

CHAPTER - I

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1.1 Evolution of Tea Industry

The Worldwide popular beverage tea is prepared from leafs and leaf –buds of tea bush which is known as *Camellia Sinensis*. It is authenticated from the various ancient writings that the origin of tea bush was rooted in China and the introduction of tea as a beverage credited to Chinese Emperor Shennong in or around 2737 B.C. The word ‘tea’ came from a Chinese ideogram pronounced ‘tay’ and with the evolution of time it changed to its present form in English with that pronunciation in 18th century. The other pronunciation for tea is ‘Cha’ used by the Cantonese dialect spoken by the people of the ports area of Guangzhu, Hongkong as well as in the Chinese dialect which travelled from China to Japan, Russian and Georgian subtropics, Iran, Middle East and India¹.

1.2 History of Development of Tea as a palatable drink:-

Tea as a beverage started to gain popularity in China between the period 6th and 8th century. In the 9th century tea cultivation had spread from China to Japan where tea drinking became the subject of an elaborate ritual known as the Tea Ceremony that greatly influenced the Japanese life and culture.

At the end of the 16th century the Dutch imported tea in Europe from China and Japan and in the 17th century tea became a fashionable drink in Portugal. By the middle of the 18th century it became the principal beverage of all section of people in different parts of the world².

Tea was also re-exported from Europe to America and by the mid-18th century tea became one of the most popular drinks in the American colonies. It became so important beverage to the Americans that the Anglo-American war on tea trade deserved special attention. As a protest against the Tea Act, 1773, with the help of which the British imposed tax on tea to perpetuate their monopoly on tea trade, the

Americans Organized the Boston Tea Party and sack upon sack of English tea was thrown in to the sea that led to the American War of Independence which facilitated freedom to the Americans.³

In this way tea cultivation which originated in China more than 3000 years ago had spread widely over the world. The British realized the prospect of trade and commerce in tea. In the 19th century tea was introduced in India and Srilanka by the British and in Indonesia by the Dutch. Commercial production in Africa started in former British colonies, such as in Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi well in the 20th century.

1.3 History and Development of Tea Industry in India:-

The British East India Company which was established in 1600 imported tea in England most probably from Holland in the year 1664. The company had a harmonious trading relation with China and as per trade agreement tea was imported from China to England. During that period China was the only exporter of tea. But this trade relation did not continue for long period and in 1883, the East Indian Company had lost its legal monopoly of tea trade between China and Britain, which led the British to search alternative sources of supply of tea. As a result the door of a new plantation economy opened before India in the year 1834.⁴

History says China was the then major exporter of tea in the world. Sir Joseph Banks took some positive steps in the year 1788 towards tea cultivation in the area of Bihar and Cooch Behar found it suitable for tea plantations.

In 1823, Major Robert Bruce discovered some indigenous tea plants growing near Rangpur in Assam.

Maniram Dutta Barua, Minister to the last King of Assam and a freedom fighter, is recognized to be the first tea planter in India. Afterwards he was hanged to death mischievously by the British administration on false ground.

The growth and development of tea industry in India has a long history. The discovery of indigenous tea in Assam in 1823 led to the origins of the tea industry in India. In that year Major Robert Bruce discovered some indigenous tea plants in Assam. Subsequently Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General took effective steps to explore the possibility of cultivating tea plants in India by appointing

a tea committee in 1834 and the committee sent reports stating the tea plants found in Suddiya and Beesa was indigenous in upper Assam.⁵

However, the Calcutta Agricultural Society differed from the above opinion. The society demanded, in the early 1700s, the ships of the East India Company used to bring the tea plants in India by way of curiosity, and one Colonel. Kyd, a resident of Calcutta and an eminent botanist found tea plants growing in his garden in 1780. In 1782 this garden was handed over to Botanical Garden of Calcutta. In 1788, Sir Joseph Bank recorded the existence of wild tea growing in Cooch Behar and Rangpur (Now in Bangladesh) districts of Bengal and suggested the cultivation of this plant. In this process the wild teas of Cooch Behar confirmed the first discovery of indigenous tea in India.⁶

The Tea Industry in India is about 175 year old. It occupies an important place and plays a very useful role for the development of national economy. The East India Company initiated the task of establishing tea gardens in the state of Assam, the first tea producing state of India in the first half of 1830s. Thereafter, the British Government realizing the great economical prospect of tea adopted it as a priority area for development. As a result of which tea gardens flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century, mostly in Assam and West Bengal and later spread to Southern India.

Tea Industry is considered as one of the prime organized manufacturing sectors in India and because of its labour intensive character it has created huge employment opportunities in India and has retained its position as the single largest employer in this sector.⁷

1.4 Organizational Structure and Form of Ownership:-

Unlike most other tea producing and exporting countries, India has dual manufacturing base. India produces both Orthodox and C.T.C. (crust, torn, curl) teas in addition to green tea. Cultivation of tea may be described as being essentially a monocultural farming operation and the tea industry represents a particular mode of commercial organization for large scale cultivation of tea. This organizational structure was borrowed from the nineteenth century sugar and cotton plantation in the new world. With the passage of time the tea industry of India, mainly the tea industry of

Assam and West Bengal witnessed a series of organizational changes in respect of production function..

Initially, the principal form of ownership was proprietary and this type of form continued till the early 1880s. From the 1880s onwards, the proprietary form of ownership started to change and partnership firms and public limited companies began to emerge. This resulted better inflow of finance and eventually professional management activities in the tea and other plantation economy started to induct. After then another institution called “managing agency” started to take active part to provide various services to the plantation enterprises. When the British Companies extended tea cultivation at the end of the nineteenth century, this managing agencies expanded their activities, such as budgetary control, cultivation, manufacturing advice, exchange control and staff recruitment at the higher levels. The addition of agency house capital with the managerial expertise laid the foundation of corporate sector in the Indian tea industry.

In the earlier stage of twentieth the Indian tea industry had some specific character. Such as, most of the tea estate were owned and managed by the Big British Companies and necessary capital was supplied by the British Banks and agency houses. Another important act was British companies controlled international trade of tea and the roles of producer, banker, shipper, broker and distributor were chained through vertical integration of production and distribution. Through this mechanism an effective centralized controlled system developed by a small group of persons who use to manage a number of companies, each of which was a legally separate entity.

1.5 Indian Independence --- An Overall Change in the Tea Industry:

By the end 1950s and early 1960s onwards the ownership of tea estates witnessed large-scale changes. Many British owners started to sell their share of holdings and found alternative place mainly in East Africa. One o the prime reasons for this was declining trend of profitability. As a result during the period 1957-58, a large number of tea estates came under the control of Indian management.

After independence, tea workers were granted trade union rights and trade union movement started to change the atmosphere of the tea gardens and the British owners could not cope with the new situation.

After independence the Indian Government took some effective steps to restrain the outflow of capital from the tea industry. Managing agency system was abolished in 1970 and higher rate of taxation was imposed to the British controlled companies, in the form of agricultural income tax. The erstwhile British Tea Companies reacted in two ways. First, they migrated to Kenya after disinvesting in India and secondly, some of them liked to re-organize themselves by collaborating with Indian capital. The process became more visible after introduction of the Foreign Exchange Regulation Act (FERA) in 1973.

1.6 High Manager-turnover ---- Poor Management Quality:-

The change of ownership from the British planters to the Indians who had the merchant background developed poor management quality in the tea plantation sector. The tea estates experienced high turnover of managers during the decades after 1970. The managers of the tea estates could not pay proper attention to run the gardens more effectively due to fear of unstable tenure of their service. Another major demerit was found that is control of management from a distance by the Indian directors. This unwise practice made the local managers unable to take proper decisions regarding many important matters like re-investment and re-plantation measures and gradually this profitable plantation sector started to become weaker.

1.7 Emergence of Indian Corporate Houses:-

British companies had earned huge quantum of profits from the tea estates and the lion's share of such profits were remitted abroad in the form of dividend. So they were not interested to increase internal resources of the tea gardens. Naturally this attitude of the British forced the tea estates to be dependent on external finance. Over the years this continuous dependence on external finance has increased the interest burden extremely high and has made the tea gardens financially weak leading towards unhealthy industrial relations in the tea industry.

At this point of time several Indian Corporate Houses got entry in the tea sector through diversification policy. For example, Tata Tea Company consideration trend started to become popular gradually during the period 1975-1990. This trend got strengthened following the liberalization of Indian economy in the year 1991. However, as per the nature of the corporate sectors a large share of profits is drawn or

financing of corporate mergers and acquisitions and for payment of dividend. As a result the easy availability of finance for production operations in plantation sectors has been correspondingly reduced.⁸

1.8 Importance to Economy:-

The tea industry has a very prominent place in the Indian Economy. From multimillionaire to the poorest Indian people drink this beverage everyday and gain satisfaction. Almost 85 per cent of total households in India buy tea, which makes India the largest consumer of tea in the world.

It is the second largest provider of employment after Indian Railway by employing more than one million people directly and 2 million people indirectly of which more or less 50 per cent are women.

The tea industry, to a great extent, influences the economics of the regions where the tea gardens are established. For instance, the state of Assam is the largest tea producing zone of India and the part of West Bengal known as North Bengal.

Production and Export:-

India is the second largest producer of tea in the world followed by China (produce more or less 25 per cent of the world production) and occupies fourth place in terms of exporter (13 per cent of the world export, in 2007). Further, the best quality of tea of the world, known as 'Darjeeling Tea' is produced in India only and is in great demand across the world.

The prices subjective to agro climatic conditions:-

Tea price cycles have no linkage with the general economic cycle. Like other commodities but with agro-climatic conditions. According to a study made by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on 27 agricultural commodities tea showed the second lowest variability in prices.⁹

1.9 Characteristics of Indian Tea Industry:-

Presently tea is grown in 13 Indian states. Out of these, four are recognized as the prime tea producing states, such as Assam, West Bengal which are situated in the

northern part of India and Tamil Nadu and Kerala are situated in southern part. Though the major part of production of tea comes from organized tea estates, the small tea growers are also performing important role increasing the share of production over the years. In recent years many small farmers of Assam, West Bengal and Bihar have increased the total production of tea switching over from general agriculture stream to tea production.

Sensitivity of Industry to Government Policies:-

The tea industry of India is highly regulated. Government issues license to the exporters and importers of tea for the benefit of the industry.

While The Tea Act, 1953 controls production and distribution functions, the Tea (Marketing) Control Order, 2003 regulates the selling of tea through the process of auction selling system.

Tea industry is also burdened by Central Cess, States Sales Tax and Agricultural Income Tax. The residual income after paying corporate tax is taxed again. This tax is levied on profits accruing to gardens located in respective states.

The Government of India has permitted 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in tea industry subject to compulsory divestment of 26% equity of the company in favour of an Indian partner/Indian public within 5 years from the date of investment.

Organized Business Tycoon Dominate the Tea Sector:-

Multinationals and big business houses control and dominate the Indian tea sectors such as Hindustan Lever, Tata & Tattly etc. Export as well as the domestic market is being controlled by these big players. Tea cultivation poses a significant barrier in terms of rules and regulations, scarcity of suitable cultivable land area, requirement of large investment. While marketing activities are relatively low entry barrier areas. It is therefore not surprising at all that the tea cultivation is dominated by the organized corporate sector while tea retailing has been attracted a host of local players.

Concerned Area:-

Tea Industry of India has tremendous importance in respect of growth and development of Indian economy. In one hand it employs large number of workforce

directly and indirectly, on the other side of earns considerable amount o foreign money by exporting nearly 200 million Kg. of tea every year.

But there have been a number of constraints for its further growth and development on the basis of which the industrial relations are also influenced.

These can be presented as follows:

1. One of the major constraints facing the Indian Tea Industry is the old age of tea bushes. At least 30% of the tea plantation area being above the economic threshold age limit and this has direct effect on production, productivity, quality of tea and profitability. In addition the slower pace of re-plantation which is less than 0.5% as against the desired level of 2% and the consistent all in tea prices, mainly during the period 2000 to 2005 (Tea Auction Price, Tea statistics, 2005-06) has adversely affected the investment in the tea plantations.
2. Stiff competition from the other tea producing countries in the export market, such as from, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and China has pushed the Indian tea exporters in the back seat. Mainly after the collapse of Russian market the Indian tea industry received a serious set-back in the export market.
3. Presently the demand for orthodox quality of tea has been increasing world wide due to change in customer taste. For example lower off take by Russia due to change in consumer preferences. Lower production of orthodox tea in India has made a barrier for expanding export market.
4. In the age of liberalized economy there has been mushroom growth of small tea sectors and Bought Leaf Factories (BLFs). But these factories produce cheap quality of tea by buying and processing green leaf from small tea growers and thus hamper the Indian credential.¹⁰

1.10. Objectives of the Present Study:

In view of the importance of the Tea Industry of Dooars and Terai region in the economy of North Bengal as well as in the national economy, its sustained development is imperative for the country. The objectives of the study are -----

- (a) To analyze the effect of globalization and liberalization on the industrial relations of tea garden of West Bengal, particularly in Dooars and Terai regions, and

- (b) To suggest remedial measures for the improvement of industrial relation in tea plantation industry.

West Bengal is the second largest tea producing state in India after Assam. There are nearly 343 tea estates situated in different parts of Dooars, Terai and Darjeeling hill area along with a large number of small tea gardens spread in Cooch Behar and West Dinajpur districts. Dooars is the prime tea producing zone of West Bengal where famous quality of CTC (Crush, Teas and Curl) tea is produced by around 163 tea estates.

The area of the study ranges over the Terai region of Darjeeling district and Dooars region of Jalpaiguri district. The study will seek to address the problem of deteriorating industrial relation in West Bengal tea industry in a broader perspective.

We will first evaluate the impact of globalization and liberalization on the market-ability and profitability of this plantation industry and then their adverse effects on industrial relation in the study area. We will also study whether there exist any direct impact of globalization and liberalization on the industrial relation in this plantation.

1.11. Research Questions:-

The present study will seek to answer the following questions:-

1. What is the effect of globalization and liberalization on price of tea produced in the study area?
2. What are the effects of globalization and liberalization on the cost of tea production?
3. What are the impacts of globalization and liberalization on the export of tea?
4. What are the impact of globalization and liberalization on import of tea in India?

What are the impacts of the trends in tea price on the wage structure and the cost of production?

1.12. Review of Existing Literature in the Field:-

In studying the problem of industrial relation in the tea industry of Dooars and Terai of West Bengal, we have come across a few studies in respect of this industry.

There have been several studies on various aspects of tea industry. These are mainly on financial management and geographical aspects of tea industry. A few studies partially dealt with labour relations. We present below a brief review of some of these studies in order to identify some of the distinguishing features of the present study.

Dr. Sharit Bhowmik made a study on "Class Formation in; the Plantation System in 1981, where he attempted to investigate into different aspects of class formation among tribal workers engaged in Dooars tea gardens of West Bengal. The study reflected how class consciousness emerged among tea garden workers. Since the study was based on sociological theories, less focus was given to the aspects of industrial relations and greater effort was made to show how social relations of tribal workers changed with the change in organization of production.¹¹

The study on "Economics of Tea Industry in India" by R.C. Awasthi in 1975 was a comprehensive study on the problems of tea industry. Along with the subject matters like finance-supplies, transport, marketing etc., the study had also gone through issues relating to labourers. The study partially dealt with the labour relations. Important indices of industrial relations, such as industrial disputes, role of governments and unions had not however, been taken up significantly in his study. Moreover the entire study was based on the tea gardens of Assam.¹²

"The History of Indian Tea Industry" conducted by Sir Percival Griffiths in 1967 was a complete study on the historical growth of Indian Tea Industry, while describing the evolution passage of the growth of tea industry in India. The study also described the origin of plantation labourers, recruitment system and the state of planters' oppression on which the workers had to undergo during the pre-independence period. The study had not separately discussed the labour relations in tea plantations.¹³

The study on "Tea Gardens of West Bengal" conducted by Tushar Kanti Ghosh in 1987 was related on the land management policies of tea gardens. The study covered the history of tea industry in West Bengal, land management policies, rules, regulations etc. This study established a co-relation between the problems of sick and closed gardens with improper land management policies.¹⁴

The study in relation of Productivity Improvement and Labour Relations in the tea industry in South Asia" in 1996 by B. Sivaram highlighted the important role of production of tea in India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in terms of employment and

foreign exchange earning giving more emphasis on various aspects of productivity in tea industry.¹⁵

In an article named “Low Productivity of Resources in West Bengal Tea Plantations – Causes and Curse,, Chai-Ki-bat” written by S. R., Mishra where he analyzed the extent of efficient use available resources with labour input, expenditure on materials inputs and expenditure on fixed capital in maximizing production of tea in tea plantation areas in North Bengal with reference to only eight estates (out o nearly 300 estates) relating to a single year (1981) in the Terai, Dooars and Darjeeling tea growing areas. On the basis of this analysis Dr. Mishra observed that there exists a scope to divert investment from excessive use of human labour to intermediate material input and capital. He also mentioned the old age tea bushes as one of the causes of low productivity in West Bengal without examining the nature and extent of its impact on productivity.¹⁶

Neelanjana Mitra in her book on “Indian Tea Industry” has made an attempt to explain the trend in production domestic consumption, exports and prices of India tea in both domestic and international markets covering the period of 1960 to 1980. Her observation was that the growth of Indian tea production appeared to be sluggish particularly in comparison to steady rise in the domestic consumption of India tea. According to her the behavior of production apparently suggests the insensitivity of the supply of Indian tea to changes in demand condition. She has explained the aggregate supply response of Indian tea in terms of the factors that are likely to govern producers’ decision in the short and long run. The empirical results obtained by her study suggests that so far as decisions about yield rate are concerned, short run profitability which is measured by unit price deflated by unit price cost fails to provide a satisfactory explanation of the observed variation in the yield rates.¹⁷

In an article “Industrial Relation in Tea Plantations: The Dooars Scene” written in 1984 Prasanneswari highlighted the factors of affecting the industrial relations in tea plantations of Dooars region. In that article it has explained the how the attitude of the management affects the relation between the employer and the worker. The article has also clearly discussed the various provisions in respect of labour welfare as per

Plantation Labour Act, 1951, and its implementation in the tea plantation industry. The article discussed covering the areas of daily wage rate, bonus issue, employment opportunities and the role of trade union, all the important actors for maintaining healthy industrial relations in the tea industry.¹⁸

Three articles written by Dr. Manas Das Gupta in the year 1988 on the Trade Union Movement in tea plantation of Terai Region is of course a pioneer in this field. It had however, some limitations also. It described well the back ground of Terai Tea Plantations, plantation economy and the wages of labourers, but the nature of industrial relations prevailing at that time was not adequately described.¹⁹

The thesis of Dr. Mita Bhadra on "Life and Labour of Plantation Women Workers" in 1992 had provided focus on the women workers of tea plantations. It was a sociological study on women which dealt with the life of women workers in a tea plantation of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. It reflected changes in the status and role of women employed in the tea industry.²⁰

The thesis of Dr. Sukhendu Narayan Saha on "Industrial Relation in Tea Plantation : A Case Study of Terai Tea Gardens since Independence" in 1999 highlighted the conditions of industrial relations stating the causes which has great impact on industrial relation and the role of trade union movement in respect of that in tea plantations of Terai region only. The study did present statistical information about the trends of industrial conflicts (strikes and lock-outs) till the year 1990. So, the study did not throw any light about the situation of industrial relations in tea plantations of West Bengal in the age of globalization.²¹

A study conducted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in the year 2005 had tried to analyze the impact of globalization on the overall tea prices in India. According to this report the large tea companies have been benefited maximum from the fall in tea auction prices. These barons of tea companies enjoy tremendous power to control the price of tea in the auction market and by doing so take the advantage of depressed markets.²²

So, there had been a very little effort to study in depth the labour relations in the tea gardens of West Bengal. The existing research works on the labourers of tea industry had been made by the scholars of Sociology and Social Anthropology. Naturally they had given much emphasis on the changing social relations of workers

than industrial relations. So, it is expected that this study will be able to throw some lights on that area which remains under explored.

1.13. Methodology:-

The present study has been designed with the help of primary data collected from the sampled tea gardens accompanied with selected questionnaires and through structured interviews and secondary data collected from different sources such as – Tea Journals, Articles, Dooars Branch of Indian Tea Association (DBITA), Indian Tea Association (Birpara), Indian Tea Planters Association (ITPA), Jalpaiguri, Terai branch of Indian Tea Association (TBITA), Bengbubi, TIPPA, Matigara, State Labour Institute, Dagapur, (Siliguri) various publication of Tea board of India, various statistical publication along with various reports published by the Department of Labour, Govt. of West Bengal, Report on Tea by NABARD, Magazines, and Newspapers etc.

1.13.1. Design of Study:-

We have used Random Sampling Technique to select the tea gardens for our study. The study was conducted to two districts of West Bengal, i.e. Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri. Dooars region is situated in Jalpaiguri district whereas Terai region is established in the plains of Darjeeling district. The present study is an investigation to find out the impact of globalization in the Tea industries of Dooars and Terai. We have collected appropriate number of tea gardens from these two regions applying simple random sampling method without replacement from this two tea producing region. In respect of Dooars region sampling was done selecting the tea estates situated in western Dooars, Central Dooars, and Eastern Dooars.

Adequate care was also taken to ensure that the sample includes all kinds of tea estates, i.e. large (above 250 ha.), medium (100-250 ha), and small (below 100 ha) with ownership pattern such as Proprietorship, Partnership, Private Ltd., Public Ltd., etc. On the whole 30 tea gardens have been selected for our study. Out of which 20 gardens are situated in Dooars and 10 gardens are situated in Terai region.

For the completion of the research work successfully we have adopted the following steps:

- 1) The main objective of our study is to examine the impact of globalization on the industrial relation of tea industry of West Bengal with special reference of Terai and Dooars. For this purpose we have considered the following parameters relating to industrial relation:
 - a) Wages and Bonus paid to workers.
 - b) Social costs incurred by the management of tea gardens
 - c) Amount of Provident Fund dues
 - d) Amount of capital invested for up-gradation of technology
 - e) Promotional opportunities to higher posts
 - f) Man days lost due to strike
 - g) Man days lost due to lock-out
 - h) Man days lost due to gate meeting
 - i) Number of Strikes held in the tea gardens
 - j) Number of Lock-Outs occurred

- 2) We will perform necessary statistical tests to find out the significance of these industrial parameters in the period of globalization.

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