolutionary approach took the drivers seat and the country witness a series of strikes and labour agitation since 1924. The communists had acquired a commendable position in influencing the trade union movements from 1928 onwards. Due to differences in opinion among the leaders splits and mergers became a common feature of the trade union movement in the thirties. The leftist unionists broke out the AITUC and formed a separate organization named as National Trade Unions Federation (NTUF). In the year 1931 again another split in AITUC happened in its Calcutta session and the extreme left minded personnel formed another new organization named as All India Red Trade Union Congress under the leadership of B. T. Randive and S. V. Despande. Besides the enactment of Trade Union Act, 1926 and Act was passed namely Trade Disputes Act, 1929 and these two provided a fillip to the growth and development of trade union movement in India.

During this period a number of political events took place. The Indian National Congress came in power in seven provinces in 1937 and this fact provided valuable sense and motivation to organize trade union activities more effectively and united. As a fact, the All India Red Trade Union Congress merged with the

AITUC in the year 1935. In 1938, the National Trade Union Congress also affiliated with the AITUC with a view to organize Trade Union Movement in a stronger form.

One of the milestones of Indian Trade Union Movement was the enactment of the Bombay Industrial Disputes Act, 1938, which included a provision of compulsory recognition of unions by the employers and that gave a huge support for the advancement of workers' movement²⁰.

3.4.3. The Phase after Independence (1947 and onwards):

With the achievement of independence in the year 1947 the features of Trade Union Movement have been changed a lot. Proliferation of trade union has been a considerable feature of the trade union movement in India after independence. The four central trade union organizations namely: the AITUC, the INTUC (Indian National Trade Union Congress), The Hind Mazdoor Sabha and the United Trade Union Congress (UTUC) emerged as the leaders of trade union movements. In this stage splits and merger also became a feature of trade unionism. INTUC was formed by those who favoured the views of Indian National Congress. Socialists established the Praja Socialist Party which later emerged in a new name known as Hindustan Mazdoor Sabha in 1948. In the year 1970 a major change took place in the field of trade union movement. Friction developed among the communists and one group separated themselves from the AITUC and formed CITU (Centre of Indian Trade Union) led by CPM (Communist Party of India), while CPI (Communist Party of India) used to control the AITUC. In the year 1972 INTUC again divided and National Labour Organization was formed. Subsequently the Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) was split and Bhartiya Mazdoor Sabha (BMS) was formed under the banner of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

So politicization of trade union movement became the distinguishing feature in the trade union history of India during the post independence period²¹.

Presently, twelve Central Trade Union Organizations in India have been functioning. They are:-

1. All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC).
2. Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangha (BMS).
3. Centre of Indian Trade Union (CITU).
4. Hind Mazdoor Kisan Panchayat (HMKP).
5. Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS).
6. Indian Federation of Free Trade Unions (IFFTU).
7. Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC).
8. National Front of Indian Trade Unions (NFITU).
9. National Labour Organization (NLO).
10. Trade Unions Co-ordination Centre (TUCC).
11. United Trade Union Congress (UTUC), and
12. United Trade Union Congress – Lelin Sarani (UTUC-LS)²².

3.4.4 Trade Union Movement in the Tea Industry of India – a brief history:

Before independence there has been no sign of organized labour movement in the tea industry of India in true sense. Owing to the fact that laborers in plantations were an incoherent and unorganized mass of workers. They were completely ignorant about their place of work as they used to travel a long way in the remote places of tea garden areas. In the days of inception of tea plantation the places were full of jungles accompanied by wild animals and diseases like malaria and 'Kalazar'. Moreover they had no knowledge about the relationship with their employers. They had been quite unable to organize any kind of protest against the behaviour of the employers or for promoting their common interest.

3.4.5 Causes for not conducting organized movement by the workers in the beginning of tea plantation:

There were several causes in the earlier days of tea plantation to organize movement on the part of the tea workers. They can be stated as follows:-

Firstly, the illiteracy and ignorance of the workers kept them away from the meaning of the organized movement.

Secondly, the workers were mostly recruited from the poorest and most ignorant classes of the people who used to live in helpless conditions and that led them to emigrate in this remote place where the tea estates had been set up. Moreover most of the labourers were recruited at the time of famine or scarcity. So, the very composition of plantation workers made it difficult to be untied for any kind of agitation.

Thirdly, the very nature of plantation industry was detrimental to labour organization. The tea estates had been established in a scattered way covering a large area and there were scarcely any opportunity to the workers in one garden to make contact with those of others.

Fourth, the living condition of the workers had been another detrimental factor. Most of the workers used to live in the plantations and any strike on their part resulted in eviction with their families.

Fifth, the remoteness of the tea garden areas had forced the workers to keep themselves away from the essence of cultural and social performances including the places of political activities.

Due to infrastructural difficulties it was a great problem for the labour leaders and political activists to visit the tea estates with a view to organize the workers. Sixth, constant vigil and necessary precautions on the part of the planters against any concerted action by the workers was another important factor to put barrier against any kind of labour agitation on the part of the laborers.

Finally, the laborers were widely separated from one another by barriers of caste, language and religion. Lack of sympathy and understanding between them made the situation more critical. On the other hand most of the planters were European and the wealth generated from the tea estates were being drained out for other purposes throwing the workers in extreme poverty, so the master

servant relationship, which was born with the starting of establishment of tea industry, the effect of which has still been prevailing in this age also.

The waves of Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 awakened national consciousness making its impact in far away tea gardens also. After then with the passage of time several unions and organizations have been formed and the trade union movements in the tea industry started to develop in all parts of the tea producing zones of India. The independence movement of India had created a national awareness in the minds of the plantation workers and gradually the sense of organized movement started to grow among them²³.

3.4.6 History of Trade Union Movement in the Tea Industry of Assam:

Assam became the pioneer state to start trade union movement in the tea plantation sector. The exploited tea workers who had no option but to live and work at the mercy of the selfish and cruel planters, started to become unite slowly but steadily being encouraged by the activities of the national leaders who had made constant effort to spread the essence of national movement among the tea plantation workers.

In between the years 1937 and 1940 the labour agitation has been spread in a greater pace throughout India. In Assam, the prime tea producing state of India, the labour unrest also got a momentum. A large number of strikes were observed in the Swedish owned Assam Match Company at Dhubri, Assam Oil Company in Degboi, the British owned Assam Railway and Trading Company and in Government establishments.

Being enlighten by these movements the tea workers of Assam started to become agitated and took part in the strikes. The government of Assam paid serious attention and communicated its concern about the higher frequency of strikes and labour unrest in the tea gardens of the state. The Indian Tea Association made an anxious appeal to the government to take necessary steps to control the deteriorating situation in the tea gardens.

As a consequent effect, Government of Assam appointed a Tea Garden Labour Committee to investigate the causes of strikes. Initially, the Indian Tea Association (ITA) had opposed strongly the formation of trade union in the tea gardens. They became frightened thinking that the right of trade union would help to increase labour militancy and labour unrest in the tea estates. They argued the production functions of the tea industry were fundamentally different in comparison to other industrial concerns and hence the introduction of trade union was not in the interest of the workers as well as the management.

But the changed political situation forced the ITA to think in a different way and they accepted a policy of conditional recognition of trade union in the tea plantation of Assam. The conditions included such as, only the permanent labourers living in the garden area would be enrolled as members and its executives should be chosen among them. A strike could be called only with a prior notice of fourteen days with a minimum of two-third of votes cast at least by fifty per cent voter members, and no union would be allowed to represent more than one garden.

This policy, in practical had remained a paper policy as the Government of India imposed the Defense of India Rules in September 1939 which repressed for the time being the embryonic trade union movement in Assam.

However, by 1943 labour struggle outside the plantation industry was heading towards the organization of workers at the provincial level and the Assam Provincial Trade Union Congress (APTUC) was formed in the year 1943 as a branch of the AITUC. Between the time span of 1943 and 1945 the APTUC became able to increase its strength and popularity as the number of members increased from 4345 to 16000 with 41 affiliated and associated units²⁴.

With the achievement of independence in the year 1947, the INTUC took the initiative of organizing plantation workers and took up their cause. Almost all the workers of Assam have been under the strong control of INTUC since then. And the emergence of this organization in 1947 paved the way for strong labour organization in Assam.

In 1958, a central organization named as Assam Chah Mazdoor Sangha (A.C.M.S.) was set up in Assam with its Head Office at Dibrugarh. The organization designed to help its members through mutual help, understanding and assistance followed by Cachar Chah Sramik Union (C.C.S.U)²⁵.

3.4.7 Growth and Development of Trade Union Movement in the tea industry of West Bengal:-

Tea industry in West Bengal was set up by the British Planters long ago in 1856. But the trade union movement got its place only around the time of independence. The reason behind this the situation was simply unfavorable to form any organized movement as the workers were treated like a “bonded labour”, who had no access to the outside world and no choice but to work from dawn to dusk accepting a very poor amount of remuneration in the form of wage. So they had no power to bargain against the tyrannies of the tea planters. On the other side, the tea planters were well organized and used to take full advantage to exploit the poor and illiterate workers to earn profits as maximum as they can from this new area of plantation economy. Since the period of independence was the political situation started to travel in a new dimension. The great leaders of national movements used their full effort and co-operation to awake the all sections of people including this working class.

The tea planters of West Bengal were well aware of this situation and made every possible effort to prevent the penetration of such agitation in the tea estates of West Bengal. They arranged constant vigil on the movement and attitude of the workers and to prevent any trade union activist from outside. In addition to these strict measures, the tea planters had employed a private armed force known as ‘North Bengal Mounted Rifles’ to suppress any form of protest by the workers.²⁶

But the situation began to change since 1946 and the fortune turned towards the workers’ side when the trade union movement slowly but steadily paved they way in the tea gardens of West Bengal. Communists performed a great role in introducing trade union movement in the tea estates of West Bengal for the first

time and the person who owes the credit to do so was Ratanlal Brahman who was the nominee of the Communist Party of India (CPI) from the tea garden constituency of Darjeeling of Bengal Provincial Assembly Election held in April 1946. As a result of hard effort of the communists the first trade union in the tea industry of West Bengal was established in Darjeeling district at the end 1945 named as Darjeeling District Tea Workers' Union. After then the workers' movement started to gain pace and started to raise their voice to seek justice in a more organized way in spite of threats from the employers.

18th June 1946 is recognized as a 'Red Letter Day' in the history of trade union movement in the tea industry of West Bengal. Because on that very day the Chia Camman Mazdoor Union declared strike in thirteen tea gardens to fulfill seven point demands which included recognition of trade union, hike in wage rate, dearness allowance @ 25% of total wage, better medical facilities, ration at a cheaper rate and abolition of 'Hattabahar' system. This industry wise strike in the thirteen tea gardens for the first time in West Bengal encouraged the workers to be firm on their stand to raise voice against the management by organizing agitation and spreading labour unrest for establishing their rights²⁷.

3.4.8 History and Development of Trade Union Movement in Terai and Dooars region of West Bengal.

The tea industry of West has immense importance for the development of the state's economy. Dooars of Jalpaiguri district and Terai of Darjeeling district are the two prime and traditional tea producing zones of West Bengal, where tea plantation was started more than 150 years ago. But the trade union movement was found its place in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai in true sense after independence.

3.4.9 The beginning of Trade Union Movement in Terai Region:-

The first organized in the tea industry of Darjeeling hill area was inaugurated in the year 1945 and its effect was flown down to the plain area known as Terai. The

communists were the pathfinder to start the trade union movement in the tea gardens of Terai. It was the Merry View Tea Garden where the two eminent communists of North Bengal, Biren Bose and Bhupen Bhowmik tried their best to form trade union. The task was not a easy one, because the planters used to take all possible measures to prevent any communication between the outsiders and the workers. But their mission was unsuccessful because Bhupen Bhowmik, the fire wood supplier of that tea garden was identified and the manager retrenched a number of workers for taking such anti-management step. Though the mission was unsuccessful but the fact awakened the minds of the workers and they started to become organize to fight against the exploitative nature of the managements. Ultimately the management had no option but to allow the workers to form their organization and in the year 1954. The communists established trade union in Kharibari, Kamala, Fullbari and Merry View tea gardens without having any proper support from the organized trade unions²⁸.

3.4.10 Origins of the Trade Union Movement in Dooars:-

During the inception days of tea plantation in the Dooars region it was an isolated place from the rest of the country and the whole area was under the rule of the planters. It was simply difficult to get entry in the tea gardens area. In this situation tea workers of the Dooars region could not draw the attention of the nationalist movement. So the large number o working class of this tea garden region was more or less unaffected by the current of independence movement. The nationalist leaders were not active at all in that area and the workers had not received any kind of support or guidance to organize any movement against the planters.

It is important to remember that the anti-colonialism feeling amongst the Indian working class was a result of the organized movement of the workers under the leadership of Congress and trade unionists against their foreign employers. But ironically, the Jalpaiguri district Congress could not provide any such leadership for the tea garden workers of Dooars to organize any movement against the planters.

One of the reasons for this attitude could be that the then district Congress Committee was dominated by the Indian tea planters.

So, though the trade union movements were well entrenched among the tea garden workers of Assam in the nineteen thirties and large scale labour unrest started to grow from 1921 onwards under the leadership of national leaders. The tea garden workers of Dooars region could not get any favour either from the nationalists or trade unionists till the end of 1945. The workers of Dooars showed signs of collective action for the first time when the trade union activists of the Bengal-Assam Rail Road Workers' Union (BARRWU) made an effort to organize them in early 1946.

The effort paved the way to organize trade unions activities in the tea gardens later on. The first few tea gardens which were situated near the railway stations started to become organize with the help and constant support of the BARRWU. During this period the communists performed a responsible role and motivated the workers of Haihaipathas (renamed Rupali), Denguajhar, Bagrakote and Lakhipara. Gradually the labour unrest and agitation began to spread from garden to garden under the leadership of communist, the tea gardens to protest against the exploitative attitude of the employers. On the other side the planters attributed it as political gain to "outside agitators" exploiting the poor workers of the tea estates.

The 'Tebhaga' movement [in which the share-cropper demanded two parts of the harvest should be in favour of them and one-part be given to renter] had also great contribution to advance the trade union movement in the tea gardens of Dooars, due to participation of the adivasi share-croppers of the Dooars in this 'Tebhaga' movement.

By this time the All India Kisan Sabha decided to spread the movement against the 'Jotedars' for exploiting the farmers and share-croppers and by the end of January 1947 tea garden workers joined with the peasants to take part in the agitation. This incident no doubt fermented the labour unrest in the tea gardens of

this prime tea producing zone of West Bengal. Considering the burning situation, gradually the planters began to realize that the tea garden workers had been empowered with the support of neighboring tribal cultivators, share-croppers and railway workers and the formation of trade unions in the tea gardens became inevitable.

In independence India the development and growth of trade union movement in the tea gardens of West Bengal become evident. The government of independent India relaxed the 'iron rule' imposed on the workers by the former rulers and granted various rights in favour of the workers. All these facts created favorable atmosphere for the establishment of trade unions in the tea estates. Communists who had a great contribution and sacrifice to spread trade union movement among the industrial workers were allowed to enter into the tea gardens in 1952 as the general election was scheduled in that year. The communists utilized this opportunity to hold meetings with the tea workers and thus trade union activities increased. In 1955 the workers struck work for long eighteen days demanding for bonus. This agitation was considered a land-mark in trade union movement in Dooars as the government also forced the employers to abide by the principle of compulsory minimum bonus.

One of the most important features of the trade union movement of West Bengal Tea Plantation Industry, as in most cases throughout the country is the multiplicity of trade union and most of them are affiliated to a Central Trade Union Organization. Generally these Central Organizations are under the umbrella of national or provincial political parties. The inter-reveler of the trade unions and inherent differences among the leaders and activists and that crumbled the unions slowly. As an example due to differences of opinion among the socialists HMS (Hind Mazdoor Sabha) had split into two groups. One of them was aligned to Congress in the name Rashtriya Cha Mazdoor Congress and the other was West Bengal Cha Shramik Union which was aligned to the Socialist Party. The split in the communist party in 1964 gave birth another communist party in the name of Communist Party of India (Marxist) i.e. CPM and that hampered the growth of trade

union movement. The CPM formed its trade union wing in the year 1961 named as CITU and later on CITU affiliated Cha Bagan Mazdoor Union was formed²⁹.

3.4.12 Development of Joint Movement:-

Realizing the darkness of the trade union movement the leaders of the various trade unions came on a common platform and formed the Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers in 1962 to fight against the employers on common issues. Unions of all political colors such as INTUC, HMS, AITUC and later CITU, UTUC and Gorkha League were formed this Co-ordination Committee.

Considering the growth, development and nature of movement of the trade unions an attempt can be made to segregate the whole journey into different phases.

The first phase was the period 1946-1947, where two major labour movements took place. One is food movement led by the communists against the acute shortage of food, and another was 'tebhaga' movement also launched by the communist party to ensure two-third share of agriculture produce to the share cropper. The tea workers of Dooars participated in the movement but the Terai region did not respond to this.

The second phase which bounded 1948 to 1951 was considered as set back period because the trade union movement received a below when the Government of India imposed a ban on the CPI in 1948. As a consequent effect, many leaders were either arrested or had to go underground. The ban was lifted in the year 1952 as per the verdict of the High Court in the year of General Election. The period of 1952-1970 is considered as the third phase, which was identified as inter union rivalry in tea gardens. Different political parties liked to form their own trade union wings to gain political power though spreading influence among the large number of working people. In spite of multi unionism the concept of forming co-ordination committee was accepted by the several trade unions for the interest of the workers. During this period militancy in trade union movement was emerged. Violence, 'gheraos' and assault of the managerial staff became the very past of trade union

movement resulting deterioration in industrial relation. From the middle of the sixties, the labour unrest became more violent, particularly in the tea gardens situated in Terai region. As a result production was hampered and the workers lost their wages due to frequent strikes and other form of agitation. During that period the Coalition Government of communist parties had been in power in West Bengal.

The period 1971 and onwards has been described as the fourth phase. Interestingly the nature and character of labour movement were started to turn towards healthy understanding between the workers' representatives and management. Trade Unions agreed to give up the militant attitude and liked to pay bonus on bilateral interest. The labourer management relation started to become cordial since the Congress came in power in 1972. The emergency was imposed by the Central Government in 1975 and the Trade Union Movements were directed in a new dimension and labour unrest became much more explosive in the post emergency period. In 1982 the Left Front Government was returned in power and had been stayed in power for long thirty-four years at a stretch. It helped the government to persuade new labour policy which discouraged strikes and desperate trade union movement with a view to healthy atmosphere for investment that can be described as friendly climate for the employers³⁰.

3.4.13 Impact of Globalization on Trade Unions:-

In the era of globalization the structure of trade union movement has undergone several changes. Due to liberalization policy private sectors have been flourished and a number of multinationals have entered into the Indian markets. Unions with internal leadership have emerged in these sectors through forceful collective bargaining. The movements carried on by these unions have ensured monetary benefits of the employees. This is really a challenge to the traditional and politically affiliated trade unions in the age of globalized economy. To cope with the changed situation most of the central trade union organizations have been opposed united Government's efforts for privatization of the public sector. Interestingly in this challenging situation multiplicity of trade unions has been

continued to exist. In the tea gardens of Dooars and Darjeeling hilly area new trade unions have been set up by the influence of regional political movement and affiliated by Adivasi Bikash Parisad. Another noticeable fact is that the strength and power of the trade unions have been decreasing ever since the reform process has begun in India. It could be due to contractualization and casualisation of workers, as a result of this the entry of private sector organizations and several multinationals. So, in this age of globalization the trade union movement in all sectors of economy has been passing through a critical stage³¹.

After the introduction of liberalization and globalization policy industrial economy of the country has undergone sea change since 1991, so the nature and character of trade union movement. The important changes which have visualized in the character of trade union movement in the tea industry are:-

(a) Attitudinal change:- The attitude of the trade unions has changed considerably towards management. This is maybe due to the declining trend in the number of membership of different trade unions. For example, the membership of INTUC has declined from 54.35 lakh in 1989 to 54.05 lakh in 1993. CITU also has lost its members by considerable numbers. This declining trend is also witnessed in other countries of the world, such as Australia, France and Japan.

With the changing situation the attitude and thinking of the workers have also changed. Spreading of education among the working class people have made them rational, matured and realistic in their approach. As a result strikes, bandhs and other form of aggressive movements have decreased considerably.

In this changed circumstances the employers have offered VRS (Voluntary Retirement Scheme), Golden Handshake and alike and the workers have prepared their minds to accept those. Before liberalization period, this was simply unthinkable.

(b) Move towards depoliticization of Unions:-

Having realized the evils of political influence in the trade union movement the new generation of working class people have started to insulate themselves from political affiliation³².

The Trade Union movement has a very vital role to play to for the revival and sustainability of the tea industry. In this situation the trade unions have to play dual role properly and effectively. Firstly, to fulfill the legitimate demands of the workers and to consider their grievances effective movement be organized on the other hand it has take part in the process of revival of the industry³³.

3.5. Industrial Relations: - Concept of Meaning:

Industrial Relations is a multidisciplinary area that studies the employment relationship, because of the importance of non-industrial employment relationships. The term industrial relations have been increasingly called as employment relations and in many fields, such as in plantation areas many outsiders also equate industrial relations to labour relations. Industrial Relations covers a vast area and consists of a number of subjects such as labour economics, industrial sociology, human resource management, political science, law and other areas. As a problem solving tool it seeks to design policies and institutions to maintain better employment relation in the work place. Industrial Relation has also an ethical sense as it contains strong normative principles, such as labours are human being and not a commodity in democratic communities entitled to human rights.

Industrial Relations researchers assume that labour market are not perfectly competitive and when there are conflicts of interest between employers and workers, for example higher wages versus higher profits, then one can not rely on markets or managers to always serve workers' exploitation. Due to this they like to support institutional intervention to improve the relationship between management and workers and to protect workers' right.

Industrial Relations are used to denote the collective relationship between management and the workers. Traditionally, the term industrial relations is used to cover such aspects of industrial life as trade unionism, collective bargaining, workers participation in management, discipline and grievance handling, industrial disputes and interpretation of labour laws and rules and code of conduct.

According to Lester, "Industrial Relations involve attempts at solutions between the conflicting objectives and values; between the profit motive and social gain, between conflicting interests of the individual, the group and the community".

The National Commission on Labour (NCL) also emphasis on the same concept, in the words of NCL, industrial relations affect not merely the interests of the two participants – labour and management, but also the economic and social goals to which the State addresses itself. To regulate these relations in socially desirable channels is a unctio, which the State is in the best position to perform.

According to O:P. "Industrial Relations" deal with either the relationship between the state, employers and workers organization or the relation between the occupational organizations themselves.

3.5.1. History of Industrial Relations:

Industrial revolution is the main root for developing the sense of industrial relations, which created the modern employment relationship by sponsoring free labour markets and large-scale industrial organizations with thousands of wage workers. Industrial revolution changed the economic and social atmosphere of the society and these changes developed labour problems. Because as human being workers started to demand better economical package and improved social life.

Low wages, long working hours, monotonous and life-risk work and abusive supervisory practices led to violent labour agitation, high employee turnover and the threat of social instability.

Industrial relations were formed at the end of the 19th century and that was intellectually between classical economics and Marxism, with Sidney Webb and

Beatrice Webb's 'Industrial Democracy (1897). Institutionally, Industrial relations were founded by John R. Commons when he organized the first academic industrial relations Programme at the University of Wisconsin in 1920. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. who extended early financial support and welcomed progressive labour-management relations in the aftermath of the bloody strike at a Rockefeller owned coal mine in Colorado. In Britain, another progressive industrialist, Mantague Burton took active part to promote industrial relations at Leeds, Cardiff and Cambridge in 1930 and the discipline was formalized in the 1950s, with the formation of the Oxford School by Allan Flanders and Hugh Clegg.³⁴

3.5.2. Theoretical Perspective of Industrial Relations:-

There are three major theoretical perspectives regarding industrial relations which have differences from the view point of understanding and analysis of workplace relations. These are as follows:-

(a) Pluralist Perspective:- The supporters of this perspective think the organization is perceived as being made up of powerful and divergent sub-groups. Each group has its own legitimate loyalties having own set of objectives and leaders.

Here management is more interested towards persuasion and co-ordination rather than being enforcing and controlling mechanism. Trade Unions are deemed as legitimate representatives of employees and conflicts are dealt by collective bargaining.

(b) Uninterested Perspective:- In unitarism, the organization is perceived as an integrated and harmonious institution where management and staff all share a common purpose relying on mutual co-operation. Besides this, unitarism has a paternalistic approach where it demands loyalties of all employees. Here the role of trade unions are considered as less important since the loyalty between the employers and employees are regarded as mutually exclusive, where there can't be two sides of industry and conflict is perceived as disruptive which is developed due to interpersonal friction and communication break down.

(c) Marxist/ Radical Perspective:- The views of such industrial relations believe that there is a fundamental division of interest between capital and labour. In Marxism it is believed inequalities in power and economic wealth are the root cause for generating conflicts in the organizations. Here the roles of trade unions are a natural reaction to protect the interest of the workers.

(d) Gandhian Perspective:- The thinkers of this perspective believe the industrial relations is based on the fundamental principles of truth, non-violence and non-possession. Conflicts can be avoided if the employers obey the principles of trusteeship; and interests of employer and employee will remain intact. Gandhi supported workers' movement by observing strike and exercising non-co-operation for their rights and to have their grievances redressed, but that should be in a non-violent and peaceful manner.

3.5.3 Actors of Industrial Relations:-

For growth and progress of any industry a healthy and harmonious atmosphere is needed and which is possible only if the attitude and activities of the employers and employees are directed towards well being of the organization. It is possible only if sound industrial relations are prevailed in the industry. Three important parties which are directly involved in industrial relations are the Employers, Employees and the Government.

Industrial relations in India are governed by the Acts and Laws formed by the government. The Central and the State Government influence and regulate industrial relations through legislations to ensure industrial peace and harmony. The government itself plays an important role in industrial relations becoming an employer in one sense and discharge responsibility by regulating working conditions in the non-government sectors.

Besides those, the Government has established wage board, labour courts, tribunals and bipartite and tripartite machineries to maintain harmonious relations between the employers and the employees. Being the welfare state as envisaged in

the Constitution of India. Government's intervention is utmost important to maintain healthy industrial relations.³⁵

3.5.4 Trends of Industrial Relations in Tea Industry of West Bengal:

The tea industry of India has a long chequered history. This industry was started in the early 18th century in West Bengal. History reveals the first tea garden in West Bengal was established in the year 1956 named as Alubari Tea Company. In Terai the first tea garden was came into operation in the year 1862 and in Dooars region the land mark year was 1874. But in spite of the long history of Tea Plantation in West Bengal, it is an irony that the trade union movement was stepped in this plantation industry of this state only around the time of independence. As the trade union is one of the key factors of industrial relations, so in the absence of this organized workers' union. The industrial relations in the tea industry practically had no appearance during the pre-independence period. The working conditions of the workers were simply miserable. They had no alternative but to tolerate the tyrannies and naked exploitation of the planters. The employers used to exploit nakedly the workers engaging them from dawn to dusk at a very poor rate of wage. The relation between the workers and the employers were more master and servant than employers and employee.

However, after independence, when the new Indian Government framed a number of legislations in favour of the plantation workers, such as an implementation of Plantation Labour Act, 1951 and the inception of trade union movement in the plantation economy in West Bengal, a huge change had been observed in the industrial scenario of tea industry of Dooars, Terai and Darjeeling Hill regions. Being organized the workers got the strength and motivation to fight against the exploitative attitude of the employers and the labour movement started to gain momentum gradually. This important industry of North Bengal started to witness large scale labour agitation in the form of strikes, lock-outs, gheraos, etc. The planters, on the other side resorted to every possible measure to curb the labour movement. But with the passage of time the conflict between the management and

the labour rates turned more intense and militant nature of labour movement used to prevail in tea industry. As a result strikes, lock-outs, retrenchment from work, confinements etc. became the regular phenomenon in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai.

3.5.5, Scenario of Industrial Relations in the Tea Gardens of Terai and Dooars during fifties:

The implementation of Plantation Labour Act, 1951, changed the scenario of industrial relations in the tea plantation sectors in India as well as West Bengal a lot. The Act, made it compulsory to provide housing, medical facilities, supply of drinking water, free primary education to the children of the workers, sanitation etc. for the employers. By this act the working conditions, were improved, some protection measures were ensured and above all the relations between the workers and the employees became formalized.

Being empowered by the several legislations such as Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, Factories Act, 1948 etc. besides PLA, 1951 the demand of the workers began to rise. By this time after the end of World War II which continued till 1953, a depression covered the economy throughout the world. As an effect, the tea industry had also fallen in trouble. It suffered several set backs as a result of which it had to retrench a number of workers. The economical benefits of the workers were also curtailed.

A number of tea plantations were closed down. The workers of the tea estate of Dooars expressed their grievances by observing strikes against the anti-labour attitude of the employers. In this process the labour management relations started to deteriorate gradually. Interestingly the workforce of the Terai region remained as mere spectators to these events and did not raise their voice in any way against these unjust steps of the employers.

In the post world war period, mainly during the span 1951 and 1953 the industrial relations in Terai tea gardens were comparatively peaceful and cordial

than Dooars region where degree of aggressive labour movement was higher. But in the year 1954 when the trade union activities paved the way in Terai region the labour movement got inspired and the workers started to organize fruitful movement to get their rights.

In the same year Dooars and Terai both the regions organized joint movement claiming bonus for the workers as the tea industry earned huge amount of profit in 1954 due to sudden increase of tea price.

Ultimately with the intervention of the Government a formula was worked out for payment of bonus and this monetary benefit was declared by the employers at a much higher rate than expectation and India became the first country in the world to accept the principle of payment of bonus to plantation workers out of profit.

But the employers were not happy with this decision and expressed their financial inability to discharge the obligation for payment of bonus. They argued they were already over burdened by the provisions of the PLA, 1951 for welfare measures, and this extra financial burden would lead to jeopardize the fortune of the tea industry. Being helpless by the verdict of the legislation framing body of India, the employers tried to put pressure on the workers. To reduce the financial pressure the retrenched many workers and even threatened to close the gardens. As a result the conflicts between the employers and the workers flared up strongly and the industrial relations in the tea gardens of West Bengal deteriorated considerably.³⁶

3.5.6. Industrial Relations during the period 1961-1970 in gardens of Terai and Dooars regions.

During this period West Bengal witnessed disturbances, mainly in the year 1969 and 1970. The Left United Front Government came into power for the first time and labour agitation became aggressive and explosive throughout the states during this period. In the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai more number of strikes, gheraos, lock-outs etc were held. Confrontation between workers and management

become the regular feature. However, amidst inter and intra trade union rivalry. The various trade unions of the different with a view to direct the trade union movement through mutual trust and understanding by forming the Co-ordination Committee of Tea Plantation Workers (CCTPW) in 1962. These steps, to some extent, succeeded in checking inter union rivalry in the tea gardens and helped in ensuring harmonies industrial relations in the tea estates.

Trade union movement in West Bengal had spread in the different industrial sectors including tea plantations by the sacrifice and fruitful leadership of the communists. So, when the United Front Government led by communist minded people came into power in 1969 in West Bengal. The trade union movement got more inspiration and the started to organize violent movements against the employers, when the West Bengal Government legalized 'gheraos', that quite often led to confinement and assault of the managerial staff. The Government also put a restriction on lay off and retrenchment of garden workers without its sanction. In the year 1969 CCTPW placed a charter of demands before the management of the tea gardens, mainly proper implementation of the provisions of the PLA, 1951 and wage hike and land-labour-ratio. To get that demands fulfilled the trade unions observed 16 long days strike at a stretch and jeopardized the tea industry completely. So, industrial relations in the tea gardens in the sixties were emerged at its worst form in West Bengal.

3.5.7. Industrial Relations in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai during the Seventies:-

We find in the sixties industrial relations in the tea industry of West Bengal became worst as the workers choose the way of aggressive movement and preferred violence to establish their rights. But from the beginning of seventies the scenario of industrial relations in the tea industry of West Bengal turned towards improvement. Disputes and conflicts were started to solve through bipartite and tripartite machineries through agreements. The trade union movement got recognition as democratic right of the workers and the labour unrest began to slow down. The

trade unions too became more responsible and preferred amicable settlement of the disputes through bilateral discussion giving up militant attitude.

In the year 1972 the political situation changed. The Congress Government tried to improve the industrial relations and discouraged gheraos, demonstration, confinement etc. These steps by the government addressed a positive outlook in maintaining peace and harmony in the industry. This also created an environment conducive for the revival of the labour management relationship. As a result labour agitation declined considerably as the number of strikes was reduced during that period.³⁷

The peaceful condition of labour relation which was re-instituted by the Congress Government after turmoil political situation in the sixties soon received a major set back when the Central Government imposed emergency in the year 1975 in India. Labour unrest developed in almost all parts of the country. Man days lost due to work stoppage went up to a new record of about 40 million in that year. The impact of emergency on the industrial relations in West Bengal is reflected in Table No. 3.14 in terms of man-days lost due to strike.

Table No. 3.7

Man-days Lost Due to Strikes in Tea Industries in West Bengal.

The nature of the industrial disputes and the trend of the workers' movement can be highlighted by the following table.

Year	Man-days lost due to strikes in Industries in general (in millions)		Man-days lost due to strike in Tea Industry (in millions)	Number of strikes in Tea Industry.
	India	West Bengal		
1973	13.862	2.572	0.020	17
1974	33.643	7.334	0.039	11
1975	16.706	10.785	0.010	7
1976	2.799	0.951	0.025	4

Source: 'Labour in West Bengal' 1976, p.10, and 1978, p. 72 Published by Government of West Bengal.

It is evident (Table 3.7) that the percentage of Man days lost due to strike in the tea industry during the period 1973-1976 had been reflected a downward trend. It indicates management and workers both had the intention to maintain a healthy atmosphere in the tea industry.

It is revealed from the Table 3.8 that the tea industry in West Bengal was not much affected due to emergency declared by the then Central Government. The number of strikes in 1973 was 17 but it reduced to 11 in the following year. It further declined to 7 in 1975 and to 4 only in 1976. The overall man-days lost in the tea industry of West Bengal increased by nearly 95 per cent in the year 1974, however in the following year it came down by about 75 per cent. On the other hand, in other industries except tea in West Bengal, there was a massive increase in the number of man-days lost due to strikes. There had been a clear picture of uprising trend of man-days lost during the period of 1973 to 1975. From 2.572 million in 1973, man-days lost increased to 7.334 million in 1974 and it touched 10.785 million marks in 1975.

Table No. 3.8

Year	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980
No. of strike	15	17	11	7	4	10	17	5	10

Source:- 'Labour in West Bengal' 1976 and 1981, Published by Govt. of West Bengal.

The Trade Union Movements in Dooars and Terai again became aggressive. The militant attitude of the workers increased considerably and the industrial relations soon began to turn hostile particularly on the issue of bonus. Number of strikes jumped to 10 in the year 1977 from number 4 which were observed in 1976, it further gone up to 17 in the year 1978. But in the following year it reduced to 5 but again increased to 10 in 1980 (Table No. 3.8).

3.5.8. Tea Industry of West Bengal and Industrial Relations during the period Eighties.

During the seventies the industrial relations in the tea industry of West Bengal were more or less unhealthy. Aggressive labour movements developed a climate of distress in the tea gardens of Dooars and Terai. But in the eighties the labour management relations made a remarkable progress. The industry which witnessed 11 strikes on an average during 50s and 60s, surprisingly did not register any single strike in the year 1981, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1989 and 1990. Definitely the trade unions affiliated to different political parties had played a constructive role to maintain co-operative attitude with the management. The Left Front Government which again was voted for power adopted a different view this time and discouraged strikes, gheraos, confinement etc. or any kind of aggressive workers' movement. They definitely gathered experience from the past and realized the importance of cordial industrial relations for the betterment of the state.³⁸

The frequency of strikes in the tea industry of West Bengal during the eighties is presented in the following table.

Table No. 3.9

Year	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
No. of strikes	Nil	Nil	1	5	8	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil

Source: 'Labour in West Bengal', 1981, 1986 and 1990, Published by Government of West Bengal.

3.5.9 Industrial Relations in West Bengal in the age of liberalization and globalization:

West Bengal has been one of the five states in India which has accounted for 50 per cent of the total Indian workforce in the industrial and service sectors in 2006. The other four states are Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. The major industries in West Bengal are leather, jute, engineering, paper

and tea. The other important industries are iron and steel, food processing pharmaceuticals and information technology.

With the advent of liberalization and privatization as a concept of open market economy nasalization of labour and employment of contractual labour has become one of the important features of Indian economy. The Supreme Court has accepted the fixed period employment terms. Earlier it was treated as a retrenchment under the Industrial Dispute Act, 1947, and due compensation had to be paid.

In West Bengal, according to government's report that contract labour has increased considerably. Mainly in the new industrial and service sectors the contract labours are larger in numbers than permanent workforce. The trend of employing contractual labours has also been observed in old establishments also. As a result dispute problems have been shifted to this temporary workforce rather than that of the permanent workers since the latter are much better looked after. Surprisingly both employees and Trade Unions have accepted these new forms of employment. This indicates the character of trade union movements has also changed and has become weaker. Prior to 2000, the trade unions used to react quickly against any measure in relation to working conditions of the workers. But at present management has become more powerful and unquestionable.³⁹

3.5.10. Changing attitude of the workers and unions:-

In the era of new economic policy which is driven by liberalization and privatization has reduced the government interference and control over the employers and employee. The characters of relations labour movement have lost its aggressiveness in one hand and the employers have placed themselves in a dominant position. In this period the following observations have been found in West Bengal.

(a) The industrial disputes have been on declining trend in general because employers and employees find it mutually beneficial to presence harmony and avoid conflict.

(b) The organizations are now considerably able to find bipartite solutions for those disputes which are cropping up. The demand of the situation has probably forced the workers and the management to think it is better to resolve disputes amicably and jointly to avoid loss of wage and production. The trade union movement has also become weaker as the workers themselves prefer to protect their jobs rather than fresh industrial closure. The declining trends in the numbers of strikes support this view of the workers.⁴⁰

The trend of management labour relations can be stated by the Table No. 3.10.

Table 3.10

Number of strikes, lockouts, persons involved and man days lost in West Bengal (1996-2006).

Year	Strike			Lockouts			All work stoppage		
	No. of cases	Men involved ('000)	Man-days lost(million)	No. of cases	Men involved ('000)	Man days lost (million)	No. of cases	Men involved ('000)	Man-days lost (million)
1995	33	234.4	.13	136	74.4	5.3	169	308.5	6.5
1996	17	23.6	1.7	144	104.6	10.5	161	128.2	12.1
1997	29	8.3	0.6	161	89.2	7.6	190	97.6	8.3
1998	25	2.8	0.2	213	105.0	11.4	238	107.7	11.6
1999	34	230.3	3.9	264	42.7	17.8	298	473.0	21.7
2000	27	204.5	3.1	286	167.4	16.1	313	371.9	19.2
2001	20	20.5	1.4	305	129.4	19.8	325	149.9	21.3
2001	30	82.1	1.2	346	148.7	20.7	376	230.7	21.9

2003	32	458.9	1.6	399	176.1	25.6	432	635.0	07.1
2004	20	205.5	1.7	354	177.8	24.4	374	383.3	26.0
2005	26	210.5	3.1	357	133.7	22.3	383	344.2	25.4
2006	24	201.9	0.6	352	115.1	20.7	376	316.9	21.4

Source: Presented by Ratna Sen – Evolution of Industrial Relations in West Bengal (P. 56).

Table No. 3.11 gives a comparison between the number of strikes and lockouts between five major industries of West Bengal between the period 1995 and 2006. It is found number of lockouts is well ahead of number of strikes held during that span. For example, in tea industry 200 lockouts were held against 8 strikes only during that period, and in cotton textile industry only one strike was observed when the total number of lockouts was 176. This trend indicates workers' movement has become weaker and the employers have become more powerful. This information also state that labour relations are directed according to the policies framed by the management in the age of liberalized economy.

Table No. 3.11

Number of strikes and lockouts in the five traditional industries in West Bengal during 1995-2006.

Industry	Strike	Lockouts
Tea	8	202
Jute	51	233
Engineering (major)	9	259
Engineering (minor)	66	830
Cotton Textiles	1	176
Total (for five industries)	135	1700
Total for all industries	317	3317
Percentage of five traditional industries to all industries	43	51

Source: Labour of West Bengal (Published by West Bengal Government, 2006,P.60).

3.5.11. Observations of the National Labour Commission.

The relations scenario has undergone a sea change after the advent of globalization. It is observed there has been a shift away from the adversarial to co-operative relationship between the trade unions and employers. As a result the number of strikes, lockouts, dharna, gherao, and pen-down, go-slow tactics, etc. the weapons which are generally used by the Workers' Organization or Trade Unions have been reduced considerably in numbers.

The Second National Labour Commission, 2002 observed the followings in respect of industrial relations.

- i. It is found that during the age of globalization Trade Unions do not like to normally to call for a strike, because there is a fear that a strike may lead to the closure of the unit.
- ii. There is an increasing trend that major industrial disputes are going to be solved through negotiations at bi-partite level. Interestingly the character and nature of demands have been changing. Presently, instead of demanding higher wages or better facilities, Trade Unions are now interested to ensure job security and some are even willing to accept wage cuts or wage freezes against job protection.
- iii. In the present age government grants permission for closure or retrenchment more easily, so, the attitude of government, particularly the Central Government towards workers and employees seems to undergone a change.
- iv. Conciliation machinery at present favour the employers to consider the problems like increase in productivity, reduction of production cost problems of competition in domestic and international sector, market fluctuations etc.
- v. Industrial Relations Machinery is not serious enough and active to pursue the recovery proceedings of huge amount of dues of workers from the employers.

- .vi. Service sector workers or employees feel they are outsiders and become less interested about Trade Union Movement.⁴¹.

It can be concluded that the industrial relation scenario has been witnessed a sea change in the days of globalization and liberalization in comparison to the days of 60's, 70's and 80's. Due to less control of the government in the field of economy the trade union movements have become weaker and the employers have become more powerful. As a result number of strikes has been showing a declining trend and closures and lock-outs have been showing an upward trend. This situation has also affected in the industrial relations of tea industry of India as well as in the tea Industry of Dooars and Terai which has been discussed in the next chapter.

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