

General Observation Discussion and Conclusion

I

In the forgoing chapters I have analysed the situation of girl child in adibasi plantation society. Before drawing any conclusion it is necessary to reiterate some of the main points of this study. The objective of the study is to see the social structure and social institutions of adibasi plantation society, the value of children among them with special emphasis on girl child; the attitude of this adibasi society as well as the parents towards the girl child since birth; their health, nutrition, education and employment status, religious participations, game, sports and leisure, socialization process and so on. Emphasis is given to probe into the distinctive feature of discrimination against the girl child, girl child labour and girl child abuse; the impact of this discrimination and abuse on the girl child. The measures taken by the Government of India, for the all round development of the girl child has been discussed with the emphasis on examining howfar these measures are implemented in the adibasi plantation society; Finally I have tried to find out the changes that have come to the life of the present day adibasi girl child.

United Nation Convention define 'child' as the human being below the age group of 18 years. The girl child is the child of female sex. Due to certain environmental and cultural reasons girls attain puberty much before 18 years and very often loss child hood due to early marriage and pregnancy. So in many legislation the identifying age of a girl child is kept at or below 14 years. Early childhood is a vital period of one's life and development but the girls since this time become the victims of gender discrimination, the most all pervading forms of institutionalised discrimination deep-rooted in our culture mainly because of some socio-cultural, historical, religious and economic factors. The patriarchal dominance lead to son preference on the other hand encourage the discrimination of female child from her birth and make her 'a lesser child', and a 'prisoner of her gender'. 'Gender' is the socio-culturally determined identity of male and female differ from 'sex' which is only a physical and biological distinction. There are three view points to explain the universal tendencies of gender biasness namely Marxist, Cultural and Feminist. One quarter of Indian population approximately comprises girls upto the age of

19 years. The total number of the population (of girls) are 190.8 million (1997-Year book). The child sex ratio shows at every stage of childhood the boys outnumbered the girls which also increases with ages. Female foeticide, infanticide and death of girl child due to negligence is prevalent all over the country. Girls are less nourished, given food with lesser calories and getting health care when their condition gets worse. Age specific death rate is high among them. Marriage of girls in an early age is another bad thing which may create child widow, weak child, sick mother and even the death of physically immatured mother. Education status of Indian girls are very low and enrolment in school especially in secondary and higher secondary level is very low specially among the rural areas. The girls are withdrawn from school to work in the households and also outside as wage earner. The socialization of girl child from her very childhood is done in such a manner with so pronounced discrimination that she grows up as a lesser child with a great degree of submission, low self confidence and low self esteem. Child abuse, especially the abuse of girl child is a common phenomena now a days despite of the several laws enacted to prevent them from abuse. Any kind of abuse, may be physical, sexual, psychological, violates the right of the victim's healthy and integrated development which is harmful for her and for the society too. Government of India have initiated several plans and programmes for the overall development of the status of the girl child though their actual condition has been changed very little. The Status of tribal girl child is quite better than that of their non tribal counterpart. She does not see gloom face at the time of birth but discrimination occurs since she becomes her mother's helper at home. Her health and nutritional status and educational status is very low since her childhood she has to work outside as bread earner. The system of 'bride price' indicate her superior status in their society to some extent.

Tea is one of the oldest, cheapest and the most popular beverage in India originally came from China and developed as an organised industry under the patronage of the British rulers who accidentally found some wild tea plants growing ⁱⁿ the Assam hills in early 1820-23. Tea is made from the young leaves and unopen buds of the tea plant 'camellia sinesis' in wet (45" per annum) and warm climate and need a huge and settled labour force. Factories are necessary for the tea gardens attached to it because the green leaves plucked should be processed within 24 hours or ^{it} decays. Legally 'Plantation' means any land used for growing tea, coffee, rubber or cincona

which covers an area of 25 acres or more and on which 30 persons are employed or employed on any day of the proceeding 12 months. Experimental tea cultivation in India was under taken by the then British Government in 1834 with the help of Chinese artisans and tea maker by some crude processes. Tea seeds were sent to the hilly areas with some possibility and several committees were appointed to survey the possibility of successful tea cultivation which found the hills of Assam as the most satisfactory one. The development of tea plantation sector in India took place with the development of global economy improvement in the means of transport and communication that widen the scope of international trade. This industry in the initial stage have faced several crisis of investment, scarcity of labour and so on which could have been overcome through time and inventions. Tea plantation in Assam was started under the government patronage but by 1839 a private enterprise, Assam Tea Company enter into this business. Production increased gradually with the increase in the acerage under tea plantation. At present Assam is the largest producer of tea in India. Beside Assam, Tripura of North East also produces some amount of tea with a ineligibile percentage added by Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Monipur of the Northern States small amount of tea is produced by Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa. Tea plantation of southern state was initially unsuccessful but later tea in the elevated area of Malaber coast and Nilgiri flourished quite rapidly. The Tea Board Statistics show in 1995 land area under tea in Assam was 234580 hectares with the yearly production of 399133 kgs. In other Northern and North eastern states it was 345788 hectares of land under tea with the yearly production of 567976 hectares. In southern states of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka the land under tea was 76125 hectares in 1995 with the production of 185949 kgs. per year (J. Thomas 1996). West Bengal is the second largest tea producer in India. The appearance of West Bengal in the tea plantation map of the country is quite late. The first tea estate in West Bengal was started in 1866. In this state tea plantation is located mainly in the bills and foot hills (Terai) of Darjeeling district and Doars of Jalpaiguri District. Since 1856-57 Tea Industry in Darjeeling took off in commercial basis. Before this it was existed here in experimental forms. The industry flourished in this district very rapidly between 1866-1874. Tea plantation in Terai region started in 1862. In Dooars of Jalpaiguri Tea Industry took commercial shape in 1874-75. Its growth was very rapid in the 1880's. Tea Industry in North Bengal experienced several

ups and downs with the march of time. At present according to Tea Board Statistics 1992-93 the number of Tea Estates in Darjeeling District is 147 of which 82 is in 'Terai', 'Doars' of Jalpaiguri can be proud of its 163 tea gardens. In 1995, 13850 hectares of land of Terai was under tea with the yearly production of 25594 kgs. In Darjeeling hills the land was 19100 hectares with the yearly production of 10403 kgs. In Doars 100650 hectares of land was under tea with the yearly production of 124308 kgs.

As the tea industry in North Bengal flourished since 1860's onward a huge labour force was needed to carry out the operation of this labour intensive industry at its different levels. The then scanty and disperse population of North Bengal failed to meet the demand of enormous supply of cheap labour. As a result and also as a part of colonial rule semi aboriginal people were imported from outside the state to serve the industry. These people were from different tribal groups viz. Oraon, Munda, Santal, Bhumij, Kheria, Lohar, Asur, Turi, Barik etc. of Chotonagpur plateau of Bihar and its adjoining region of Madhyapradesh and Orissa. Traditionally these people were of agricultural or atrisan background. They came in the fold of the strict three tyre bureaucratic structure of tea industry. Initially the immigrant labourers were recruited by 'Arakati' or 'Sardari' system though the agents who draw them from their natal place by advance paying. With the expansion of tea industry in North Bengal by 1959 the recruitment from outside the state were stopped by act. By this time the planters could recruited labourers directly from the previous ones who immigrated with family and settled down in and around the plantation creating a surplus condition. In plantation the daily wage labourers perform all types of manual works in field and factory. Depending on sex generally light work is given to women^{and} children. In West Bengal they have to work in between 37 to 47 hours in a week. The tea garden labourers are given wage (Hazira) according to the task (Thika) given to them fora time period. In 1994-95 the daily wage of the adult workers were Rs. 21.80 in the big gardens (500 hec) of Doars and Rs. 17.87 (500hec) Terai and hills of Darjeeling while the children gets Rs. 11.02. Besides wage they enjoy some other job facilities like free quarter, fire wood, ration, medical facility education facility for the children etc. The immigrant tribal labourer groups externally forms a more or less homogeneous group termed by the local folk as 'Modesia'(i.e. native people) by which the adibasi people initially referred to their tribes men before the local folk who started calling the whole group by this name. Internally the Modesias are highly differentiated with

their distinct socio-cultural traits, language, religion and customs. They may have some similarities due to their same place of origin and same traditional occupation yet the great similarity they have is the illiteracy, ignorance and dire poverty which make them backward socially and culturally in every aspects of their life. The structure of the multi-ethnic plantation society is very complex and unique where different ethnic groups has daily, friendly and face to face interaction being engage in same economic activity. Here several social process are in operation, several groups and subgroups are formed through the process of assimilation, amalgamation, as well, based on religion, traditional occupation, place of origin and so on. The different ethnic groups arrange themselves in caste like hierarchy on this basis and their commercial relation follow this hierarchy, though not so rigidly in today except in community participation. In plantation the adibasi labourers live in 'Bastee' i.e. the labour settlements allotted by the management, communicate in 'Sandri' i.e. broken Hindi mixed with Bengali and mostly are 'Saosar', animist, by religion. Their family get nuclearised with the authority resting upon the earning male member of the working couple. Their kinship obligation in homeland get staking and new relationship grew up within plantation with increasing local as well inter ethnic marriage. Marriage, commonly endogamous, appears more a social contact based on individual choice than social sacrament. Law and order of this society rests upon the unofficial garden panchayat. Large scale women participation in plantation as wage labourer raise their status in society. Besides plantation work these people also engage in agricultural activities as share cropper in and outside plantation and also in petty business. These people living in the remote gardens of North Bengal are very much unaware of the political scene of the country. At present trade unionism entered among them but these unions are much concern about the issues like increase of wage, bonus etc. Immigration, adoption to new socio-cultural setting, occupation mobility from traditional agriculture to industrial bureaucratic organisation of plantation changes almost all the aspects of life of the Modesia labourers which is of a great sociological importance.

The two gardens studied in Terai and Doars are of two types. Both are old while the Doars garden is the older (1879) bigger (1052.10 hec) well organised, well equipped than that of the Terai garden (1932; 124.46hec) with higher yearly production of 15 lakh kgs. in comparison to 140 thousand kgs. of the Terai garden. Both of these gardens produce CTC type tea. Both

of the gardens have well organised bureaucratic management under which groups of staffs (Bengali and Bihari caste group) work. The third and fourth categories are formed of sub-staffs and labourers from different adibasi groups of Oraon, Munda, Kisan, Sabar, Santhal, Baraik, Turi, Mohali, Dhimol, Lohar, Naik and other tribal groups who are in small number. The Mundas are high in number in Terai garden with Naik, Lohar, Mohali, Oraon are considerable groups. The Oraons are dominant in the Doars garden. Santhal, Sabar, Sonar, Rajwar, Dhimol, Bhumij are seen exclusively in the Doars garden along with the other common groups. At the time of investigation as per official records the number of permanent labourers in Terai garden was 214; male 109, female 119. In Doars garden the number of labourers was 1513; male 876 and female 568. The labourers of multiethnic community live side by side in labour lines scattered in and around the garden. Except the Bihari no such ethnic clusterization is pronounced. The garden authority provides quarter to its permanent labourers which is more developed in the Doars garden. Here all the labourers' quarters are pacca and have electricity and 65 percent of these are twin quarters while in Terai garden 50 percent quarters are pacca. In both of these gardens well are the source of water both drinking and bathing, though in Doars garden tap water is also available. Sanitation and sewage system in both of these gardens are very low. The Terai garden has only a small health centre while the Doars garden has a 25 bedded hospital. Both of these gardens have a medical team each, to help the labourers in problem. In both of these gardens among the adibasis Sandri is the common 'lingua franca' as seen in the other Terai and Doars gardens and they are the followers of 'Saosar' religion mixed with some traits of Hinduism. Besides the Biharis and the Nepalis are Hindu and speak in their respective languages. Both of these gardens are old enough and its labourers are the second or third generation of the earlier immigrants. Most of them are born and brought up in the respective gardens except some women came from neighbouring gardens or basti due to marriage. Marriage is monogamous and endogenous. It is a rule though polygamy and inter tribal marriage is seen in both of the gardens. No legal divorce is reported while either one of a couple may leave the other and the children as he / she wishes. Literacy picture in both of these gardens is very low. In Terai garden only 25.05 percent of the labour population are literate and most of them are child and adolescent population. In the studied part of the Doars garden the percentage is 24.15 percent. Most of the literates are the child at the age group of 7-14 years and the adolescent. More than 60

percent in women of both of the gardens are illiterate. Among the tribals there are the lack of culture of education, seriousness and consciousness of education as well. Besides these poverty sicken people hardly afford their basic necessities Education is a fancy to them. Still among the parents of present generation some, sense of consciousness regarding their ward's education have been arose. The Dooars garden also provide free primary education for the wards of the labourers; the Terai garden has no primary school of its own but the Kadamtala Primary School, adjunct to it, may serve the purpose to some extent. The willing parents sent their wards to this school. So in both of these gardens percentage of literacy among the children and adolescent are comparatively high. Plantation work is done in both of these gardens in two shifts with a weekly holiday which is on Sunday and Tuesday in Doars and Terai garden respectively. The labourers get daily basis payment on the day before weekly holiday. In Terai garden it is 29.15 Rs. and in Doars garden it is Rs. 32.30. At the time of investigation there was 215 permanent labourers in Terai garden of which 53.48 percent was women. Beside the permanent labourers there also live some people in seperate households who get job in the garden in pick season while in the slack season they work outside as jugari, ricksaw puller and so on. But in the Doars garden there is no such household of temporary labourers. The authority take the dependents from the permanent labourer's household in pick season. Child labourer is also present in both the garden though the authority deny their existence. CITU is the prevailing trade union in both of these gardens though the labourers mostly are unaware of their political rights and duties. They attend union meetings and gatherings, give the subscription mechanically and the union generally fight for the short term issues like regular payment of salary and bonus. The adibasi labourers have a cordial relationship with each other and inspite of their ethnic differences behave like single universe. The notion of purity and pollution is not so pronounced in these days, as was in past except community participation. Through regular and intense interaction each group have affected by the customs of others. Local 'haat' i.e. weekly market is the main link of the labourers to the world outside the garden. The status of women is not raised satisfactorily inspite of being bread earner. They enjoy some freedom than their caste counterparts but as their status with their male counterpart is compared it is quite low. They are exploited both in home and working place and is burdened with a lot of works and responsibilities without adequate authority.

Children are equally valuable in all societies and so also in adibasi society, where they are considered as the 'Gift of God'. Tribal society traditionally had no such son preference as experienced in the society of the caste people, neither showed any gloomy face to the new born girls. But in tea gardens living side by side with the caste people the innocent adibasis too have adopted the ugly idea of 'son preference'. Now son to them is considered as 'future helper', he may not take care of them in future still he would live before their eyes; he is considered as the asset of a family; 90 percent of the respondents of both the gardens opine that in an ideal family there must be both boy and girls but almost all of them says a boy child is a must for a family. In the gardens no such pronounced discrimination between the boy girl child exists, except in case of education. Here the girl children are over burdened with household activities while the boys enjoy too much free time. In Matigara tea estate the total number of child are 349 of which 50 percent are girls and in the studied part of Soongachi Tea Estate there are 360 children and the girls constitute 55 percent. 92 percent of the respondents prefer family planning to cope with the 'high price' of essential commodities. The family back ground of these children are very poor. From their parents they have inherited dire poverty, ignorance and illiteracy. The children whose parents both are permanent job holders enjoy a comparatively good condition than the others. In most cases they get a chance to go to school and do not need to go out for earning; those children whose either parent is a permanent labourer their condition is quite better but the condition of the ward of the temporary labourer is worst. They do not even get food regularly. Study is more than a dream to them. Even they have to earn by working within the garden as child labourer or outside. Child rearing is the duty of mothers who do it with the help of the elderly women in family or neighbouring. Mostly women in tea gardens work as labourers and it is hard for them to take proper care of their kids. In Soongachi tea estate there are 12 creches to look after the kids of the working mother upto 2 years. While in Terai tea garden there is no such facility. Here mother generally keep their kids under the care of their elderly siblings, often take them to the garden tying them with cloths on their back. Health picture in both of the garden is not very good. There is lack of consciousness of both personal as well as environmental hygiene. The sanitation system as well as sewage of both the gardens is very low. There is also lack of hygiene training. The children play on mud and dust in bare feet and very often without dress. They suffer from skin diseases. The close

living with domestic animals lead to some contagious diseases to them. Dysentery and diarrhoea is common to them along with iron deficiency, anaemia, worm infection and malnutrition among the children. Both of the gardens have medical facilities which record that the girl children are rarely taken to them than that of the boys. Education status of the tribals are very low; though among the tribal children it is quite high. Of the children at the age group of 7 - 14 years 43.42 percent children of Terai garden is literate while it is higher (51.67 percent) in Doars garden where there are three primary schools within the garden. But this percentage is high only upto primary level (35.16 percent in Terai garden and 37.32 percent in Doars garden). This percentage is very low among the girls (13 percent in Terai; 26 percent in Doars garden) who very soon have to stop their education. The tribals traditionally have no culture of education. They are not at all serious of the education of their ward. Girl's education, to them is meaningless. They think that girls have to rear child, prepare food and pick up leaves; none of these need education. In many families girls stay at home to look after their younger siblings and cattles as well as to do the household works left by their mothers while their brothers enjoy school life. The adibasi girls are over burdened with domestic works from dawn to dusk. Collection of fire wood, cleaning huts, utensils, washing cloths, bringing water, look after the cattles and the younger siblings are their normal duty. Those who are studying go to school after doing these. The unfortunate ones who stay at home very often prepare the lunch of their family when the mothers are at work. Some also work as wage earner in the local construction works as daily labour. Though this situation is absent in Soongachi. But in both of these gardens very small percentage of children (5.32 percent and 12 percent in Doars and Terai garden respectively) work in plantation too. Though light activities are given to them like light digging, cleaning of nursery beds, cleaning the bushes or nullahs, picking up the seeds of shed trees and the stalks etc. But all these rob their childhood from them. The performance of religious rituals are the job of the elderly male members of a tribal family. The younger ones only observe these. The younger girls often show 'deep dhup' to god and goddess; some often fast on Siv Puja. Some worship Tulsi. All these they adopted from their caste neighbours. The respondents report that the tribal girls have very little leisure. They lose their childhood even in their childhood. Leisure is lesser among the girls of working mother. In little leisure these poor children

play indigenous games like chupa-chupi, kunda-kundi, dom-dom, kitkit etc. The comparatively aged one of 12 - 14 years spend much time in gossip. The children of all ethnic groups are friends together. All the elderly people of a locality are called by the name, 'kaka' 'dada', 'mama', 'mamis' 'bhatu'. Child abuse, especially the abuse of the girl child is a common crime in our present society. The adibasi plantation society is not free from it. Female foeticide and infanticide is not reported in either garden. But depriving the girls of minimum health care and nutrition, depriving them of their right of education, over burdening them with household activities and sibling care thus rob their leisure and childhood are some crude forms of abuse too. No incident sexual abuse has been reported in the gardens though the working girls are always become afraid of being scolded by the sardar at their work place due to late and lack of fulfilment of the assignment given. The abuse and discrimination affect the girl child a lot. 70 percent of my respondents report that they have to be boys because being girls they enjoy lesser freedom, respect, care and comfort than that of their brothers. They grow from their childhood with lesser self confidence, self respect and low esteem. The ignorant and innocent adibasi labourers living at the remote part of North Bengal know nothing about the plans and programmes initiated by the Government for the development of their girl child. No such effort is seen to make them aware of the benefit they can get either from the garden authorities or Government agencies or the existing local NGOs. So the girl child among the adibasi plantation labourers are still in total darkness. As far as the comparative study regarding the position of girl child in the two gardens of Terai and Doars is concerned it is more or lessly same. The only difference is that as the Doars garden has three primary schools within its premises here the enrolment of girls upto primary level is comparatively high then that of the Terai garden. The percentage of girls children working in plantation is comparatively low in Doars garden. Here girls need not go out of the garden for work. Here in this garden (Doars garden) there are a number of creches so the burden of sibling care is also less on the elder sisters. Though the other things are almost same in both of these gardens. In Matigara Tea Estate the male child form 49.84 percent of the total child population. It is 43.32 percent in Soongachi Tea Estate. The status of boy child is superior to the girl regarding health and education. The boy child enjoys more health care than the girl and also the more nutritious foods. Of the total literate adibasi children of Matigara Tea Estate (43.42 percent) 29.05 percent is male child. It is 24.82 percent out of 51.67 percent of Soongachi

Tea Estate. They enjoy their childhood without work burden and get a larger share of family affection.

By analysing the case studies of the girl child of the plantation labourers it is obvious that the situation of the girls are not at all good. They are overburdened with work, mainly with the household activities and sibling care. They have to work from dawn to dusk. This is true for those who attend school as well as stayed at home or work to earn money. Generally in this society girls are seen in four situations. The girls, the smaller ones at the age group of 3-6 years just eat, play and sleep without any work or study. Those at the age group of 6-14 years have the tough time. Very lucky few of them studying at school. They are mainly the daughters both of the parents of whom are permanent labourers. Yet they can not take their study fully but have to fulfil certain household duties after which they get a chance to go to school. Their parents too are not conscious of their study and they are under a continuous threat of dropout. In Doars garden the percentage of school goer girls are higher than in the Terai garden. The next category includes the girls mainly at the age group of 12-14 who work to earn money. In the Doars garden these girls work only in the plantation while in Terai garden some of them work outside the garden in neighbouring constructional works. In plantation they work light type of activities at a very low wage (15/- in Terai and 18/- in Doars garden) as casual labourer. The girls, who have no economic participation nor have to attend school, ^{their} condition is awfully miserable. They have to do all types of household activities, to take care of their cattles and siblings in absence of their parents. They do all the thank less jobs. They don't have the honour of the school goer girls neither they have the freedom like the job holders. Another particular thing is noted in both of these gardens is the peculiar grouping among the girls. The working girls group together ^{and} are generally more dashy; enjoy certain freedom. They spend a part of their wage or go outside the garden to see movie or to village market with the girl and boy friends. The school goer girls being the most privileged group enjoy some kind of respect from the elderly women too. These girls try to confine their friendship among themselves. The last group live their life without any pleasure but with burden of duties. In the study it has been seen that the education status of the adibasi girls in very low. Among the cases of twenty there are only four cases of school goer girls. The girls who attend school in most cases have to leave school at the age of 10 to 12 years and become the mother's helper. From the case studies

it is seen that age of the school goer girls are upto 12 years. It is also seen that only the daughters of the permanent labourers get a chance to attend school. Of the three cases of school goer girls from Soongachi Tea Estate all are the daughters of permanent labourers. Of the cases from Matigara Tea Estate there is only one case of school goer girl whose parents are too permanent labourers. Though it is not expected that all the permanent labourers send their girls to school. The case of Rukhmini Mohali is a typical example of this where the girl's parents being permanent labourers of Matigara Tea Estate do not send the girl to school due to prejudices. Another thing is clear from the study that the education among the girls is mostly seen among the adibasi groups with superior status viz. the Oraon, Munda, Naik than that of the Lohar, Mohali, Turi, Baraik, while the economic participation of the girls is seen mostly among the second group. Regarding discrimination against the girls there is no such ethnic differences. It depends mainly on the outlook of the parents, the number of child as well as girl child in the family, the presence of boy child among them, the economic condition of the family and so on. The greater the number of girl child the discrimination is more pronounced. Hankering after son also lead to more intense discrimination. The girls having their own income enjoys much freedom and also some voice in the family. The school goer girls enjoy certain respect but the girls having only the burden of household responsibilities are the worst sufferer. Almost all of them say that they are not satisfied with their life.

II

Traditionally Indian Society idolizes sons who are considered ritually and economically desirable and ensure the continuation of lineage and family name. On the other hand girls are looking upon more of a burden and liability and is likely to be given a meagre share of family affection and resource out of the belief that the investment made on her bring no return instead when she gets married a sizable dowry has to be given to her which is considered to be a draining of family resources. The girl child in poverty stricken rural and tribal households is twice disadvantaged. Children depend entirely upon adults for access to resources which are all denied in relative terms more often than not. The girl child contends with not merely deprivation due to poverty but also discrimination on the basis of gender. Her survival is threatened right from conception. Female foeticide and infanticide continue

to be widely prevalent. Girls are given food of lower caloric value and smaller amounts while the rich foods are reserved for boys. They are also weaned earlier. Girls are severely malnourished as compared to boys. They suffer from iron deficiency, infection more than the boys and receive significantly less response to illness in terms of hospital care and medicines and have higher death rate too. The higher the birth order of the girl child the more likely she is to suffer from all these discriminatory factors. The factors are compounded by greater work burden upon the girl child due to additional domestic responsibilities as well as low waged casual work in unorganised sectors, greater lack of education and awareness and low social status and self esteem.

India is the largest producer, exporter and consumer of substantial amount of CTC and Orthodox tea in the world. Of the Indian States Assam ranks first and famous for its strong liquor tea while the tea of West Bengal, the second ranking state, specially of Darjeeling hills is famous for its flavour. Of North Bengal, the tea producing region of West Bengal, Darjeeling hill can boast of its high quality tea. Tea produced in Doars of Jalpaiguri is larger in quantity though its quality is not as good as Darjeeling hills. Tea gardens of Darjeeling hills and Terai are not as large as the Doars gardens. These are generally in between 200-400 hectares while the gardens of Doars are mostly above 400 hectares. In Doars of Jalpaiguri land under tea in 1995 is 100650 hectares which is 19100 hectares in Darjeeling hills and 13850 hectares in Terai. The production is higher in Doars being 124308 kgs. in 1995 as against 10403 kgs. in Darjeeling hills and 24494 kgs. in Terai. Though yield per hectare is almost same in Terai and Doars. It is 1948 and 1935 kgs. respectively and in Darjeeling hills it is only 545kgs. Plucking season is same in both of Terai and Doars which begins with early rain in May and ends in late November or early December while highest yield is during the month of July and August.

The society of tea plantation labourers in Terai and Doars are more or less same. The gardens of these areas are mainly manned by immigrant adibasi people of Chotonagpur plateau, Bihar, Orissa. and Madhya Pradesh while the Nepali immigrants and the Lepchas are the main labour force of the gardens of Darjeeling hills. It is hard to differentiate the adibasi society of Doars and Terai gardens. The main differences are the Doars gardens being larger and comparatively older are more well organised with strict work

schedules and wage structure and are provided with better infrastructural facilities than that of Terai. Trade unions are also more well organised here. Though the adibasi labourers in both the areas are actually under the shadow of ignorance, innocence and dire poverty.

In the foregoing paragraphs a brief and comparative discussion of the two gardens will be made. In few lines I shall point out the similarities as well as the differences the two gardens have.

As far as the similarities are concerned, both of these gardens are old enough with well organised bureaucratic structure of management both in field and factory attached to the respective gardens. Both of these gardens have a huge residential labour force. The garden authority provide free residential quarters, drinking water facility, medical facility, ration of food grains and firewood etc. as per their own level. The different immigrant adibasi groups form the major part of the labour force in both of the gardens while the different Nepali and Bihari caste people form a negligible part of it. These multiethnic groups live side by side without no such pronounced ethnic clusterization. In both of these gardens Sandri is the lingua franca and Saosar is the prevailing religion while Marriage is an important thing of the labourers' life. In both of these gardens consciousness of the labourers about their personal and environmental hygiene is very low along with their educational status. A strong affiliation towards home made alcohol is seen every where CTC type of tea is produced in those two gardens and in both places CITU is the prevailing trade union while its members are very little conscious about their duties to it.

As far as the differences between the two gardens are concerned these are quite a few. The Soongachi T.E. of Doars being older bigger and much well organised then that of the Matigara Tea Estate of Terai has much greater turn over. The setting of the two gardens are also different. The Doars garden occupies a vast land in the hills and foothills of Mal Police Station. It has a number of sectors and the ^{at}quality of tea it produces is much greater quantity than that of the Terai garden. On the other hand Terai garden being the smaller one occupies some acres in the east and western side of the river Balason of Matigara Police Station. The Doars garden has much greater infrastructural facilities than that of the Terai garden. It provides ^spacca quarter with electricity to all of its permanent labourers while the Terai garden authority provides ^spacca quarter to only a part of its permanent labourers. The Doars

garden also provide tap water to its labourers' quarters, beside well facility while the Terai garden has some well which are ^{the} only source of water in labour lines. The Doars garden has a number of creches for the kids of the working mothers and three primary schools of their own while the Terai garden has no such facility. The Terai garden has only a small health centre while the medical facility of the Doars garden is better as it has a hospital of its own. Here in the Doars garden some exclusive adibasi groups are seen besides the common adibasi groups of Terai and Doars. They are Sabar, Santhal, Sonar, Malar, Rajwar, Dhimol, Porja etc. Another major difference in between these two gardens is that the Doars garden with a huge labour force pick up temporary labourer in the peak season from among the families of the permanent labourers while in the Terai garden groups of people live in the labour lines in thatch huts who work as temporary labourers when the authority need their job. No such temporary labour group live in the Doars garden.

As far as the situation of girl children of these gardens is concerned there also exist some similarities as well as a few differences which are outlined in the following paragraphs.

The plantation labourers of both of the gardens give much value to the children. In their society, the status of a childless woman is much lower than one who has her own child. A same thing is seen in both of these gardens that is the newly adopted trait of 'son preference' by the adibasis from their caste neighbours. Children from their parents get poverty and backwardness and in most cases earn money by working. Child rearing is mostly the mother's duty but now a days after the initial stage the working mothers rest this burden on their elderly girls who actually become her helper too in her household activities. Discrimination is seen equally in both of these gardens regarding fooding and clothing and also in case of medical treatment. Negligence of girl child in every sphere of life is common. This is much greater where there are 2 or 3 girl children and no boy child. Out of frustration the parents mainly the mother abuses the girls. Education picture among the girls is low along with the high percentage of working girls.

The main difference seen among the girls' position in the two gardens is in the field of education. In the Doars garden there are three schools within the garden premises so there is an inclination among the parents to send their girls to these free school atleast upto primary level. This is possible

here because of the existence of a number of creches in the garden where the mother can keep their kids and the girls get free from the burden of sibling care. But in the Terai garden there is no primary school of the garden except the local schools outside. The labourers too get afraid of sending their girls to school outside the garden. Another difference seen the position of girls of these gardens is the percentage of girls working in plantation is low in the Doars garden than that of the Terai garden. Here the girls do not need to go outside the plantation for work as seen in Terai garden. No other such pronounced difference is seen in the situation of the girls in the two gardens.

By analysing the case studies of the girls of both of the gardens a clear profile of the girls is gathered. It is clearly seen that the girl child's condition is not at all good in this society. In most of the cases their family accept them though initially almost all of the parents wanted a boy. Being in intense poverty the parents cannot fulfil the basic needs of their child while in most cases discrimination really exists in the allocation of these scanty resources. The girls suffer much due to the burden of the household activities which ruin their childhood. She may be a student, may be a working girl in most case she has to do a lot of works in home. This is mainly because here the mother are working women too. Here the girls get very little time of their own development.

My study of the tea plantation society has some similarities as well as differences with the existing studies of some eminent scholars in this field. Work organisation in tea plantation of North Bengal is very strict and strong. My observation from Terai and Doars gardens in this respect very much fits to that of Kar (1984-85) as he studied it in two tea gardens of Assam. It can be said that the social situation of adibasi plantation labourers is almost unchanged for the past few years. My observation of Matigara Tea Estate of Terai very much matches to Bhadra's (1992) observation of Chandmani Tea Estate. Just as Soongachi Tea Estate of Doars shows almost same picture as Bhowmik (1981) observed in Sonali Tea Estate. The status of the women workers still not raised satisfactorily inspite of being bread earner. Bhadra (1992) too observed it in Chandmoni. Analysing the socialization process of the girl child in the gardens studied I too agree with Bhadra that from childhood girls are socialized in their role of male dependency which continues even after marriage and even when they have a family of their own. The health culture of plantation society of North Bengal still is very poor. My observation

suits very much to that of Bhadra (1997) and just as Bhadra I have also seen in the gardens that the adibasi labourers have no aversion to modern medical treatment as they get it easily in their respective gardens. My observation regarding the status of adibasi girl child differs a bit to the observation of Dashora (1995) as she opines that the adibasi girls are well come at the time of birth and discrimination arises when she become the mother's helper. But as I observed among the adibasi plantation labourers of North Bengal, the new born girls in this society also see glumface at the time of birth. Most of the parents admit that they have a hankering after son. In most cases discrimination does not exist regarding fooding and clothing but as far as education and work burden is concerned discrimination is high. But I am agreed with Dashora's comment that the girl child is the worse sufferer of economic disorder of tribal society and is always at the shrinking end of population, poverty and environmental spiral.

III

Superficially it can be said that the status of the ^{tribal} girls are better than that of their non tribal counterpart since there is no child marriage. The traditional tribal society does not consider it bad or 'curse' to have birth of a girl child. They neither have any custom to differentiate between boy and girl at the infant stage. The tribal society has love and respect for the girl child. She can select partner by choice. There is Bride price instead of Dowry; all indicating her high social status.

But the actual condition is totally different. The adibasi people at the midst of the industrial plantation society are no more innocent rather they have become very much conscious of their economic interest. Living side by side with the caste people for a long period they have greatly influenced with their deep rooted notion of son preference. Though this newly adopted notion of the adibasis have no such ritualistic or transcendental base like that of their caste neighbour but have economical need i.e. the son will be the helper of the parents; who will look after them in their old age. These people have a traditional custom of Ghardamad by which a sonless man with large property can keep his son-in law at home. In such case he has to pay a large amount of Dowry instead of Bride Price. But for the poor plantation labourers it is very tough to afford a Ghar-damad. They rather prefer a son of their own. Besides, with the increasing popularity of love marriage the system of bride price have almost been abolished. So the girl's parents have no such gain

from their girl child. Which on the other hand boost their notion of son preference. Naturally the to day's girl child in adibasi society too see gloomy face since her birth. Though the girls of this society felt no such pronounce threat like female foeticide or infanticide, yet discrimination regarding food, education, work are common. The poor adibasi labourers afford food with very lesser quality for their wards and so also the health facilities. It is seen that the girls are given the least of this lesser share than their male counterpart. She is forced to stay home right from her infancy for helping her mother in household activities and burdened with sibling care when she should have formal schooling. Her labour in assisting mother is always unrecognised and uncounted for. Out her home she has to earn money by labouring. There is higher percentage of girl child labour in tribal society. In most cases she has to give her earnings to her parents. In there early days she has no as much freedom as generally thought. She has little leisure, very little scope to enjoy her childhood. She is the worst sufferer of the economic disorder of their society.

IV

From the forgoing discussion its can be said that the condition of the adibasi girl child in plantation society is far from satisfactory. The Government of India have initiated several schemes recently for the over all development of the girl child. There are also several programmes implemented by the Government of India for the development of the tribal people but none of these have been reached to this remote plantation society of North Bengal. So the need of these days is to take the initiatives from the management of the respective garden, the Local Self Government i.e. the Panchayet and the different Non-Governmental Organisations for the all round development of the girl child in plantation society. For reaching to this end the following mechanisms may be recommended. For the all round development of the girl child the following facilities should be initiated by the respective garden authorities.

- (i) Health care units in the garden should be revamped reorganised and revitalise.
- (ii) The work of immunization and supplementing vitamin dose should be given to priority among with the availability of cheaper antibiotics.

(iii) Programme for safe drinking water be implemented to reduce possibility of water borne diseases.

(iv) To improve the nutrition level of the adibasi girl child, girls themselves should be encouraged to grow fruit plants like papaya, guava, mango near their houses and surrounding. They should be trained to undertake poultry activity so that they can easily get animal protein from egg and fish.

(v) The respective garden authority should open educational institution, especially primary school in the garden. Garden authority should take necessary steps to open secondary girls' school at least one in the respective gardens.

(vi) It is also necessary to recruit the lady teachers to run these institutions and there should be an effective control over the regularity, punctuality and performance of the teacher.

(vii) Reasonable scholarship is to be given to the needy and meritorious students.

(viii) Sufficient incentives should be given to the needy parents to prevent early drop-outs.

(ix) Efforts should be made by the garden authorities or by the voluntary bodies to organise adult education centres separately for men and women. The contents for teaching in these centres should be attractive and useful.

(x) To encourage and motivate the adibasi girls the Media should highlight the success stories of tribal women.

(xi) Proper education on the basis of social and political awareness should be imparted by text books and by extensive use of Audio and Audio-Visual Media.

(xii) The adibasi girl child should get vocational training in school so that in later life she can choose the right course of action and can fight against poverty and can create sustainable economic progress of her society.

Finally, it can be suggested that the parents of the girl child should be motivated by the Panchayat body, social workers and garden people in such a way that they can welcome their daughters happily since their birth and treat equally irrespective to her feeding, clothing, education and allow her to enjoy her childhood properly.